

# Erotic Comics in Japan



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# Asian Visual Cultures

This series focuses on visual cultures that are produced, distributed and consumed in Asia and by Asian communities worldwide. Visual cultures have been implicated in creative policies of the state and in global cultural networks (such as the art world, film festivals and the Internet), particularly since the emergence of digital technologies. Asia is home to some of the major film, television and video industries in the world, while Asian contemporary artists are selling their works for record prices at the international art markets. Visual communication and innovation are also thriving in transnational networks and communities at the grass-roots level. Asian Visual Cultures seeks to explore how the texts and contexts of Asian visual cultures shape, express and negotiate new forms of creativity, subjectivity and cultural politics. It specifically aims to probe into the political, commercial and digital contexts in which visual cultures emerge and circulate, and to trace the potential of these cultures for political or social critique. It welcomes scholarly monographs and edited volumes in English by both established and early-career researchers.

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# Erotic Comics in Japan

*An Introduction to Eromanga*

*Nagayama Kaoru*

*Translated by  
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Cover image: A sample from Nakata Aki's *Pure Pink Diary* (Junjō momoiro nikki, published by Yukkusha in 1991). The artist recalls encountering eroticism in childrens manga. She would later work in *eromanga* magazines.

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## Note on Japanese Names and Words

In this book, Japanese names are generally written surname first, as is the custom in Japanese, unless the person publishes under, is known by or prefers the reverse order. In the case of artists, especially those whose work circulates in English translation, we have elected their preferred names and romanization; be aware that this introduces inconsistencies in romanization of names among artists. The same standard applies to publications and organizations with official or preferred English names and romanization. Japanese words are transliterated according to the modified Hepburn system. For this reason, macrons appear over some long vowels; however, for words commonly published without macrons in English (for example, Tokyo), we follow the convention of omitting them. Other small changes have been made to aid pronunciation. In text quoted from English-language sources, translation of Japanese names and words may differ.





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# Translators' Introduction: *Eromanga* in the Global Now

## *Eromanga*, Japan and Translation

In the summer of 2014, a swarm of international journalists descended on Akihabara, a neighborhood in Tokyo known for its concentration of stores selling manga (comics), anime (cartoons) and related media and material. For over a decade, they and others had filed breathless reports about the global spread and influence of Japanese popular culture, especially manga and anime, which fueled hype about “Cool Japan.” In the process, Akihabara, where manga/anime stores are more densely clustered and visible than anywhere else in the world, had become a symbolic site for Cool Japan and tourist destination (Galbraith 2019). The journalists, however, were not in Akihabara to talk about Cool Japan. On the contrary, they came to report on manga and anime as something that Japan ought to be ashamed of. In Akihabara, which metonymically stood for Japan, they found examples of comics and cartoons featuring youthful-looking characters engaged in explicit sex, or what appeared to them to be “child pornography” (Adelstein and Kubo 2014; Ripley et al 2014; Fawcett 2014). The keyword was “*lolicon*,” or work associated with the “Lolita complex.” There was nothing new in responding to manga and anime this way, which reflects a relatively stable international discourse about “the Japanese Lolita complex” (Saitō 2011: 6) and Japan as a “dangerous (potentially pedophilic) ‘other’” (Hinton 2014: 65), but this coverage was notable for the intensity of its collective moral outrage.

The journalists were reporting on the Japanese government’s decision to revise child pornography laws, namely to ban possession (production and distribution were already illegal). This seemed to align Japan with international standards, but lawmakers notably did not include fictional forms in their definition of child pornography. If increased concern about the safety of children led to stances against pornography and abuse from the late 1970s on (Rubin 2011: 168, 218), then this had taken the form of an ongoing and open-ended campaign by the 2010s. In hopes of stamping out the scourge of child pornography and abuse, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom have all moved to make illegal both real and fictional forms (McLelland 2016: 11). In the United Kingdom, changes to the law have at least in part been a reaction to the spread of manga and anime (Eiland 2009: 400-401), and the first successful prosecution for possession



of offending media and material from Japan came in 2014 (Lightfoot 2014). That Japan, under close scrutiny, did not act against such content earned condemnation from reporters, who seemed overwhelmed with concern for children as they encountered manga and anime. Walking through the streets of Akihabara, a reporter for CNN, a global news provider, could not help but wonder if “cartoons might be fueling the darkest desires of criminals” (Ripley et al 2014). It did not matter that manga historian and translator Frederik L. Schodt had pointed out in response to a Japanese debate about the imagined harm of manga decades before that there does not seem to be a significant statistical relation between the relatively high profile of sexual and violent comics and low occurrence of sexual and violent crimes in Japan (Schodt 1996: 49-53), which had also been said about pornography (Diamond and Uchiyama 1999: 11). It did not matter that Japanese politicians told reporters again in 2014 that, on the issue of sexuality and violence in cartoons, “It has not been scientifically validated that it even indirectly causes damage” (Adelstein and Kubo 2014), or that Japanese activists echoed “there’s no scientific evidence” (Ripley et al 2014). To infuriated critics, this sounded like a defense of perverts, pedophiles and potential predators.<sup>1</sup>

While manga/anime fans online relished lampooning these journalists, who did not know much about the Japanese comics and cartoons they held up to critique, one might be forgiven for asking where they were supposed to turn for more information.<sup>2</sup> There were no books specifically focusing on pornographic comics and cartoons in Japan. Not in English, anyway.<sup>3</sup> If they had accessed the Japanese-language literature, the journalists might have seen that in the spring of 2014, just months before the explosion of discourse in international news media, a book called *Eromanga Studies*,

1 Critics attribute the low crime rate to underreporting, which render numbers suspect. For example, a 2015 government survey found that more than two thirds of rape and sexual assault victims in Japan never told anyone what happened to them, and only four percent reported the incident to police; by comparison, the U.S. Justice Department found that same year that almost 33 percent of rape and sexual assault crimes in the United States were reported (Mori and Oda 2018). The statistical relationship between manga/anime and crime can also be highly contested in Japan (for example, Cather 2012: 262-267).

2 The CNN journalist mentioned above, for example, presented a horror manga title as “child porn,” and fans quickly pounced on his obvious mistake (Cabrera 2014).

3 We mean this in the sense of a book on the Japanese pornographic comics and cartoons perceived to be by and for men, which is the content most often under debate. There is a monograph devoted to “ladies comics,” including pornographic content for women. Fittingly enough, that book ends its introductory chapter by noting that “the sex and violence [sic] content popular among Japanese adults may not be as acceptable to the American population. Such material could create political debate in the years to come” (Ito 2010: 31).

*Expanded Edition: An Introduction to Manga as a "Pleasure Apparatus"* (Zōho eromanga sutadiizu: "Kairaku sōchi" toshite no manga nyūmon) had been published. As the name implies, it was an expanded edition of a landmark work introducing *eromanga*, or "erotic manga," pornographic comics, which are often also labeled "adult" (*adaruto*, *seijin muke* or *seinen*) and "restricted to readers age 18 and older" (*jūhachi kin*). In *Eromanga Studies*, the journalists would find surprising facts about the world's most robust market for pornographic comics. In just the first few pages, they would read that, as early as the 1970s, over 80 *eromanga* magazines were published a month; that although debate over pornography is often framed as an us versus them issue divided along gender lines, since the 1990s, some magazines have had the majority of their contributions coming from female artists; that many celebrated manga artists have experience in the industry; that there are numerous genres, subgenres and styles that allow for some of the freest and most unique expressions of sexuality in any medium; that freedom of expression and diversity encourage innovation, which feeds into manga, anime and media overall.

Although the title is different, the book you are reading is an English translation of *Eromanga Studies* (hereafter *Eromanga*). The original Japanese text was written by Nagayama Kaoru (aka Nagayama Kaworu, aka Fukumoto Yoshihiro, born in Osaka in 1954), who is an influential critic and activist in Japan. One could also describe him as a scholar of popular culture and a "popular scholar," but this requires some unpacking. Indeed, to reach not only those journalists, but also a wide range of readers unfamiliar with *eromanga*, including researchers and educators who could be in dialogue with this aspect of Japanese visual culture, in addition to the language, we feel it is necessary to translate some of the context of Nagayama's work. We will do so in three ways in this introduction: first, explaining the relationship between popular and academic publication in Japan; second, positioning this book in past and present international debates about pornography, manga and harm, with reference to academic and English-language literature; and third, mapping the general industry and visual culture of manga, the place of eroticism in it and how regulation has impacted manga, eroticism and those writing on these topics and advocating against increased regulation. Rather than rigid separation and progression from one to the next, these three lines are interwoven in this introduction.

To begin, *Eromanga* does not follow conventions familiar to many academics reading and writing in English. The style is casual, citations do not appear for every assertion and engagement with texts might be described as empirical rather than strictly theoretical. There is no methodology section.



