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# Notions of Japan and Manga in France and Italy<sup>1</sup>

## The First Main Results of a Survey among Readers and Non-Readers of Manga

### Abstract

Since 2007 the 'Manga Network', an international research group, is working on a project on the success of manga and the image of Japanese pop culture in several European countries. After the first phase of its work in 2007–2010 with an international survey, in 2011 a second survey has been launched, this time not only among readers but among non-readers of manga as well. As a first outcome of this second survey, the work upon which is still ongoing, the present chapter presents a starting outlook of the first statistic tests carried out and a set of theoretical and empirical considerations on the images of manga and Japan in the countries here considered.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Manga Network

The 'Manga Network' is an independent research team formed by professors, researchers and Ph.D. students originating from several European countries and Japan. It was created in 2006 by Jean-Marie Bouissou,

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<sup>1</sup> Previous, preliminary versions of the first half of this essay have appeared in English (Pellitteri 2010b in Bouissou, Pellitteri, Dolle-Weinkauff, Beldi 2010) and Italian (Pellitteri 2011). The present chapter also borrows some data analysis from Pellitteri 2010a. The essay has been published, in the present version, in Japanese as Pellitteri 2014a.

a French historian and political scientist of contemporary Japan (Sciences-Po, Paris); Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff, a German expert in children's literature and a comics specialist (J.W. Goethe Universität, Frankfurt); and myself, an Italian cultural sociologist and a scholar in visual narratives; with the financial support – in its first phase – of the Japan Foundation. Soon after the birth of the group, Japanese sociologist Kiyomitsu Yui (Kōbe University) joined it too. The Manga Network organized a workshop in 2006 and two international conferences on manga and J-culture<sup>2</sup> in 2007 and 2008, all in Paris, with such participants as Hiroki Azuma, Jaqueline Berndt, Gō Itō, Steffi Richter and other internationally renowned scholars. Its members have participated in several international conferences, invited lectures and workshops, propagating the results of the research group's work.

Since 2007 the Manga Network has been working on a multi-phase project, based on qualitative and quantitative methods and focused on the spread of manga and the notions of Japan and Japanese popular culture in several European countries. In 2007–2008 the group conducted a first survey based on a questionnaire which was circulated among over 1,200 respondents of four European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland), then undertaking an analysis of the data acquired and getting a revealing picture of the success of manga in those European countries and of the related fan practices and opinions. In 2010–2011 the group launched a second European survey, this time not only among readers but also, as a control group, among non-readers of manga; it also extended the methods' array to several face-to-face interviews. As a first outcome of this second survey – the work of data input and analysis on which is still ongoing – I here present the results based on the data input so far and a set of theoretical and empirical considerations<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For the term 'J-culture' refer to Richter, Berndt et al. 2008, especially Richter 2008. In this essay, the J-cultural areas taken into account are manga and anime.

<sup>3</sup> At the time in which this chapter is published in the present book, I am currently working as a JSPS fellow with a research project precisely focused on the implementation and development of new phases of this surveys and data analyses.

## 1.2. Importance and Risks of Quantitative Research on Manga Readership

Japanese manga's popularity is a big phenomenon<sup>4</sup>. It was exactly in order to investigate its success in Europe that the Manga Network was formed; it is also worth noticing that it is the first research team of its kind<sup>5</sup>. This tells us much about the novelty of the topic and the fact that manga as a social and economic fact was passing unobserved by most European academics in disciplines such as sociology, economics, international relations. The Manga Network's surveys may have limits of their own, as our group had to face several difficulties in terms of methodology, due to limitations of economic and organizational kind. However, they are the first structured efforts in order to acquire wide-range and in-depth information on the issue of manga in Europe at large, and on manga's audiences: their socio-demographic composition, their opinions, their relations with manga as a form of reading and objects to spend money for, the social contexts in which readers live, and finally the inner, profound reasons why manga are loved, read, purchased and exchanged among peers. We have chosen to define this research framework 'a sociology of manga fans'.

One of the research group's central goals – along with that of understanding the role of manga in the lives of their actual readers – is that of discovering new information on the ways manga have been thought of among people who have never approached this medium, in order to see what the main differences about the image of manga between manga readers and manga non-readers are. This is one possible and effective analysis path in order to acquire more data and knowledge about the actual influence of manga on the different ways Japan may have been perceived in European countries<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> *Manga* is, in the Japanese context, the term designating comics of any type and format (be they Japanese or not); but for the non-Japanese, the word only designates comic strips, comic series and comic books made in Japan by Japanese creators. Here, when I speak of the arrival and success of manga in the Western world, the reference is to Japanese comics only.

<sup>5</sup> More recently (Summer 2013), another – indeed interesting and useful – survey has been launched by the website *Anime France*, focusing on a related topic: the impact and consumption of Japanese animation in France. Cf. [Animefrance.fr](http://Animefrance.fr).

<sup>6</sup> For detailed discussion see Bouissou 2012, which is complementary to the present essay.

Below, I present a general view on the success of manga in its European main national markets, in order to contextualize the aims and scope of our work; I then sum up the research conducted so far; and finally I introduce the main results of the second survey.

## 2. The Manga Markets in Europe<sup>7</sup>

### 2.1. Starting Considerations

In this section, general information on the most relevant national markets of manga in Europe is provided. This information concerns the mid- and late 2000s, which, for the Manga Network, formed the basis upon which the surveys were conducted.

The information is still relevant and should also be put in perspective, because in the most lucrative markets (i.e. Italy, France, Spain, Germany) the mid-2000s were the period of highest official expansion of manga: after 2007 the sells began to shrink, due to several factors, including the growing use of scanlations<sup>8</sup> and, very likely, the decrease of the euro's purchase power. This means that not only this information, but also all the data collected with our surveys, record the commercial climax of manga's popularity in Europe. That is also why the Manga Network's data, collected between 2007 and 2011, are still so useful for the understanding of the impact of manga on the success of J-culture in Europe and vice versa.

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<sup>7</sup> In this section, I neglect some areas of Europe where manga is actually successfully marketed: (1) because they are not included in the research design; (2) because of lack of space and/or data; or (3) because – as for Great Britain – an analysis of such nations would be more fitting in comparison to the United States. On the contrary, the countries taken into account are: (1) the ones at the centre of the first survey (France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland); (2) those at the centre of the work currently completed via the second survey (again, France and Italy); (3) those that constitute the worthiest nations to be ideally researched for the understanding of the success of manga, due to their developed comics cultures and manga sellings.

