PREFACE

by *Kiyomitsu Yui*[1]

I. A Dazzlestruck Japanese

Thanks to this «dazzling» book *The Dragon and the Dazzle*, published at the beginning of the 21st century, I have realized that we have finally entered an era of all-comprehending and systematic analysis of *manga* and *anime*—the Japanese comics and cartoons—as a *glocal* phenomenon. Before this volume, those who analyse these two expressive forms had never reached this level of accuracy and attention. One of the most amazing (and indeed most «dazzling») features of this book is its perfect combination of detailed information, precision in discussing them and in-depth analysis. As a Japanese scholar, and therefore a «compatriot» of the *manga/anime* phenomenon, my surprise is doubled and focused around two questions: first of all, how did the author of this book reach his goal? And, more importantly, how did he do it despite being—from my point of view as Japanese scholar—a foreign author?

I am sure that, reading this book, the readers will ask themselves the same intriguing questions.

There is nothing more I can add to this book, but I can try to highlight other topics that could be explored and developed from what has been discussed here; this is my aim for this Preface.

II. Glocalization and *anime*

Over the last few years, every time I have had the opportunity to visit different countries, holding conferences on *manga* and *anime* in several universities in Poland, Austria, Italy, France, Egypt, China, and South Korea, I have used two diagrams as starting points. The first is on the next page.

In my opinion, there can be great differences even between *manga* and *anime* because they are distinct cultural products, but have in common some basic sociological elements; they are features related to glocalization [Robertson 1992] and to postmodernity. As shown in the diagram, I have attempted to theorize a basic social disposition around the *manga*/*anime* phenomenon. In the middle of the vertical/temporal axis is the modern age, characterized by the nation-states. On top, there is the postmodern or late-modern age, while below lies the pre-modern age. On the horizontal/spatial axis, in the direction of the Local dimension, we find the phenomena of «less than» national importance, like regionalism, ethnicity or small groups that can be defined «tribal»; in contrast, moving in the Global direction, we find the phenomena of «more than» national importance, like McDonaldization and the information society.
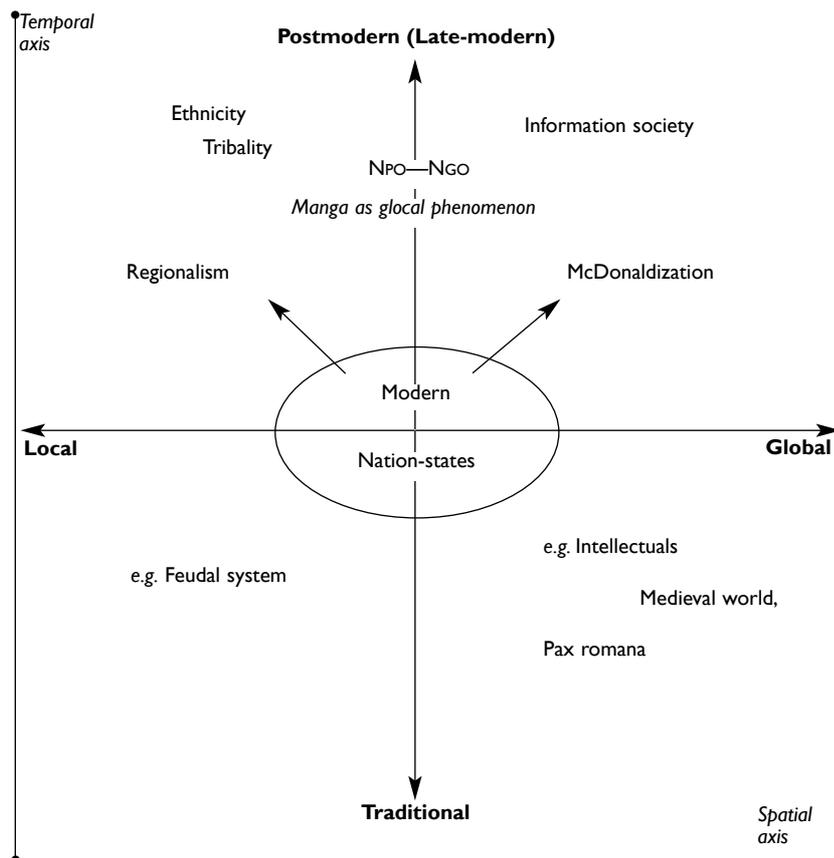
I believe that *manga* and *anime* can be placed in the postmodern direction, in the middle of the Local-Global axis, or, in other words, in the Glocal zone. It is said that the NPO and NGO (non-profit and non-governmental organizations) movements can be glocal, represented by the slogan «think globally, act locally»; *manga* and *anime* are glocal themselves, but not exactly like other cultural productions of the glocalization age. As Arjun Appadurai suggests, the tie between imagination and social life is becoming increasingly global and less territorial [Appadurai 1996: 55].

