

Doraemon and *Sailormoon*. Fourth, Japanese comics in Singapore are very affordable, usually about SD \$3-5 dollars for a comic book or a comic magazine, much cheaper than their American or local counterparts.

Time was ripe for the emergence of Singapore editions of Japanese comics. In 1989, Chuang Yi Publishing Pte. Ltd (or Chuang Yi Comics) published *Dragonball*, which met with an overwhelming response, being the best-selling title during its serialization from 1989 to 1994. During that time, besides *Dragonball*, Chuang Yi also published a large number of popular titles, including *Gundam*, *Slam Dunk*, *Black Jack*, *What's Michael*, *Astro Boy*, and *Ranma 1/2* and two successful weekly comics magazines, *City Comic* and *Comic Street*, both of which serialized Japanese comics exclusively. They were modestly priced (about SD \$3), featured popular titles such as *Slam Dunk*, *Ranma 1/2*, *Dragon Ball*, and *Dragon Quest*, and sold about 6,000 copies per issue. Some were even exported to Malaysia. Unlike some Taiwanese or Hong Kong publishers, Chuang Yi did not publish erotic comics; however, not unlike most Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Malaysian editions, those by Chuang Yi were all pirated. Japanese publishers and the Singapore government began to pay attention to this problem. In 1994, under tremendous pressure, Chuang Yi made the decision to withdraw all popular titles which did not acquire copyrights from Japanese publishers.

This blow was only temporary. Chuang Yi made a strong comeback in 1995, after which, the company only published licensed Chinese editions for domestic distribution and sales. It has secured the copyrights for nearly 200 titles from more than ten Japanese publishers. In order to prove its sincerity to the Japanese publishers, Chuang Yi destroyed all its pirated comics inventories. It has also improved the quality of printing. For instance, since June 1995, Chuang Yi has used high-quality paper imported from Japan in printing its comic books and magazines.

Now a major player in the local comics market, Chuang Yi has published about 250 Japanese comics, including many multi-volume series, such as *Doraemon*, *Slam Dunk*, *Shōtai no Sushi*, *Sailormoon*, *Detective Kōnan*, *Captain Tsubasa*, *Tenchi Muyō*, *Dr Kumahige*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and *Kindaichi Shonen no Jikenbō* (Chuang Yi, 1999:2-87). Chuang Yi reproduces Taiwanese and Hong Kong editions of Japanese comics with licenses from Japanese and relevant publishers. The company promotes its business by participating in book fairs, sending posters to bookstores, selling comic merchandise through mail order, creating a homepage (only in Chinese), and organizing meet-the-artists sessions. Its success in getting Inoue Takehiko, the creator of *Slam Dunk*, to come to Singapore created a great commotion among local comic fans.

Although Chuang Yi is influential in comic books, its ventures in comics magazines have been disastrous. Since 1995, Chuang Yi has launched a number of weekly comics magazine such as *Newcom* and *X-Zone*, but none could survive due to the strong competition from a Malaysian comics magazine, *Comic Weekly*, the most popular and longest running comics magazine in Singapore and the rest of Southeast Asia. First published in 1990, it initially only targeted the Malaysian market. *Comic Weekly* came to Singapore in 1992 and became popular after 1994, partly because of the closing of two of Chuang Yi's popular comics magazines. All comics serialized in *Comic Weekly* are pirated,

photocopied from Taiwanese comic books or magazines. The photocopy reduces the size of the original by four times; thus, a page is equivalent to four pages. Readers are content because the longer story compensates for smaller pictures. The reason that *Comic Weekly* can have all these popular titles owned by different Japanese publishers in one magazine is that it is a pirated publication. Because it is basically Malaysian, somehow it can do away with censorship and regulations in Singapore. Japanese artists such as Inoue Takehiko wrote letters of complaint to the publisher of *Comic Weekly* and the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) of Singapore but to no avail.

Only a few Hong Kong and Taiwanese comics magazines exist in Southeast Asia, among which are *Co-Co*, a Hong Kong biweekly children's comics magazine, and the two top Taiwanese comics magazines, *New Youth* and *Youth Express*. They are not popular in the region because most are old issues and the supplies are inconsistent.

In the late 1990s, most Chinese editions by Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Singapore publishers are no longer pirated; however, Malaysia and China still produce pirated copies. In the Singapore market, the majority (about 70 percent) of Japanese comic books are Taiwanese editions which maintain quality printing and translation. The numbers of Hong Kong and Singapore editions are at the same level. Malaysia is the main supplier of pirated copies. Although Taiwanese and Hong Kong editions are licensed, they are not supposed to be distributed outside their respective countries as part of an agreement with Japanese publishers. Hence, there are no official distributors of Taiwanese and Hong Kong editions of Japanese comics in Singapore; publishers and book dealers import them secretly through their connections in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

A small number of Japanese comics are also available in other languages in Singapore. M.G. Creative, a small local company, translated and published the English edition of *What's Michael* until it went out of business. Asiapac Books, a major local English comics publisher, translated the famous four-panel strip, *Kobochan*, into English in 1993. Asiapac has published a large number of local cartoons about Chinese stories or Chinese modern novels drawn in a somewhat Japanese style. About 10-15 titles of Viz have been shipped to Singapore including *One-Pound Gospel*, *Fist of the North Star*, *Ranma 1/2*, *Maison Ikkoku*, *Inu Yasha*, *Yūyū Hakusho*, and *Tenchi Muyō*. Some Japanese publishers have translated a small number of Japanese comics into English; for example, the English version of *Szaesan* (by Kōdansha) is easily accessible in Singapore. If readers are lucky, they may find English editions of *Akira* or *Memories* in some bookshops. Two Japanese book dealers in Singapore, Kinokuniya and Maruzen, carry hundreds of Japanese comic books and a dozen Japanese comics magazines in Japanese. *Doraemon* also has a Malay edition imported from Malaysia. (Figure 2)

Although Japanese comics have been translated into different Southeast Asian languages, non-Chinese editions are relatively few in number and small in circulation. Malaysia and Singapore are the two centers of Japanese comics in the region, but other capital cities also have a considerable number of Japanese comics fans. For instance, in Jakarta, one major publisher has translated more than 70 Japanese comics into Indonesian. Most Indonesian bookshops carry some Japanese comics and