<sup>8</sup> Scanlation is a fan practice consisting in the digital acquisition of the pages of manga works, the amateur translation from Japanese into a local idiom and the illegal publication on the web, for free reading by other fans from all over the world.

## 2.2. General Figures

The manga market outside Japan has been, at least from the early 1990s until the second half of the 2000s, literally thriving: in 2005, Asia (except Japan) filled 42% of it, the United States 36%, and the rest of the world 22% (JETRO 2005). However, what is not clear in these percentages is the impact of manga according to variables such as the population's size, the volume of the actual manga's readership in the single countries or the level of incomes. With more circumstantial data it would have been possible to see better the impact of manga in each nation, especially in Europe, a market made of many countries, in each one of which manga have arrived and gained success according to different histories and dynamics. Let us furthermore notice that in the United States of America (population: more than 300 million), the best selling manga in 2006 was *Naruto* #9 with about 100,000 copies (Hibbs 2007), whereas in France (64 millions), each new volume of *Naruto* sold around 130,000 during its first year on the market (*Le Monde*, 25 January 2008); in Italy (59 millions), single issues of series such as *Dragon Ball* have regularly sold, since the late 1990s and until at least the early 2000s, more than 150,000 copies monthly<sup>9</sup>.

### Italy

Since 1990 Italy has been the largest manga market in Europe, but official figures on manga's sales are not divulged. One of the few verifiable information is that in 2005, 58% of the about 2,800 comics titles published were manga (1,624 in total) and, also, not few were Korean *manhwa*<sup>10</sup>. The all-times best-selling manga is the *Dragon Ball* deluxe edition, whose each issue, as said, used to sell about 150,000 copies since the second half of the 1990s; afterwards, the best sellers – *Inuyasha* and *One Piece* – reached no more than 75,000 copies per volume, partly because of a richer and more wide-ranging general supply. Ten houses publish/published manga: Dinyt, D/Visual, Shin Vision (only manga); Star Comics, Flashbook, Hazard (mainly manga); Coconino Press, Panini, Kappa, GP Publish-

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<sup>9</sup> This and the following figures concerning the sellings of manga in Italy are not official, but anyway strongly reliable. They have been provided to me by Mr Andrea Baricordi, former editor-in-chief of the manga line at Edizioni Star Comics, one of the main Italian publishers of manga including *Dragon Ball*, *Inuyasha*, *One Piece*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Zaccagnino, Contrari 2007: 2; for each country, these statistics include all the new volumes of already running series.

ing and Play Press (manga among other kinds of comics). Occasionally also big mainstream publishers like Einaudi, Mondadori or Rizzoli, which normally do not deal with manga, publish some titles.

## France

France used to lag behind Italy: until 2000-2001, the new manga titles published each year in Italy were about the quintuple of those published in France. But between 2001 and 2005, manga increased their presence in France by 500%. In 2001, there were only 269 new manga and manhwa titles published. In 2006, new titles from Asia reached 1,418 – comprising 1,110 manga titles, about 250 manhwa, but also newcomers from China, Singapore (6), Taiwan (1) and India (1, in a slightly ‘manga-ish’ style) – accounting for 44.4% of the newly published comics<sup>11</sup>. This made France the second largest European manga market.

The structure of the French manga publishing business is unique: as for 2004, no less than 37 new publishing houses entered the field<sup>12</sup>, about 20% of whom failed soon. Most of them were bottom-up enterprises started by manga fans, often people with an academic background in business school and/or coming from the world of bookstores and fanzines, whereas the big publishers shunned manga. Glénat, Tonkam, Delcourt and Soleil are the most famous publishers of this ‘first generation’. But since manga have proved a profitable business, big publishing houses have also rushed into the field (Hachette, Dargaud, Casterman, Flammarion, Le Seuil), as well as minor companies<sup>13</sup>, while those of the first generation have merged<sup>14</sup> and new small publishers keep entering the market<sup>15</sup>.

## Germany

Germany is, since the mid-2000s, the third and arguably the most interesting European market for manga (Dolle-Weinkauff 2006). Due to the lack of a strong local production, Japanese comics account ever since for about 70% of all the comics sold. A peculiar feature is that manga’s audience is mostly

<sup>11</sup> About 2001: cf. Pasamonik 2005; about 2006: cf. Pasamonik 2006a and Zaccagnino, Contrari 2007: 2.

<sup>12</sup> For a complete list cf. Dunis, Krecina 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Éditions Philippe Picquier.

<sup>14</sup> Delcourt and Tonkam joined hands in 2006, and Soleil now heads a consortium of six publishers.

<sup>15</sup> IMHO, Cornelius.

female, whereas in other countries it is more evenly divided between genders. Also, the lack of polemics on manga's alleged futility has allowed an undisturbed increase of sales. In ten years (1997–2006) the revenue in manga sellings rose exponentially from 3 to 70 million euro. The best sellers were *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon*, *Inuyasha* and *Meitantei Conan*. Each one of the latter two has reached by 2005 the million copies sold, but still pale in comparison to *Dragon Ball*, the absolute record holder with over 6 million copies sold between 1997 and 2006 and still doing well afterwards. The main publishers are either German (Carlsen, although initially Danish), European (Egmont from Denmark, Panini from Italy) or Japanese/American (TokyoPop; after the closing of the Los Angeles headquarters, TokyoPop's only offices are today in Europe, namely in Hamburg).

#### Switzerland<sup>16</sup>

Switzerland, 8 million people, distinguishes itself from other European markets by the fact that it is divided into three linguistic regions, matching the zones exchange with France, Germany and Austria, Italy. Switzerland has never developed a strong entertainment industry: most media contents made available to Swiss consumers are imported directly from the neighbouring countries. Manga is no exception. Thus, the Swiss market reflects those of its neighbours, just on a smaller scale. Accordingly, manga has remained a niche market in Switzerland, concerning mostly teenagers and young adults under 30.

In the French-speaking regions, manga constitute about 30% of the whole comics sector like in France, and the top-selling titles of the last five years include *Naruto*, *One Piece*, *Fairy Tales*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Bleach*, *Death Note*, *Pandora Hearts*, *Eyeshield 21*, *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* However, besides such titles, the Francophone market has experienced a noticeable diversification in terms of genres. Until 2005–2006, the vast majority of titles translated into French belonged to the *shōnen* (boys') category. However, *shōjo* (girls') manga have been taking more and more space on the shop shelves, with titles like *Nana*, *Fruits Basket*, *Vampire Knight*, *Maid Sama...* meeting a public of enthusiastic readers, mostly female.

