

The Study on the Relationship Between the Comic Artists' Styles and the Visual Languages: From the Stylistic Changes in the Work of Japanese Comic Artists

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Abstract

Recently, attempts have been made to analyze manga using machine learning. In this research, a manga analysis method is proposed that combines iconography and text for the purpose of understanding the "style" peculiar to manga. Specifically, using the framework of linguistics and narrative story, the elements that form the impression of the work, the micro / macro level development of the story, and the synchronic and chronological transition of the author's drawing style are focused on.

Keywords: manga, comic, style, synchronic transition, chronological transition, machine learning

1. Artistic and linguistic perspectives on comics

Neil Cohn said in his book: *The disparaging viewpoint of this similarity would claim that the other artists were simply "knock-offs" or "clones" of the original. From a linguistic perspective, let's consider a different viewpoint: these drawers all use similar cognitive patterns in the way that they draw, and those similarities constitute a shared visual vocabulary that reflects and reinforces an identity of belonging to a particular group of people* (i.e. their studio and their subculture)[†]. Comics originally developed from two perspectives: the "Art Frame" (imitation is a suppression of creativity, and innate imagination should be developed naturally) and the "Language Frame" (it grows and develops by storing patterns in memory through the influence of others, appreciation and practice)[‡]. In a sense, comics is an art form that emphasizes its uniqueness, but also has a linguistic property that develops through interaction with others.

2. The imitative property of comics

In his essay *Manga Genron*, the "manga" scholar Inuhiko Yomota describes the differences in style that

appear in manga as "stylistic", borrowing a phrase from poetry and novels. He notes that it is possible to create a sense of discomfort by mixing characters drawn in a gag style, as in the works of Fujio Akatsuka, for example, with characters and backgrounds drawn in a *gekiga* style, as in *Golgo 13*, for example. Indeed, a reader who is used to reading manga can see the incongruity of the designs at a glance, and take it as a meta-nonsense gag. Here, the "style" that Yomota refers to depends on the so-called genre, and he focuses on the heterogeneity that emerges when different "styles" of genre are mixed together. However, "genre" in "manga" is not self-evident, and its definition is vague. Rather, genres are simply the collective flow of styles that have been recognized and subsequently named by their predecessors. In this paper, I would like to consider the change of drawing as a part of the style of poetry and novels, which is called "individual style" (as Yomota also understands) and includes the atmosphere that the artist cannot control.

3. Regional differences

Cohn points to the existence of a visual vocabulary, idioms and syntax in comics, and then addresses regional

differences. According to him, there are two streams of comics drawing in the United States: the *Kavian* style and the *Berkshian* style. The former is more nasal, more realistic in its depiction of muscles and emphasizes the distinction between female and male appearance. The latter is the typical cartoon style of drawing as it is known today, as seen in the early *Walt Disney films*. It is characterized by a small number of fingers on the hands, a lack of joints, and strange bodies.

On the other hand, the visual language of Japanese manga is characterized by large eyes representing goodness and narrow, pointed eyes representing seriousness and vice, pointed chins for women, diverse chins for men, and very large hair. The features depicted in this chart are certainly features of Japanese comics, but the actual drawings in the book are, at least in my opinion, more characteristic of the manga and anime of the 1990s. This shows that Cohn himself does not take into account the different styles of Japanese manga genres and their changes.

4. A style dependent on a particular genre

Natives of Japanese “manga” drawing, so to speak, may find it difficult to speak for themselves of a typical drawing stream in Japan. But that is not to say that there are none. The web animation *Senpai Club* (2014) by the Swedish unit “*makebabi.es*” emphasizes the characteristics of Japanese school romantic comedy and other genres of animation and manga. Despite the fact that the Japanese language is a mess and the drawings are rough, it is possible to discover the style of Japanese animation drawings. Another example is *Idol Densetsu Artemis*, an online manga by “Jojimura”, who has published several works on the Internet, in which the flow of panels and scene transitions are more than mature enough, but the drawing is like that of a girl who has just started to imitate manga and animation. But the drawings look as if they were done by a girl who has just started to imitate manga and animation. Neither “*makebabi.es*” nor “Jojimura” have the same style drawing works. However, viewers and readers recognize that they have seen similar works in the past, and they recognize a flow of atmosphere and style that integrates the characteristics of the drawings, so to speak.

