

*YOUNG BRITISH READERS’
ENGAGEMENT WITH MANGA*



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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents young British readers' engagement with manga regarding literary, aesthetic, social, and cultural dimensions. The study explores young readers' points of views of their reading preference – manga. I investigated how children interpreted manga, with respect to the artistic techniques, the embedded ideologies, and the cultural elements therein. I also looked into children's participation in manga fandom and its social meanings. This allowed me to explore what attracted British readers to this exotic text. This study involved 16 participants from two schools, aged between 10 and 15, with genders represented equally. The participants were grouped by gender in each school. Each group of students received three group interviews based on three manga that they were required to read in advance. Individual interviews with each student followed the group interviews, and all the students were asked to keep reading reflections. The findings show that the attraction of participants to manga includes at least five dimensions. First, manga is a visually rich text, which not only had great power in rendering vicarious experiences to the students, but also allowed the struggling students to grasp the meanings of the text better. Second, both the verbal and the visual storytelling were characterised as fragmentary, which inspired the students' imagination to join the creation of the story. Third, manga provided a temporary shelter where the participants could forget a stressful and frustrating reality. In addition, they felt that they gained renewed hope, refreshed energy, and insights to face potential challenges and difficulties in their lives. Fourth, the elements of Japaneseness and otherness made manga reading a rich experience of an exotic culture. Fifth, manga afforded collective pleasures in fan communities where the students could express their passion and gained a sense of identity.

In order to discover what young readers are attracted by, we have to ask them. To find out what the author is up to, we must stop assuming that we always know. We need to redescribe both children reading and children's books and to give ourselves reading lessons from both (Meek, 1992, p. 178).



This drawing is Fiona's response to *Naruto* volume 6.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<i>N6</i>	<i>Naruto</i> volume 6
<i>VK4</i>	<i>Vampire Knight</i> volume 4
OEL manga	Original English-language manga

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This drawing is Rena's response to *Naruto* volume 6.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how young readers engage with manga. In this chapter, I will introduce the motivation for this research, and locate my study in the existing research. Following that, I will explain the research focus, the goal of the investigation, and the contribution of this study. Finally, I will provide an overview of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 About Manga and Me

My personal relationship with manga (comic books originating in Japan) started with my childhood reading experience and anime viewing in Taiwan. Due to the historical and geographical background, Japanese culture has had significant influence on everyday life in Taiwan, including child and youth popular culture. I started reading manga when I was seven years old. My first manga, and still my favourite today, is called *Doraemon*. Doraemon is a robot cat that travels back in time from the twenty-second century to the twentieth century to aid the underdog primary schoolboy, Nobita. I used to daydream about having a robot like Doraemon who could use magic gadgets to make my life easy and fun. I was introduced to manga by my brother who often rented manga from rental bookshops or purchased them. As a result, when my brother reached adolescence, I started reading *shōnen* manga (manga aimed at boys) with him. It was not until I was a teenager myself that I started reading *shōjo* manga (manga aimed at girls) and visited manga rental shops regularly. It was common for me to spend

consecutive evenings or weekends diving into a pile of manga where I completely blocked out everything happening outside the world of the book. My mother used to frown at me when she realised that the silence in the house was not a result of my diligent work on school tasks or preparation for exams. Her view of manga as a distraction from my study and house chores induced a sense of guilt when I was caught reading manga. Sometimes, I would hide manga in my school bag or under my coat to smuggle them home, and read them secretly in my room. At school, my friends and I would swap manga, and introduce each other to new titles. We collected and exchanged spin-off products of manga, such as stickers, playing cards, key chains, models, and stationery. Some of us also practised drawing manga.

In its country of origin, manga has wide readership ranging from elementary school children to adults. The topics cover a broad spectrum in order to appeal to a variety of readers. According to Schodt (2013), the peak of manga industry in the local market was in 1996 when manga represented nearly 40 per cent of all published magazines and books. In 2009, sales of manga paperbacks alone represented nearly 230 billion yen (around GBP 1.3 billion). Nakazawa (2005) believes that there are three main reasons for the huge presence of manga in Japan. First, Japan has a long history of pictorial media. Second, manga is a low-cost form of entertainment, which is affordable to the general public, particularly during the time of economic recession after the Second World War. Third, the expressive techniques in manga are attractive, such as the flexibility of panels and the depiction of emotions through characters' eyes.

Manga has also become a significant cultural phenomenon in its neighbouring countries, as well as in the Western world. Hakuhodo (2013) conducted a global habit survey of consumers' lifestyles and media preferences in 36 major cities around the world in 2012. The report claims that manga and anime are preferred to local alternatives in most of the cities studied. The phenomenon is most prominent in Hong Kong and Taipei where respectively 76.3% and 65.4% of comics/animation that respondents consumed were from Japan. The report points out that reasons for the high acceptance of manga and anime in overseas markets may be that Japanese cartoon characters are not easily identified as belonging to particular races or ethnic groups, and that the focus on protagonists' personal growth is universally attractive to the audience.

The penetration of manga/anime in Western countries is also a significant phenomenon. According to Goldberg (2010), manga dominated the U.S. graphic novel market in 2007. Briel (2010) also points out that manga led the comics sales charts in France in the same year. In the UK, manga and anime have been one of the main features in the twice-yearly MCM London Comic Con, which has a continuously growing record of attendance. According to its official press, the attendance record of the recent 3-day exhibition in October 2014 reached 110,197, compared to 88,000 in October 2013 (MCM-London-Comic-Con, 2014). The growing interest in manga has also led local bookstores and public libraries to set up an independent section for manga. For example, a substantial stock of manga with high issue rates is seen in Cambridgeshire libraries. According to a record of young adult graphic items across the county from May to October 2011, the graphic novel *Point Blanc* had the highest borrowing record, followed closely by two *shōjo* manga, *Sand Chronicles* and *Vampire Game* (M. Carrigan, personal communication, 3 November, 2011). The popularity of manga has inspired the British publisher, Self Made Hero, to publish a series of Shakespeare's plays in manga style under the collective title of *Manga Shakespeare*. This series endeavours to attract young readers who find it hard to read classical literature in its original form.

The observed cultural phenomenon of manga in the UK and my own passion for this childhood reading have motivated my research interest in manga and young British readers. I was curious about the popularity of manga among young people despite its dubious reputation among some adults.