The market of the Germanophone area also reflects that of its large neighbours. Like in Germany, *shōjo* series make up the large majority of

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<sup>16</sup> This section on Switzerland has been kindly provided by Dr Ariane Beldi, Swiss member of the Manga Network, who participated in the first survey, collecting the data on her country.

manga sold. However, the Manga Network study on Swiss manga readership in 2007–2008 showed a slightly different picture from a reader's standpoint, since shōnen manga emerged as making up three out of the five most cited favorite series. Those were *Death Note*, *Naruto* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the other two being *Sailor Moon* and *Inuyasha*.

Concerning the Italian-speaking area, the data is really scarce and difficult to come by. It is also the smallest region of the country, counting for hardly 5% of the Swiss population, that is about 400,000 people. However, one can probably state that the types of manga sold there must be the same as in Italy, not only because the media content available there is edited by Italian publishers, but also because most citizens of this region live just within a few minutes drive from North-Italian cities, where they often go shopping. Moreover, manga books (as well as anime DVDs) are 15–20% cheaper in Italy than in Switzerland.

### Spain

In Spain, since the 1990s, the most important manga publishers are Norma Editorial, Glénat España, Planeta-DeAgostini, Mangaline, Ivrea and Selecta. At first, they made a marketing mistake – as happened also in Germany – by copying the American *modus operandi* and selling manga in comic book format<sup>17</sup>. The market stagnated at very low level, obliging the publishers to stop publication (Rodriguez de León 2005). Only since manga have been published as *tankōbon* (small format, b/w paperback)<sup>18</sup> have they gained a real success, in a second and more structured wave that, however, has recently turned into a new stagnation.

### Belgium

Belgium is a bilingual country divided between Flanders (Dutch idiom) and Wallonia (French idiom), with a strong local tradition of *bande dessinée* (or BD). Its manga market has been steadily growing since the late 1990s, but figures are unavailable. Manga by all major European publishers are distributed in Belgium. Naturally, the supply is much richer in French language than in Dutch. In a country with such a rich comics cul-

<sup>17</sup> 'Comic book format' here refers to the typical American comic book: 17x26 cm, between 22 and 32 pages, full-colour.

<sup>18</sup> And very often, also in Spain like in the other big European national markets (especially Italy, France, Germany), the *tankōbon* format maintains the Japanese reading direction from right to left, without the page mirroring.

ture as Belgium, the homeland of Hergé, most titles aim at general, and/or adult and well-educated audiences – like Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha*, Naoki Urasawa's *Monster* and the works of Jirō Taniguchi.

### Russia

Manga were unintentionally introduced in Russia in the 1980s by diplomats, who in their travels to Japan casually bought some manga magazines or volumes. The first Russian manga readers were the children of employees at Russian diplomatic offices (Alaniz 2005). The market has exploded since 2000, above all thanks to anime on TV and DVDs. Similarly to what happened in the USA (Leonard 2005), manga have grown from the fans: at first, thanks to underground imports and home-made copies, then with the professional publishers. The very first manga officially published was *Ranma ½*, by local venture Sakura Press in 2005.

### Poland

In this country comics have been struggling for years, between bad reputation and censorship. Nowadays, famous Polish artists like Grzegorz Rosiński, author of the *Thorgal* saga, sell in Poland very well. European BD takes 20% of the market but manga, which entered it in 2005, has conquered in a stroke a 70% share (Pasamonik 2005). This success owed much to two Japanese entrepreneurs, who started two Japanese-Polish publishing ventures – Japonica Polonica Fantastica (JPF) and Waneko. They have been joined by the Danish-German Egmont, which offers about one half of the Polish manga catalog. The situation has not changed that much in more recent years<sup>19</sup>.

## 2.3. Final Considerations on the European Manga Markets

This trend of 'Japanese' companies entering the market – a process begun in the United States in the 1980s – has also been at work elsewhere in Europe (Gō Nagai's production company and agency Dynamic Production established Dynamic Italia in Italy and Dynamic Vision in France as subsidiaries), but with little success because of the vigour of the domestic manga business; except in Germany, thanks to TokyoPop's Hamburg headquarters and entrepreneurial strength, which has allowed manga to reach about the same market share than in Poland.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bolalek 2011: 34–37, available at <http://imrc.jp/lecture/2010/11/2.html>.

In all this turmoil, new trends emerged in the European market. Manga have gained acceptance, and even some praise, among well-educated readers and literary critics. In France, since 2003, manga works regularly get prizes at the famous Festival d'Angoulême (the biggest European comics art festival), including the Best Album Award in 2007 given to Shigeru Mizuki's *NonNonBâ*; in Italy, a similar situation is recorded at *Lucca Comics & Games*, the biggest European comics commercial convention, where in 2010 Jirō Taniguchi was awarded the prize as best writer and artist.

Crossbreeding is also taking place. Here and there – mostly in France, Italy and Germany<sup>20</sup> – authors publish 'manga-ish' comics that in Europe have been often called 'euromanga'<sup>21</sup>. In 2006, Dargaud – traditional powerhouse of French comics – launched *Cosmo*, a line of comics mixing authors and styles from French-Belgian BD, American comics and Japanese manga (Pasamonik 2006b). Also, as the first generation of fans – those who had their first contact with Japanese manga in the wake of such anime series as *Alps no shōjo Heidi*, *UFO Robo Grendizer* (a.k.a. *Goldorak* in France and *Atlas UFO Robot* in Italy) or *Candy Candy*, aired on television in Spain (since 1975), Italy (1977) and France (1978) – is now in their thirties or early forties, manga culture is deepening and refining (Pellitteri 2006 and 2010c). The manga fandom now extends beyond the teenage base, to well-educated adult readers.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

In 2007–2008, the Manga Network circulated a 15-pages long questionnaire in France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. It covered social, cultural, psychological and economical aspects of fan practices. Although the questionnaire used in each country was the same, the methods of collection and analysis did vary. In France, the questionnaires were first circulated as a Microsoft *Word* document in web forums gathering manga fans, then also distributed to people attending the *Japan Expo* convention<sup>22</sup> in July

<sup>20</sup> Cf. for Italy: Pellitteri 2006; for Germany: Egmont 2005 and Malone 2011, also at <http://imrc.jp/lecture/2010/11/2.html>.

