



Special Feature: Shared Japanese Culture

Manga Will Surpass Korin

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How the Story of the Revolution Is Told

Recently, I have started reading various books and research papers — whatever I can lay my hands on — relating to the French Revolution. Having said that, it isn't that I'm actually trying to research the history of the Revolution itself.

The thing that I'm interested in is the fact that the manner in which the Revolution is discussed changes with the times. Indeed, the way that the Revolution was talked about during the mid twentieth-century, and the way it has been discussed since the end of the twentieth-century are very different. It's the same revolution that is being dealt with, so why does the style of discourse differ so much? That gap got me interested, and so I started tracing the history of that narrative.

Of course, there is also a gap between the telling of the Revolution during the early part of the twentieth-century and the way in which it is spoken of later on. I'm keeping that within my range, too as I continue my investigation. Eventually, I want to complete a summary of the history of the telling of the French Revolution in twentieth-century Japan. I don't know if it will turn out well or not, but that's my ambition right now.

The height of research into the French Revolution was surely during the mid twentieth-century. One thing I noticed from reading the books and such of that period is the mismatch between the research of the University of Tokyo, centering on the work of Takahashi Kohachiro, and that of Kyoto University, led by Kuwabara Takeo. The Revolutions as portrayed by the University of Tokyo and by Kyoto University during the same period turn their backs on one another. This discrepancy, born out of pettiness and academic traditions, will no doubt need to be properly dissected too.

It's looking as though this is going to turn into quite a formidable task. I can't deny that I



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have ever been urged by acquaintances to reconsider. “It’s a huge job. At any rate, Japan’s intellectuals have waged a long debate over that revolution. In your plan, you will surely be forced to face up to building an overall picture of all that. It’s not a topic that can be summarized easily,” they tell me.

I’m not completely free of anxiety about that myself, either. I get the feeling I might end up raising the white flag and giving up.

But then, I have already bought up a sizable amount of old books that seemed like they could be relevant. I can’t just give up and run away now. I have prepared myself, with the tight-fisted mentality that it will be a waste of money if I quit now. And I have a feeling, too, that in the end, this expense — paid out of my own pocket — will push me to keep going.

Gazing at the French Revolution literature starting to line my bookshelf, I am caught up in a deep feeling of emotion. Our predecessors swarmed towards the Revolution; they ganged up and, together, built it up into a really big theme. At the same time, I think to myself: I wonder what was the extent of the spread of research in France about the Meiji Restoration.

French researchers thrashing out a heated debate about manufacturing during the Bakumatsu period (the final years leading up to the end of the Tokugawa shogunate), spit flying from their mouths as they rage at one another over differences of opinion about the lingering remnants of feudalism in the Meiji period and onwards — it’s pretty hard to think that sort of thing would have played out in the world of French academia. The vision of a French person’s bookshelves, overflowing with French literature debating the Meiji Restoration, doesn’t exactly spring to mind either.

I have a feeling that it would be pretty easy to trace the progression of research in France into the history of the Meiji Restoration. At the very least, I’m sure it would be easy in comparison with the task of trying to fathom the history of Japanese research into the French Revolution. It probably wouldn’t take much time or effort.

I probably wouldn’t be reprimanded by the people around me, telling me to “give it up because it’s going to be a really tough job,” either. But I might possibly drop in their estimation for engaging in such a trifling and pointless task.

The Main Stage of International Humanities

I want you to picture an Italian researcher, taking up the challenge of researching Japanese art history. I think that Japan’s art history community would take favorably to such a person. If he or she could discourse with them about the likes of Unkei and Ogata Korin, they would probably get the impression that this person was praiseworthy. If there were something that this person wanted to look up, they would probably even feel they wanted to lend a hand, right?

The International Research Center for Japanese Studies — where I currently work — is a research center that embodies those kinds of sentiments. How many researchers are there overseas, tackling the challenge of studying Japanese culture? Where, and how are they distributed? Having ascertained that, we try to provide them with a variety of different



information. Where possible, we seek to make research easy for them. The International Research Center for Japanese Studies was created based on these kinds of ideas.

