UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

Reading Comic Books Critically:
How Japanese Comic Books Influence Taiwanese Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Fang-Tzu Hsu

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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University of California, Los Angeles, 2015
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Education knows no boundaries but hot button topics, like comic books, demonstrate school, teacher and parent limitations. Japanese comic books (*manga*) are a litmus test of pedagogical tolerance. Because they play an important role in the lives of most Taiwanese teenagers, I give them pride of place in this dissertation. To understand Japanese comic books and their influence, I use Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy to combine perspectives from cultural studies, comparative education, and educational sociology. With the cooperation of the administration, faculty and students of a Taiwanese junior high school, I used surveys, a textual analysis of five student-selected titles and interviews with students and educators. I discovered that Japanese *manga* contain complex and sometimes contradictory ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence. From an ethnic perspective, although students may glean cultural content from *manga* heroes and their retinues, people of color and non-Japanese Asians are either caricatures or non-existent; although Taiwanese teenager readers seem unaware of this. From a gender standpoint, neither the female characters' provocative representation nor the male characters' slavering responses to it raise students' and teachers' concerns.

Depictions of social and economic class are sometimes distinct in Japanese comic books. However, the dominant ideology of their creators is middle-class. Students are mostly oblivious to such distinctions, but may notice that ancient caste precepts survive. Although most *manga* focus on violent combat, students have no problem with excessive gore. By a process I call "fantasized death," violence is not only neutralized but transformed into aesthetic and spiritual challenges that encourage readers.

Taiwanese students love Japanese comic books. However, from a post-colonialist perspective, the growing hybridity of Taiwanese and Japanese cultural images may create challenges for the future of a discernible Taiwanese phenotype. I suggest that critical pedagogy may provide an antidote to this unfortunate fusion, which is currently unrecognized by the adolescent comic book consumers who are its harbingers or by the majority of their preceptors.

Keywords: Comic Books, Freire, Critical Cultural Studies, Post-colonialism, Taiwan

This dissertation of Fang-Tzu Hsu is approved.

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Dedication Page

I dedicate this work to Huan-Tang Huang, my beloved fiancé, who has had the greatest patience in the world to wait for me for ten years. As a professional librarian and a comic book lover, he supported my study from start to finish. His company and kindness helped me overcome many challenges, even though we spent three years living on opposite sides of the Pacific Rim.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world.

——*The Importance of the Act of Reading* (Freire, 1983)

1.1 Teenagers and Comic Books

Teenagers love to read comic books. Most junior high school teachers understand their students prefer comic books to textbooks. But are comic books merely sources of entertainment? Or do they contain subtler and, in some cases, more insidious information hidden among their words and pictures?

From a Cultural Studies perspective, Japanese comic books (also known as *manga*) have become an important part of many Taiwanese adolescents' lives. In Taiwan, comic books are considered the core of ACG (Animation, Comics, and Games) that expose techno-savvy teens to a multiplicity of *manga*-related productions and merchandise.[1] In the capital, Taipei, one sees throngs of young people in comic book stores, reading *manga* online, watching animated cartoons, or attending ACG exhibitions. In the Far East, comic books have outgrown their initial purpose as inexpensive, disposable reading matter for the masses to become the launching pad of a global network of cultural industries.

However, the provenance of the present comic book boom in Taiwan is worthy of note. According to the *2010 Taiwan Publishers' Survey*, the largest Taiwanese comic book manufacturer published nearly 30,000 new books from 1992 to 1998, and 95% of them were

[1] In Taiwan, fans of comic books, animation, and games (ACG), especially boys, are called "宅" (Otaku).

Japanese *manga* (Department of Administration, 2011). It goes without saying that Japan's dominance of Taiwanese popular entertainment has increased in the seventeen years since that survey was published.

What we do not know is whether Taiwan's young comic book fans are aware of the extent of their reliance on Japanese *manga* to take them where they want to go in their scant leisure hours. According to the aforementioned government survey, the most populous percentile of comic book readers are those between 12 and 15 years old. From a psychological perspective this is a very volatile age, developmentally. At the onset of puberty and for several years after, most young people are slaves to their hormones and forge their identities in relation to their peers, their appearance and their ideas about what is "weird" and what is "cool." Japanese comic books fill the space between these polarities with personable young heroes who embark on endless adventures, endure all kinds of challenges and emerge unscathed to venture forth once more.

For these early adolescents, comic books are an approachable cultural representation— an adventurous, rather bellicose, simulacrum of life. *Manga* are striated with ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence and subtly advance the supremacy of Japanese culture in ways their young Taiwanese readers find attractive and are happy to absorb. Comic books are the bane of anxious 'helicopter parents,' concerned that their children will waste precious time in their thrall, do poorly on their exams and miss the opportunity to attend a good senior high school. Meanwhile, progressive educators argue that *manga* deliver rich cognitive material in a more provocative way than school books and, if Taiwanese kids learn to decode and discuss them, starting in junior high school, they will be better for it.

Since comics have ruled the minds of generations of junior high school students, I think

the time has come to consider what, if anything, teenagers learn from them. Although middle school teachers know that many students are devotees, most of them have no idea what kinds of *manga* they read or what world view they espouse. In fact, due to the lack of studies focusing on the experiences of *manga* readers, educators and academic researchers know little about their effect. They think they get to know their students' through their written work and classroom responses but know next to nothing about the power of *manga* in their lives.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the issue grows even more complex. Japan's ACG exports have coopted the Taiwanese imaginary to the detriment of the nation's indigenous cultural industries. People pay too much attention to formal education and usually misunderstand or overlook the power of informal learning. However, education never happens in a vacuum. It is always connected to the surrounding social environment and to the life experiences of both educators and students. To ignore the putative value of Comic Book Studies in schools is like failing to notice an elephant standing in the schoolyard, waiting for recess. Educators, even when they acknowledge their students' evident fascination with comics, do not think there is any reason to make them part of their cognitive concerns.

Recognizing the need to discuss this issue educationally, culturally, and internationally, I came up with the following problem statement: 'What ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, violence, and cross cultural issues exist in mainstream Japanese comics, and how do they influence teenage Taiwanese junior high school readers?[2] Acknowledging the problem's pertinence to the fields of Comparative Education and Cultural Studies, there are several perspectives that should be investigated. Here are my three research questions:

1. From the critical perspective of Cultural Studies, what kinds of hidden messages, including

[2] In my research, I use "ethnicity" rather than "race" to discuss the difference between Japan and Taiwan, because race is associated with biology and ethnicity is associated with culture. From a biological perspective, Japanese and Taiwanese are both Asian peoples. It is their culture, as much as anything, that differentiates them.

ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence, are represented in Japanese comic books?

2. How do junior high school students and educators see Japanese comic books and their influence?
3. Do Japanese comic books as a foreign communications medium influence Taiwanese teenagers' cultural identities?

Guided by these questions, this study attempts to present a multi-leveled cultural arena in the age of globalization. By delving into the diverse strata represented by this cultural phenomenon, educators and educational researchers are given the opportunity to become aware of the value of critical thinking and invited to take a broader view of the possibility it offers for rethinking and, ultimately, redesigning some aspects of contemporary education.

1.2 Taking Comic Books Seriously

To open and examine the cultural and ideological baggage associated with the current craze for Japanese comic books in Taiwan, it is necessary for the reader to know something about the relationship between the two countries. From a historical perspective, the influence of Japanese culture on Taiwan can be traced back to the Japanese Colonial era from 1895 to 1945. During half a century, the Han immigrants from mainland China and Native Taiwanese were ruled by Japanese overlords. Through systematically controlling Taiwanese education, public policies and life style, Japan altered the culture of the Taiwanese people and profoundly influenced their racial and cultural identity.

To maintain the power of its colonial government, Japan applied *Kominka* (皇民化) to Taiwan.[3] By supplying the nation's public schools with specially edited textbooks, they became

[3] Influenced by the increasing tension between China and Japan after the July 7th, 1937 Incident (七七事變), that

virtual 'brain-washing' centers where teachers imposed Japanese culture and values on Taiwanese students. The Taiwanese were trained to be loyal citizens who would unquestioningly follow their rules without challenging the inequitable privileges established by their colonial masters (Wang, 2004; Lin, 2006). Japanese culture all but superseded the dominant Han Chinese culture of nineteenth century Taiwanese society. Even after Japan's surrender, the legacy of Japanese cultural imperialism persisted and its effects are still evident.

With the support of the U.S.A., Japan's post-war economy thrived and the country soon resumed a leading role in the region. Compared to Taiwan which is still, in many ways, a developing nation, Japan is a modern superpower. Its usually vibrant economy has had many cross-cultural effects on Taiwan. During the Taiwanese martial law period (1949-1987), several cultural activities were either banned or censored. In 1962, the "Comic Books Counseling Law (連環圖書輔導辦法)," which served the hegemony of Taiwanese martial law, established political restrictions governing local comic book publication. As a consequence, many Taiwanese comic book manufacturers chose to reject the work of local authors and import 'pirated' editions of Japanese comic books (Li, 2004, 27).[4] The censorship imposed by the Counseling Law caused a rapid and dramatic decay of Taiwanese comic books, and created an open field for Japanese *manga*. By the 1970s, Japanese animation dominated what were then the 3 Taiwanese TV channels and imported *manga* were all anyone who liked comics wanted to read (Chou, 2008,107).

Japanese cultural products are largely welcomed by the Taiwanese, and its predominant

---

marked the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, Japanese colonial governor-general Seizō Kobayashi (小林躋造) decided to institute a strong policy that completely 'Japanized' Taiwanese language, ideologies, and identities (Tsai, Hsu, Wang, & Hsu, 2008). This policy was called *Kominka* and sealed Taiwan's fate during World War Ⅱ.

[4] At that time, many local comics were banned because they reflected erstwhile Taiwanese society and criticized the dictatorial government. By contrast, Japanese comics did not describe Taiwanese social reality. So even under the edict of martial law, they remained unrestricted.

economic and cultural influence has made “Japan” a synonym for “fashion” and “cool” with young people, many of whom express a strong interest in one day visiting that wonderful land. Taiwanese media often use the term “Japanophile” (哈日族) to describe citizens fond of everything Japanese.[5] This phenomenon has not only changed the structure of Taiwanese popular culture, but also affects the day-to-day lives and thoughts of Taiwanese youth. By constantly accessing Japanese media, they have internalized many of the ideologies diffused there (Yang, 2009, 125-126).

Taiwan thus serves as a fecund field for Japanese ACG imports. Many Taiwanese consume Japanese comic books, animated TV series and movies, video games, as well as all sorts of ancillary products ‘spun off’ by these multiple approaches. Comic books, capsule toys, and poster-calendars are among the collectable merchandise prized by fans for purposes of entertainment and social intercourse (Huang, 2010, 70). Japanophiles by the thousands create their own extended works based on *manga* themes and characters whom they also emulate in dress and manner during “Cosplays” and *Doujin* exhibitions (Comic-lovers parties). All of this attests to the brand fidelity and enthusiasm *manga* generate.

From this, it is fair to say that Japanese comic books represent far more than illustrated reading material. They are at the core of a network of entertainment industries, all deeply embedded in the Taiwanese consciousness. Similar to Marvel and Dell Comics (DC) in the U.S., the most famous Japanese comic books are familiar to all Taiwanese, whether or not they are fans. In fact, comic books are not “just for teenagers.” According to the last Taiwanese government report, people aged 30 to 60 represent 40% of the readership; of which 13.7% are in

[5] In Taiwan, we have another term “哈韓族”(Ha Han), which is used to describe people who admire everything Korean including TV series, films, singers, food, etc. However, since the Taiwan did not have strong historical ties to Korea, the roots of the “Ha Han” phenomenon may lie shallower in the socio-cultural humus than those of Japanophilia.

the 30-34 bracket, and 9.8% aged 35-39 (Department of Administration, 2011).

Thus, *manga*'s status has grown from that of a vibrant sub-culture supported by an international fan club of imaginative and playful young people to a new "common sense"[6] in the 21st Century.

Due to the continued growth and vitality of comic books' cultural orbit, I believe the time has come for it to be the focus of scholarly discussion and analysis. Because, without formal academic discussion, it is too easy for people to return to their pre-formed opinions and biases without looking for the truth. To encourage such discussion, I would like to introduce several key terms.

1. Manga

Manga is a specific term for Japanese comic books. The word first appeared in the title of a work by Japanese artist Hanabusa Itcho's *Graphic Manga: Butterflies and Flowers* (漫畫圖考群蝶畫英) in 1769 (Hsu, 2009). The concept of *manga* can be traced back to Fusanosuke Natsume in the 12th Century, which is regarded as a "pre-manga era" by Japan's Ministry of Culture and Education (Gravett, 2004, 18).

Japanese comic book authors learned their fundamentals from American comics, including the best way to coordinate picture, word and frame and combined them with traditional Japanese elements (Gravett, 2004, 18-38). However, even though *manga's* creators were initially influenced by American comic books and graphic novels, they soon found a direction of their own, one with different formats, different drawing styles, and creative outlets for self-expression unknown in the West. In 2007, Japanese deputy prime minister Taro Aso led a delegation of diplomats promoting "comic book diplomacy" by using *manga* as a bridge to increase political

[6] I borrowed the term "common sense" from Gramsci, because several elements of comic culture have been adopted into common parlance as evidenced by TV and media ad campaigns.

and economic connections between Japan and other countries (Wen, 2007). It would be no exaggeration to say that Japanese comic books, *manga*, are one of the most prestigious and far-reaching popular entertainment formats on the planet.

2. Anime:

Anime (ah-nee-may) is a term synonymous with Japanese animation. *Anime* are usually adapted from comic books and have the same characters. Most *anime* are TV series, and have the same plots as their *manga* originals, but they can be classified in three different categories: OVA (Original Video Animation), OAD (Original *Anime* DVD), and *anime* movies, some of which offer storylines that diverge from the comic books that inspired them. A successful *anime* film is often as financially rewarding as those in which roles are played by real actors. For instance, in 2013, the movie *One Piece Film Z*, adapted from one of the most popular *manga*, *One Piece*, had box office receipts of nearly twenty-one million Taiwanese dollars ($697,333 USD) within the first week of its release (Bahamut GNN, 2013) and went on to be the highest-grossing Japanese film of the year in Taiwan.

3. *Doujin* exhibitions:

In Chinese characters "*Doujin*" is written 同人, which means a group of people united by their common interest in Japanese cultural products. Nowadays, the term is usually employed by diehard *manga* fans to describe one of their favorite pastimes. This kind of exhibition usually includes two activities: selling homemade comic products, and *Cosplay*, which is an opportunity for fans to dress up and behave like their favorite comic characters. *Doujin* exhibitions in Taiwan began as small parties where *manga* fans could create and grow social networks. However, they have grown prodigiously in recent years. At one *Doujin* exhibition in 2013, nearly 50,000 people attended the two-day event (Hsu, 2013).

In this research, I use multiple perspectives to analyze the extraordinary cultural phenomenon that Japanese comic books have created in Taiwan. Although research about comic books is still a novelty in the Taiwanese Cultural Studies field compared to other kinds of media analysis, focused on books, movies, and television, it does not mean that this topic is less important than the rest. In fact, it is the very lack of academic research on comic books' influence in educational settings which proves that most educators and researchers have limited knowledge about what young students care about, and what kinds of cultural and societal information they derive from their devotion to the burgeoning *manga* worldview.

Thus, I employ three interrelated academic lenses, provided by cultural studies, comparative education, and educational sociology, to focus on the most popular Japanese comic books in Taiwan and their teenage devotees. By combining these three perspectives with Paulo Freire's dialogical methodology, I trust that my "study" will live up to his definition of the word by maintaining an attitude of "curiosity" and "seriousness" while confronting the research "problem." In so doing, I borrow certain concepts and terms from Cultural Studies that help me conduct a deep analysis of the Top 5 comics' contents; I examine their cross-cultural (Japanese/Taiwanese) effects aided by some of the tenets of Comparative Education; finally, I discuss the feelings and ideas they invoke from both adolescent and adult readers, using concepts from the field of Educational Sociology. By traversing the boundaries between academic disciplines, I trust I have circumvented their limitations and provided a research bridge between them.

1.3 Structure of Chapters

This dissertation comprises six chapters. These chapters provide both a theoretical review

of the subject and the results of research I conducted with Taiwanese junior high school students and teachers. Chapter Two begins with a literature review. By using Freirian concepts as its theoretical frame, I provide a critical review of what I consider relevant academic studies from the combined perspective of the aforementioned disciplines. Ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence in Japanese comic books are revealed through a Cultural Studies optic. Combining this with a comparative analysis of the role *manga* play in furthering the post-colonial relationship between Japan and Taiwan thickens the plot, while ideologies of ethnicity are explored as an international cross-cultural issue in the era of neo-liberal globalization. Finally, the perspective of educational sociology is used to present existing studies about the influence of comic books and the pedagogical value of recognizing comic books as cognitive material.

Chapter Three presents both the methodology and the methods used in this research. I choose three different methods to work with junior high school students, educators, and librarians. To understand the reactions and feelings aroused by their habitual reading of *manga*, I survey and interview a dozen Taiwanese junior high school students. To help me establish a reliable textual analysis of the comics' content, I form an "expert review panel" where I am joined by a quartet of Taiwanese educators and librarians who help me ferret out and analyze the hidden ideologies they contain. These interviews with students and educators provide multiple first-hand accounts of their views about and use of comic books in an educational context. By collecting and analyzing the data from both my survey and the panel's textual analysis, critical questions are clarified that arouse the interest of both students and teachers and enliven further dialogue between us.

Chapter Four provides the results of the survey, the textual analysis and the interviews. In

this chapter, the results are presented in detail, using both quantitative and qualitative lenses. Going through the data, I attempt to describe the different opinions held by different groups of people as well as the similarities between them. Energized by the dialectic give and take of our discourse, these results demonstrate the variety of ideologies embedded in selected *manga*, and how people at different stages of education and experience understand and interpret them.

Chapter Five is the most important chapter in this study because it provides the analysis of the results presented in Chapter Four. By melding the Freirian framework and methodology discussed in Chapter Two, the analysis is separated into six different categories to answer the research questions. These six categories include a discussion of the pervasive though subtle influence of the ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class and violence presented by *manga*; their role in what I see as a new phase of Japanese cultural colonialism in Taiwan and, finally, the feasibility of applying critical pedagogy to comic books as a way of propagating what I see as a much-needed dialogical wave in the future of Taiwanese education. Through discussion combining survey results, textual analysis, and interviews, this chapter provides in-depth reflections and critiques on both the content of selected comic books and the biases and opinions that students and educators have of them. Employing the multiple perspectives provided by this kind of theoretical analysis, this chapter reveals a broader, more complex view of *manga* as surreptitious agents of cultural dominance and is intended to awaken and raise my readers' consciousness that comic books are more significant than they seem at first glance.

Chapter Six contains my conclusions. In this chapter, I attempt to answer my research questions, and provide the reader with a summary overview of the study. While discussing the limitations of this study, I present possible strategies for its improvement and recommendations for future research in the field. Finally, this chapter presents a series of potential educational

practices for educational researchers, educators, parents, and government administrators. Aside from making the public aware of the potential of comic book research, this study aims not only to provide an academic breakthrough, but is also meant as an invitation to my colleagues and countrymen to engage in revolutionary educational praxis which has the potential to overcome time-worn limitations and change Taiwan's future.

CHAPTER 2: A FREIREAN APPROACH TO COMIC BOOK ANALYSIS

2.1 The Influence of Japanese *Manga* on Taiwanese Youth

The actual act of reading literary texts is seen as part of a wider process of human development and growth based on understanding both one's own experience and the social world.

—*The Importance of Act of Reading* (Freire, 1983)

As many educators know, young people like to read comic books. Taiwanese adolescents' consumption of *manga* cannot be regarded as mere entertainment. Indeed, comic books are one of the ways Japan dominates Taiwanese culture. The graphic representations and ideologies contained in imported *manga* may have a more powerful cognitive effect on Taiwanese youth than any formal educational process they undergo.

I believe it is necessary to discuss this phenomenon from a critical analytical point-of-view. Therefore, in this chapter, I use Paulo Freire's educational theory to reveal predominant influence of *manga* on Taiwanese teens, especially the hidden messages inside Japanese comic books. There are two main reasons for using Freire's theories. First, Freire's idea of education provides the possibility of linking popular culture and education. Believing, as he did, that the educational process transpires in both formal and informal settings, Freire's methodology, originally designed for poor and unlettered adults, is invariably connected to the world of work (Freire, 2012). The absorption of Taiwanese youth by Japanese *manga* is the result of generations of political and cultural domination by Japan.

The other reason for using Freirian theory in this research is because Freire perceives

political power and dominant culture as inextricable. His analysis of the complex relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is a relevant critical instrument with which to examine the subtle but pervasive influence of Japanese cultural colonialism in Taiwan.

Before they were given words to learn, Freire gave the Brazilian peasants he was teaching pictures of people engaged in what were to them familiar tasks; farming, hunting, digging wells, and explained they were "makers of culture." In the context examined here, Taiwanese adolescents are borrowing the cultural byproducts of Japanese hegemony because their parents and grandparents lost their identity as thriving producers of a multiplicity of exportable goods as a result of an international realignment of economic power. Thus the *manga* they love are laden with Japanese cultural subtext which they accept as a given because they are unaware that it is their oppressor's socio-cultural mindset and not their own that the *manga* describe. If comic books were prized rather than despised by their teachers, they might be used as what Freire called 'codifications,' discursive aids, pedagogy might change from vertical (banking) to horizontal (dialogical,) and a new generation could be recruited to advance the recreation of 'glocal' Taiwanese culture. [7]

Moreover, it is difficult to do justice to the complexity of the subject using only one academic perspective. To paint a meaningful picture of the breadth and depth of the comic book culture of Taiwanese youth requires cross-disciplinary theories from multiple academic lenses including cultural studies, comparative education, and educational sociology. From a cultural study perspective, the sub-textual, ideological messages comic books reveal are ripe for analysis. From a comparative educational view, the dominance of *manga* puts into sharp relief the enduring power of Japan's influence on Taiwanese intellectual life. From an educational

[7] Glocal means a combination between influence from globalization and local culture. Japanese comic books as foreign media that becomes parts of Taiwanese popular culture, present this feature.

sociological standpoint, it would be interesting to see how comic books influence young Taiwanese readers, and how their teachers react to, avoid or embrace them as epistemic tools. From Freirian perspectives, these influences imbricate and meld in Taiwanese students' daily encounters with their classes, their teachers and each other. While based in Taiwanese society, the panoramic view provided by these three dimensions may be broader than that of formal education, which remains firmly based on the image of Taiwanese culture and its future development.

Therefore, in the following sections, I am going to use Freire's theories as my theoretical framework, and the trifocal lens of cultural studies, comparative education, and educational sociology as my optic. By doing so, I can integrate all three perspectives and form a solid research structure which can provide a critical analysis of the following findings.

2.2 Cultural Studies Perspective: Ideologies in Comic Books

Sometimes its [ideology's] presence is greater than we think. It is directly linked to that tendency within us to cloak over the truth of the facts, using language to cloud or turn opaque what we wish to hide. We become myopic. Blind. We become prisoners of artifice. Trapped.

—*Pedagogy of Freedom* (Freire, 2001, 112).

Like many other media, comic books transfer selected ideologies through their content. Aware of their influence among young adults, researchers have undertaken comic book studies since the 1970s. In *How to Read Donald Duck*, originally published in 1971 as *Para Leer al Pato Donald* by the University of Valparaiso Press, Chilean playwright Ariel Dorfman and Belgian sociologist Armand Mattelart subject Walt Disney and his "magic kingdom" to a

blistering Marxist critique. The world's most publicized purveyor of entertainment, overseer of a menagerie of adorable anthropomorphic characters, is accused of manufacturing imperialist propaganda. The dark underpinnings of Disney's incipient colonialism and capitalism are revealed: degrading images of servile women and savage children, the absence of representations of the working class, the incessant search for money, fame and fortune as the be-all and end-all for dizzy Donald and his plutocrat Uncle Scrooge. The book was published at the height of President Allende's aborted socialist experiment and banned by his executioner and successor, General Augusto Pinochet. In its subsequent English translation by art historian David Kunzle (Dorfman & Mattelart, 1975), *How to Read Donald Duck* received international attention when Pinochet incarcerated Dorfman and made his work a symbol of Chile's evanescent moment of truth.

Another offering from the early 1970s, *The Comic Stripped American* by San Francisco State University sociology professor and media analyst Arthur Asa Berger, is a compendium of U.S. comic strips from Krazy Kat and the Katzenjammer Kids to Mr. Natural. Berger mentions that ideologies like gender bias were revealed in the comic pages of American newspapers as early as the 1930s (Berger, 1973, 10). Comic books reflect the zeitgeist of the eras and societies in which they are published. As Berger discovers, "there is a fairly close relationship, generally, between a society and its heroes; if a hero does not espouse values that meaningful to his readers, there seems little likelihood that he will be popular" (Berger,1973,151). Characters like the superheroes furnish an evolving mirror of a nation's consciousness that reflects their creators take on society and their post-WWII optimism about the Great Society's ability to overcome existential obstacles as Superman surmounts skyscrapers, "at a single bound".

As cultural products, newspaper comic strips and comic books are an ideal medium for the transmission of political propaganda and popular ideologies to their readers (Wright, 2001).

Because of their narrative depiction of the adventures of popular characters, comic books serve as sales tools. The ideologies they espouse should not be underestimated, even though feature films and television series are more congenial to the adult consumer (Barker, 1989).

Ideologies do matter. They exist in every culture and every society. They are so engrained in the lives of most people that take little notice of their presence, unless they blatantly espouse an unpopular cause. In Freire's later work, he discusses a plethora of ideological issues—neoliberalism, ethnicity, gender, class, and nationalism—and their effects on our everyday lives (Freire, 2001, 113-118). As in real life, the ideologies of comic books are diverse. They may be evident in the figures, dialogue, situations, by whom, how and why the story is told. They may lie hidden in the subtle details or provide the narrative frame. Unless they stimulate critical thinking, ideologies may have a soporific effect on consumers looking for action and thrills. Their ability to establish sufficient critical distance from what they are reading or watching may nullified by its violent or prurient content and the emotions it stirs.

As Torres said, "all ideological thinking, all ideology, is committed thoughts. Ideology accompanies structures to support or modify them" (Torres, 2014, 27). It is important to know the connection between ideologies and its supporting cultural backgrounds. Therefore, in this study, I will be examining not just the ideologies *manga* express, but the cultural environment of the Taiwanese readers who consume them, however consciously. Investigating and analyzing the connections between popular culture and comic books, I am following cultural studies' long tradition of ideological critique. My intention is to identify the ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence that form the basis of this study of the influence of one nation's creative product on another nation's youth.[8] When reviewing former studies, these four perspectives

[8] Ideological critique is the essence of cultural studies. The term "ideology" can be traced back to the 18th century Enlightenment, when it was seen as a notion defying prevailing rationality by criticizing non-progressive ideas

will allow me to form a convincing argument about the effect of Japanese comic books on Taiwanese youth.

2.2.1 Ethnic Ideologies

Ethnic ideologies are one of the most important topics in Western cultural analysis. Buffeted about by cultural currents and counter-currents unknown in comparatively homogeneous societies like those of Taiwan and Japan, Western cultural study scholars have discussed racial and ethnic issues since the revolutionary 1960s and early 1970s. Writers like Stuart Hall, one of the key scholars of the Birmingham School, noticed:

> Blacks have typically been the objects, but rarely the subjects, of the practices of representation. The struggle to come into representation was predicated on a critique of the degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject (Hall, 1989, 443).

Black people were virtually misrepresented or excluded in the dominant White society. In the more than three hundred years since their ancestors were brought to the New World in chains, the voices of successive generational cohorts of brilliant, fiery Afro-American philosophers, novelists, poets and playwrights began to catch the attention of the world that had oppressed them for so long.

Today, the critiques of race and ethnicity are widely discussed in different media. Comic books are not excluded. In fact, since many readers are from different ethnic backgrounds, comic book publishers seem to be more and more aware of this issue. Today, many superheroes and characters in American comic books are from different racial backgrounds. They are not

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(Larrain, 1994, 9-10). In the 19th Century, Marx uses it to identify the tenets of the ruling class (Marx & Engels, 1968). Gramsci, who links the concept of "ideology" with those of "hegemony" and "common sense," employs a political perspective to illustrate how dominant groups maintain authority (Hoare & Smith, 1999). Both Marx's and Gramsci's ideas were absorbed by the cultural studies scholars of the Frankfurt School and Birmingham School. They transformed their ideological critiques into a culturally-oriented perspective from which to reflect on capitalism, ideologies, and biases.

only representatives of certain racial groups, but also projective characters who speak to and for their "minority group consumers. In Singer's research, he pointed out that most American superheroes have two identities, like Superman, Spiderman or The Hulk. This 'secret identity' that must not be divulged heightens the kinship attachment of a multitude of adolescent readers who themselves bear potentially shameful and therefore secretive addictions and sexual proclivities (Singer, 2002). The connection between their pre-adolescent and teenage readers' traumatic identity experiences and the superhero with a secret, mundane identity assures the devotion of a fan-base who can relate to powerful, simultaneously vulnerable archetypes.

However, the fact that multiple races are shown in mainstream comic books, does not guarantee that they are treated equally. As Brown points out, minority characters like Jews, Asians and Blacks tend to be depicted as meek, weak, or excessively "physical" (Brown, 1999). A similar argument can be found in Karen McGrath's study of Marvel Comics, *Amazing Fantasy*, which states even though Marvel tries to represent every ethnic groups in the USA, it still depicts characters in racially stereotypical ways (McGrath, 2007). Comic books do not achieve social equality or assist in reconstructing damaged identities just by creating ethnically diverse characters with appealing flaws. Stereotypes are harmful to the psychological health and well-being of young readers, whether they are from mainstream or marginal social strata.

Freire acknowledges that similar ethnic issues exist in people's everyday lives. From the perspective of the dominant group, minority ethnic groups in comic books are often described as "objects" by their oppressors. Therefore, to judge whether a certain comic book series represents multi-ethnic and pan-racial equality may be more complicated than counting the number of "bad guys" or "good guys" in each ethnic group. What is more, whether a character can represent or contain diverse perspectives (rather than merely reproducing the dominant

group's bias) is even more important than character demography. From a Freirian standpoint, the most important thing is the mutability of awareness. Unless they depict all characters, regardless of their ethnic or racial background, as narrative "subjects" rather than "objects," comic books would just repeat official ideologies, invented and delivered in classic "banking" style, by the dominant culture.

Ethnic ideologies in Japanese comic books are not my main research topic. However, this does not mean that Japanese comic books do not deal with ethnicity. Even though the social and scenic context of most *manga* tend to reflect the homogeneity of Japanese society and culture, ethnicity is always present, especially as it relates to the post-colonial situation between Taiwan and Japan. This will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3, below.

2.2.2 Gender Ideologies

Gender is another typical issue in cultural studies. Based on Feminist theories, cultural studies provide a critical perspective to look into the ideologies of male-dominated society.[9] Many cultural study scholars have noticed, even though the audience is not all males, the "male glance" still dominates the mass media, and tries to intimate a feeling of sexual "pleasure" by building up images of women's bodies (Mulvey, 1975; Hammer & Kellner, 2007). The existing gender ideologies show that, although in several developed countries, what is popular has outgrown core conservative ideas about the traditional role of men and women, some degree of cultural bias still survives. Comic books, as one type of popular media, also reproduce these gender ideologies in many ways.

[9] Feminism defines different perspectives in gender study over three successive eras. Currently, Feminism is in its "third wave." By Heywood and Drake's definition, it not only "inherits a critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structure [posited] in the second wave, but also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defying power of those structures" (Heywood & Drake, 1997).

Focusing on how women's bodies perform in comic books, feminist scholars use a critical standpoint to see how an idealized female figure can become a political arena, reflecting both cultural reality and stereotypical attributes. For instance, in their study, Hinds and Tatum examine Mexican comic books and note that there are only two kinds of female characters, the 'witch' and the 'wife,' who exemplify the untamed, libidinous and servile, domestic aspects of women in a *macho* (male chauvinist) society. Wives sacrifice everything for family and love. As role models of fidelity and breeding, they are "good women" and societal heroines. On the other hand, witches are women beyond man's control who through their wild and unpredictable behavior, rebel against the dominant culture. They are objectified as demonic *brujas* (Hinds & Tatum, 1984). Similar issues are discussed in relation to *manga*. Ito analyzes mainstream Japanese comic books and notices that women are usually depicted as "accessories" or "cheerleaders," unfailingly supportive of and obedient to their boyfriends or husbands (Ito, 1994). These images demonstrate how, in *manga*, female characters represent stereotypical Japanese women who are usually under the control of male figures.

Some fans may disagree that women in Japanese comic books are just accessories. Indeed, Yukari's research on fans of *One Piece* and *Naruto*, finds that female characters in *One Piece* who are competent and often depicted as capable as men, are more popular than certain female characters in *Naruto* who are not required to fight and are therefore overly attentive to their romantic urges (Yukari, 2013). Since Japanese comic books have varied topics, it is not difficult to find females as warriors or mother figures. However, what researchers should ask is not "What types of roles do these women play?" but "Why do they exist in these comic books?" In Chang's study of heroines in sci-fi comic books, most female warriors' images still reflect patriarchy, including the control of female bodies, and the threats they may contain (Chang,

2008). Conversely, Huang's study indicates that Taiwanese males are addicted to women as mother-figures because they are tired of pressure from traditional male responsibilities such as marriage which they cannot afford in the economic downturn of the actual society (Huang, 2009). In sum, Japanese comic books are obviously male-dominated. From a critical perspective, different styles of women are mostly created to serve the demands of different male fantasies.

Another gender ideology in comic books is related to LGBT issues. However, LGBT issues in Western and Japanese comic books have different meanings. As gender awareness grows, there have been some gay and lesbian images in American comic books and graphic novels. A well-known publisher, Dell Comics (DC), even created a gay hero in 2002, which brought about more positive discussion than negative feedback in obliging readers to rethink mainstream homophobia and the possibility of social reform (Mehta & Hay, 2005). Similar to portrayals of ethnic characters, those of sexual minorities are not just representations of authors' perspectives, but also role models who can 'speak for' their gender-bending LGBT readership.

However, Japanese gay or lesbian comic books are of a different order. An interesting *manga* subtype, categorized as "Boy Love (BL)" focuses on romance and sex between two gays, but its main readers are actually straight women.[10] Different from heterosexual love presenting in traditional romantic comic books, which are also popular among female readers, BL gives readers a different way to imagine love and sex. By depicting beautiful male characters, BL comics supply these women a voyeuristic frisson of homoerotic love, including the masochistic pleasure of imagining themselves the helpless targets of the pretty boys' misogynist vituperation (Wood, 2006; Yen, 2010). Making typical gender identities ambiguous, BL *manga* create more space for their readers' imaginations to depict ideal sex and love. To

[10] There are also "Girl Love" (GL) *manga* that focus on lesbian romance. However, in Taiwan and Japan, the BL market is much stronger than the GL market.

explain this cultural phenomenon, McLelland argues that BL comic books reflect the dissatisfaction of Japanese wives, trapped in husband-dominated marriages. Since the situations and erotic sensibilities of the male characters in BL manga are feminized as "beautiful, slender and often of ambiguous gender" figures, their representations are closer to those of married women than gays, because "only a boy who loves a boy (or a girl who loves a girl) is truly free in Japanese society to love beyond the constraining roles imposed by the marriage and family system" (McLelland, 2010). Chao reaches similar conclusions in her study, which demonstrates that even teenage girls understand that the handsome young men in BL *manga* are different from "real gays." They are fantasy gay couples bounded by the binary discourse of gender ideologies (Chao, 2011). According to Chao, BL manga are made to titillate frustrated women rather than providing believable scenes and archetypes of gay life.