<sup>21</sup> 'Euromanga' In Japan refers to BD: cf. the *Euromanga* anthology, Asuka Shinsha, 8 volumes so far. But in Europe it means 'manga' (in the sense of 'Japanese-style comics') made by European creators.

<sup>22</sup> With more than 80,000 people attending in three days, *Japan Expo* – started in 2000 with 3,200 – is by far the largest convention in Europe solely devoted to Japan and Japanese culture, there including manga.

2007; about 370 responses were recovered. In Italy (about 420 answers) and Germany (about 340 answers), the questionnaire was circulated via the web. In Switzerland, the questionnaire was circulated using the website SurveyMonkey.com; 76 people from the three Swiss linguistic regions answered it.

The apparent bias of these modes of dissemination is that the statistic samples were neither random nor generally representative, but 'self-selected' (the respondents chose to answer). However, we meant to address mostly the hard-core fans, those who spend time in web forums and/or go to conventions and who are passionate enough to have spent up to 30-40 minutes to complete our very detailed questionnaire. In contrast, the younger cohort of schoolboys and -girls may have been under-represented, because the questionnaire was not conceived for them (anyway, when queuing for a long time with nothing else to do, like the French fans did at *Japan Expo's* entrance, the younger cohort did answer in large numbers). Despite these problematic features, the survey could be – as it has been – very well used for explorative and generally descriptive purposes related to the 'universe' of manga readers.

The data input and then general data analysis were conducted during 2008 and 2009; our first results were presented in conferences and published in journals. The main points of our investigations, as shown in previous publications of the Manga Network, concern the laying out of our 'sociology of manga fans' (Bouissou et al. 2010: 257), the origins of the first contact with manga by readers (*ibid.*: 258–259), the discovery and analysis of reading habits and practices (*ibid.*: 259), the social dimensions of fandom (*ibid.*: 260–261), the inner motivations for reading manga (*ibid.*: 261–263). For the first time in the history of studies on manga and their audiences, concrete figures were shown and commented, based on quantitative data. The scope and aim of this first survey were rather explorative/descriptive than explanatory, and – besides a variety of hints and information towards a more explicative direction – linked the scenarios of manga consumption in Europe to a broader theme: that is, the role of manga (and *anime*)<sup>23</sup> in the alleged spread of a Japanese cultural 'power' in Europe and America.

Below, I will sum up the observations made on the data of that first survey.

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<sup>23</sup> *Anime* is the term generally used for Japanese animated cartoons, especially those for television but also for cinema, using the animated cartoon technique.

## Socio-Demographics of Manga Fans

- A gender axis emerged: in France, Italy and Switzerland there is a substantial balance in the number of male and female readers, whereas in Germany a large majority (80%) of readers are female. Another gendered axis appeared in the form of participation: male fans tend more to a still 'traditional' form of reading, while female fans are more inclined to a variety of fandom activities, especially in Germany and France (in Switzerland and Italy there is a more pronounced balance).

- Italy/France/Switzerland on the one side, and Germany on the other, are in counter position also for what concerns the age of readers: in Germany they are substantially younger. The reasons are not that complicated to find. (1) The different history of anime on television in these countries: in Germany the anime boom occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, whereas in the other three countries it happened between the late 1970s and the end of the 1980s, inspiring an older generation of TV-watchers than in Germany to read manga<sup>24</sup>; (2) the different role of comics in Germany by comparison to the other countries: Germany has no strong tradition in the production of comics.

- The majority of readers are mostly middle class, with a medium to high level of education.

### Why to Read Manga / 1

Three main socio-cultural reasons were found.

- The previously existing habit of reading comics: only 29.5% of the respondents declared that they began to read manga *without* having read other kinds of comics before. That is, most fans used to read other kinds of comics before approaching/discovering manga.

- Manga as an early-age discovery and then a cultural consumption habit: 12.5% of the respondents declared to have discovered manga before they were 10 years old, 44.5% between 10 and 14 years of age, 29% during high school.

- The existence of a pronounced 'generation gap' between younger and older readers regarding the role of TV anime (and of the new media): for most young readers, manga is part of a multimedia menu, reading them is not necessarily due to the impact of TV anime and the practice of reading

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<sup>24</sup> On the concept of 'anime boom' in Japan and in European countries, cf. Pellitteri 2010c and 2014b.

and exchanging manga is characterized by 'distinction' in the Bourdieuan sense (Bourdieu 1979). For the older readers, manga reading, in the adult age, has in most cases a direct 'nostalgia effect' due to a previous, massive exposition to 'old' TV anime during childhood.

### Reading Habits and Practices

- Manga is a daily or weekly commitment: overall, 77% of readers practice reading at these paces. This percentage includes the reading of both paper manga and digital manga.
- 75.5% of the respondents would love to read more manga than they currently do.
- Manga are read in the local native languages and in English (by 51% of the respondents), but 22% of those who participated in the survey also read them in Japanese.
- Reading manga is a commercial commitment, too: at the moment of the survey, manga were not simply read, they were regularly bought either in bookstores or in comics stores or (in France and Italy) also at newsstands<sup>25</sup>.
- Public libraries also play a role, especially in Germany and Switzerland (37% of the respondents in both of these two countries borrow manga at libraries) and France (28%).

### Social Dimensions of Fandom / 1

Manga reading is a social practice in most cases.

- 39% of the respondents were introduced to manga by friends.
- 66% of the respondents introduced at least some friends to manga.
- Conversation with other manga readers is highly sought and carried out (32%) and manga are often or at least sometimes discussed within the respondent's family (70%).
- Social participation is important in the exchange of manga volumes: 78% frequently exchange manga, in order to save money, make friends and discuss the titles read.
- Exchange is not only a matter of money; manga are, literally, 'a pleasure which must be shared': 56% of the respondents chose this definition in the related set of questions.

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<sup>25</sup> In recent years, however, the role of scanlations has increased. Cf. below, 'Social dimensions of fandom / 2'.

### Social Dimensions of Fandom / 2

The internet is a privileged channel of social-cultural exchange, reading and purchase.

- 95% of the respondents visit manga-related websites on a regular basis.
- 62.5% regularly chat in manga-related web forums.
- 73% usually upload/download anime and manga series.
- 50% regularly buy manga via the web.
- 65.5% access manga in other languages through scanlations.
- 64% took part in manga conventions.
- 13.5% participated in cosplaying events.

### Social Dimensions of Fandom / 3

The consumption of manga is not only a form of reading: it is a multifaceted practice.