It is my opinion that Appadurai means that nowadays all the cultural products generated and distributed through the electronic media share the same destiny to intersect with these two contemporary tendencies: postmodern and glocalization. In this context lies the basic difference between *manga* and *anime*: *anime* are a product closely associated with the electronic media, and often become the ambassadors of *manga* in the global arena *before manga* is exported through the press. *Manga* fans in the world are often exposed to the *anime* first, and only at a later stage their passion brings them in contact with the broader contents of the *manga* and the large amount of collateral information orbiting around them. Ironically, on account of the creativity of this enormous sector of the content indus-

try, it is really *manga* that have served as a sort of endless well and have constituted the central image for a typical strategy of *media mix*; animated television series, films, videogames, food products, trading cards and so on, what is elsewhere called *image alliance* [Shiraishi 1997]. In other words, in this whole strategy of media mix, *manga* is the starting point, which is exactly the opposite of what happened with the historical and chronological process of penetration of Japanese comics into markets outside Japan.

In order to look for the true creativity core of the industry of *manga/anime*, fans from across the whole world are searching for and examining original manga.

Diagram 1

Temporal axis

Postmodern (Late-modern)

Ethnicity

Tribality

Information society

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Npo—Ngo

Manga as glocal phenomenon

Regionalism

McDonaldization

Modern

Local

Global

Nation-states

e.g. Intellectuals

e.g. Feudal system

Medieval world,

Pax romana

Traditional

Spatial axis

III. Postmodernity and *anime*/*manga*

The popularity of *anime* (and then of *manga*) and the promptness in welcoming them, particularly from new generations, is indicative of a deeper predisposition to postmodern condition. The role of *manga* and *anime* today must be explained in connection with the postmodern tendencies/conceptions that now follow.

1—Time fragmentation and space reorganization, in close relationship with that process already called glocalization. Let us think about daily life in contact with MTV and the internet, that can bring us in every angle of the world in a heartbeat. This situation can result in continuous space-time fragmentations of our life.

2—Aesthetic reconfiguration of daily life. This process concerns the diffusion of urban lifestyles. Sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel has explained this process very well, but for him this tendency was limited to some small middle-class groups, which introduced a large variety of possibilities within which it was possible to decide to assume a large variety of behaviours dictated by personal tastes and styles. Now, this tendency has expanded to other social classes in almost all the advanced capitalistic countries.

3—Self decentralization or deconstruction of the subject. Following the time and space fragmentation, the «modern man» described by David Riesman as a human being who has absorbed a transcendental system of values does not exist anymore. Here «transcendental» means a system of values that is not inserted in a concrete context but transcends it, puts it aside. In place of this type of modern man, now the dominant person is «eterodirect», as Riesman calls it [Riesman *et al.* 1950].

4—De-differentiation of the boundaries. Between high and low culture, nation and ethnicity, original and copy, real and fictitious, genres and forms such as the classical arts, objects, the visual arts, novels, games, etc.: all these boundaries have a tendency to fade.