1.2 About Manga and Child Readers

As a popular cultural text, manga is burdened by criticisms principally directed towards its representations of violence and sex. Moreover, the stereotype of comics as non-serious literature with low literacy value has labelled manga as an inferior type of reading (Barker, 1989; Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005; Gibson, 2010a). In 2004, the Reading Agency, a charity funded by the UK government, ran a project called Manga Mania to promote reading for leisure. They selected 150 titles to send to libraries and schools, targeting at youth aged 13 to 16 (Curzon, 2004). This project raised a debate on the

legitimacy of introducing manga to schoolchildren. Owen (2004), for example, wrote an article on *The Mail on Sunday*, entitled ‘Child murder, incest and rape... is this really how our schools should be encouraging boys to read?’ He argued that this project might lead teenagers to seek out pornographic titles once they become hooked on the text form. Although manga are created for wide demographic groups varying by gender and age, concerns about children reading the ‘wrong’ manga and ignorance of the demographic varieties in manga’s targeted readership have resulted in arguments for manga to be banned from schools. These stereotypes and misconceptions of manga have ignored its literary, literacy, aesthetic, and socio-cultural values.

However, some scholars have argued that critics need to re-examine their bias towards texts that are traditionally considered as low literature. For example, Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) respond to criticisms on the literacy value of manga, “We educators and literacy researchers need to broaden our definitions of texts and recognize that our bias toward written text is a result of our own socialization in a print-dominated world” (p. 43). Styles (1994) also contends:

Those of us who care about children and education have to win the argument about a literature for everyone with the aim of empowerment for all our pupils. Surely what we need is explorations of all kinds of text, fostered by real engagement, in ways that attempt to be meaningful for all our pupils (p. 52).

Styles’ argument draws our attention to child readers and meanings they make from different texts. Botzakis (2009) suggests that the diversity of readers and their tastes should be respected when discussing what books children should read. He calls on scholars and educators to give attention to what readers do with texts before ascribing certain functions to these texts. Smith (1988) also points out that we should stop thinking that reading is only for the purpose of acquiring information. He criticises this misconception with its origins in the grade-oriented policy in education. Instead, he argues, what readers experience during reading should be valued and studied.

Regardless of the controversial nature of manga and comics in general, there are scholars who try to redirect attention away from the infamous stereotypes of these texts towards a fuller awareness of their potential. For example, Meek (1988) points out that the literary competence needed to read comics has been neglected. Comics demand skill

to interpret and integrate two modes of texts. Moreover, the reader is required to comprehend the time flow of sequential panels because the linear narrative in panels combines the potential of words and pictures. Versaci (2001) suggests that there are at least three advantages of using comic books in the classroom. First, students can explore literature in various forms. Second, students may be more forthcoming with their ideas and opinions about comic books than about traditional literary work, as the latter sometimes feels like occupying a space above their level of thought. Third, introducing comics to the classroom teaches students to avoid making assumptions based on the appearance or popular conceptions of certain works and genres too quickly. Gibson (2009) also argues that comics can stimulate students' interest in reading, and build emergent readers' confidence. Moreover, Gibson (2007a) contends that a reader's community of manga can enable the young people involved to form their personal identities in relation to a subculture. These scholars try to make the point that there are positive educational and personal values in manga and comics that should not be overlooked.

As academic interest in sequential art has grown in recent years, more research on manga has started to emerge. Kinko Ito, Frederik L. Schodt, Paul Gravett, Robin E. Brenner, Jennifer Prough, and Jean-Marie Bouissou have done thorough research on the historical development, the social and cultural contexts, and the content and art styles of manga. The distinct art styles and format of manga have also drawn the seminal cartoonist and theorist, Scott McCloud, to conduct comparative research on manga and Western comics. In addition to McCloud, Cohn takes a semiotic approach to analyse the panel structure and its narrative functions in manga. Some scholars take an interest in the cultural phenomenon of manga overseas, such as Wendy Goldberg, Jason Bainbridge, and Craig Norris. Other scholars have also tried to explore the reception and productivity of readers/audiences in terms of their experience with manga/anime, both domestically and overseas. For example, Kate Allen and John E. Ingulsrud looked at reading patterns of manga among teenagers in Japan; Michael Bitz explored the social impact on children's involvement in the creation of comics and manga in the U.S.; Patrick Drazen and Susan Napier examined American readers'/audiences' perception of Japanese cultural elements in manga and anime; Theresa Winge, Joel Gin, and Frenchy Lunning looked at the fandom practice of Cosplay; Patrick W. Galbraith, June M. Madeley, and Fran Martin investigated female readers' perceptions of effeminate boys in manga; and June Nakazawa explored the development of literacy

among young readers of manga in Japan. In addition to these scholars' research, Mel Gibson focused on the youth culture of comics and manga in the UK. She looked at this cultural phenomenon and the social and educational impact on young readers. Although manga is growing popular among young people in the UK, little research has been done to investigate it. Gibson's study is extremely valuable in enlightening us with regard to young people's reading culture of this popular text in Britain and the socio-cultural significance of a reader's community of manga. However, her research does not set out to investigate the literary and aesthetic aspects of manga and readers' reception and (re)construction of meanings in any depth. My study aims to redress this significant gap in our understanding by focusing on these areas, as well as furthering investigations on the transcultural phenomenon of manga and the socio-cultural meanings of young people's fandom practices.

To initiate my investigation, I ask three questions:

1. What engages young British readers with manga in terms of literary and aesthetic qualities?
2. How do readers respond to manga, both cognitively and affectively?
3. What are the social and cultural dimensions of young British readers' engagement with manga?

The first question aims to explore the multimodal and sequential structure of manga, as well as the literary and artistic techniques that manga artists deploy to direct readers' attention, inspire their imagination, and keep their interest. The second question examines participants' responses to the literary and aesthetic qualities of manga, with particular attention paid to their perception of what they read, how they make meanings of it, and what feelings are evoked in their interaction with the text. The third question seeks to understand how Western readers perceive, interpret, and respond to cultural elements in manga, and what fandom participation means to them, both culturally and socially.