The reason that it is possible to create this kind of research center is that the number of researchers overseas studying Japanese culture is small. Foreigners aiming to do research on Ogata Korin are few and far between. So much so, that we feel grateful if we find one. We want to make a fuss of them. It is because we feel that way, that this research center was started.

If research into Korin were positioned at the central focus of international art history studies, the establishment of this center would be out of the question. Firstly, even in the case of a Korin researcher from another country, we probably wouldn't feel that person was worthy of praise. Of course we wouldn't feel the motivation to assist them either. Most importantly, providing support to the overflowing number of Korin researchers in the world would be impossible. It's doubtful whether we could even make contact with them, let alone provide them with information.

I'm pretty sure that in the world of Italian art history, researchers coming from Japan to study Michelangelo are not regarded as a rarity. Even with the topic of your research being Michelangelo, people thinking, "Oh great — another one," is probably about the best you could hope for.

I doubt that would be limited to just Michelangelo either; the same would go for research into Da Vinci, Cicero, Dante or Vivaldi. The Italian humanities are probably not quizzical of foreigners researching Italian culture — they take it for granted that researchers from foreign countries would try to study the Vatican.

Because of this, they cannot make an "International Research Center for Italian Studies." In reality, it would be impossible for them to make contact with the surely countless number of researchers of Italian culture in various countries around the world. To begin with, it isn't technologically possible.

Actually, I hear that more than half the researchers studying Renaissance art are in American Universities. Apparently, another 30% of them are made up of German researchers. It's a common theme, worldwide. It isn't the kind of theme for Italy, as a nation, to provide official support for by itself in the first place anyway.

But Japanese culture is not a worldwide common topic of study. The home of research into Ogata Korin or into *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) is, without a doubt, Japan. There are a large number of Japanese devoted to the study of the Muromachi/Ashikaga shogunate, but there are virtually no foreigners. Studies of Japanese culture are being continued in a place removed from the main stage of international humanities.

It is for that reason that the International Research Center for Japanese Studies was set up. The establishment of a research center like this was stimulated by a feeling of obscurity at being given only a supporting role on the international stage. This state of affairs, where studies of the Rin school can never be in the worldwide mainstream, forced us to take the leap into investing state funds. You could possibly even say that this international adversity is the very thing that gave us our salaries.



The research center where I work is flying the banner of internationalization. For example, we have aimed for the Rin school to become a common topic for worldwide humanities research. We are an organization that would have to rejoice at the Rin school becoming a theme of research on a par with Michelangelo.

However, if that happened, then foreign researchers of the Rin school would lose their virtue. The enthusiasm on the part of Japan to want to assist them would naturally fade away as well, and the nation's willingness to pay the salaries of the researchers who work for the purpose of that support would most certainly drop off too. In other words, they wouldn't need us anymore.

But we are vaguely starting to realize: there is no way that research into the Rin school will ever step up into the limelight and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Michelangelo research. And we've continued collecting our paychecks as we preach, with our mouths, the internationalization of Japanese studies — knowing somewhere in our hearts that, in the end, it will most likely just stop at nothing but empty talk.

The International Research Center for Japanese Studies is charged with a mission that would mean the loss of the basis for its own existence. There is also a sense of security that this mission will probably never be accomplished. It's a pretty savory place in my opinion, but maybe that's just me....

The Possibilities of Manga

There is a monumental work called *Akira* (1982–90) by manga artist Otomo Katsuhiro. It was also turned into a theatrical anime, and gained tremendous acclaim. It is also widely known internationally.

Yokoyama Mitsuteru's *Tetsujin 28* (1956–66) casts a shadow on this work, and *Akira* may actually have been intended as a secret homage to it. I have long held that view.

The “Akira” who appears in *Akira* is referred to as “No. 28,” and the characters Kaneda and Tetsuo intertwine with it. This composition is modeled around a manga, in which *Tetsujin 28* is controlled by the young boy Kaneda, and I have come to think that *Akira* might have been a big, elaborate “*honkadori*” adaptation of that manga.

I have also spoken of this interpretation to an American youth who told me that he liked Japanese manga. He told me that he rated *Akira* highly, so I brought up the topic of *Tetsujin 28*. On the reverse side of it, I can't totally deny having felt quite condescending towards the aforementioned youth.

