

MAN Y years ago foreigners who came to Japan were stunned at the sight of adults reading manga (Japanese comic books) in trains. In those days, it was even odd for most Japanese because they used to have the idea that manga was entertainment for children. Today, however, nobody is surprised when they come across adults reading manga.

### As Common as Drinking Juice

Businessmen buying manga magazines at station kiosks and reading them in trains during the morning rush hour is a common sight. (Of course, some read newspapers or books while others read nothing at all, choosing instead to take a nap.) Not a few manga readers leave the magazines on overhead racks when they get off trains. These magazines are mostly consumed in less than an hour and abandoned just like soft drink cans. It can be said that manga has become an inseparable part of businessmen's life just like soft drinks.

Japanese manga magazines are selectively targeted at specific groups or genders such as teenage boys or girls, adults or young women. The contents and stories cater to their respective readerships, so that readers can enjoy manga even when they get older. ☉

### Impact of Japanese Animated TV Programs

Manga is said to be the world's lingua franca. It became popular under the influence of Japanese animated TV programs (anime). Exported anime based on manga caught the fancy of children throughout the world, which in turn raised their interest in Japanese manga itself and prompted them to read manga books translated into their own languages. Today, manga has made a considerable impact on world culture. The fans in various countries enjoy not only reading them but also wearing the costumes associated with characters in such manga as *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon* and *One Piece*. Manga exhibitions and symposiums are held in various parts of the world to discuss manga as part of modern art. Anime and manga are a representative Japanese cultural asset now.

The most important development in the history of manga was the inauguration of two weekly magazines for boys in 1959. The magazines focused on manga from the start and before long their contents were dominated by manga. They became a favorite with children and displaced monthly magazines for kids, which had focused on tales, from the top spot of the children's magazine world. Other publishing companies entered the manga business one after another

# Manga — an Inseparable Part of Japanese Life —

By Kurosawa Tsuneo

er and magazines specifically targeting young girls were also launched. Looking back, 1959 was the dawn of the manga boom.

### Manga Even Explain Einstein's Theories

Parents and teachers were concerned that manga would turn children off their studies and thus tried to keep children away from them 30 to 40 years ago. These days, however, manga is touted as a useful tool for picking up knowledge. From science, history, biography to religion and philosophy, every metaphysical or academic field is covered in the form



of manga. Even subjects as difficult as Einstein's Theory of Relativity have been taken up in manga. Manga, which can convey information with both words and pictures, enable readers to easily understand profound subjects.

Since ancient times, picture scrolls, known as *emakimono*, on which a narrative is interspersed with illustrations, have taken the fancy of the Japanese people. *Emakimono* originated in China and were hugely developed in Japan. Enjoying tales while looking at illustrations appears to match the sensitivity of the Japanese people. JS

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