It would be interesting to use Freire's viewpoint to discuss gender ideologies of female and BL issues. There is a noticeable underrepresentation of women in most mainstream comic books. On the other hand, female readers expect male characters in the BL comics to provide their partners with ecstatic experiences similar to those depicted in the heterosexual trysts of mainstream *manga*. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discusses a subtle psychological state he calls "fear of freedom:"

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom [which] would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift … It is the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (Freire, 2012, 47).

Since the oppressed do not understand the reason for their oppression, they inculcate what they feel most keenly—the power of the oppressor—and become oppressors themselves when the opportunity arises to objectify and mistreat other sentient beings, human or animal.

"However," Freire reminds us, "the oppressed have become resigned to the structure of domination" and "are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires (idem, ibidem)." Ironically, it is only the oppressed who, when they can no longer bear "stifled humanity," opt for liberation for both themselves and their oppressors. The oppressor is too inured to his privilege and too "dehumanized" to feel anyone's pain but his own. Left to his own devices, he will never change. Thus BL *manga* fans, and comic book aficionados in general, will remain unconscious of gender ideologies and gender bias as long as they continue to objectify and be titillated by characters with different ethnicities and sexual preferences than their own. Comic book analysis can provide scholars and researchers with interesting social and demographic information. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that Taiwanese youth will ever be stirred to seek self-knowledge or social justice by the hegemonic subtext of Japanese *manga*.

Like laboratory test tubes teeming with infectious strains of classism, concupiscence, gender inequalities and ethnic bias, comic books *per se* neither pose the existential problems nor inspire the growth-in-consciousness Freire called "dialogical." True gender equality should be built on a foundation of mutual respect. This would indicate comic books' epistemic use as what Freire called "codifications"[11] to be unpacked in classroom discussions by educators unafraid to open a Pandora's Box of adolescent judgment and anxiety. Were this barrier to be surmounted, there would be more than enough role models in comic books to generate countless hours of fecund teacher-student dialogue about the nuances of ethnicity, gender and sexual

[11] In *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990, 87-88) Freire explains that "the codification works as a challenge to the students and the educator, [it] gives itself or exposes itself to the cognitive subjects, to those who are open to know, to read the codification as a representation of [their] reality. Precisely because the reality you present in the codification is the reality of the students, in looking at [it] the students see again what they already know about reality. Then they speak about what they are seeing, and in speaking about what they are seeing, they are expressing how, before that moment, they perceived reality. Reading codifications leads people to have a perception of [their] former perception of reality.

expression. What is more, the extent and depth of their socio-emotional influence could begin to be researched and analyzed.

2.2.3 Class Ideologies

Class is not as popular an issue as ethnicity or gender in cultural studies. It is seldom discussed as an individual topic but, rather, considered an underlying factor in situations rife with gender and ethnic bias. As Freire reminds us, "one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class" (Freire & MacEdo, 1999). Economic disadvantages are usually related to the race and gender of the oppressed, because they are physically and mentally controlled by the rich and powerful. The U.S. media, controlled by the rich and representing middle and upper-middle classes, accentuate their liminal status, seeing them as criminal miscreants and/or disenfranchised "street people," undereducated, undocumented, unqualified for the specialized jobs of the "information society." In short, thugs on drugs. In the endless campaigning of fat cat politicians, this low-income, low-output minority is a handy scapegoat, blamed for sabotaging the progress of capitalist society, putting hard-working middle class families at risk by demanding minimum wage, housing and healthcare at the taxpayers' expense (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001; Kellner, 1995, 126).

In comic books, the underclass is almost always invisible. In the post-WWII "boom years," from the 1950s to the 1980s, the rampant materialism of the burgeoning U.S. military-industrial economy was celebrated by its entertainment industry (Belk, 1987). An unprecedented outflow of comic books, comic strips and animated cartoons not only reflected America's economic values but also its social structure and, more recently, the hyper-capitalist neoliberalism of globalized markets controlled by transnational companies has expanded the roster of world

champion economies to include the "Asian Tigers," Japan and Korea, and the new industrial and financial heavyweight champ, mainland China. The plot of the Japanese animated film, *Spirited Away*, while set in a fantastic world, ponders the life style of the post-modern middle class by comparing traditional Shintoist values with greedy, neo-liberal capitalism (Han, 2005).[12]

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" explains the reason comic books represent a middle- and upper-middle class way of life. Brown's study shows that fans and followers of comic book culture have the disposable income to purchase both comics and related products, attend conventions and special events so they are the consumers that comic book publishers really care about (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, comic book writers and illustrators are themselves products of the middle-class. This allows them to depict a lifestyle and furnish plots with mores and boundaries which are familiar and pleasing to their fans. A question can be raised as to whether this circumscribed socio-economic class optic restricts reader awareness of other socio-economic classes, which will be discussed later, in Chapter 5.

As Freire pointed out, neo-liberalism has been accepted as the dominant worldview and its moral and material values have been integrated as part and parcel of our lives (Freire, 2001, 114-115). Thus, the class ideologies in comic books are a reflection of capitalist neo-liberalism in the societies of developed countries. Since readers are so familiar with them, such ideologies are taken for granted and, for the young people who make up the comic book fan base, it is as if they are invisible. For educators, then, the most important issue is how to bring them in touch with values that do not exist in comic books: the plight of poor and working-class people who have everywhere been marginalized by the volatile, speculative force of the world economy.

[12] I found no discussion of class issues in Japanese comic books. However, *Spirited Away*, which was originally released as an animated feature film that subsequently spawned *manga* adaptations, is a case in point. In this story, Chihiro Ogino, a ten-year old girl accidentally goes to a fantastic world full of Japanese gods and goodness, is asked to do labor work in a bath house by a witch in return of her freedom and her parents' lives.

This silent majority is sidelined by its lack of career opportunities—people who, in the middle of the last century, would have been rank and file union workers have been abandoned by what was once a benevolent democracy and left to fend for themselves in an age of specialized knowledge that privileges specialized training and cultural capital they do not share. They can neither afford nor take pleasure in imaginary stories concocted by middle class publishers and filmmakers if all their time and energy is spent on the desperate struggle to stay afloat in a winner-take-all economy where worker's rights have been rewritten by the financial-judicial alliance to give every advantage to big business and none to the little guy.

2.2.4 Ideologies of Violence

Comic books are often criticized for concentrating on sex and violence. The same argument has been leveled at Western graphic novels and Japanese comic books. Researchers like Fredric Wertham strongly criticize American comics for their admiring focus on sex and crime as models for readers to imitate (Wertham, 1954). Based on moral concerns, he was strongly against children reading comic books. However, Japanese *manga* actually illustrate and advocate more violence than American comic books (Gravett, 2004, 100). Most of what mainstream *manga* depict involves fierce combat, copious bloodshed, violent harm and death. Graphic images of mutilation proliferate. These horrify parents and educators alike and generate widespread negative opinions—yet *manga* flourish and constitute a major Asian export.

Why do Japanese comic books embrace ideologies of violence? One possible reason is that violence provides release from the pressures of growing up at a time and in a society fraught with uncertainty, since "deadly serious in representing violence" is considered "as a legitimate practice to define one's identity and negotiate the terrain of everyday life" (Giroux, 1996, 11).

Indeed, to certain youth, the violence represented in the entertainment media may be a "quick fix" to self-definition and problem-solving. According to many social observers, there is a definite connection between the world of *manga* and the covert violence of Japanese society, both of which are based on male-dominated ideologies (Funabashi, 1995). As a symbol of patriarchy, violence not only creates tension between male and female, but also between subjects and objects. Complicated issues are simplified in direct competition and combat between characters. This is far more appealing to disaffected but obedient Taiwanese youth than the laborious, time-consuming compromises and changes of perspective adults abide in the world of business where differences are negotiated by non-violent means.

Of course, from the perspective of their publishers, comic book violence is beside the point. To their writers, designers and manufacturers, the reason that violent force has become one of the most frequent elements in comic books is simply that it attracts adolescent readers who faithfully follow the stories from book to book and series to series (Weinkauff, 2013). The fact that these readers are kept on a leash of addictive violence by the makers of *manga* is the polar opposite of the revolutionary reaction to political hegemony that writers like Gramsci and Freire prescribe. The readers do not struggle to free themselves from an untenable and restrictive situation, but are content to be "spoon fed" bellicose ideologies full of sensory stimulation that anesthetize their fear. Their pleasure in depictions of violent brutality abrogates any kind of critical awareness. From a critical educational perspective, any ideology that abducts people's capacity for independent thinking is inimical. Since most of the consumers of *manga* hold views antithetical to those of their parents and teachers, it is necessary to understand their perspective as well as the history of how this polarity was created.

2.3 A Comparative Educational Perspective on Japanese Cultural Influence

Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people's behavior.

—*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2012, 61)

Taiwan was once ruled by Japan and the two island nations have a complex relationship. As its political and military oppressor during WWII and its victor in the current economic competition, Japan has always dominated Taiwan. Public opinion polls show that most Taiwanese believe Japanese culture is superior to their own. Evidence of this can be found everywhere in Taiwan, especially in popular youth culture products like "teen idol" actors and recording artists, youth fashion, comic books and animated films (Wang, 2007; Chen, 2005). Taiwan accepts unilaterally and willingly the incessant dumping of Japanese cultural products in the open market. Taiwan's willingness to become an international import market for Japanese goods puts its own cultural development at risk.[13]

From a comparative educational perspective, the unequal relationship between Taiwan and Japan proves the validity of Wallerstein's world-systems theory: as the world-economic system has created a hierarchy of countries, core-states like Japan are more likely to influence peripheral areas (Wallerstein, 1976). Countries that remain peripheral occupy the lowest economic positions and may have difficulty in upgrading their status. As Taiwanese cultural study scholar Kuang-Hsing Chen notices:

Compared with the display of early imperialism, neo-colonialism went through a huge change as a consequence of the decolonization of [former European] possessions after the First and Second World Wars and especially during the 1970s and 1980s. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, acquisition of territory, armed suppression, and direct control of foreign governments has

[13] Japan is not the only country that ruled Taiwan. During the past four centuries, Taiwan has been colonized by the Dutch, the Portuguese and the Chinese. However, as far as comic books and popular culture is concerned, Japan's influence is even stronger than China's.

tended toward hegemony. Multinational corporations, global capitalist structure, and super-state machinery have become agents for and constituent parts of the new imperialism (Chen, 2014, 36).

From a post-colonial standpoint, global capitalism, international politics, and military force have secured this structure so that it is now more stable than in the past.[14] It is plain to see how neo-liberal globalization creates an unequal world. Although Taiwan is not in a peripheral area globally, the Taiwanese situation demonstrates dependency and weakness in the global market game. Even in the entertainment media, Taiwan does not have its own industry. Thus, it allows Japan to win the hearts and minds of Taiwanese youth.[15]

Regarding the comic book market, the post-colonial situation of Taiwan is pretty obvious. However this is not the only reason that Japanese comic books have such an easy time winning the Taiwanese market. Another factor is that *manga* include cultural elements that have international appeal. Whether or not the characters subscribe to Western standards of beauty or have cute figures and adorable if exaggerated facial expressions, *manga* feature aesthetic attractions that are accepted and admired by the Taiwanese people who, as fellow Asians, share a common cultural background with Japan (Hsu, 2001). Starting in the 1970s, Taiwanese publishers illegally 'bootlegged' several well-known Japanese comic books. Most Taiwanese readers read these pirate *manga*, and this situation has not changed until today. Although there are policies to protect intellectual properties, many Taiwanese readers are used to reading pirated comic books online rather than purchasing them. Although Japan is Asia's cultural overlord, their takeover of Taiwan's *manga* market was facilitated by Taiwanese consumers who collaborated in

[14] Dr. Kuang-Hsing Chen, one of the main leaders of Taiwanese cultural studies, has authored a series of studies on the Taiwanese post-colonialist situation. In the book *Towards De-Imperialization*, he identifies Taiwan's ambiguous status as one that has both "third world" and imperial characteristics in its connections with other countries.

[15] In Asia, Taiwan should be categorized as a "middle player." In Chen's study, he notes that there is an invisible hierarchy between Japan, Taiwan and Southeast Asia (Chen, 1996; Chen, 2014). On the one hand, Taiwan is materially colonized by Japan while, on the other, it economically colonizes South East Asia.

their own cultural colonization (Huang, 2007).

Another interesting phenomenon is the recreation of colonial culture by the colonialized nations. After Japanese manga became famous in Taiwan, local publishers started to imitate them and develop their own comic book culture. According to research, comic books and related merchandise are more popular in Taiwan than in Japan (Shang, 2006). So the phenomenon is more complex and multi-faceted than one country admitting defeat and absorbing the popular culture of another. An oppressed culture may *adopt and adapt* the aesthetics of a foreign power and, knowing its own market better than the outsider, improve on them.

However, this does not mean they have the autonomy to shape their own culture. Indeed, even though the adapted cultural products achieved commercial success, the ideas on which they were based and the way they were imagined remain Japanese. From a Freirian perspective, this situation displays Taiwan's post-colonial fatalism. During the process of oppression, the Japanese amply demonstrated their cultural superiority. The Taiwanese internalized their hegemony and adopted its guidelines. Now they are reluctant to strike out on their own since this would require them to reject the Japanese paradigm and replace it with their own autonomy and responsibility (see p. 12, above).

Even when the oppressed reclaim some power, they may continue to imitate their oppressors, lacking the fundamental belief that they can create a different future. Today, this fatalism is preponderant, no just in Taiwanese culture but also in the Taiwan's relationship to other countries. Taiwan, still reacting to the psychological burden of Japanese hegemony, falls into the trap of insufficient belief in its own potential which continues to obstruct its cultural and economic development.

One hundred years ago, as a Japanese colony, Taiwan was obliged to accept the reigning

ideologies of imperial Japan, albeit unwillingly. Today, the nation continues to be culturally and economically dominated by Japan's aesthetic prowess and financial acumen. The imitative origin of Taiwanese *manga* not only demonstrates the extension and durability of this influence, but also shows how, together, globalization and neo-liberalism create a more effective way to control colonized countries than ever before.

Capitalism and globalization work hand in hand. Neoliberal globalization has become a main ideology of this century, one that challenges humanity and the value of human life (Freire, 2001, 114-115). As C.A. Torres has written, economic globalization has dramatically influenced the concept of the traditional nation-state and created close links between countries that influence every economic unit in the world (Torres, 1998). Indeed, the complicated connections between Taiwan and Japan reflect the globalizing trends of neo-liberalism. Indirectly, in cultural terms, they have made Taiwan a nation of consumers and threatened its autonomy and self-reliance. Because of their economic power, core nation-states like Japan and the U.S. can establish and cater to the cultural tastes of virtually every consumer in the world (Torres, 2009,119). As a small nation-state, Taiwan cannot avoid this trend and it rankles those in power who remember a day not so long ago when Taiwanese exports were globally diffused. Therefore, it is crucial for the Taiwanese to reassess their political-economic status in the world and strategize ways to cope with the cultural influence of Japan and a crescent cohort of new global players. According to Freire, the first step toward successfully navigating and, ultimately, interfering with the cyclical nature of the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed is to become aware of the fact that "those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence" (Freire, 2012, 61). Becoming conscious of the limitations and penalties exacted by such a system, it may be possible to enter into fruitful dialogue and strategize ways that

dependent cultures can develop and grow without becoming oppressive themselves.

2.4 Educational Sociological Perspective: Influence of Comic Books

Critical consciousness represents things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations.

—*Education for Critical Consciousness* (Freire, 2005)

From an educational sociological perspective, comic books are a powerful cultural medium that can influence teenagers' thoughts and behaviors. Many educational sociological researchers see comic book culture as one of the most important adolescent sub-cultures, and several studies seek to understand how and what students learn from comic books. The main foci of these studies have to do with the influence of comic books on teenagers' personality development, and their potential to change young adults' behavior and way of thinking (Tan, 2000; Chang, 2004).[16] By exploring the ways *manga* influence comic book consumers, researchers can provide educators with a deeper understanding of teenage sub-culture from a variety of perspectives.

Of course, comic books' influence on individual readers depends on their ethnic, gender, and class differences. For example, in Lin's study, violent Japanese comic books are more attractive to male junior high school students with low academic performance profiles than to their female peers (Lin, 1999). This is important to bear in mind, because some studies maintain that comic book characters can become role models for readers. In fact, a study which focuses on the violence of comic books posits that, even though adolescent readers can

[16] Chang's study demonstrates that, although comic books affect all junior-high school students' behaviors and thoughts, middle and upper class students seem more critically reflective than students from working class families. This shows that cultural capital theories apply to comic book studies.

distinguish the chaos they depict from ordinary reality, the dramatic dualism of comic books may convince them it's easy to tell "good guys" from "bad guys" (Yu, 2012). Such over-simplified role models may skew their internal compass and consequent ability to safely navigate the real world.

However, comic books exert an even more pervasive influence on younger readers. Tsay's (1999) research shows that elementary school students in the fifth and sixth grades identify more strongly with the characters in the *manga* they consume than with teachers and parents, the standard role models in most traditional psychological theories. Both Simon and Moeller suggest that the self-image and gender identity of some high school students can be strongly influenced by comic books like those issued by Marvel, something their teachers should keep in mind (Simon, 2012; Moeller, 2011). In other words, if read judiciously, comic books can also provide positive influence on young readers. Thus, Wang's (2012) research posits that students who read comic books are more likely to follow group rules, experience progress in self-realization, participate in social interactions, and be cognizant of environmental protection opportunities.

Comic books can change students' perception of the world. However, as opposed to that offered by formal education, this type of learning is largely unconscious, independent of its positive or negative effects. In other words, comic book readers may not feel they are learning anything or that what they are visually and mentally ingesting is changing their perspective. Freire might interpret their unconscious acceptance as a sign of strength of the dominant hegemony of Japanese culture that gradually turns Taiwanese readers into oppressed consumers, passively inculcating any information offered. As they uncritically receive, memorize, and repeat whatever they are offered, students subsume foreign cultural ideologies into their

"learning process" (Freire, 2012, 72).[17] Once teenagers become habituated to their enticing plots and the fantastic worlds they depict, they accept the cultural ideologies implicit in Japanese comic books without question and import them into their lives and ways of thinking.

Educators who claim they are opposed to what Freire defined as the narrative, "banking" concept of education but allow comic book producers to dump their prepared ideologies on young student readers are hypocrites. While others believe that the ideological content of comic books should be unpacked and subjected to critical analysis by students and teachers in dialogical classroom discussion. While Chuang uses popular Japanese *manga* to encourage teenage girls to reflect critically about experiences of gender bias, Chen uses comic books as discussion materials with fifth- and sixth-grade girls, teaching them to be aware of gender stereotypes, and Tung uses politically-oriented comics to teach high school students critical thinking (Chuang, 2003;Chen, 2004; Tung, 2010).

However, the majority of Taiwanese teachers do not yet accept *manga* as legitimate goads to reflection. At best, they see comics as supplemental materials, rather than critical ones connected to students' life experiences. Studies that take this perspective including Lai's research on sport comic books and their influence on students' athletic performance, and Cheng's study of science comics as potential teaching materials concerning Newton's laws of motion (Lai, 2008; Cheng, 2013).[18] In *Graphic Novels and Comics in the Classroom*, the authors show that a wide range of cognitive material, including history, science, art, and language can be taught by

[17] I use Freire's critique of "banking education," because I believe if readers accepted ideas from books without reflection, the reading process would be no different from banking education. Nevertheless, students receive, memorize, and repeat comic book information all the time, which is demonstrated in the aforementioned studies, as well as in this one.

[18] In terms of academic study, some researchers have created lists of potentially cognitive comics for educators and students. In Christensen's article, she provides a book list for high school teachers to use political-historical graphic novels to teach social studies (Christensen, 2007). Also, in Boerman-Cornell's article, he even points out that, by giving enough background knowledge, graphic novels can be used to raise high school students' motivation to study math, social studies, science, and language arts (Boerman-Cornell, 2013).

reading popular graphic novels, or educational comic books (Syma & Weiner, 2013).

Comparing two cognitive uses of comic books: a) teaching ideological perspective and b) teaching academic subjects, it is clear that the latter is more promising than the former. More and more teachers, while aware of their students' passion for comic books, do not feel comfortable using them as the basis of classroom discussions about subjects like sexuality, ethnicity, gender, class and violence with which they abound. Unlike school subjects, ideological critiques are not part of the formal curriculum. Indeed, if we take a broader view, most educators are not yet willing to subscribe to the critical pedagogy of comic book reading as a vital, creative part of their students' education.

It is important to note that, although many Taiwanese educators and parents believe that critical thinking and reflection are essential skills for children and teenagers, their educational practice is grounded in what Freire describes as "the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled … banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation" (Freire, 2012, 79). The process of banking can be naturally hidden in daily life experiences. Thus, even when they are aware that *manga*, *anime* and Japanese graphic novels supply constant stimuli to their students' imaginative universe, educators fail to acknowledge the potential dividend of using them as goads to critical thinking. Without understanding the cultural reality with which students spend a lot of time interacting, educators and parents refortify their separation as adults to condemn these vivid pennants of youth culture. From a Freirian point-of-view, these dragons of the status quo are stuck at the level of naïve consciousness, based on a series of irrational and/or emotional assumptions, fragile arguments, and problem-simplification (Freire, 2005, 14). The sad truth is that most parents and educators cling to negative perspectives of comic book culture and, morally indignant, refuse to understand

what students bring to this world or what they derive from it.

It is common to hear educators and parents say that they do not understand their students' or children's culture. However, according Freire, their willful ignorance is erroneous. Because all learning experiences are interconnected, comic books may be as valid as textbooks as "learning materials." Keeping an open mind about this is essential. Thus, raising the critical consciousness of students, educators, and parents to the cognitive potential of comic books and graphic novels would be an important task in the field of education. And understanding the enthusiasm and devotion they inspire among their followers would be a sapient first step toward a holistic view of the dynamic and youth-oriented universe of comic book culture.

2.5 Conclusion: Building Up a Freirean Approach

The infant is still lively, still learning to question, still committed to building a pedagogy of questioning.

—Learning to Question (Freire & Faundez, 1989, 140)

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that Freire's political and educational writings provide a solid theoretical standpoint from which to review existing studies and provide new perspectives to explore the cultural phenomenon of Japanese comic books in Taiwan. His educational overview is founded on an alliance of the fields of sociology of education, cultural studies, and comparative education and proves their connective efficacy. In many ways, education and culture today are tied to and influenced by the politics of international economies. Thus it seems myopic to depend on a single optic when there are three at our disposal.

Some Freirian concepts, including consciousness, liberty, ideologies and the

oppressed/oppressor dialectic will appear and reappear as we review our case studies. Most social and cultural situations are political as well. The imbalance of power between the oppressed and their oppressors influences the representations of ethnicity, gender, class and violence in comic books to the extent that they become the norm for a generation of young readers who accept them as "common sense" without questioning their ethics or whether and to what extent they are grounded in the reality of the quotidian.

Focused on their marketability, the creators and publishers of Taiwanese *manga* freely combine dominant ideologies and false ideas in a charismatic mixture of daring deeds and graphic violence laced with gender-bending sexuality as the forbidden, and therefore tasty, bait for bored adolescents. However, the best way to understand these issues may be more complicated than simply using parental perspectives to judge them. After all, besides these obvious problems, there are actually more complicated issues behind the scene. From a broader view, the influence of Japanese comic books is not a singular case. It is just part of the phenomenon that reflects the unequal power relationship between Taiwan and Japan. What can inferred from all this is a more serious issue, one not only related to Taiwan's identity, but also to its cultural independence.

Indeed, Taiwan is a long-term oppressed country. Therefore, it is difficult to develop an independent cultural environment that can, at the same time, play a part in the globalized world and keep its own local values. However, from a Freirian perspective, it should not be impossible to foment change. Taiwan needs a fundamental change of its culture. This cultural revolution, as Freire indicates, is based on the awakening of people's consciousness in a way that can transform them as "subjects" and allow them to recognize and recreate their world as "makers of culture." (Freire, 1971, 43, 51). Focusing on the eternal human struggles, what

Freire's approach can bring is a way to critically review today's media, to reflect on education, and to construct a potential blueprint for Taiwanese educational reform. Without being trapped by traditional thoughts about utilitarian educational purpose and practice, adopting a Freirian approach will allow me to identify a broader optic with which to examine educational and cultural phenomena, based on the experiences that educators and students relate about their daily lives.

Indeed, as Freire says, to discover the reasons behind people's attitude toward cultural reality is an essential and important step toward the understanding of the world (Freire, 2012, 25). Talking about their consumption of comic books, some educators, students, parents and scholars believe that they can gauge each other's attitudes. However, without engaging in and analyzing these understandings through dialogical interaction, it may be difficult to tell whether they are real or fabricated. As a cultural and educational scholar, it is important for me to attempt to discover what is really happening within and around the phenomenon of the popularity of *manga* in Taiwanese youth culture. By revealing and analyzing my informants' attitudes and opinions, this study provides the possibility of understanding a part of their world so that future critical pedagogy can be constructed, based on this understanding.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Freirian Methodology

Freire's theory not only provides this comic book study a new lens with which to examine ideologies from the perspectives of cultural studies, comparative education, and sociological education, but also a new angle from which to critically reflect on our daily life experience. His understanding of culture has created a bridge to connect different theories with praxis.[19] To advance my application of his ideas to the next stage of my research, I have used them to develop a methodology with the fundamental idea of supporting my data collection.

In this research, I use surveys, textual analysis, and interviews as my main methods of collecting empirical data. To understand how and why teenage Taiwanese students read comic books and to learn more about their reading habits, I conducted a survey in several classes in a junior high school near Taipei to get a notion of what types of comic books they consumed. Since understanding how readers read is as important as understanding what they have read, I apply textual analysis to selected Japanese mainstream comic books, which were the most representative readings for the students in the group I chose to study. Finally, based on data collected from surveys and textual analysis, I formed a series of interview questions for both educators and students. In this way, I was able to gauge what young readers thought about certain issues implicit in the comic books, while learning more about the reactions of their teachers to this medium.

To use Freire's ideas as a methodology in this process, it should be kept in mind that the

[19] In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the 'consciousness of oppression,' 'critical consciousness,' is linked to the dialectic relation between subjectivity and objectivity to which Marx refers when he considers that real oppression grows when it is experienced consciously. In Freire's book, transformative *praxis* is determined by the way people actually live rather than by the transcendent concerns of society and history" (this comment is provided by Dr. Peter Lownds, translator of an unpublished paper by Adriana Puiggrós.)

methods that have been used are, first and foremost, based on respect for the participants' humanity. In other words, researchers should see every single participant as a special human being who should not been treated as a scientific object, or lead by the researcher's goals for the study. A proper educational action, according to Freire, should not be a monologue, based on the ideas of educators or researchers and impervious to the participants' views: "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their views and ours" (Freire, 2012, 96). The dialogue between participants and researchers should be horizontal and move in both directions, if it is based on a Freirian phenomenological epistemology. This idea is very different from a goal-oriented study, which is commonly supported by governments or certain institutions that are in the habit of dictating findings and predicting results. In order to match these predictions, researchers may use self-serving techniques to manipulate the results of surveys or interviews so that they support the goals and assumptions of their employers. This, in Freire's view, is similar to what he calls "the banking style" of education.

Such goal-oriented studies may be regarded as "efficient" because they seem to fulfill their specified purpose. However, if participants are asked to change their answers for any reason, the veracity of the collected data is questionable. As results that have been manipulated may have only tangential relationship with the reality of the situation investigated, it would be misleading to use them to draw conclusions. Therefore, in this research, I use Freirian methodology for all surveys and interviews. This does not mean that, as a scholar, I should question or dismiss all the ideologies I observe, especially as this study depends, to a large extent, on comic books' ideological subtext. I must remain open to all perspectives and differences of opinion and listen

to those who present them with respect and as carefully as possible (Freire, 2001, 119).[20]

Following this point, it is important to note that researchers and participants in Freirian research are always in a dialectic relationship. As Freire puts it, education and the investigations designed to support it must both be "sympathetic" activities. That is, they must derive from mutually respectful communication between educators and investigators so that their common experience of reality is perceived in the mutability and complexity of its constant "becoming" (Freire, 2012, 108).

In keeping with the literal meaning of the word "communication," researchers should refrain from using authoritative language that is not attuned to the concrete situation of the participants they address (Freire, 2012, 96). Participants should always be treated as human beings with their own perspectives and opinions rather than rendered "neutral" and manipulated as informants. Therefore, researchers not only have to have sufficient background knowledge about the issues they are seeking to understand, they also have to know how to use this knowledge properly. During the preparatory process, when research participants are not yet sitting in front of them, the idea that both parties should be engaged in energetic dialogue should dictate the type and tone of the questions researchers prepare. This idea is so essential to my inquiry that it can be found in every step of my data collection: survey design, textual analysis, and the interviews themselves.

My idea of research is inspired by and stems from Freire's educational approach. As I explore the context of my informants' lives, the idea of using "generative themes" to generate critical discussion is foremost in my mind (Freire, 2012, 97). In this research, I use materials

[20] In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire (2001) questions whether a person can change his or her own ideologies through ideological discourse. He indicates that, since it is impossible to find a person who has no ideologies, researchers and educators must bear in mind that ideological discourse is prevalent. If they accepted only one "critical" perspective, they would be blinded by their own prejudice.

from mainstream Japanese comic books as a generative theme throughout the process of data collection. Grounded in the knowledge I have cultivated about comic books' pictures, plots and characters, I attempt to stimulate discussions related to the character and acquired beliefs of my informants by asking them about their reactions to the ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence intrinsic to their magnetic and often addictive attraction to *manga*. Even though my questions do not intend to change their perception of reality, the fact that my subjects have been questioned by someone who shares their interest in a subject most adults devalue may lead them to consider what had formerly been a solitary, even secretive, pursuit in a brand new light.

3.2 Multiple Methods

Only men, as "open" beings, are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world's reality in their creative language.

—*Cultural Action and Conscientization*, Freire, 1970

According to Freire's educational ideas, it is important for educators and researchers to understand and express the quotidian reality of those involved in the process of educating themselves so as to provide the epistemic foundation of their future transformation. Applying this idea to my data collection, I attempted to get as close as I could to the daily reality of Taiwanese junior high school students and their teachers. In so doing, I have adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The survey is designed to facilitate my knowledge of my informants' comic book preferences so that, in my subsequent analysis, their ideologies and sub-textual messages can be brought to light. It was my intention, throughout all the interviews I conducted, to honestly represent both the students' and their teachers' words and

ideas. As far as I am concerned, this is the way to reveal possible connections between emergent ideologies, issues, and cultural identities that may prove beneficial to the future of education in Taiwan.

3.2.1 Surveys: Top 5 Comic Books

To gain a general understanding of junior high school students' comic book reading and cartoon watching preferences, I decided to use a survey as the first step in my data collection.[21] This survey included several options that not only asked students to list their favorite comic books and cartoons, but also inquired about their reading and watching habits and asked them to supply a limited amount of personal information: their gender, the amount of time they spent reading comics and/or watching animated cartoons based on them, where and how much they spent on their purchase, how they rated the comics they read and cartoons they watched, what types they preferred, etc. (shown in appendix 1).

Gender is important because it can relate to their preference for a certain type of comic book. Informants' estimation of their reading/watching hours gives some idea of how much time teenagers spend consuming comic books and animated cartoons.[22] Acquisition information indicates how young readers get their comic books and how much they spend to acquire them, and the way they rate them may shed light on issues connected to what many disparaging adults see as a tidal wave of sex and violence in R-rated *manga*. In providing options for the listing of preferences, I separate comics and cartoons into nine categories, which are based on the

[21] In my original design, I tried to use an open form rather than a survey with specific options, because I did not want in any way to limit my informants' responses. However, after the first round of data collection, most students appeared to be confused when asked to list their "most favorite comic books." Many of those surveyed said they were unable to 'prioritize' their choices as I was asking them to.

[22] Japanese comic books and the animated cartoons they generate are virtually inseparable in the minds of my informants. Therefore, in my survey, I used the term "動漫 ['animation/comic books'], which is generally accepted in Taiwan as a way to describe the medium of comic books and animated cartoons based on them.

categories used by the dealers and shops that sell them. My informants are asked to give 1 to 5 points for their favorite categories. By determining students' preference types, I can see how they define their own fields of interest and compare them with the results of their voting for the "Top Five" comic books.

The most important part of this survey is the category of my participants' "favorite comic books." To provide a specific list of comic books for the students to choose, I used three standards of selection. First, the series had to have been published within the last ten years and continue to be published for at least two or three months after my survey was conducted. Second, the series should number over twenty issues, unless it had attained sufficient fame to be considered an exception.[23] Since comic book sales are as volatile as any other pop culture component, these two standards were included to guarantee that the selected comic series would stay popular for the duration of my study. That the comic books represented Japanese *manga* popular among my adolescent informants was my greatest concern. Moreover, I wanted to verify that there were animated cartoon versions of the *manga* I chose. Since only the most popular comic books are chosen for animated cartoon production, this filter guaranteed that they had major market visibility. The last requirement was that all the series I selected should not include R-rated *manga*. Since my analysis and interviews depend on the selection of specific content from the selected comic books, ethical concerns might arise if I used a comic book prohibited for people my informants' age. After passing through these four filters, my final selection included twenty-four series of Japanese comic books/animated cartoons. I asked my informants to rank them from one to five points. By computing the average scores and the total scores given each series, I was able to rank my informants' top five comic books.

[23] There are two exceptions on the list: *Black Butler* and *Attack on Titan*. Both are internationally famous so they were not excluded by the second standard.

Why limit the choice to five books? One reason is the time limitations of my study. Since both textual analysis and dialogical interviews require a profound understanding of the cultural materials, using too many books from different series at the same time might confuse my informants. Therefore, I chose five as my number of sample comic book series, which is also the middle number of the 'top ten' ranking system broadly used in global popular culture.

3.2.1.1 Introduction of "Tablet Junior High School" and its Principal, Mrs. Lin

The school that I chose to work with is "Tablet Junior High School (Tablet High)." As one of the largest public high schools in Taipei, it is famous for its educational quality and academic performance.[24] Although Tablet J.H.S. boasts over eighty classrooms from seventh to ninth grades, with thirty students per class, it is fully enrolled every year.

Like other famous schools in the capital, Tablet High is well located. Even though it is not in the center of the city, it is close to one of the main business areas, which includes an all-night market, a subway station, and a farmer's market. Surrounded by both business buildings and apartment housing, Tablet High is one of the best places for holding special events, like government employment exams. In fact, Tablet High students and faculty often staff these events since most of them take place on the weekend.

I had visited Tablet High several times, and have known the principal, Mrs. Lin, for over ten years since she was a chemistry teacher and my mentor when I was in another junior high school close to central Taipei. She is an outgoing person who relates to students and staff as a friend. Even when dealing with school business with fellow administrators, she treats them like family.

[24] It may be worth describing Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, Republic of China. Although it is a very compact city, Taipei is Taiwan's cultural nexus. It is where most educational reforms are designed and conducted. From 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule and Taipei was the colonial capital. Walking in the streets of Taipei, one sees colonial structures flanked by Japanese restaurants, clothing and convenience stores. Japan and the USA are the most powerful foreign influences but, lately, Korea has been challenging their hegemony.

Comparing Tablet High with other schools, Mrs. Lin said, "While Tablet's main focus is academics, it offers many extracurricular activities; students can participate in club sports or scouts." Indeed, each time I visited Tablet High, I saw many students engaged in group activities in the gardens and corridors. Fridays are, at least partly, dedicated to "Club Time" so that students may pursue extra-curricular activities conducted by their teachers. In Mrs. Lin's words, "Since Tablet High provides both academic and nonacademic study, parents trust this school very much……most parents care deeply about their children's learning. In fact, since most of their parents from the middle class, not businessmen or celebrities like 'our old school' (referring to my junior high school), the students tend to be more innocent. As you see, they do not dye their hair, they follow the dress code, they do not smoke in the bathrooms, and they seldom challenge the teachers' authority."