- 81% share their practice with family: 72% with their spouse/companion, if in couple.
- 67% met other fans at school, university or workplace; and 86% of this subgroup actively interact with others who share their passion.

The strong amount of face-to-face relations suggests an interesting conclusion on the participatory aspect of manga culture. The intensity of the practice is in correlation with general behaviours and states of mind: 89% of the respondents declared that manga had a degree of influence upon their life (49% answered with the options 'extremely' or 'a lot').

Finally, manga have positive 'effects' on the life of the readers who answered the questionnaire: thanks to manga, 54% of them made new friends, 53.5% felt less stressed, 52% became or felt more dynamic, 32.5% learned new values.

### Why to Read Manga / 2

- Among the reasons why to read manga there is a major escapist factor: for 67% of the respondents, reading manga is a form of break-out from everyday life; and it is also a stress-relieving factor (for 42% of the participants to the survey).

Nevertheless, escapism is not the only reason why, according to our data and our interpretation of them, manga are so much read. In fact, 15% of the respondents appreciate manga because the narratives reflect their own problems and experiences; 44.5% feel that manga characters are 'easy to

identify with'; 36.5% think that manga can encourage reflection about life and society; and 34% state that manga heroes show qualities which readers wish to have. Besides, for 41.5% manga heroes are more emotionally attractive than characters of European/American comics. Thus, 'the common image of manga as a literature of escapism and manga readers as people looking primarily for (supposedly cheap) entertainment [...] [is] only half of the story' (Bouissou, Pellitteri, Dolle-Weinkauff, Beldi 2010: 261)<sup>26</sup>.

### **3.1. Some of Our Provisional Conclusions at the End of the First Survey**

Among the many provisional conclusions we drew from the data we analysed, I would like to stress here, very schematically, some points in particular.

First of all, the almost total inability of European and American comics to attract certain kinds of readers (above all, women and girls) and, as a historical intersection, the central role of manga for many people who had not been comics readers, especially women but not only. Manga are perceived by the respondents of this survey as more 'modern' and 'dynamic' than European and American comics; here we see a spurious correlation with Japan, which is perceived as more modern and dynamic as well, according to the answers in the sets of questions related to the opinions on Japan. The success of manga, besides, has part of its roots in editorial formats, price and marketing strategies. Reading habits are, for a considerable percentage of readers, a sort of 'addiction': 20% of the respondents admitted that this practice is costly; 33% wish an acceleration of the publication pace.

Finally, content is important. Whereas a common prejudice against manga is that they contain much sex and violence, actually just 15.5% of the respondents declared to buy manga for this kind of contents; most readers long for complex narratives that are able to resonate with their daily life and experiences, especially in the case of the younger ones.

### **3.2. General Methodology of the 2010–2012 Survey**

In the subsequent steps of our work we decided to extend the array of our research questions. After the first survey, the group launched a new survey addressed this time not only to readers of manga but also to non-readers.

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<sup>26</sup> The other sentences quoted in the rest of this section were written by respondents of the survey in the spaces left free for open comments.

The primary research goal was, now, to get information about the notions of Japan among manga readers and non-readers, and the ideas on manga, as a cultural element of Japan, among those who do not read manga.

One of the reasons to pursue this path in the second phase was the results I discovered after grouping by content the answers to the open questions positioned at the end of the first survey's questionnaire. A major theme emerged: Japan as the main set in manga stories and manga as a mirror of Japan. Below I present some representative answers, grouped according to the main themes I could identify. The answers are associated to some relevant data of the related respondent: gender, age, family situation, level of school/college education, job/study situation, profession of the father (occasionally also that of the mother is indicated, if considered relevant). All answers have been translated into English from Italian, or German, or French. A *Leitmotiv* of all these comments could be summed up in the concept of an '*imagined* ['imaginary'] Japan' (Rafoni 2004, Sabre 2006), a concentrate of stereotypes and prejudices mixed with more realistic and reality-based notions.

### **Relationships with Manga and a Imaginary Japan among Fans in the Open Questions of the First Survey**

#### A. Relationships with Japan

##### a) Japan as a Life Destination

- *Female, 30 y.o., in family, high school graduate, employed as graphic designer*

Japan is the only place where I would like to live and I can really say that, being 30 years old already. The Japanese are very much like me in their way of thinking, they respect very much their neighbours, are polite, are civilized. The perfect opposite of Italians and Italy overall.

- *Female, 18 y.o., in family, professional school graduate, unemployed, father: hotel manager*

I wish I were born in Japan. Downthere, social life is so much easier because when you are still at school there are so many chances to get a job, using school uniforms is one of the finest things because so ALL are like the same... it seems to me that relationships with others are easier...

## b) Japan as a Complex, Contradictory Place

- *Female, 19 y.o., in family, high school graduate, university student, father: bank employee*

Japan is a nation technologically more advanced than the West. Apparently, it hence appears more vital and very advanced for what concerns justice. But this is just a surface image: that is, everything in Japan is about appearance. Inside their daily life, every person struggles to be someone, and not to just live their lives. In Japan the greater good is more important than the individual, and this makes that society exist as we know it; and this brings to a 'killing' of the individual, which is both a psychological and a social death for those who are not able to keep up with machines.

- *Female, 17 y.o., in family, high school student, father: public servant*

Perhaps there is in Japan the highest number of maniacs, given all these idols and all these dirty magazines... I would say that in Japan there is this atmosphere... <\_< ' ... but I don't know if I'm wrong.

## c) Wrong about Japan: the Belief to Understand Japan through Manga

- *Female, 14 y.o., in family, high school student, father: chartered accountant*

Japan is a bizarre country, it is free, and there are not even those prejudices people have in daily life in our countries [in Europe], they accept others as they are, for example homosexuals [...].

- *Female, 16 y.o., in family, high school student, father: craftsman*

Japan, in my opinion, can be defined as one of the few countries capable to sustain a development without harming [...] wildlife.

## B. Relationships with Manga

## a) Manga as a Bridge to Japan

- *Female, 17 y.o., in family, high school student, father: factory worker*

Manga introduced me to a culture very far from our country, but a culture which, nevertheless, remains mysterious. However, I hope that Japan will be more and more taken into consideration in Italy, but, judging from manga sales, I guess this process is still ongoing... who knows if certain prejudices will ever vanish.