This thesis addresses a significant gap in existing research on manga, particularly in the context of the UK. It will challenge a common stereotype of manga as a low literature, and instead suggest that manga is not only a valuable source of reading for pleasure, but also a helpful material for developing young readers' literary and literacy competency,

and cultivating their aesthetic appreciation of literature in different forms. Moreover, manga facilitates a collective reading culture and other fandom activities, which allow young people to seek self-identities. The study will contribute to the reader response, comic studies, and popular culture research fields. Through presenting different dimensions of young readers' engagement with manga, I urge educators and scholars to re-examine potential values of manga and this popular reading culture among young people.

1.3 An Overview of This Thesis

In the introduction, I have presented my own experience of manga and an observation of local and global popularity of manga as my research motivation. I have also shown how emerging positive views in the academic field have begun to challenge popular stereotypes of manga. Although manga has drawn increasing interest from scholars, I have identified a significant gap in existing research, which my own study is designed to address.

In the next chapter, I will provide a theoretical framework of my investigation on young readers' engagement with manga. It is necessary to first define manga by its historical development, narrative structure, and art styles. Following that, I will discuss certain characteristics of manga that have great potential in engaging readers in the imagined realm, and draw on reader-response theory to bring attention to readers' interaction with texts. Finally, I will look into the socio-cultural value of manga by first examining the formation and characteristics of a popular culture, and then exploring the phenomenon and meanings of manga fandom.

In the methodology chapter, I will explicate the chosen methods to conduct this study and the rationale behind them. I will include a textual analysis of the corpus texts, from which I developed sets of questions to discuss with participants regarding their experiences with manga. This chapter will end with reflections on the validity and limitations of the study, as well as ethical issues.

In the finding and discussion chapter, I will first focus on participants' responses to the literary and artistic aspects of manga, particularly the storytelling styles and the representation of cultural elements. Then, I will discuss how the participants made meanings of the chosen texts and why they pursued an optimal experience of immersion in manga. Thereafter, I will examine the participants' attachment to manga by presenting their attitudes and views of this popular culture, and discussing what fandom practices mean to them.

Finally, in the conclusion chapter, I will summarise key findings, explore the implications of this study, and make suggestions for future studies.



This drawing is Wesley's response to *One Piece* volume 8.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter, I provided a background of research relevant to this study, and presented three research questions to investigate young British readers' engagement with manga. In this chapter, I will review existing literature on manga in three parts. The first, *2.1 An Overview of Manga*, will introduce the historical development of manga and features of the two demographic categories focused on in this study – *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga. The next part, *2.2 Text and Reader*, will draw attention to the interaction between readers and texts based on reader-response theory and discussions of literary emotions. This is followed by an overview of the narrative structure of manga and its potential for engaging readers, and the skills required to comprehend this distinct style of storytelling. Finally, *2.3 Popular Culture and Manga Fandom*, will explore the political context of popular culture and the characteristics of manga fandom.

2.1 An Overview of Manga

For many people outside Japan, 'manga' remains a term that is either completely foreign, or falsely understood as anime because of their close relationship. A loose definition of manga is 'comic books originating in Japan'. A more sophisticated definition needs to cover its distinct format, art styles, ideologies, and historical background. In this section, I will look at the physical form and the content of manga. I will also outline the historical development of this text, including the mutual influence of Western and Japanese cultures in the realm of manga.

2.1.1 What Is Manga?

Manga is the roman alphabet spelling of Japanese *kanji* – 漫画 – rendered also in another two written systems in Japanese as まんが (hiragana) and マンガ (katakana). In Japan, manga refers to ‘comics’. It is associated with ‘unrefined’ or ‘unsophisticated’ images (Schodt, 1996). In English speaking countries, the understanding of manga is affected by stereotypes of Japanese animation (anime) and the associated art styles. As manga and anime often go side by side, each promoting the sales of the other, some people misunderstand manga as meaning both Japanese comic books and cartoon films. Moreover, since a number of sci-fi and fantasy anime have attained popularity in the U.S. and Europe, some people have a false impression that manga only deal with these themes (Gravett, 2004). Another approach that people have taken to understand manga makes use of its art style and place of origin. According to Brenner (2011), the term *manga* is used in the U.S. to mean comics originating in Japan. However, she also says, “Manga can be used to identify any graphic novel that mimics the style of creators from Japan” (p. 257). As manga artists have developed a particular grammar in terms of the format, the schematised depiction of characters, and the use of symbolic signs, it is possible for artists outside Japan to imitate the artistic style of manga, using *How to Draw Manga* guides. This approach suggests that ‘manga’ is a form of sequential art that is similar to graphic novels in length of narrative. In addition, it recognizes the Japanese root in manga, even those Original English-language (OEL) ones.

In fact, manga can sometimes be used as a term to distinguish the local comics from foreign ones in Japan. Schodt (1996) points out that members of the industry sometimes favour the term *komikkusu* when talking about comics in general, because it sounds more sophisticated. However, when talking about overseas comics, they revert to the term *manga* to differentiate the Japanese species from its American counterpart. Interestingly, not all Japanese people think that manga has to be exclusively faithful to the Japanese spirit. Eijiro Shimada, the chief editor of manga magazine *Morning Two*, commented in an interview about an international manga competition. He was looking for something American in the manga-style comics from the U.S. He said:

The term ‘manga’ is a little misunderstood. Manga is supposed to be free and unrestricted. It’s the creativity to express yourself on the page. It’s like American baseball; [in the U.S.] it’s one thing, but in Japan baseball has its own flavor (Cha, 2007, para. 22).

Shimada’s definition of manga agrees with the meanings of the Sino-Japanese ideogram of this word, written as 漫 (*man*) and 画 (*ga*). ‘漫’ means ‘involuntary’ or ‘in spite of oneself’, and ‘画’ means ‘pictures’ (Schodt, 1996). That is to say, manga is an art form that allows free creativity to be developed through pictures. Although there is a schema of a ‘manga style’, generally known by characters’ big eyes, small mouths, slim figures, and hairstyles, manga is a media through which the artist and the reader can communicate beyond the restrictions of nations and cultures. OEL manga is a product of globalisation that indigenises manga to celebrate both Western and Eastern cultures.

Although definitions of manga vary among groups of fans, artists, publishers, industry members and scholars, it is generally agreed that manga refers to comics that retain strong affiliation with Japanese traditions in art, literature, and ideology. Whilst the standardised instructions in *How to Draw Manga* guides on the market make manga-specific art styles possible to imitate by anyone, Japanese-specific ideologies may be harder to pick up by artists who do not share a Japanese social and cultural background. As fans are known for their demand regarding the ‘authenticity’ of a cultural product, I decided to use manga of Japanese origin in this study to observe Western readers’ engagement with this cultural product. In this thesis, I refer to ‘manga’ as comics that are written and drawn by artists with Japanese cultural roots, so as to examine elements of ‘Japaneseness’ in this art form and how they are perceived and received by non-Japanese readers.