When talking about their potential cooperation with this research, Mrs. Lin admitted that Tablet J.H.S. parents may have serious concerns about "a comic book study." Since most parents believe that comic books interfere with their studies, they do not allow their children to read them, even though the school has no official position on their value or use. However, since Principal Lin was herself a graduate student in Education, she was aware of the difficulties I might encounter in locating a school that would accept this kind of progressive research, especially a junior high school. Therefore, she helped me to find potential informants among her faculty members.

My first meeting with the Tablet teachers was very successful. All the seventh-grade teachers Mrs. Lin had recommended, happily accepted my research request. After a brief conversation between the classes, we decided to start the survey in November, 2014.

3.2.1.2 Administering the Survey

During my fieldwork, I observed that most students arrived before 7:30 AM to clean their classrooms while the teachers walked into class promptly at 7:30 to proctor the daily study halls and tests. Every student is required to follow the school rules, wear the designated uniform and obey all orders from teachers and administrators. Standing in the hall when classes were in session, all I could hear was a mélange of amplified lectures coming from the different classrooms. There was no one in the hall but me as students may not leave class at any time during its forty-five minute duration. It reminded me of what Freire calls "the banking method" of education[25] which, in Taiwan, is as dominant today as it was when I was in junior high school, seventeen years ago.

I applied the surveys in the morning study hall. I administered the survey separately, class by class. As I was waiting, I had a chance to observe that teachers were checking students' assignments and the thoroughness of their classroom cleaning in three of the classes, while the other class was having a math test. When my turn came, the teachers welcomed me and let me take the lead. I introduced myself and spoke briefly about the nature of the study. The students sat still but seemed to be curious about what I was proposing to do.

It remained quiet as they worked on filling out the surveys I distributed, since their teachers were still present. However, I could see that some students were pondering before writing their answers, while others wrote fast and finished quickly. I told them they could ask me questions

[25] In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (2012,72) writes: "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."

if they did not understand something. A boy raised his hand in one class and asked me "What is BL?" Many of his classmates began to laugh. The teacher seemed to have no idea why they were laughing. "It is a *manga* about gays!" "Boys love boys!" one or two students shouted, and many of them exchanged funny looks and small talk. Their teacher calmed them down soon. I said, "Well. BL is a series of gay comic books. You know, romance between men." The boy still seemed confused, but he continued his survey. The same thing happened in another class too, but this time my answer came quicker so that the other students did not join in.

When the students handed in the surveys at the end of class, I visited the principal again and thanked her for helping me. After a long chat, we set up time for the faculty interviews.

3.2.1.3 Brief Review of the Survey

I distributed one hundred and eighteen surveys in the four classes and one hundred and fourteen were completed and returned. Just ten students admitted that they did not read comic books, four boys and six girls. The other fifty-two boys and fifty-two girls listed their preferences, as I asked. Nearly ninety-one percent of the students willingly shared their experiences with and opinions about *manga* with me. After counting the total scores of each series, the top five comic books, in order of rank, were *One Piece*, *Case Closed*, *Attack on Titan*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*. Each series had a significant number of student supporters. However, it is important to note that, as the main purpose of this study is not to describe the overall effect of comic books and animated cartoons on adolescent consumers, these data will be used as background materials to support other findings from textual analyses and interviews. Rather than providing a shallow statistical extrapolation, I intend to focus on the ideological influence of Japanese comic books as a post-colonial, psycho-cultural invasion centered on the hearts and

minds of Taiwanese youth.

3.2.2 Textual Analysis with Expert Validation

Foreign ideologies, overlaid by magnetic storylines, violent imagery and exclamatory dialogue, are capable of changing the thoughts and behaviors of vulnerable adolescents whose brains are not yet fully formed or capable of adult ratiocination and analysis. When confronted by cultural texts, which include all forms of media that provide meaningful ideological content, most adults are able to discern and resist such ideologies as other people's socially constructed epistemologies for understanding and/or interpreting the world (Brennen, 2013, 193). In most qualitative cultural studies, textual analysis is used to reveal and interpret ideologies. By applying textual analysis to the top five Japanese comic book series selected by junior high school students in Taipei in response to my survey, I can utilize a Freirian perspective from which to examine their understanding of populist ideologies encompassing ethnicity, gender, class, and violence.

Japanese comic books are usually published in huge series. According to the results of my survey, four of the five selected comic book series included over 60 separate issues. By the end of November 2014 when the survey took place, each series contained a large number of volumes: seventy-five in *One Piece*, eighty-one in *Case Closed*, seventy in *Naruto*, and sixty-four in *Bleach*. The only exception was *Attack on Titan*, which had only fourteen volumes since it is a relatively new series. All the others had been up and running for more than five years.

Because of the size of the series, it is impossible to analyze each issue. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze a five-volume sample from each. To make my selection, I chose the first volume, the last volume, the middle volume, a volume a quarter of the way through and a

volume three-quarters of the way through. To create a specific ending, all these markers were established according to the number of volumes that had been published when I conducted my survey at Tablet J.H.S. at the end of November, 2014.

The selected comic volumes in different series are shown as the form below:

Comic Book Titles	**Selected Volumes**	**Publishing Information in Taiwan**
One Piece	1, 19, 37, 55, 75	First volume published in 2003
Case Closed	1, 20, 40, 60, 81	First volume published in 1995
Attack on Titan	1, 4, 7, 10, 14	First volume published in 2011
Naruto	1, 18, 35, 52, 70	First volume published in 2000 End in volume72, 2015
Bleach	1, 16, 32, 48, 64	First volume published in 2002

Fig. 3.1 Selected comic books

3.2.2.1 Contents of the Selected Top 5

These comic books that were voted Top 5 by my participants are all well-known, mainstream *manga*. Three of them, *One Piece*, *Naruto* and *Bleach*, were originally published in Shueisha's *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, the most popular teenage *manga* magazine in Japan. Of the five, *Case Closed* is the only one that does not focus on combat. It is a collection of detective stories, distributed by *Shogakukan*, a publishing company that is famous for its young adult catalogue.[26] *Attack on Titan* is a new series originally published by Kodansha, a well-established international publishing company, which publishes several *manga* magazines for teen boys and girls. All of these comic books are welcomed with open arms by Taiwanese

[26] *Shogaku* means "elementary school" in Japanese. Indeed, this publishing company began by publishing books and magazines for kids and young adults. Today it publishes many books for the adult audience as well.

people of different ages, from elementary school students to teenagers, and adults.

In first place is *One Piece,* written and illustrated by Eiichiro Oda (尾田 栄一郎). The story focuses on a group of nine pirates led by a teenager, Captain Monkey D. Luffy. Deriving his super power from a rare "Devil Fruit," Luffy can stretch his body like rubber in any direction and has a rare ability called "Color of the Conquering King" to control people and turn enemies into friends. Luffy and his friends, including a samurai, a magician- navigator, a sniper, a cook with martial art skills, a doctor transformed from a deer, an archaeologist with magic powers, a half-robot carpenter, and a skeletal musician, rescue people who are suffering from despotic empires and gangs, and challenge the Navy controlled by an autocratic "World Government." With the dream of finding the mysterious treasure, "One Piece" and becoming the Pirate King, Luffy and his crew have to confront challenges from pirates and soldiers with different types of super power.

In second place is *Case Closed,* written and drawn by Gosho Aoyama (青山 剛昌). The story's protagonist is a high school detective, Shinichi Kudo, who was poisoned by the "Black Organization," an underground gang, and transformed into an elementary school boy, Conan Edogawa. To crush the Black Organization, Conan works in a detective agency operated by his girlfriend's father. With the high-tech inventions of Dr. Agasa to bolster his special talent for detection, Conan has solved hundreds of cases and he gradually comes to understand that Black Organization is more powerful than he imagined. Both the FBI and the CIA are investigating this international crime syndicate, although Japanese police authorities seem not to be aware of this.

In third place is *Attack on Titan,* written and drawn by Hajime Isayama (諫山 創). The story is set in the distant future, when the world is dominated by huge giants, and the relatively

few surviving human beings have taken refuge in European castles to protect themselves from being devoured by them. The story's protagonist is a teenage soldier, Eren, who can transform into a giant with special powers and has become a secret weapon of Master Chief Levi's Survey Corps. However, after several fierce battles against the Titans, Eren and his teammates come to the conclusion that there is a political conspiracy behind the war they are waging. They may have to become a rebel army to discover the whole truth.

In fourth place is *Naruto*, written and illustrated by Masashi Kishimoto (岸本 斉史). The story describes fierce fighting between different ninja groups. In Naruto, ninjas are employed as special agents on super missions. Getting involved with a series of vengeful conspiracies, the main characters, Naruto Uzumaki and Sasuke Uchiha, are forced to turn their brotherly friendship into bitterest enmity. As teenage ninjas with special magic powers granted them by the spirit of an ancient, nine-tailed fox, Naruto and his friends have to fight against different ninja enemies with fearsome super powers to protect their hometown. Naruto becomes more and more powerful on the battle field, determined to achieve his goal of becoming Hokage, the leader of their ninja group.

In fifth place is *Bleach*, written and drawn by Tite Kubo (久保 帯人). The story concerns Ichigo Kurosaki, a senior high school student who can see the spirit world. After he accidently bumps into Hollows, a monstrous phantasm of giant proportions, Ichigo fights Rukia, a Soul Reaper belonging to the Soul Society that rules the afterlife. Triumphant, he inherits Rukia's powers and becomes a Soul Reaper. Soul Reapers are samurais dressed in black with magic soul *katanas*. As a samurai, Ichigo not only has to face constant challenges from the nefarious Soul Society gangs, but also has to keep the Soul Reapers' many enemies at bay, like Bounts (a soul-devouring human), Arrancar (a horrifying mix of Soul Reaper and Hollows), and Quincy (a

human ghost-buster).

It is important to note that all the above *manga* originated as comic books, spawned animated cartoons, and then underwent successive adaptations as animated movies, video games, light novels, and even board games.[27] All of them are responsible for a plethora of related products including stationery, decorations, and figurines. According to the Japanese statistics company Oricon (2014), four of them are included in the Top 25 bestselling series of 2014, including 11,885,957 volumes of *One Piece* (No.1), 11,728,368 volumes of *Attack on Titan* (No.2), 5,505,179 volumes of *Naruto* (No. 6), 2,986,968 volumes of *Bleach* (No. 18), and 2,380,774 volumes of *Case Closed* (No. 25). From this, it is safe to say that the results of the student survey and my analytical sampling match the standard of "mainstream comic books."[28]

3.2.2.1 Analysis of Ideological Categories

To provide a clearer focus on the different ideologies, I created an analytic form for the four ideological categories with each category's contents specified in sub-categories (see appendix 2). To identify ethnicity, the five sub-categories are: 1) location/landmark; 2) mystery tales: 3) cultural products; 4) traditional skills and, 5) spirits. As for the uses of sex and gender, the subdivisions are: 1) to drive the plot; 2) to help other characters; 3) to show weakness; 4) to show strength; 5) sexually explicit dialogues; 6) sexually explicit body exposure and, 7) sexually explicit behavior, 8) intimate actions. To identify class-conscious references, I use: 1) plot dominance; 2) positive descriptions; and, 3) negative descriptions. To differentiate the different

[27] 'Light novels' are the hardcover version of comic books. They consist entirely of spoken dialogue and usually include comic book-style illustrations. Since their characters are derived directly from their comic book forebears, they are closer in style and format to *manga* than to traditional novels.

[28] I did not use Taiwanese statistics, because statistical data regarding comic book sales are not tabulated in Taiwan. However, the Japanese Top 25 reflects a very similar ranking to that of the Tablet J.H.S. participants. It should be added that, since the Japanese ranking does not specify any age limits regarding *manga* readers, it may represent adults' preferences as well.

depictions of violence and crime, I use: 1) bloody; 2) bodily damage; 3) death; and, 4) nonviolent crime. I believe, by using sub-categories, that hidden messages in images, plots, and dialogue can be unveiled referentially.

3.2.2.2 Members of Expert Validation

Since I am a comic book reader myself and do not want my own taste to influence the ideological analysis, I provided the same form with sub-categories to a select group of experts, thus avoiding the monologue of my own opinions. I attempted to broaden the process by distributing the survey to two junior high school teachers, who are also interviewed, as well as two experienced librarians. Using 'snowball sampling,' I found two teachers who were interested in my description of this study.

The two librarians are Mr. Huang and Mr. Ho. I have known Mr. Huang for ten years. He is 32 years old and has been a fan of *manga* since he was in elementary school. He showed me his hundreds of electronic collections, including comic books and light novels. He loves comic strips, especially those featuring comedy and romance, and has voluminous knowledge of the comic book rating system. For the last seven years, Mr. Huang has worked for Taipei's Public Libraries, serving in eight different branches and has gained a lot of experience serving educators, teenagers and parents.

Mr. Huang introduced me to Mr. Ho, the manager of the branch library where he currently works, who agreed to participate on my committee. Mr. Ho is 29 years old, and has been working for three years as an employee and library manager whose job is to plan multiple public activities for teenagers and their parents. A *manga* devotee, he has read most of the mainstream comic books, and watched their animated cartoon and light novel versions as well.

The two junior high school teachers I invited to serve as committee members are Ms. Yeh and Mr. Yen. Ms. Yeh is 30 years old. I have been her friend for eight years. When we were university students, we often shared comic book information and went to comic book exhibitions together. Actually, since she rented comic books at least once a week, she has read more of them than I have. Besides understanding and agreeing with my preference for action and comedy, Ms. Yeh is well-versed about BL and horror comic books. She is capable of bringing her experience as a former sociology major into her Chinese Literature class. During the three years she taught in Hsinchu and Taipei high schools, she built close relationships with her students. Her warmth and ease with people make her a very popular teacher, more like a big sister than a person of authority.

Mr. Yen is 29 years old and has been teaching for four years in the city of Taoyuan. We have known each other for less than a year, although he studied in the same educational department as I did, and we have similar interests in sociology and philosophy. Like Ms. Yeh, he is a teacher of Chinese, who has dozens of Japanese comic book collections in his living room and study. He likes comedy and action comic books and has acquired a lot of knowledge about them on the Internet. However, unlike Ms. Yeh, he seldom discusses or shares this knowledge with his students. Talking about his relationship with the students in his class he said, “Actually, I think my students are a little bit afraid of me, because I am a very demanding teacher.” However, some students still like to joke with him because they know that his rigorous pedagogy is founded on a deep sense of dedication to their success.

All these experts have been reading *manga* for more than ten years and are very familiar with the selected texts. By dialoguing with them and comparing their judgment of the results of the survey with mine, I gain a clearer understanding of the hidden ideologies from four trusted

allies who will prevent my getting lost in the socio-cultural underbrush. Indeed, it is important to note that the differences between them are not just occupational, but also pertain to their scholarly background and training. Although all of them have studied sociology, the teachers' social science training is more thorough that that of the librarians, whose learning is more focused on their technical achievement in information studies. Throughout our discussions, it has been important for me to understand how the taste and experience of each of them has shaped a unique and valuable standpoint.

In this study, I use analytic formulas to raise the readers' and my own consciousness regarding the ideological subtexts of selected Japanese *manga*. However, my textual analysis is not limited by formulaic structures or strictures. So as to remain flexible and vigilant about the possibility of the existence of ideological categories other than those already mentioned, I will strive to keep my analyses at once succinct and attuned to any evidence of unequal power structures represented in the *manga* chosen for dissection. Thus, I will include supportive data from other cultural resources including the internet, animated cartoons, and advertisements. My aim is to create an organic dialogue with the texts I examine so that my study can offer an analysis of contemporary Japanese comic books that is as broad as it is deep.

3.2.3 Interviews: How Do Educators and Students think?

In keeping with my Freirian theoretical approach, I use interviews as my primary research method. By knowing what junior high school educators and students think about ideological issues related to ethnicity, gender, social class, and violence, I can train my eye to observe how they react to the underlying messages comic books contain and whether or not, as *manga* consumers, they approach certain power-related issues consciously.

Tablet High was the site of most of my interviews. With the support of the school principal, Mrs. Lin, I used two of the four seventh-grade classes participating in the survey to conduct extended interviews with student respondents: Class A and Class B. I spent two months interviewing students in Class A and Class B. Because it was convenient for teachers and students alike, I did all the interviews at school during the non-academic classes. To protect the participants' anonymity, all their names have been changed to English names, and our conversations were conducted in a locked conference room on the school campus.

So as not to in any way interrupt the school's daily schedule, the duration of each interview was limited to a single forty-five minute class period. Hampered by time restrictions and the reservations of doubtful adults, I turned my original design of open-ended interviews, into a structured interview, based on a series of pre-designed questions related to ideological issues. However, the change of design did not limit my fruitful results. Actually, since most of the students were willing and even eager to share their comic book experiences, the interviews were overwhelmingly positive experiences for researcher and informants alike. Some of the students evinced deep understanding of the ideas of equality and social justice, leading to further questions and my growing respect for their youthful sagacity.

With strong support from their teachers, I collected more data than I thought I would. To honestly report my findings, I have first to introduce the informants.

3.2.3.1 Interview Participants

I interviewed sixteen people, twelve students and four teachers. The students were evenly divided between genders. The instructors of both classes also participated in this research. They are Mr. and Mrs. Dai, who have limited knowledge about or interest in *manga* compared to Mr. Yen and Ms. Yeh who are truly expert about the subject.

Class A is led by Mr. Dai, a 51-year-old math teacher and the head of the Office of Student Discipline at Tablet J.H.S. Mr. Dai has twenty years teaching experience, eighteen of them at Tablet. As a veteran educator, he has had a lot of experience handling students' issues and helping them acquire good study habits. He saw me as a young scholar/practitioner just getting started and was generous in sharing his wealth of experience. Having survived several radical national education reform projects, he has developed his own thoughts about education, which are more conservative than those of younger educators but seem to work well.

Although Mr. Dai believes in the traditional style of test-oriented education, he still likes students to cultivate their own academic viewpoints. Sensing the importance of my study, he kindly supported my research by inviting potential students, organizing interview schedules and generously granting me an interview during one of his rare, unscheduled periods. As far as the selected comic books, he admitted having only read some of *Case Closed*. However, he declared himself a fan of one of the most famous military *manga*, *The Silent Service*.[29] After our interview, he strongly recommended that I read that series.

With Mr. Dai's assistance, I picked three boys and three girls from Class A to participate in this research. Most of them had read the Top 5 *manga*, so they could knowledgeably reflect on their plots and characters. Here are thumbnail sketches of the six: 1) "Vincent" is a shy boy with a soft voice. He seemed a bit nervous. When I was asking questions, he sat still, never looking at me directly. Sometimes, his answers were cryptic and I had to guess what he meant and double check with him. 2) "Jessica" is a gentle girl and very articulate. She seemed confident when expressing her views. We put each other at ease from the start so there was a lot of laughter during our conversations. 3) "Sheryl" is very shy. She answered my questions

[29] *The Silent Service* is a story about international naval forces. It deals at some depth with issues of nuclear arms, and the complicated relationship between the USA and Japan in the wake of the latter's defeat in WWII.

so quietly I had to lean forward to hear her. Sometimes, she only nodded or shook her head in assent to something I said. 4) "Aida" is a cheerful girl who has considerable self-expressive ability. She did not avoid eye contact, and was able to use idioms and examples to explain her answers. During our conversations, we sometimes made jokes about the *manga*. 5) "Olin" gave very clear answers, and when he answered, his face seemed firm and serious. He told me his parents allow him to read comic books and he has a lot of knowledge about the field, including the online fans' reactions. 6) "York" gave short but clear answers. Although he said he only spent three hours a week on comic books, he seemed familiar with a lot of mainstream and non-mainstream comic books, including an R-rate manga, *Battle Vixens*.

Class B is led by Mrs. Dai, who is 38 years old. She is also a mentor and a math teacher, who has been teaching for twelve years, three of them at Tablet High. She is a very friendly teacher, who related to me like an older sister and felt free to share her own thoughts and experiences. Like Mr. Dai, she also helped me approach potential informants, students in her class who seemed interested in my research. She said nearly everyone was interested in participating in this study. However, some of their parents had concerns about my "comic book study," since they are afraid that it would further encourage and validate their children's love of comic books, so she had to supplant three students who originally signed up with substitute volunteers.[30]

Although I suspected that the reaction of the parents to my study might cast a shadow of doubt about its validity, things ran as smoothly with Mrs. Dai as with Mr. Dai. Students and teachers seemed to have clearer ideas about the contents of the Top 5 *manga* than the parents.

[30] Even though the parents understood that this study was not a long-term study and would probably not be published, they still had a lot of concerns. I interpreted this as an affirmation of the fact that, in Taiwan, comic books are still considered 'taboo' as a focus for academic study. But it also demonstrates the lengths to which Taiwanese parents go to protect their children from anything potentially 'harmful' to their academic progress.

However, as Mrs. Dai willingly admitted, she had little interest in comic books. She knew all the titles, but had difficulty understanding the order of the frames. The only comic book series that she had read was *Doraemon*, an internationally famous *manga* series that has attracted children and teenagers for more than thirty years.[31] Mrs. Dai told me that her husband is a *manga* aficionado, so she has some second-hand knowledge from him.

With the assistance of Mrs. Dai, I also interviewed six selected students from Class B. 1) "Fay" is shy with a very soft voice. During our conversations, she paused a lot. She used the word "abnormal" to describe things she considered negative. 2) "Rod" spoke quickly. He loves battlefield *manga*, especially *Naruto*. 3) "Ruby" is cheerful, loquacious and very articulate about what she has read. We laughed a lot during our conversations. She was the only one of the twelve students who admitted she enjoyed reading Boy Love (BL) *manga*. 4) "Julian" is a courteous young man who expresses himself easily. His father reads the latest comic books and watches animated cartoons with him, so he has a lot of up-to-date knowledge about *manga* and *manga* offshoots. 5) "Helen" seemed shy at first but, within ten minutes, started to use longer sentences to express her ideas and enthusiasm. Like "Rod," she loves battles and bloodshed. 6) "Dana" is small and shy. He frequently answered "I don't know" to those questions based on hypothetical situations, or that required extensive replies. He is the only one who actually picked up one of the comic books on the table and read half of the first volume of *One Piece*. His teacher said that he was raised by his grandparents and had minimal social skills. She guessed that is why he seldom makes eye contact.

It is important to note that the students interviewed are all from middle class families, and

[31] *Doraemon* is the name of a blue, cat-like robot from the 22nd century. This series is one of the most long-termed popular *manga* in Asia.

are ethnically *Han*, members of the dominant group on my island nation.[32] In the course of the one-to-one interviews, I discovered several interesting perspectives I did not expect, which will be explained below, in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2.3.2 Creating Structured Questions

Although I used structured interviews that may limit the nature and scope of my discoveries, I wanted to retain some vestige of Freirian, dialogical spirit in any way I could. Therefore, I included many teenage idioms in the way I formulated my questions and, insofar as possible, changed their tone from formal, scientific jargon to a more idiosyncratic approach designed to overcome the diffidence and lack of dialogical experience I knew I would encounter with student participants. Separated into several different categories, the questions I asked are as follows:

Basic Questions

1. How many comic books of these Top 5 series on the table have you read? How many hours a week do you usually spend reading/watching comic books and animated cartoons? How do you get them?
2. Which character in the Top 5 *manga* do you like best? Which country do you think he/ she belongs to? Is he/ she rich? If he becomes a "she" or she becomes a "he", would you still like this character?
3. Do you want to have super power like people in comic books? Which super power do you want?

Ethnic Issues:

1. Many comic books use Japanese or Western culture in their settings (e.g. The idea of

[32] Besides Han, there are indigenous Taiwanese and "New Taiwanese," a term mainly used to describe first- and second-generation immigrants from South East Asia and mainland China.

reincarnation). Did you want to know more about that after you read them?

2. Many Japanese locations and much Japanese culture can be found in these comic books. Do you think you learn more about Japan by reading them? Does it make it more likely that you will one day visit Japan and see those things?
3. Many characters have Japanese names. Actually, *manga* often use Japanese exclamations to express reactions and emotions. How do you feel about this?

Gender/ Sex Issues:

1. In *One Piece* or *Naruto*, women like Nami and Tsunade dress to look "hot." Do you think they are too sexy?
2. Why are all the main characters males? What if they were females?
3. In *One Piece* and *Case Closed*, Mori and Sanji act dramatically when they see beautiful women. Is this different from the real world? What do you think?
4. If the scenes of women taking baths in *One Piece* or *Bleach* were of men taking baths, would it make any difference?
5. What do you think about the "shemales" in *One Piece*? How about in real life?
6. These *manga* all tell "boy loves girl" stories. Would you accept them if there were gays or lesbians in future plots? How about in real life?

Class Issues:

1. Of these main characters, which are poorer than you? Which are richer than you? Which are similar to you? Before I asked these questions, did you compare yourself to them?
2. In *One Piece*, *Naruto* and *Bleach*, the main characters are powerful because their fathers are special people. If their fathers were normal people, like farmers or fishermen,

would you still like the main characters as much as you do now?

3. In *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan*, there are several critiques about the rich. Do you agree with them?
4. In *Case Closed* many poor people do illegal things. Do you agree that the detective should jail them for their crimes?

Issues of Violence:

1. Some people say comic books are too violent. Do you agree? Does this violence influence the way you behave?
2. Many characters in comic books fight and bleed. Do you think this is too violent?
3. Sometimes people are cut in half, or their hands and legs are severed in comic books. What do you think about that?

Nationality and Society:

1. Do you read Taiwanese comic books? How do they compare to Japanese *manga*?
2. Many people think we can learn from comic books. What do you think?
3. Why do you think some schools prohibit students' use of comic books?
4. Why should schools allow students to read novels but ban comic books?
5. In comic books, the main characters always win. Do you think this is true in real life?

It is important to note that, when some students had not read the comic books mentioned above, I asked questions about characters they knew from other comic books. Moreover, the *basic questions* were designed to lead to challenging or extended questions. When challenged by further questions, some students would change their answers, while others stuck with their original views. Before we began, I told each participant there were no "right" answers to these questions. After explaining the safety issues regarding interviews, I asked some of these

questions with strange tonalities and exaggerated gestures while pointing to the comic books on the table. I did this to make the students feel they were involved in an interesting 'brain storming' game rather than a conventional test.

My interviews with teachers did not include this ludic overture nor were they specially designed. They were more like open-ended dialogues with comic books as the main focus. The participants, besides Mr. Dai and Mrs. Dai who had little experience with comic books, were Mr. Yen and Mrs. Yeh, whose knowledge about comic books is comparatively profound. Most of my face-to-face interviews with teachers took about an hour, and extensive discussions were continued on the Internet, via skype, Facebook and email.

Although the number of participants in this research is not huge, the ensuing dialogues have generated some interesting facts and issues that people working in the educational field have ignored for too long. I believe I have succeeded in identifying some cultural conflicts and ideological common sense in the minds of both the students and teachers I encountered. From these results, I will be able to provide a practical reflection on the future of critical education in Taiwan.

CHAPTER 4 REACTIONS OF TAIWANESE STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

In the course of my research, I applied surveys, textual analysis, and interviews to collect the empirical data. In this chapter, I will present my research results from this data. The students' responses are presented in a logic order. After transcribing them, I use them as indicators of their comic book reading experiences. The point of my textual analysis is to identify ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence from the five mainstream comic books the students selected: *One Piece*, *Case Closed*, *Attack on Titan*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*. After processing the survey results as raw data for textual analysis, I return to the interviews with the students and their teachers to compare their perspectives on the influence of Japanese comic books .

With critical lenses borrowed from Paulo Freire, I am able to discern not only parts of the cultural phenomenon of Taiwanese comic book culture, but also certain issues that have been largely ignored in the educational field. Thus, to provide deeper analytical resources for Chapter 5, I will point out some important information and pivotal details in this chapter. Through this process, the longstanding question of the educational value of comic book consumption by Taiwanese youth can be presented in a straightforward manner.

4.1 Results of the Survey: Comic Book Reading Preference and Top 5 Comic Books

It is important to see how teenagers read their comic books, and how they see it as extracurricular reading that is excluded from formal school learning. By comparing results from surveys collected in four classes, certain facts became clear.

The hundred and four student respondents showed marked similarities in the way they read

comic books. The time that they spent reading comic books and/or watching cartoons was generally less than three hours a week. 53 students (53.5%) said they spent less than an hour a week on comic books or cartoons, while 31 students (31.3%) said they spent two to three hours a week. Only 11 students (11.1%) said they dedicated three to five hours to reading comics and/or watching cartoons, and only 4 students (4%) said they spent five hours a week or more. Of course, since comic book reading/cartoon watching is considered "entertainment," students may not do it as regularly as academic study. Only two students answered, "If I have time, I will read/watch a lot at once" and one student said he would rather read the whole series of comic books or watch the whole season of cartoons at one time, without waiting for the weekly update. Two students did not respond to this question.

Hours / Quantity	Less than 1	2-3 hours	3-5 hours	More than 5 hours
Students	53	31	11	4
Percentage	53.5%	31.3%	11.1%	4.0%

Table 4.1 Time spent reading comics or watching Japanese cartoons every week

The answer of how students acquire comic books or cartoons shows a less concentrated distribution, wherein none of the methods mentioned attains 50%. In this question, students can choose multiple answers. The result showed 53 students (34.4%) claimed that they get comic books and cartoons online; while 41 students (26.6%) said they get them either from relatives or friends. Only 35 students (22.7%) spend their own money to buy comic books, and only 25 students (16.2%) 'rent' comic books from stores where this is possible. Only two students said

they use library resources as well. Two students said they only watch animated cartoons without reading the comic books on which they are based.

Methods / Quantity	Buy for myself	Share with family and friends	Rent	Read online
Students	35	41	25	53
Percentage	22.7%	26.6%	16.2%	34.4%

Table 4.2 How I acquire comics/animated cartoons

To me, the most interesting part was the student-respondents' answer to the question, "Do you pay attention to the rating of comics before you read them?" This is a very sensitive question, since none of the students are yet old enough to legally read 'R-rated' comic books. However, only one student did not answer the question. 60 students (58.3%) gave a definite "yes," implying that they do not read R-rated comic books. Compared to this number, 14 students (13.6%) answered "no," implying that they found the contents more important than the rating. 29 students (28.2%) gave a more ambiguous answer by selecting, "sometimes."

R-Rated Books / Quantity	Yes	No	Sometimes
Students	60	14	29
Percentage	58.3%	13.6%	28.2%

Table 4.3 Do you pay attention to the rating of comics before read them?

The last two 5-point scale parts reflect what kind of comic books young readers love to read and, most important, which are their Top 5 comic books. From the selected junior high students' perspectives, "Fantasy" is the most popular type of story, which has the highest voting score (241 points) and also shows the highest overall average (3.30 points). The second one is "Science Fiction", which scores only slightly lower than Fantasy, with 224 total scores, and a 3.29 average. The other four that have over one hundred total points are Detective (189 points), Horror (178 points), Campus Drama/Campus Comedy (176 points), and Sports (162 points). However, their total points do not necessarily reflect their average points. Only Horror (3.02) and Sports (3.18) reach an average of over three points, while Detective (2.95) and Campus Drama/Campus Comedy (2.79) do not. This shows that although many students like to read detective stories, or stories set on campus, they prefer fantasy and other types of comic books. The opposite can be said of Boy Love/Girl Love (BL/GL). Although it only gets 38 total points, students who love to read this genre ranked it high. Therefore, it has an average of 2.92, placing it right behind Detective on the popularity scale.

Besides the aforementioned comic books, there are Romantic Story with 92 total points, and 2.79 average points and Special Talents which has 56 total points and 2.33 average points. It should be noted that not all the students distributed their 5 points to every comic book category. While some students merely listed their favorite comic type as "Other," one student wrote "Historic Wars," another wrote "Family drama," and two wrote "Action and Fighting."

Types / Scores	Fantasy	Science Fiction	Sports	Campus drama	Romantic story	BL/GL	Detective	Special talents	Horror
Total points	241	224	162	176	92	38	189	56	178
average	3.30	3.29	3.18	2.79	2.79	2.92	2.95	2.33	3.02

Table 4.4 My favorite comics

The last part of the survey is voting for Top 5 comic books. As we said in Chapter Three, the result showed a centralized distribution of the Top 5 series. They are *One Piece* (239 total points and 3.41 average points), *Case Closed* (198 total points and 3.41 average points), *Attack on Titan* (186 total points and 3.15 average points), *Naruto* (155 total points and 2.87 average points), and *Bleach* (92 total points and 2.49 average points).

It is easy to see that the first four comic series have significantly higher points than the fifth place contender. Actually, the points of the one in fifth place, *Bleach* and the one in sixth place, *Hunter X Hunter* (79 total points and 2.93 average points) are pretty close.[33] Students who love *Hunter X Hunter* ranked it higher than *Bleach*. This result shows that although the Top 5 are all mainstream comic books, there is considerable variation when it comes to their individual popularity. It is important to notice this, so that the interpretations of young readers' attitudes and the influence of the different series are not exaggerated.

From a critical perspective, among the many issues that can be revealed from the above data are the student-respondents' values, their concept of consuming, their social identity and reading

[33] *Hunter X Hunter* is an adventure-oriented comic series made by one of the most talented authors Yoshihiro Togashi (冨樫 義博). This series has been published for more than ten years. Although the author frequently suspends this series, there are still a lot of fans who support these stories.

preferences. These clues can be detected and explained, using the results of my textual analysis and interviews, which are presented in the following sections.

4.2 The Reactions of Textual Analysis: Ideologies in Mainstream Comic Books

From a Freirian cultural study perspective, my textual analysis mainly focuses on four ideologies: ethnicity, gender, class, and violence. In discussions with my Expert Validation committee members, I became aware of several elements that were missing in my analysis and found out that, as far as ideologies are concerned, different people hold different opinions, based on their own logic, theoretical training and social backgrounds. To identify how comic books create characters and stories that demonstrate ideological representations, I present the results as follows:

4.2.1 Format of Japanese Comic Books

Compared with American comic books, Japanese comic books conform to certain standards. Most *manga* are pocket size, containing more or less 200 pages, a paper cover, and printed in black and white on light-weight paper. For many students, this is very important. Because they can easily slip them into their backpacks or, in schools that ban comic books, secrete them in lockers desks, or textbooks they appear to be studying.

Mainly focusing on student readers, Japanese comic books are usually sold with a low price. To reduce the cost, most of the comic books are printed in black and white, very different from the U.S. giants, Marvel's or DC's, colorful format. Without multiple colors to enhance their drama, Japanese comic books use multiple motion lines, lots of onomatopoetic exclamations, and screen tone patterns to strengthen special effects and add contrast and texture to their

presentation. The translation of Japanese onomatopoeia into Taiwanese is not deemed necessary although many of the exclamations rendered have specific cultural meanings in the language of their creators. However, all the onomatopoeia in the Top 5 comic books are in Japanese characters, which most Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese students do not understand. Nevertheless, they are translated into English for U.S. distribution; a clear case of cultural imperialism.

The management of Japanese comic books is different from American comic books as well. Japanese mainstream comic books are usually long series that have been published for years. Therefore, to attract readers, it is not enough to just rely on "superstar" comic characters. The author himself/herself has to become a superstar too. Therefore, on the front page, a single author's name is printed on the cover with no mention of the existence of a support team. *Manga* creators have distinct personalities and interact with fans in ways unheard of outside the Asian market. Thus, comic authors usually dedicate pages in front, between different chapters and at the end of stories to relate personally with their fan base, creating added entertainment and treating them like confidants. For example, in *One Piece*, Eiichiro Oda uses an "SBS" forum to answer readers' comments and questions between different chapters, in *Attack on Titan*, Hajime Isayama makes "fake coming soon" to make fun of the main characters, and the author of *Case Closed*, Gosho Aoyama goes so far as to draw different versions of his putative demise on the introduction page of each volume. Compared to a serious discussion of ideas and the production process in famous American comic books like *Walking Dead* or *Sand Man*, Japanese *manga* are more casual, with authors inviting their readers to enjoy the show while reminding them that not one of the bloodthirsty conflicts they create has any basis in reality.