- *Female, 18 y.o., in family, high school student, father: policeman (and mother: school teacher)*

I see Japan as a fantastic, compelling world, like a twister which kidnapped and conquered me. All of this happened thanks to the passion for manga, which gave birth to my interest and curiosity for the Japanese universe, a curiosity which has soon become a passion. Now I have approached all the aspects of the language and the culture, and I have even changed my field of study. Today, after almost six years reading manga, I have a new dream... I want to reach my wonderland, the mythical country of the rising sun, where I hope I will spend a big part of my life.

#### b) Manga from Entertainment to Deep Passion

- *Female, 20 y.o., in family, high school graduate, university student, father: university professor*

Since I began to read manga and to know Japanese culture, I found a true passion to dip in (unlike previous hobbies). It is a fantastic, compelling world, and I find it is very educational: I am just sorry that many consider manga as childish comics.

- *Female, 22 y.o., in family, high school graduate, university student, father: businessman*

I believe art is a mirror of society. Manga is a typically oriental art, but in such a globalized world society as well is getting orientalized, so that we can read manga and get astonished about how Japan is different from Europe in its traditions and habits, but at the same time very similar for what concerns the problems of today's society.

- *Female, 16 y.o., in family, high school student, father: chartered accountant*

Manga is a world of its own, it cannot be understood by those who are full of prejudices, and above all, too mediocre. [Manga], besides being a true form of art, can trigger every kind of emotions, help creativity to develop and, this is really something, sometimes (but beware not to fall in a sickness/obsession) it can save you from situations which could drive anyone crazy.

#### c) Manga as a Help in One's Own Life

- *Female, 14 y.o., in family, high school student, father: hospital technician*

Manga is often seen as a thing for children, but it hosts very deep themes. [...] I'd have many things to say, but I don't know well how to express them. If I put them out, then, I feel like I am trivializing them. I began to love manga when I was 11 and was about to be 12. Manga helped me to overcome a bad period and, even though it seems a little stupid, it saved

me from sinking in a totally empty space, for it made me open my eyes and made me understand that what I used to see around me was not the only thing in this world.

- *Male, 14 y.o., in family, high school student, father: truck driver*

Thanks to manga I have understood many things about life.

- *Female, 18 y.o., high school graduate, university student, father: profession not declared*

Manga is a special thing to me. My life would have not been the same without it: after all, it is a part of me, a part of me which I hope I will never deny.

Data of this kind have been collected from France, Italy, Germany, Slovenia. The research is currently under further implementation. Let me also add that our work was, from 2009 to 2014, not funded by any institution. New results will be presented from 2016.

Here I present a starting comparative analysis between Italy and France, with a data set of 1,071 cases, collected between Autumn 2010 and Spring 2011 and digitally inputed in early 2012<sup>27</sup>. Italy and France are the two countries whose data input has been completed so far. In the months to come, thanks to my current assignment as a JSPS research fellow, I will manage to complete the data input from the other national samples I will include in the research<sup>28</sup>.

A few words on the methodological aspects of this second survey. We built two questionnaires: one for respondents who declared to be manga readers, and one for respondents who declared not to read manga. The questionnaire for readers – very similar in its structure and questions to the questionnaire used in the first survey – was significantly longer than the

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<sup>27</sup> I warmly thank the members of the Italian website Animeclick.it (specialized in news and criticism on manga and anime) and the NewType Media non-profit cultural association, for their digital inputing of the Italian questionnaires: Francesco Belloni, Alberto Centioli, Lara Dalla Valle, Renato Pappadà, Valeria Russo. For the data input of a part of the French questionnaires I heartfully thank Guillaume Makowski (France) and Carla Mossolin (Italy).

<sup>28</sup> On this occasion I would like to cite and thank in particular Prof. Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff (J. W. Goethe Universität, Frankfurt/Main), one of the three pillars of the Manga Network, for his work on the German sample, and Ms Katarina Kunstelij (BA in Japanology at the University of Ljubljana in 2013) for her effort with the Slovenian sample. Their national samples, and those from other countries, will be digitally processed in the close future.

questionnaire for non-readers, but the questions in the latter were also included in the former. Thus we were able to carry out a comparative analysis.

The composition of our current sample is as follows. Italian readers: 205; French readers: 553; Italian non-readers: 37; French non-readers: 276. Total number of readers: 758; total number of non-readers: 313. The aforementioned practical difficulties have produced at the present time a smaller sample in Italy. Male readers are in total 49.2% of the sample, female readers 50.8%; the age cohorts of the respondents are as follows: children (6–12 y.o.): 1.4%; adolescents (13–20): 50.0%; young adults (21–30): 38.7%; adults (31–45): 7.9%; old adults (more than 46 years of age): 1.7%<sup>29</sup>.

I will here display my initial statistical tests, driven by a set of basic research questions. These research questions will deserve a multivariate analysis, but in any ideal path of statistical investigation the first step is the presentation of the overall scenario.

#### 4. Basic Research Questions from the 2010–2012 Survey

The basic questions we wanted to be answered were the following:

1) *what are the notions of manga among manga non-readers?*

2) *what are the differences in the notions of Japan among manga readers and non-readers?*

3) and, as cumulative questions: *can we observe specific trends related to such notions?, and if so, in correlation to which main socio-demographical independent variables?*

The main independent variables we selected are gender and age cohort; and in this initial phase of the analysis, the first factor we wanted to look into was that of ‘being vs. not being a manga reader’. It was observed that the reading of manga has an impact upon the perception of Japan among readers: manga readers think of Japan less in terms of stereotypes than non-readers. But we also had to check if this variable changes according to nationality.

To explore these issues, the questionnaire presented two sets of questions:

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<sup>29</sup> For what concerns the means of selection of the samples, please refer to our publications related to the first phase of the research project: the criteria are the same. Namely, cf. Bouissou et al. 2010.

1) a set of questions with lists of pre-formulated concepts and dimensions regarding manga and Japan among which the respondents had to choose – this set of questions is the same as in the questionnaire of the first survey;

2) open questions asking for free definitions on manga and on Japan.

The open questions were the most significant novelty in the questionnaires of the second phase; they required the classification and codification of each single word written by the respondents. The words on manga and on Japan emergent from the survey are very revealing not only in themselves, but also with respect to the choice of words and the frequency by which some of them surfaced. I have created a set of dimensions for both the categories 'Japan' and 'Manga'. The words have been put into each one of these dimensions, according to their meaning. The lists of words count about 170 items for the Japan list and 150 for the Manga list (synonyms have been assigned one single numeric code). The request of writing free words on manga was made only in the questionnaire for non-readers: we were interested the most in what non-readers think of manga and what concepts they associate manga with. Regarding manga readers, the same question seemed to us less interesting at this time.