It is believed that *manga* was coined by the woodblock artist Hokusai in the nineteenth century, but was not used to refer to comics until the twentieth century (Schodt, 1996; Gravett, 2004; Koyama-Richard, 2007). According to Gravett (2004), the word manga was used by Hokusai to mean loose and unself-conscious sketches that allow exaggeration and caricature. Although manga was not employed in reference to comics at Hokusai’s time, the essence of burlesque has been passed down along with the term. Gravett says, “Hokusai never dabbled in narrative in his sketchbooks but, were he alive today, he might recognize in modern manga some of the same pleasure in grotesque

expressions, physical comedy and uninhibited drawing” (p. 21). In 1902, the word, *manga*, started to be widely applied to cartoons, comic strips, and comics when Rakuten Kitazawa, a cartoonist, illustrator, and magazine editor, used it in his comics page, entitled *Jiji manga*, in a Japanese newspaper, *Jiji Shinpō*. In order to resist Edo-period forms of visual expressions and excessive use of words and puns, Rakuten tried to promote the use of the term, *manga*, to refer to comics, particularly to a new form that originated in the Euro-American world.

Manga can be understood as a form of ‘sequential art’ – a term coined by comics artist Will Eisner (Eisner, 2008). Like other forms of sequential art, such as Western comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels, manga tells stories in sequential panels where words, images, speech/thought balloons, and sound effects all take part in constructing the narrative. In spite of these commonalities, manga differentiates itself from the Western counterparts in several ways.

In terms of format, manga is distinct in its reading direction and story length. Opposite to the Western reading tradition, manga is read from right to left. The length of a manga magazine varies between 400 to 1000 pages, whilst a single volume of manga (*tankōbon*) takes up 250 pages or so (Schodt, 1996). When manga was first introduced to the United States in the late twentieth century, publishers, such as Dark Horse and VIZ Media, tried to cater it to American readers’ reading habits by altering the format of manga to American comic-book style. They were published in a pamphlet form of thirty-two to forty-eight pages, and the book was reversed to the left to right direction (Schodt, 1996; Goldberg, 2010). Thus, the long story comics were broken into short units, and the reading direction was not ‘backwards’ anymore to the Western readers. However, publishers found out soon that the Americanisation of manga only made publication of translated manga complicated and difficult, especially when it came to reverse sound effects in complicated drawing (Schodt, 1996). In 2002, publisher Tokyopop decided to release manga ‘unflipped’. This market strategy allowed them to publish their key manga titles with three-to-six times more frequency than the industry standard at that time. And it also appealed to *otaku* (hard-core fans of manga) who made demands for ‘authentic manga’ (Goldberg, 2010). Today, most Westerners consume manga that are read ‘backwards’ from right to left. If readers accidentally open a manga book from the wrong side, they will see a note on the endpaper saying that they are reading the wrong direction. Some publishers, such as VIZ Media, also offer a tutorial

of the direction to read the panels. In addition to reading direction, publishers no longer issue manga in American comic-book styles (pamphlets), but use Japanese styles (magazines and paperbacks) instead.

Graphically, manga is monochromatic and visually symbolic. It is drawn and published in black and white, with the exception that covers of magazines and paperbacks are always in colour, and some colourful pages may be inserted in magazines as a bonus for readers. However, as Schodt (1996) says, monochromatic drawing is “no handicap when it comes to artistic expression” in manga (p. 23). Japanese artists have had a long tradition of brush painting, with which they learnt to communicate subtle emotions with a minimum of effort, such as an arched eyebrow or a downturned face. Moreover, they often heighten the drama of the story by dissolving the setting to a streaked background to emphasise a character’s momentum, or by inserting flowers to depict a poignant feeling or a romantic moment. The latter characterises the art style of *shōjo* manga, which is aimed to invite readers to participate in the character’s emotional life (McCloud, 2006; Takahashi, 2008). In addition to these techniques, manga artists have developed some visual conventions to depict the character’s emotions or actions in symbolic way to produce comedic effects. Whilst these visual symbols can communicate their meanings efficiently to experienced readers, they may be puzzling to the uninitiated. Brenner (2007) summarises some most commonly used symbols as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. A quick guide to common visual symbols in manga (Brenner, 2007, p. 52)

Visual symbols	Meaning
Sweat drop(s)	Nervous
Pulsing vein near forehead	Anger
Blush	Embarrassed
Prominent canine tooth	Animalistic behaviour, losing control
Dog ears/ tail	Begging
Drool	Leering
Ghost drifting away from the body	Fainting
Snot bubble	Asleep

Shadow over face	Extreme anger
Glowing eyes	Intense glare
Nosebleed	Aroused
Ice/snow	On the receiving end of cold or cruel behaviour
Chibi/super-deformed character	Extreme emotional state

These symbols are 'visual' punch lines that rely on extreme exaggeration of human emotions and behaviour. *Chibi* form, for example, is the shrunken version of a character with head and body in the ratio of a child figure. It is sometimes accompanied by animal traits, such as a dog's tail or a cat's ears. *Chibi* style is usually used at the moment when a character is hit by overwhelming emotions, such as anger, anxiety or embarrassment. However, it may also appear without any link to emotions but simply for the purpose of a comic effect. The abrupt appearance of characters serves as a visual slapstick that happens at a split moment for laughter. Thus, the visual system, including lines, shade, background, and symbols are visual cues that speak paragraphs to readers. The symbolic drawing of manga is well described by the famous manga artist, Osamu Tezuka, about his own comics, "I don't consider them pictures – I think of them as a type of hieroglyphics... In reality I'm not drawing. I'm writing a story with a unique type of symbol" (Schodt, 1983, p. 25).