Another noteworthy element is the price. Since the potential buyers are mainly students,

the price of comic books is relatively inexpensive, around 100 NTD (US$3.50). Although the price of a single volume is low, they publish new editions monthly and can still make profits in the long run.

4.2.2 Protagonists as Salesmen

As in most comic books, *manga* stories are always told from the protagonist's perspective. Protagonists are not only the soul of a comic book series, they are its primary salesman and the entire industry relies on them to turn a profit. Through their eyes, adolescent readers find a cogent way to read the fantastic world in which they wish to live. Therefore, it is important for comic books to create attractive protagonists with positive personalities, special talents, and easily identifiable images as it makes it easy for readers to project themselves into their heroes' adventures and vicariously share their achievements and glories.

Since most *manga* fans are teenagers, adolescent traits are reflected in the protagonists of the stories they read. In the Top 5 comic books my student-informants selected, all the main characters are about eighteen years old. Furthermore, all the main characters in these comic books are male, with a strong sense of 'justice,' and rebellious, adventurous, and brave personalities that embrace all kinds of situations and challenges created by their super-powered enemies. However, there are enough personalities and super powers to choose from for their creators to fashion each of these heroes as unique. Monkey D. Luffy in *One Piece* is presented as a fantastic, teenage pirate, always optimistic and full of energy. Although the author depicts him as a naïve boy notably lacking either common sense or sexual desire, the big smile on his face attracts readers of all ages. As the captain of a nine-man pirate team, he is a superlative fighter who can stretch his body like flexible rubber and employ his super power, "Color of the

Conquering King" to subdue and control other people. Both his father, the leader of a rebellious army, and his grandfather, a Navy Admiral, believe that Luffy will soon become the Pirate King and discover the legendary treasure, "One Piece."

Similar images can be found in *Naruto*, whose main character is Naruto Uzumaki. A comedic variant of the ninja stereotype, Naruto is optimistic and naughty and sometimes uses his ninja power, *Chakra*, to play tricks on friends. Like Luffy, Naruto dreams of becoming a super leader, a *Hokage*, like his father. Inheriting his *Chakra* from the legendary, nine-tailed fox, Naruto knows how to turn use it at maximum power—something no one but his best-friend-turned enemy, Sasuke Uchiha, can match.

Fathers are perennial role-models in *manga*. As most of the main characters are teenage males, fathers often model appropriate behavior for their sons. There are several cases can be found in these selected comic books. The main character in *Bleach* is Ichigo Kurosaki, Soul Reaper as adolescent whose father, a high-ranking Soul Reaper himself and a member of an elite family, doubles as his mentor. Unlike Luffy and Naruto, Ichigo has a more serious personality. However, he is enthusiastic about helping others and fearless on the battlefield.

In *Case Closed*, the story is more focused on protagonist Shinichi Kudo's personal charisma. Simultaneously a high-school student and a well-known detective, Shinichi is brilliant, dashingly handsome and good at football. He is also famous throughout the Tokyo megalopolis as a teenage version of Sherlock Holmes. Even though he has been poisoned and transformed into a six-year-old boy, Conan Edogawa, he still exhibits extraordinary intelligence and beats both the Japanese police and the U.S. FBI when it comes to sleuthing. *Case Closed* boasts an international scenario and has many Western elements. Shinichi's father is portrayed as an international writer who teaches Shinichi the skills of an Eagle Scout on the island of Oahu.

Compared to the other protagonists, Eren, hero of *Attack on Titan*'s appears to be sullen, filled with hatred and lusting for revenge after witnessing his mother devoured by Titans. Since he is the only human on his team who can transform into a Titan, he is portrayed as a secret weapon whose special talent was inherited from his father in a mysterious way.

Since all protagonists typify the spirit of their comic book vehicles, they share identifiable traits, distinct from those of their supporting players and wear special apparel which never changes from volume to volume. They have representative props, like Luffy's straw hat or Ichigo's sword, which is not the case with sublunary characters. These special identities are very important to their readers, who relate to them as heroes and role models. Therefore, In *One Piece, Case Closed,* and *Attack on Titan*, the authors draw these characters with black hair and Asian faces, even though two of them have non-Asian names. Of course, there are exceptions, but even though a character may not have black hair, he can have other cultural attributes that emphasize his Japanese origin. Ichigo, in *Bleach*, has red hair, but always dresses in the traditional black Japanese garb of a Soul Reaper. Naruto has blond hair and blue eyes, which make him look Caucasian, but his raiment is that of a ninja.

Another theme worth emphasizing is the importance of supporting characters. The best friends of most of the protagonists have special relationships, like blood brothers. Although one of Shinichi's supporting characters is more like a bosom buddy, being decidedly female. Friendship is very important, especially in stories like *One Piece*, and *Attack on Titan*, where ultimate success can only be attained through sustained collaboration, and the virtues of team work and trust are strongly emphasized. Stories like *Bleach* and *Naruto*, which focus on personal combat, feature similar values, especially *Naruto*, which re-defines friendship as a kind of sublime brotherhood.

It is impossible in this study to analyze every character in five extended *manga* series, although most of them bear a plethora of cultural symbols and in some way represent the worldview of post- modern Japanese society. I will take up this theme again in Chapter 5.

4.2.3 Ideologies of Ethnicity

Manga include many Japanese cultural elements in their character designs, settings, and materials. Characters with Japanese names and Asian faces are standard in Japanese comic books where they represent powerful cultural elements, like the Soul Reapers' samurai style in *Bleach* or ninja images in *Naruto*. Even though the background of the story may not be set in Japan, Japanese figures predominate, like Roronoa Zoro, the samurai chief in *One Piece* and the unforgettable Mikasa Ackerman, the "last Japanese" in *Attack on Titan*. It is worth noting in the aforementioned stories that, although the majority of characters are not Japanese, those that bear distinctive Japanese characteristics are always portrayed as superior warriors and play important roles as the protagonists' 'besties.'

Apart from the central characters, most *manga* feature Japanese cultural components including mystery tales, traditional skills, cultural products and even spirits. For instance, in *Case Closed*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*, the majority of cultural representations are either distinguishably Japanese or refer to Western cultural products which are seen as superior to those from other Asian countries . To identify cultural themes associated with ethnicity, it is important to look at *manga* versions of mystery tales, because they are a core element. Indeed, both *Naruto* and *Bleach* use the Japanese Buddhist belief in reincarnation to create their magic worlds, which take pains to explain the traditional Japanese belief that people will be judged and suffer rebirth in six different life forms, while the relationship will continue, like that of Naruto

and his best friend, Sasuke.

Traditional Japanese martial art skills frequently depicted, karate in *Case Closed* (Vol. 1) or, in *Naruto* and *Bleach,* kendo and ninjutsu respectively. Typically Japanese cultural symbols like kimonos, bath houses, traditional masks, and *katana* (Japanese sword) are *manga* standbys. Quotidian images of Japanese life styles are presented through the depiction of the school lives, housing, and domestic habits of *manga* protagonists and their friends. In certain stories, the comic book creator portrays real locations that can be easily identified like the National Olympic Stadium in Tokyo (*Case Closed*, Vol. 20), while others contain typically Japanese historical edifices like the ninja villages in *Naruto,* or the Japanese mansion and castles in *Bleach* (Vol. 17).

In *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan,* however, my committee of advisors noticed that most of the cultural and ethnic representations are Western, like European pirate ships and castles. Moreover, characters in both stories wear western garments and bear western names. In fact, to make *One Piece* international, many fans believe that the author transformed the names and images of famous pirates like Anne Bonny who becomes Jewelry Bonney and Blackbeard Edward Teach who is represented as Blackbeard Marshall D. Teach, Luffy's arch enemy (Magic cancellation, 2013).[34] It is no secret that the authors of *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan* are inspired by American culture. In Vol. 68, *One Piece's* creator, Eiichiro, admitted that one of the supporting characters, Sanji, in Luffy's Straw Hat Pirate team was inspired by the famous American crime film, *Reservoir Dogs*. Likewise, Isayama acknowledged that Captain Levi in his *manga* epic, *Attack on Titan,* was modeled on the character Rorschach in the classic U.S. graphic novel, *Watchman* (Oda, 2012; mangahakuran, 2014).

Manga sometimes poke fun at foreign cultures, like the reference to Mount Rushmore in

[34] Although the author/illustrator remains mute about the provenance of his characters, many fans believe some bear traces of pop icons and movie stars like Zorro, Michael Jackson, and Jim Carrey.

Naruro, where the four American Presidents turn into the leaders of a ninja village. At other times images and character representations in Top 5 *manga* may seem almost surreal and strongly biased . For example, in *One Piece*, the supporting character Usopp has Asian skin color, but African lips, nose, and head shape; in *Bleach* Vol. 1, there is a runner in athletic gear with an 'Afro' head; in *Bleach* Vol. 64, the image of Stern Ritter, the enemy of the Soul Reapers has a German name, while his troops wear white, Nazi-style uniforms.

It should be noted that racial identifications are never so clear in *manga* as in U.S. comic books. In fact, the majority of protagonists are drawn with western standards of beauty in mind: round eyes, pointed chins, and 'American' height. Other races are conspicuous in their absence. In *Attack on Titan*, only Caucasians and Asians with Caucasian characteristics are depicted. No Latinos, Africans, or other darkly pigmented people are visible in "the last castle of human beings." Of even greater significance is the fact that, although all Asian people are devotees of *manga*, no Asian countries except Japan are mentioned in any of these Top 5 comic book series.

My committee of advisors and I agreed that some Japanese virtues are easily identifiable in *manga*, like *bushido* in *Bleach* and *One Piece* and loyalty in *Naruto*.[35] However, to pinpoint the origin of others like the loyalty to the emperor shown in *Attack on Titan*, is difficult. Only Mr. Huang and I thought it originated from Japanese tradition, while other committee members believed it is commonplace in both Asian and Western culture.

Ethnic ideologies proliferate in *manga*, but it is also important to notice what they don't contain. After all, the *manga* worldview represents not only the vision of their authors, but also that of mainstream Japanese society.

[35] '*Bushido*'is the spirit of Japanese samurai, which contains loyalty, honors, fearlessness, and *zen* from Buddhism (Littlewood, 1996, 170-192). Samurei, as a warrior follow bushido, must not only keep his mind calm and brave, but also keep his skill perfect.

4.2.4 Ideologies of Gender

The Top 5 *manga* are all geared to the zeitgeist of their adolescent male readers and this is reflected in their plots and character design. In *One Piece* and *Naruto*, important female characters like Nami, Robin and Tsunade dress in specially designed clothes that emphasize their huge breasts and slim bodies. However, compared to American superheroes in Marvel and DC product, most male bodies in *manga* are not muscle bound. In fact, Top 5 protagonists have recognizably human bodies, while some of the most important supporting characters, like Capitan Levi in *Attack on Titan,* are short.

Moreover, sexual attraction may have diverse cultural meanings and representations in *manga*. There are female characters who look like cute little girls and males who are as slim and beautiful as women. This explains why Ai Haibara in *Case Closed* and Haku in *Naruto* are popular characters, even though they are not protagonists.

Gender and sexual ideologies are not only represented by character illustrations but also by the plots themselves. In the Top 5 comic books, it is evident that stories are mainly driven by males. Male characters are always given the power to make decisions while female characters generally remain silent or simply comment on events. Male dominance is also evident in the interactions and attitudes of characters. After reviewing how characters collaborate, which gender shows weakness, and which gender shows strength, my advisory board members agreed that males are always more decisive. For example, in *Naruto*, Vol. 70, even when Sakura boldly attacks the enemy, she needs to be rescued by male characters who make clear their opinion of the futility of her act. In *Bleach,* Vol. 16, this bias is made even clearer. Although there are female characters that join the battle, most of time, the plot depicts the imprisonment of the main female character, Rukia, who waits passively for the protagonist, Ichigo, to rescue her.

Mr. Yen, another of my advisors, stated that "Female characters only show their strength in the pirate field, in the public field, they have to rely on strong male figures." Compared with their male counterparts, female characters make fewer contributions to the team, and even when they do contribute, it is not in a way that moves the story forward. "Except Mikasa in *Attack on Titan*, who fights so fiercely that it is difficult to ignore her contributions," Ms. Yeh said in her note. Indeed, her performance is impressive because *Attack on Titan* is one of the few *manga* series that allows female characters to show their strength. In most cases, as the child protagonist, Conan, says in *Case Closed*, Vol. 1: "As a man, it is so embarrassing to be rescued by a woman. "

Interestingly, although comic books are often accused of presenting inappropriate sexual interactions, after reviewing the categories of dialogues and behaviors with sexual implications, intimacy, and body exposure, not many examples can be found in these five series. Mr. Yen even felt it was difficult to answer these questions, because "In many situations, those sexual implications are presented more like jokes…I think in these teenage comic books, male characters can only orally take advantage of women, they cannot really do something evil." Mr. Ho agreed that portrayals of sex in *manga* have little or no erotic magnetism: "Even the exposure of bodies does not arouse sexual desires."

However, all of my committee members agreed that the exposure of female characters' body parts is greater than that of males'. An interesting example of this phenomenon can be found in *Naruto*, Vol. 1, where the eponymous protagonist uses *ninjutsu* to turn himself into a naked girl with the express purpose of seducing his teacher. But even in this example, the apparition's breasts and sex are modestly obscured by smoke. As far as other sexual implications and depictions of sexual physical intimacy are concerned, Ms. Yeh, Mr. Huang, and I only identified

fragmentary dialogues and behaviors, mostly directed by male toward female characters, as in *Case Closed,* Vol. 1, when Detective Kogoro seems interested in his female client and puts his hand on her shoulder while she looks uncomfortable. Two characters that were frequently mentioned by my advisors are Sanji and Boa Hancock in *One Piece*. Sanji is similar to Detective Kogoro in that he likes to flatter beautiful women whenever he meets them, while Boa is the only female who aggressively seduces a protagonist, for which is she is given the name of a snake.

There is no mention, in the Top 5 *manga*, of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender characters, everyone is a putative heterosexual. Thus, the LGBT category does not exist in teen-targeted comics where homosexuality is an embarrassing joke. For example, in *Naruto,* Vol. 1, when Naruto and Sasuke accidentally kiss, they exhibit nauseated expressions when they realize their mistake. The embarrassing encounter foreshadows a rapid decline from friendship to enmity and may have some residual appeal for fans of BL *manga*. Another case is Emporio Ivankov, an elaborately named transgender male, who helps Luffy escape from jail. He is portrayed as a short, wiry male in tights and fishnet stockings, weird but funny, in *One Piece*, Vol. 55. As he used as a clown, the author does not delve any deeper into his personal story or context.

4.2.5 Ideologies of Class

In the teenage fantasies *manga* cater to and inspire, class-consciousness is never part of the plot, so the best we can do is account for fragmentary details related to the life styles of the protagonists and their coterie: the way they dress, their family status, housing, and grooming all send subtle messages to the inquiring mind.

The socio-economic class of most protagonists represents the class ideology of the storyline

they propel. Shinichi in *Case Closed* is the only one all my advisors agreed about. From the moment his European mansion is depicted, we know he belongs to the elite. Four out of five advisors concurred that Ichigo, the hero of *Bleach*, belongs to the middle class. Only three felt that the main characters in *Naruto* and *Attack on Titan* were from the lower class, citing the lack of food, and orphaned characters struggling to survive at world's end. The most complicated one to decipher is Luffy in *One Piece*, who lives in a remote fishing village as his story begins but gradually becomes wealthy as his adventure proceeds. Two advisors saw his life style as middle class, one thought his humble childhood made him lower class, while two judged him as upper class because of his wealthy relatives.

It is important to discuss the element of relatives since, in Asian society, the reputation and class status of ones' relatives is considered a legacy for the next generation. Thus, Mr. Yen considered all the protagonists as members of the upper class because they all have a father with social cachet, important leaders in *One Piece*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*, an international celebrity in *Case Closed*, a doctor in *Attack on Titan*. Mr. Yen explained, "Whether these characters are rich is not as important as that they are all from influential families. That's why they can have special lives without worrying about daily chores and responsibilities; they are members of the elite." Indeed, from this perspective, social class and economic class should be viewed separately, because all of these characters have definite political power but that does not mean that they are wealthy. Ms. Yeh disagreed with this idea; she thinks we should judge them only by their economic status and life styles. "Because characters like Luffy, Naruto, and Ichigo have no idea about what their fathers do. Their fathers' secret identities are just an added plot twist. It does not mean that all protagonists come from the elite."

It is valuable to have both Mr. Yen's and Ms. Yeh's views to analyze class ideologies,

especially social class, which is seen as a ranking system that segregates people in terms of their influence or power in most *manga*. The ideology of social rank is transformed into different ranking systems to prove the elitism of the protagonists. This includes bounty rank in *One Piece*, soldier rank in *Attack on Titan*, ninja rank in *Naruro*, and Soul Reaper rank in *Bleach*. Most comic book protagonists display upward mobility. As they reach their highest ranking position, their reputation grows and they are recognized by important figures, all of which increases their influence and prestige.

The other thing that should be noted is that, although my panel members had different ideas about the protagonists we examined, all of us agreed that their life styles are solidly middle class. Even though some of us saw the main characters in *Naruto* and *Attack on Titan* as coming from working-class families, they dress well and can afford to live in clean and well-equipped domiciles. Despite the authors' attempt to delineate a certain amount of childhood deprivation, none of the above features pertain to working class families except shortage a shortage of food. Even the main character in *Case Closed*, who lives with his girlfriend's family, enjoys the comforts of a middle class Japanese lifestyle.

Besides the dominant class ideologies in the plot, panel members and I also discussed how comic book authors use plot to positively or negatively describe certain socio-economic classes. Focusing on helping the poor in different countries, all the committee members think *One Piece* shows enough emphasis on helping the lower class people to be seen as critical of the privileged elite. *Case Closed* admires the life style of celebrities as well as middle class family values, so it mixes ideologies from both the middle and upper classes. However, its plot line also suggests that celebrities live chaotic lives and that the poor conduct murder with unreasonable hatred, so it criticizes both ends of the spectrum.

Panel members said it was difficult to judge the ideologies presented in the other three series, since them all focus on combat without too many descriptions of social issues. Three panelists believed that these series favor the upper class because they admire the power of elite politicians and family dynasties. On the other hand, they critique power and privilege, especially in their graphic portrayal of criminals or rebels who commit heinous crimes because of their poverty and hatred toward the elite.

Class ideologies are usually the most overlooked parts of comic book series. However, this does not mean they are less important than the others I have mentioned. Indeed, by revealing all their hidden ideologies, my panel of experts agreed that the social ranking system is an essential element of Asian society, especially in Japan. This may be different from the depiction of Western class ideologies in U.S. comics.

4.2.6 Ideologies of Violence

Ideologies of violence are the categories that nearly all panel members agreed about. From the review results, all the committee members agreed that there are scenes of bleeding, bodily damage, and death caused by violence in every Top 5 series although, often, violent and non- violent crimes are presented in the plot: threats in *One Piece* Vol.1 and *Case Closed* Vol.20; stealing in *One Piece* Vol. 1, *Attack on Titan* Vol.1 and *Naruto* Vol.1; kidnapping in *Case Closed* Vol.1 and *Attack on Titan* Vol. 14; torture in *Attack on Titan* Vol. 14; prison raids and campus bullying in *Bleach* Vol.1 and Vol.16. Manga are marked by frequent scenes of violent combat and death that provide vicarious excitement and stimulation to readers.

Of course, crimes and violence are mostly related to the topics of these comic books. Therefore, while the detective story in *Case Closed* has a wide variety of violent and non-violent

crimes, the other four combat-oriented stories contain more bloodshed and bodily harm. Violent combat and crimes present physical and mental challenges and provide main characters with obstacles to conquer, challenging their extraordinary powers. The more deadly the wounds they incur or inflict, the greater the challenge. Therefore, when they vanquish worthy opponents, it demonstrates their superior power and confirms the values they are fighting for. However, it could be argued that even though violence and criminal themes exist, they are presented with restraint, as Disney did with Lion King. Therefore, it is important to delve into the content and see how authors present these scenes, before pressing the point.

All panel members agreed that *Attack on Titan* is the most violent of the five series we examined. Mr. Huang said, "Frankly, I thought this series should be prohibited for anyone under fifteen." Indeed, in the first three volumes of *Attack on Titan*, there are a lot of brutal deaths caused by the invasion of the giants. Human beings are eaten, broken into pieces and torn apart by the Titanic invaders. The severing of limbs is graphically depicted. Bloodshed is commonplace. All such scenes are much more graphically illustrated in *Attack on Titan* than in any of the other four series. Although serious bodily injuries occur (a stick is run through a body in *Naruto* Vol. 35, a blade slashes through a chest in *Bleach* Vol. 48, or a whole body is burned by acid in *One Piece* Vol. 55), the wounds themselves are not featured. Bloodshed is rendered artistically. The recipients of these wounds seem to feel no pains because there is an absence of any realistic facial or corporal reaction. The violence is unaccompanied by screams, spasms, or the curling up of the effected body. Most of the victims continue to fight or talk, as if it were no bigger deal than an accidental finger cut. Even in *Case Closed*, which depicts various kinds of mortalities, the dead are shown with their eyes open, like the dead man in the snow in Vol.20. Very little bloodshed is visible and there are no fearsome wounds. Death and

violence have been 'airbrushed' and made tolerable to adolescents. By such subtle cleansing, the message is sent that this violence is nothing more than a fantasy.

Although these comic books present bloodshed, bodily injury, and death, it does not mean that the contents are unsuitable for adolescents. In fact, *Attack on Titan* Vol. 1 is actually part of the *Great Graphic Novels, 2013* list recommended by the American Library Association for readers aged 12-18 (ALA, 2015). Compared with these made-for teens comic book series, R-rated comic books like *Berserk* include more sexual violence as well as detailed depiction of wounds and viscera.[36] Moreover, sexual/gender related violence like rape and partner/child abuse does not exist in the *manga* produced for teenagers.

While Mr. Huang, Mr. Yen, and I think some of the violent scenes are not suitable for young readers, Ms. Yeh and Mr. Ho do not regard most of them as serious ideologies of violence. Therefore, it is important to review the reactions of readers before judging these representations of violence.

4.3 Interviews: Perspectives of Students and Educators

Different from the foregoing textual analysis, which represents the views of adults with sociological training, the comments of student informants are primarily based on their comic book consumption and nascent sense of cultural engagement. By categorizing the results of these interviews into five different themes, the thoughts and ideas of adolescent *manga* readers are brought to light and delineate one of this study's main foci.

4.3.1 Ethnic and Post-colonialist Themes

[36] *Berserk* is a Japanese fantasy *manga* set in a Western medieval world. Like combat-oriented comic books, it depicts brutal fighting, sexual crime, psychosis, and other adult subject matter.

The ethnic and post-colonialist themes for students' interviews mainly focus on three parts: their ideas of Japan, their ideas of the world, and their idea of Taiwan. Each theme is related to several questions I designed. To understand how these Taiwanese teenagers identify race/ ethnicity, I asked "Which character in the Top 5 *manga* do you like best?" and "Which country do you think he/ she belongs to?" Through their explanations, I came to have a better understanding of how they perceive these figures.

Surprisingly, although many people believe that the color of eyes, skin and hair are important clues to people's ethnicity, only one student, Julian, used "hair color" to identify Naruto as someone "probably from western countries because he is blond." Other students used totally different standards, and some related to stereotypes of other countries: Vincent said "When Naruto eats, he eats super-fast! I think he is an African refugee." Sheryl said "Zoro is Japanese. Only Japanese know how to use *katana* [a long blade used by samurai]." Helen made an interesting inference about Americans.

Helen: I think Luffy is Japanese, because the author is Japanese.

Me: What if you judge Luffy from the clothes he's wearing or his lifestyle?

Helen: Then he is probably an American, because he eats a lot of meat.

Me: Why American? Do Americans prefer to eat meat?

Helen: Yes, Americans' main dish is meat.

Four students assumed their favorite characters were Japanese because of their names, while one student, Olin, believed the protagonist Eren to be German. "Because the story happens in…..anyway, it can't be anywhere in Asia."

Only two students, Jessica and Rod, said their favorite characters are "Taiwanese," or wished they were. Jessica said, "We do not have pirates in Taiwan, so it would be cool to have

one."

Rod: If Sasuke were Taiwanese, we wouldn't have to worry about winning an Olympic event!

Me: That sounds like wishful thinking. What if you judge him from his looks or attitude?

Rod: Then he is probably Japanese.

Since these books use many cultural materials, I asked them " Many comic books use Japanese or Western culture in their settings. Did you want to know more about that, after you read them?" Only four girls and one boy said they did not want to know, while most students showed a great interest in learning more information related to their favorite comic books. Actually, some students were already doing that.

Olin: I checked out the three castle walls in *Attack on Titan*. They actually exist in Europe.

Helen: I checked out the Amazon warriors from *One Piece* on Wiki…[The descriptions] are very similar, but *One Piece* simplified it. If the background's too complicated, no one will read it."

Besides cultural materials, students have different strategies to get closer to their favorite comic books. Some of them purchase related products, like Vincent who bought the *Attack on Titan* handbook. Some attend comic activities, like Rod who said he went to the *Doraemon* exhibition. Every teacher noted that students show their enthusiasm for comic characters. "Little girls like to collect pictures of these beautiful figures. To them they are like Korean pop stars. They post these figures everywhere (Mr. Yen)." As a senior comic fan, Ms. Yeh said she sometimes brought students to *Doujin* Parties, and shared information when she taught high school: "Junior high school students have more restrictions. They seldom attend *Doujin*

exhibition, but they download online pictures or read related articles…Many of these pictures are made by other authors, not official pictures, like *Attack on Titan*. Because, you know, the original work is not so beautiful."

The influence of Japanese comic culture is everywhere. Even school campuses are not impregnable. Actually, school is an ideal place to enthuse with your mates about *manga*. Mr. Yen said "Students like to use comic characters for their Facebook, or school, activities. In fact, they made a huge *One Piece* poster in our classroom. Students think it's fun, so they do it. I think this makes sense, since the characters are so beautiful, cute, and expressive." Mrs. Dai and Ms. Yeh also noticed that students use comic characters or imitate certain comic styles when working on school projects. Mrs. Dai recalled a specific case: "My students who graduated last year brought *Cosplay* blue hair to performance class." *Cosplay* supplies costume ideas so that readers can turn themselves into comic characters, but this is not usually the case in a junior high school classroom.

The influence of comic culture is obvious, but what about specifically Japanese culture? Related survey questions were: "Many Japanese locations and much Japanese culture can be found in these comic books. Do you think you learn more about Japan by reading them?" and " Does it make it more likely that you will one day visit Japan to see those things?" Nine students said they have more understanding about Japan after reading Top 5 series. Eleven students said they want to visit Japan after reading. As Jessica said, she learned much Japanese culture through *Case Closed*, because "all the settings are in Japan, and it also shows Japanese schools." Three other students, Aida, Fay, and Julian, said they did not learn "more" about Japan, because they were already interested in it from conversations with a relative's Japanese friend, traveling experiences, and other resources.

Aida: Of course we know about *katana* and that Japanese stuff. It is COMMON. But if you mean actual Japanese locations, then maybe not.

I raised the question about whether the "Japan" shown in comic books is the "real world" Japan. From their traveling experiences, the four teachers agreed that the two worlds are quite different. According to Mr. Dai, "Comic books only show you the good parts. When you are traveling, you can feel kind of lost. When you actually get in contact with the Japanese, you feel worse. In *Case Closed*, all Japanese characters act efficiently and precisely, but in Japan that's not the case." Mr. Yen agreed that comic books sometimes may mislead readers, especially when they do not have much real life experience. Mr. Yen could relate to this, "When I was a kid, I liked *Captain Tsubasa* very much, so I thought the Japanese football team was the best in the world.[37] But when I grew up, I realized that was not the case." Most students have not had a chance to go to Japan, so they cannot compare the comics' version of Japan with the real Japan. However, all the students except Sheryl said they would like, one day, to visit Japan to see those places mentioned in the comic books and especially the weapons used in combat.

Students are interested in Japan, but how about their original Taiwanese culture? Do students sense the difference between the two within their comic reading? The survey question was: "Many characters have Japanese names. Actually, *manga* often use Japanese exclamations to express reactions and emotions. How would you feel if they were translated into Taiwanese?" Only four students said they wouldn't mind, while most students said they wanted the names and onomatopoeia to remain Japanese.

Sheryl: It is so *weird* to use Taiwanese names.

[37] *Captain Tsubasa* is a famous soccer *manga* from the 1990s. The eponymous hero becomes a professional soccer player through hard work and fierce competition.

Jessica: I think you should keep them Japanese, because those are the originals. If you change them, those Japanese features will change, and maybe that is not what the author wants!"

To students, it is important to honor the author's intentions. Most believe that the names and onomatopoeia should be kept in Japanese, although they cannot understand what they mean literally. As Aida said, "I think the plot is the most important thing. Japanese names are just the representations of the characters."

Most students feel Japanese words do not prevent them from enjoying the plot, but would Taiwanese comic books, which use their own language and culture, be more attractive? Their responses were negative. When I asked, "Do you read Taiwanese comic books? How do they compare to Japanese *manga*?," there was only one student, Dana, who said "Some Japanese comic books are good, and some Taiwanese comic books are also good." The unanimous opinion of the other eleven was that Japanese comic books are much better than Taiwanese comic books. In fact, only four students could recall specific titles of Taiwanese comic books. For the majority, Taiwanese comic books, as a genre, were forgettable.

Some students said that is because Japanese authors have more experience.

Vincent: *Manga* have a long history, so they know how to do it. In Taiwan, it's just starting, so there is no such experience.

Aida: Well, the moon in a foreign land always seems bigger.[38] So Japanese is better. In fact, a lot of authors are from China and Japan. We read a lot of their stuff. They are really different from Taiwanese work.

Me: What is the difference?

Aida: Foreign authors are more skillful. They depict things more realistically than

[38] A Taiwanese saying that means whatever comes from foreign countries must be better than the local product.

Taiwanese authors. When they create a battle, it really looks like a battle.

Some other students agreed.

Helen: Japanese authors' drawings are better. Their figures never look weird."

York: The topics of Japanese comics have more variety.

Julian: I watch Taiwanese animation like *Wild Boar-Flying squirrel-Sakinu.*[39] I like it, but Taiwanese comics and animation are still too weak. Now I prefer Japanese comics and cartoons.

Me: Why is Japanese better?

Julian: Because most Taiwanese comics and cartoons are too local. Those things may be funny to us, but if you publish them outside this country, no one will get it.

Me: Japanese comics sometimes have those problems too, like homophone jokes.

Julian: Yes, but not as many as we do. Many Taiwanese cartoons use local language, so only we can understand them. Besides, Taiwanese comics and cartoons always want to tell you what is right and what is wrong. Most foreign readers just want to enjoy a wonderful story!

Senior comic readers like Mr. Yen and Ms. Yeh agree that Japanese comic books are better quality.

Ms. Yeh: Some Taiwanese authors are too 'Japanesey', while others use local materials without making them attractive enough. I think Taiwanese online comic books and *Donjin* works [those done by non-professional artists] are better than those that get published.

However, would their preference for Japanese products influence students' cultural identity? Many teachers agree that *manga* consumption somehow makes students crazy about anything

[39] *Wild Boar-Flying squirrel-Sakinu* was originally a novel by an indigenous Taiwanese author, Sakinu, who describes his youth among other Taiwanese tribesman, hunting in the mountains.

from Japan, but Mrs. Dai casts the net wider: "I do not think students have that sense…because our national consciousness is not as strong as Japan's, so students would prefer whatever comes from other countries." Mr. Dai, however, believes that Japanese comic books have considerable influence on students' cultural identities: "Of course, that is how Japanese style becomes the fashion. It has enormous impact! You could call it a *cultural invasion.*"

Ms. Yeh: Some students bring a lot of Japanese terms from *manga* directly into their daily lives, like '問題發言'(problematic announcement). They also use Japanese comic names as nicknames on the Internet like '神樂(Kagura)' or '神無月(Kamnazuki)'. "

From the above findings, it is worth noting that students and teachers, teenagers and adults, have different ideas about the ideologies of ethnicity, race, images of different countries, and cultural identities. Their perspectives will be compared with other findings and accrue additional meaning in Chapter 5.

4.3.2 Gender Theme

Compared to the ethnic theme, students react more strongly to the gender theme. As the result of our dialogue, some students changed their answers several times, and presented complex thoughts about what they had experienced.

As described in the foregoing section, I asked "Which character in the Top 5 *manga* do you like best?" Nearly all the students' favorite characters were male, except Ruby, who picked a female warrior, Mikasa, in *Attack on Titan*. So I asked a further question to challenge their ideas.

Me: If he becomes a *she* or she becomes a *he*, would you still like this character?"

Fay: In that case, I probably won't support Naruto because *she* will be too weak.

Me: But if *her* ability is the same?

Fay: No, I would feel disgusted about that.

Other students said it wouldn't matter if the characters' genders were changed.

Julian: If Naruto became a girl, I would still support her. What I like about her/him is attitude, not gender.

Jessica: If Luffy were female, she would be a highlight! It would prove that girls are just as awesome. Gender does not make any difference."

It seems that students are very open to the gender issue. However, when I asked, "Why are all the main characters males?" and "What if they were females?" their answers were very different. All twelve students said that they would feel uncomfortable if a female led the plot, but their answers were not inflexible. Some of them changed their perspective after I asked further questions, while some remained the same. Most students' first answer showed the strength of stereotypes, as in the following:

Jessica: I think (pause), if the main characters are male, more readers would be interested in reading *manga* because EVERYONE thinks boys are good at fighting and girls are too gentle. So comic books give people the feeling that the main characters must be male.

Me: So you agree with that? You really think that the main characters should be boys because they have to do the fighting?

Jessica: No, I disagree (laughs). I believe that girls can be tough too.

Olin partially agreed that, while some comic books may be fine when the main character's gender is switched, others cannot: "You cannot change *Case Closed*, because it's set in a modern society. If you change that, the perspective of main characters will change." Aida also

partially agreed that, in some cases, girls may be able to be the main characters: "If he makes the girl character a tomboy, maybe the story would be more interesting" Julian's response reflects a similar idea of the difference between girls and boys.

Julian: I actually read some works with female main characters…I feel that the plot is more straightforward when boys are the main characters. If it is a girl, there will be a lot of unnecessary descriptions.

Me: Really? Like what?

Julian: Like a lot of nuisance, like those girls' thoughts. Actually, not many comic book authors are female.

It is clear that students believe that a person's personality and abilities are effected by his or her gender, but what about teachers? Mr. Dai agreed with the students: "Since Asian culture is patriarchal, I think it is difficult to reverse the male dominant ideas in our generation or the next one. I think it is important to respect females but, realistically, it is hard to change. Especially after the eighth grade, when students start to learn physics and chemistry. You can see that the boys' ability to think rationally is better than a girl's." Other teachers did not mention the gender difference, but Ms. Yeh does give her idea about male leading roles in comic books: "Okay. Girls may not just be princesses, waiting to be rescued. Men may see them as companions or assistants, but, you know, the Leader will still be male."

I also wanted to understand how students interpret the body images of different genders in these comic books. So I used two popular characters as examples: "In *One Piece* or *Naruto*, women like Nami and Tsunade dress to look "hot." Do you think they are too sexy?" None of the students felt they were too sexy. Four students said their dressing style is one of their personal characteristics.

York: Nami is a pirate, and the weather is as hot as summer. Of course she wears less .

Me: What about Tsunade?

York: Well, ninjas should dress light. Anyway, the plot is more important than their clothes.

