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# JAPAN'S GROWING CULTURAL POWER: THE EXAMPLE OF MANGA IN FRANCE

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This paper is an attempt to analyse the success of manga on the international market of cultural goods in the same way as the success of any other commercial product, with special attention to the case of France – not only because France is this author's country, but also because it is – with the possible exception of Korea – the most developed export market for manga, still well ahead of the United States.

Starting with the translation of Ôtomo Katsuhiro's *Akira* in 1990-1991, manga has gained a 38 % share of the French comics market. According to my computation<sup>1</sup>, as of December 31, 2005, 628 titles from 231 manga artists (*mangaka*) have been translated in French, and several dozens of new volumes keep pouring every month<sup>2</sup>. Last but not least the manga has replaced martial arts as the main reason why young people chose to study things Japanese at university.

My starting point is a statement of fact. Manga appeared in a very specific cultural and historic context, i.e. the unique experience of the atomic cataclysm and the traumas inflicted on Japanese society by fast-track modernisation under the pressure of threatening external forces. Manga comes from a country whose international cultural influence was for a long time very limited, and it is radically different from everything that Japan exported in the past in this field. While Japanese cultural commodities that have been successful in the Europe since the end of the 19th century, such as *ukiyo*e woodcut prints or Zen gardens, were finally – if not immediately, depending of the countries and audiences – treated as part of high culture, and exhibited aesthetic based on the values of equilibrium, refinement and spirituality, manga is a form of popular culture founded chiefly – at least as far as the products that are most successful in France are concerned – on various forms of excess, confrontation and sensual pleasure.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's calculation based on Dunis and Krecinba (2004) for 1989-2004 and *Animeland Hors-Série* (12-2005).

<sup>2</sup> During 2005, an average of 7 new *mangaka* have been introduced every month to the French manga fans . For the sole month of December, no less than 91 new volumes have been published by 16 publishers – including 9 new titles and 82 volumes of already running series. Source: *Animeland* 117 (December 2005), p. 99.

And yet, manga is becoming a global cultural product that appeals to a very wide spectrum of audiences. This is an interesting paradox.

This raises the question of how this product found a mass market outside its original sphere. At a time when cultural globalisation is on the increase in tandem with economic globalisation, the significance of this question goes way beyond the framework of "Japanese studies" and could be of interest for specialists of international phenomena linked to the problematics of either "identities" or "soft power"<sup>3</sup>.

I chose an "economics-based" approach, starting with an analysis of the particular niche that manga occupies in the international cultural market – what I call "pure pleasure products" (I shall return to this concept later), then defining the conditions a product must fulfil in order to succeed in this niche, and then determining whether manga does so.

This approach seems to have two major drawbacks. The first one is that I focused only upon those manga that succeeded most on the French market – especially the series for the teenagers called *shōnen manga* (for boys) and *shōjo manga* (for girls), which have been the key for opening the country of *la bande dessinée* to Japanese exports and still constitute the bulk of the sales, even though new genres – manga for adults, historical fictions, manga dealing with social problems or politics, and the old *gekiga* – are attracting a growing readership. But since my question is why manga succeeded, it is only natural to limit my analysis to successful genres, even if this does not do justice to the fascinating diversity of the universe of manga.

The second drawback is that the way I ask the question might well dictate the reply. Having defined the criteria of commercial success for a "pure pleasure product" and established that manga is successful, it is well too tempting for the researcher to conclude *ipso facto* that manga does fulfil these criteria – and to "prove" it by grossly oversimplifying the universe of manga to retain only those elements that bear out his conclusion. But here again, the question is not that of manga *per se*, but of its consumption. Now all consumption is by nature a process of selection and processing – one could even say "digestion". French readers, like any others, take only what they need from the manga universe and appropriate it as they please. Their approach is essentially reductive, and it is this reduction that interests us. Duplicating this reduction is the only means of answering the question, which is not "what is manga?" but "how did manga become a global cultural product?".

In order to answer this question, *initially, I have treated manga like any other manufactured product* by analysing its advantages compared with its two international competitors – American comics and French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*. *Secondly, I have taken into account the specificities of cultural products*. They are commodities used by consumers to fulfil an extremely varied "need for pleasure", and invested with numerous significances which determine their value beyond any economic considerations<sup>4</sup>. It is as if the manufacturer has produced only "an empty form" that can be used in many different ways, which make its value range from "almost nothing" to "billions of dollars". This leads us to ask why manga above other products has this capacity to be imbued with meaning by today's French consumers of comics strips. *Lastly, I turn my attention to the soft power that Japan can derive from the global spread of manga*. I sought to investigate what resources manga can provide Japan in terms of

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<sup>3</sup> This is why my research centre (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, belonging to the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques) is presently funding my work on manga – quite a big first in the French academic world of both political science and international relations.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in 1998, it was the audience that turned *I will survive*, the pop song by Gloria Gaynor, into the unofficial anthem of the Football World Cup, by investing it with the fighting spirit embodied by the French team, and which made it a multi-million earning hit.

potential influence on French public opinion. As a researcher in an institute devoted chiefly to international relations and political science, I could not ignore this question.