Apart from visual symbols, sound effects in manga are presented in a highly metaphorical way. As in Western comics, audio sounds are translated into verbal onomatopoeia and presented in pictorial forms. The size, the outline, and the position of the sound effects indicate the strength, the quality and the direction of the sound respectively. However, Japanese artists vie for the cleverest use of sound effects to the extent that the Japanese language "performs magic" in depicting silent activities and emotions (Schodt, 1983). For example, the sound "shiiiiin" appearing behind a character's head conveys awkwardness; "hoyid hoyid" describes a dog's paw waving, and "choi chip" indicates tail wagging (Yadao, 2009, p. 61). This has added difficulty to the work of translation when manga is marketed to overseas readers. Yadao points out that Western publishers have taken several different approaches to translate sound effects. Some replace the Japanese onomatopoeia with their English counterparts; others

keep the sounds in Japanese characters whilst providing English translation alongside; still others forgo translations altogether, leaving these words to be appreciated solely for their artistic value. An English-language rewriter of manga¹ talks about how she copes with the Japanese sounds that are in lack of equivalent counterparts in English:

When I first started rewriting manga, my biggest problem was the sound effects. The Japanese have a sound for everything, even “silent sounds” like grabbing someone’s sleeve, touching a piece of paper, or grinning. Sound effects like *gatan*, *gacha*, *jyaki*, *zawu*, *garagaragara* and *doku doku* just don’t work in English. I had to decide just what was the sound of someone landing quietly on their toes, and I decided it was *ptt*. Another silent sound I decided on was *kchh*. (Robbins, 2007, pp. 290-291, italics added by the author).

The realm of sound effects in manga provides a space for artists and translators to play with their creativity, and to encourage their readers to join it using their imagination. On the one hand, these manga-specific sound effects heighten the experience of ‘otherness’ and ‘Japaneseness’ to Western readers, especially those that have been left untranslated due to the publisher’s decision. On the other hand, they require the reader to make an effort to interpret it. These sounds become a common language that is only shared by artists and experienced readers.

In terms of narrative structure, manga stories are told using many more pictures than words. As mentioned earlier, cartoonist Rakuten detested the visual culture and excessive word puns of the Edo period. In order to break away from the past, he learnt from American and European artists to create what he called, manga – a new type of comic that uses fewer words (Stewart, 2013). Later, the dependence on visual storytelling became greater when Osamu Tezuka introduced cinematic techniques (varying angles, distance, and perspectives) to the creation of manga (Schodt, 1996; Gravett, 2004; Thorn, 2005; Ito, 2008; Prough, 2011). He decompressed the storylines using many panels and pages to capture characters’ movements and facial expressions faithfully. The emphasis on visual narrative did not sacrifice the complexity of Tezuka’s manga, but added more pages to them. He became the pioneer of ‘story manga’ that have long and complex plot lines (Gravett, 2004; Bouissou, 2010). His stories would easily end up containing hundreds to thousands of pages (Schodt, 1996, Thorn, 2005).

¹ An English-language rewriter of manga rewrites the literal translation done by a literal translator,

Since Tezuka, manga stories have become even more visually oriented. Compared to Western comic artists, Japanese artists are given more space to work on their drawing. Instead of compressing a substantial amount of verbal and visual information into one panel, manga artists inherit the philosophy of “less-is-more” from the tradition of Japanese brush painting. Therefore, more panels and pages are used to build up the narrative, and yet the story can be quickly read. Schodt (1983) says, “In contrast to the American comic, which is read slowly to savour lavishly detailed pictures and to absorb a great deal of printed information, the Japanese comic is scanned” (p. 23). However, he points out that such a narrative format does not demand less from the reader. Instead, readers are required to actively seek out clues and interpret them. They need to absorb the information contained in pictures and coordinate it with words. Japanese readers who grow up reading a massive amount of manga have developed reading skills that allow them to decode meanings in manga adeptly and quickly. According to Schodt, a 320-page comic magazine averagely takes Japanese readers twenty minutes to finish, which yields a breakdown of 16 pages a minute, or 3.75 seconds per page. This speed allows Japanese readers to consume a massive amount of manga. Publishers are able to meet the market demand by producing manga on a large and frequent scale since adopting monochromatic printing and recycled paper incurs low cost. For casual consumers, manga is “cheap, disposable mass literature” (Gravett, 2004, p14). It is said to be “read quickly, and discarded easily” (Prough, 2011, p35). However, there are genuine *otakus* (hard-core fans) who do not only buy manga to chill out or kill time, but also make manga a life style. They collect paperback versions of popular titles in magazines and keep them carefully².

As a popular cultural text, manga rely on readers' feedback to make profit and give readers what they want. Like popular novels that sometimes have a space for authors to respond to their readers' letters and to introduce their other works, manga have an ‘author's corner’ for the artist to interact with readers. An ‘author's corner’ may appear as a text box on the edge of several pages. It may also be illustrated in one or more pages after a chapter ends. Manga artists use it to share with readers how they create manga or what a *mangaka*'s³ life is like. They also use it to ask for and respond to readers' feedback. In this space, an imagined community or a sense of intimacy may be

² The popular titles in manga magazines are usually compiled into paperbacks later on. There are clear sleeve covers made specially to protect paperback manga. Whilst manga magazines are seen as ephemeral and disposable, paperbacks are published to be collected and kept.

³ *Mangaka* (漫画家) is the Japanese word for a comic artist or cartoonist.

formed between readers and artists. As the production of manga involves significant participation from the editor, the content of an ‘author’s corner’ may also be driven by the editor’s decision. For example, editors regularly hold polls to investigate the popularity of characters in popular manga. The results of the polls are announced in ‘author’s corner’. To readers, participating in the polls is one way to show their support for particular characters. Even though not every reader responds to the polls, the results are generally interesting to readers because they can compare their own preferences of characters with others’ in a wider reader’s community. To artists and editors, the results of polls give them ideas for the development of characters in the future. Thus, readers are invited to be in part of the creative process of manga by joining in the conversations with the artist and with other readers in an ‘author’s corner’. Prough (2011) asserts that author’s corner “creates consumers, raises readers, and rears artists” (p. 58). It is structured by editors to understand readers’ tastes and interests so as to instigate magazine purchases. However, it also provides readers opportunities to express their passion and to actively engage in the production of manga.