Ruby said, "It is common. People dress that way on the beach too." While Fay, Jessica, and Dana said it was different from the way ordinary people dressed.

Fay: If it is in comic books, it is okay. But in real life, it would be a bit abnormal.

Aida: It is normal. They are created by Japanese.

Me: You mean it is normal because they are from Japan?

Aida: (Laughing) Because people say Japan is the "XX Empire" so…[40]

Me: You mean their porn industry? But not all the girls in *manga* dress like that!

Aida: Well, I mean, it is probably the common sense of today's society. In the past, if a girl dressed like that, people would think her shameless, but today you feel okay, because a lot of people do it. Standards gradually become acceptable so, today, they wouldn't be drawn and quartered.

To know how teachers think, I showed them the page where Naruto turns himself into a naked girl in *Naruto* Vol. 1. The male and female teachers' answers were diametrically opposed. The two male teachers thought it fine for students.

Mr. Yen: Come on, people expose much more than that on TV and the Internet. Compared with that, I think the sexual stuff in comic books is present in a much more naïve way.

However, the two female teachers disagreed.

[40] "XX" is pop culture language. It has the same meaning as the beep sound in American media. Usually it applies to sexual taboos and strong language. On the internet, people joke about Japan as the "XX Empire."

Ms. Yeh: Of course, this kind of gender-switching is to attract male readers! Otherwise, why on earth would a common woman want to dress like that?

Mrs. Dai: Some girls are very sensitive about such things. They would come to me and tell me 'The boys are reading pornographic *manga*!'

Also related to body images, I ask students "If the scenes of women taking baths in *One Piece* or *Bleach* were of men taking baths, would it make any difference?" Some boys, like Vincent and Dana, avoided including explanations along with their positive responses. In all, five students said if it came to men taking baths, their feelings would change. Olin believed that "maybe that will attract more girl readers." While, for York, "The feeling would be different…uh, in comic books, people would be more interested in seeing naked girls, if it were boys…it would considered *gay*. However, seven students said it would not be that different.

Jessica: I don't really care about who is taking bath. I usually skip it.

Fay: If they are real people, I would not feel that good. In comic books, it would be still a little bit weird…but if something important happens because of it, then that is fine.

Some students like Rod, placed certain conditions on their acceptance. When I asked him this question, he laughed: "Definitely not! You mean those boys would show 'that part'? "

Me: No, of course not. It would be covered by smoke, like what they do to girls' bodies.

Rod: Okay, that won't make a difference."

Apart from body images, I also wanted to know if characters' sexual behavior or intrigue would be something students noticed and reacted to. Therefore I asked, "In One Piece and Case Closed, Mori and Sanji react dramatically when they see beautiful women. Is this different from the real world? What do you think?" Four students felt their reactions were exaggerated but that it made the story funnier.

Helen: It is inappropriate to do that in the real life but, in comic books, it makes the characters seem lively and funny.

York: Their reactions are the same as ordinary men, but the way they talk is unusual.

Olin: There is a lot of this kind of behavior in my classroom.

Aida: In my classroom, a lot of boys act like that but you seldom see men accost beautiful women on the street.

Of course, gender issues are not confined to men or women's issues. In some comic books, there are other sexual representations too, like the transgender character in *One Piece*. I asked, "What do you think about the 'shemales' in *One Piece*? How about in real life?" However, since not all the students knew this character, I only asked Class A, and only three students answered.

Olin: I think shemales are people who want to transform to another sex…They are funny.

Aida: His personality and physiology may be different from…For example, he may be biologically male, but with a tender heart, that is, a social stereotype[41] that is closer to women than to men. They are also human beings. No different from us. They are just special, and do not match our standards.

Jessica: They have their own characteristics, but in real life, if there are too many of them, I am afraid that the world may lose its balance.

Me: Oh right, the shemale leader in *One Piece* said she wants to transform everybody. Then, you agree that those men want to have women's characteristics?

Jessica: No, they do not respect their own bodies, I mean, their parents give them perfect

[41] Social stereotype is not a common term for junior high school students, so I asked her "You mention about stereotypes. Can you say more about that? " She used her own experience as an answer. "Like me, if I don't sit properly, my mom would say 'Can't you sit like a girl?' While sometimes, my brother would sit like a girl, and my mom would pat his butt and shout 'Sit properly!' "

forms, why do they want to change that? If everyone transforms from male to female, or from female to male, then how can I tell that a girl standing in front of me is really a girl? I can't!

To have a deeper understanding about students' comprehension of the LGBT phenomenon, I asked a hypothetical question about the BL/ GL plots: "These *manga* all tell 'boy loves girl' stories. Would you accept them if there were gays or lesbians in future plots? How about in real life?" Interestingly, only two students said they would not accept any BL/ GL plots in comic books and/or in real life, while other students said they might accept, but only under certain conditions.

Vincent: If their purpose is to tell us that we should get rid of gender bias and respect others, I would accept… But if it is just romance, then I would not accept.

Ruby: It doesn't matter; they are just dating other human beings. In my class, there are also a lot of boys who call each other 'husband' or 'wife' for fun. They even use the 'princess carry.'[42] To me, it is not a big deal.

There are students like Sheryl and Fay, who accept BL/ GL plots in comic books, but not in real life.

Fay: I do not accept Girl Love, but Boy Love is fine.

Me: Why?

Fay: Girls with girls are disgusting. Boys with boys are better."

Me: Then what is your feeling about them in real life?

Fay: They embarrass me. I wouldn't disagree with them, but they'd better think twice before they try to do something.

Rod exhibited the strongest reaction.

[42] "Princess carry" is a Taiwanese pop culture term, which is used to describe a male carrying a female in his arms.

Rod (frowning): I can't accept it. It sounds so *gay*.

Me : Well, it does not only sound gay. It *is* gay.

Rod: Oh…then that would be too weird. I never read that kind of stuff before.

Me: But there are gays in the real life too.

Rod: But I haven't seen one.

Me: What if you do?

Rod: I will walk away.

Ms. Yeh reads BL comic books too. When I asked her, "Do you think students read BL or GL according to their gender?" She said "I think today many girls read them just because their peers do, as a status symbol. To some people, it may also be a projection of their own gender. You know, some girls are dissatisfied with themselves, so they project themselves on a male's body. " Mr. Yen's answer showed he believed there are differences between genders relating to gay and lesbian *manga*. "I know that girls like to read BL, while boys seldom read GL. Maybe it is because they would mock each other. At least, if I notice boys are reading that, I will call them to my office. (Pauses, then laughs) Wait! That sounds like sexism! Oh, I am horrible! But anyway, I know girls like to see their favorite male characters being intimate. Although I do not understand this, I respect it."

Compared to the ethnic theme, gender issues stimulated more intensive reactions from students. They seemed less certain than when responding to survey questions about the cultural theme, sometimes changing their attitudes during our conversations, or having opposite perspectives about similar ideologies. That is why I want to find an explanation for these confusing but interesting answers.

4.3.3 Class Themes

The representations of socioeconomic class in the Top 5 comic books are probably the most ambiguous ideologies to identify. The members of my panel of experts had different ideas about the class ideologies these *manga* presented, as did the students. To avoid the possible conflicts between social class and economic class, I started by asking the students, "Which character in the Top 5 do you like best? Is he or she rich?" and "Of these main characters, which are poorer than you? Which are richer than you? Which are similar to you?" However, even though many students mentioned the same characters, their judgments ran a broad gamut of opinion.

Shinichi in *Case Closed* is the one that most students agreed about, in terms of status. Seven students judged him rich, while five consigned him to middle class status. Aida, who picked him as her favorite character, said, "He is probably super rich. His father is a novelist, and his mother is a famous actress. They all dress in expensive clothes." On the other hand, Helen thought he was middle class because "Although he is smart, he can earn bonuses from catching bad guys. Now that he is a child again, he has no job, just like me. "

Seven students thought that Luffy in *One Piece* was from a wealthy family while five categorized him as middle class:

York: He has a lot of jewelry.

Fay: When they lose a ship, they can afford to build a new one and Nami has a lot of clothes.

Helen: He is not rich, because he eats a lot and always wears the same clothes.

Dana vacillated, decided he was poor and then changed her mind to middle-class, while Jessica upgraded him from middle-class to wealthy. She believed "He must be rich, otherwise

how can they sail for so many years without starving? They have big meals every day!"

Four students thought Naruto middle class, while four believed him poor. Fay picked Naruto as her favorite character but said, "I don't think he is rich, he is too silly." Sheryl claimed Naruto is just like her "because he only eats noodle soup." On the other hand, Eren in *Attack on Titan* was judged middle class by three students, upper class by one student, and working class by five students. The reason why most students thought he was poor is "They are fighting and killing every day, the city is totally destroyed and never recovers." (Fay) "Eren has to pick firewood every day, and his house is very small." (Rod) Only Olin judged him rich "because his father is a doctor."

Since not all the interviewed students read *Bleach*, only five students mentioned Ichigo. Three students said he is middle class, one student judged him rich, and one student did not give any judgment. The only one who ranked him upper class is Rod: "Rich? In *Bleach*, Ichigo's house seems huge." According to Olin, "He is a little bit richer than Naruto, because his life style is not so sloppy. You can tell from his room."

After they finished ranking, I asked "Before I asked these questions, did you compare yourself to these characters?" All the students said they never paid attention to the financial status of their favorite characters.

Julian: I would rather think all the characters are the same as me. Because there are not detailed descriptions in the plot, I assumed they were *average*, like me.

Other students also claimed they do not care whether the protagonists are rich or poor.

Ruby: I read comic books for relaxation. I am too tired to consider these things.

Besides their economic status, I also wanted to know how they saw their heroes' social status, generally based, in Asia, on family and kinship. Therefore, I asked "In *One Piece*,

Naruto and *Bleach*, the main characters are powerful because their fathers are special people. If their fathers were normal people, like farmers or fishermen, would you still like the main characters as much as you do now?" Eleven out of twelve students said the changes did not influence their support, while one student thought otherwise.

York: It would make the main characters less noticeable.

Some students believed that, even if the main characters' fathers were not socially prominent, it would not influence the plot.

Jessica: That means they are willing to improve themselves. Although they may be normal people, they work hard to become special.

Ruby, Dana, and Sheryl agreed with her: "Their achievement is still the same. It has no relationship with their family background." (Sheryl)

Four students believe family background may influence the plot. Julian and Aida both believed the protagonists' personality or habits may change. Julian used Luffy as an example: "If Luffy's father were an ordinary fisherman, he would be more interested in catching fish. Thus his habits and values would be different, and his life style too." Rod even believed the influence could be mental.

Rod: Yes, take Naruto — his will to fight is inherited from his father.

Me: But ordinary ninja may have the desire to fight as well.

Rod: Yes, but not that much. Maybe, if his father were just an ordinary ninja, Naruto would not want to become the *Hokage*.

To see how well the teachers understood their students' thought processes, I asked them whether they believed the adolescents may be influenced by traditional class ideologies to think that their personal success is inevitably linked to their parents' social status. All except Mr. Yen

believed they did not.

Mr. Dai: Students would not be influenced by that kind of thinking.

Me: Then what do you think may influence students' understanding of social economic class?

Mr. Dai: That's hard to define. In today's Taiwanese society, if you work hard you will have a chance to be somebody. This is probably the best part of Taiwanese society: that anyone can change his fate by hard work. Actually, there are a lot of cases of such upward mobility among the faculty in this school.[43]

Mrs. Dai and Ms. Yeh also thought that the protagonists' exalted lifestyles would not influence students' thinking, because it is simply part of the *manga*'s artifice to attract readers.

Mrs. Yeh: People who read *Harry Potter* don't think magic is real. It is just a fantasy. All those main characters begin as normal people so that students can identify with their characters. But you know, people all wish to be something special, so that is why these characters gradually develop special abilities and backgrounds. This gives students hope that they too have something special, something not yet noticed.

The next two questions I asked students are interrelated. The first one: "In *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan*, there are several critiques about the rich. Do you agree with them?" The second: "In *Case Closed,* many poor people do illegal things. Do you agree that the detectives should jail them for their crimes?" I wanted to know if and how they linked class images to their related social phenomena. Eight students agreed that the punishment that Luffy and his crew gave the rich and the powerful was justified. Only four students disagreed.

Vincent: Kings should love their people, not bully them.

[43] One thing that should be noted is that most teachers in Tablet High are over thirty and, as such, may have very different backgrounds and come from different social strata than their students.

Ruby (laughing): I agree with them. I hope we can do the same thing in the real world. Olin, York, and Julian also shared this opinion. When I asked, "Do you think this reflects on Taiwanese society?," their responses were unequivocally positive.

However, people who disagreed with Luffy's harshness toward the elite, were equally emphatic.

Aida: If you travel somewhere where there are rich people and somebody says they are bad guys, you should ask more people before you judge them.

Rod: I do not agree that they should criticize people that much. They barely climb on the floor, before they get killed."

Jessica: I think it depends. Some rich guys or powerful people are good.

Me: Can you find some examples of this in *manga*?

Jessica: (Hesitantly) Well…there seem to be none.

As to what students think about the relationship between poverty and crime? None of the twelve I interviewed had any sympathy for criminal activity.

Jessica: You should rely on hard work, you must not harm other people.

Helen: If you create a situation, you should work on it. You shouldn't bother other people.

Me: So the most important thing is your behavior, not your financial circumstances?

Helen: Yes, everyone has a different personality, so people do things differently.

Most of the students had similar arguments about the link between responsibility and professional stance. As to whether punishment is justified for 'shady activities,' most were adamantly pro-law.

Aida: If you have hands and feet, you should get a job. If you think that you do not have any skill, then you at least you can be a coolie. Maybe you won't earn a lot, but you

will have something to eat. ”

Me: So you think poor people who break the law deserve the punishment they get?

Aida: If they have already repented and the main characters are still severe with them, that may be too much.

Me: So it depends on the criminal’s attitude.

In sum, class ideologies in comic books are probably the most difficult concepts to identify. Most students have difficulty evaluating the socioeconomic class to which they belong. This could be related to their own lifestyles and social experience which we will discuss below, in Chapter 5.

4.3.4 Thematic Violence

To understand how students feel about the violence presented in Japanese comic books, I asked them “Some people say comic books are too violent. Do you agree? Does this violence influence the way you behave? ” Since this is a common critique in the mainstream media, it is important to know how students regard the role of violence as novice cultural critics. Most of my informants agreed that some comic books are violent, but they did not believe that their exposure to *manga* would influence them to condone or commit violent crimes, as the mainstream media intimated.

Aida: I don’t think all comic books should be labeled as violent or sexual material. It depends.

Sheryl: I don’t read that much and I quickly forget what I read.

However, some students remembered reacting to specifically violent scenes.

Rod: In *Attack on Titan*, there are always people eaten by the giants with lots of blood

spray!

Helen: I only choose normal comic books. I do not like those with extreme sex or violence.

Me: So, if someone says comic books are violent, would you tell them "You can choose not to read the violent ones?

Helen: No, because some people like them.

Me: Would that influence people's thinking?

Helen: I do not read those but people who do may have weird personalities. They are probably addicted to weird plots.

An incident in Taipei in 2014 focused on a youth who randomly killed people on the subway and later was accused of being under the influence of violent comic books, I asked some students their opinions about the case.[44] They all disagreed with the accusations of the mainstream media. York: Some people did not read comic books, and they murdered others too! Chieh Cheng had mental problems.

Olin: The media just wants to create hot issues. Some politicians criticize comics to win parents' votes, because many parents do not allow their children to read comic books.

Me: So do you think if parents read comic books along with their children, they might change their minds?

Olin: Yes, because many parents do not understand *manga* so when they occasionally notice their kids are reading them, they criticize them.

Me: How would you explain your devotion to *manga* to those adults?

[44] The May, 2014 Taipei Metro attack involved Chieh Cheng (鄭捷), a 21 year-old university student who allegedly killed four innocent bystanders (Wikipedia, 2015). Since Chieh Cheng was addicted to violent comic books and video games, the mainstream media condemned his brutal behaviors as caused by them. After this fatal incident, the central government asked the police to "investigate" comic books and video games as potentially provocative elements (ETtoday, 2014). One of Cheng's favorite comic book series was *Case Closed*.

Olin: I would give them one and ask them to read it. Actually, my parents are very cool when it comes to *manga*. My mom is actually a bigger *Naruto* fan than me.

To understand more specifically about their feelings concerning different levels of violence, I asked, "Do you think all the bloody combat in comics is too violent?" Eleven out of the twelve students said it was not. Rod said, "Scratches don't count. Even though there is violence, it is not excessive."

Many students consider fighting as drama rather than violence.

Aida: Sometimes the plot *needs* fighting and bloodshed. That's not violence."

Me: What do you mean when you say 'the plot needs it?'

Aida: Even when they fight recklessly, there is no bleeding. Is that realistic?"

Olin and Julian also referred to their daily lives in response.

Julian: When we fall down we bleed, and we go to the doctor, people don't get unnecessarily excited. It has nothing to do with violence. So I think this is fine.

Ruby: I think I'm used to it, but sometimes the bloodshed is too graphic. At the end of *Attack on Titan,* Vol. 1, I was shocked to see Eren's mother spurting blood. It was horrible!"

Then I asked "Sometimes *manga* characters are cut in half or their hands and legs are severed. What do you think about that?" Ten students said they felt it was violent, but acceptable. The other two, York and Fay, had different views.

York: It is nothing. It just makes it more dramatic.

Fay: It doesn't disgust me as much as real violence.

When nothing in their lives is comparable, *manga* violence soon becomes commonplace.

Olin: It's okay. After you get used to it, it's fine. Maybe in the beginning, you may feel a

little bit violent."

Aida: I think it's fine as long as the author doesn't draw too many details, like how the blood vessels explode, or the blood emerges. My family prefers love and peace.

Me: Why do you say that?

Aida: If my mom notices I am reading *manga,* she will yell 'What are you reading!' and throw it away.

Some students discussed their fantasies.

Me: If a character's body is cut into pieces or his hands and legs are severed, is that violence?

Rod: Yes, it is violent.

Me: How does seeing such images make you feel?

Rod: (Laughing) I think the characters are cool and I wish I could do what they do.

Me: So you are envious?

Rod: Well, a little bit.

I also asked teachers about whether they think the violent representations in comic books influence students. Mrs. Dai did not give me a clear answer, but Mr. Dai and Ms. Yeh believed the influence was minimal, while Mr. Yen did not. Mr. Dai and Ms. Yeh maintained that violence is acceptable if the plot calls for it.

Ms. Yeh: I do not believe it has negative influence. Current media entertainment, like novels, movies and films always include a certain amount of sex and violence. Even American talk shows have dirty jokes, don't they? If it were always nice and peaceful, like preaching, no one would watch. I think it is because human beings want something special, something like extreme sex and violence, because they are

not the experiences that everyone has, so they excite us, entertain us.

Another teacher saw the prevalence of violence as threatening to the social fabric.

Mr. Yen: I think it is bad for students to read violent *manga*. It makes them believe that violence can solve everything. Even if their goals are good, it would be easy for them to say 'I have to help my friends, so I have to use violence.' These comic books do not tell students 'you should negotiate or look to your elders for help.' Their message is 'If I believe I am right, I can punch other people.' I do not think that is good.

Vincent had an argument that is very close to Mr. Yen's idea. He said "Two people fighting can be considered violence, because they could actually communicate. But, *manga* wouldn't be fun if all they showed were people talking." Indeed, ideologies of violence become more complex when you consider their social and emotional implications. Since most *manga* fans understand they represent an escape from everyday tasks and behaviors, the logic of the comic world needs to be clarified.

4.3.5 Overview of Japanese Comic Books

In the last part of our interviews, I asked students different questions to ascertain how they felt about comic books generally, and if they thought comic books should be seen as educational resources. To understand if and what they have learned from the comic books, I asked, "Many people think we can learn from comic books. What do you think?" Most students used *One Piece* and *Case Closed* as examples, to prove that they had derived information and/or moral values from *manga*. Only Sheryl said she had learned nothing: "Because their plots are always the same. They are always hitting or arresting bad guys."

Six students said they had learned things like the importance of friendship, teamwork, detective techniques, persistence, that justice is swift, and crime and punishment inextricable. Only one, Aida, said "comics are full of drawings, so people can learn how to draw." Vincent said he probably learned some knowledge about crime from Case Closed, but he "can't remember it anymore."

Since many students mentioned moral values, does that mean they actually learn them from comic books and apply them to their everyday lives? My question: "In comic books, the main characters always win. Do you think this is true in real life?" Eight out of ten students believed that it does not always work this way in the real world.

Olin: That's impossible, you won't always be the winner in life, unless you are a rich man's son and don't have to work for a living.

Next, I asked "Do people come to the aid of their friends in the real world as they do in comic books?"

Aida: Not in the real world, even if they know they need help. People are concerned about their own safety and vulnerability. Life is more complicated.

Julian: I do not think the rule works in the real life. There's a saying: "Work hard, lose your job; do very little, get a promotion!"

Me: So real life is very different from *manga*?

Julian: It's up to you to make the best of it.

Me: So you believe, if you do something good, there will be good returns?

Julian: You can be honest and a fool. You have to find some good opportunities. You can't count on being lucky just because you do the right thing.

Students seem to face real life situations in ways that have little or nothing to do with comic

books. Although they claim they get knowledge from comic books, they also have to "read the world," as Freire put it. Sometimes, these values interrelate. For instance, I asked, "Would you like to have a super power like the manga heroes? If so, what kind?" Six students said they would:

Julian: So I can save the world, and solve the crisis.

Rod: I would use *ninjutsu* to catch criminals!

Olin: As a giant I can eat whoever makes me angry. Or I can attack China!

Others weren't so sure:

Ruby: Superpower might bring me a lot of trouble. I don't want to be killed!

Aida: I want to be a normal person, because I do not know whether the superpower would disappear someday. If it is gone, then I won't be popular anymore, I'll be lost."

Another question I asked was, "Why do you think some schools prohibit students' use of comic books?" Only three students said they disagreed with schools that prohibit reading comics at school, three agreed that schools have the right to ban *manga*, and six students thought that, while schools can prohibit students from reading comic books, they should not confiscate them.

Rod, who disagreed with the prohibition, said "If there is testing in the former class, I might want to read some comics during the break time to relax. It doesn't harm anyone." Jessica's answer was antithetical: "It's okay for schools to set these guidelines. School is a place for study. In fact there's no time for reading comics because the academic pressure is so heavy. You can read at home to relax, but you should concentrate on your studies at school." When I asked her whether teachers can take away their comic books, she replied "It's okay, because if you don't take them out in class, teachers won't take them away." Olin had a different answer.

"I don't totally agree with the confiscation. What if you just bought it on the way to school? What if you bought it several days before, and just forgot to take it out of your backpack?" Ruby also said, "I do not understand why teachers should confiscate comic books. Unless people read them in class, otherwise I think it is fine to read them during break."

Another question I asked was "Why should schools allow students to read novels but ban comic books?" Three students, Vincent, Fay, and Dana, said: "Because novels are like textbooks. They are very wordy."

Julian: Many novels are recommended by teachers of Chinese language. They want you to read literature. There are only dialogues in comic books.

Helen: Maybe because novels have fewer pictures, and the stories are not that funny. Comic books are too funny and interesting, teachers do not want students to think about them during the class and have bad academic performance.

Rod: Maybe the school wants us to read some useful books, like geology.

Me: If comic books were more scientific or literate would they be accepted?

Rod: Yes.

The teachers, Mr. Dai, Mrs. Dai and Mr. Yen, said they set certain restrictions to students' reading comic books.

Mr. Dai: My school banned R-rated comic books, but allows students to read the general ones. However, teachers have the power to ban other comic books as well. I think only the 8th grade students should be allowed to read a little bit.

Me: Is this policy related to the students' academic study?

Mr. Dai: Since the academic pressure is huge, I seldom find students reading comic books in my class.

Mr. Yen, who is a comic lover, also bans comic reading at school.

Mr. Yen: Actually, I just took *One Piece* from one of my students. He asked me 'Can I read this during break?' I replied, 'Only after school.' I do not allow students to read at school, but sometimes I use comic characters as examples to let them know I read them too.

Me: Is it is because of academic pressure?

Mr. Yen: I think that is part of the reason. However, even without the pressure, students still should not read comic books because they have no educational value."

Mr. Yen also used literature to make a comparison.

Mr. Yen: After reading ten comic books, you may get something of value, but it can't be compared with reading meaningful pros. Reading comic books is like drinking Coke, the only nutrition you get is calories."

Mrs. Dai: There was one student who bothered me for three years. She had read comic books since she was a child and she had a big collection. After noticing that her academic performance was negatively affected, her mother banned her from reading them, so she hid those comic books in her and her classmates' cabinets. She was a very gloomy, almost lifeless, girl with dark circles under her eyes who seemed more interested in sex than the other students.

I asked Ms. Yeh if students learn more from reading novels than reading comic books.

Ms. Yeh: This is a bias. Why novels? You can read comic books much faster than novels and not waste time. Furthermore, comic books and novels are both forms of entertainment. The only thing important is whether they make you happy. If you do learn something, it should be seen as bonus.

Me: What is the difference between comic books and novels?

Ms. Yeh: Comic books are pictures, so they won't help you learn better writing skills as novels may, but both of them increase their readers' imaginations.

It is clear from the preceding pages how students, teachers, comic book lovers, and non-comic book lovers take different positions. Even pedagogical colleagues may have totally different ideas about the potential value of comic books as educational fodder. It will be worth recalling these differences as we continue our investigation in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5 INTO THE GREAT COMIC BOOK ERA:

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

In Chapter 4, I presented different perspectives of comic book readers and non-readers, many in their own words. As I attempted to translate and transcribe the insights and opinions of students, teachers, and librarians (as well as my own as an educational researcher and a culture worker) it became apparent that what seemed serious problems to some people were held and handled with much more humor and grace by others. These diverse reactions to the material reminded me that conflicts of consciousness exist both in comic book culture and in the fields of education and cultural studies that are just beginning to account for the phenomenon of *manga* and some of its commercial and sociological spillover. This kind of tension has existed for decades between teachers and students, parents and teenagers. It also exists between generations of teachers and groups of students, and may flare up between teachers and an educational researcher who suddenly appears, asking to interview their students about something they do not espouse or think has any business in their classroom.

Of course, besides such observable differences, there are also many similarities between the different groups. Libraries may agree with teachers' standards, and students may agree with teachers' goals and means. In the present study, all these participants, including me, would come to change their old opinions and to accept new ones by posing problems and engaging in dialogue and reflection. In this eminently Freirian process, we all learned something, albeit inexpertly, or at least noticed there were many things we did not know, from the tangle of mutually provocative ideologies to our own habitual views of the world.

In this chapter, I am going to combine both theory and practice, to discuss the rich results of

surveys, textual analysis and interviews by using the ideological perspective on *manga* in particular and Japanese cultural influence in general, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Since the influence of comic books is a theme that connects both to the different ideologies and to Japanese cultural influence, I will use them as categories for discussion in the following sections as well as identifying how each idea influences students in different ways. In analyzing the different themes revealed in Chapter 4, I identified the following subcategories: 1) the ideology and influence of ethnicity; 2) the ideology and influence of gender; 3) the ideology and influence of class; 4) the ideology and influence of violence;
5) Japanese cultural influence and, 6) comic books and critical pedagogy. With the help of Freirian critical theory mentioned in Chapter 2, I am going to analyze what Japanese comic books have brought to Taiwanese young readers and speculate about their potential role as a valid source of information in the educational field. Finally, I suggest that it is possible to use Freirian pedagogy to introduce Taiwanese students to a critical-analytical lens with which they can demythologize the often sub-textual, ideological and graphic subtleties of the *manga* they love.

5.1 The Ideology and Influence of Ethnicity

Ideologies of ethnicity are one of the most important themes that this research examines. What can be gleaned from the representations of race and ethnicity in Japanese comic books is not only related to racial equality but also to post-colonialist ideas. After engaging in textual analysis of the Top 5 *manga* and transcribing and coding the interviews I conducted, what I want to discuss are the ways the Japanese portray themselves vis-à-vis other world ethnic groups and, what is even more important, the way young readers combine the impressions they receive when

absorbing the comic books' plots and illustrations and then comparing and combining them with their own life experience to produce meaning.

5.1.1 Japanese Images in Comic Books

From textual analysis, it is clear that all the selected series contain a plethora of Japanese images. These images include Japanese characters, who exist in all the Top 5 series; Japanese mysteries and folk tales that are often used to specify and enhance story settings; Japanese traditional skills, especially martial arts like *ninjutsu* or *kendo*; Japanese cultural products ranging from traditional kimonos to their state-of-the-art schools; Japanese locations which are often substantially transformed and given other names; and Japanese codes, especially *bushido*, a military etiquette from feudal times that purportedly values honor above life itself.

Since all *manga* authors are Japanese; it is small wonder that Japanese cultural representations, with which many Japanese readers are already familiar, are employed as key establishers of ambiance and setting. However, it also raises questions about how readers who are not Japanese understand and interpret such ethnocentric content. Namely, is it meant to represent the manga producers' vision of an ideal and, in some cases, apocalyptic Japan? If so, what kinds of extra-textual messages can be implied from such quintessentially Japanese images and concepts?

In the course of and, later, when processing my interviews with student informants, it became clear that the great majority were aware that Top 5 *manga* contain a lot of Japanese cultural references. They knew most of these by heart; there was no need for them to go back to the *manga* themselves or consult Google to check on or define them—they had absorbed and remembered them, often in impressive detail. Here, for instance, is a snatch of dialogue from

my interview with Helen.

Me: Do you think you learn more about Japan by reading these comic books?

Helen: Yes, of course. In the beginning, I did not understand much about Japanese culture. But, after I read many *manga*, I had a much clearer picture.

Me: Can you give me an example?

Helen: Like *kimonos*. Before, I had no idea what they looked like. But after I saw them in the comic books, I went on line to see what they looked like. The *manga* illustrations were similar to the photographs.

Helen exemplifies the extent to which Japanese comic books can be used as stimuli for auto-didactic learning. Some of her classmates admitted their fascination with the weapons, school uniform styles and background locations that appeared in Top 5 *manga*. These telling details are part and parcel of the enormous cultural influence of Japanese comic books on Taiwanese students. By employing provocative cultural images, emphasizing traditional knowledge, and placing information about their traditional spirits in the mouths of compellingly attractive characters, *manga* authors and illustrators stimulate the epistemic curiosity of intelligent Taiwanese adolescents.

It is difficult to tell whether these cultural images, knowledge, and spirits are added for instructive purposes. However, the psychological effect of such materials presented in widely-diffused and affordable comic books is to create the idea of a superior Japanese sensibility in the minds of impressionable readers throughout Asia and the world at large. Japanese psychologist Hiroshi Minami writes, “In Japan, there is not much paranoia, but many Japanese exhibit hysterical behavior. They have a heightened sense of their own importance. They want to present the best image of themselves, and they are very self-centered” (Minami,

2014, 255). I believe such "hysterical behaviors" are also connected to the collective ideologies Japanese authors present in their work, particularly their sense of national consciousness. In order to match the high racial standards of Japanese readers, the main characters and protagonists must have Japanese characteristics. This kind of national consciousness is not that unusual in an Asian context, since examples of what Minami calls "hysterical behavior" can also be found in Taiwanese and Chinese culture. The characteristics I refer to are thematic ideas, presented in *manga* plots and story lines and, as such, tightly bound to the universal popularity of Japanese comic books and animation, which exalt classic Japanese elements, whether these are ninja in *Naruto*, samurai in *Bleach*, or Tokyo high school students in *Case Closed*. This noumenal exaltation is also visible, albeit in a more subtle way, in the portrayal of protagonists like Luffy in *One Piece* or Eren and Levi in *Attack on Titan.* Although they are given western names, their black hair and yellow skin make them identifiably Asian.

On the barricades and battlefields of *manga*, these 'Japanesey' characters are endowed with incredible intelligence, noble morality and extreme fighting skills. They usually perform in ways far superior to other ethnic groups, particularly Caucasians. *Manga* authors make this clear through the juxtaposition of characters: Mikasa Ackerman, whose name denotes a Japanese-German hybrid is one of the best warriors in *Attack on Titan*, who often comes to the aid of her more timid Caucasian friend; or in *Case Closed*, where Shinichi demonstrates he has superior investigative skills to a female FBI operative engaged in a case he is attempting to solve. One of my panel of experts, Mr. Yen, agreed with my argument in our interview, "Many bad guys in *One Piece* are Western with Caucasian characteristics … it seems that those depicted as arrogant or vulgar are also white."[45]

[45] It should be mentioned that there are 'good guys' in *One Piece* with Caucasian physiognomies but, to Mr. Yen, the impression they make is not as strong as that of 'the bad guys.'

Japanese comic books do not indulge in ethnic diversity. I wondered whether my student-informants were aware of this, so I asked them "Which character in the Top 5 *manga* do you like best? Which country do you think he or she belongs to?" Only four students identified their favorite characters as Japanese. Others thought they were from Taiwan, the USA, Africa, Germany or other Western countries. Their answers revealed that, even when Japanese characters are portrayed as superior, it does not affect adolescent *manga* consumers as seriously as adults may imagine. They generally ignore the difference between Taiwanese and Japanese, or other racial groups. They seem to be "color blind" to the race and ethnicity of their favorite comic book characters.

However, this does not mean that Japanese comic books do not hold cultural sway over young Taiwanese readers. In fact, to understand the ethnic influence of these comic books, they should be set in a broader cultural context. From a cultural perspective, it should be noted that since Taiwan and Japan both belong to the East Asian cultural sphere, Taiwanese readers not only have a similar appearance to Japanese people but also share similar cultural values, most of which can be traced back to Chinese culture. For example, in American anthropologist Ruth Benedict's study *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, the concept of *Giri* describes a series of moral obligations having to do with "the righteous way; the road human beings should follow; something one does unwillingly to forestall apology to the world" that may seem strange to non-Asians (Benedict, 1946, 134). However, when this idea appears in *One Piece*, Vol. 1, it is not difficult for Taiwanese readers to understand why Zoro would feel he has a moral debt to his erstwhile fiercest competitor, a young swordswoman with whom he competed and who died young, when he becomes the world's number one swordsman.

In the first half of the twentieth century their common cultural roots were tested by Japanese

colonization of the island sixteenth century Portuguese traders called *Formosa* (Beautiful). Taiwan bore the brunt of the imperial hubris of "The Land of the Rising Sun" until U.S. President Truman ordered the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and put the brakes on Hirohito's expansionist plans seventy years ago. Today, it is the technological and artistic sophistication of Japanese culture that exerts a magnetic pull on Taiwan's populace. According to Japanese scholar Koichi Iwabuchi, the fact that the two island nations are culturally and geographically proximate sets the stage for Japanese popular culture's overwhelming influence on Taiwan. Not surprisingly, Taiwanese find it much easier to relate to Japan than the U.S. (Cheng, 2005). A constant Japanese media bombardment offers the Taiwanese people a dizzying media bazaar of television series, popular spokespeople, robotic appliances and trend-setting fast food through dozens of TV and internet channels, all day every day. As my student-informant, Aida, emphatically reminded me, "Of course we know about *katana* and that Japanese stuff. It is COMMON." When I asked one of their teachers, Mrs. Dai, "Do you think *manga*'s portrayal of Japanese cultural icons, ritual objects and landmarks influences students?" She replied, "I think it's reassuring for them to see so many things they recognize."

For most Taiwanese people, the Japanese zeitgeist is part of their cultural capital, something they grew up with. Even though students may not realize that their favorite *manga* characters are imbued with distinguishably Japanese characteristics, they see them as ambassadors of a culture they consider part of their Asian heritage. *Manga* and *animé* are influential cultural agents, not only in that they transmit Japanese cultural knowledge but also because they make people from other countries and cultures as comfortable with it as if it were their own. Whether or not this extraordinary influx of images and ideologies is capable of changing Taiwanese students' cultural identities or challenging Taiwan's national development is another topic, one

that will be dealt with in more detail in section 5.5.