The second and third parts of this paper are based on the analysis, as yet incomplete, of a survey I am conducting among French manga readers. This survey has been conducted through Internet. As of December 2005, it has generated 123 answers – 64 from male readers and 59 from female fans, ranging from ages 14 to 31. 61,7% of the respondents are university students, 27,6% are people in work and 10,5% are high school students or below. Due to the exclusive use of Internet, the survey has a very strong bias towards the more intellectually and materially well-equipped fraction of manga's readers, but it nevertheless encompasses a large variety of social conditions. This is still a work in progress, but it is already apparent that the new answers which continue to come do not modify substantially the results.

This survey produced a clear view of the most successful series among the French students and people in work manga fans in 2005<sup>5</sup>. The most interesting result is probably the fact that the fans mix up all the genres. The three superstars – equally popular among and young men and women – are *Nana* (a *shôjo manga* by Yazawa Ai), *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* (a *seinen manga* by Urasawa Naoki) and *Great Teacher Onizuka* (a *shônen manga* by Fujisawa Toru) in that order – preceding a mixed bunch of *shônen manga* for teenagers (*One Piece* by Oda Eiichirô, *Dragon Ball* by Toriyama Akira, and *Naruto* by Kishimoto Masashi) and for more grown-up audience (*City Hunter* by Hojo Tsukasa), *shôjo manga* (*Fruits Basket* by Takaya Natsuki), and *seinen manga* (*Monster*, by Urasawa Naoki *City Hunter* (Hojo Tsukasa), plus a lonely piece of cyberpunk science fiction (*Gunnm* by Kishiro Yukito)<sup>6</sup>. Thus it seems that the genre – and even age – categories are not very significant for the purpose of analyzing “how manga has succeeded in France”. As a consequence, I feel entitled here to analyze “manga” as a whole.

Another important point to note is that all the series among this Top Ten are from the 90's (*Dragon Ball* and *City Hunter* started in Japan in 1985 and 1986 but lasted well into the 90's), and so are most of those which appear in the more detailed results in Annex I. As a consequence, it remains to be seen if my analysis could apply to the gigantic production of the first generation of mangaka<sup>7</sup>.

## **I - MANGA AS A MANUFACTURED PRODUCT**

### **1) Cultural products as the new pillar of developed economies**

As globalisation leads to the delocalisation of material commodities production, goods that are “chiefly non-material”, like services of all kinds, R&D, design and cultural products, are becoming a pillar of the most advanced economies. It is no coincidence that the world's two most highly developed countries – the USA and Japan – are also today's biggest exporters of cultural commodities. This has been true of the USA for a long time, but it is new for Japan, and all the more surprising as its culture was traditionally seen, including by the Japanese themselves, as being very specific, contrary to western cultures which claimed to have a universal quality and were therefore naturally exportable. Nor is it a coincidence if the easing of trade restrictions on cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Since my poll was intended for students and above, although some teenagers have also responded, these are too few to get significant results.

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed results, see Annex I.

<sup>7</sup> As more and more works from Tezuka Osamu, Shirato Sampei, Tatsumi Yoshihiro, Chiba Tatsuya and the like are being published – or will be published soon – in France, this would be possible in a not too-distant future.

commodities has led to a clash between the champions of the “global market” and the defenders of the “cultural exception”. As for any product, the conflict is about commercial principles, with the major exporters (USA, Japan) pitted against those anxious to protect a waning cultural production capacity (France) or a developing one (Korea).

From an economic point of view, cultural products offer numerous advantages compared with industrial products. They are often inexpensive to develop and manufacture. They can be produced in a variety of formats thanks to the media mix which reinforces their impact and increases profits. On the one hand, they are consumed almost immediately, which leads to a frenzied demand for more; but on the other, they can be exploited for decades, like the Beatles’ catalogue. The dissemination of cultural commodities takes numerous forms, which are becoming less and less concrete, thus allowing new producers to bypass existing controlled distribution channels. Lastly, although manufacturing techniques are simple and it is very easy to copy the finished product, the know-how required to develop them is very hard to emulate.

From a broader perspective, cultural commodities also enable the countries that dominate the market to propagate their value system. And so they are endowed with a “soft power” which can be used to promote these countries’ national interests in various areas, as shown by Joseph Nye (1990, 2004). Cultural products are not by any means the only vehicles of soft power, but they make a huge contribution. We could well ask whether there is a connection between the rapid expansion of Japanese popular culture worldwide in recent years and the dwindling influence of the dominant US culture as a reaction to the Bush administration’s ruthless policy of hegemony.

