

Manga: A Critical Guide, by Shige (CJ) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart

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Manga: A Critical Guide by Shige (CJ) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart is the latest in the Bloomsbury Comics Studies series, and as such it is meant to be a text for novices and experts alike. It should, therefore, be considered along these lines. Ultimately, does this book do what it sets out to accomplish? In the broadest possible terms, it does, but there are caveats that should be noted, although these caveats are comparatively minor issues when looking at the complete text.

This book is divided into four chapters and a glossary.

The first chapter focuses on the historical development of manga, and the chapter is split into two parts: pre-1945 and post-1945. The authors highlight this immensely important aspect of the history of the medium: the imperial-era state's impact on the way manga was perceived and produced. It was also in the aftermath of the Japanese surrender that, arguably, the most influential manga artist began his career.

Before discussing Tezuka Osamu, it would be best to focus on the first half of chapter one. The authors highlight the ways in which we, generally, have two views of manga history: the “long history view” and the Tezuka view. The long history view, effectively, goes back as far as the 8th century CE to argue that ancient illustrations *technically* count as manga, but this is often disputed in favour of a “great man” view of history, which generally considers the origins of the medium being paired with Tezuka's entrance on the scene in 1946.

The first part of chapter one is dedicated to a longer, less “great man” centred approach. It looks at the development of the earliest manga as comic strips, political cartoons and

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humorous illustrations, originating in the Meiji Period (1886–1912) with the advent of public printing technology. There is an especially strong focus on the work of Kitazawa Rakuten, the man considered the “Father of Manga,” who founded the pioneering *Tokyo Puck* magazine and became the first professional *mangaka*, or manga artist.

The text is quick to move on from Kitazawa Rakuten to various other publications and artists who came in his wake. This is because of the authors’ attempt to depart from the “great man” approach. They do not entirely succeed in that regard, particularly in the second part of chapter one.

The influence of imperial control led to intensive regulation and censorship, as a result of which manga was obligated to encourage “traditional Japanese virtues” while shunning anything considered violent or problematic. There is not much attention paid to this period of manga’s history in the book, possibly because development would have slowed with such extensive control, but as soon as part two begins, the focus continually returns to Tezuka. After all, it is rather difficult to ignore the man nicknamed “The God of Manga.”

The authors no doubt wanted to focus on Tezuka’s contemporaries, but Tezuka is ever-present and his connections to the early anime industry are also highlighted. However, in the post-1945 section, the authors take pains to explore the development of various genres, the beginnings of long-form narrative manga, and the growth of the commercialisation of manga, especially with regard to the “media mix” that would become prevalent as manga became attached to various other forms of media, such as advertising, anime, merchandise, et cetera.

The discussions of the 21st century are comparatively short. Despite the attempt to avoid it, the focus is during Tezuka’s lifespan, which ended in 1989. The last 30 years of history are breezed through quite quickly.

Virtually half the book is history, and this is a good thing. It allows for the dispelling of misunderstandings about the origins of manga as a medium *and* it illuminates the lesser-known individuals who were involved in manga’s history. Chapter two focuses on some aspects of manga in terms of society and culture, such as imperial censorship, tourism’s use of manga imagery, and the participatory nature of manga fandom. Various aspects of manga within contemporary culture are discussed, and there is a stronger elaboration on some of the 21st-century aspects that were absent in chapter one, but none of these sections is particularly deep, unlike the historical overview.

The third chapter is a guide. It is effectively a series of lists that show the ways one could analyse and/or teach manga, such as on formal, content, gendered, biographical, contextual, and/or historical levels. This is not done in much depth and can instead be used as a launchpad for those who are new to manga and wish to delve further into the medium and related research. Many of the points on display are rather simple, but it

serves as a useful tool for those who, for instance, may be educators who want to use manga as a way of teaching literature, but who are not well-equipped enough to do that yet.

This is where chapter four and the glossary come into play. Chapter four is another list—a list of influential manga. The list is usefully separated into various categories, such as pre-1945 texts, children's manga, *shōnen*, et cetera.

The glossary provides a good list of terms for those newly interested in manga. It should nonetheless be noted that the glossary is, at times, lacking in terms of specificity. For instance, it contains entries for *lolicon* and *yaoi*. The former describes the controversial genre/cultural phenomenon that is eroticised images of underage girls, while the latter describes feminised homosexual material. While these terms are certainly more well-known, it may have been useful to include oppositional terms like *shotacon*, the eroticisation of underage boys, and *bara*, the masculinised homosexual equivalent to *yaoi*.

As an introductory text, *Manga: A Critical Guide* is a great resource that could have been a little more robust in some sections to provide a more balanced picture of manga. Nevertheless, Suzuki and Stewart have succeeded admirably in providing a text that explores manga's history, sociocultural impacts, and critical uses.