5.1.2 What Happens to the Rest of the World: Representations of Other Ethnic Groups

Many of the Top 5 series use Western materials among their cultural elements, like Western lore and celebrities in *One Piece*, a medieval European castle in *Attack on Titan*, or South Dakota's Mount Rushmore in *Naruto*. Although significant details are often transformed to suit the plots, it is easy to identify their origins. Many of the students I interviewed noticed these western elements too. I asked, "Many comic books use Japanese or Western culture in their settings. Did you want to know more about that after you read them?" Olin said, "I checked out the three castles in *Attack on Titan*. They actually exist in Europe." Helen said, "I checked out the Amazon warriors from *One Piece* on Wiki." Inspired by the fantastic worldviews *manga* present, some students pursue additional information about the illustrations. It might be argued from this that comic books have a positive influence. However, before celebrating the multicultural phenomenon these series represent, it is also important to ask, what kind of "international perspective" do they espouse? And are the different ethnic groups described in a compassionate, integral way that preserves their dignity?

Let us recall, for a moment, what the authors of *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan* were quoted as saying in Chapter 4: that American media inspire their art work, just as American culture inspires other authors. *Case Closed* would be the most representative example of this kind of reverent homage since its creators refer both to the FBI and to the CIA in the plot. Although it is doubtful that American investigators would work so closely with a teenage Japanese detective, these kinds of details reveal how strongly the U.S. influences Japan, both politically and culturally.

According to Hiroshi Minami (2014, 379), the Japanese exhibit conflicting emotions about foreign influence, especially when that influence is European or American:

> From a historical perspective, the attitude that the Japanese have about foreigners seems to vacillate between superiority and inferiority. The nationalism of modern Japan was determined by European and American standards. Whether it is a single person or a nation, the Japanese want to match the standards of Europe and America, and they want to be recognized by them.

After Japan surrendered to the Allies to end World War Ⅱ, it acknowledged U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur as its conqueror and MacArthur outlawed the Japanese military and drafted a democratic Constitution for the post-imperial nation, based on its revolutionary French and American precursors. After its surrender, Japan underwent an extraordinary metamorphosis. Ruth Benedict describes how Japanese POWs changed their attitude dramatically toward the USA, "Japanese behaved as if, having put everything they had into one line of conduct and failed at it, they naturally took up a different line. (op. cit., 42)"[46] Japan's imperial identity was now a relic. The Japanese gratefully inhabited MacArthur's jury-rigged democracy and joined the U.S. as its strategically positioned "Cold War" partner.[47] America did not treat Japan as it did its European allies. According to Edward Said, "The relationship between America and its Pacific or Far Eastern interlocutors—China, Japan, Korea, Indochina—is informed by racial prejudice, sudden and relatively unprepared rushes of attention followed by enormous pressure applied thousands of miles away, [it remains] geographically and intellectually distant from the lives of most Americans" (Said, 1994, 290). Modern Japan gradually fell into an ambiguous status:

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[46] South African-born British officer Laurens van der Post was held prisoner by Japanese forces in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) from 1942-45. He wrote of "the strain caused by being continually in the power of people who are only half-sane and live in a twilight of reason and humanity." After the peace treaty was signed, he and his fellow POWs were treated as respected guests. At a dinner in their honor, a Japanese general raised his glass, saying "I drink sincerely to your victory." (van der Post, 1971, 114).

[47] Japan represents one of the most complicated identities in East Asia: colonialist before the war, it became colonialized after it yielded to the atomic might of its conquerors which was interpreted as an act of divine intervention, thus sparing them the shame of surrender. The two identities offset each other and created the delicately balanced, love-hate relationship between Japan and the U.S. (Chen, 2014, 15).

during the 'Cold War,' it rose to the level of an economic and cultural super power in Asia while being relegated to a supporting role by its Western allies.

As the image of white men from the West contains tumultuous and conflictive meanings for the Japanese, comic book creators portray them as members of the retinue of their 'Japanese' protagonists or they are employed as unspecified 'Caucasians' to swell and signify the importance of an "international" ambiance in series like *One Piece*, *Attack on Titan*, and *Case Closed*.

As noted in Chapter 4, it is often difficult to identify the race of *manga* characters as their racial characteristics are made to conform to Western standards: round eyes, pointed chins, tall and chiseled physiques. Their oriental identifiers are their complexions, their names, or through character introductions which include their provenance. Although most non-Asians in these three series function as adjuncts to 'Japanesey' lead characters, no ethnic bias is implied. However, in *Bleach*, the Soul Reapers' antagonists, known as *Stern Ritter*, have Western names and dress in crisp white uniforms reminiscent of Nazi garb, although only a few of them are identifiable as Caucasian and some have darker complexions. Although it is difficult to identify them as a group, their combatants are "Western knights" and "Japanese samurai" and the author's stated intention is to create an "international" atmosphere similar to those of the other Top 5 series.

Naruto raises a different perspective on white Europeans/Americans in Japanese comic books. The eponymous boy protagonist is a ninja like his father and has blond hair and blue eyes. Why a blond ninja? The author, Masashi Kishimoto addresses this question in a *manga* interview: "The concept of Naruto *manga* was originally conceived as a Japanese image from a foreigner's perspective, but it changed later. The character's blond hair is just for attracting

attention" (Mezamashi Live, 2014). As far as Kishimoto is concerned, "foreigner" does not refer to people in other Asian countries, or dark-skinned ethnic groups. Stereotypical Westerners, "foreigners" are always White. According to Minami, since the Miji era of the early 1900s, Japanese have adored the White race's culture and lifestyle (Minami, 2014, 23-32). Although many of these old ideologies have gradually died out, some of them are being reborn in other forms in today's globalized world. It is not difficult to see how "blond hair and blue eyes" represents a racial fantasy of a better mind and body, a superior form of life. As Mr. Yen, the teacher, said in our interview, "Like Goku in *Dragon Ball*, the only way for an Asian to become powerful is to transform into a white man with blond hair and blue eyes."[48]

We have seen that representations of White people in Japanese comic books contain certain ideologies, but what about Blacks, Latinos, and other Asian groups? As I mentioned in Chapter 2, several studies have shown that, in American mainstream comic books, these minority groups are usually presented as stereotypes. Most black superheroes are "often characterized in terms of their origins, customs, street-language, and anti-establishment attitudes" (Brown, 1999). Do Japanese *manga* reproduce similar stereotypes? In Chapter 4, I discussed two Black characters in *One Piece* and *Bleach*. In *Bleach* Vol.1, the Black character is depicted as an athlete with an elaborate Afro hairdo, which connects to the stereotypes of Blacks' athleticism and the "Black is beautiful" revolution of the American civil rights era. In *One Piece*, the "Black" image is presented in a more devious way.[49] Usopp, one of Luffy's crew members, has many African characteristics, including thick lips, broad nose, and bushy hair which seem to have little to do

[48] In *Dragon Ball*, one of the most famous Japanese comic series, the main character, Goku, is able to access "Super Saiyan form" to gain super powers by which he is transfigured from a young man with Asian hair, skin and eyes into an Aryan *übermensch*.

[49] Asian readers may argue that stereotypes, which Usopp represents, may not refer to the Black. However, when I first presented this analysis in my lecture at the UCLA Paulo Freire Institute summer program in 2014, several Egyptians in the audience quickly identified the problematic "Black" image this character projected.

with his role as a timid and slightly inept comic figure.[50] Extrapolating from the foregoing examples, "Black" images in Top 5 *manga* seem to be mixed with other types of bias and stereotypes. Without knowing much about Black culture, their authors draw people of color from an outsider perspective, one that may stem from cultural ideologies of long standing in Japanese society. A historical anthropologist, John Russell, analyzes the portrayal of Afro-descendants in Japanese advertisements, comic books, TV shows, and other mass media and points out that "Japanese views of blacks have taken as their model distorted images derived from Western ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony" (Russell, 1991). He identifies eight characteristics of racial stereotypes the Japanese seem to have borrowed from western racists to describe Afro-descendant persons including "infantilism, primitivism, hyper-sexuality, bestiality, natural athletic prowess or physical stamina, mental inferiority, psychological weakness, and emotional volatility" (Russell, 1991). Although these stereotypes are not all represented in the Top 5 series, the aforementioned examples reveal certain characteristics like mental inferiority and athletic prowess.

As important as it is to track ethnic representations in Japanese comic books, it may be just as important to see which groups are made conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, in the other three series, *Case Closed*, *Attack on Titan*, and *Naruto*, Black and other dark-skinned races do not appear. Even in *One Piece* and *Bleach*, characters with dark skin are much fewer than Whites and Asians. Even though Asian faces are dominant in these comic books, it must be noted that not all Far Eastern nationalities are included in their pages. In the Top 5 series this study examines, not one of the characters is identifiably Taiwanese, Chinese, Korean or Indonesian. The only Asian country that exists in these comic books is Japan, which is ironic

[50] *Manga* creators often endow comic personae with Afro hairdos, unaware of their being emblems of black pride. While Asian readers are more likely to associate them with the fright wigs of circus zanies.

since *manga* series boast a pan-Asian audience. Therefore, while Iwabuchi mentions that "Japan began explicitly and positively reasserting its Asian identity in the early 1990s after a long retreat following the defeat of World War II" (Iwabuchi, 2002, 5), the many Asians manga *authors* choose not to depict cannot help but feel slighted.[51]

How did my student-informants view these representations? I asked them, "Which character in the Top 5 *manga* do you like best? Which country do you think he/ she belongs to?" Unlike the members of my review panel, only Julian thought Naruto was "probably from a Western country because he is blond." Three students judged the main characters' ethnicity based on their personality traits and habits, without even considering their racial characteristics. Thus, Vincent pegged Naruto as "an African refugee" because he "eats super-fast." While Sheryl saw Zoro as Japanese because "only Japanese know how to use *katana*" and Helen believes Luffy is American because "he eats a lot of meat… Americans' main dish is meat." In the selected groups, Ruby was the only one who did not answer this question, saying she was "not sure because I have no idea about the personalities of people who live in foreign countries."

From these answers, it appears that nearly half the students did not judge *manga* characters' ethnicity by the color or texture of their hair, their eyes, and their skin. To these Taiwanese teenagers, characters' personality traits or behaviors are more telling than their racial characteristics. Perhaps because these young people's life experiences are limited, it is difficult for them to perceive the racial markers of people they may not have seen or read about. In fact, it is rare for most Taiwanese students to have had contact with other people of similar ethnicity, including Japanese, Koreans, and Southeast Asians. Taiwan's population is relatively homogeneous compared to that of the U.S. or most Western European nations, which have

[51] According to Iwabuchi, Japan used to see other Asian nations as backward societies, so it used a "self-Orientalist strategy" to mimic the development of European countries; but witnessing the precipitous economic revival of its 'Asian Tiger' neighbors, Japan decided to realign itself regionally (Iwabuchi, 2002, 8-12).

experienced recent influxes of emigrants from less developed countries and former colonies. The media are their main source of information and contact with the world at large. Thus, much of the information that comes their way is based on long-established biases and stereotypes. This makes Taiwanese teenagers' understanding of global racial and ethnic issues rather limited.

Since the students I interviewed do not seem to notice the absence of their ethnic counterparts in Japanese comic books and have a partial or myopic vision about the differences between groups, Japanese comic books do not seem to shape their ethnic views. However, since much of what *manga* portray as human variety is based on stereotypes and bias, they can be accused of misrepresenting the real world. Extrapolating Freire's educational dictum, a medium devoid of critical essence is like "a false educator who can only 'domesticate' because, instead of undertaking the critical task of demythologizing reality, (s) he mystifies it further" (Freire, 2005,132). By extension, even if some *manga* inspire enterprising, curious students to seek international knowledge or information, they are not able to understand different ethnic groups from the way they are depicted because the portrayals tend to be stereotypical and biased. Thus, in some way, comic books may strengthen students' bias and stereotypes about other ethnic groups rather than increasing their curiosity and empathy and this may have the effect of permanently limiting their curiosity and ability to understand the world beyond their shores.

5.2 Ideologies of Gender and Their Influence

From their reactions to our interviews, my student-informants appeared to have more to say when asked questions related to gender than to any other ideology. Certainly, exploration of gender issues evoked more complex reflections and contradictory answers. Therefore, to produce a meaningful analysis of their understanding of gender ideologies, I have combined

results from my survey with textual analysis and interview transcriptions. These are separated into two different categories: one focused on the images of men and women, and the other focused on LGBT issues.[52] In the following discussion, I will critically point out how the genders are given different weight in comic books, what types of gender topics are absent or misrepresented, and how all of this influences Taiwanese teenage readers.

5.2.1 The Images of Men and Women

In Chapter 4, I argue that images of "sexual attraction" in Japanese comic books are different from those in their U.S. counterparts. Japanese comic books have illustrations of muscular males and females with oversized breasts but cute girls and beautiful men attract teenage readers as well. One thing they have in common is that the great majority of mainstream comic books in both Japan and the U.S. are created by males and boast male protagonists. In the Top 5 series, all the plots are driven by male characters, who are similar in age to their adolescent readers and have somewhat similar personalities revolving around a heightened sense of justice, rebellion, daring, and the willingness to respond to all kinds of challenges. They are smarter than the female characters and make much better warriors.

To understand whether my student-informants believed that the gender of the main characters influenced the plot, I asked them to think about one of their favorite characters: "If he becomes a 'she' or she becomes a 'he', would you still like this character?" Only one student, Fay, said she would definitely dislike such an alteration because "*she* will be too weak" while the other eleven said they would have no problem supporting *her* because it is the characters' personalities and fighting skills that attract them and, if those remained the same, their gender wouldn't matter.

[52] In the U.S., this acronym is used for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-sexual matters.

Since students claim they do not care about the main characters' gender, does this mean they have no gender bias? Their subsequent responses belie this. I asked another, related question: "Why are all the main characters males? What if they were females?" This time, contrary to their responses to the preceding hypothetical situation, all the students said that they would feel uncomfortable if a female drove the plot, and most of their answers were true to gender stereotypes. Six students believed that men are better in the fighting than women. Jessica said, "EVERYONE thinks boys are good at fighting and girls are too gentle." Other students believed male "personalities" make the stories more compelling, while female "personalities" may divert the story line with trivial or tedious concerns. Julian said, "I feel that the plot is more straightforward when boys are the main characters. If they were girls, there would be a lot of unnecessary description." However, Aida's response was more nuanced:

Me: Would it influence the story if the main character were a girl?

Aida: Not really, it depends how the author set the story. If he makes the girl character a tomboy, maybe the story would be more interesting.

Me: A tomboy? You mean someone that boys can relate to?

Aida: Yes.

It is important to understand what "personality" means to these 13-year olds. In a preceding section, I have shown that students believe different ethnic groups have their own special personalities. Similar ideologies appear here. We have already established that qualities such as justice, rebelliousness, and bravery are traditionally associated with males. From students' answers, females who do not possess "tomboy" personalities are generally more passive, careful, and sensitive. Their different ideas about gender are often tied to their nascent sexual identities, and may never change. Perhaps, what they call "personality" is founded on

bias and stereotypes formed from previous social experiences.

Since many students referred to gender stereotypes by using examples from comic books, it is clear that even though comic books may not be the only medium that creates students' gender bias, they influence their ideas about gender by strengthening these stereotypes. Gender bias can also be extrapolated, through textual analysis, from their responses to questions about *manga* characters' qualities: "helps other characters," "shows weakness," "shows strength." As discussed in Chapter 4, although female characters and male characters both have occasion to exhibit weakness and strength and/or come to each others' aid, it usually only the male characters who have the power to overturn disadvantageous situations and make significant contributions to their team's success. Ito's study has similar findings. She notices many comic books chart the protagonists' bumpy road to success but while comic book heroes overcome all obstacles and rivals, the would-be heroines "are usually depicted as accessories" (Ito, 1994). Most female characters in Top 5 series are passive, dependent on male characters' initiation of action or waiting to be rescued by them. The exception is *Attack on Titan*, which includes a unique band of powerful women warriors. Although this does not mean that women lack voice in the other four series, most of the time these women can only express their power in private relationships, chiding male teammates when they fail to take threats seriously in *One Piece* Vol.19 and are powerless to change the situation per se; or demand to be taken seriously and demonstrate impressive fighting skills when responding to their male friends' challenges, but immediately afterward exhibit compensatory weakness, as in *Naruto,* Vol.18.

What beliefs are at the root of these ideologies? In West's study, he researches Japanese news and points out that a powerful social norm exists in Japanese society that makes "nearly two-thirds of Japanese believe that girls and boys should be socialized differently" (West, 2006,

241). This exemplifies the kinds of culture that support comic books' creation of a different set of expectations and behaviors for females and males. The argument that something about the nature of the sexes causes their social difference as well as that of their related thoughts and behaviors is common in male dominated cultures like Taiwan and the U.S. In fact, when Mr. Dai argued that "a boy's ability to think rationally is better than a girl's" he acceded to the Taiwanese belief that males and females are naturally different when it comes to thoughts and behaviors.

It should be recognized that even though their sex influences males' and females' bodily performance in certain fields, it does mean that comic books, should always portray men as better fighters than women or as if they possessed superior mental abilities and more rational thinking. Either of these notions would support the false justification of a female's inferior status, and create the misperception that such skewed descriptions of males and females are natural and verifiable. As bell hooks points out, the justification of sexism and racism as applied to black females is no different in kind than the slavery era ideology that "black females are not capable of rational thought" and is still used to assert their inferior performance in the academy" (hooks, 2010, 97). Similar ideologies that exert insidious notions of subservience concerning women's minds and bodies in Taiwan and Japan must be challenged as well. This static, unchallenged condition of bias and stereotype can be included in Freire's critique: "Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of a historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of people's behavior" (Freire, 2012, 61). As a critical thinker, it is important to distinguish between natural differences and man-made "limit situations," both in comic books and in real life.[53]

[53] "It is interesting to observe how our strong historical-cultural traditions, authoritarian in nature, always put us in ambiguous positions concerning the contradictory relationship between freedom and authority. (…) Neither one of

At this point, it is necessary to determine how these gender biases and ideologies influence readers' behaviors. Ms. Yeh believes students may be influenced subconsciously, which is borne out by some of their responses to my survey questions (see Chapter 4). She points out that "[students] naturally think male leaders would be more reasonable. They say they wouldn't object to female leaders, but admit that would be "weird." Mr. Yen had a similar thought:

Mr. Yen: Students may get influenced subconsciously. Boys believe when something happens, they have to deal with it, while girls would retreat.

Me: But isn't Taiwan different from Japan where most things are led by males?

Mr. Yen: (pausing) Well, maybe…in certain issues like choosing a class leader. But I don't think it is always like that. Teenagers don't rely on boys to do everything, especially in junior high school where girls are more mature than boys.

From both students' and teachers' answers, it seems that most of the gender ideologies that influence students are stereotypes and biases they absorb from comic books. There is not yet enough evidence that this would significantly influence their behavior later in life.

5.2.2 Sexy? Harassing? Just joking?

Many parents and teachers are concerned about comic books' sexual or violent content: Since 41.8% of the students said they were permitted to read R-rated comic books, which contain graphic scenes of sex and violence, such concerns make sense. However, do students' favorite Top 5 comic books merit the same level of concern?

In my textual analysis, I attempted to find sexually explicit dialogue and behavior and

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these positions, authoritarian or permissive, works in favor of democracy. Living the tension between freedom and authority, both at home and in school, is of the greatest importance. t is through these relationships between freedom and authority that, little by little, we learn to define limits for freedom and authority, without which both positions deteriorate and democracy is denied" (Freire, *Letters to Cristina*, 1996, 149).

depictions of erotic intimacy. Despite popular belief, there are very few instances of any of these in Top 5 comics. In fact, it was difficult for members of the review panel and my teacher-informants to determine what constituted actual sexual harassment and what was just a joke. This was also true when we looked for examples of lascivious exposure. Although all of the committee members agreed that female bodies were more exposed than male bodies, since female pirates and ninjas usually wear sexy dresses to emphasize their slim figures and large breasts, the two male panel members said they did not experience any inappropriate urges while looking at them.

To understand how the students felt about these sexual ideologies, I asked them "In *One Piece* and *Naruto*, women like Nami and Tsunade dress to look 'hot.' Do you think they are too sexy?" Also, "If the scenes of women taking baths in *One Piece* or *Bleach* were of men taking baths, would it make any difference?" None of the students felt these female characters' outfits were too sexy. Both female and male students thought the way they dressed was related to their occupations and not meant to inspire lust. A few students mentioned that this mode of dress is different from that of ordinary Taiwanese people. Fay said, "In real life, it would be a bit abnormal." Other students did not agree: Ruby said, "It is common. People dress that way on the beach too." Aida said, "In the past, if a girl dressed like that, people would think her shameless, but today you feel okay, because a lot of people do it."[54]

As discussed in section 5.2.1, female's bodies are more exposed than male's. Sometimes they are teasingly immersed in bathtubs, or revealed in astonishing acts of male-to-female shape-shifting such as Naruto's previously mentioned transformation in Volume 1. This question, which is different from the one about 'triggering' clothes, raised the anxiety level of the

[54] If we look back at Aida's answers in Chapter 4, she began by saying these women's dresses were overly sexy like 'Japanese porn' and then changed her mind and gave the answer above.

responses. Only five students said if naked female bodies were turned into naked male bodies, they would react differently. The boys, like York and Rod, seemed to react more intensely than the girls. York said, "If boys were naked, it would be considered *gay*" and Rod worried about "that part" of their bodies being visible.

Male body exposure seems to make students, especially boys, uncomfortable. Interestingly, naked female bodies do not arouse similar reactions. Olin and Julian both noted that manga artists' renditions of comely girls in the buff are a fail-safe attraction for teenage boys.

Julian: A lot of comic readers are male, they just like to see women take baths. They wouldn't care to see men.

Many readers think that teenage comic book consumers are mostly boys. If nothing else, this study disproves that notion, both boys and girls enjoy reading Top 5 *manga*. However, after analyzing their sexual implications, it is abundantly clear that female bodies are unilaterally considered an appetizing treat for male voyeurs regardless of the fact that more and more female readers indulge in *manga* mania.

Similar ideologies can be found in the main characters' emphatic responses to erotic stimuli. I asked "In *One Piece* and *Case Closed*, Mori and Sanji react dramatically when they see beautiful women. Is this different from the real world? What do you think?" I got the same reactions from student-informants as from members of my expert panel. Although in the stories, Mori and Sanji demonstrated their interest in beautiful women in ways designed to catch their attention, most of the students I interviewed did not think this was abnormal, based on their daily life experience. Most students agreed that Mori's and Sanji's actions – whether grabbing a woman's shoulder, gaping at her breasts or accosting her at first sight – were intended to inspire laughter rather than signal that they were about to harass them. Olin said, "There is a lot of this

kind of behavior in my classroom." To students in the hormonal grip of puberty, the best that can be said is that they seem to find their own images in comic books' depiction of the complex and sometimes confusing steps of the tango of love.

What do teachers see as the influence of sexual ideologies on middle school students? Interestingly, male educators responded differently than their female colleagues. After looking at examples of bodily exposure, Mr. Yen and Mr. Dai both believed that students would not be harmed by reading comic books, because, as Mr. Yen said, "People expose much more than that on TV and the Internet." Ms. Yeh and Mrs. Dai, had more to say about *manga*'s exposure of female body parts. However, while Mrs. Dai held that some girls would feel uncomfortable about boys' comic books, Ms. Yeh, although critical of the way they use female bodies to attract male readers, still felt "Those intimacies are okay in comic books; of course, if they were photographers, the characters would be sued to hell!"

In sum, most teachers and students seem to believe that teenagers' exposure to erotic images and lascivious behavior is not conducive to inappropriate actions or behavior on their part, as parents and authorities seem to believe. By their responses, the students know what kinds of behaviors are exaggerated in comic books and would be inappropriate in the real world. However, this does not mean that *manga*'s sexual and gender ideologies may not have a negative influence on those who continually absorb them. In today's world, different types of media, including comic books, have both socialized and inured youthful consumers to images and situations that were once considered outside the norm. As they accept the overwhelmingly male dominant point-of-view of both the protagonists and the plots, comic book lovers tend to overlook the fact that female standpoint is denied.

From a critical perspective, comic books, along with other media, have made the

commercialization of female bodies the norm. This has a negative influence on students' own body images and behavior in terms of what is acceptable for females, and what is acceptable for males. The commodification of female bodies is like a game in male–dominated society, which "continues to judge the value of women by their attractiveness and seductiveness" (Ronai, 1989, 296). Therefore, it is important to rethink global media's commercialization of body images. Since there is broad agreement in the West that an ever-increasing amount of body exposure and sexual intimacy is 'mediagenic' and therefore should be to some degree acceptable by both males and females, teenagers and adults, it would be reactionary to say that all the body exposure in comic books should raise moral concerns. From a Freirian point-of-view, what these images really influence is students' consciousness. By becoming inured to male-dominant entertainment, young readers lose the chance to critically rethink the reasons that female perspectives have been ignored in cultural media. In the larger social context, the inexistence of consciousness-raising[55] about the deleterious effects of boundless internet pornography illustrates a similar nonchalance. The fact remains that comic books, like so many media, fail to consider "the problem of men and women who oppress and men and women who suffer oppression" (Freire, 2012, 55). Female readers, currently languishing in *manga's* moats and dungeons, are forced to accept the view of the men on the bridge.

5.2.3 LGBT issues in Comic Books

LGBT is an absent topic in most mainstream comic books. Since Japanese mainstream comic books have been dominated by the ideologies of heterosexuals, gay and lesbian themes can only be found in BL/GL comic books, especially BL comics that, as discussed in Chapter 2,

[55] This is the American equivalent of Freire's use of the Portuguese *conscientização*. The literal translation, "conscientization," is not yet accepted by lexicographers.

'go light' on homoeroticism and, instead, cater to female voyeurism by depicting the private fantasies of beautiful males. The survey shows that even though not many students voted in this category, it got a higher cumulative score than heterosexual romances (2.92 to 2.79). This suggests that Taiwanese adolescents prefer Boy Love and Girl Love to standard boy-girl romance. Therefore, it is important to look carefully into this topic, find out what students think about it, and if and how it influences their views of and attitude toward 'real world' LGBT issues.

In the interviews, I asked students "These manga all tell 'boy loves girl' stories. Would you accept them if there were gays or lesbians in future plots? How about in real life?" To the first question, only two boys, Rod and Donald, said that they were not interested in gays and lesbians, while the other ten students seemed somewhat tentative but not unwilling to consider them as *manga* protagonists. However, not all the students who claimed to accept gays and lesbians in comic books accept them in the real world. In fact, two girls, Sheryl and Fay, disagreed with the idea of homosexual love.

Fay: I do not accept Girl Love, but Boy Love is fine.

Me: Why?

Fay: Girls with girls are disgusting. Boys with boys are better."

Me: Then what is your feeling about them in real life?

Fay: They embarrass me. I wouldn't disagree with them, but they'd better think twice before they try to do something.

Again, there seems to be a divide between the comic book world and real life in students' minds. This contradictory reaction somehow supports McLelland's argument that beautiful boys' images in BL comic books actually "embody all the most attractive features of the female gender" (McLelland, 2010).

Moreover, it is extremely doubtful that these barely pubescent junior high school students have any first-hand knowledge about the lives of gays and lesbians. Rod claimed he had never seen "a real gay" but would "walk away" if he did. Other students, like Aida and Ruby, who claimed they supported gays and lesbians are unlikely to ever have had contact with them. Ruby admitted, "In my class, there are a lot of boys who call each other 'husband' or 'wife' for fun." However, this has nothing to do with their being gay. Since most students have no contact with homosexuals, their images of gays and lesbians are mostly from second-hand resources like the media, books and magazines or the opinions of adults like parents, teachers or TV personalities. Thus, it is doubtful that they understand the concept of homosexuality. Even though some student-informants said they understand and honor the multicultural ideal of according people different from themselves understanding and respect, they don't seem to have the vaguest notion about who such people might be.

The other topic related to the 'queer' ideology is transgender. I asked students "What do you think about the 'shemales' in *One Piece*? How about in real life?" Emporio Ivankov, the only transgender character in a Top 5 series, is depicted as a clown with a strong male body who wears sexy, female clothing. We can only imagine that he was created to bring an edgy, postmodern aspect to mainstream comic books. Although only three students responded to this question because most had not encountered this character, there is something poignant about their answers. All of them know what "transgender" means, but Jessica disagreed with people who choose to undergo sex change operations because "they do not respect their own bodies." While Aida saw 'shemales' as "no different from us," Olin, who did not comment on real-life transgender people, thought that their presence in *manga* "is funny."

Since *manga* representations of transgendered characters have been presented in a comic

way, there are few negative feelings about them. However, these are shallow representations without reference to the struggles, courage or concerns of people contemplating such metamorphoses so they do not challenge the students' established ideologies. Most adolescent *manga* readers react to people who choose to change genders as 'funny.' To some extent, the students' reactions support the teachers' observation that their sexual identities would not be challenged that easily by the media they access. As Mr. Dai said, "Most gender identities are formed in and by students' families and are difficult to change." Ms. Yeh and Mr. Yen do not think reading about "LGBT" issues in comic books will change students' gender ideologies either, because students, especially female students, read BL comic books just for entertainment or to follow the trend.[56]

From the above discussion, it can be gathered that LGBT issues are mostly underrepresented in mainstream comic books. The dominant heterosexual culture is strengthened, not challenged, by *manga*'s treatment of the issue. Even in BL and GL comic books or fragmentary representations of transgender themes in mainstream comic books, the images of 'queer folk' are either made subsidiary to heterosexual fantasy or seen as comic diversion. Since most Taiwanese junior high school students do not have clear idea about LGBT issues, the absence of 'queer voice' in mainstream comic books may be a strategy to strengthen and solidify heterosexual culture. At any rate, it does nothing to challenge existing Taiwanese credos.

5.3 The Influence of Class Ideologies

Unlike ethnic and gender ideologies, class ideologies are the vaguest concept in Japanese

[56] As Mr. Yen was responding to the question, he noticed that his attitude about female students reading BL comic books was different than his opinions of male students reading GL comic books. Even teachers feel uncomfortable when discussing sex matters outside their self-imposed boundaries.

mainstream comic books. Since most of stories in Top 5 series are set in fantastic domains, it is difficult for both adult and teenage readers to perceive a social ladder, if one exists. However, as revealed by the responses of my informants, Asian class ideologies are different from the Western social paradigm in that perceptions of economic and social status may be distinct. Therefore, in the following sections, I will use results from my textual analysis and interviews to determine whether ideologies of economic and social class in Japanese comic books influence Taiwanese students.

5.3.1 Class & Economic Status

In modern society, economic status is a definitive element, affecting one's lifestyle, behaviors, and thoughts. Taiwan, Japan, and the U.S. were mainly constructed by "middle class" people who worked hard and supposed they would earn sufficient income to maintain their social stability and afford some degree of comfort. Based on this understanding, when I was engaged in textual analysis with my review panel, most of us (except Mr. Yen) judged *manga* characters' economic status by the presence and nature of their material acquisitions. Focusing on main characters, we all identified Shinichi in *Case Closed* as upper class, four of us identified Ichigo in *Bleach* as middle class, three of us identified Naruto in *Naruto*, and Eren in *Attack on Titan* as underclass, and two of us identified Luffy in *One Piece* as middle class, while one person believed him to be underclass.

Through discussions with review members, it became clear to me that property was the determining factor because what is most commonly depicted are the protagonists' worldly possessions, including houses, cars, food supplies, the occupations and status of their parents, and that often ephemeral quality called 'lifestyle.' Student-informants relied on a similar optic.

I asked them, "Which character in the Top 5 do you like best? Is he/ she rich?" and "Of these main characters, which are poorer than you? Which are richer than you? Which are similar to you?" They employed material standards to estimate their heroes' wealth, including their houses, cars, ships, food, occupations, their lifestyles and accouterments. Moreover, they saw protagonists' clothes and personalities as valuable clues to their status. As Helen said about Luffy: "He is not rich, because he eats a lot and always wears the same clothes." Fay said something similar about Naruto: "I don't think he is rich, he is too silly."[57]

Although students used similar material standards as the adults on my review panel, their estimates of characters' economic class were more dispersed than those of the experts. Shinichi in *Case Closed,* Luffy in *One Piece, and* Ichigo in *Bleach* were judged to be in the range of middle-to-upper class. Naruto in *Naruto* was seen as middle-to-lower class, while Eren in *Attack on Titan* was given the widest range; different students considered him upper class, middle class or underclass because of different perceptions of his material resources and varying estimations of the social capital of his father's occupation.

How can the same standards of judgment applied to the same works produce such different results? One of the reasons is that the materials presented in comic books are unrealistic. Therefore, even though all the students have some idea of how much material possessions matter in capitalist societies, they lack the lens of day-to-day life experience through which to interpret and weigh them in the balance. Also, some students do not really care about the economic status of *manga* protagonists. That is why I added a supplementary query: "Before I asked these questions, did you compare yourself to these characters?" None of the students said they had considered the characters' wealth before my questions brought it into focus. Julian said, "I

[57] Again, "personality" appears in this category. To young, inexperienced eyes, the identities and behaviors of both the rich and the poor are stereotypes.

assumed they were *average*, like me." To these overwhelmingly middle-class students, the most important thing is whether the plot is interesting. Social class, its most subtle component, is just part of the background.

However, this does not mean that class ideologies in Japanese comic books are not worthy of analysis. Han's study, discussed in Chapter 2, suggested that what comic books and *animé* present are the values of the dominant, middle class culture and, by extension, that they are a litmus of the concerns of postmodern socio-economic systems (Han, 2005). Moreover, class is associated with more than material processes, it is an important key to understanding society as a whole. Indeed, as the result of my textual analysis, it is fair to say that middle class ideologies proliferate in all Top 5 *manga*. There are no descriptions of how much the underclass suffers from a constant lack of economic and cultural capital, affordable housing and healthcare, or that it is continually threatened by violent social and climatological events. Even Naruto, who is supposed to be poor, varies from the middle class paradigm only when he is shown to have little food in his larder. On the other hand, Shinichi, who is supposed to be a member of the elite, also has a very middle class lifestyle. His taste in clothes and way of dealing with money is identical to that of his middle class girlfriend. The only thing that makes them different is that Shinichi has a huge mansion and has traveled in several countries. The point is that, although the characters' living arrangements may be different, what they represent is still the dominant lifestyle of the majority of *manga* readers, one unsullied by the crescent disparities between the oppressed and their oppressors in the world at large. The social context of most *manga* is a deliberately sketchy class fantasy constructed so as not to disturb the acquisitive propensity and blinkered *weltanschauung* of the endangered middle class.

In *One Piece, Case Closed*, and *Attack on Titan*, the upper class is usually associated with

the exercise of political power, which signifies a combination of social and economic class models.[58] Characters with upper class attributes are depicted as of the nobility, holding high-level ambassadorial or government positions and/or as glamorous celebrities. As such, they are the simulacra of real world stereotypes. Thus, the depiction of their glamorous lifestyles invites comparison, just like the televised pap fed to the families of middle class teens on a daily basis. To understand more about how students view the fantasized upper class in comic books, I asked them, "In *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan*, there are several critiques about the rich. Do you agree with them?" Four students thought that the main characters' criticism of the rich and powerful may stem from an oversimplification of the situation or a need to punish them. For instance, Jessica reminded me, "Some rich guys or powerful people are good," although she couldn't substantiate this claim with examples. The other eight students supported the main characters' rebuke. Vincent said, "Kings should love their people, not bully them." Olin, York and Julian were reminded of Taiwan's current socio-economic dilemma although they couldn't say exactly why.