## **2) The comparative advantages of manga in the global comics market.**

Manga has driven the success of Japanese cultural commodity exports. True, television series preceded manga in the European market, and it does not enjoy the same recognition as the animated films of Miyazaki Hayao, for example, and probably generates smaller profits than video games. But it is manga that provided the television series and the animation and video games industries with their imaginary universes, value systems, often their plot lines and even the graphic designers’ labour. And so it is fair to say that the Japanese cultural export industry basically relies on manga.

The first key advantage of manga compared with its main competitors in the global marketplace, French *bandes dessinées* and American comics, is being a mass industrial product, manufactured on far more massive scale. In 2002, the manga industry produced some 1.5 billion copies – magazines and books combined (SKK 2003) – as against 40 million French *bandes dessinées* (Caractère 2004, Internet) and 110 million American comics<sup>8</sup>. As a result, manga is much cheaper: the French consumer can buy up to 300 pages of manga for 6 to 9 euro, whereas a 46-page comic album can cost over 12 euro. Furthermore, the volume of production gives manga more commercial muscle than its competitors. Many Japanese series exported to France are long enough to supply the market for several years at a rate of one volume every two months, whereas the most successful French and Belgian *bande dessinée* series like *Asterix* and *Tintin* would provide the Japanese market with barely two compilation volumes (in the standard *tankobon* format of about 300 pages) in total : even if they sold well, it would be a one-off success.

In their national mass market, the Japanese manga producers have developed a marketing strategy which relies on products tailored to each category of customer down to the most specialist niche market. In France, the narrowness of the market has made the producers adopt the opposite strategy. The only way they can sell millions of albums

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<sup>8</sup> Estimation from Schodt (1996), p.50.

is to produce series that will appeal to all their customers, children and adults, at the same time. The slogan of the weekly *Tintin* comics magazine, "Pour les jeunes de 7 à 77 ans" (For the young at heart from 7 to 77), perfectly encapsulates this strategy. Most of the bestselling *bandes dessinées* are "one size fits all" series, neither truly for children nor adults – like *Asterix* or *Lucky Luke*; furthermore, they are confined to a single genre – offbeat humour – for the plot lines cannot be "adult" (drama, love, sex, social issues) at the risk of losing the children's market, and only humour will appeal to adults in stories with plot lines aimed at children. This rather narrow genre alone is not enough to create a mass market.

The Japanese cultural commodities industry is also unrivalled in the way its various branches interact to develop media mixes the likes of which do not exist in France. As well as boosting profits, these media mixes open up distribution channels that make it possible to circumvent national protectionist policies. In France, the penetration of manga is entirely thanks to the TV series, or, among today's generation, to computer-and-cards games (*Pokemon*, *Yu Gi Oh*): 95% of my respondents discovered manga in this way. Manga came up against the hostility of parents, teachers, the media, the government<sup>9</sup> and the major *bandes dessinées* publishers, who boycotted them. The TV series, OAV and DVD of animation films were a way to overcome this hostility by creating a demand directly among young people<sup>10</sup> and this demand was exploited by new young publishers who were themselves fans of the TV series and Japanese animation films. The media mix of TV series, animated films and computer games created both the demand for manga and the entrepreneurs who fulfilled it.

To help create the market – or because they were not very interested by exports at the beginning, or both –, the Japanese publishers then sold manga publication rights at cut-price rates; now, once the market has been consolidated, they can sell the rights at a much higher price. Separated by a quarter of a century, there is a striking similarity between the manga industry's success story and that of the other major Japanese export industries, such as the automobile. The strategy is the same. First stage: consolidate in a captive national market, shielded from competition, and develop comparative advantages in terms of productivity and costs. Second stage: forge ahead in the export market by practising dumping and bypassing protectionism using innovative methods – while the automotive industry delocalised its production to the heart of "enemy territory", manga has surreptitiously circumvented its defences by using new distribution networks.

If one adds that the manga industry has many other points in common with the major Japanese export industries – for example the dual structure (major publishing houses which organise the production of numerous small or family studios) and a highly trained labour force (amateur *mangaka* who learn the trade in clubs and *dojinshi*)<sup>11</sup>, then the success of manga outside Japan can therefore be analysed *mutatis mutandis* like that of any other industrial product. But strategy alone would not have been sufficient if manga had not also been a product of superior quality in this very specific field of cultural commodities – or rather what I call "pure pleasure products".

## **II - MANGA AS A "PURE PLEASURE PRODUCT"**

### **1) What is a "pure pleasure product"?**

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<sup>9</sup>As exemplified by the Kriegel Commission (2002), appointed by the French government to examine the problem of violence and pornography on television, which denounced the (mostly Japanese) series for teenagers shown on French television.

<sup>10</sup>This is how the things went, rather than a deliberate strategy by Japanese publishers, which did not seem to have been fully aware of the potential of manga as an export product before the mid-90's.

<sup>11</sup>*Mangaka* : manga artists. *Dojinshi*: the extremely developed world of amateur manga.