The perspective is of a contemporary witness and insider exploring media and material and opening it up to others. The author also adopts an approach that has been called “life studies,” or opening the self and one’s inner thoughts and feelings to interrogation (Morioka 2017: 174-176), in this case in relation to the *eromanga* under discussion. It at times sounds like phenomenology, but is not named as such. While this may seem strange to academic audiences, it makes the writing and its insights extremely accessible. This is not an accident, as Nagayama was originally writing in the format of an inexpensive paperback book intended for general audiences. However, rather than “unacademic,” this and similar content is more accurately described as scholarship published outside the academy and in another form. This form is also adopted by Japanese academics, who “have a much more fluid relationship with the popular press and mass culture” (Ivy 1989: 26) than many other parts of the world. Even as academics approach popular writing, the opposite is also true, with popular writers approaching academics. The result is that Japanese publishing is “not so strictly divided between academic and trade publications” (Abel and Kono 2009: xix), and professionals, practitioners and public intellectuals mingle.

In contrast to the publishing industry making academic texts into mass artifacts or academics writing for general audiences or taking on popular topics, the case of Nagayama and *Eromanga* follows a more common pattern in Japan. Before celebrated academics such as Azuma Hiroki overturned the status quo by addressing manga and anime in the 2000s (Abel and Kono 2009: xx), almost all work on such media and material was written by industry insiders and critics with minimal or no connection to universities. One of Azuma’s primary interlocutors, Ōtsuka Eiji, for example, was mostly known for editing subcultural magazines, developing marketing theory and penning stories for manga, anime and games, but that did not mean he was not also “one of the most important writers on fan cultures” and “anime and manga subcultures in Japan” (Steinberg 2010: 99). For its part, broadly, manga studies was conducted as “criticism” (*hyōron*) by those “out of power” (*zaiya*), or without academic positions. Furthermore, just as elite academics tended to avoid popular culture (Abel and Kono 2009: xxiii), manga scholars tended to avoid pornographic content. The extremely vigorous manga market in Japan is divided by gender and age, with strong stylistic and thematic differences refined and reproduced through core publishers, magazines and editorial boards. Most of the Japanese critical writing on manga focuses on publications categorized as for “boys” (*shōnen manga*), “girls” (*shōjo manga*), “young men” (*seinen manga*) and “women” (*josei manga*), as opposed to categories such as “adult” (*seijin muke manga*) and “ladies” (*redīsu komikkusu*), which include





explicit depictions of sex. With increasing crossover of artists, readers and imagery, however, it is ever more difficult to quarantine and ignore *eromanga*. Even as much of manga looks erotic to confused journalists and concerned citizens, we know very little about *eromanga* as such.

This was the critical gap that Nagayama addressed when his book was originally published in 2006, and there remains a gap in general understanding outside Japan and in the English-language literature that this translation addresses now. By Azuma's estimation, a preference for work by elite academics means that few Japanese experts on popular culture have been translated into English and academic contexts beyond Japan (Azuma 2009: ix-x). To rephrase somewhat, that these experts are outside the academy and producing different forms of scholarship discourages translation. While Azuma's credentials as an elite academic and use of continental philosophy make the translation of his popular scholarship more acceptable, though the relaxed style still "may make academics uneasy" (Abel and Kono 2009: xx), the bulk of work in Japanese on manga, anime and related media and material continues to be overlooked. This is all the more so when it comes to work on pornographic content. The result is not only hindered communication between scholars, as Azuma rightly asserts, but also hindered understanding of vast swaths of visual culture.

Fittingly enough, Azuma in part inspired Nagayama to write *Eromanga*, even as the English translation of Azuma's book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Dōbutsu-ka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai, 2001) paved the way for Nagayama's own.<sup>4</sup> By the early 2000s, Nagayama had already been working as an editor and critic in the industry for decades – for example, reviewing pornographic comics for publications coming out of the infamous Coremagazine Co., Ltd. It was through interactions with this material and its producers and consumers that Nagayama honed his critical perspectives and positions, but it was interactions with Azuma and his circle that pushed him further. At the start of the decade, Azuma was organizing discussions of psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki's groundbreaking *Beautiful Fighting Girl* (Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki, 2000), and these discussions connected and motivated a whole cohort of popular scholars.<sup>5</sup> When Azuma edited these discussions into the collection *Net Discourse Final Version: Postmodern, Otaku, Sexuality* (Mōjō genron F-kai: Posutomodan, otaku, sekushuariti, 2003), it included a contribution from Nagayama. That original essay grew into the book-length manuscript *Eromanga*.

4 The English-language translation is Azuma 2009.

5 For an English-language translation, see Saitō 2011.

Even compared to Azuma, who is as likely to be seen at his Genron Café as on any university campus, Nagayama works in a space beyond the academy, where he has become a notable activist. From 2007, Nagayama and close collaborators have produced *Manga Ronsoh*, or “manga debates,” a series published outside academic and conventional commercial channels. Each volume contains articles and interviews on issues facing manga and related media and material, especially issues of freedom of expression. Into volume 22 by December 2019, no publication series has done more to shine a light on and promote debates of manga. Nagayama appears at various events to collect information for *Manga Ronsoh*, and also sells copies in person at various events, including the Comic Market, perhaps the world’s largest fan gathering with a record 750,000 attendees in December 2019. Most of those participating are manga/anime fans, many producing their own publications featuring manga/anime characters engaged in explicit sex, and lines form for the latest volume of *Manga Ronsoh*.<sup>6</sup> Behind a table and stacks of printed books fans find Nagayama, who is happy to talk about recent manga debates in Japan and overseas. These interactions continue on social media, as do the manga debates. If anthropologist Didier Fassin urges academics to work in non-academic forms and forums as part of a project of “popular translation” (Fassin 2013: 635-639), then translating Nagayama’s popular scholarship may conversely broaden discussion in the academy and connect it to ongoing manga debates in Japan and around the world.

## A Roadmap to Regulation and Resistance

Working on *Manga Ronsoh* clearly impacted Nagayama, who, when given the opportunity to produce an expanded edition of *Eromanga* in 2014, chose to add an extensive discussion of Bill 156, which was a revision of the Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youths. After decades of debate about manga, and an intense period of concern about “harmful manga” (*yūgai manga*) in the 1990s, Bill 156 staged a dramatic confrontation between advocates of child welfare and freedom of expression. Generally, the revision expanded the powers of government

6 The Comic Market has long maintained one of the most strident positions in support of freedom of expression of any organization in Japan, basically allowing anything insofar as it is not a copy of someone else’s work and minimally masks genitals. Because artists are in most cases not motivated by profit, and do not have to be concerned with reaching a mainstream or mass audience, they can do things that are impossible in commercial publications, which leads to extreme depictions of sex and violence involving manga/anime characters.



actors to identify “unhealthy publications” (*fukenzen tosho*) and have them zoned out of public spaces where children might be exposed; specifically, it allowed these actors to include manga, anime and games depicting unhealthy sex. Responding to the bill’s discussion of “non-existent youth” (*hijitsuzai seishōnen*) – language seeming to suggest, on the one hand, that fictional characters ought to be treated like actual young people, and, on the other hand, that young people need to be protected from fictional sex acts – a coalition of artists, publishers, lawyers, academics and fans opposed the revision, which was successfully blocked in 2010, but pressed through later that year. The example of Bill 156 is remarkable because while the outright banning of depictions of fictional sex acts involving underage characters has elsewhere proceeded without much discussion (Johnson 2006: 392), the mere zoning of such material was fiercely debated in Japan. Furthermore, as Nagayama elaborates in the section added to *Eromanga*, Bill 156 exposed lingering assumptions and emerging alliances in ongoing manga debates.

Many Japanese drawn to political action by Bill 156 shared concerns about its possible effects on manga and visual culture broadly. It may seem reasonable enough for the revised Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youths to be used to limit the circulation of publications such as *Little Sister Paradise 2: More Older Brother and Little Sister Everyday Fuck Fest* (Imōto paradaisu 2: Onii-chan to go nin no imōto no motto ecchi shimakuri na mainichi, 2014), which it did to much fanfare in 2014 (Anime News Network 2014a), but this high-profile move was not the only one underway. Soon after the revision passed, for example, newly sensitized retailers sent out memos asking staff to remove potentially problematic publications from shelves, which in one instance included volumes of *Berserk* (Beruseruku, 1989-) and *Vagabond* (Bagabondo, 1998-), two of the most acclaimed manga series of recent memory (Fujimoto 2011: 30). Newly sensitized editors decided not to risk publishing manga that might run afoul of regulators, for example *Aiko’s Little Mā* (Aiko no Mā-chan, 2014-), in which female artist Yamamoto Arisa depicts a young girl’s conversations with her body from puberty (Anime News Network 2014b). Needless to say, perhaps, but *Aiko’s Little Mā* is no more pornographic than *Berserk* and *Vagabond*, but measures were taken against them amid concern about the consequences of being deemed “unhealthy.”

