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Helen McCarthy

The Manga Bible

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Contemporary and Historical
Manga

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THE MANGA BIBLE

For Darren-Jon Ashmore

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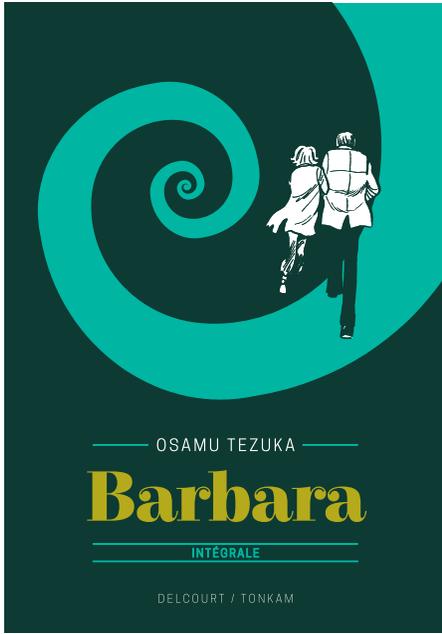
**WHERE
MANGA
IS NOW**

WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

The current global spread of manga has two major strands: the way languages have spread across the globe, and recent advances in communications technology and connectivity. To understand this, we need to look back at economic and technological developments over the last 20 years. Since around 2005, both broadband and personal devices—smartphones or tablets—have proliferated at unprecedented speed in markets where capitalism and the quest for profit has driven mass-adoption.

This acceleration in world communications was fueled by the preceding centuries of imperialism, colonization and trade, which established the English language as a major global communications medium. This was due in large part to the British Empire, which established English as the primary language of its many colonies. Crucially, the US colony retained the English language when it achieved independence. Two centuries later, the world's two major computer systems (Microsoft and Apple) were designed and marketed by two American companies. This long history of colonization, both successful and failed, gave the English language great leverage in terms of its global spread.

Of course, English isn't the only language to spread around the world through colonization. French, Belgian and Italian manga translations have been hugely popular since the late 1970s, with Spanish and German not far behind. The colonial history of these countries gave their languages vast areas of influence. For much of the 20th century the ability to translate Japanese was still a relatively rare skill in Europe; it was faster and cheaper to translate from a language where trade had already encouraged widespread communication. Once a text was translated from Japanese into English, French or Italian, it became a source for translation into other European languages. French translations of manga spread across North Africa and the Arab world; Spanish and Portuguese translations spread across South America. Russian elites used to speak French and intermarried with the English aristocracy, so French and English were useful source languages for Russian translations. Each translation into a European language produced more localized translations, and colonial-era maps became conduits for new works and new ideas of all kinds.



Osamu Tezuka's manga *Barbara*, in a French edition published by Delcourt. The cover style echoes the 1970s vibe of the story.

It's no accident that European languages gave manga such a worldwide boost. Many European countries have thriving comics cultures with multigenerational cross-gender audiences. Manga fits easily within these markets, where comics are easy to buy in mainstream outlets and can be read by anyone without disapproval. In Britain and America, despite heroic efforts by small publishers and creators, mainstream comics culture after World War II was dominated by American-style superhero and gag comics

and was not considered to provide any wider cultural value. With a few honorable exceptions, mainstream English-language comics marginalized characters who were not white, straight, able-bodied and male. Trolling and gatekeeping sadly still persists in some online spaces, targeting fans who do not conform to an outdated stereotype. But thanks to the spread of manga, almost any reader can now walk into a local chain bookstore or shop online and find a range of comics that they will love.

STATE OF THE MARKET

Manga has revived the English-language female comics audience, which local publishers had largely abandoned in the latter third of the 20th century. According to the *Manga Market Size & Trends* report by Grandview Research, the 2023 global manga market was split between male and female readers 65 to 35 percent, but female global market share is predicted to grow faster between 2024 and 2030. The market for romance and drama manga will grow over the same period, and although both genres are mostly popular with female readers, drama also attracts many male readers.

According to the report, the adult market for manga, defined as readers aged over 16, is the largest, with almost 57 percent of 2023's 13.7bn global manga market. Action-adventure leads the genres with a third of the revenue and is popular with female and older readers as well as the target audience of younger males. Other popular genres include comedy, thrillers, romance, fantasy, sports, drama, food, and travel. Except for comedy, these genres were almost invisible in the mainstream English language comic book market before manga became widely available.

Perhaps the key factor highlighted in the report is that online distribution has boomed since the Covid-19 pandemic first made headlines in 2019 and sent many affluent markets into lockdown. A focus on work/life balance and working from home resulted in huge growth in online distribution in digital formats, which accounted for over 72 percent of sales in 2023. However, more than one-third of manga readers worldwide like to collect the works of their favorite creators in physical book form. Online distribution and its relationship with print seems to be functioning in the same way as the Japanese printed manga anthologies; the most popular stories in cheaply printed phone-book-sized weeklies such as *Shonen Jump* and *Comic Afternoon* are collected in smaller, higher quality formats that fans can treasure and re-read. Online distribution also provides fans with new reading material from which they can curate a personal library to buy and keep.

DEMAND AND ACCESS

Why did these changes have such an impact on the way English readers consume manga and the amount they consume? Once again, it's all down to cheap, easy, rapid access. As people outside Japan got more and easier access to manga and anime—the animated TV shows based on manga—they wanted more. It's difficult to want what you've never seen, but once you see it, it creates demand.

Anime penetrated the French TV market in the late 1970s and opened the door for manga and other merchandise. It's a classic case study. The first screenings of giant robot show *Goldorak*—the localized title for Go Nagai's manga and anime hit *Grendizer*—in the school summer holidays in 1978, made the show an instant word-of-mouth sensation among school-age children. Merchandise was in huge demand and the difficulty and expense of importing and translating manga from Japan led to the distribution of local, unlicensed material at prices young fans could afford.

A typical example is the girls' manga *Candy Candy*. This romantic drama by Kyoko Mizuki, with art by Yumiko Igarashi, appeared in Japan between 1975 and 1979. The story was animated and aired in

Japan between 1976 and 1979. The anime made its French debut in 1978 under the title *Les Aventures de Candy*, shortly after *Goldorak* became a hit on French TV. The TV listings publication *Télé-Guide* for June 1978 included a free color booklet with images from the *Candy* anime and a locally generated cover proudly proclaiming “*comme à la télé*” (“as seen on TV”). The booklet was so popular that a series of *Télé-Guide* editions retelling stories from the anime followed, all locally produced, like the equally popular and successful *Goldorak Télé-Guide* color books. Before the end of the year the books were being sold at pocket money prices, generating work for French artists and revenue for French companies as well as feeding the market for anime and manga. It was 1993 before the original *Candy Candy* manga appeared in France from Presses de la Cité. Until then, unlicensed merchandise helped to feed and grow both the local market and markets in French-speaking countries such as Canada.