In order to serve the interests of readers of different gender and age, manga industry has been divided into several demographic categories, including *Kodomo* (manga for children), *shōnen* (manga for teenage boys), *shōjo* (manga for teenage girls), *seinen* (manga for mature male readers) and *josei* (manga for mature female readers). Whilst manga generally deals with a broad range of themes, including adventure, science fiction, historical drama, sports stories, fantasy adventures, romance, everyday drama (school life, office work, and family life) and detective investigation, manga in different demographic categories have distinct styles of artwork and narrative structure. As this research focuses on teenage readers, I have chosen *shōnen* manga and *shōjo* manga as the corpus texts. In the next section, I will look into their common themes, the gender depiction, the art styles, and what the features above reflect about their readers’ or artists’ interests and Japanese society’s expectations of men and women.

2.1.2 *Shōnen* Manga and *Shōjo* Manga

Mainstream *shōnen* manga are action and competition oriented. Most of them promote the values of friendship and personal perseverance (Gravett, 2004). The hero usually begins as an ordinary boy or a social misfit who struggles to prove his self-worth or to achieve a dream that can fulfil the meaning of his life or enrich the world around him. However, seldom does the hero take this journey alone. There are always two or more supporting roles who assist the hero to achieve a dream that they share. Thus, teamwork plays a key role in how the hero may be able to achieve his success, and sacrifices for friends are encouraged in every circumstance. Eventually, when all the hero's teammates are defeated, it is down to the hero's own perseverance and the belief of a righteous and glorious victory that sustains him to be the final winner.

The Japanese spirit of dying for honour lies behind the hero's determination and courage. Benedict (2012) observed Japanese soldiers' behaviour in the Second World War and analysed the reasons why Japanese people would rather kill themselves than surrender to the enemy. For them, surrendering was the most humiliating. The person who surrendered was worse than a dead person because he would have to live as an object of scorn from his compatriots for the rest of his life. Therefore, Japanese soldiers did not surrender no matter how powerful the enemy was or how doomed they were to lose, unless it was an order from the Emperor. This extreme nature is reflected in manga heroes who never surrender to their enemies nor to the obstacles in their lives. They may be defeated physically, but their spirit has to win. This spirit sustains them to stand up and grow stronger to fight the same enemy or obstacle again and again. Thus, a circular structure of challenge (or failure), training, and victory repeats in almost every story. Through this recurring pattern, the hero turns from a boy to a man. Gravett (2004) traces the winning formula of overcoming challenges with determination back to sports manga in the post-war time. In 1950, General MacArthur realised that Japan needed to learn about winning again if they wanted to "restore morale and instil hope for a new Japan" (p. 54). He decided that if Japan were no longer allowed near the battlefield, it would be wise to learn about winning at sports. It was at this time sports manga started to thrive. Readers could expect to see the hero win or lose well. They could be thrilled when seeing the hero finally achieve an unlikely triumph through his determination.

Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila (2006) believe that values and perseverance define masculinity in *shōnen* manga. A hero is the one who holds on to the ‘correct’ values that are socially agreed upon, and gains strength physically, mentally, and psychologically by passing one test after another. Such ethos give readers hope to believe that there will be an ultimate victory to those who try hard no matter what they struggle with in their lives. Drummond-Mathews (2010) points out that the manga hero provides a mirror of the reader’s life in which he grows and matures through learning to overcome struggles. Most importantly, the hero affirms the value of struggles that the reader shares in his life. In contrast to the self-made hero in *shōnen* manga, the American superhero is a hero not because he learns and grows from overcoming difficulty, but because he is born to be one. Even though the superhero may undergo difficulties in achieving a goal, they are seldom life-changing ones. Therefore, Drummond-Mathews argues that readers read the American superhero to see the hero fulfils the prophecy that is inherited in him:

[T]he main idea of a Superman or Batman comic is to see the hero defeat the villain, verifying for the reader the prowess, skill, or power predicted by the name of the hero. At the end of the comic, the hero is the same person he was at the beginning of the comic with only a few exceptions (p. 73).

On the contrary, readers read manga to see the development of the hero and to affirm the hope that endurance and perseverance may produce. When Masashi Kishimoto, the author of my research corpus *Naruto*, was once asked in an interview about what he hoped his reader to take away from his manga, he said, “I created *Naruto* to tell the younger generation that although there’s hardship in life, you can get along” (Kido & Bae, 2012, para. 10). *Shōnen* manga encourages readers to believe that ‘where there is a will, there is a way.’

While characterisation in *shōnen* manga is primarily developed through characters actions, it is partly determined by what they look like. According to Brenner (2007), there are stereotypes that heroes often have spiky hairdos, thick eyebrows, easy smiles and wide eyes, whilst villains tend to be older and have narrower eyes that fix in a menacing glare. Although girls in *shōnen* manga also have stereotypical facial features, such as big eyes, small nose and mouth, a more notable phenomenon is that one or more female characters would usually be portrayed with a voluptuous figure. The function of these sexually attractive girls is to create comedic effects when the deliberate or

accidental display of their private parts paralyses the male characters due to sexual arousal. The humour is based on an exaggeration of the male character's reaction, for example, bulging eyes or a bleeding nose. Another important function of these female characters' sexual appearance is to attract male readers. The manga series, *Bakuman*, is a collaborative autobiography of the lives of a writer and an illustrator who create manga in a highly competitive environment in Japan. In episode 61, the writer, Takagi, gives a female manga artist, Aoki⁴, some tips to draw *shōnen* manga from a male perspective. He agrees with Aoki's editor Yamahisa's suggestion that she should draw some panty shots in her manga if she wants to make it sell:

Mr. Yamahisa sounds like a clever editor. That will probably be popular. But you have to draw the panties as realistically as possible... Most teenage boys really want to see women's underwear... This next part is key, you can't be too blatant about the fan service. The panties have to be visible in a natural, and accidental way (Ohba & Obata, 2011, p. 184).

This excerpt points out an important entertainment value of *shōnen* manga; that is to gratify the reader's sexual desire in a voyeuristic way.

Jones (2010) points out that female characters with sexy bodies serve primarily as "wish fulfilment" or "fan service" for male readers (p. 44). They are objectified and commodified, being valued by their bodies and consumed by male readers. Allison (1996) relates sexual presentation of female images in children's manga to Western theories of 'male gaze'. According to her, three components are involved in the positioning of male readers and female characters. Firstly, gender – men look and women are looked at. Secondly, power – viewers are empowered subjects and the viewed are disempowered objects. Thirdly, sexuality – the looking process produces sexual pleasures for viewers. Allison agrees that male gaze in children's manga is structured in both voyeuristic and fetishistic ways that are congruent with scopophilic practices in the adult landscape. However, she also observes that looking rarely leads to further action in children's manga. She concludes that Japanese male gazing is not necessarily a practice of scopophilia that empowers male readers. Similarly, Jones

⁴ The majority of the artists of *shōnen* manga are male. In *Bakuman*, Aoki's manga gets to publish in manga magazine *Shōnen Jump*, because she can depict the poignant feelings that girls have when they are in love. However, she is criticized for not being able to present boy's points of view in her manga. Therefore, she decides to seek advice from her male friends.