“You like American anime, right? And you're rating *Akira* by today's standards of perfection. But do you realize that a backdrop of postwar Japanese manga history also lies hidden within that work? I'll bet you don't know Yokoyama Mitsuteru, do you? See, uncle Shoichi has been reading manga ever since he was a kid. You (youngsters) are no match for all those years of accumulated knowledge!”

Well, with that kind of arrogant sentiment included, I made mention of *Tetsujin 28* — with some part of myself thinking, “Let's knock this young guy from America down to size.”



However, things didn't go quite as expected. He says:

“Hmm, I see... that's an interesting little thought. The naming of the characters in *Tetsujin 28* and in *Akira* certainly do echo one another. Otomo might have been conscious of Yokoyama, mightn't he...”

This young man also knew his postwar Japanese manga history. The blueprint, for laying this as the base for a cultural education (in manga), had reached the young generation of America too, and I was made acutely aware of that fact.

At the same time, it also made me think to myself: Japanese manga, along with its historical background, may have started to become internationalized.

The jazz-lovers of the world pay respect to the pedigrees of Charlie Parker and Miles Davis. The thoughts of rock-lovers go out to Chuck Berry, the Beatles, and Led Zeppelin.

In the same way, Japanese manga is starting to turn into a shared global heritage. Why, if it hasn't succeeded in becoming a cultural category with its history since the time of Tezuka Osamu! That's what my chance meeting and discussion about *Tetsujin 28* with that young man ten-odd years ago made me think.

Maybe the likes of Ogata Korin and the Rin school will never reach the realm of Michelangelo. It will probably be difficult, too, for the subject of the Meiji Restoration to become a worldwide intellectual heritage on a par with that of the French Revolution. But for modern Japanese manga, internationalization is a possibility. You can't say with any finality that it won't spread its wings and fly off into the world, the story of its historical development included.

Anyway, back to the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. I said it earlier, but let's recap: this research center is aiming for the globalization of studies in Japanese culture. We've come along holding the aspiration that the various items of Japanese cultural history will be shared and understood on a worldwide level — while at the same time hiding, deep in our heart-of-hearts, the acknowledgement that this will probably never actually happen.

But manga, anime and such, might actually go on to become internationalized. They have the potential to reach the heady heights of the world where not even *Genji monogatari* or Natsume Soseki could stand.

The number of researchers of Japanese culture around the world who are interested in the likes of Otomo Katsuhiro and Tezuka Osamu will increase. They will be given roles akin to those of champion class sumo wrestlers, in the arena of worldwide pop culture studies. And when that happens, the information network of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies will no longer be able to keep up — in the same way that Italian academia is unable to grasp fully all those researchers studying the Renaissance.

The authorities involved with cultural exchange will surely rejoice at this manga and anime boom. I have a feeling that the financial authorities — out to reap the returns of anything related with “Cool Japan” — will welcome it too. The International Research Center for Japanese Studies will also — officially — have to go with the flow and act happy about it.

This research center has made it its mission to construct an international network for those doing research into Japan, and to provide information to those researchers and facilitate their



work.

But if manga research spreads around the world, it will be impossible for us to fulfill that role. I'm sure we could be of use to the small number of researchers studying the Rin school. But we would be unable to respond to the kind of new status that manga and anime have the potential to acquire, and that powerlessness will end up being exposed — whether we like it or not.

In that sense, there are some respects in which we cannot go along with the national policy rejoicing at the proliferation of Cool Japan. People tend to think of this research center as being in line with state policy, but let me just emphasize that this is, surprisingly, not so true.

Of Course, They Can't Read It Anyhow!

It was from the late 1980s that word began to reach my ear that Japanese manga and anime were gaining popularity in Europe, particularly in southern Europe.

Then, while traveling to Paris in 1993, I confirmed it with my own eyes. I was watching TV in my hotel, when they showed the anime *Maison Ikkoku*. I remember witnessing that firsthand and thinking in admiration, “Aha! So, the rumors are true.”