Regarding the decline of the great narratives in discussing postmodernity, we can see many small narratives and stories coming from every corner of the world, each with its own «exotic» fragrance. It is easy to perceive the bond between this phenomenon and the fragmentation of space and time, and therefore the connection between this situation and the pluralization process of the globalization centres. The *anime* DVDs and the *manga* books and magazines that we can find in almost every newsstand, bookstore, comic-book store and grocery store all around the world, are one of the examples of this plurality.

Besides, this fragmentation of time and space corresponds, in the Japanese case, to a syncretism at the level of the value system. Japanese syncretism, well-known as it is, is in direct correspondence with the processes of modernization as much as with those of postmodernization. The fundamental duty of modernization in Japan was very different from that of the Western world. Since in Japan—both in the late 19th century and after 1945—the central problems were accepting, adapting and planning a strategy to obtain short-term objectives, the typical local syncretism and the mixture of religions had a functional importance. Therefore, both the Japanese society and culture already possessed some postmodern elements during their process of modernization, and now these are gradually gaining the spotlight. It is however important to look at the differences between modern and postmodern Japan: if in the former the key word was «attainment» (of industrial, economic, urban, political, military, colonial objectives, etc.), in postmodern Japan the most important points are «invention» and «creation». It is not a coincidence that Japan is currently emphasized as one of the main propulsive centres of glocalization.

This type of Japanese syncretism involves almost all the neuralgic points of the postmodern condition. I strongly doubt that Riesman's crucial image of «modern man» who absorbs a transcendental value has been included in the process of historical and social modernization in Japan. Certainly the «situational self», which is the ability of handling every situation in a different way—a sort of collection of oneselves which vary according to the various contexts—is not at all an unusual factor in Japanese structural and social organization. But it is westernization that is one of the most crucial aspects of the Japanese modernization: during the process of «importation» of elements of the Western world, the previous boundaries and distinctions among genders, areas and hierarchies have become confused.

Finally, Japan is famous as a land giving a lot of attention to aesthetics. But why? One can once again call upon the case of Western-style modernization. From a Japanese point of view, the combination of a nucleus of values seen as transcendental, of a Freudian disciplining super-ego and of a Weberian ascetic tradition is not universal at a historical level, not even if considered inside the process of modernization. I am certainly not saying that asceticism or suppression of the super-ego are unknown in Japan; to the contrary, some important areas and situations, mainly in public life, exist where «repression» is essential for Japanese society and way of thinking. But there are other sectors of social life which are totally free

from these containment processes. Once again this follows the division of a society in portions of fragmented space and time. In every sector of social life, people follow different behaviours. That is, the expression of desire is different in Japan in comparison to what happens in the West. This difference has allowed Japanese society to develop asceticism in daily life in a relatively easy way, without interruption in the passage from the traditional to the modern ages.