Indeed, in these *manga*, there *are* representations of the poor and powerless as well. Although presented in a superficial and stereotypical way in *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan*, members of the underclass are sometimes depicted as the innocent victims of either government or empire. However, along with these images, the results of our textual analysis show that Top 5 series also depict the oppressed as rebels or criminals forced to murder, kidnap and steal to survive. To understand if and how my student-informants took all this in, I asked them: "In *Case Closed*, many poor people do illegal things. Do you agree that the detectives should jail them for their crimes?" All the students agreed that their punishment was justified by their

[58] In *Naruto* and *Bleach*, economic class is less important than the traditional Asian concept of social class as associated with family. In this, they are distinct from the other three series.

actions, without little or no sympathy for the perpetrators. Jessica said, "You should rely on hard work, you must not harm other people." Even though Aida thought that their punishment should be diminished if criminals confessed, most students maintained that citizens should be responsible for their own economic well-being and find ways to survive condoned by society.

The students' answers demonstrate that they tend to judge right and wrong by pre-determined ethical and/or legal precepts. Whether a man's or woman's behavior is the product of his or her socio-economic situation is unimportant. Most of these students seem not to consider economic need or deprivation a rationale for what they see as anti-social behavior. Since comic books represent an over-simplified, middle class perspective on the world at large, this is not surprising. However, another reason for their absolute lack of mercy can be explained from the perspective of developmental psychology. Indeed, results presented from students' answers can be explained by psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's philosophy of moral development, which shows teenagers at this stage as just leaving "an instrumental relativist orientation," and moving towards either "an interpersonal concordance or 'good boy-nice girl' orientation" or "a law and order orientation" in which "they judge right and wrong either by other people's reactions, or by the rules" (Kohlberg, 1981). Since most students have not had enough social experience to consider or understand the gradations of justice and/or the effect of the ministrations of lawyers and courts. So they cannot imagine solutions to criminal behavior other than those represented by the institutional rigor of the penal code.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the superficial class representations in Japanese comic books do not afford Taiwanese teenagers a critical understanding of the underlying issues involved. Instead, they rigidify students' already stolid middle class ideologies and supply them with a media-abetted notion of hierarchical, top-down prison states where "the quality of

mercy" is definitively "strained."[59] Although, from a positive perspective, these comic books do not emphasize materialism, as discussed in Chapter 2; neither do they critically examine the consequences of neo-liberal capitalism. Freire's critique, "without civil rights, people were set aside, irremediably removed from any experience of self-government or dialogue" (2005, 23), reminds us of the marginalization of both under- and middle-classes in a world economic scenario where corporations wield ungovernable power. It is easy to see children as caught in a media landslide where the truth lies buried under the detritus of a disposable culture geared to profit and inured to loss. Without a chance to parse and react to the daily welter of stimuli to which they are subjected, they will be unable to create or sustain the dialogical ethos required for critical thought.

5.3.2 Social Class

Social class generally relates to one's professional occupation and ability to earn. However, in the process of textual analysis, some review panel members found representations of social class in Top 5 comic books that were either unrelated or antithetical to the characters' economic status. Thus, Mr. Yen ranked all the Top 5 series' main characters as upper class because they are presented either as scions of traditionally powerful families or the equally talented offspring of celebrity parents. The other three panel members discerned a political hierarchy hidden in the stories' subtext. All review panel members believe that the origin of these ideologies is the traditional Japanese family hierarchies, although Ms. Yeh later denied that

[59] This idea was contributed by Dr. Peter Lownds through our dialogues. The meaning of the "rich heiress" Portia's speech: "The quality of mercy is not strain'd;/It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:/It blesseth him that gives and him that takes./'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes/The thronéd monarch better than his crown" seems lost at a time when the construction of penitentiaries is the United States' most profitable real estate venture and more than 7,000,000 adults, many of them people of color convicted of drug- and violence-related crimes, are either incarcerated in Federal and State prisons or on parole (Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice," 1594, Act IV).

these special identities are essential to the creation of elite protagonists, claiming that "their fathers' secret identities are just an added plot twist."

However, it cannot be denied that social hierarchy is very important to Japanese comic books. Sometimes, this hierarchy is presented in tangentially, as a visual ranking system. In *One Piece*, it is a ranking of bounty hunters; in *Attack on Titan*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach* it is, respectively, a ranking of soldiers, ninjas, and Soul Reapers. People who have higher ranks are seen as members of the upper class, in terms of their social power and influence. As the story continues, readers can see how main characters exhibit extraordinary talent and industry so as to be recognized by other elite people and ascend the social scale.

From a perspective of class mobility, *manga* support the idea of positive vertical flow. However, the protagonists of these stories either discover they have powerful parents or are able to 'unmask' a father who has kept his true identity a secret for years. It is difficult to deny the strong elite bias expressed by such plots. In fact, from a cultural perspective, Japanese and other Asian societies were founded on historical alliances between elite family clans. In Hsu's study, she shows that Japanese clans of this type have many characteristics in common with the Hindu caste system, including their hierarchical structure and artificial boundaries (Hsu, 1975, 181). In such traditional systems, a male child can inherit
not only his father's wealth, but his political power and reputation as well, a fortunate combination which both segregates and shields him from the laws and duties governing ordinary people. Of course, the caste system is no longer dominant in modern Japanese society. In Ochiai Emiko's study of the postwar era, traditional Japanese families underwent a reformation process to become "modern, American-style" or "democratic" families which respected the value of worthy individuals rather than the family as a whole (Emiko, 1997, 76-181). However, this

does not mean that the cultural concept of a traditional family has been supplanted by a belief in the merits of individualism. At least, from the class ideologies represented in current *manga*, the reappearance of noble though clandestine father figures shows that the traditional kinship system retains some of its former significance in the Japanese imaginary.

To know what students think about the remnants of Asian social archetypes represented in *manga*, I asked them: "In *One Piece*, *Naruto* and *Bleach*, the main characters are powerful because their fathers are special people. If their fathers were normal people, like farmers or fishermen, would you still like the main characters as much as you do now?" Only one student thought that having humbler roots "would make the main characters less noticeable." while the remaining eleven believed a significant change in social status would not influence their feeling for the main characters. Some students like Jessica even thought it would make the main character more appealing if his/her ancestors were normal people, because "That means they are willing to improve themselves. Although they may be normal people, they work hard to become special." Although the Taiwanese are both heirs to and notable preservers of classical Chinese culture, which had a similar family-oriented system in the past, many students now prefer the Western value of individualism to the traditional Asian concept of inheritance. Disagreeing with the ideologies espoused by *manga*, most students believe that being born into a middle class family does not assure a person's upward social mobility or a person's achievement, beliefs that demonstrate how firmly rooted the social values of the "Taiwanese Dream" have become.

However, some student-informants understood that revelations of their fathers' previously clandestine social capital might influence the "personality" and behavior of the main characters. Julian said, "If Luffy's father were an ordinary fisherman, he would be more interested in

catching fish." While Rod speculated that, "Maybe, if his father were just an ordinary ninja, Naruto would not want to become the *Hokage*." These students' answers demonstrate that they already have some ideas about how changes in their social standing may affect people's thinking, habits and lifestyles, even though they do not yet understand how social status and class are linked. As Bourdieu points out, people with different social capital express different cultural interests that are connected "to the relation between the structure of the distribution of cultural capital and the structure of the distribution of economic capital" that can be reproduced by the educational system (Bourdieu, 1974). Based on their more or less experiential understanding of Taiwanese society, students are somewhat aware that the nation's classist hierarchy is not advancing its democratic ideals. However, they still believe that dedicated labor and unswerving obedience to hegemonic rules and dictates can compensate for a meager share of social capital.[60]

Many teachers fervently embrace what Freire might label 'mystical thinking:' they are certain that their students will not be influenced by *manga*'s stereotypical representation of traditional class ideologies. Mr. Dai, for instance, believes Japanese comic books' hierarchical, classist social perspective is the antithesis of the present day fluidity of Taiwanese society "where anyone can change his fate by hard work." Some other members of my panel of experts thought this untrue as many minority groups in Taiwan are still victimized by severe social inequities, have dead end jobs and attend inferior schools.[61] According to Mrs. Dai and Ms. Yeh, teenage *manga* fans pay little attention to their materialist trappings because they

[60] The meritocratic "Taiwanese Dream" is usually embraced by teachers and parents because it encourages Taiwanese students to believe that academic excellence is tantamount to upward mobility. My research neither proves nor disproves this credo.

[61] Chang, Yeh, and Chang's study shows it is very difficult for students from the underclass to enroll in high-ranking public universities (Chang, Yeh, & Chang, 2005). The situation remains unchanged, despite the 2002 educational reform.

understand that these are just fantasies to entice readers to identify with the characters.

From this discussion, it seems that ideologies of social class do not influence students as much as those of economic status. Students believe that they can achieve stellar goals by making a concerted effort, without relying on privileges that may be the birthright of elite Japanese families. From their pragmatic perspective, the fantasy of the protagonists' noble birth is just bait to attract gullible readers. It may be a reflection of the cynicism of the purveyors of Japanese culture but appears to have minimal effect on the self-reliant belief system of middle class Taiwanese adolescents.

5.4 The Influence of Ideologies of Violence

The violent scenes presented in Japanese comic books have always caused serious concern among parents and teachers. Frequently seen as the cause of youth crimes by Taiwanese mainstream media, ideologies of violence in Japanese comic books are usually regarded as a toxic and degrading threat to the nation's future. Some newspapers even claimed that "after years of watching cartoons and reading comic books, it is easy for readers to imitate the thoughts and behaviors of their favorite characters," so they are likely to become killers and merciless criminals just like their role models (Huang, 2014).[62]

In Chapter 2, Giroux points out that violence to teenagers is not just a way to vent their emotions, but a fast-fix to solve problem and identity issues (Giroux, 1996). In today's major media including Japanese *manga*, this idea seems to be widely accepted. Even though most Taiwanese teenagers may not personally experience violent attacks in their daily routine, they still expose themselves to an environment full of violent information from the surrounding media.

[62] An example of this hyperbolic concern can be found in Chapter 4, "Chief executive asked police officers to read *Case Closed* to prevent the next Chieh Cheng."

Fighting, killing, and bullying frequently appear in comic content. In most *manga* stories, violence is not only neutralized, but transformed into heroic actions. By overcoming every "necessary" violent action, heroes and their trusted companions continually face more and fiercer combat on the way to achieving their goals.

Do comic books really possess such nefarious influence on young readers' minds? Let's examine the kinds of potentially sinister ideologies they conceal. It is true that Top 5 comic books depict and dramatize a wide variety of violent and non-violent crimes. Review panel members agreed that scenes of bloodshed, bodily damage, and death caused by violence are presented in every series, whether as the result of homicides in the detective stories of *Case Closed*, or the constant combat of the other four series examined. However, my panel members and I agreed that the display of violence in each of the series is different and causes readers to react in different ways. In *Attack on Titan*, the author depicts the destruction of helpless humans in the claws and maws of giant cannibals by graphic illustrations of hemorrhaging bodies being ripped limb from limb. In other stories that are also combat-oriented like *One Piece*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*, even though bloodshed is illustrated, it is often rendered in an aesthetic style reminiscent of *Sumi-e*, Japanese ink brush painting. Many characters who have sustained serious injuries are still able to walk and talk and seem inviolable to their crippling or fatal consequences. In *Case Closed*, the bodies of murder victims are prone but otherwise indistinguishable from those of the detectives, police and forensic personnel who examine them. Comparing this carefully cleansed quartet to *Attack on Titan* is instructive.

In other words, the way in which different cartoons are illustrated makes a difference. To use a parallel, American example, the violence presented in *Bugs Bunny* is less likely to make your skin crawl than that of *Batman*. In all the Top 5 comic books except *Attack on Titan*,

violence is rendered in ways unlikely to make readers queasy or to want to imitate it. These "fantasized deaths" can be defined as a special strategy used in comic books for teenagers whose authors curb their penchant for realistic detail or arrange story plots to reduce the brutal consequences of violent confrontations and the crucial details of homicides. The goal is to spare readers the gory details without diminishing their involvement with the story. Since fantasized death is not real death, readers remain relatively unfazed by the situations their favorite characters face and confident they will overcome them. Thus, they are willing to suspend their disbelief that a protagonist can be burned, poisoned and frozen in a single episode, like Luffy in *One Piece,* Vol. 55, and still survive to seek other adventures.

When we remember the concept of "fantasized death," it is easier to understand students' reactions. To get their ideas about the issues of violence presented in comic books, I asked: "Some people say comic books are too violent. Do you agree? Does this violence influence the way you behave?" Although all the students admitted some comic books are violent, they disagreed that comic books would influence them to practice or advocate violence as a way of life. Jessica said that the stories in *manga* are just entertainments, while Olin and Julian thought that the idea of comic books inspiring violence is a bias created by the news media. Helen claimed she had the ability to select proper material and emphasized, "I only choose normal comic books."

However, as Aida said, "I do not think all comic books should be labeled as violent or sexual. It depends." Indeed, some comic books do contain violent images that should be considered as inappropriate for adolescents. These extreme cases can be found in the R-rated category and pertains to series that may contain psychotic crime sprees, extraordinary bloodshed,

and detailed depictions of stab and gunshot wounds and vascular damage.[63] However, none of this extreme violence exists in Top 5 comic books. Indeed, of the Top 5 series, *Attack on Titan* is the only one regarded as "violent" by Rod and Ruby. Both mentioned the graphic depiction of characters' hemorrhaging. Ruby said, "At the end of *Attack on Titan*, Vol. 1, I was shocked to see Eren's mother spurting blood. It was horrible!" Vincent mentioned that some combat in comic books can be considered violent, but just "a little bit," because characters do not negotiate with each other before fighting. But, he added, "*manga* wouldn't be fun if all they showed were people talking."

Combat is a primary focus in both American and Japanese mainstream comic books. As Weinkuff pointed out in Chapter 2, since Japanese comic books are usually published in extended series, some people may be under the impression that "extensive combat scenes are simply meant to conceal deficiencies in the narrative or results" (Weinkuff, 2013, 100). However, since Japanese comic books are so popular, it is doubtful that lack of narrative is a definitive fault. On the contrary, their frequent combat scenes cross cultural and national boundaries to excite the bellicose imagination of young readers around the world.[64] When it comes to durable series like *One Piece*, which launched its 75th volume in 2014, one can only imagine the thousands of combat scenes that have had to be presented in novel ways to hold the attention of veteran readers and attract new ones. Since a single series can attain such dimension and longevity, the sheer mass of violent scenarios in all Top 5 series combined staggers the imagination. Moreover, young readers' taste for *manga* may not be sated by

[63] My survey results showed that 41.8% of the students said that they read R-rated comic books as well as mainstream comic books. However, this study does not deal with R-rated violent comic books, nor can it draw any conclusions as to whether or to what degree student-informants' behavior may be influenced by them.

[64] The exception to this may be the *Gin Tama* series, whose sense of humor is extremely Japanese. Therefore, even though it contains a plethora of combat scenes, the characters' dialogue and subtler story elements would require expert translation if published abroad.

perusal of only the most popular series. Japanese comics' violent content is omnipresent. Because of the categorical enormity and stylistic range of *manga* combat, it may be necessary to establish a clear-cut separation between ideologies of "inappropriate violence" and "acceptable violence." To define all the violence in comic books as "unacceptable" leads to a series of more complicated questions: should PG-13 movies also be criticized for showing combat and bloodshed? When we employ strict standards to criticize Japanese comic books, should we use the same standards to pass judgment on young adult literature, TV series and news reports? And, if it were possible to stop the myriad ways violent images are reproduced and diffused in contemporary culture, what would be the legal, ethical, and artistic consequences of such censorship?

Since the notion of "acceptable violence" in the popular media is always expanding to include new manifestations and broader coverage, another issue that should be considered is how young readers and viewers react to the frequent display of violence. A pair of survey questions attempted to address this: 1) "Many comic book characters fight and bleed. Do you think this is too violent?" and, 2) "Sometimes people are cut in half, or their hands and legs are severed in comic books. What do you think about that?" Interestingly, students' reactions to these two questions appeared to be contradictory. As far as the bloodshed which usually accompanies combat, only one student saw it as "a little bit violent," while the other eleven said it is not. Olin and Julian referred to their own experience to make the point that it is natural that characters bleed when fighting: "When we fall down, we bleed," Julian said, "It has nothing to do with violence." However, relating to the issue of bodily damage, ten students felt it constituted "acceptable violence." Perhaps one of the reason students think it acceptable is because they have gradually gotten used to this kind of graphic display. As Olin said, "After you get used to

it, it's fine." As novice *manga* readers, not all of them felt comfortable with 'bodily damage,' although the amount of detail in the depiction of wounds is moderate in all the Top 5 series except *Attack on Titan*. Aida and Julian said they are still uncomfortable with certain scenes; however, they continue to read the series that contain them. As Julian said, referring to *Attack on Titan*, "It is horrible to see limbs severed, but that's what the main character has to go through. He gains his power by passing this challenge."[65] To most students, graphic images of grave corporal insult challenge their limits and arouse strong feelings, like fear and revulsion. On the other hand, they may also experience a sense of vicarious accomplishment at having 'survived' such tribulations along with their hero. As Rod said, "I think the characters are cool and I wish I could do what they do." When representations of violence are not so challenging, they act as palliatives for young readers who find they can concentrate on an action-packed story line without having to pay a psychic toll. This is why the violence in most popular *manga* series is so different from everyday violence.

Some students' answers to the survey question, "Many people think we can learn from comic books. What do you think?" also touched on ideologies of violence.

Jessica: Luffy and his crew show the spirit of teamwork. He always fights for his friends and faces challenges.

Fay: They teach me that if you fail at something, you should try it again.

Dana: They make me stronger."

From these answers, it seems that ideologies of violence are essential not only to keep *manga's* story-lines compelling but also because they contain the seeds of positive values. To dramatize the challenges with which the main characters are confronted, obstacles are presented

[65] In *Attack on Titan*, volume 1, the protagonist, Eren, has his leg and hand gnawed off by ravenous, man-eating giants.

with different levels of violence in combat-oriented comic books. Fatal punishment is a potential consequence of attempting to overcome extremely challenging physical and mental barriers. By conquering them, *manga* protagonists not only show their superior power, but also defend the validity of the positive values they hold. Even in comic books that do not focus on fighting, like *Case Closed*, violent crimes provoke and maintain the readers' interest as they witness the detective hero solve challenging cases and become more steadfast in his conviction that truth and justice are worth putting life and limb at risk to defend.

Why cartoon-like depictions of the triumph of justice and truth are so popular in mainstream teenage comic books can, perhaps, be explained by our favorite theorist: "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression" (Freire, 2012, 56). *Manga* protagonists, often presented as existentially oppressed at the beginning of their adventures, are often challenged by what Joseph Campbell called "the dragons of the status quo." The growth in understanding that accompanies and is a consequence of the struggle to protect their values is similar to the process of 'humanization' that Freire describes. By identifying with "the hero's journey" of *manga* protagonists created in their image, youthful readers get a foretaste of their eventual maturation into men and women of action and purpose, whose mission in life is intimately connected with their spiritual growth.[66]

It is true that the Japanese comic book version of this journey is not a handbook for human development. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that young readers are inspired by these characters and get caught up in their struggles. Indeed, their teachers noticed that students like to read

[66] In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Paperback, 1973) mythologist Joseph Campbell traces this archetypal journey.

comic books with action scenes, but they had different ideas about the extent of their influence. Mr. Dai and Ms. Yeh agree with the students that the ideologies of acceptable violence in Top 5 series exert no long-lasting, nefarious influence on their behavior or mentality. Ms. Yeh said, "Current media entertainment, like novels, movies and films always include a certain amount of sex and violence." Since it exists in every medium, students have gotten used to it. Mr. Dai thought that, since *manga* protagonists always win in the end, they have a beneficial effect on student readers: "Their journey is heroic and there's nothing wrong with heroism, particularly in our current dilemma." Only Mr. Yen believed that ideologies of violence have a negative influence: "It makes them believe that violence can solve everything. Even if their goals are good, it would be easy for them to say 'I have to help my friends, so I have to use violence.' " Indeed, although all my student-informants agreed that violence was not a viable solution for situations like those depicted in comic books, it is impossible to conjecture that no young person would act out violently as a result of psychological pre-disposition, naiveté or overexposure to their magnetic pull. Therefore, without further study, it is better to reserve one's conclusions about the negative influence of violent ideologies.

Whether media violence influences students' thoughts and behaviors has been the subject of an ongoing debate that has spanned the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some psychological studies of young adults who have watched violent TV programs for years show that they can promote aggression and violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).[67] Also, as Cultural Studies scholars often remind researchers, readers are not always passive when receiving messages; children often function as "active producers of meaning, rather than passive consumers, although they are also concerned with the ideological and formal constraints"

[67] The results of studies focused on the negative effects of televised violence do not mean that comic books would have the same effect, as violent scenarios filtered by purposeful lack of realistic detail in *manga* can be brought to life on TV by talented casts and technicians, believable dialog and verisimilar locations and props.

(Buckingham, 1997). This is another factor that makes it very difficult to establish a causal connection between media violence and violent aggression, whether aimed at others or oneself.

However, I believe my research makes clear that the danger of Taiwanese adolescents resorting to violence after reading Top 5 *manga* is negligible. Indeed, what *manga's* transmission of violent ideologies influences is not so much their consumers' behavior, but the surprising degree and variety of violent representations they are able to process through the protective filter I call "fantasized death." These less than realistic illustrations of fatal incidents do not provoke readers' murderous instincts. Instead, they show their pity and fear, their horror and disgust. More importantly, according to their responses to a variety of specific survey questions I posed, they derive excitement, empowerment, and faith in the future from what they interpret as the inevitability of victory over fearsome combatants by diligent, organized, courageous collaborators who look and sound a lot like them.

5.5 Japanese Cultural Dominance in the Neo-liberal World

In section 5.1, **"**The ideology and influence of ethnicity," I point out that *manga's* ethnic representations are skewed insofar as Japanese and Caucasians are disproportionately featured. In this section, I propose to address certain consequences of this phenomenon by attempting to understand how Taiwanese consumers interpret the many cultural and ethnic differences between Taiwan and Japan and how *manga* are used as a cultural tool to keep Taiwan culturally and economically subservient to its erstwhile colonial rulers. By using a combination of surveys, textual analysis and interviews, I will discuss how comic books influence students' understanding of Japan, and speculate as to whether Taiwan can recreate its own comic book industry.

5.5.1 Japan as Shape-shifter

As discussed in Chapter 2, post-colonialism is an essential perspective from which to analyze the special cultural relationship between Taiwan and Japan. Japan is one of the strongest foreign cultural influences on Taiwan and has consistently extended its marketing and industrial power over the latter in what I describe as a multifaceted cultural invasion. Using marketing strategy, Japanese comic books progressed and proliferated from simple printed texts to serve as seeds and sediment for a radiant garden of budding merchandise: animated films, TV series, games, and a host of ancillary byproducts. "Published in Japan" became known as a high quality imprimatur not only to Taiwanese readers, but for a much wider audience.

My survey results show that 22.7% of my student-informants buy comic books for themselves, while 16.2% rent them from stores.[68] Thus, although these junior high school students' depend on their parents for allowance, nearly 40% of them use the money they are given to purchase comic books. Another 34.4% read them online, a percentage nearly as great as those who buy them. Online *manga* are usually pirated and translated by bilingual fans, a fact confirmed by Huang's study, discussed in Chapter 2, which shows that the cultural diffusion of Japan's comic empire is largely the result of the illicit but widespread sharing of product (Huang, 2007). For *manga* producers, viral distribution on the Internet has been a double-edged sword since 2006, vastly increasing the genre's popularity although at the loss of much profit by its conceptual and creative talent. Their losses appear even more grievous in a recent report, which shows that product 'pirated' in U.S., cost Japan two trillion yen (about $16 billion). Therefore, starting in 2013, the Japanese government initiated *Project Manga*,

[68] This rate is different from the Taiwanese government report of 2010, which showed that 1,237 people, only 6.6%, purchased comic books in 2009, and only 8.9% rented them from stores (Government Information Office, 2010). The age of participants, time period, and size of the sample may influence the result.

working with fifteen publishing companies to protect them from unwarranted international distribution (Lin, 2014).

To attract teenage readers and turn them into loyal customers, there are some special tricks hidden in Japanese comic books. Their paperback format, black and white design and pocket size make Japanese comic books both portable and affordable. To turn readers into diehard fans, comic authors use different strategies designed to display their sense of humor and endear them to young comic book aficionados. Besides the format, the contents are important too. By design, protagonists in these comic books are usually the same age as readers with special personalities that make them seem ideal friends and companions. By making protagonists into super stars, their adventures, their special powers, their weapons, outfits, and representative props can all be commercialized as physical or digital product.

From the above results, it is clear that the success of Japanese comic books has to do with more than the author/illustrator's talent and imagination. When adequately published with detailed drawings and popular appeal, these printed comic books represent the end product of a great cultural industry. By transforming the traditional relationship between products and consumers into a fantasy relationship between super stars and fans, readers are brought into an emotional connection with the personalities of these *manga*. As Chen said, "fans are productive, which means that they actively, enthusiastically, sometimes fanatically interact with the text. The successful globalization of Japanese comic book culture relies on its fan base" (Chen, 2004). However, Chen exaggerates when he claims that Japan takes a "horizontal approach" to manga fans, different from Disney's "vertical approach," which relies on industrialized capital. In fact, both "approaches" are used in both markets.

In Taiwan, Japanese comic books have gradually created a new common sense. A virtual

tsunami of Japanese comic books and related products has flooded Taipei, so much so that Japanese comic book culture has infiltrated and influenced many Taiwanese people's memories and daily experience. In other words, apart from their influence on the economy, they have instigated cultural and ideological change. According to the teachers I interviewed, students demonstrate their interest in Japanese comic books in a variety of ways. Mr. Yen said, "They like to imitate Japanese characters by dressing like them or they use them as decorations, affixing their images to their book bags or putting them under their desk mats." Ms. Yeh agrees: "Some students bring a lot of Japanese terms from *manga* directly into their daily lives, like '問題發言'(problematic announcement). They also use Japanese comic names as nicknames on the Internet like '神樂(Kagura)' or '神無月(Kamnazuki)'."

"You could call it a *cultural invasion*," claims Mr. Dai. But from the teachers' observations, what can be seen is that many Taiwanese teenagers are trying to get as close as possible to their favorite *manga* characters, either by collecting their commodified mementoes or by incorporating their language into daily speech, email and text messages. Vincent bought the *Attack on Titan* handbook. Rod attended the *Doraemon* exhibition. Diehard fans are not satisfied just to read *manga* series, they want to make every ancillary experience part of their lives. Therefore, even though they do not always recognize characters in comic books as "Japanese" (see 5.1.2 above), most students are still influenced by the cultural ideologies embedded in *manga* and consider everything about Japan "cool." In fact, when I asked them "Do you think you learn more about Japan by reading them (*manga)*? Does it make it more likely that you will one day visit that country and see those things?" nine students said yes to the first question, and eleven students said they'd like to visit Japan with their parents' permission. Japan has become a major attraction for Taiwanese people. Their admiration for the country

and its culture has made them open to all sorts of Japanese influences in their daily lives. Thus, it is not surprising that Aida describes Taiwanese acceptance of Japanese culture as "common." Mrs. Dai also believes "students here are familiar with Japanese culture and locations." Without giving it much thought, many Taiwanese adults and teenagers become 'Japanophiles.' Mr. Dai admitted, "I am not a student but, personally, I feel rather fond of Japan after reading *manga*." Mr. Yen also thought it easy for students to be influenced by Japan, because "I myself actually got influenced…I'm a Japanophile. I think Japanese products are superior. I love to go shopping in Japan."

At the same time, the teachers understand that the timeless, tradition-bound and embattled empire purveyed by *manga* has little to do with the crowded streets and cutthroat commercialism of post-modern Japan. This imaginative overlay is a neo-colonial invention, one that implies the existence of a culture both more intense and spiritually fulfilling than the one the Taiwanese inhabit, containing a magic ethos young readers can dream about, tantalizingly near but, somehow, just beyond their reach. Indeed, it is difficult to determine the extent of the inferiority complex created in Taiwan by the compelling but unattainable *zeitgeist* Japanese comic books fabricate. Moreover, since Taiwan and Taiwanese citizens are non-entities in the *manga* universe, adolescent believers long to adopt the cultural capital and savoir-faire of their favorite characters. But, although they may imaginatively embody 'the other,' profound feelings of inferiority do not subside. This may lead, *in extremis*, to a quasi-psychotic mindset like the one ascribed to the descendants of African slaves in former French Antillean colonies like Martinique and Haiti that Frantz Fanon so vividly describes in his 1961 classic, *The Wretched of the Earth*.[69] Dazzled by a fictive world of ceaseless action and adventure, young

[69] Freire cites Fanon in the first chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed:* "The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people." (op cit, ___fn., p. 62).

Taiwanese readers access Japanese language and culture through *manga* images and onomatopoetic exclamations, momentarily unaware that they are different people on a different island than the one where crenellated castles, man-eating giants and teenage knights are created and appear to abide.

Japan's cultural dominance is maintained by *manga* exported to Taiwan where the characters' names remain Japanese. This is different from those published in the West. For example, the hero of the American version of *Case Closed*, Shinichi, is renamed 'Jimmy.' Even though most Taiwanese students are unable to read Japanese, many exclamatory expressions, uttered by characters in the heat of battle, are purposely not translated into Mandarin. In my survey, I asked: "Many characters have Japanese names. Actually, *manga* often use Japanese exclamations to express reactions and emotions. How do you feel about this?" Eight students said they didn't mind that characters retained their Japanese names and used Japanese exclamations, while only four students said it would be okay if the names were changed to their Taiwanese equivalents and the exclamations rendered in Mandarin. When I further questioned their complacency, most students said they would actually be annoyed if Chinese characters were used in exclamations and if Taiwanese names supplanted the characters' given names.

Sheryl: It would be so *weird* to use Taiwanese names!

Jessica: If you change them (their names), their Japanese features will change.

York: If you rename characters and translate the exclamations, readers will object!

When the students believe that Japanese expressions and names are more authentic and integral to their enjoyment, they doubt the relevancy of their local dialect and the power of Taiwanese names to match them. As Freire said, "The language of the people cannot exist without thought; and neither language nor thought can exist without a structure to which they

refer" (Freire, 2012, 96). Freire believed that language and thought are inextricably bound together. Language is not so much a product of our experience and need to describe it as the medium of ideologies, and an agent of culture. It is a mental current, a sonic and visual adhesive that helps us organize our thoughts and understand how we feel about things. In his dialogues with Faundez, Freire pointed out that the use of the colonizer's language always excludes the oppressed who have little or no access to the cultivated speech of city dwellers, are unable to read the codified signs that 'lettered' people live by, or understand the printed discourses of the university-trained elite (Freire & Faundez, 1989, 110-117). This was a lesson he learned while attempting to institute a literacy program in the recently liberated African nation of Guinea Bissau where he ended up recommending that people learn to read and write their local dialect rather than Portuguese, the "official" language of their colonizers which was not spoken outside the capital city yet remained the idiom of choice of the revolutionary government that requested his expertise.[70]

Freire's argument demonstrates that political power is an essential language component. Through their passionate embrace of *manga*, Taiwanese youth have grown used to Japanese ideograms, the linguistic building blocks of an idiom and a culture they are unable to read. From their willing acceptance of Japanese exclamations and nomenclature, it is clear that they regard Japan's culture as superior to their own. However, is it possible to decolonize the Japanese influence by re-emphasizing the importance of Taiwan's local languages, as Freire's argument implies? From the results of my interviews, it may require a lot of effort to redeem this generation's confidence in Taiwanese culture, even if the immediate goal is simply to make

[70] An English-language edition of Freire's *Cartas à Guiné-Bissau, Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea Bissau* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) translated by St. John Hunter and with a foreword by Jonathan Kozol, was published in a limited, hardcover edition the same year. A new and affordable paperback addition is scheduled to be released in 2016.

young readers feel less “weird” about translation from an idiom and its attendant culture which, while undoubtedly appealing is tangential to their own lived experience.

Abetted by their nation’s economic and cultural industries, Taiwanese people need to confront their post-colonial situation and seriously reflect on the difference between admiring Japanese cultural products, and becoming economically and culturally dependent on Japanese resourcefulness and productivity. With this in mind, I will continue my argument by outlining some strategies for Taiwanese resistance to Japanese strength.

5.5.2 Can Taiwan Resist Japanese Hegemony?

The Taiwanese government report of 2013 shows that printed copies of comic books and light novels have dramatically increased. Comic books, with 3,013 titles, make up the seventh largest publishing category (National Central Library, 2014). What is more, the 2010 report leaves no doubt as to the provenance of more than 95% of these books: Japan, and implies that shrinking competition from the national market is the inevitable result (Government Information Office, 2011). As discussed in section 5.5.1, the excessive dependence on Japanese comic publications make Taiwan extremely vulnerable to its ideological influence. If local readers and publishing companies continue to ignore the manifold implications of this cultural takeover by a former colonizer, it will be difficult to reclaim the hearts and minds of a generation of impressionable students from cultural allegiance to a foreign power.

To confront this issue, the most obvious solution would be to construct a strong Taiwanese comic book industry that could begin to redeem its current reliance on Japanese imports. Are Taiwanese and international investors willing to offer financial incentive to the recovery and retooling of the nation’s flagging comic book industry? How do young readers compare the

local product to foreign imports? To know their answers, I asked both young readers and teachers, "Do you read Taiwanese comic books? How do they compare to Japanese *manga*?" A single student, Dana, defended the national comics: "Some Japanese comic books are good, and some Taiwanese comic books are also good." Only four others could recall specific titles of Taiwanese comic books. According to the responses of the other eleven students and two teachers, Japanese comic books are superior in every way to their Taiwanese imitators.

Aida: Foreign authors are more skillful.

Helen: Japanese authors' drawings are better.

York: The topics of Japanese comics have more variety.

Julian: Taiwanese cartoons use local language, so only we can understand them. Besides, Taiwanese comics and cartoons always want to tell you what is right and what is wrong.

Mr. Yen: When I was a child, I read both Taiwanese and Japanese comic books, but lately, I notice Taiwanese comic books are rougher. Although certain authors produce excellent work, most of them are immature. They are no match for an important pop culture like Japan's.

Ms. Yeh: Some Taiwanese authors have gotten too 'Japanesey,' while others use local sites and stories without making them attractive enough.

Obviously, there are objective factors that cause Japanese comic books to get better reviews than their Taiwanese counterparts. From a commercial perspective, it seems logical that people prefer high-quality products to those that consistently display inferior quality or workmanship. Even an analytical article from the Chinese Cartoonists' Union admits, "Since the Taiwanese market has been overwhelmingly occupied by Japanese comic books, local authors and readers

have grown accustomed to consuming these 'fine art' exemplars. Therefore, the total output of Taiwanese comic books is relatively small" (Chen, 2013). Authors who lack the requisite skills cannot elicit the support of Taiwanese readers but, in fact, no local author can compare to a popular Japanese illustrator with years of experience. This lack of experience combined with the conservative marketing plans of most Taiwanese comic book publishers, place Taiwanese authors in an extremely challenging situation, one non-conducive to the steady development of confidence and acquisition of relevant experience that would make them competitive with Japanese *manga* masters.

How can Taiwan turn this situation around? The Taiwanese people are currently confronted with a serious ideological issue that exists in all capitalist societies. Here is how Freire describes it: "What we hear is that [corporate] globalization of the world's economy is a necessity from which we cannot escape. A given aspect of the capitalist system, an instance of the productive forces of capitalism as experienced and played out in the centers of world economic power, is thus made universal" (Freire, 2001, 113). Indeed, as a dedicated contributor to the development of Asian capitalism, it is difficult if not impossible at this point for Taiwan to hop off the neo-liberal, hyper-capitalist train and settle for an economically disadvantageous position on the other side of the tracks. But the Taiwanese *can* employ critical thinking to question deeply embedded ideologies that they have held as 'the true way' for generations. As Carlos Alberto Torres points out, "Culture is a battleground and post-colonialism's main goal has been to address the need to decolonize the mind and to advance the interest of oppressed people" (Torres, 1998). Taiwanese citizens must afford themselves the opportunity to reflect on the cultural-economic battles of their everyday lives by critically challenging the neo-liberal 'common sense' employed by certain large companies. Because what these companies sell,

aside from goods produced elsewhere, are subtle but potent ideas and ideologies that accompany their diffusion but may have a detrimental effect on local beliefs and identities.