(2010) noticed that in *shōnen* manga, male characters, although gazing frequently with relative impunity upon the bodies of female characters, are rarely allowed to touch them. He asserts, “the male’s power is always potential, rarely actualised” (p. 33). However, it is arguable that male gazing in manga is exempt from punishment. A lot of male characters who enjoy looking at the female characters’ bodies or nudity often have to face the consequence of being beaten up. For example, Master Roshi in *Dragon Ball* is often hit by the female character Chi-Chi for his perverted behaviour, and the protagonist Naruto in *Naruto* is punched by his master whenever he uses a Transformation Technique to turn himself into a nude woman. As mentioned previously, the sexual reaction to female bodies (usually indicated by blood gushing out of the male character’s nose) and the consequences incurred are often exaggerated to an extent that they become a tactic to create humour in stories. Ironically, whilst the sexual portrayal of female bodies in *shōnen* manga clearly serve the interest of their male readers, the comedic repercussions of male gazing seem to control rather than encourage such scopophilic practices.

The projection of male desires on female characters is also manifest in *shōjo* manga. Before post-war Japan, male artists dominated manga industry. They created manga for readership of all demographics. Osamu Tezuka’s *Ribon no Kishi* (Princess Knight) was believed to be the beginning of girls’ comics in their modern format (Schodt, 1983). With influence from the visual styles of Disney characters, Tezuka drew his heroine with similar stylistic features – large eyes, big pupils, and long eyelashes that make her appear cute, attractive and innocent. In addition to these features, the heroine has a slim figure and a petite nose and mouth. This style has been passed down to modern *shōjo* manga even though most of them are now created by female artists.

As women’s social status improved in Japan after the Second World War, female artists started to join the creation of *shōjo* manga, claiming that they knew girls better than male artists did. The 1970s was the golden age of *shōjo* manga as female artists started to take over the market (Schodt, 1983). They experimented with ways to express emotions and inner thoughts. Through the depiction of eyes and the use of frames, they visualised the interiority of a character. As a result, girls’ eyes have been intensified even more in size and potency under female artists’ pens. Prough (2011) points out that several female artists explained in their interviews that the larger the eyes, the wider the range of emotional state they could draw. Large, galaxy-like eyes become the trademark

of *shōjo* manga. Rather than serve male artists' or readers' sexual interest, they are utilised by artists to express the poignant feelings and internal struggles that female characters often experience in romance stories.

The majority of *shōjo* manga is based on romance. In order to capture more aesthetics of feelings, female artists started to draw their manga in an abstract layout. Unlike the uniformly regimented rectangles and rows in *shōnen* manga, panels in *shōjo* manga are in various shapes, and some are without frames. They overlap or merge into a collage-like layout. This style eliminates space between panels and creates layering and juxtaposing of various images. According to Takahashi (2008), the spacing in *shōjo* manga is to immerse readers in the character's "feelings, dreams and memories" rather than to emphasise the passage of time (p. 127). Similarly, Prough (2011) points out that the linear progress of boxed-in frames with a lot of white background is handicapped in expressing the "heartfelt style" of *shōjo* manga" (p. 49). For the same emphasis on emotions, characters are not restrained within boxes, but can stand in front of panels to make readers stop to assess the emotional atmosphere before finding out what happens next (Gravett, 2004; Takahashi, 2008). In addition to that, characters' unvoiced ruminations are not always presented in thought balloons, but may 'float in the air'. The free-floating text approximates first-person narration (Takahashi, 2008), which encourages a sense of intimacy to develop between the character and the reader. Such a page layout may be opaque for the uninitiated. However, it is all about building a refined mood in romance stories and evoking emotional responses from readers.

Much like *shōnen* manga, *shōjo* manga is concerned with the protagonist's self-fulfilment and inner struggles. What differentiates the two demographics is that the former is moved by action, whereas the latter is driven by human relations (Prough, 2010). Manga heroes share the goal to enrich themselves and the world around them, whilst manga heroines seek for harmony in love and friendship. Love triangles and unrequited love are almost essential elements in the narrative. There are trials and tribulations on the heroine's journey to obtain true love. Eventually, the heroine grows from a girl to a woman after conquering the obstacles. Similar to heroes in *shōnen* manga where men are encouraged to die hard for a righteous cause, particularly when it involves saving a friend's life, heroines in *shōjo* manga can do anything for love – even self-sacrifice is acceptable and sometimes expected (Brenner, 2007). The unconditional sacrifice for love conveys a message that women have to anchor the values of their lives

on romantic love that only men can fulfil. This is an idea rooted in a patriarchal society where marriage and family are everything that women need to care about. In traditional Japanese society, women are inferior to men in whatever social class or age. They have to walk behind men and support men to pursue their goals (Benedict, 2012). In 1887, education for girls became available and accessible to the middle and upper classes. However, the curriculum was not to prepare girls to function independently in society, but to become wise mothers or good wives (Takahashi, 2008). At that time, a Japanese woman's identity was defined by her wifehood and motherhood. The so-called "*shōjo*-ideal" was "the dream of becoming happy future brides, isolated from the real-life public world outside the family" (*ibid.*, p. 116). Although the rise of women's social status in Japan after the Second World War has given birth to new manga heroines who can fight in battles and save the world as their male counterparts do, the stereotypes of women being docile, domestic, dependent, and sexually available have not yet been completely wiped out from contemporary *shōjo* manga.