The apartment, *Ikkoku-kan*, where this anime is set makes the distinction between shoes for inside and outside wear. People going into the apartment have to change into indoor shoes or slippers at the shoe cupboard by the side of the entrance hall. In the *Maison Ikkoku* that I watched in the hotel too, they were showing that scene just as it is. How do French people — who continue wearing the same shoes inside the house as they do outside — react to this? That thought sparked a sort of comparative-home-economical type of interest in me.

The fact that the title of *Maison Ikkoku* had been changed to *Juliette je t'aime* also made me laugh. Apparently it seems that, in France, the heroin Kyoko is named “Juliette.” That made me feel a little strange, too.

When I told a Japanese person living in Paris about this, he replied that I should “try going to (the book store) Junkudo.” “Because if you take a peek inside there, you'll be met with an even more amusing sight,” he said.

“The Paris branch of Junkudo is near the opera house. And in the basement floor, there are rows of Japanese manga lined out. How about taking a look at the way the French children swarm around them?” That's what the aforementioned Japanese — who claimed to have been living in Paris for a long time — advised me.

I'm a curious guy too, so I aimed for the time roughly around the end of school and visited Junkudo. And, just as I had been told, I ran into a group of French children forming a line. I'm sure the fact that new issue of *Dragonball* had just arrived also had something to do with it. Many of the children were lined up in front of the counter with that in hand.

This wasn't a French translation of it — they were holding the Japanese *Dragonball*, which, I was informed, had just arrived from Japan.

Of course, there were virtually no children who could understand Japanese. But even so, they



still wanted a manga book that was published in Japan. They wanted to have, in their hands, the original version of the anime that they saw on TV. That — I was told — was their motivation for purchasing it.

“Of course they can’t read it!” Spat one mother I spoke too, who was there accompanying her child. She was unable to hide her resentment towards the manga that capture children’s hearts.

This isn’t something that is limited to just this one mother. Japanese-made anime mesmerizes children sitting in front of their TV screens. The decent, sensible people of France have regarded this with resentment. Perhaps even in countries like Spain and Italy, where Japanese anime were broadcast from early on... I wonder, did it remind them of something akin to the Pied Piper of Hamelin?

But whatever the case may be, Japanese anime has captivated the children of southern Europe since the 1990s. The broadcast rights for these anime are bought from Japan at a low price. It doesn’t cost much to air them. Having these kinds of advantage from a business perspective too, anime continued to be shown one after another.

The educated classes of southern Europe were not at all happy about this. The people endowed with cultural capital have frowned upon it. But they have just allowed this influx to pass them by, watching in a stunned daze, subdued by their children’s ardent enthusiasm.

In that sense, they are in a state very similar to that of Japan during the time when manga was heading towards its boom of prosperity. As Japan entered its postwar period of rapid economic growth, manga enchanted Japanese children — while at the same time provoking a backlash from liberal-educationalist parents. But the culture of reading manga and watching anime became firmly established in Japanese society.

Around a quarter of a century later, the same thing was being repeated in southern Europe. That was how things looked to me. I wrote a little earlier about the mother in Paris’s Junkudo, who viewed manga coldly. This was the reason why, in meeting her, I remembered my own mother — for whom manga was also an icy topic of discussion.

Held up by a Powerless Native Language

Getting their parents to buy them a Japanese manga they can’t even read: as I looked, appalled, at this line of children, one of the Junkudo store clerks spoke to me:

“There are some young people who can understand Japanese too. You can occasionally see those types amongst the young people who gather around the *dojinshi* (fan magazines) that discuss Japanese manga and anime. People who want to read deeply into the original manga. There are quite a few people who study Japanese for that sole purpose.”

Through the introduction of the store clerk, I too was able to meet one of them. He said he was still at high school, but was managing to speak pretty decent conversational Japanese. Later, I was shocked to receive a letter written in Japanese *kanji-kana majiri*. “Is the passion for manga driving young people this far?” I thought.

In speaking with that high school student, I recalled the fever brought about by rock music



in the 1960s. At that time, many young people were enthralled by the electric guitars and the sound of English. Continuously checking their English dictionaries to try to understand the lyrics of the Beatles. The thought ran through the back of my mind that there were many youngsters like that too.

