

Japanese manga vs japanese anime: genre comparison

[Entertainment](#)



Overweight otakus trundling around at comic book conventions. Stylized hair and skimpy schoolgirl uniforms. Children's fare and pornography. There are many stereotypes associated with manga and its more visual representation of anime. Often criticized and discredited by those of a more lofty artistic presence, despite whatever prejudice any given member of the population may hold, manga and anime remain an integral part of Japanese cultural memory, "all those processes of a biological, medial or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts" (Erll 1).

Inherent to manga and anime is the concept of *nihonjin-banare* (ethnic bleaching), a concept with strong ties to "the representation of traumatic pasts" (Erll 1), "the afterlives of literature" (Erll 2), and "transnational and transcultural memory" (Erll 3). Though manga and anime predictably entertain the largest fan base in The Land of the Rising Sun, the dark undercurrent in these forms of media is the perpetuation of the implicit desires of the Japanese to forego their own cultural identity for that of the West.

Though most individuals have a basic grasp of the fact that manga and anime are Japanese in origin, "a fascinating characteristic of anime is that it usually does not seem Japanese" (Lu 169). Indeed, "many [examples of manga and] anime feature Caucasian-looking characters either from the West, or Orientals with Western names" (Lu 171). This is because manga and anime deal with "the Japanese people's deeply entrenched sense of self-loathing, extending even to their own ethnic traits" (Lu 172). Characters lack the physical characteristics of the Japanese. Settings are often European, or set in generic fantasy or science fiction worlds. Topics are rarely Japanese in

nature. While many would point to the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as Japan's inherent traumatic narrative, a less physically violent example can be found in "the experience of colonialism and decolonization" (Erll 2) that was present during the Meiji Restoration. A period of unprecedented national growth, "Japan's turbulent and phenomenal advance in both the political and economic realms inevitably created new pressures and new demands" (Morton 164), primarily a conflicted Japanese inferiority complex that has its roots in Meiji Era aspirations "to become accepted by the leading nations of the world so that the unequal treaties would be revised, tariff rates improved, extraterritoriality abolished, and Japan accorded its full place in the comity of nations" (Morton 155). Ever since the Meiji Restoration, Japan has always held Westernization and modernization in the highest regard, an attitude that pervades even in the modern age. This notion has facilitated and encouraged the "de-politicized internationalization that has made anime more open, allowing for more participation" since "audiences see...not any specific cultural characteristics but a blend of different cultures" (Lu 173). This in turn contributes to the "complex entanglements of memory and media in the social arena", as in the current age, the Meiji Restoration is a "cultural memory...produced through objects, images, and representations" (Erll 3). Manga and anime transmit "the memories of those who experienced the events first-hand...to people not immediately involved in the events" (Erll 3). As Japan's most successful export, the risk of manga and anime lie in their "ability...to produce empathy and social responsibility as well as political alliances that transcend

race, class and gender” (Erl 3), mainly empathy for and social responsibility and political alliance to the West.

What types of memory do manga and anime engage in? I believe the sense of ethnic bleaching to be so firmly engaged in the Japanese mindset that the “ declarative memory requir[ing] a conscious act of recall” (Mayer-Schonin 19) is not in play. Unfortunately, ethnic bleaching has been dealt with to such an extent that its perpetuation through manga and anime “ is not a conscious act, but a by-product of humans engaging in certain routines” (Mayer-Schonin 18). This is how the ethnic self-loathing in question has entered “ implicit memory- memory that we acquire and recall without realizing it” (Mayer-Schonin 19). Obviously manga and anime weren’t around in the time of Meiji Restoration, and I do not mean to implicate them in the origination of these unfortunate national ideologies. However, their de-politicized internationalization was directly influenced by Meiji Restoration anxieties, and they now continue to pass on those anxieties to countless new generations. For indeed, manga and anime are forms of external memory, “ drawing [and] writing, [that] captures an event, an emotion, a thought” (Mayer-Schonin 28). “ External memory is an extension of our own human memory”, one that “ can...be used to facilitate the construction of shared common memory” (Mayer-Schonin 28-29). Granted manga and anime do not have explicit creations of “ images of a scene or an event” (Mayer 29) that continue to place the West above Japan, but every time a Japanese person looks at these cartoon characters with Western features there’s not a small bit of regret and self-consciousness?

Applying a more general interpretation of the word literature to include anything that can be defined as a “text”, the “afterlife” of manga and anime is troubling considering the dubious nature of de-politicized internationalization discussed above. Manga and anime “manage to “live on” and remain in use and meaningful to readers” (Erll 4), possessing a great propensity for “continuation and actualization” (Erll 3). However, what is particularly unique about manga and anime is that the ethnic bleaching they encourage doesn’t change with the generations. The “new lease of life in changing social contexts” (Erll 3) seems to continue because all Japanese social contexts other than the “deeply entrenched sense of self-loathing” (Lu 172) are in the process of changing. Japanese women are getting more rights in the workplace. Efforts are being taken by the government to combat the alarmingly declining birth rate (which in turn is critically tied to the rights of Japanese women, but that’s a topic for another time). Yet despite positive changes such as these, the ethnic bleaching and self-loathing it perpetuates still remain ubiquitous.

What is interesting in terms of manga and anime is the distinct lack of a Japanese “methodological nationalism” (Erll 4) and the fact that the art forms are adamantly insistent upon remembering and championing Western ideological colonization as opposed to “forget[ting] the history of culture exchange” (Erll 4). A “methodological nationalism” is present, but it’s not a methodological nationalism centered around Japan. The “history of culture exchange” is not forgotten in such a way that glorifies pre-Restoration Japanese society; rather, it would appear as if Japan wants to forget the time that it wasn’t dominated by the West. It would appear that the only

nationalism being committed to methodology is one in which Japan will always be inferior to the West, constantly striving to be considered equal. The most obvious deleterious effect is of course the aforementioned national self-loathing. But a more subtle but no less harmful consequence is the sour seed of “ self-orientalized internationalism” (Lu 169) that continues to be perpetuated. “ Japan considers itself a Western country in Asia” (Lu 179), a fact that may initially seem positive. If the topic so far has been dealing with Japan’s desire to be considered a Western equal, than isn’t this a signifier of success? Unfortunately, much like the West has Orientalized virtually all of the East, now “ another kind of Orientalism has developed in Japan, primarily as a result of cultural exchanges between the East and the West” (Lu 179). Japan now looks at other Asian countries with the prejudiced and patronizing eye that was bestowed upon them by the West, turning them into “ cultural imperialists” (Lu180). This is dangerous because the self-loathing sparked by the West’s interactions with Japan may be sparked in another nation, this time centered around Japanese interactions. The cute cartoon characters of manga and anime champion some ominous ideals.