I have operationalized seven dimensions related to the notions about manga.

- 1<sup>st</sup> dimension: *genres, characters and authors*;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension: *links between manga and other media* (i.e. anime and video games);
- 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension: *public discourse on manga*;
- 4<sup>th</sup> dimension: *linguistic features of manga*;
- 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> dimensions: *notions and imagery coming from manga* (of positive/neutral/negative kind).

The dimensions for the images of Japan originally classified by us were 16 (as in Bouissou 2012), which for this article I have further re-grouped and operationalized into 6; but in this case the dimensions were created *ex ante*, that is, on the basis of our starting hypotheses:

- 1<sup>st</sup> dimension: *Japan's pop culture*;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension: *traditional and exotic Japan*;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension: *Japan in war and crisis*;
- 4<sup>th</sup> dimension: *modern and seducing Japan*;
- 5<sup>th</sup> dimension: *life and values in Japan*;
- 6<sup>th</sup> dimension: *Japanese language and other*.

## 5. The First Main Results from the 2010–2012 Survey

The most frequent words related to manga deal with one category: manga as a bridge to other worlds, seen under a descriptive light. Table 1 shows the definitions pertaining to manga as a cauldron of features related to visual storytelling, genres, characters and authors.

**Table 1. The six words manga non-readers think of when they read the word 'manga'. Recodification into thematic areas and incidence of the words written by respondents to each area. General frequencies (Column %; N=270; Missing=43)**

	%
Genres, characters and authors	14.3
Links to other media (anime and video games)	7.4
Public discourse on manga	7.2
Linguistic features of manga	18.4
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / neutral	29.6
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / negative	11.8
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / positive	11.3

The crossing of these indexes with gender does not show strong changes in the overall picture. We can observe that women tend more than men to include manga in the framework of imagery and languages, while men in that of genres, characters and authors (Table 2).

**Table 2. The six words manga non-readers think of when they read the word 'manga' according to gender. General frequencies (Column %; N=270; Missing=43)**

Thematic areas	Gender (%)	
	Male	Female
Genres, characters and authors	17.5	10.9
Links to other media (anime and video games)	9.4	5.3
Public discourse on manga	6.0	8.2
Linguistic features of manga	17.3	19.2

Thematic areas	Gender (%)	
	Male	Female
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / neutral	28.2	31.6
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / negative	9.8	13.9
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / positive	11.8	10.9

The situation does not vary at all when the independent variable tested is age (Table 3). With the increase of age, there is a decreasing tendency to consider manga in terms of genres, characters and authors; the same tendency is noticed in relation to themes concerning the public discourse on manga. Furthermore, let us note how adults and old adults respond to manga's language and imagery: these two subgroups more often recognize manga's nature as a visual language and tend to assign to it neutral or positive imaginative features.

**Table 3. The six words manga non-readers think of when they read the word 'manga' according to age. General frequencies (Column %; N=268; Missing=45)**

Thematic areas	Age cohort (%)			
	Teen-agers (13-20)	Young adults (21-30)	Adults (31-45)	Old adults (46>)
Genres, characters and authors	15.6	14.0	12.0	5.7
Links to other media (anime and video games)	5.3	10.2	11.8	5.4
Public discourse on manga	7.9	7.0	5.3	3.3
Linguistic features of manga	17.2	16.6	14.3	17.0
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / neutral	30.2	30.2	37.1	28.7
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / negative	13.7	11.2	4.8	13.7
Ideas and imagery coming from manga / positive	10.1	10.8	14.7	26.2

The core of this outlook is the respondents' image of Japan (Table 4). For what concerns this topic, the independent variables to be used in this earlier phase were gender and age cohort. Here the most interesting and relevant difference is among male and female respondents, in the non-readers sample, for what concerns Japan seen as a traditional and exotic place: 28.1% of men and 54.9% of women. It is a steady correlation, as also stated by a good value of the Pearson's  $X^2$  – that is, the coefficient of correlation, a value which measures the significance and 'strength' of the correlation between two variables.

There are some relevant differences between Italy and France for what concerns the notions of Japan, both in general and according to gender. First of all, in Italy the dominant idea of Japan is the traditional/exotic one (45.4%, vs. 19.0% of the pop-cultural framing), while in France the dominant notion is the pop-cultural one (47.3%, vs. 36.2% of the classic/exotic framing). Within the national samples, this is the situation: in Italy, the pop-cultural framing is selected by 21.7% of men and 11.9% of women, while in France by 37.1% of men and 35.0% of women; the traditional/exotic framing is selected in Italy by 44.2% of men and 45.0% of women, in France by 27.8% of men and 42.4% of women. This means that in France (and slightly in Italy) women frame Japan more as a traditional/exotic culture than men; and, while in France there is a balance between genders for what concerns the pop-cultural framing, in Italy almost the double of men over women see Japan in its pop-cultural features. The other relevant framing, Japan in war and crisis, shows that men are more inclined to see Japan this way (Italy: 8.5% males, 3.7% females; France: 10.6% and 6.0%).

**Table 4. The six words manga readers and non-readers think of when they read the word 'Japan'. Recodification into thematic areas and incidence of the words written by respondents to each area, according to gender (Column %; N=1066; Missing=5)**

Image of Japan: thematic areas	Gender			Pearson's $X^2$
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	
<b>Japan's pop culture</b>				
Readers	38.8	37.3	38.1	1.120
Non-readers	16.4	16.8	16.7	

Image of Japan: thematic areas	Gender			Pearson's X <sup>2</sup>
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	
<b>Traditional and exotic Japan</b>				
Readers	33.0	36.7	34.7	13.952
Non-readers	28.1	54.9	43.9	
<b>Japan in war and crisis</b>				
Readers	7.1	4.2	5.7	7.682
Non-readers	19.5	9.2	12.8	
<b>Modern and seducing Japan</b>				
Readers	9.8	9.5	9.7	0.0
Non-readers	15.6	14.7	15.1	
<b>Life and values in Japan</b>				
Readers	3.0	3.6	3.3	0.74
Non-readers	2.3	2.2	2.2	
<b>Japanese language and other</b>				
Readers	0.5	2.2	1.3	3.455
Non-readers	0.0	0.0	0.0	

Finally, let us see the thematic areas in which Japan is framed according to age (Table 5). The counterposition 'Japan framed as a pop culture vs. Japan framed as a traditional and exotic culture' is relevantly correlated to the age of manga readers from childhood to adult life: with the increase of the age, respondents see Japan's culture less as a pop culture and more as a traditional culture and an exotic place. Non-readers tend to see Japan mostly and always in a traditional and exotic fashion, irrespective of their age. In this case, it appears already from these simple statistical tests how the reading of manga may influence the framing of Japan between the two poles pop/traditional. The other dimensions appear marginal, nor show neat, linear correlations.