So, through these processes, in which postmodern characteristics and glocal movements meet, a favourable situation for the development of a Japanese pop culture and the explosion of *manga* and *anime* has come to form, based on these very presumptions.
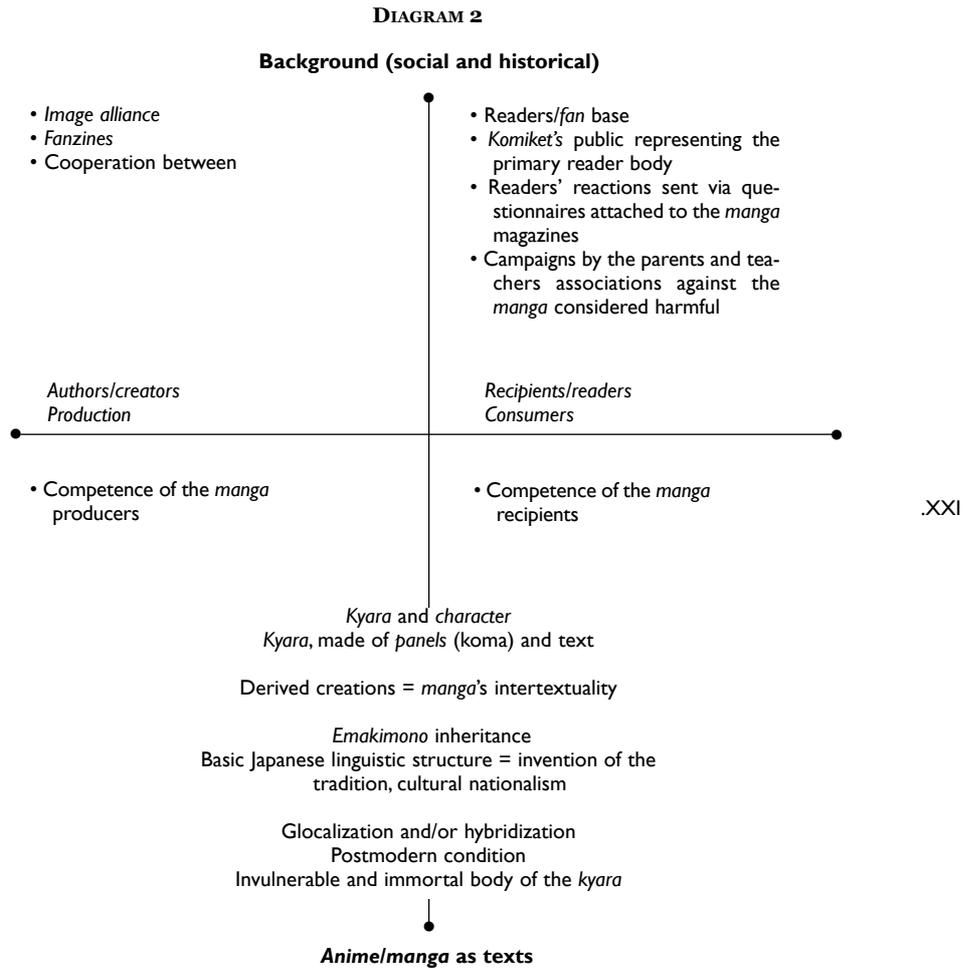
IV. How to «read» *manga* and *anime*

In a second diagram analysing less general aspects, I offer a scheme «to read» *manga* and *anime*.[2] On the top, divided by the top half of the vertical axis, on one side there are the creators, who are the producers and the authors; in the opposite direction are the consumers, who are the recipients and readers. *Manga* and *anime* are on both sides of the horizontal axis, being considered both as products of a historical and social context, and as works. Several critics have discussed the textual component of *manga* and *anime* and their multi-faceted characteristics as narratives; others instead have tried to explain them in sociocultural terms, at times seeing the themes or the quality of some *manga* and *anime* as a reflection of great social events.

The image alliance is positioned in the quadrant combining production and social context, while the most assiduous fans are found in the reception quadrant. I have chosen to position the fanzines on the production side, but it must be underlined that one of the peculiarities of the *manga* is the lack of distinction between official and amateur producers: the fan base and the world of fanzines are an inexhaustible source of creativeness behind the world of the *manga*.

Recent research has underlined that cooperation between editors, publishers, and authors is increasingly important. This collaboration, and the close relationship between groups of fans who make fanzines and the professional authors, once again point out the indefiniteness of the border between fans and professional *manga* authors. In the world of *manga*, the phenomenon is connected to the so-called *niji sôsaku* ('derived creation'), which high-

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lights the inter-textual nature of Japanese comics. It is well known that the readers' answers to the postcard feedback questionnaires for the various stories published in magazines is the principal tool to check the quality of the *manga* stories from the point of view of the productive apparatus.