A "cultural" product is defined not so much by its material nature (book, film, CD, work of art) as by the fact that necessity is not the prime consideration in the act of purchasing it, unlike commodities that fulfil basic material needs such as food products or textiles. However, this boundary is hazy: the purchase of some so-called "cultural" products can have a practical purpose ("How to..." books, which the buyer hopes will help to improve his or her life), while the fulfilment of material needs can be devoid of any "necessity" (dinner in a three-star restaurant, a haute-couture garment). But for products like a novel, a music CD or a manga album, the act of buying seems to be driven by a quest for pleasure as an end in itself. That is why, in the following part of this analysis, I shall abandon the hazy notion of "cultural product" in favour of that of "pure pleasure product"<sup>12</sup>, the very antithesis of the "basic needs product" on which I have modelled my definition.

To understand what makes manga so successful in this commercial niche, beyond the comparative advantages resulting from its mode of production, we must first of all explain what the consumer is looking for – in other words, what is "pleasure" when it is not derived from the fulfilment of a material need.

In each person's subconscious, the alchemy of "pure pleasure" has three components. First there are the constants shaped by primitive impulses (the desire for power, the search for security, sexual desire), and by the scenario common to the development of all human beings living in society (the primal trauma of separation from the mother, the painful discovery of the principle of reality, the turmoil associated with adolescence, etc.). Second is the forms these constants take depending on each person's own history, and thirdly is the particular culture combined with factors such as education, age or social category. The combination of these three components determines the objects which give each individual pleasure in possessing them, as well as the situations or scenarios that are pleasurable when he or she experiences them directly or vicariously, via one form or other of the media.

And so a "pure pleasure product" will attract a customer base that is all the broader in that it will be both "full" of constants common to the human species and "empty" enough to let each person invest it with their own story and with the cultural specificities associated with place and time. In this sense, teddy bears, dolls and the warrior or fairy costume appear as prime examples of "pure pleasure products". They are simple aids that allow each child to make up their own story mixing various quantities of the three ingredients as required. It is this infinite plasticity that explains why they never go out of fashion.

But what is the function of this story for which the "pleasure product" acts as an aid – or, to use an alchemy image: "What is the function of this reaction for which it is the catalyst"? It aims to satisfy six fundamental psychological needs: the wish for power, which makes pleasurable to control through possessing or learning things; the need for achievement (to experience gratifying situations, even if vicariously); the need for security (to re-live familiar situations which made us feel good); the need for excitement, which prompts us to seek violent adrenalin-pumping emotions or feelings of different kinds; the need for escape (remove ourselves from the mundane which is little gratifying or stressful); and lastly the wish to be different from other people. A pleasure will be all the more intense if it satisfies all six needs at the same time. This happens when a person experiences a situation in which they feel powerful, which they recognise, which arouses intense feelings, uproots them from their everyday life and turns them into an

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<sup>12</sup> "Pure" is to be understood in the sense of "having no relation to any basic material need, including that of improving one's situation".

entirely different person. In this sense, the ideal pleasure is unquestionably that experienced by serial killers and, to a lesser degree, junkies...

This last comment highlights the fact that the satisfaction of the six needs is hardly compatible with day-to-day social life. It assumes means of escape from reality, be it for the most mundane vicarious satisfactions (reading, films, video games) or the radical marginalisation of the serial killer, by way of physical escape (holidays) or joining virtual communities (Internet). Escape is therefore not only one of the six needs, but also, more broadly, a "technical requirement" essential for their fulfilment.

## **2) Manga: a "pure pleasure product" of superior quality**

Manga – at least the kind of manga (mostly *shôjo manga* and *shônen manga* of the *Shônen Jump* and *Margaret* type, but nevertheless transcending the age and genre categories and produced in the 90's) which opened up the French market – appears to be a better "pure pleasure product" than American comics and *bandes dessinées*. It draws more powerfully on the great constants of the subconscious, is a better receptacle for personal stories and cultural variables and responds more fully to the six fundamental psychological needs.

### *2-1) Manga and the alchemy of pleasure*

Anybody who has flicked through *shônen* or *shôjo* manga knows that their plot lines feed on the traumas, fears and primitive desires of adolescents the world over: the pain of separation from the mother, conflict with the father and rebellion against authority, issues around virginity, the fear of rape in girls and that of castration in boys, uncertainties over sexuality and the teenage personality, and even violent death. A classic example is *Great Teacher Onizuka*, the *shônen manga* by Fujisawa Tôru which is the second favourite series among manga fans of both sexes in my survey: all the girls are raped or threatened with rape, nearly all the teenage protagonists have to face the prospect of an immediate violent death, and the hero himself is killed at one point (he resuscitates). The families are all at loggerheads or lone parent and, as in all manga, the characters are all obsessed with the loss or preservation of virginity.