**Table 5. The six words manga readers and non-readers think of when they read the word 'Japan'. Recodification into thematic areas and incidence of the words written by respondents to each area, according to age cohort (Column %; N=1071)**

Image of Japan: thematic areas	Age cohorts						Pearson's X <sup>2</sup>
	Children (6-12)	Tenagers (13-20)	Young adults (21-30)	Adults (31-45)	Old adults (46>)	Total (%)	
<b>Japan's pop culture</b>							
Readers	66.7	44.1	35.2	20.3	33.3	38.4	22.325
Non-readers	0.0	21.4	8.5	6.3	13.3	16.8	
<b>Traditional and exotic Japan</b>							
Readers	20.0	27.1	38.3	52.2	100.0	34.5	14.601
Non-readers	0.0	45.9	39.0	50.0	46.7	44.3	
<b>Japan in war and crisis</b>							
Readers	0.0	13.8	11.0	12.5	13.3	12.9	2.692
Non-readers	0.0	8.6	6.9	9.4	11.1	7.9	
<b>Modern and seducing Japan</b>							
Readers	13.3	7.0	11.4	13.0	0.0	9.6	2.552
Non-readers	0.0	14.8	13.4	25.0	13.3	14.9	
<b>Life and values in Japan</b>							
Readers	0.0	2.1	3.7	5.8	0.0	3.1	4.137
Non-readers	0.0	2.0	3.7	0.0	0.0	2.3	
<b>Japanese lan- guage and other</b>							
Readers	0.0	2.1	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.4	2.136
Non-readers	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	

There are two last observations, which do not need any further cross-table here.

First: both in France and Italy, apart from some small exceptions, we could notice comparable trends in the three main framings of Japan (pop culture, traditional/exotic culture, war and crisis) according to age group: with the increase of age, the tendency to describe Japan in terms of pop culture and in terms of war events decreases; on the contrary, the traditional/exotic framing increases. Pop-cultural framing: children (Italy 100.0%, France 61.5%), teens (It 20.8%, Fr 37.1%), young adults (It 18.4%, Fr 34.2%), adults (It 8.0%, Fr 31.4%), old adults (It 10.0%, Fr 25.0%); traditional/exotic framing: children (It 0.0%, Fr 23.1%), teens (It 39.6%, Fr 33.5%), young adults (It 44.7%, Fr 36.0%), adults (It 48.8%, Fr 57.1%), old adults (It 5.0%, Fr 62.5%); war/crisis framing: children (It 0.0%, Fr 0.0%), teens (It 8.3%, Fr 8.6%), young adults (It 5.3%, Fr 7.5%), adults (It 8.0%, Fr 11.4%), old adults (It 10.0%, Fr 12.5%). Although the general pattern of the pop-cultural framing is higher in the French sample and that of the traditional/exotic one is higher in Italy (there are no relevant differences about the war/crisis framing in the two samples), the trends are similar.

The second observation applies to the education variable. While, in general, manga was regarded more or less neutrally as a cauldron of imageries and ideas, with the increase of the education level manga was considered rather a carrier of non-dangerous ideas and imagination. The strength of this correlation was supported by high values of the Pearson's coefficient. On the contrary, the framing of manga as a language does not depend on the education level.

## **6. Final Remarks**

First of all, concerning the notions of manga among non-readers: the ideas emerging are generally descriptive and positive. That is, 'positive' in their not being negative. This, combined with the qualitative data I had already collected (Pellitteri 2010: 497–513), shows the powerful permeation of manga, and of the notion of manga as a reading form among others, in the Italian and French social-cultural contexts. Both countries have seen in the past 30 years three generations of readers approaching manga: the third generation is today in its teen age and is growing up in a culture where many art festivals and conventions on Japan and manga are yearly organized. The domestication of manga as a cultural form has almost

reached its accomplishment, thanks to a co-presence of factors which include anime on television and in theatres: among the terms chosen to define manga, many non-readers wrote words like 'Miyazaki', 'Lupin the 3<sup>rd</sup>' and others which, in the perception of French and Italian fans and also in the public discourse, are much more related to anime than to manga.

Concerning the images of Japan, it appears that the very same stereotypes and cultural framings are at play both among non-readers and readers. This means, in a few words, that the history of manga in these two countries has given rise to correct notions of this medium among non-readers, while at the same time manga itself has not led manga readers to frame Japan in alternative ways with respect to old stereotypes and clichés.

On the one hand, we can infer that stereotypes and framings of Japan coming from outside the world of manga are still widespread: in mainstream media, in journalism, in the public discourse. But on the other hand, attention should be drawn to what kinds of 'Japans' are represented in the manga titles published in Europe, since assiduous manga readers reproduce in their perceptions the very same representations of Japan as manga non-readers do. We could provisionally say that the cultural power of manga is self-referential: manga sales are good, manga is 'cool' and a matter of discussion among fans and also in the mainstream media, but it appears that the cultural and commercial power of a typically Japanese product, such as manga, does not always coincide with 'soft power', at least not in the way Japan as a national culture and a people are perceived at large. Now, the concept of soft power, as introduced by Joseph E. Nye (1990), refers to the influence exerted – willingly or not – by the cultural system of a given nation onto the policies of foreign nations in regard of that very nation. It explains the impact of US culture on foreign policy of nations under the United States' area of influence. Its application to the popularity of Japanese popular culture abroad and to the 'cultural diplomacy' recently carried out by the Japanese government is more problematic. It is being discussed in the fields of Japanese studies, comparative media studies and international relations (Leheny 2006, Bouissou 2006, Lam 2007, Otmazgin 2008).

What of course emerges, in our investigation, among readers by comparison to non-readers, especially in the interviews, is a recognizable benevolence and indulgence to an abstract idea of Japan, simply because Japan is the land where manga come from. In this sense, some could infer that a slight and localized soft power is in action, but then we should introduce a new definition of soft power; at least, when speaking about Japanese pop culture.

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