

# THE PRODUCTION OF A “MANGA CULTURE” IN FRANCE : A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A SUCCESSFUL INTERCULTURAL RECEPTION

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Manga and anime are now part of the cultural habits of different generations of French readers, and they are today a major cultural space where images and meanings about Japan and Asia circulate. In this paper, I will try to analyse the reception of manga and Japanese pop culture in France as an historical process challenging traditional cultural hierarchies. The reception of these global commodities in France has involved conflicting discourses and representations, and has eventually resulted in the production and acknowledgment of a specific set of activities and cultural resources about manga and anime. This “manga culture” is however far from being homogenous, and is even more and more differentiated. I will try to show how this form of “cultural capital” was built up, and how it relates both to an interest in Japanese society and to skills related to Information and Communication Technologies, especially among teenagers and young adults. Two dimensions of this process will be more precisely developed in this paper:

- A discourse analysis of the symbolic conflicts between cultural critics, media representations, and fans, which led to different forms of cultural acknowledgment of manga and anime.
- A sociological analysis of the cultural and media practices of a group of French manga readers, in order to understand how they appropriated these textual, visual and technological materials (through forms of “poaching”).

These two levels of analysis are complementary and allow us to understand the interactions between the individual reading experiences and the collective production of a “manga culture” in France.

First, I will analyse the actors and “cultural entrepreneurs” of the reception of manga in France, from the 1990’s controversy to the current processes of legitimization. Mangas and anime were indeed first considered a lowbrow commercial form of child entertainment: a “moral and media panic” emphasised their negative effects, and spread the traditional highbrow prejudices against television, mass culture and new technologies. Manga were considered a purely economic and temporary craze, whereas French “bande dessinée” (comic books) had reached a more artistic and legitimate status since the 1970’s. It’s interesting to see how French young fans organised themselves

collectively to resist this dominant cultural legitimacy, to promote their passion through associations, fanzines, conventions.

In a second part, I will try to analyse the reception of manga through interviews conducted with French manga readers: the aim was to understand their personal histories as manga readers, their uses of a whole set of media in relation to Japanese Pop Culture, and how it influenced their reading habits, their personal media literacies. These interviews throw light on the social construction of cultural tastes and literacies among manga readers, and underline the complexity of cultural globalization.