Diagram 2

Background (social and historical)

• *Image alliance*
• *Fanzines*
• Cooperation between

• Readers/*fan* base
• *Komiket's* public representing the primary reader body
• Readers' reactions sent via questionnaires attached to the *manga* magazines
• Campaigns by the parents and teachers associations against the *manga* considered harmful

Authors/creators
Production

Recipients/readers
Consumers

• Competence of the *manga* producers

• Competence of the *manga* recipients

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Kyara and *character*
Kyara, made of *panels* (koma) and text

Derived creations = *manga*'s intertextuality

Emakimono inheritance
Basic Japanese linguistic structure = invention of the tradition, cultural nationalism

Glocalization and/or hybridization
Postmodern condition
Invulnerable and immortal body of the *kyara*

Anime/manga as texts

On the bottom side, along the vertical axis, are listed several facets of *manga* seen as «texts». I will not go into a detailed discussion of such facets, which have already been largely studied, in Japan and foreign countries, for at least fifteen years; but I will mention one of the most recent elements of reflection, the difference between *kyara* and *character* in man-
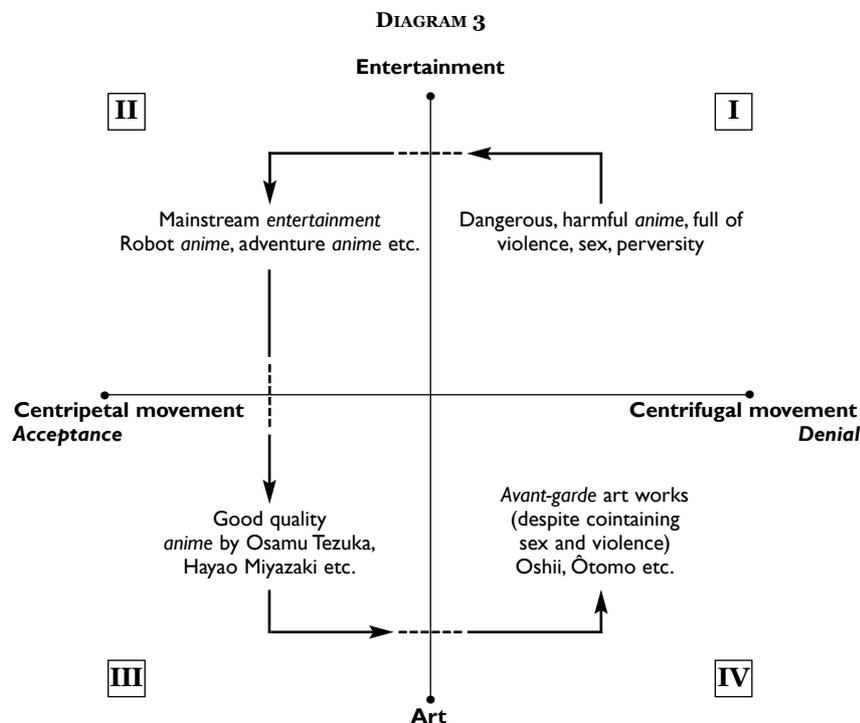
ga, proposed and explained by Japanese critic Gô Itô [2005]. *Kyara, koma* and *word*[3] are the three elements that Itô proposes in his theory on the expression of *manga* as text. Itô points out that the qualitative difference between *kyara* and character as symbolic expression in the most recent *manga* resides in the different nature of the body: the character's vulnerability on one side, and the immortality of the *kyara* on the other. If the *kyara* has a postmodern nature because it does not have a body that can be hurt or that can die, then the character was and still is represented and understood as endowed with a vulnerable and mortal corporeity.

Either way, being a text, in *manga* both the skills of the author in creating an enjoyable comic, and the readers' competence in being able to read it, count. Based on these two competences, the *manga* and the *anime* industries flourish as much as the image alliance strategies. It is said that *manga*'s origins go back to the scrolls drawn in medieval age, the *emakimono*, as was discussed by the filmmaker Isao Takahata in his book [1999]. Takahata adds that the same Japanese language is the authentic root of *manga* because of its nature of hybrid idiom. I more prosaically believe that, since every tradition is a cultural construction elaborated in retrospect, Japan has been emphasizing this rich historical heritage for the advantage of *manga* and *anime* ever since it noticed their great international success. As such, this can be connected to an intensifying cultural nationalism. At the same time, the cultural origins of *manga* can once again be factors in the hybridization and glocalization of comics and cartoons in the West.

