



Figure 3: The drawing of clothes and panties on naked body to beat censorship

Fourth, comics reading in Japan (and Taiwan and Hong Kong as well) is a national habit shared by all age and sex groups. In Singapore, however, the comics culture is largely made up of young males. Small children in Singapore play video games, but few read Japanese comics, and most primary and secondary students seldom read and do not prefer reading in Chinese because of their low proficiency level in that language. Comics for small children are all in English. Thus, young males in their late teens to early twenties are the most ardent readers of manga. Older adults are less interested in Japanese comics and some hold negative views on them. Parents discourage their children from reading comics.

Fifth, in Singapore, comic books are popular, but comics magazines are few and marginal. In Japan, all comic fans read comics magazines, some of which sell more than one million copies per issue. However, the

best-selling comics magazine, *Comic Weekly*, only sells about 7,500 copies per issue in Singapore and about 30,000 in the entire Southeast Asia. Compared with counterparts in Hong Kong and Taiwan, comics magazines in Singapore have a very small circulation. In Hong Kong, the top comics magazine featuring Japanese comics, *Ex-am*, regularly sells 40,000 copies, and in its heyday, sold about 100,000 copies per issue. There are at least two other comics magazines in Hong Kong which each has circulations of about 40,000 copies per issue. In Taiwan, top comics magazines such as *New Youth* and *Youth Express* even have larger circulations. An explanation is that Singapore readers are used to reading an entire series, not bothering to follow the new titles serialized in comics magazines. In Japan, comics magazines serialize new works and the popular ones are made into comic books, animation and other spin-offs. This order does not exist in Singapore.

Sixth, manga do not monopolize the entire comics market in Singapore. Although the market share of Japanese comics has increased steadily over the years and manga have secured a leading position in the 1990s, still they have to compete with comics by Hong Kong, Taiwanese, American, and Singaporean artists. According to my March 1999 survey of 300 Singaporeans between ages 13 and 29, 68 percent prefer Japanese comics, 14 percent those from Hong Kong, 13 percent those in English comics, and 5 percent those by Taiwanese.

Seventh, TV cartoons and video games promote Japanese comics. Manga are the mother of popular culture in Japan, made into animated TV series and other spin-offs which eventually make the comics even more popular. In Singapore, the process is reversed. In many cases, comics come before animation, but they become popular only after the showing of their TV animated series. Comics become a spin-off of animation in Singapore rather than the other way around. Video games also have an impact on comics in Singapore; popular games such as *Samurai Spirit*, *Rock Man*, *Street Fighter*, *Street Fighter Zero*, *Tekken*, *Pokemon*, *The King of Fighters*, *Virtua Fighter*, and *Fatal Fury*, are made into comics.

Japanese comics have a strong impact on the entertainment industry in East Asia. For instance, in Hong Kong, Japanese comics such as *City Hunter*, *Slam Dunk*, *Touch*, *Kindaichi Shonen no jikenbō*, and *Dr. Kumahige* were made into live-action movies, and *Ai to Makoto* (Love and Sincerity) into a TV drama. Japanese comics also influence the expressions and content of some Hong Kong movies (in particular those of Chou Sing Chi). There is no parallel in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Japanese comic culture will continue to grow in Singapore and Southeast Asia generally, but dramatic growth is unlikely in the near future. Because of the differences in racial composition, cultural background, value system, religion, and state censorship, Southeast Asia will never reach the level of maturity and popularity that East Asia has enjoyed.

References

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