

# Hooked on Books

Photos and essay by Sonia Katchian



With 99.99% of the Japanese population completing their compulsory junior high school education, it is said that literacy in Japan is nearly universal.

What use they put this literacy to is another matter altogether, since the majority of the reading public seems to prefer reading *manga* comic books over any other form of literature. A recent survey shows that 69% of high school students prefer to read *manga*. Office workers and businessmen are no exception—they can often be seen reading these hefty volumes on their way to work. Businessmen can be seen standing for hours on end at bookstores reading their favorite books. In fact, reading while standing at a bookstore is so popular in Japan that a word has been coined for it: *tachiyomi*. One wonders how it is that millions of books are sold in Japan every year!

The statue of a young boy reading while carrying a bundle of sticks on his back is a familiar sight throughout Japan. He is the popular 19th-century moralist Ninomiya Kinjiro, who encouraged the Edo-period citizenry to work twice as hard at all their tasks, and he has been a role model for schoolchildren ever since.



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