In our interview, when Vincent said "*Manga* have a long history" as the rationale for Japan's outperforming Taiwan, I told him that Taiwanese comic culture reached its zenith in the 1950s and, perhaps, his generation could revive it.[71] There is no doubt that Taiwanese artists are capable of producing high quality work. They have revealed their talents either on the Internet, in traditional publishing, or *Doujin* exhibitions. This shows that Taiwan is not yet an oppressed state, one which passively acquiesces to and absorbs the dumping of cultural products from other countries. Indeed, Taiwan retains its powerful creativity and the possibility of resisting the neo-liberal monster. Thus, I believe that critical pedagogy is a necessary first step in rebuilding the potential of the upcoming generation. Whether led by the government or an alliance of NGOs it is clear that the time has come for Taiwanese consumers to raise their level of consciousness about their present situation and consider ways of controlling blind consumerism and supporting the grass roots redevelopment of Taiwanese culture.

5.6 Is Critical Pedagogy for Comic Books possible?

In section 5.5, I discussed the need for critical pedagogy. In this section, I am going to explore the question of whether it is possible to use critical pedagogy for comic books, and what are the caveats and guidelines that must be considered when adopting a Freirian approach.

Resuming our Chapter 2 discussion, Freire used critical pedagogy in the educational field

[71] From the 1950s to the 1960s, Taiwanese comic books flourished and several famous authors used comic books to reflect social reality (Taiwan Comic Net, 2014). However, in 1962, the "Comic Books Counseling Law (連環圖書輔導辦法)," borrowed the hegemony of martial law to set political restrictions on local comic book production, which led many companies to reject local authors' works in favor of importing pirated Japanese *manga* (Li, 2004, 27). This was a harbinger of Taiwan's current reliance on Japanese exportation of comic books, *animé* and their vendable paraphernalia.

should when he posed the problem of what he called "banking education" wherein students passively accept each and every ideology their teachers bring to their attention without actively seeking to understand their specific relevance or provenance. To build an educational space that is both liberal and critical, teachers and students must dialectically investigate what Freire calls "generative themes," which can be found in a community's (or a nation's) social representations, and "afford [students] the opportunity both to discover and discuss them in order to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes" (Freire, 2012, 96-97). By using words and concepts adopted from the students' linguistic universe, teachers in forming a *culture circle*, which is based on problem posing, stimulate critical dialogue and problem solving (Manning, 2010, 35). Thus, students have chance to reflect about those things in the surrounding culture that they have taken for granted. As Freire himself describes it, "within dialogue and problem-posing, educator-educatee and educatee-educator go forward together to develop a critical attitude" (Freire, 2005, 113).

In my research and interviews, I used these principles to stimulate dialogue with student-informants, and most of them showed strong interest in giving their opinions. Especially when my questions were based on hypothetical explorations of interesting responses to preceding questions, many students relied on their creative imagination and allowed themselves to be challenged and spontaneous during our back-and-forth dialogue. Some students showed a willingness to connect their life experiences with comic books, as when answering the question, "Which super power do *you* want?" From the values revealed in their answers, a further question arose: "Do you believe that a super power can solve your problems?" With the four girls who said they did not want superpowers, it would be interesting to initiate a dialogue about why they are so concerned about the dangers that come with enormous power?

Connected to the question of what to do with the sense of empowerment that people tend to derive from critical thinking, perhaps it affords further elucidation to ask: Should we remain what we call 'normal' and conduct 'business as usual?' Or should we attempt to change the world, as Freire prescribes?

Then I asked the students to reflect on the difference between *manga* tales and reality: "In comic books, the main characters always win. Do you think this is true in real life?" The answers of eight students not only demonstrated their understanding of the difference between the real world and world of comic books, but also presented complex examples of their understanding of that reality. Several students said that, although they admire the positive ideologies that comic books provide, they noticed that hard work does not guarantee good results in the real world where even 'good guys' may not get the support they need to accomplish worthy tasks. As Julian said, "You can't count on being lucky just because you do the right thing." There are many other dialectical themes that can be extrapolated from this point, like the ways in which the comics' world is "better" than reality, or what can be changed by practicing patience with and compassion for one's fellow beings in everyday life. In this, Freirian dialectical education can work even better with Taiwanese students. By extending the structure of dialogues and the number of participants, it would be possible to build and sustain the foundation of an ongoing tradition of critical pedagogy, based on numerous experiments like the interviews I conducted with these young Top 5 *manga* readers.

However, as far as developing an actual critical pedagogy for comic books, the interviews revealed several limitations. When asked, "Many people think we can learn from comic books. "What do you think?", the dozen Taiwanese junior high students said they had learned certain values, including friendship, persistence, and justice. However, none of them mentioned

specific information from specific series. Even though Vincent mentioned that he learned many things from reading *Case Closed*, he could not remember what they were. Since most readers see comic books as entertainment and an escape from homework, they pay scant attention to the information they provide, reading them at lightning speed and remembering very little. Indeed, from Kellner and Oechslin's study, even 'educational comic books' are not failsafe: if readers do not seriously respond to both images and narrations, it will be difficult for them to inculcate the knowledge the books present (Kellner & Oechslin, 2013). From this perspective, it seems more likely that mainstream comic books could be used to spur dialogical discussions of ideologies rather than cognitive study.

Furthermore, it is important to note that students are very aware of comics' "preaching" potential. In other words, top-heavy educational content may cause students to reject the text, despite its comic book-like illustrations and captions. This is what Julian meant when he explained the reason he does not like Taiwanese comic books in section 5.5.2: "Taiwanese comics and cartoons always want to tell you what is right and what is wrong." The same logic governs classroom conversations of comic books. Once students notice that teachers are trying to tell them "what is right" about them, comic books become no different from text books with 'right' and 'wrong' answers. When either side starts to feel uneasy, the dialogical relationship between teachers and students quickly unravels.

Also, the selection of teaching materials would merit careful consideration. From the results of the survey, 53.5% of my student-informants said they had time for less than one hour a week of comic book perusal, which may mean their reading is limited to fragments. This also implies that the comic books read by the students would not be the same. It could be difficult for a teacher to select a series of materials that are familiar to all the participants and lead to class

discussion. Furthermore, the theme of comic books should be noted as well. Horror comic books are popular with teenage readers, but may raise more concerns than mainstream fantasy, science fiction, sports or detective categories as far as being suitable for ideological discussions.

Besides these teaching strategies, there are two other educational/ideological challenges to the application of critical pedagogy for comic books. First, over half the students and teachers I interviewed agree that teachers should have the right to curb or control students' comic book consumption at school. Nine of my student-informants agreed that teachers should maintain the right to prohibit students from reading comic books, while three teachers mentioned that they set different rules to ban or limit students from reading comic books in school. Most students who agree with the restrictions believe the purpose of this rule is to make them focus on academics. Jessica said, "School is a place for study." However, considering that nine out of twelve students disagree with school authorities confiscating their possessions for multiple personal reasons, it seems that the majority have different ideas than teachers.

Through the dialogues, it is clear that all the teachers except Ms. Yeh have serious concerns about students reading comics. Mr. Dai's concern is that they actually heighten the academic pressure by wasting students' precious time, but Mr. Yen's and Mrs. Dai's, concerns are the "values" implicit in the books themselves. As Mr. Yen said, "even without the pressure, students still should not read comic books because they have no educational value." Mrs. Dai also mentioned the behavior of a student who seemed obsessed with comic books: "She was a very gloomy, almost lifeless, girl with dark circles under her eyes who seemed more interested in sex than the other students." Currently, comic books are still taboo in most Taiwanese classrooms. Even when teachers read and approve of comic books, they may believe it is their duty to protect students from any potential harm hidden in them. Thus *manga* are currently

banned at most schools even though, one day, they may be seen as provocative, ideology-saturated artifacts for educational and cultural studies.

For the great majority of teachers and students, even if they have the time, interest and energy to promote critical pedagogy and reading comprehension, novels and poetry are more legitimate objects of concentration than comics. Five out of seven students said schools allow them to read novels but ban comic books because novels have the same characteristics as text books and include useful vocabulary and grammar leading to improvement of their didactic skillset. Two other students mentioned the quality of the knowledge imparted and the influence on their class performance. Helen said, "Maybe because novels have fewer pictures and their stories are not that funny. Comic books are too funny and interesting, teachers do not want students to think about them during the class and have bad academic performance."

It is interesting to see how students compare "funny comic books" with "boring novels, like text books." Of course, many novels have interesting stories and dramatic plots, but in these students' minds, compared with the strong visual impact of *manga*, novels do not provide the visual entertainment they crave. Yet, knowing this, Mr. Yen revealed his idea that reading comic books "can't be compared with reading meaningful prose." Another Chinese language teacher, Ms. Yeh, took a different position. Although she believed "comic books and novels are both forms of entertainment", so comic books are not less valuable, she admitted that "Comic books rely on pictures so they won't help you learn better writing skills, as novels may." Nearly all people believe studying text-heavy narrative can increase students' reading and writing ability more than light-weight comic books. Therefore, since most class time is used for increasing academic performance, novels are favored as extra-curricular learning materials.

It is true that all such rationales mean that my proposal for comic books as tools for critical

pedagogy must face some practical challenges. What if, regardless of these situations, teachers are ready and willing to try this kind of teaching? To know these four teachers' answers, the last question I asked them was: "Do you think it is suitable to attempt critical pedagogy on comic books with junior high school students?"

The two senior teachers, Mr. Dai and Mrs. Dai, thought it was not proper for teachers to apply these kinds of curricula for junior high school students, while the two junior teachers, Mr. Yen and Ms. Yeh, thought it would be suitable material for middle schoolers. Teachers who have concerns about critical pedagogy said they are afraid that junior high school students are not mentally mature enough.

Mr. Dai: Students must be mentally mature to take this class. That means he or she should be at least 18 years old. If you teach this to early adolescents, they will easily doubt everything. That may seriously influence the way they see things or study.

Mrs. Dai: Most students of this age cannot think systematically. If they feel the things they are asked to think about are complicated or difficult, they give up. They simply enjoy comic books for fun. In a [junior high school] class, if you have five students who are capable of deep thinking, you are lucky.

However, Mr. Yen and Ms. Yeh both disagree with the senior teachers' opinions.

Mr. Yen: Many junior high school students aren't yet conscious of stereotypes, so you may have to let them know what they are. Otherwise, they may think they do not matter.

Me: Then you think it's feasible for teenagers to take this class?

Mr. Yen: Yes, I still think it is feasible for teenagers. But you may need more than one class to introduce the subject. Don't expect they'll understand everything in

forty-five minutes … Personally, I think this class would be better for undergraduates, because they are more mature and would be able to have positive dialogues. And they have spent more of their lives under the influence of *manga*.

Ms. Yeh: I think it is suitable for junior high school students, because now they only read without thinking, and it would be good to teach them to read things from different perspectives.

Me: Some teachers believe critical pedagogy should be applied to older students. What do you think?

Ms. Yeh: I think junior high school students can do that. The key is the degree of difficulty you introduce. You cannot ask them difficult questions.

From the above opinions, it is clear that most teachers still feel uncomfortable about applying critical pedagogy. However, this kind of resistance may be linked to a basic mistrust of its nature and potential effectiveness. Since, in Taiwan, most curricula are introduced and conducted in classic "banking style," students seldom have the chance to question the information they receive, and teachers also feel confused about how to lead students to think critically without unleashing their inherent skepticism. Therefore, many teachers lack confidence in their students' abilities and tend to seek a safer way to conduct their teaching, especially when it comes to imparting mainstream ideologies. Educators feel pressure and uncertainty about challenging thoughts that are not embedded in approved text books.

Regardless of what I see as teachers' over-protection of the next generation of Taiwanese citizens, as a researcher who believes in critical analysis, I also believe that students should have the opportunity to take part in critical pedagogy focused on comic books at different levels of

their development. I trust that educators, parents and researchers can encourage and give them opportunities for critical thinking. In fact, that may ultimately be seen as their most important task: to empower students' minds and thoughts. Because, without serious training in thinking, there is no way for students at any age to be able to see the world reflectively or critically and thereby achieve mental and physical autonomy. From this perspective, junior high school would not be too early to assist students in their first steps toward critical thinking.

However, it is also important to note that educators and parents may worry about the process of their becoming conscious, and the results of such critical pedagogical awareness. It is not an issue of right or wrong, but if critical pedagogy is to play a part in the greening of the Taiwanese field of education, it may require more conversation and systematic support so that people come to understand the intricacies and advantages of the 'globalized' world and to become more aware of its threats. In that way they can play their part as informed and outspoken citizens. If they are willing to go beyond their 'limit situations' and to be made uncomfortable enough by the *status quo* that they are willing to question and protest about the way their governments profit from and protect it, private citizens may gradually understand that "critical thinking" is not just a slogan, but a practical way to assume their rights and duties as citizens.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The oppressed groups cannot and should not accept the dominant class's categorization of them as "minority" and, in the process, remain divided along race, class, gender, language and ethnicity lines.

—Paulo Freire, *A dialogue: Culture, language, and race* (Freire & MacEdo, 1995)

6.1 Answers to Research Questions

Imagining an artifact, which is so powerful and influential, becomes a daily life experience that lives with us, and sometimes defines us, and a medium that is widely admired and appreciated by readers from six to sixty. That is the situation of Japanese comic books in Taiwan. Indeed, faced with a cultural phenomenon as strong as this, one would have to be blind to ignore it.

Therefore, to gauge the extent of the *manga* phenomenon in Taiwan, I used multiple perspectives to discover important issues linked to my research. In Chapter 1, I formulated the following research questions to address one of my most pressing concerns: how the ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, violence, and cross cultural issues in mainstream Japanese comic books (*manga*) influence Taiwanese adolescent readers.

1. From the critical perspective of Cultural Studies, what kinds of hidden messages, including ideologies of ethnicity, gender, class, and violence, are represented in Japanese comic books?
2. How do junior high school students and educators see Japanese comic books and their influence?
3. Do Japanese comic books as a foreign communications medium influence Taiwanese

teenagers' cultural identities?

In Chapter 5, I discussed my findings and survey results in some detail. My intention here is to summarize them from a broader perspective. It is clear, for instance, that there is authorial bias in the ideologies of ethnicity presented in Top 5 *manga*. Since they are produced in Japan for Japanese readers, they are ethnocentric to a fault, with the exception of *One Piece* and *Attack on Titan*, which use stereotypical Western images to create an 'international' milieu. In most *manga*, the heroes and their supporters are depicted as superior to non-Asian characters. When "international" or "foreign" types are included, they are usually Caucasians. It is difficult to find dark-skinned people in Japanese comic books. Black or African characters are drawn as phenotypes; more attention is paid to their looks than to their culture. Yet, according to my student-informants, the cultural representations in comic books pique their curiosity to seek out related data, which can be seen as a positive benefit. Since most Taiwanese students only know other Asians, they do not identify *manga* protagonists or villains by their physiognomies, but rely on stereotypes they learn from other sources. Therefore it is very possible that *manga* may strengthen ethnic stereotypes and biases through conscious misrepresentation.

Ideologies of gender show that, even though mainstream *manga* readers include both males and females, male protagonists and their henchmen take more decisive actions and risks than their female acolytes. Since most female characters are depicted as passive, predominant gender stereotypes flourish. Although their teachers believe that teenage *manga* devotees tend to emulate their heroes' behavior, it doesn't necessarily follow that my student-informants think all decisive situations must be resolved by men.

Facts demonstrate that gender ideologies are also connected to body image and sexually implied behaviors. Female bodies are more frequently exposed than male bodies and male

characters often react outrageously to the physical allure of 'hot' women although, in most *manga*, this is presented as comic relief rather than as grounds for charges of sexual harassment. Still, the ineluctable fact is that masculine, heterosexual ideologies dominate *manga* story lines and are accepted by the majority of readers, whether students or teachers, males or females. Moreover, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues are either represented as heterosexual fantasies, like Boy Love (BL) comics whose depiction of beautiful males alone together are meant to titillate female readers or treated as derisory matters, unworthy of serious consideration. Lamentably, neither standpoint does anything to help Taiwanese adolescent readers' understandable confusion about "queer issues."

Ideologies of class should be examined both from an economic perspective and a social perspective. In the Top 5 *manga*, middle class ideologies predominate regardless of the financial backgrounds and material wealth of comic book protagonists. In the course of our interviews, student-informants referred to their favorite characters' material possessions as indicators of their "adult" economic status. However, most admitted that they did not pay much attention to this issue until I questioned them about it. When they were asked what constituted right or wrong behavior, a character's economic status did not seem to influence their judgment. Thus, it is fair to say that the materialist basis of *manga*'s representation of different economic classes do not help young readers' understanding of real life situations, because they seem to be based on and biased by standard, middle-class preoccupations. On the other hand, the concept of social class presented in Japanese comic books is related to the traditional *caste* system of ancient Japan. Father figures and family (or clan) values are emphasized in all the selected comic books. However, most Taiwanese students and teachers believe that such ideologies do not influence their belief in the meritocratic value of individual effort and achievement,

independent of social standing.

Ideologies of violence were frequently represented in all five series examined, especially the combat-oriented stories. However, because of what I refer to as "fantasized death," an anesthetizing, artistic way of presenting bloodshed and damaged bodies, students and teachers seem to be unconcerned about the long-range effect of the ubiquitous combat in *manga*. In fact, many readers, older and younger, claim they are inspired by the heroes' positive spirit in overcoming the many challenges that warfare causes. Although Japanese comic books are full of violent images, they do not appear to provoke violent instincts and behaviors in the great majority of readers.

To answer the last research question: "Do Japanese comic books as a foreign communications medium influence Taiwanese teenagers' cultural identities?" the ideology of ethnicity should be considered. Since *manga* transmit intensely Japanese cultural and racial images, many teachers were of the opinion that the cultural identity of Taiwanese teenage readers might be permanently affected. Because of the comic books' ability to fascinate aided and abetted by a series of very successful marketing strategies, many Taiwanese students admire Japanese culture to the point of adopting it as an available paradigm. They are the recipients of a proliferation of Japanese culture and the massive and continuing Taiwanese importation of *manga* has had a negative influence on their acceptance of their motherland's own language, culture, and arts. This may have a lasting effect on their thinking and behavior as well as the fate of the nation's cultural industries and media.

Indeed, some people may oppose this idea. Since Japanese comic books are also popular in the USA and other countries and do not seem to influence their readers' identities, it is logical that Taiwanese readers prefer them to the local product due to their superior story-lines and

graphics. However, following the discussion in Chapter 5, I would like to emphasize that the challenging situation Taiwanese face is different than that of the USA. Because the latter's population and cultural diversity is much greater. Taiwan's relatively small population is comparatively homogeneous. Lacking a diverse fan base and room for creative experimentation, the Taiwanese market does not allow *One Piece* to stand side by side with *Superman* on the best-seller lists. Except for Japanese comic books, local and foreign products never reach that degree of popularity. From a long-term perspective, this Japanese hegemony is truly harmful to Taiwanese culture which has lost the power and presence to tell its own stories.[72]

Confronted by this post-colonialist situation and the on-going ideological force of Japanese comic books, I believe it is essential to construct a critical pedagogy that considers them objects worthy of codification and prime discussion materials for critical thinking. Although this kind of critical pedagogy may arouse pressure and anxiety among Taiwanese educators, if they are willing to experiment, they may discover it is capable of awakening their and their students' consciousness and freeing their minds of self-imposed restrictions that may otherwise calcify as limit situations and cancel the creative impetus on which progress depends.

6.2 Research Limitations and Possibilities

As my research was limited by time and resources, the student participants are all from the same junior high school in Taipei, Taiwan's capital. Their socio-economic class and ethnicity are also similar, reflecting the homogeneity of Taiwan's urban populace. Although these controlled factors allowed this study to reveal certain ideologies held by most Taiwanese

[72] Of course, the dominance of Japanese *manga* has not entirely stopped the growth of Taiwanese comic books. Many Taiwanese authors try to use a "hybrid" style, combining manga's sophistication with local cultural material to imitate the appeal of the Japanese model. However, this attempt at hybridity raises other questions: Is this hybrid style a limitation to the potential creativity of Taiwanese comic books or will Taiwanese authors find their own way of contributing to local culture?

teenagers, it is also restricted as far as understanding whether different cohorts of their chronological peers would bring different perspectives. Therefore, the results of this study only reflect the ideas and imaginations of urban, middle class students. We cannot assume that Native Taiwanese students or second generation immigrants would use the same standards to judge race and ethnic issues in comic books, or that students from the underclass would subscribe to the notion that one's moral standards are more important than one's economic circumstances.

To advance understanding of Taiwanese teenagers' consciousness of the ideologies implicit in the *manga* they read, student-informants from different social and cultural backgrounds should be considered in the future.[73] To know how Japanese comic books influence disadvantaged groups in Taiwan, more diverse groups should be explored, and students from remote areas or non-core population centers should have the same chance to participate in this project. In this way, a wider range of voices would be heard and the opinions expressed would more closely reflect a conglomerate of Taiwanese teenagers.

The other finding that needs to be expanded upon has to do with the changing concepts of Taiwanese cultural identity. Although, in this research, both students and teachers admit they prefer Japanese products and agree that Japanese *manga* are superior to Taiwanese product, which tends to be emulative and suffers from comparison, adult readers have a clearer understanding of the historical background and industrial conditions which severely handicap local production. Throughout the interviews, teacher participants seemed much more aware of the inventions of Japanese culture, subtler ethnic issues and have a clearer understanding of the

[73] In Chapter 2, Chang's study shows that students' understanding of comic book contents is related to their cultural capital (Chang, 2004). However, since no follow-up studies have been published for more than a decade, further research may be required to discover whether the consciousness gap between middle class and working class teenagers still exists.

roots of the many differences between Taiwan and Japan. They also have higher expectations of the future of Taiwanese culture, regardless of currently insufficient levels of support from both government and local media. It is also very clear that teenagers and adults have different ideas about the influence of *manga* or their impact on Taiwanese society as "foreign" productions. However, there is no clear evidence in this research as to why Taiwanese of different ages and generations hold such different attitudes toward Japan. In other words, there is a cultural identity gap between Taiwanese teenagers and adults on this issue that is beyond the bounds of my research.

Therefore, in ensuing studies, it will be important to continue to explore these ideas with readers of different ages. For instance, further studies may focus on whether, as young adults, these adolescent *manga* fans become more nationalistic or are content to remain adult 'Japanophiles.' If such changes occur, what are some of the factors that account for them? What kinds of roles would local cultural products play in an incipient Taiwanese renaissance? Could Taiwanese cultural products become the positive media with which to create a vision of the future for the local people? All of these are questions that need to be answered by further analysis and research development.

The last but by no means the least important suggestion for further research is to extend Freire's dialectical ideas by creating "culture circles" for critical pedagogy. Although in this research, a full description of Freirian theoretical tools is impossible, a potentially fruitful path lies open if students and educators are willing to discuss their cognitive experiences both in and outside of school and allow themselves to think outside the box by engaging in problem-posing dialogue. This is what Freire referred to as the path of "untested feasibility."[74] In keeping

[74] "The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves. But since people do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the human-world relationship. Accordingly, the point

with such praxis, arousing dialectic interest by using comic books or other media resources as student-oriented teaching materials is an interesting possibility. This could come about as the result of long-term action research for and with different groups of students. Depending on the diversity of materials selected, more issues could be uncovered, and more cultural phenomena revealed.

Indeed, since comic book studies have been ignored for so long in Taiwan, there is an infinite list of potential topics. I therefore propose this study as a first step toward a nontraditional educational approach. When other scholars choose to join me, it could lead to an as-yet-utopic situation in which Taiwanese educators and researchers come to a better understanding of the local teenage culture and generations meet and mingle on a playing field level enough to inspire real dialogue between those who educate and those in the process of education. What Freire called "banking education" has prevailed in Taiwan for generations. I am not advocating its overthrow. Rather, I argue that it will be simultaneously tempered and probed by the willingness on the part of a new generation of educators and learners to broaden the curriculum to include a new method of inquiry, one which would stress their common humanity, amplify the dialectical play of consciousness and make genuine communication possible among Taiwanese of all generations, persuasions and social classes.

6.3 Implications

This study provides a cross-disciplined approach to the educational field. By combining epistemological perspectives from cultural studies, comparative education, and educational

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of departure must always be with men and women in the 'here and now,' which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting form this situation—which determines their perception of it—can they begin to move. To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging." (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2012, 84-85)

sociology, I want to indicate my belief that future educational studies need to be increasingly flexible and diverse, willing to venture into new domains of creativity and imagination and thus encompass an ever-changing world. If Taiwanese researchers understand that educational research is not limited to issues related to formal education and need not be conducted only by people trained and employed by government-sponsored educational institutes, it will open the way for exploration of a gamut of social and cultural issues that are now relegated to oblivion. In this study, comic books represent vivid and viable parts of many young people's daily existence yet are judged unworthy of serious consideration by their elders and consigned to a critical netherworld where the attraction of what is forbidden accrues to them and they become increasingly threatening to the status quo. If the reason for their durability and relevance to a significant proportion of the population is brought to light, everyone's consciousness will be raised accordingly. By revealing the powerful effect of *manga*'s ideological content on their youthful audience, I want to point out how media have become powerful agents that closely connect tens of thousands of readers' minds, educationally and non-educationally. As Freire says, educational research "must consist of communication and of the common experience of a reality perceived in the complexity of its constant becoming" (Freire, 2012, 108). Since the socio-cultural ramifications of human experience have become far too complex to be explained by a single discipline, I believe that more and more cross-discipline studies should and will be conducted. By cooperating with scholars and researchers from fields having only tangential relation to education, educational research will become a more diverse playground and its connection to the lives of students, educators, and researchers will strengthen a system that, in many parts of the world today, seems to inspire divisive and acrimonious debate.

Apart from these suggestions for educational researchers, this study also has some practical

implications for parents and teachers. Despite the fact that *manga* may be censored by readers' families or banned by school authorities, their socio-political ideologies exert a powerful if nebulous influence on the minds and hearts of adolescent consumers. Therefore, to impose restrictions may not be the best way to deal with many of today's media issues. To bring adolescents into the awareness of critical consciousness, Taiwanese teachers and parents must be willing to radically transform their existing attitudes and educational strategies. *Manga*'s stereotypical and often unbalanced descriptions and depictions of ethnicity, gender, and class should be rationally discussed and systematically reflected upon, in schools and in family settings. Readers' emotional reactions to depictions of violence should be carefully shared and dealt with especially if, at first, they seem irrational or disturbing. Furthermore, teenagers should be made aware of and encouraged to acknowledge the potential power of local culture without undue guidance or explanation by adults who think their role is to protect them. They should be encouraged to think critically and autonomously and wholeheartedly supported in using their creativity and imagination to create their own stories. Only in this way will the subtle and not always beneficent effects of Japanese cultural neo-colonialism be contextualized.

It is important to note that the recommended changes do not have to happen in a formal class. Indeed, this kind of critical pedagogy or media education could happen during times and in spaces otherwise designated for extra-curricular activities, public celebrations and hobbies. The form that "education" takes is not important *per se*. Actually, if and when resources allow it, the important work of process mutation can happen anywhere and everywhere. This is why it is essential that educational administrators allow such change to occur. Without the need to constantly establish short-term goals which burden an already overloaded school system, social education can be conducted via the media or by community-based institutions like public

libraries. By introducing systematic, intersectional plans, Taiwan's governors will become more aware of what critical education has to offer instead of merely paying it 'lip-service' or consigning it to sporadic, showcase status. Financial and ideological sources must be cultivated so that Taiwanese educators feel free to speak about problematic social issues to their students outside the rigid boundaries now imposed by school discipline, peer pressure and official textbooks. When we are ready to act on them, our educational issues can be posed as communal problems and discussed, not avoided, until they become mammoth problems that affect the quality of people's lives in deleterious ways.

Of course, all these changes cannot and will not happen overnight. However, sooner or later, the Taiwanese educational system will be confronted by the continuing socio-cultural revolution in the globalized, hyper-capitalist world to which we subscribe, albeit tremulously. This will encompass more than comic books and prove more powerful than the media. However, I believe thinking about how we can change and improve the shape of education for future generations is an appropriate starting point.

6.4 Final Thoughts

Future pace with me and imagine a typical scene in a Taiwanese junior high school. On the announcement board, there is a huge "One Piece" poster showing the happy faces of Luffy and his crew, ready for their next adventure. Two girls walk through the alley, with "Attack on Titan" key rings attached to the side of their backpacks. Inside the classroom, you can hear a group of students discussing the newly released "Naruto" and "Case Closed" animated films *while a lonely boy is surreptitiously stowing the new volume of* "Bleach" *in his cabinet.*

Comic book research in the educational field has been a long time coming. Paradoxically, the worldwide influence of this special type of media is still on the increase. Lack of understanding about this burgeoning field may be a way of demonstrating to educational researchers that they have set too many restrictions on educational studies or created unrealistic standards about what constitutes worthwhile educational research. Whatever happens in society, educational scholars are social scientists whose job is to investigate it. Particularly when the experiences gleaned from comic book reading and cartoon watching become part of the collective memory of a large percentage of the Taiwanese populace, there is no reason not to confront this as a significant cultural phenomenon.

Indeed, the issues of ideologies and their cross-cultural influence are serious concerns, especially for Taiwan, which relies on massive importation of cultural products from other countries, especially Japan. From a pessimistic perspective, this is tantamount to being willingly colonized. From a positive perspective, the popular trend from country to country also implies that the Taiwanese People will have an opportunity to present their history and language, stories and myths for the delectation of an increasingly interconnected and competitive planetary audience.

Through this research, I have attempted to present a complex cultural phenomenon to educators, educational researchers, and cultural workers. Comic books are much more than comic books. Their importance and cultural relevance transcends the boundaries of teenage entertainment; they should have long since been fair game for intellectuals as a thriving and significant epistemic medium deserving of intense academic scrutiny. This study intends to make readers aware of ideological defects in this medium without passing judgment on comics' overall worth or meaning. Based on what I have learned from my investigation of Japanese

comic books, I believe there are many misunderstandings and anxieties that can and should be relieved in order to make room for critical discourse about more emergent issues. I believe, by delving into and attempting to understand *manga*'s imperfections, readers will be able to enjoy their exciting stories and the fantastic worlds they propagate without being enslaved by the hidden persuasiveness of their creators' twisted ideologies.

Let me close by stating my desire that this research be seen as a first step along the pedagogical path of encouraging young people to read comic books in a more conscious, deliberative way and thereby obtain from them some of the benefits now ascribed only to 'serious' literature. Ultimately, we will come to understand that part of their undeniable appeal lies in the mythic weight of the stories they tell — stories of the ceaseless human struggle to make sense of our lives and learn to read the world in which we lead them.

Appendix1:

Survey of the Comic Book Reading Preferences of Junior High School Students

Dear all,

I am a Ph.D. student from the UCLA Graduate School of Education in the USA.
My dissertation title is "Another Way to Read Comic Books: International Issues in Media Education (Japanese Comic Book Reading among Taiwanese Junior High School Students)." This research will focus on mainstream comic books. By agreeing to participate, you may contribute to the development of Taiwanese media education and allow researchers from around the world to better understand Taiwanese culture. Your names will not be used. The results of this research will not be published. I will not provide any information I gather to school administrators, so feel safe to answer the following questions.

Thank you for your assistance!

Fang-Tzu Hsu, doctoral candidate, GSE&IS, UCLA

Survey Form

School: _____Junior High _____ Grade, Class _____ Gender:_____

1. Time spent reading comics or watching Japanese cartoons every week (choose one):

□ less than 1 hour □ 2-3 hours □ 3-5 hours □ More than 5 hours

2. How I acquire comics/animated cartoons (multiple choices):

□ Buy for myself □ Share from family and friends □ Rent □ Read online □ Other_____

3. Do you pay attention to the rating of comics before read them?

□ Yes □ No □ Sometimes

For the following questions, please rate from 1-5 (5 is the best and you have only 5 choices. You must distribute all points).

My favorite comics are:

□ Fantasy □ Science Fiction □ Sports □ Campus drama/Campus comedy □ Romantic story □ BL/GL (Boy Love/Girl Love) □ Detective □ Special talents (ex. chess, cook, wine testing) □ Horror (ex. mystery, bloody) □ Others_____

Please list your Top 5 favorite comics from the list below:

□ Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic □ Chihayafuru □ Kimi ni Todoke □ Yowamushi Pedal □ Big Windup! □ Line barrels of Iron □ Claymore □ Toriko □ One Piece □ Bleach □ Naruto □ Case Closed □ SKIP BEAT! □ Attack on Titan □ Gin Tama □ Hunter X Hunter □ Nagasarete Airantou □ Black Butler □ The Knight in the Area □ D. Gray-man □ Ace of Diamonds □ Zettai Karen Children □ Fairy Tale □ Hayate the Combat Butler

Thank you for participating!

Appendix2: Content Analysis Form

Please fill out the form according to the representations, use "series" as one unit. If you find there are representations which match the description but are not in the selected books in this series, you can describe them in the section marked "Note."

Violence/Crime

If there are scenes of violence or crime, please write "Y." If not, please write "N."

Description	One Piece	Case Closed	Attack on Titans	Naruto	Bleach
Bleeding					
Bodily damage					
Death caused by violence					
Nonviolent crime					
Note					

*** "Bodily damage" means wounds caused by puncturing, hacking or hitting human flesh. For example, mutilated body parts, swords piercing bodies, gunshot wounds, etc.**

Sexual/ Gender

If the initiator of the action is female and the object is male, please write "F." If the initiator is male and the object is female, please write "M." Use arrows to show how different genders react toeach other for the categories marked with "*" like M→F(male to female). One blank can be filled with multiple symbols.

Description	One Piece	Case Closed	Attack on Titans	Naruto	Bleach
Drive the Plot					
***Help other characters**					

Show weakness					
Show strength					
***Dialogues with sexual implications**					
Body exposed					
***Behaviors with sexual implications**					
*** Intimacy (kisses and hugs, affectionate expressions)**					
Note					

*** "Body exposure" means characters revealing their sex organs (female breasts, male genitals). "Behaviors with sexual implications" are provocative and/or graphic (sado-masochistic acts, making love).**

Ethnicity

If there are Japanese cultural/ethnic representations, please write "J," for Western representations use "W, " and non-Japanese Asian representations use "A." One blank can be filled with multiple symbols. If you can identify a specific country/race, describe it in the space marked "Note."

Description	One Piece	Case Closed	Attack on Titans	Naruto	Bleach
Location/ Landmark					
Mystery and tales					
Cultural products （ex. clothes, accessories）					
Traditional					

Skills （ex. Martial arts, Tea Ceremony）					
Spirits （ex. Bushido, chivalry）					
Note					

Class

If the representations can be identified as low social economic class, write "L." If the representations can be identified as high social economic class, write "H." If the representations can be identified as middle class, write "M." One blank can be filled with multiple symbols.

Description	One Piece	Case Closed	Attack on Titans	Naruto	Bleach
Dominant the plot					
Positive descriptions					
Negative descriptions					

***positive descriptions means the descriptions agree with a certain class, ex. Empathy for the poor (L); The admiration of an upper-class life style (H). Negative descriptions means the plot satirizes or criticizes a certain class, ex. The poor violate the law because of their poverty (L); The rich enjoy the luxury life and disregard their "inferiors. (H).**

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