In the USA on the other hand, these subjects have been censured by the "politically correct" or banned by the Comics Code; French *bandes dessinées* have been shying away from them, both because of the genre's pretensions to being an art form and its "one size fits all" strategy. Manga plots therefore have a dramatic intensity and a crudeness that European and American consumers are not accustomed to.

This intensity also results from manga's mode of production, in particular its publication in serial form which requires new plot developments every 25 or 30 pages, and the length of the series, which allows the author to flesh out the characters. It is also linked to market conditions, characterised by fierce competition: the formula for a successful series is immediately copied, and the *mangaka* are constantly forced to raise the ante in a way similar to the competition in the fast food market. Since all hamburgers and all chips are similar, only quantity is left as the variable to oust the competition (the "Supersize" strategy); similarly, many *mangaka* keep adding more drama, more sex or more violence in order to overcome competition.

If the intensity of manga plot lines is one reason for its popularity among French consumers<sup>13</sup> weary of a certain blandness in *bandes dessinées*, the often cruel *mise en scène* of the subconscious can be disturbing or shocking. But the skill of manga is to let the readers do as they please by appropriating the work to suit their own personal

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<sup>13</sup> In my study, it is the second most frequently cited reason by fans to explain their love of manga (70%)



history and culture. To assist this appropriation, the *mangaka* – especially those who have been the most successful in the French market up to now – use processes that are generally alien to *bandes dessinées* and comics.

The first consists of mixing opposing genres in the same series – comedy and drama, the extraordinary and the mundane, violence and romance, realism and the absurd – and this blend allows the readers to impart the tone that suits them. Here again, *Great Teacher Onizuka* is a classic example, where the constant evocation of violence, especially sexual, and death, does not prevent the series from being entertainingly funny – and it is no coincidence that it ranks second favourite among the French fans interviewed. The second process consists of setting extraordinary actions in the most familiar surroundings (school, the neighbourhood) or of endowing characters similar to the reader (schoolchildren, high-school students) with super-powers. The third is to present the reader with a very broad range of characters to identify with: the major series offer so many archetypal characters (the hero, the cunning character, the show-off, the big tough guy, the short fat guy with glasses), that everyone can find one to identify with<sup>14</sup>. French, Belgian and American writers are familiar with this formula, but their short, less dramatic story lines offer much less scope for identification. Furthermore, unlike *bandes dessinées*, manga allows the reader to identify even with the baddies, because there is no clear boundary between Good and Evil, and heroes often overstep the line: classic cases are the character of Tetsuo in *Akira* and that of Vegeta in *DragonBall*, the two series that have been the most effective in opening up the French market to manga. And – as the icing on the cake – the manga readers are often allowed to write their own story, especially since Ôtomo Katsuhiro (*Akira*, once again...) made fashionable the tendency to leave the ending open.

Manga thus incorporates the three components of the alchemy of pleasure. On the one hand, the great constants of the subconscious give the plots their characteristic intensity. On the other, the reader's own history, personality and culture, are given free rein to determine the tone of the story, choose the hero and even end it. Manga thus achieves the feat of being both very "full" (too full even for readers of *bandes dessinées*, who often lose the plot) and very "empty". It is literally crammed with materials from our collective subconscious, characters and action. But, insofar as it does not impose a tone, a hero or an univocal meaning on the reader, manga is empty, or at least infinitely flexible. This plasticity explains why the genre has been able to break out of its original cultural and historical sphere and why its French readership is socially and culturally very diverse, as my study shows, ranging from provincial high-school student and the unemployed from the run-down Paris suburbs to "bobos"<sup>15</sup>, the product of France's top universities who move in financial or European lobbying circles (there is even a tax inspector!).

However, manga do seem to be imbued with one unequivocal meaning. They give adolescents the most moral life lesson possible: for boys, it is "Friendship, effort, victory" (the slogan of *Shûkan Shônen Jump*), and for girls, it is "Endurance, friendship, marriage". But this lesson is repeated so many times throughout the series and is so familiar to the readers that it could be argued – subject to a more in-depth study on this question – that they see it as a familiar convention or stylistic device that is all the easier to accept as this moral message does not prevent the plot from teeming with extreme situations and shocking images. So although manga is not exactly "devoid of meaning", since it does embody one, this meaning is "empty", so little does it intrude on the (French) reader's imagination.

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<sup>14</sup> The most typical series offering an extremely diversified range of characters to identify with are *Dragon Ball*, *Naruto*, *One Piece* and *Fruits Basket*, but also *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* for a more mature audience, all 5 of which are in the Top 10 favourite series in my survey.

<sup>15</sup> *Bobo*: short for *bourgeois bohème*.