For their part, newly empowered regulators have shown just how ambiguous and subjective such identifications can be. As Nagayama documents in *Manga Ronsoh*, when authorities announced their monthly list of unhealthy publications in July 2017, of five manga titles – a number higher than usual to begin with – only one was what is usually thought of as erotic material



for boys and men; another was categorized as “teen love,” or racy adolescent romance; and the majority, a total of three, were “boys love,” which is content primarily by and for women that focuses on relationships between male characters (Nagayama 2017a: 50). This trend was confirmed at the end of the year, when Nagayama found that, over the course of the preceding 12 months, a total of 29 manga were identified as “unhealthy,” with boys love titles accounting for a whopping 16 (Nagayama 2017b: 52).<sup>7</sup> There is of course nothing criminal about boys love – which appeals not only to its target demographic of heterosexual women in Japan, but also men both gay and straight, lesbians and queer folk (McLelland et al 2015) – but it was still identified as “unhealthy,” if not harmful, and regulated as such. This had already happened earlier outside of Tokyo with demands that boys love publications be removed from a public library in Osaka (McLelland 2015: 257-260), which they were, only to be returned when feminists and free speech advocates asked how boys love was “unhealthy” (Fujimoto 2011: 30-31). Then as now, many suspected that someone simply did not like the material and did not want young people to have access to it. Activists worry about allowing majorities, concerned citizens and authorities to dictate morals and taste.<sup>8</sup> Looking back at the lessons of history, they see that the push against “harmful manga” in the 1990s started with sex and violence in works for boys and men, then quickly expanded to ladies comics, girls

7 In this report, Nagayama helpfully analyzes every one of the 29 titles and explains the logic behind identifying them as “unhealthy.” Before doing so, he highlights something often missed: “Almost all *eromanga* for men are labeled as adult comics and are thus outside of the purview of youth ordinances. What is being targeted is light eroticism (*raito ero*)” (Nagayama 2017b: 52). With this in mind, of the 29 titles identified between December 2016 and November 2017, a total of 11 can be categorized as eroticism for men, with the remaining 18 being eroticism for women, including 16 boys love titles, one teen love title and one ladies comic. Nagayama argues that one reason boys love is so overrepresented is because of its inclusion of explicit sexual depictions, but tendency not to label these works “adult comics.” While many maintain that this is a good thing, because it makes the works accessible to young people, women and minorities outside of the narrower distribution network of “adult comics,” Nagayama predicts that boys love will soon follow *eromanga* and split into explicit publications that are labeled and zoned and more general releases with light eroticism.

8 For his part, Ishihara Shintarō, who was governor of Tokyo during the debates about Bill 156, did not instill a great deal of confidence. At a press conference on December 17, 2010, asked to explain the necessity of revision to the ordinance, Ishihara snapped: “There are after all perverts in the world. Unfortunate people with messed up DNA. People like that, with thoughts like that... Well, feeling ecstasy from reading and writing this stuff is fine, after all. But I don’t think that it would be allowed in Western society. Japan is too open. After all, it’s abnormal, right?” The transcript has been removed from the government’s website, but is still available at: <[http://blog.goo.ne.jp/harumi-s\\_2005/e/fd37cd702fd9abo84a215dc38e1ed280](http://blog.goo.ne.jp/harumi-s_2005/e/fd37cd702fd9abo84a215dc38e1ed280)> [Last accessed on April 2, 2020].

comics and beyond to any content that someone thought for whatever reason might be “harmful” (Nagaoka 2010: 233-238).<sup>9</sup>

Given its use to target sexual expression in manga for women, young people and minorities, one begins to grasp why there was such a broad coalition of voices against Bill 156 in 2010. While it may seem obvious that underage sex in manga such as *Little Sister Paradise 2* is unhealthy and ought to be zoned, if not banned, many in Japan resisted increased regulation, which they perceived as a power grab (McLelland 2011: 355). Boys love artists such as Takemiya Keiko and girls and ladies comic artists such as Satonaka Machiko stood alongside boys comic artists known for sex and violence such as Nagai Gō, and even Chiba Tetsuya, an artist revered for producing socially and politically conscious comics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, opposed increased regulation. In Chiba’s case, he took this public stance despite personally disliking and criticizing content along the lines of *Little Sister Paradise 2* (Fawcett 2014). So too did Fujimoto Yukari, a professor at Meiji University and feminist manga critic, who shares many perspectives and positions with Nagayama (Galbraith 2017: 9-11). In *Eromanga*, one might see points of intersection with Fujimoto’s influential work on comics for girls and women, which allow readers to “play sex/uality” (Fujimoto 1998: 196). Indeed, Nagayama and Fujimoto appear together at many events, and have mutual concerns about challenges to freedom of expression in manga. As Nagayama has demonstrated for years in *Manga Ronsoh*, it is rarely as simple as standing with women and children against content that is “unhealthy” or “harmful.”

In addition to the more recent debates about child pornography laws and healthy youth ordinances being used to regulate manga and related media and material, there is another, deeper history of legal conflict in Japan. It begins with Article 21 of the Constitution of Japan, promulgated in 1946, which states that, “No censorship shall be maintained.” This strong stance on freedom of expression, a response to so-called “thought policing” by Japanese authorities in the lead up to the Second World War, is moderated by Article 175 of the Penal Code of Japan, which deals with obscenity. While the definition of obscenity is vague, rulings by Japanese courts have in practice located it in exposed genitals (Allison 2000: 160-164; also Cather 2012). Although this definition of obscenity is not clearly codified, the

9 Journalist Nagaoka Yoshiyuki recounts a particularly bizarre example when, in 2000, Ōshima Yoshihisa, a politician with a leading role in closed-door discussions of regulation at the time, suggested that scenes of violence in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) might negatively influence children, hence characterizing it as part of a “harmful environment” (Nagaoka 2010: 222-223).

result is that, to avoid trouble with the law, all pornography in Japan bears the conspicuous mark of censorship in the form of some sort of covering or blurring of reproductive organs. Because the rules are not explicit, this covering ranges from complete masking to the barest of cosmetic work, which tests uncertain waters; when called out with a warning or slapped down with a fine, there is typically a reactionary industry-wide move toward masking, until someone ventures out again and the cycle continues (Kimi 2017a: 280-320). Struggles persist in Japan over the use of Article 175 to police sexual expression, which impacts art both high and low, by and for both men and women, even as this also inspires creative ways to depict sex without relying on genitals or their full visibility.

Since the turn of the new millennium, there have been a number of milestones, starting with the Shōbunkan Trial, which began with the arrest of an *eromanga* artist, his editor and their publisher in 2002. Rather than accepting the obscenity charge, the publisher challenged it all the way to the Supreme Court of Japan in 2007, which ended the case with a guilty verdict, a hefty fine and a ban of the *eromanga* in question. In her thorough review of the Shōbunkan Trial, literary scholar Kirsten Cather highlights that the apparent age of characters involved in sex acts was not a marked reason for the verdict (Cather 2012: 269). Despite explicitly depicting the brutal gang rape of a highschool girl, for example, the *eromanga* was not described as child pornography or argued to be obscene on those grounds, as it might have been in the United States. Instead, the relatively unrestrained exposure of genitals, realistically drawn, was found to be obscene regardless of the content of the depicted sex act. This seemed to confirm the precedent of court decisions that – insofar as no one is harmed in the production of cartoon images, there is insufficient evidence that they cause harm and genitals are sufficiently covered – in Japan, manga, anime and games can legally feature imaginary sex acts that could be deemed obscene in other jurisdictions.<sup>10</sup>

Another milestone came in July 2014, when Igarashi Megumi was arrested for distributing digital data of a scan of her vagina (Osaki 2014). Better known as “Rokudenashiko,” Igarashi produces art using her vagina, which is a way to underscore and undo taboos around female anatomy. Igarashi’s

10 Some speculate the definition of obscenity in Japan may eventually be stretched to include depictions of underage sex, which would be similar to the situation in the United States. Here Cather is prescient, noting that the judges in the Shōbunkan Trial introduced “international laws and norms concerning child pornography,” which “suggests both whence this verdict came and where obscenity trials might head in the future” (Cather 2012: 255). It was unorthodox for the judges to introduce evidence, and the ages of characters in the offending manga did not officially impact the verdict, but pointedly mentioning international laws is indeed telling.



arrest disgusted international Japan watchers, feminists and art critics, who saw authorities impinging on her right to freedom of expression. Often unacknowledged in all this, however, were her connections to the ongoing manga debates in Japan. It should not escape our attention that Igarashi's legal representative was Yamaguchi Takashi, who also served as lead council for the defense in the Shōbunkan Trial. He is an active volunteer at the Comic Market and friend of Nagayama, who he often appears with at events. When some critics – including a number of prominent feminists in Japan – were distancing themselves from Igarashi, in the summer of 2017, publication of her manga about art, activism and freedom of expression resumed in the pages of *Manga Ronsoh*. For those who would like to see a bright and bold line between the *eromanga* found legally obscene in the Shōbunkan Trial and Igarashi's "vagina art," this proximity may be troubling, but it is part of the reality of a shared terrain of struggle in contemporary Japan.