5. Changes in personal drawing

For many professional cartoonists, it is almost impossible to say that the styles of their drawings have

not changed over the years since their debut. It is thought that “manga” drawing begins with imitation of existing works, followed by deliberate changes such as drawing practice and the search for one's own style. At the same time, there are likely to be unconscious influences and changes, such as unknowingly changing one's drawing according to one's favorite works, or becoming more sophisticated as one continues to draw, or developing habits, good or bad. In this way, the style of many professional comic artist changes in ways that cannot be explained by “growth”. It is not possible to make a general assessment of the changes as to whether they are good or bad. Some comics artists give the impression that their drawing has become more sophisticated in the years since their debut, while others receive comments from fans that their old drawing was better.

In this article, we will examine two manga artists who have been working in comics for more than 30 years to see how their drawings have changed. One is Kouga Yun, active mainly as a girl's manga artist and coterie artist, and the other is Obata Takeshi, a drawing artist active mainly in *Weekly Shonen Jump*.

Kouga celebrated her 30th anniversary in 2015 with the publication of a commemorative art book. In addition to her coterie magazine activities, she began publishing her work “*Wakakusa Monogatari*” e.g. in commercial magazines in the 1980s and is still an active artist today. “*Aashian*” started 1987 is likely a Girl's manga at that time. You will find that a long time make character's faces changed in “*Choju Densetsu Gestalt*”, it spent 1992-2001. “*Sato-kun to Tanaka-san to*” is published 2007. That draw style has been renewed. Over the past thirty years, her drawing style has certainly changed, but in the atmosphere of her drawings from all eras, one can recognize the face of Kouga Yun in her works.

Takeshi Obata (1969-) was debut in 1989 with *CYBORG Grandpa G* (then under the name Shigeru Hijikata) in *Weekly Shonen Jump*. Perhaps we can't realize it is his work because the character drawing is so different from now. However, it doesn't mean that He was not good at drawing. The reason for this is that we find in his work a wonderful manga effects in “*Majin Bouken Lamp Lamp*”. In fact, he has always been a man capable of drawing at the highest level of each period. In “*Otogi Zoshi Ayatsuri Sakon*”, we can look the 90's Japanese animation style character face. His work on the hit series *Hikaru no Go*, which ran from 1999 to 2003, is

where his drawings changed the most. He continue to use that style in "*Death Note*", and remarkably changed in "*Bakuman.*", but at "*Platinum End*", he returned his style to "*Death Note*".

This change in the individual artist is likely to lead to a change in the larger trends of the manga industry in Japan, as we can see that the tendencies in the way characters are drawn in 1950 and 2020 are very different, in terms of head size, hairstyle, eyes and line thickness. It is easy to recognize that works of different genres are from different periods. In addition to the historical differences, the huge size of the industry has led to the branching out of characteristics from genre to genre and magazine to magazine, and it is thought that differences in style appear, so to speak, like dialects.

6. The style of comics: social influences and the singularity arising from personal nature

The phrase "the drawings are old" is a painful criticism for manga artists. Of course, in a commercial magazine, "it's all right if the drawings are old, as long as they are interesting", and this may not be a particular concern. However, "new drawing" is definitely a weapon for the comics industry in Japan to keep offering something new. What I would like to focus on in this article is the fact that authors and readers have a sense of what can be called "old/new drawing", and that the drawing itself changes in this way. In a sense, the drawing of comics has a social properties, propagating and changing like a language. If an artist's drawings, panel layout and atmosphere are to win the hearts of many fans, the stylistic elements must be considered not only in terms of personal factors (talent, training, knowledge, etc.), but also in terms of social factors (influence of other comics, period, magazine, field, social background, etc.).

Time-changing comics artists change their style in order to incorporate fresh influences, while at the same time transmitting a cutting-edge style that influences others. It is not only the "Art Frame", i.e. the individual elements of individuality and talent, but also the "Linguistic frame", i.e. the multiple conscious and unconscious elements that influence and change each other in a language-like manner, that leads to the rich diversity and interest of manga styles. The study of comics as a visual language may not only advance the study of comics themselves, but may also help to clarify

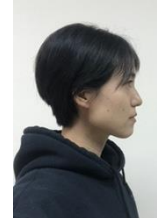
the nature of human language. In the future, I would like to study the existence of manga writing styles and the elements that make up these styles.

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Authors Introduction

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She received her Doctor's degree from the Department of Social System Studies, The University of Kitakyushu, Japan in 2018. In 2020 she published the book "*The Anthropology of Relationship Repair*", based on her doctoral thesis, and in 2021 she was awarded the 20th Society Prize at the Japanese Society of Oceanic Studies.