## 2-2) Manga and the six fundamental psychological needs

It would be hard to find a cultural product that presents *the desire for power* and *the need for achievement* as extensively as manga. "Fulfilling their dream" (*yume o kanaeru*) is the ultimate goal that the hero attains at the cost of both a bitter internal struggle and an endless series of confrontations with all kind of competitors or evil characters – as in *Dragon Ball*, *One Piece* and *Naruto*. But while those who identify with Sangoku, Luffy or Naruto obtain immediate satisfaction, our survey shows that identification is not the most widespread mode of consumption among French manga readers<sup>16</sup>. That is no problem: manga can fulfil the need for power and achievement in other ways. Its inexpensive cost, the fat albums and lengthy series make it easier for avid manga readers than for collectors of the slim *bande dessinée* albums to build up spectacular collections. On top of this, there is the plethora of goodies and posters<sup>17</sup>. And there is also the gratifying feeling of developing a knowledge of a country and a culture very different from our own and – last but not least – the pleasures of the lightly – or not so lightly – erotic "fan service".

There is no need to emphasise the *need for excitement*. Many manga – especially those best liked by French fans – give even to the most aloof or blasé reader a good shot of adrenalin. The action-packed stories, exaggerated intensity of the feelings and situations and erotic titillation have no equivalent in comics, which have been emasculated by the politically correct, or in *bandes dessinées*, whose artistic pretensions make them steer equally clear of Grand Guignol or gore outrageousness, unbridled comedy like *Friends* and the mawkishness of TV soap operas – forgetting that all these genres have a popular mass-market following.

Manga also satisfies our *need for security*. It is a dramatic, violent world, but there are no surprises. The readers make their way through *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga amid signs, symbols and graphic codes that all the *mangaka* use to some extent and which they know by heart. They find the same situations repeated over and over again, the heroes suffer the same trials and tribulations, and there is always the same moral message. Even the sustained rate at which the books come out fulfils the reader's need for security by guaranteeing them to get their "fix" every two or three months (whereas *bande dessinée* fans never know when their favourite author will grace them with a new album, which they might sometimes wait years for).

On top of this, there is the kinship of the fan community which *bande dessinée* readers do not experience. Our study showed how structured this world is and how it constitutes a true social space where people come together. Even though the replies which attest to an extremely high use of the Internet<sup>18</sup> cannot be considered as a valid indicator, given the means by which the questionnaires were distributed, and even though the sample is made up of the most active section of the readership, it is significant that more than one respondent out of five belongs to a circle of fans beyond the online chat rooms, that 80% of them "regularly" or "sometimes" exchange their mangas with other fans, and that nearly all of them say they know other fans and "talk about manga with them".

The fulfilment of the *need to be different* also seems to be a major manga pleasure factor. The fan has a knowledge and an expertise that are unusual. While anybody can buy a manga, not everyone is capable of understanding all the codes, finding their way

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<sup>16</sup> In our sample, it was only the third reason cited by fans explaining their enthusiasm for manga (40%), a long way behind escape (70%) and the intensity of the characters and the plots (65%). But the result would probably be different with a proportion of the younger and less sophisticated readership.

<sup>17</sup> Nearly all fans in our survey buy them.

<sup>18</sup> 100% of the sample uses it for information and around 86% join in discussion forums.

through the host of characters, remembering the ins and outs of plots that run for 3,000 pages and knowing the work of the famous *mangaka* in detail. Fans' tendency to surf the web to read series in scanlation<sup>19</sup> before the *vulgum pecus*, despite the relative discomfort of this method, is part of the same need to differentiate themselves through their expertise, as is the surprising number of those who state they want to learn Japanese<sup>20</sup> and have even embarked on lessons<sup>21</sup>.

The differentness that gives enthusiasts an edge is boosted by the fact that manga is still far from being accepted in France. More than half the respondents state that they have sometimes been the subject of curiosity, more than a third, sarcasm, and more than a quarter, disapproval. Half of those in work fear that their love of manga carries a social risk and prefer to conceal it from their colleagues. In the last few years, manga has become more mainstream : Taniguchi Jirô won a prize in 2003 at the Angoulême festival – which is for the comics what the Cannes festival is for the movies industry – and manga is sometimes getting favourable reviews in such sophisticated mainstream media as *Télérama* and *Le Monde*<sup>22</sup>. But this does not affect our respondents much, as the *mangaka* honoured by the intellectual establishment –like Taniguchi – are not the ones they prefer, far from it<sup>23</sup>.

Lastly, if *escape* provides the most appropriate means of satisfying the six above needs, here too manga enjoys advantages compared with *bandes dessinées* or American comics.<sup>24</sup> This is thanks to its exotic origins and its borrowing from a non-western history, mythology and folklore, but equally to the *mangaka's* skill in playing on time and place, and having their heroes travel to all four corners of the earth and the galaxy, and to every imaginable time recess. Out of the ten favourite titles cited by the students and working adults answering my survey, only two – *Nana*, by Yazawa Ai, and *Monster*, by Urasawa Naoki – have a realist contemporary setting; all the others transport the reader to purely fictitious worlds, other eras or supernatural dimensions.