With this in mind, it is perhaps not so puzzling that, when called as a witness for the defense in the Shōbunkan Trial, feminist scholar Fujimoto stood against censorship of manga, even pornographic content that was graphic, violent and frankly offensive. The other way around, considering the waves of global support for Igarashi and her vagina art in 2014, it is somewhat surprising that few outside of Japan seemed to care when Yamamoto's manga about Aiko's "Little Mā" – that is, her *manko*, or vagina – was canceled by its publisher that same year for fear of it being labeled "unhealthy." One cannot help but notice that Igarashi was arrested in 2014, the very same year that revision of Japanese laws concerning child pornography sparked worldwide outrage for not taking a stronger stance against artists producing offensive work. (Apparently the means of regulation employed in the case of *Little Sister Paradise 2*, which splashed over into the cancellation of Yamamoto's manga, was not enough.) It is hard not to see the growing regulatory momentum in Japan, as well as the schizophrenic response from critics abroad. At the risk of redundancy, we state again that, when considering freedom of expression and art – including manga, *ero* or otherwise – things are not as simple as taking a stand with women and children against harmful content.

## The Manga Industry, Diversity and Eroticism

If the diversity and complexity of *eromanga* in Japan is often smoothed over by denouncing it unitarily as "harmful," then this might be because the diversity and complexity of manga in Japan is often underappreciated. Not only is manga produced by and for men, women and others, young



and old and everyone in between, but it is produced on a truly remarkable scale. While a shrinking population – spurred by low rates of birth and immigration – difficulty transitioning to digital distribution and competition from entertainment on networked devices have contributed to declining sales, at the high point in the mid-1990s, an estimated 40 percent of all publications in Japan were manga; the most popular magazine, *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, alone circulated between five and six million copies; and anime series based on hit manga such as *Dragon Ball* (Doragon bōru, 1986-) became ratings machines and cultural touch stones for generations of fans (Schodt 1996: 19, 88, 306). Beyond these flagship publications and manga/anime franchises with mass appeal are more narrowly targeted, intimate and challenging stories and styles.

Although the manga market is divided into gender and age categories such as “boys” (*shōnen manga*), “girls” (*shōjo manga*), “young men” (*seinen manga*) and “women” (*josei manga*), and this content is categorized as distinct from *eromanga* or manga for “adults” (*seijin muke manga*), sociologist Sharon Kinsella is correct that sex and violence have “not been as strongly compartmentalized in postwar Japan as [...] in postwar America or Britain” (Kinsella 2000: 46). Themes and depictions that may strike readers outside Japan as very mature appear in manga categorized as for boys and girls, for example. There is also nothing stopping boys and girls from reaching for publications categorized as for older readers, with the exception of age-restricted *eromanga*. This flies in the face of the deep-rooted notion that children should be shielded from mature content, which had a devastating effect on comics in North America. In the early 1950s, it is estimated that between 80 and 100 million comic books circulated a week in the United States; a multitude of genres catered to the young and the not-so-young, men and women (Hajdu 2008: 5). However, in his provocatively titled *Seduction of the Innocent*, originally published in 1954 amid concern about juvenile delinquency and crime, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham summarized the position that comic books should be treated as an issue of “public welfare” or a “public-health hazard” and hence, for the safety and wellbeing of children, regulated to avoid “social harm” (Wertham 2004: 330, 334-335).<sup>11</sup> If this sounds familiar, it is no doubt because Wertham anticipates many of the

11 More specifically, Wertham argues for “the protection of children against temptation, seduction and unfair punishment after they have succumbed” (Wertham 2004: 329). The critique of violence is more often mentioned, but Wertham was also concerned about young people reading sexual comics and becoming perverts and/or prey for perverts (Wertham 2004: 118, 173-193, 326). A full page of his book is devoted to arguing for connections between comics and child prostitution, where, “Evidently comic books prepare the little girls well” (Wertham 2004:



anxieties surrounding manga today, for example “harmful potentialities” in a “harmful environment” (Wertham 2004: 118). But if Wertham and his allies were successful in getting publishers in the United States to establish the Comics Code, which cut objectionable content – “All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism” (Hajdu 2008: 291-292) – from what was to be a medium for children, such was not the case in Japan.

From Tezuka Osamu introducing themes and ideas from novels, film and theater into his manga for children, which started a postwar revolution in Japanese comics, there has been a constant struggle to expand the horizons of the medium. As early as 1949, some of Tezuka's manga was already being deemed inappropriately mature for children (McCarthy 2009: 91), but he pressed on, drawing more readers and artists to the medium and establishing it as a compelling and crucial form of mass culture before television. By adapting his own popular manga into Japan's first weekly televised anime series in 1963, which included marketing tie-ups and toys, Tezuka created synergy between comics, cartoons based on them and merchandise featuring characters; the model was quickly copied (Steinberg 2012: 40-41). Meanwhile, inspired by Tezuka but feeling that he was not mature enough, a new wave of comics artists challenged him in the 1960s with their alternative *gekiga* or “dramatic pictures,” which pushed boundaries with gritty sociopolitical commentary and spectacular violence that appealed to young adults. Even as Tokyo's youth ordinances can be traced back to this moment and fears about manga and crime (Nagaoka 2010: 118-136), artists and publishers did not bend to pressure. If what was prohibited by the Comics Code in the United States made its way into “underground comix” in the 1960s, then *gekiga* at that same time was not only embraced as counter culture, but also proliferated rapidly, opened new markets and potentials for expression and was folded back into the mainstream by the late 1960s and early 1970s. In that decade, comics for boys and girls tested the limits of sexual expression. Almost as if to represent this history, resistance to Bill 156 in 2010 brought together artists known for *gekiga* and taboo-busting comics for boys and girls, namely Chiba Tetsuya, Nagai Gō and Satonaka Machiko and Takemiya Keiko. Further confusing those who see comics as for children and distinct from mature content is the cartoony, cute style that spread from Tezuka and manga for boys and girls to become the industry standard, irrespective of serious stories and depictions of violence and sex.

186-187). It is astonishing how close this is to claims made about manga today (see, for example, stories of manga being used to groom children in Ripley et al 2014).



Often unmentioned in this history of the expansion of manga expression is *eromanga*. Manga historian and translator Frederik L. Schodt highlights that niche magazines that sold copies by including risqué content provided artists space and creative autonomy and thus became “incubators of idiosyncratic talent” (Schodt 1996: 283). In *Eromanga*, Nagayama shows how this scene enriched manga and visual culture overall from the 1970s into the 2010s. This of course occurs through adaptations of *eromanga*, but also the crossover of artists into categories of manga targeting boys, girls, young men, women and more. For example, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, serialized in boys manga juggernaut *Weekly Shōnen Jump* from 2012 to 2019, features art by Saeki Shun, who professionally debuted drawing comics for adults – that is, comics categorized as “adult” (*seijin muke manga*). The magazine also publishes work such as *To Love Ru* (2006-2009), which includes scenes directly employing *eromanga* innovations such as “naughty tentacles” (Kimi 2017a: 174). Small wonder, then, that *Weekly Shōnen Jump* appeals to not only the boys it ostensibly targets, but also adults, who make up the majority of readers (Hodgkins 2019). Furthermore, series focused on attractive male characters, particularly sports and adventure franchises, draw in female readers, who are now a key demographic for *Weekly Shōnen Jump* and similar magazines (Bauwens-Sugimoto 2016: 114-118). At the Comic Market, where over half of those coming to buy and sell fanzines are women (Comic Market Preparations Committee 2008: 21), the genre designation “Jump” is all but synonymous with pairing favorite male characters in romantic and sexual relationships. The desires of these fans are reflected in the pages of commercial magazines that cater to them, even as these magazines increasingly adopt affective and erotic styles from fanworks and fans debut and work as professional artists. That all of this is occurring in and around a single manga magazine for boys, and in ways that directly interact with and relate to eroticism, throws into stark relief Kinsella’s point about compartmentalization. Adult content, let alone eroticism, is nowhere near as circumscribed as category and market distinctions suggest.