The matter of the campaigns in the early 1990s against those *manga* that were seen as harmful can be relevant, considering the process of progressive acceptance of *anime* and *manga* in the world. Notoriously, the greatest supporters of the anti-*anime/manga* movement were those mothers worried by the proliferation of pornographic comics, potentially within reach of their children. In my opinion, this is one of the effects of the processes of variegated interrelation of previously separated fields, which animate the postmodern condition, and which have a tendency to make the boundaries between what previously used to be very different and separate spheres fade. Because of this process of dedifferentiation, the «pornographic» *manga* have come to the attention of a population of housewives who before ignored or snubbed their existence.

The same type of dynamics have also taken place in foreign countries, when the parental world has found itself—sometimes indirectly—in touch with *anime* considered «harmful» because they are full of erotic allusions.

As Tamaki Saitô puts it [2000a], the Japanese *otaku* can enjoy the perversions of the fictional *anime* world because in truth they are *not* perverts; more precisely, the border between fiction and reality is deeply different in Japan in comparison to what is seen in the West. Anyway, this is not the right place for me to get into too many details on this topic: I am only trying to write down some notes and impressions on the process of acceptance of Japanese *anime* and *manga* in the world, basing them on general reasoning, given that every real acceptance process differs from country to country.

DIAGRAM 3

Entertainment

| II | | I |

Mainstream *entertainment*
Robot *anime*, adventure *anime* etc.

Dangerous, harmful *anime*, full of
violence, sex, perversity

Centripetal movement
Acceptance

Centrifugal movement
Denial

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Good quality
anime by Osamu Tezuka,
Hayao Miyazaki etc.

Avant-garde art works
(despite cointaining
sex and violence)
Oshii, Ôtomo etc.

| III | | IV |

Art

The acceptance of Japanese *manga* and *anime* seems to have been met with resistance from the start. *Anime* were and still are supposed to be full of violence, sex and perversion—at least some of them—and these topics are not suitable for children. Some ethical codes or regulations of receiving countries have in the past prevented the broadcast of *anime.* From this starting point, represented in quadrant I of Diagram 3 (above), many countries have subsequently moved to phase II, in which, following more

balanced reasoning, the public recognizes the quality of *anime* and *manga* as entertainment products. In phase III, the *anime* by Tezuka or those by Hayao Miyazaki—just to give two famous examples—have received international praise and won many important awards in film festivals. Phase IV, which is taking place in recent years, has seen films like *Ghost in the Shell* by Mamoru Oshii and *Akira* by Katsuhiro Ôtomo, or comics like *NonNon-Bâ* by Shigeru Mizuki, gaining international success and being seen as sophisticated art.

In my opinion, the flow of events resulting in the progressive acceptance from phase I to phase IV is between «centrifugal» and «centripetal» positions. The «centrifugal» position is one of great denial from the receptive countries—which for years have believed that Japanese products were only a lower form of entertainment, cheap and of poor quality. The «centripetal» position is of great reception of *manga* and *anime*, whose artistic potentialities are now also better seen, and which are put in comparison with works of great merit. In the latter case, the considered works could also again result in a centrifugal mechanism of refusal, this time because of avant-garde works carrying «radical» and «dangerous» images and content, seen as new forms of art: «perversion» as a form of avant-garde art. I certainly do not mean to say that the problem of sex and violence in *manga* and *anime* does not exist anymore or has been misconceived by Western observers, but it involves other considerations.[4]

With this certainly incomplete summary of some of the basic elements needed to try to understand the general processes of the gradual acceptance of *anime* and *manga* across the world, I conclude my Preface, letting the reader open the doors of this book, a work of great value that contains innovative and exceptionally profound investigations.