

Book Review: *Manga: A Critical Guide*

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Suzuki, Shige (CJ), and Ronald Stewart. *Manga: A Critical Guide*. London, UK:

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In Shige (CJ) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart's book, *Manga: A Critical Guide*, they set out to provide an analytical overview of manga with particular attention to social, historical, cultural, and aesthetic matters surrounding the medium. This publication modernizes previous frameworks and research to introduce an updated survey of the amazingly diverse and ever-evolving field of manga and Japanese comics studies. In this compendium, the authors introduce the study of manga and its socio-cultural impact. They provide insights for discussing the medium and its contexts without over-generalizing and essentializing the vast field of Japanese comic studies. Additionally, this refreshed overview includes recent trends and occurrences regarding manga culture and mentions current evolving forms of manga. Further, this publication traces key issues and proposes methodological approaches that would be helpful and practical tools to utilize in the pedagogical instruction of manga.

Manga: A Critical Guide is organized into four chapters: Historical Overview, Social and Cultural Impact, Critical Uses, and Key Texts. Each section is mainly organized chronologically and highlights critical issues that influenced the medium and its transformation within cultural contexts. Suzuki and Stewart demonstrate their knowledge of Japanese comics in the Historical Overview chapter through their analyses of the major historical claims related to the origins of manga. The authors reconsider these claims by reviewing, debunking, and further analyzing previous arguments that manga is a "long tradition" that goes back centuries. They also reconsider the argument that it is a post-war product attributed to the creative innovations of a singular mangaka. Instead, Suzuki and Stewart conclude that manga is a modern medium that gradually emerged in the late 19th century, influenced by Western comic art and the growth of the modern print media industry. They recount the history of Japanese

comics, from some of its important and notable events to the present. Throughout this section—and the rest of the publication—they reference other scholars and their works in manga and related Japanese cultural studies, beefing up their historical claims and further updating previous survey work by scholars such as Frederik Schodt in his publication *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, published in 1983.

The next chapter, titled Social and Cultural Impacts, examines current and prior controversies concerning Japanese comics and the culture attached to them. It addresses censorship, gender and sexuality in manga, historical representation as depicted in manga, and the cultural status of the medium. The third chapter looks at the critical uses of manga. It presents essential pedagogical information that scholars will find useful when teaching about Japanese comics as a literary medium and an art form. It introduces tools, analytic perspectives, and focused concerns of various scholarly approaches to studying manga. The final chapter, Key Texts, is a compiled list of manga for any English-speaking fan, scholar, or student looking to dive deep into the world of manga. This list includes an assortment of manga with different topic matters, genres, and socio-cultural significance.

Though this publication may be out of reach for the general reader due to its information-rich nature, this work certainly offers many opportunities for scholars looking to engage with manga on a critical and analytic level. It can also be used as an essential text in media studies, popular culture, and Japanese studies classrooms due to its vast inclusion of social, historical, and cultural matters related to the medium. Further, the incorporation of illustrations throughout the publication was phenomenal. These images were taken from a wide variety of sources to back up and emphasize assertions made by the authors and highlight that manga is a highly visual storytelling

medium. Scholars will be pleasantly surprised with the Appendix, which includes a wonderfully curated list of resources for individuals looking for museums and websites that would be useful for accessing archived manga and deriving information about exhibitions and manga-related experiences.

Although this overview presented a wide array of topics and lenses to look at manga and its key issues, Suzuki and Stewart recognize that the scope of this publication is such that it would be impossible to do justice to the diverse and ever-evolving world of manga. Instead, this book offers entry points for discussing and analyzing the medium using critically informed approaches and methods. Furthermore, due to the nature of the “manga-verse,” Suzuki and Stewart recognize that current processes are evolving the way that we produce, distribute, and consume these comics. However, due to the novelty and recentness of these developments, it would be impossible to include an in-depth, critically derived theory, history, and guide to these processes. With this knowledge, the book ends on an open note, touching on the digital age and its inevitable impact on the future of manga while calling attention to the fact that manga was—and still is—a dynamic medium characterized by evolution and change. It calls on scholars to pay attention to the transformations of the medium while leaving room for future research.

Through their introduction and explanations of the nuances and critical issues encompassed in the world of manga, Suzuki and Stewart successfully invite scholars, researchers, and students to join in on the current conversations regarding manga, Japanese comic studies, and fan participatory culture. I would certainly recommend this text to anyone looking for a comprehensive guide to the manga-verse or any scholar looking for additional supplementary texts related to Japanese comics in the classroom.