The diversity of manga expression, including *eromanga*, snaps into focus when we consider female artists and readers. For example, Clamp, an all-female group, started out producing fanzines featuring popular characters from *Weekly Shōnen Jump*. While these fanworks were primarily for female readers, after their professional debut, Clamp created erotically charged manga/anime franchises such as *Chobits* (Chobittsu, 2000-2002), which appealed to men. Similarly, as Nagayama explains in *Eromanga*, female artists such as Yonekura Kengo produce both boys love works and pornographic comics for men. Many female artists show up in the pages of this book, but



readers unfamiliar with *eromanga* may still be surprised that Nagayama's experience leads him to estimate that around 30 percent of the artists producing this work are women. If we include artists in categories that are erotic and even explicit, but principally target women and are typically not counted as *eromanga*, then the number is much higher. And, as suggested by pennames such as Unite Sōji, Kudara Naizō and Morizono Milk, it is not always clear that the artist is in fact a woman. Artists can appear male or female, both or neither, and it seldom matters to publishers and readers because the basic standard, as Nagayama relays, is that anyone who can produce work that is erotic is welcome. Inclusivity, fluidity and freedom of expression attract a wide range of artists to *eromanga*. These aspects also attract a diverse readership, which of course includes women (Kimi 2017a: 363-371); Nagayama draws attention to artists such as Machida Hiraku, whose signing events are attended by an equal number of women. In this way, the common perception that *eromanga* is solely male fantasy begins to shift. Indeed, Nagayama locates the origins of contemporary *eromanga* in crossover, or artists and readers crossing gendered lines. By the end of Nagayama's analysis, in the span it takes to get from *The Rapeman* (The reipuman, 1985-1992) to *Anal Justice* (Anaru jasutisu, 1997-2002), one is left with a head-spinning sense of gender mayhem.

If *eromanga* is still largely ignored in scholarly discussions of manga, then some have argued it is akin to “dark matter” (Kimi 2017a: 7), or the missing mass that is necessary for us to understand how things work. That said, for the most part, *eromanga* remains, as Nagayama puts it, “invisible” and “unseen.” Rather than seeing the content, we more often simply hear that it is objectionable and obscene. The invisibility is reinforced by increased regulation, which pushes *eromanga* out of the light and out of focus. The artists and their contributions, historical and contemporary, are seldom acknowledged, let alone celebrated. The *eromanga* booms of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s are not officially included in the oft-rehearsed story of the expansion of manga expression, and we know few names associated with them. These men and women do not have a seat at the table, even when they really should be there. There is no representative of the content stereotypically thought of as *eromanga* in the anti-regulation alliance of Chiba, Satonaka, Nagai and Takemiya that came together in 2010. Today, those interested in Japanese visual culture and freedom of expression perhaps know Igarashi Megumi or “Rokudenashiko,” but not Suwa Yūji or “Beauty Hair.” This is the structural silence that Nagayama attempts to disrupt with *Eromanga*, which turns the lens toward and zooms in on these other artists and their work. Doing so opens *eromanga* to interrogation, even as it calls our assumptions into question.



## Positioning *Eromanga* in Debates about Pornography

There is much to consider about the relative openness of sex and violence in manga in Japan, which is increasingly at odds with other parts of the world. Writing at a time of heightened concern about manga and harm in the 1990s, Schodt considers again what he earlier described as “the Japanese tolerance of fantasy” and “unique dichotomy between fantasy and reality” (Schodt 1983: 137). If before he noted that Japanese manga readers seem “very much at home in their medium” (Schodt 1983: 132), he now adds that, “The gap between fantasy and reality in Japan is enormous, and for that very reason readers of manga may actually be better at making a distinction between the two than readers in other nations” (Schodt 1996: 51). Here Schodt means the gap between the relative order and safety of Japan and the chaos and danger of manga worlds, but there is more. Growing up with the distinctly cartoony characters and worlds of manga and anime – which are separate and distinct enough from realism based on approximation of the natural world that some critics posit the existence of “manga/anime-like realism” (Ōtsuka 2003: 24) – one learns to understand them, or develops media literacy about fiction in relation to reality. Beyond manga and Japan, writing on role-playing games in the United States, scholar of religion Joseph P. Laycock cites studies that suggest that sustained engagement with fantasy helps people learn to distinguish it from reality (Laycock 2015: 289-290). Some studies also indicate that people who fantasize are generally more aware of the implications of violence and less likely to act out (Laycock 2015: 193). If violence is taboo even in the context of fantasy, Laycock argues, then people will be unable to make sense of it (Laycock 2015: 190). The same can be said about sex, and in fact has been in discussions of manga in Japan (Galbraith 2017: 9-11).

In *Eromanga*, Nagayama takes this further by advancing an implicit ethical principle, which is that it is better to acknowledge and work through fantasies in the open with others than to deny them or, worse, project them onto a deviant and dangerous “other.”<sup>12</sup> In many ways, he shares the opinion of psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki, who, after years of personal and professional interaction with manga/anime fans with the most active of fantasy sex

12 On sex and violence in pornography, feminist legal philosopher Drucilla Cornell argues that “an individual viewer can potentially learn a great deal about his/her sexuality, and society’s construction of sex and gender, precisely by having to confront it so directly” (Cornell 1995: 155). Literary critic and social theorist Michael Warner also advocates for an ethics that begins with an “acknowledgement of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself,” namely the indignity of sex, which allows for a “special kind of sociability” (Warner 2000: 35).

lives, argues for “the right to be perverts [... in] the imaginary” and “ethics in a dissociated life lived with self-awareness” (Saitō 2011: 31, 172). This is a strong stance indeed, and a difficult one to maintain when faced with some forms of manga sex and violence, however ethical those imagining them may be in their self-awareness and separation of manga/anime fiction from reality. As one progresses through the pages of *Eromanga*, the content can become difficult to tolerate, let alone try to understand. When confronting these images, it may help to remember that no one is being harmed in the drawings. They are, as American underground comix artist Robert Crumb clarifies, “just lines on paper” (quoted in Cashwell 2014: 123). Or, as Neil Gaiman, an English author celebrated for his work in comics, put it more recently on one of the most pressing and thorny issues of our time, “Child porn is a crime and an evil. Manga are lines on paper.”<sup>13</sup> The imaginary sex and violence is just that, imaginary. If it were real, it would be a crime, but it is not real and thus is not a crime. At least not in Japan. Not yet.

Rather than taking for granted that this is a problem, we might inquire, “Is this a problem?” And, if so, “Why?” The argument that immediately comes to mind is that representations of sexual violence, be they fictional or real, reflect and reinforce a culture of sexual violence. This takes us back to debates about pornography that swept North America and other parts of the world in the 1970s and 1980s (Williams 1989: 15-29). Issues surrounding pornography divided feminists and pitted them against one another in a series of intense and bruising battles that collectively came to be known as “the sex wars,” which inform present “culture wars,” for example over sexual objectification and violence in comics and games. It is important to note that anti-porn feminists were addressing sexual violence in a structure of unequal relations of power between men and women. Stated most provocatively by feminist lawyer Catharine A. MacKinnon, the equation is, “Man fucks woman; subject verb object” (MacKinnon 1982: 541). Here sex is something done to women, if not violence plain and simple. In unequal relations of power, it does not make sense to talk about consent as something freely given;

13 This statement came in the form of a tweet in response to a Swedish court deciding in 2012 not to punish a translator for possession of manga that might be deemed child pornography. See: <<https://twitter.com/neilhimsel/status/213707804651962370>> [Last accessed April 2, 2020]. This was not the first time that Gaiman had spoken out on related issues. In 2008, responding to an Australian court expanding the definition of “person” to include fictional characters to punish a man for producing pornographic art of underage siblings Bart and Lisa Simpson, Gaiman wrote on his blog, “I think it’s nonsensical in every way that it could possibly be nonsensical. The Simpsons characters aren’t real people. They definitely aren’t real children.” See: <<http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2008/12/word-person-included-fictional-or.html>> [Last accessed April 2, 2020].

in the relation of master and slave, saying the latter has a choice obfuscates structure entirely. For MacKinnon, pornography reveals the truth of sex under patriarchy as “eroticized domination” and the “forcible violation of women” (MacKinnon 1997: 168). Pornography is also said to be part of “rape culture,” or a culture where sexual violence is normalized. In the oft-cited formulation, “Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice” (Robin Morgan, quoted in Williams 1989: 16). There are discussions to be had here, and Nagayama engages in them by taking on MacKinnon and machismo in Japan in *Eromanga*, but it is important to account for correctives to an optic that can be limited to seeing “men versus women” (Halley 2006: 4-6).<sup>14</sup>

Such an optic misses other forms of sexual oppression and alliance. Responding to the sex wars in an essay originally published in 1984, anthropologist Gayle S. Rubin develops a theory of sex, power and politics independent of forms of feminism that see in binary and totalizing formations (Rubin 2011: 180). While assigned sex and gender can and do impact power relations and politics, a feminist critique of men dominating women cannot adequately explain oppression of sexual minorities. It also cannot fully articulate how anti-porn feminists, who advocated for government and legal action, were “playing into the hands of the right wing and its reactionary agenda” (Rubin 2011: 274) in the 1980s. Rubin argues that sex is “organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others” (Rubin 2011: 180). Stated schematically, sex can be “good” or “bad,” with the “good” promoted and the “bad” policed (Rubin 2011: 146-154). There need not be any real threat posed by “bad” sex, because the line between “good” and “bad,” and the threat posed by the “bad,” are “imaginary” (Rubin 2011: 151). In many cases, Rubin continues, anti-porn feminists aligning themselves against “bad” sex can mean “police abuse and bureaucratic harassment for women and men who have done nothing wrong but express unfashionable desires, create illicit imagery, or engage in disreputable occupations” (Rubin 2011: 273). The result is “new forms of legal and social abuse” (Rubin 2011: 273), even when the crime is imaginary.