This is only a crude analytical framework which I have outlined to explain as methodically as possible how manga has become a crucial component of the cultural globalisation that goes hand in hand with economic globalisation. It still begs for a more detailed comparison between manga and its competitors on each of these six points. But anybody who is the least bit familiar with the universal world of comics will be able to add their own examples to the framework.

### III. MANGA AS A VEHICLE FOR SOFT POWER

Another purpose of my survey was to analyse the soft power influence that Japan is likely to derive from the fad for manga in France. Surprisingly enough, what I have found is not quite new and sometimes paradoxical – beginning with the fact that, while it might be thought that all manga fans love Japan, this is only very partially true: taking all ages and both sexes together, less than half of the respondents find Japan “sympathique”

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<sup>19</sup> Two thirds of the respondents do so. *Scanlation*: translate, scan and put a manga online.

<sup>20</sup> Two thirds of the working adults and more than half the students and young people.

<sup>21</sup> 25% of the respondents (apart from those in work, who do not have the time)

<sup>22</sup> *Télérama* is a weekly cultural magazine cherished by left-leaning intellectuals, especially teachers. *Le Monde* is the most influential French daily among the establishment.

<sup>23</sup> Out of 177 titles cited by the working adults in our survey, there are only 2 by Taniguchi, and only 1 out of 207 titles cited by the students – and each one has been cited only once.

<sup>24</sup> Comics once had a comparative advantage over *bandes dessinées* with their Wild-West and anthropomorphic characters, but these figures now belong to the common cultural domain.

(likeable), and only 40% of the students do<sup>25</sup>. This suggests that the use of manga as a vehicle for soft power cannot be taken for granted, and that the image of Japan among manga fans is complex.

### **1) An image that is not very original**

First point to note: the traditional base on which the image of Japan in France has rested since the 1970s (Bouissou, 1994) – the decade when Japan became visible once more in the French media and in publishing, and when it shrugged off the bad image inherited from World War II and from defeat for that of the model of economic success – remains unchanged among manga readers. For them, the archipelago still seems to be a “very different” country, “full of spirituality” and “hard-working”. Insofar as the most popular series among manga fans are not – at least at first glance – those which best convey the values of spirituality and the work ethic that come to mind when they think of Japan, it is tempting to conclude that they have a pre-existing image of Japan in their minds, on which manga only builds. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the older the readers are, the more firmly rooted this traditional image is<sup>26</sup>, and the less they feel that manga has changed it<sup>27</sup>.

And yet a major element of traditional imagery is missing: harmony and consensus. The two items “inner peace” and “harmonious, consensual” achieve very low scores<sup>28</sup>. It is tempting to explain this by the fact that *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga plot lines are based on the torments of adolescence and confrontation. And yet, even the most violent series often end with the restoration of harmony for the community and inner peace for each character<sup>29</sup>. It would appear that the readers, as we suggested earlier, pick and choose, taking from manga what pleases them and ignoring what doesn’t suit them. Alongside the image of a Japan that is “full of spirituality” and “hardworking”, French readers have in their minds a second image which does not fit in with notions of harmony and “inner peace”: that of a country “full of contradictions”<sup>30</sup> “stressed out”<sup>31</sup> and, in particular, uneasy over its sexuality<sup>32</sup>.

There is nothing surprising in this. Insofar as the painful insecurities of adolescence and young people’s experimentation with love and sex are the stock in trade of *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga, it would have been surprising if Japan seen through these media had appeared to be comfortable with itself mentally and physically. But this bias does not explain everything. Well before the French market opened up to manga, the notions of contradictions and ruthlessness were already central to the negative image of Japan that came to be superimposed (without obliterating it) on the positive image during the 1980s, culminating in open Japanophobia which was only dispelled by Japan’s crisis (Bouissou 1994: 108-109). There too, it would seem that manga fans inherited an image forged

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<sup>25</sup> The item “likeable” only ranks 4th among the adjectives selected by the working adults to describe Japan, and 6th among the students.

<sup>26</sup> The three items achieve an average score of 60% among working adults, of 57.6% among students and 53.6% among the youngest interviewees.

<sup>27</sup> 37% of working adults derived only a “classic, with no surprises” view of Japan from manga, as against only 25% of students and 6% of the youngest interviewees.

<sup>28</sup> Between 2% and 7% according to ages.

<sup>29</sup> Emblematic in this respect is – once again – *GTO*, the second most popular manga among students and working adults of both sexes.

<sup>30</sup> 57% of working adults, 52% of students, 38% of the youngest interviewees.

<sup>31</sup> 43% of working adults, 42% of students.

<sup>32</sup> 40% of working adults, 37% of students (of whom 35% also consider it to be “repressed”).

over about a quarter of a century – which would explain why, as with the traditional positive image, its resonance depends on age<sup>33</sup>.