At the time, students attracted to electric guitars were frequently branded as delinquents. Junior high schools and high schools also had an aversion to boys growing their hair long. There are bound to have been some schools that instructed students explicitly not to go to electric guitar concerts.

The voices of public decency and liberal-educationalism were reluctant to acknowledge rock music and the culture associated with it. Even so, the young people — their souls stolen by the music — charged right on towards it. Chasing, not only after the Beatles, but the likes of Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin too.

The young people of Paris, absorbed in Japanese manga, are living the same kind of youth. In that respect, maybe I should have supported them like this:

“Thanks to your manga-madness, you have the adults thinking behind your back, right? But don’t be discouraged! Even I myself — a Japanese person — was looked down on by adults for the fact that I liked manga. There were even some teachers who regarded me as a delinquent just because I liked rock music.”

“But now, manga occupies a firm place in print culture. It’s now a time where anime too — in some cases — can become highly acclaimed. The Beatles have now reached the level where they are even featured in some music textbooks.”

“Maybe someday, even the situation in your country will change. Tezuka Osamu, Otomo Katsuhiro, and Okazaki Kyoko will all be spoken of gloriously — you can’t rule out the possibility that a time like that will come, right?”

Well, if that does happen, then when it does it will probably lose half its attraction too, but still.

Let’s look back at 1960s rock one more time. At that time, many young people were knocked out by the electric guitar sound. They also felt something new and different, too, in the “band” format. Maybe they found various other kinds of musical fascination there too.

But whatever you say, the fact that the songs were sung in English surely had a large part to play. In the end, the globalism of the English language boosted the international popularization of rock music. If that had been another language, it is questionable whether or not it would have spread so widely.

Or at least, I used to think so at one point. That at the end of the day, Purple and Zeppelin too were sustained by English language imperialism. In that sense, I have a feeling that I somewhat underestimated their musical power.

But having seen Japanese manga being sold in Paris, I felt remorseful.

It’s not the case that manga and anime, originating in Japan, are backed-up by an international language. They are spreading out into the world together with the very “local” language of Japanese. But even without a hegemonic language, if it’s interesting, then the world



will accept it — the same way the children of Paris jostle with one another to buy manga written in Japanese.

Given that, we shouldn't excessively over-rate the power of English in the case of 1960s rock, either. It was enjoyed because the music itself was so exciting. To argue that it was all just thanks to the imperialistic momentum of the English language is taking it too far. That's the way I started to reconsider things after my visit to Paris's Junkudo.

Modern day Japan has worked, as a nation, to achieve Westernization — not only in terms of national and social structure, but also down to the way people live their lives, starting with food, clothing, and housing.

That being said, these things were by no means pushed ahead by the common people. The ones who led this Westernization were the leaders burdened with the task of running the country. Or perhaps it was the upper classes surrounding them who were the driving force.

The attitude of appreciation for the likes of Bach and Michelangelo, too, also spread from those upper classes. The Western concept of a humanist cultural education itself was brought into Japan via privileged universities etc., and the thing that underpinned this type of “top down” dissemination (of culture) was the overwhelming power of the West.

The acceptance of rock in the 1960s, however, has a different aspect to it. I mentioned it a little earlier too, but the ones who jumped at it first were the young demographic — who were viewed as being still immature. But the momentum of those young people, who held no power in society, overrode and overcame the liberal-educationist values of the adults, who were regarded as mature.

The acceptance of rock music overturned the “top down” acceptance of Western culture that had existed until that time, and made it clear that the “bottom up” style was also sufficiently possible. In that sense, maybe you could say it was a revolutionary phenomenon. Well, the acceptance of jazz during the period between the two World Wars did show signs of something resembling that too.

“Top down” propagation probably wouldn't function well without some sort of hegemony to support it. Thinking of Bach, Michelangelo and so on as precious — that kind of attitude spread amongst Japan's educated classes because Japan had accepted the superiority of the West.

Japan's Rin school, *gagaku* (a type of Japanese classical music) and so on are appreciated by some Westerners. But Japan doesn't have the kind of civilizational power needed to back that. Early-modern Japan didn't possess the power that was needed to enable it to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the hegemony of the West.