While pornography may represent “bad” sex, Rubin contends that, “The content of the image produced, whether or not it is sexual, and whether or not it is violent or distasteful to the viewer, is irrelevant” (Rubin 2011: 268).

14 Be aware that Nagayama agrees with MacKinnon’s fundamental point about structural inequality and violence. See the discussion of MacKinnon’s frequent collaborator Andrea Dworkin in Chapter 7, especially Footnote 11. For his response to MacKinnon specifically, see Footnote 1 in Chapter 9.



For Rubin, the only concern is if someone is coerced, abused or harmed in the production of the image. In Rubin's case, the discussion is of photography and film where sexual violence might be represented, but is staged and performed and not necessarily a record of abuse. She cautions critics not to confuse representation for reality and allow distaste for the content to drive criticism regardless of the reality of production. This is all the more germane when discussing *eromanga*, which involve humans in the imagining of sex acts, but not the acts themselves; however violent and distasteful the sex depicted, no one is harmed in the production of these images. Thus feminist psychoanalytic thinker Setsu Shigematsu, considering forms of *eromanga* featuring underage characters, argues that, "The use and potential abuse of girls in the *production* of pornography and their sexual molestation is a serious problem that must not be displaced onto or reduced to an issue of 'pornographic content'" (Shigematsu 1999: 138). It is entirely possible to be against actual abuse without being against content that depicts abuse. Beyond moralizing over "bad" sex, for Rubin, Shigematsu and others in this vein, the only ethical concern is "whether a person's sexual deviancy is demonstrably harmful" (Bering 2013: 166). If "benign sexual variation" (Rubin 2011: 154) meant for Rubin things such as sadomasochistic fantasy and play among consenting adults, then the imaginary sex of *eromanga* producers and consumers might be another case in point. To this Nagayama adds that working through fantasies in the open with others can be beneficial for individuals and society.

So it is that Yamada Kumiko, representing the Women's Institute of Contemporary Media Culture, rejects a United Nations' proposal to "ban the sale of manga and video games depicting sexual violence" with "an absolute no" (Yamada 2016). Not only is manga expression "not a violation of any real person's human rights," Yamada argues, not only are women themselves producers and consumers of manga depicting sexual violence, but "to ban expression and commerce unilaterally based on feelings of whether or not something is unpleasant, or viewpoints on what should be moral, is a practice not to be condoned" (Yamada 2016).<sup>15</sup> The sentiment is echoed by

15 Underscoring the many women producing and consuming manga of all kinds in Japan, Yamada states that, "Manga is a field where women have put in hard work and effort to cut forward paths and cultivate a place of their own" (Yamada 2016). She points out that critically acclaimed boys love works by Takemiya Keiko and Yoshida Akemi contain depictions of sexual violence and could very well be banned under the United Nations' proposal. The proposed ban would limit the ability of female artists to freely and fully express themselves, which decreases the overall variety and complexity of the manga market, pushes producers and consumers away and "narrows the career possibilities of Japan's women" (Yamada 2016). The United Nations'

Nagayama in *Eromanga* and his discussion of liberal ideals, which are not always easy to maintain in the face of frankly offensive content. Ultimately, Nagayama's position is that fighting for these ideals leads to greater freedom for all, including, as Yamada puts it, "greater freedom and rights for women" (Yamada 2016) as producers and consumers of manga, *ero* or otherwise. Yamada's "absolute no" to increased regulation of depictions of sexual violence caught activists across the globe off guard. This is even more so in the case of similar Japanese responses to calls from a United Nations' envoy to "ban extreme child manga porn" (Kato 2016), which confused and infuriated those seeing this as an obvious and necessary step toward a safer world.

If the issue is not use and abuse in the production of pornographic images, then it shifts to the more contentious claim that they inspire use and abuse, which is to say concern about media effects. The danger here is legal mutation and overreach, where protecting potential victims means taking action against potential criminals before there is a crime, or policing the potential for crime. In the process, imagining certain things, and producing and consuming certain images, becomes criminal. In her response to the sex wars, writing a decade after Rubin and two before Yamada, cultural critic Laura Kipnis asks, "What kind of a society sends its citizens to prison for their fantasies?" (Kipnis 1996: 3). The question is rhetorical, as she goes on to discuss the case of Daniel DePew, a man sentenced to 35 years in prison for sexual fantasies about "a crime that never happened" (Kipnis 1996: 4). To be more specific, the victim was "a fictional, nonexistent child" (Kipnis 1996: 12), which DePew imagined abusing. So, what kind of a society? One like DePew's own, the United States. Or the United Kingdom, Australia or Canada. Given that anxiety about imaginary sex, violence and crime has been building in North America and other parts of the world for decades, those paying attention might have predicted the arrest of DePew for "thought crimes" (Kipnis 1996: x) in the United States in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> Seeing that artists in Japan continue to produce *eromanga* that crosses all kinds of lines, they

proposal is thus, as she sees it, anti-woman. "There is nothing to be gained from regulating fictional sexual violence," Yamada states, and Rubin adds that there is much to lose in regulating sexual expression (Rubin 2011: 273-275). Encouraging respect for local norms and standards, Yamada concludes that regulation should be limited to "zoning and circulation only. We should not ban any manga that depicts 'unpleasant expressions' under content guidelines that enforce moral standards unilaterally on society" (Yamada 2016).

16 When it comes to policing "bad" sex, in the 1980s, Rubin warned that authorities would target "victimless crimes" committed by "strangers and weirdos [...] real and imagined" (Rubin 2011: 165, 184-185). Further back, in the 1970s, philosopher Michel Foucault argued that sex would become a "roaming danger" or "omnipresent phantom," a threat to be managed in relation to children and other "high-risk populations" (Foucault 1988: 276, 281).





might even have predicted the arrest of Christopher Handley in the United States in the 2000s. For importing *eromanga* from Japan, this Iowa man was charged with possessing “drawings of children being sexually abused” (Anime News Network 2008). While not 35 years, Handley was sentenced to six months in prison and ordered into a treatment program during another three years of supervised release and five years of probation (Anime News Network 2010).

The tricky thing is that the cartoon images in question are offensive, but asking whether producing or possessing them ought to be criminal seems to many to be a defense of not only a pervert, but also a presumed pedophile and potential predator. One is compelled to stand against him and the material; failure to do so means standing against children. There is little room for discussion, in fact no room at all, because there are only two accepted positions, which are “good” and “bad.” The title of Kipnis’ book, *Bound and Gagged*, refers in part to the poverty of discourse on pornography in the United States at the time, which for two decades before her publication had been treated as harmful to women, hate speech, something to be regulated out of existence if possible; during the sex wars, one was either for or against pornography, for or against the sexual violence it reflected and inspired, for or against women, which severely limited discussion of the texts and nuanced positions (Williams 1989: 22-26). As a critic who saw issues of freedom of expression, socioeconomic class and politics in *Hustler* and other offensive material (Kipnis 1996: 122-206), perhaps Kipnis herself felt bound and gagged. Although advocacy against pornography has little ground in a world where porn is ubiquitous and easily accessible online, we can say almost the exact same things that Kipnis did about the scarcity of critical thought when it comes to *eromanga* today. Her reservations about putting fantasy on trial and the expansion of surveillance and authority over imaginary sex and crime are more relevant than ever.

With all of this in mind, we share Kipnis’ view that it is necessary to maintain “a sanctioned space for fantasy” (Kipnis 1996: 163). Given the importance of her words, we feel it appropriate to cite Kipnis at length here:

There’s zero discussion of pornography as an expressive medium in the positive sense – the only expressing it’s presumed to do is of misogyny or social decay. That it might have more complicated social agendas, or that future historians of the genre might generate interesting insights about pornography’s relation to this particular historical and social moment – these are radically unthought thoughts. One reason for this lacuna is a certain intellectual prejudice against taking porn seriously



at all. Those who take porn seriously are its opponents, who have little interesting to say on the subject: not only don't they seem to have spent much time actually looking at it, but even worse, they seem universally overcome by a leaden, stultifying literalness, apparently never having heard of metaphor, irony, a symbol – even fantasy seems too challenging a concept. I've proposed that pornography is both a legitimate form of culture and a fictional, fantastical, even allegorical realm; it neither simply reflects the real world nor is it some hypnotizing call to action. The world of pornography is mythological and hyperbolic, peopled by characters. It doesn't and never will exist, but it does – and this is part of its politics – insist on a sanctioned space for fantasy. (Kipnis 1996: 163)

For academics, researchers and critics, three insights immediately demand attention: one, there is a great deal more complexity to pornography than is usually acknowledged; two, there is much to be learned from pornography; and three, there is a stigma that keeps us from doing so. For activists, there is an even more significant revelation: Insisting on a space for fantasy, for its freedom and autonomy, is an issue of politics. As Kipnis sees it, there must be space for “the anarchy of the imagination” (Kipnis 1996: 203). This is because, she elucidates, “the freedom to fantasize different futures, and different possibilities for individual, bodily, and collective fulfillment, *is* a crucial political space” (Kipnis 1996: 203). Now, this may seem obvious to those familiar with the academic field of porn studies, but reread the above sentences replacing the word pornography with *eromanga*. The struggle over fantasy and imagination has not ended. In opposition to the politics of what media and sexuality scholar Mark McLelland calls the “juridification of the imagination” (McLelland 2012: 473), or expansion and densification of law surrounding the imagination, there is a politics in insisting on the freedom of imagination. Against the backdrop of moral outrage over certain forms of manga and anime generally and *eromanga* specifically, this begins by recognizing, as McLelland does, “that apparently unobjectionable ‘child protection’ legislation, when handled badly, has serious ramifications for adult communication [...] *even when that communication involves fantasy alone*” (McLelland 2005: 75).