The image of Japan in the eyes of manga readers thus appears to be rather unoriginal. Overall it conforms with the mixture of Japanophilia/Japanophobia that dominated the French media and public opinion since the end of the 1980s. And so manga does not appear to have – or has not yet – brought in anything new (which should disarm the critics who accuse it of sullyng the image of Japan as well as the minds of French youth).

## **2) Elements of a revival**

All the same, it is not apposite to conclude that manga is not a powerful vehicle for soft power. The survey shows that it does attract a new audience to Japan: only 15% of the youngest respondents were interested in Japan or Asia in general before beginning to read manga; the percentage is not even half of students (46%) and it is 57% of working adults. Manga also gives the country a new image – or at least people think so: nearly two thirds of the respondents consider that manga has “changed their view of Japan”. Even if this “new image” is often no more than the updating of the old image buried in the collective French subconscious and even if “new” does not always mean “positive”, the very fact that manga fans think that they are discovering something new proves that times are changing. Furthermore, manga fans’ interest in Japan is very keen: three quarters of the respondents (and 92% of the younger ones) want to go and visit the country; two third would like to learn the language; half would like to meet Japanese people and “find out more about Japan”, and 15% would even like to find a job connected to Japan. On top of this, these newcomers display a strong missionary zeal<sup>34</sup> which will amplify the impact of manga as a medium, and more than three quarters of them state that they will continue to read manga at age 50, thus providing for a long-lasting influence.

Consequently, manga appears as an effective medium for drawing attention to and conveying messages about Japan to a new audience. Noticeable is the fact that a section at least of this new audience – the one that replied to our Internet survey – is socially and culturally well equipped, in sharp contrast with the still-too-common image of manga fan as a semi-illiterate youngster from suburban ghettos. If one adds that the bulk of the manga audience has not been taken into account by the survey because of the Internet bias, and that this neglected fraction is the youngest and the more popular one, the real impact of this medium is certainly more powerful and more diversified than measured by the survey. The survey suggests that manga’s soft power potential is strongest among the younger respondents, because they are less knowledgeable about Japan. Less influenced by pre-existing representations, through manga they have built up an image of Japan that is much more favourable than that of their elders: they find it less shocking, more likeable, less stressed, less repressed and less prey to contradictions. Unfortunately, given the nature of the sample, this result only has a very low indicative value and needs to be confirmed by a new study aimed at secondary school pupils, which I am currently developing.

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<sup>33</sup> The three items score an average of 46.6% of working adults, 43.6% of students but only 20.3% of the youngest interviewees.

<sup>34</sup> Around 80% of the respondents have already lent their mangas to one or several people with the intention of converting others.

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## ANNEX I.

### THE MOST LIKED SERIES AMONG STUDENTS AND PEOPLE IN WORK FRENCH MANGA FANS

#### The fifteen most popular series among student boys (in that order)

20th Century Boys (Urasawa Naoki), GTO (Fujisawa Toru), One Piece (Oda Eiichirô), Dragon Ball (Toriyama Akira), Monster (Urasawa Naoki), Gunnm (Kishiro Yukito), Akira (Otomo Katsuhiro), Hunter x Hunter (Togashi Yoshihiro), Planètes (Yukimura Makoto), City Hunter (Hojo Tsukasa), Nana (Yazawa Ai), Evangelion (Sadamoto Yoshizuki) Berserk (Miura Kentarô), Slam Dunk (Inoue Takahiko), Naruto (Kishimoto Masashi)

#### The fifteen most popular series among the men in work (in that order)

Dragon Ball, GTO, 20th Century Boys, One Piece, Monster, Nana, City Hunter, Hunter x Hunter, **Bleach** (Kubo Taito), Berserk, **Basara** (Tamura Yumi), **Hokuto no Ken** (Hara Tetsuo), **Sanctuary** (Ikegami Ryoichi), Gunnm, **Banana** Fish (Yoshida Akimi)

#### The ten most popular series among the student girls (in that order)

Nana, **Fruits Basket** (Takaya Natsuki), **X** (CLAMP), **Détective Conan** (Meitantei Conan, Aoyama Gosho), City Hunter, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys, Naruto, **Hikaru no go** (Obata Takeshi), **Angel Sanctuary** (Yuki Kaori), **Ayashi no Ceres** (Watase Yû), One Piece, **Hanakimi** (Nakajo Hisaya), Dragon Ball, GTO, Monster, **Fushigi Yûgi** ( Watase Yû)

#### The fifteen most popular series among the women in work (in that order)

20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys, Nana, Gunnm, Fruits Basket, **Say Hello to Black Jack** (Satô Shûhō), Fushigi Yûgi, **Saint Seiya** (Kuramada Masami), GTO, **Hanayori dango** (Kamio Yoko), Monster, Naruto, **RG Veda** (Clamp), Ayashi no Ceres, Evangelion, Bleach

(Survey **BOUISSOU – 2005**)