First, almost 100 percent are Chinese editions, licensed or pirated; only a few titles are available in English or Malay. Therefore, only the Chinese Singaporeans read Japanese comics. While some Malays and Indian Singaporeans occasionally watch Japanese animation, very few read manga because of the language barrier. This is a big obstacle to the further popularization of Japanese comics because Chinese constitute only 77 percent of the Singapore population, and even some of them have problems reading Chinese. This is a major reason why Singapore lags behind Taiwan and Hong Kong in Japanese comic culture. A similar condition prevails in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries, although their ratio of Chinese population is even lower. Japanese comics and animation are all converted into Chinese and thus Japanese comic culture has become a Chinese subculture in Southeast Asia.

Second, Singapore is an immature and small but fast-growing market. Japanese comics have become a mainstream youth culture in Singapore only in the 1990s. They are becoming more popular, but, compared with mature markets such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, Singapore still lags behind in aspects such as number of readers and publishers, quality of publication, and social and cultural impact.

In terms of circulation, Singapore is a very small market. Best-selling titles such as *Dragonball* and *Slam Dunk* sell about 10,000 copies per issue; in its heyday, *Dragonball* sold 13,000 copies. These figures are pathetic by Hong Kong or Taiwanese standards. For instance, in Hong Kong, *Dragonball* and *Slam Dunk* sell more than 100,000 copies per issue. In Singapore, the best-selling girl's comic, *Sailormoon*, sells about 5,000 copies per issue. In Hong Kong or Taiwan, a comic book selling 5,000 copies ceases publication. Most Chuang Yi's comic books sell a mere 2,000-3,000 copies, barely meeting a break-even point.

Most comic books are translated in and imported from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Malaysia; local translations and publications are few. Only one company, Chuang Yi Comics, has some impact on the local market by publishing a considerable number of Japanese comics. Taiwan and Hong Kong have a dozen companies which publish Chinese editions of Japanese comics, and some are very large and influential (Lent, 1999: 108-128).

Taiwan and Hong Kong introduce new comics very quickly. For example, *Shonen Jump*, the number one comic magazine in Japan, has an official Chinese edition in Taiwan, which appears almost simultaneously with its Tokyo counterpart. In Singapore, bookstores import Chinese editions of manga from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Malaysia, the majority of which are at least a year old. Censorship further delays their publication in Singapore as does economics; local publishers play it safe by introducing popular works to new works. They buy the copyrights and reprint Taiwanese or Hong Kong editions of Japanese comics, thus explaining why Singapore is always slower than Taiwan and Hong Kong in introducing Japanese comics.

Comic fans in Singapore are not up to date on new developments and are not aware of which manga lead the market in Japan. For instance, according to a survey (Animage, 1999: 99) in December 1998, the top ten popular comics in Japan were:

Rankings	Comic Titles	Authors
1	*Alas! My Goddess*, Vol. 18	Fujimura Yasusuke
2	*Bastard 2*, Vol. 20	Hagiwara Kazushi
3	*Detective Saiko*, Vol. 3	Tajima Shôu
4	*Tenjô tenka*, Vol. 2	Ôgura Ito
5	*Excel soccer*, Vol. 4	Rokudô Kôshi
6	*Arms*, Vol. 6	Minakawa Ryôji
7	*3X3 Eyes*, Vol. 30	Takada Yûzô
8	*Intorondepot 2 Blade*	Shirô Masamune
9	*Card Captor, Sakura*, Vol. 7	Clamp
10	*Tenchi muyô, Ryôuki*, Vol. 3	Okuda Hitoshi

At the time, these titles and artists were largely unknown to Singapore readers. Except for *3X3 Eyes* and *Tenchi muyô*, none has been screened on Singapore TV, and only half of the ten have Chinese editions available in Singapore (*Alas? My Goddess, Bastard, 3X3 Eyes, Card Captor Sakura* and *Tenchi Muyô*), and they are not popular. Among artists of these top ten comics, only Clamp, Shirô Masamune, and Okuda Hitoshi are familiar to Singapore readers.

Third, Japanese comics in Singapore are relatively clean because of rigid censorship laws, much more restrictive than those in Hong Kong or Taiwan. All comics are screened by MITA of the Singapore government, and no Singapore publisher can publish a comic book without the approval of MITA. MITA can request the publisher to cut or redraw certain portions of the comic as a condition for publication. Even with approval of MITA, the publisher has to be very cautious, for, if MITA receives complaints from parents or teachers about a comic book, a warning is issued. Book dealers and local publishers also exercise self-censorship. Eroticism is totally absent, and some popular comics which contain sex scenes or foul language are banned. The latter include *Video Gals, Crying Freeman, Prince Peacock*, and even the award-winning *Section Chief Kôsaku Shima*. Humorous comics about sex are screened out, and nude scenes in manga are either erased or covered up (such as by drawing a T-shirt or panty on the body). (**Figure 3**)

Bathing scenes and scatology are not permitted, but, some degree of violence is tolerated. Comics which provoke religious or racial discrimination are also discouraged. MITA does not usually take action against comic bookshops unless it receives complaints from parents or readers. In contrast, censorship in Hong Kong and Taiwan is not very strict. The Hong Kong government screens and classifies comics into categories of: wholesome for all ages, some unhealthy contents and strictly for adults, and erotic, which are banned from distribution. However, criteria are very loose so that very few comics are classified in the latter category.

Paradoxically, wholesome Japanese comics also are not introduced into Singapore. For instance, the many educational, informational, and historical manga do not find it to book shelves in Singapore because book dealers are not interested in importing them for lack of commercial value, and besides, there are no Chinese editions.