## Toward an Expanded *Eromanga* Studies

In contrast to the boys love manga that McLelland discusses, which is being approached in sophisticated ways outside Japan, as are ladies comics



(Shigematsu 1999; Shamoon 2004; Ito 2010), there are few extended analyses of *eromanga* targeting men and the discourse is relatively stable. “That *eromanga* are misogynistic is undeniable,” writes anthropologist Anne Allison. “That they embed and thereby foster an ideology of gender chauvinism and crude masochism is also irrefutable” (Allison 2000: 78). Although originally written in 1996, the assessment remains basically unchanged today.<sup>17</sup> Despite Allison pushing back on anti-porn feminism, her conclusions on *eromanga* are not far off. Looking at feminist work on pornography in the new millennium (Williams 2004; Attwood 2010; Taormino et al 2013), one is struck by how limited the discussion of *eromanga* really is. In Japan, Nagayama identifies a general “erotic barrier” (*ero no kabe*), which is surely also a factor elsewhere in the world, but it does not explain the contrastive difference between work on boys love and ladies comics and *eromanga*. To be blunt, it seems that there is specific resistance to *eromanga* targeting men. When assumed to speak to not only violent sexual desires and perversion, but also predatory sexual desires and pedophilia, such *eromanga* is simply beyond the pale for researchers. The material demands moral condemnation, not study, and anyone who breaks ranks here is deemed to have suspect interests. And so the silence on *eromanga* continues. This is a problem, because it is the material associated with men that is most often brought up in assessments of risk and the need for increased regulation of *eromanga* and manga and anime more broadly. Now more than ever, we need to have a serious discussion. We firmly believe that this begins by knowing what *eromanga* is, which is to say knowing what we are talking about when we engage in discussion, let alone critique from an assumed position of authority, be it moral or academic.

Getting beyond this specific erotic barrier starts with realizing that the most viscerally upsetting content identified as *lolicon* is just a tiny fraction of what is going on. Imagining that it is all *lolicon* manga – or worse, child abuse material produced by and for abusers – creates an almost insurmountable barrier to seeing the diversity of works, people and perspectives involved. If Fujimoto shows how girls and women explore sexuality in manga (Fujimoto 1998), and Yamada adds that they have worked to cultivate in manga “a place of their own” (Yamada 2016), then recall that around 30 percent of the artists behind *eromanga* are women; there are also other female-dominated categories of content. Restricting *eromanga* impacts these people and their work, too. Like feminist legal philosopher Drucilla Cornell, many in Japan are opposed to laws that would limit pornographic content or sexual expression

17 For a notable and early exception, see Buckley 1991.



and for “unleashing the feminine imaginary” (Cornell 1995: 98-99). “There are many other imaginaries,” Cornell writes, “and it is the very best of liberalism that would insist that they flourish” (Cornell 1995: 104).<sup>18</sup> In Japan, unleashing the feminine imaginary has occurred as part of the flourishing of imaginaries in manga, *ero* and otherwise. If, as Shigematsu argues, manga open “alternative sites and different dimensions of what is typically conceived of as sex and sexuality,” and its global circulation can expand the “possible imaginary” (Shigematsu 1999: 127-128), then the question is what imaginary is possible today? Let us be clear: As it currently exists in Japan, manga is perhaps the freest medium of expression, at the heart of one of the freest visual cultures, on the planet. It is worth trying to understand what such freedom means, and we might want to think carefully before deciding on limits. Now more than ever, we need to consider the politics of imagination, or, to borrow a turn of phrase from one of Nagayama’s interlocutors, “freedom of imagination/creation” (*sōzō no jiyū*).<sup>19</sup>

For all the diversity in its pages, *Eromanga* is only a small sample and general introduction to pornographic comics in Japan. For a more thoroughly historical perspective, one might turn to Yonezawa Yoshihiro’s *Postwar Eromanga History* (Sengo eromanga shi, 2010); for more on content targeting women and a female perspective, one might turn to Mori Naoko’s *Women Read Porn: Female Sexual Desires and Feminism* (Onna wa poruno o yomu: Josei no seiyoku to feminizumu, 2010); for the voices of artists and a creator-centric perspective, one might turn to Kimi Rito’s *The Eromanga Scene* (Eromanga no genba, 2016). There have been numerous books since Nagayama’s original publication in 2006, but none offer as thematically consistent and concise an overview of *eromanga* associated with men. Granted, this is only part of the story, but we have to start somewhere. Where better than a book that presents the most controversial content in as simple and straightforward a way as possible? Precisely because the core of the text was written before the intensification of the manga debates in

18 Cornell goes on to clarify: “My argument is only that no one should be an enforced viewer of the degree that these images do infringe on some women’s imaginary domain” (Cornell 1995: 104). She advocates zoning, but not limiting imagination as such: “There is evidence that societies and communities in which there is sexual tolerance, in which the proliferation of sexual imaginaries are encouraged, are safer places for women” (Cornell 1995: 153).

19 This comes from an interview with Sugino Nao conducted by Patrick W. Galbraith on March 16, 2015. The Japanese word for imagination, *sōzō*, is also a homonym for creation. The difference is understood from the characters used in writing and context in spoken conversation. In this case, Sugino was intentionally using the homonym to mean both imagination and creation, which he argues should be free. Nagayama often crosses paths with Sugino, who represents the Institute of Contents Culture and organized against Bill 156.

which Nagayama would become involved, *Eromanga* defends this content as rarely as it judges it. In these pages, Nagayama just explores *eromanga* as part of the range of imagination and creation that make up manga generally. Such an introduction is invaluable to the discussion of comics, freedom of imagination/creation and their potential and limits.

In a troubling testament to regulatory momentum in Japan, in April 2018, the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that Kimi Rito's *A History of Eromanga Expression* (*Eromanga hyōgen shi*, 2017) was among those identified under a local ordinance as a publication that “might interfere with the healthy development of young people” (Katō 2018). It is worth noting that Kimi is close to Nagayama, who often shares table space with him at the Comic Market; as detailed in the afterword to the expanded edition of *Eromanga*, Kimi assisted Nagayama in understanding newer material, and the older man anticipates him carrying the study of *eromanga* into the future. In many ways, Kimi's book is a spiritual successor to *Eromanga* (albeit closer to fan vernacular), which makes it all the more poignant that it would run afoul of regulators. Perhaps it is true that even contextualization and critical discussion of pornographic comics is too much for some, but it is more likely that “ero” in the title of Kimi's book simply caught the attention of screeners, who found in it visual citations of *eromanga* pushing the legal limits of expression over the years. To their eyes, the study of *eromanga* appeared not only pornographic, but also “unhealthy.” It is hard to imagine a more fitting example of the erotic barrier or “erotophobia” (Warner 2000: 23), which serves to discourage further questions, research and open and informed discussion. Out of sight and out of mind, as they say, and not for the better in terms of critical thinking.

It is thus with tremendous excitement that we offer this translation of *Eromanga* through Amsterdam University Press and its Asian Visual Cultures Series. Sharing its goal to “probe into the political, commercial and digital contexts in which visual cultures emerge and circulate, and to trace the potential of these cultures for political or social critique,” we intend for this book to support debates of manga and related media and material and push them in new directions. The decision to allow the inclusion of images from *eromanga*, as Nagayama did in his original publication, is one that we find especially heartening. To have a productive discussion, we need to know what we are talking about, which is increasingly difficult as images disappear from the pages of books and history (Galbraith 2016). We should acknowledge here that many images from the original publication could not be reproduced by even a university press, because, as our editor warned, the book could be “banned in a number of countries.” Although Japan continues



to stand out for the comparatively large size and high visibility of its market for pornographic comics, *eromanga* have seen declining sales of physical copies due to issues of regulation and distribution (Kimi 2017b: 114; also Yano 2016).<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, as *eromanga* circulate online through official and unofficial channels, calls for increased regulation become louder internationally. This is not limited to sites of local reception, but also extends to demands that Japan do something, which is impacting government actors and creators in ways that should give us pause. Personally, professionally and politically, we have much to gain from thinking about *eromanga* and its challenges. *Eromanga* is not the final word. Rather, in the spirit of Nagayama's original work, and with a nod to its original title, we hope this book will encourage readers to embark on their own *eromanga* studies.