Because of that, the Rin school and *gagaku* etc., only reached a portion of curiosity-seeking Japanese culture-lovers. There is no way that Ogata Korin could have ever become a Michelangelo. Not as long as he was relying on “top down” propagation.

But the new media environment of the twentieth-century changed things completely, raising up people, who were not on the side of the “top down” imposers, as the accepters. It established the culturally uneducated, and young people still dependent on their parents, as new consumers, and provided a method of winning media-based success to (forms of) expression that cut into



that market.

Rock is a form of music that was made possible precisely because it was that kind of era. Even without undergoing cultural authorization, it forced its way from the “bottom up.” Well, after achieving success and fame it was subsequently granted some authorization.

And Japanese manga and anime are starting to be spread around the globe too, following this same course. If it’s by this path, then even with the backdrop of the powerless Japanese language, it is still possible for them to reach the world. Or should I say rather, I have a kind of feeling that the globalization of Cool Japan by any other route is just impossible.

A Pro-Wrestler Like Robespierre

Some time ago, a pro-wrestler called Maeda Akira attempted to bring some new innovations to the world of professional wrestling. “Let’s get rid of all the acting,” “show the spectators a match where the pain really comes across,” “overthrow the seniority-based system of promotion within the association,” etc., etc.

Because of this, Maeda was regarded as the revolutionary child of the wrestling world. The pro-wrestling commentators on TV Asahi jeered Maeda, calling him “the black-haired Robespierre.” This was in the 1980s.

Robespierre was one of the prominent figures who colored the history of the French Revolution. By way of the Jacobin’s dictatorship, he brought a reign of terror to Revolutionary era France; a patriot who made the French people of bygone days tremble with fear.

This TV station likened Maeda to this Robespierre. Established wrestlers didn’t know what to do with Maeda; they were sometimes frightened by him, and found him difficult to handle. The commentators looked at that situation, and pressed a single frame from French Revolutionary history onto Maeda.

Pro-wrestling coverage of the time boasted almost 20% viewing figures. The viewers are not necessarily all people educated in foreign history, and it’s doubtful whether a reference to a figure from French Revolutionary history would be understood or not. I think there were some apprehensions of that kind too, but the TV commentators took the plunge, calling Maeda by the nickname of “the black-haired Robespierre.”

Could this kind of phenomenon possibly occur in sports broadcasts in other countries? I haven’t been able to investigate fully, so I couldn’t really say.

But when I heard the words “black-haired Robespierre” I was moved by a certain profound emotion: modern Japanese mass society is quite familiar with the French Revolution. At the very least, the TV station judged that to be the case. What on earth does this all mean? This phenomenon itself is worth analyzing; it also made that kind of thought cross my mind.

There are more than a few Japanese people who celebrate Bastille Day on the anniversary of the French Revolution (July 14), even though there is nobody in China or Korea etc., who celebrates it. Do traditions like this reverberate with “the black-haired Robespierre” too?

Come to think of it, *The Rose of Versailles*, which is set in Revolutionary era France, can’t be



underestimated either. The manga was popular, and the show by the Takarazuka Revue girls musical theater troupe also brought huge success. Count von Fersen trying to help Marie Antoinette: there are many patrons who are familiar with that kind of Revolutionary history.

At the start of this article, I stated that I have an interest in the history of the telling of the French Revolution, and of the ways in which it is told. I also wrote that I want to re-read (the work of) Kuwabara Takeo and Takahashi Kohachiro.

However, just doing that won't solve everything. Surely the French Revolution that has been loved by Japanese popular culture can't be discounted from the history of the telling either.

The traditional humanities are currently at a loss as to what to do about the rise of so-called sub-cultures. A clear method hasn't yet been found for how to deal with manga, anime and so on. There is a breach, between the culture that has come from the "top down," and expression that has swelled from the "bottom up."

But if we keep things like the Takarazuka Revue, professional wrestling and so on within our sights too, then we can at least build a bridge between the two. We might be able to find common ground between Japanese research into the French Revolution and manga. And if I use manga and so on as a foothold, then maybe my work might even reach France....

Ah... I've shown you all my trifling ambition. Well, I'll get on with my work now, and try to stop thinking like that.

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