20 Using trade paperbacks as an indicator for the industry, Kimi highlights that only 569 distinct titles (not including anthologies) were released in 2017, with the most prolific publisher putting out 64 and even popular artists hurting for sales (Kimi 2017b: 114). In terms of distribution, in 2019, 7-Eleven and Lawson announced that they would be joining other chains of convenience stores in Japan in refusing to sell adult magazines (Sankei News 2019).



# Introduction: The Invisible Realm

Many facts about *eromanga*, or erotic manga, are surprisingly not well known.<sup>1</sup> For example, the fact that over 80 magazines a month were mass-produced during the boom of so-called “third-rate *gekiga*,” or erotic *gekiga*, in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Or that over 100 new trade paperbacks were released onto the market each month during the boom of *bishōjo*-style *eromanga* in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> That since the mid-1990s the number of female artists has increased, and over half the contributors to some *eromanga* magazines are women.<sup>4</sup> That *eromanga* encompasses endless genres and subgenres.<sup>5</sup> That countless art styles are competing for supremacy.<sup>6</sup> That many popular manga artists have experience producing *eromanga*.<sup>7</sup> That *eromanga* magazines have been a platform for publishing avant-garde and experimental work. That it is one of the epicenters of “*moe*.”<sup>8</sup> That it vividly reflects disruptions of machismo

1 *Eromanga* is manga that contains erotic elements. However, all manga works contain erotic elements in some form, and the spectrum of what one takes as erotic differs depending on the reader. If we define it narrowly at the outset, then erotic manga is work depicting an erotic or sexual theme, or work in which eroticism or sex occupies an important position.

2 Translators’ note (TN): *Gekiga* refers to a style of comics produced in Japan from the late 1950s, which is notable for its gritty aesthetic, social and political consciousness and focus on “reality.” One might think here of Will Eisner’s “graphic novels,” so named to distance mature work from “comic books,” but Eisner adopted the term in 1978, while *gekiga* was coined by Tatsumi Yoshihiro to differentiate his mature work from “manga” in 1957. *Gekiga* tends toward sharp angles, rough linework and dark crosshatching that also make it visually distinct from the industry standard of cartoony and cute manga. For more, see Chapters 1 and 2.

3 TN: *Bishōjo* literally means beautiful girl, but is more accurately translated as cute girl, because the style and characters in question draw on the cuteness of Tezuka Osamu’s work, manga for girls and anime. For more, see Chapters 2 and 3.

4 TN: On the whole, Nagayama estimates that around 30 percent of artists working in the *eromanga* industry are women.

5 Love stories, romantic comedies, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, horror, action, comedy, parody, historical drama, war stories – all of these and more exist in *eromanga*. It is faster to ask what exists in general manga magazines but not *eromanga*.

6 The styles of manga for children, boys, girls and young adults; the styles of *gekiga*, anime and games; and indeed all imaginable styles have been folded into *eromanga*.

7 For example, Nōjō Junichi, Nakajima Fumio, Yamamoto Naoki, Miyasu Nonki, Amamiya Jun, Yui Toshiki, Hirano Kōta, Amazume Ryūta, Kaishaku, Morishige, Oh!Great, Okama, Fumizuki Kō, Tannōji Kitsune, Fujiwara Kamui, Okazaki Kyōko, Shirakura Yumi, Utatane Hiroyuki, Sano Takashi, Yamada Shūtārō, Amatsu Sae, Ditama Bow, Hanamigawa Kyūtārō and Saku Yukizō. Once one starts to list up the names, there is no end to it. The number is even greater when we include artists who use pennames when producing *eromanga*.

8 TN: *Moe* is an affective response to fictional characters. It is also used to refer to styles and characters intended to trigger an affective response. See Chapter 3 of Galbraith 2019.





and heterosexism. That it expresses any kind of eroticism and sexuality that one can think of.<sup>9</sup> That *eromanga* is connected by open pipelines to zines, boys love manga and general manga magazines.<sup>10</sup> In short, that the content categorized as *eromanga* is broader, deeper and far more intriguing than readers who have never encountered it might anticipate. I do not intend to push readers with absolutely no interest, but to those who identify as manga enthusiasts, those who had the curiosity to pick up this book and of course those whose inquisitiveness extends to eroticism in all its diversity, to those readers I declare that you are missing out by not knowing *eromanga*.

Why has this content been overlooked until now? A number of reasons come to mind. For starters, in the massive manga industry, which accounts for nearly half the printed publications in Japan, *eromanga* is of modest scale. Mid- and small-sized publishers are the majority, and the average print run for a trade paperback, while still large, is only 10,000 copies. Popular artists might get a print run of 50,000.<sup>11</sup> *Eromanga* titles cannot be sold at every bookstore in the country, as are mainstream manga. If they do make it in, their place on the shelf is limited, and the cycle of receiving new books and returning them to publishers as unsold is short. To be sure to get a copy, one must follow information about new releases and order them online or go to a manga specialty store in a large city. Further, historical developments have systematically made *eromanga* difficult to see. Since an episode of bashing at the beginning of the 1990s, the “adult comics label” (*seinen komikku maku*) was introduced as a form of self-regulation by the industry, and independent segmenting of displays was later strengthened by ordinances, which had the compulsory force of law.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, shelf space at bookstores

9 There is countless variation in even just the coupling of men and women. We find equal relations in love, male and female dominance; lovers, married couples, student and teacher, master and servant, adult and child, children themselves, elderly people; and more. Any combination that you can think of is being tried. When we go beyond the category of “male and female pair / normal,” there is group sex; incest (big brother and little sister, big sister and little brother, mother and son, father and daughter); *lolicon*; homosexuality; boys love; sadomasochism; scatology; cross-dressing; costume play; myriad forms of fetishism; *moe*; and more. The diversity of *eromanga* almost reads like the entries of a popular sexology book, or a scene of polymorphous perversity, a profusion of flowers in bloom, spreading before one’s eyes.

10 TN: Boys love manga focuses on romantic and sexual relationships between male characters. In Japan, it is produced primarily by and for heterosexual women, and has achieved astonishing commercial visibility and critical acclaim. For more, see McLelland et al 2015.

11 For example, Ikoma Ippei sells an average of 50,000 copies, and in total has surpassed one million copies.

12 TN: See Chapter 2 in Schodt 1996 and Chapter 5 in Kinsella 2000.





has diminished even more, and one can expect now that major chains of convenience stores do not carry manga with an adult comics label.

While scale of publication and regulation of distribution do limit exposure and understanding of *eromanga*, an even more serious issue is the resistance I call “the erotic barrier” (*ero no kabe*). Is it not the case that, above and beyond challenges posed by its relatively small scale (compounded by regulation), manga researchers and critics have not reflected more on *eromanga* because of the erotic barrier inside of them? Examples include thinking that erotic forms of expression are deficient and dirty; they are not something that we should discuss, and there is really no value in discussing them; I do not want to touch, let alone evaluate them, and cannot stand them; they are horrible, cannot be shown to children and are embarrassing; they are a blight on humanity. At the core of this barrier is a negative response to the erotic.<sup>13</sup> The erotic barrier allows for concealing all that has to do with sex, for suppressing and privileging it. Before this barrier, people suspend their decision-making faculties and turn away. We are dealing with an illogical taboo on the erotic.

As someone working on *eromanga*, I should probably state my objection to such prejudice and discrimination. I might start by pointing out that the word “*eromanga*” is often used pejoratively. But such an approach would not eliminate the erotic barrier, which exists in even the hearts of readers who enjoy *eromanga*, artists in the industry, editors and critics. In the same way, I am certainly not completely free of prejudice. Moreover, paradoxically, taboo is one reason for the existence of *eromanga*. Why is there an erotic barrier? It is not pointless to consider why we cannot remain calm when faced with “sex and eroticism.” However, we will not easily obtain an answer, and just because we have one does not mean that we can tear down the erotic barrier. No one can do such a thing. What we can do is measure the height of the barrier, find a foothold and start to climb it. I want people, even those with a resistance to *eromanga* or prejudice against it, to gaze upon the realm of eroticism that stretches out beyond the barrier. This book is a survey of that realm, which has been largely invisible. It is also an invitation to cross the border to it and explore what lies beyond.

13 TN: Anthropologist Gayle S. Rubin refers to this as “sex negativity,” and illustrates the imaginary line separating “good” and “bad” sex as a wall or barrier (Rubin 2011: 148-154).