Although heroines in modern *shōjo* manga may be endowed with power that traditionally belongs to men, they are primarily concerned with finding happiness or completeness in a heterosexual relationship. The heroine may be portrayed as a warrior, but her battles are seldom like boys' where fights are 'battles to death'. In fact, she often ends up being rescued by a male character. Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila (2006) identify paradoxical features in manga heroines. They examine the popular manga series *Sailor Moon* and argue that the heroine's (Usagi Tsukino) brave and heroic conquests to save the world are compensated with conventional, heterosexual femininity. In Tsukino's transformation to her superheroine alter-ego, the jewellery that gives her magic power also transforms her svelte adolescent features into more womanly characteristics. It seems to imply that a woman's power has to derive from her inherited femininity. Another paradoxical feature that Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila fail to mention is that Tsukino's magic power is never sufficient to enable her to defeat the evil power without assistance from the male character, Tuxedo Mask, with whom she develops a romantic relationship. Even though the heroine is set in an action-adventure role to protect the earth from the evil queen of the Dark Kingdom, she constantly relies on Tuxedo Mask to give her advice and physical aid in battle so that she can fulfil her role as a saviour.

Gwynne (2013) concurs with Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila. He points out that the sailors in *Sailor Moon*, although embodying conventions of boys' culture, such as fighting, warriorship and superheroes, depend on jewellery and makeup to obtain their power. This marks *Sailor Moon* an example of post-feminism, which emphasises that girls are empowered by their sexualised femininity. However, Gwynne argues that this manga series fails to provide any means of negotiating the problems in a realistic context since the empowerment of the sailors is based on a fantasy context, and the only realistic mode of empowerment that is offered to the reader is the sexual presentation of the body. It leads to a question whether modern *shōjo* manga advocates the idea that biologically inherited femininity is the best capital that women can rely on in negotiating social power with men. On the other hand, we may argue that the seemingly paradoxical heroines in *shōjo* manga praise women for having better capabilities of inhabiting double roles than men – the caring nurturer and the powerful protector.

Although elements of fiction and fantasy in manga give artists much freedom to deviate from reality with their imagination and creativity, literature in all forms mirrors society and its inhabitants. The image of the modern heroine in *shōjo* manga can be telling about the creator, the targeted reader, and the social context. The embodiment of masculine power in the heroine suggests that it is possible for a woman to do what was stereotypically regarded as men's work. However, the portrayals of gender in manga do not necessarily reflect reality. Although there is evidence that women's social status has improved much, gender roles remain very rigid in Japanese society – men are expected to dedicate long hours to the company, including after-hours drinking with colleagues; whereas women are expected to commit themselves to household responsibilities even if they have a career (Madeley, 2010). The heroine who owns both sexualised femininity and masculine power becomes an ideal model that the female reader (and artist) can project herself on. Given the frustration of unequal distribution of power between men and women in patriarchal societies, the reader may seek pleasure in a temporary feeling of empowerment through identifying with the heroine.

The heroine mirrors the target reader's ideal image not only through their actions, but also their appearance. According to Schodt (1983), characters in *shōjo* manga have universal features, such as a long, leggy look that makes them look like fashion models from Paris or New York. The artist pays scrupulous attention to details of characters' hairstyles and incorporates the latest trends in their clothes so as to attract female

readers. Interestingly, this stylistic feature is also applied to male characters who often look thin and wispy, with narrow waists. In fact, both male and female characters look like identical mannequins in different suits and wigs. It is almost not possible to distinguish one character from another, whether men or women, if not for their stylised clothes and hair. Schodt points out that male characters with clearly masculine features are rather rare in *shōjo* manga. If there are any, they usually take up villainous roles. The convention of drawing male characters with unmasculine appearances in *shōjo* manga may have inherited the tradition of the Takarazuka theatre⁵ where female actors play both male and female roles. According to Nakamura and Matsuo (2003), these male-impersonators particularly attract female fans because they are portrayed in the context of an ‘ideal male’ image. “They are outstandingly handsome, pure, kind, emotional, charming, funny, romantic and intelligent – that is, the complete antithesis of the salaryman/*oyaji* stereotype of Japanese men” (p. 136). This ideal image of men is embodied in the male character in *shōjo* manga. His charming qualities attract the female reader and make her want to identify with the heroine who will eventually find true love in this perfect man.

It is an interesting phenomenon that, under female artists’ pens, romance is still the main concern in their heroines’ lives. The image of a girl waiting for her prince to rescue her and to make her life ‘complete’ remains in modern *shōjo* manga. It may be a result of patriarchal ideologies that have been deeply rooted in Japanese society. They continue to affect female artists and their readers today, even though there are signs of society moving away from the traditional views. It is arguable that romance is a patriarchal tactic to stabilise the social structure. Radway (2002) points out that women are expected to achieve their personhood through romance in a patriarchal society. She draws upon Sigmund Freud’s theory of Oedipal complex⁶ to explain why the heroine in romance has to embark on a quest for her new self and a new connection with a man to make herself complete. Her connection to an autonomous and powerful male confirms “her longing to be protected, provided for, and sexually desired” (p. 31). By showing that the heroine will eventually find someone who can fulfil all these needs, romance legitimises the reader’s pre-oedipal wish to recover the primary love of her initial

⁵ According to Nakamura and Matsuo (2003), the Takarazuka theatre was founded in 1913 by a railroad baron. The Takarazuka women’s revue is one of the larger theatre groups in Japan.

⁶ A better term to describe this context is Electra complex, the female analogue of Oedipal complex. Both terms refer to a child’s desire to possess the parent of the opposite sex and the concomitant sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex.

caretaker – her father – through another man. On the other hand, the ideal love encourages the reader to continue to commit to her marriage and motherhood because it provides her with strategies to reinterpret her own relationship, e.g. a man's indifference and cruelty to a woman is a mask of his true love and affection. Thus, romance becomes a tactic to insure the continuity of patriarchal culture and stabilise the power structure of gender in the society.

Radway argues that romance originates in “the female push toward individuation and actualization of the self” (p. 315). However, because it is written by women who have been engendered in patriarchal families that bring them up to be ‘caring mothers’, the female self in romance, which is an expression of patriarchal culture, is constructed in relation to ‘husband’ and ‘child’. The exclusively female mothering is thus embodied in their stories. Similarly, Schodt (1983) identifies the influence of patriarchy on female artists. He says, “Girls in the comics [*shōjo* manga] live for love - any love” (p. 97). He explains it with what Kumiko Minami writes in a biography for a manga artist, Machiki Satonaka, that romance is a product of men's centuries-long suppression of women in the past, who if ever had any freedom, was in the world of sentiment – the fantasised world of love and dream that no outside authority could intrude. Although women in Japan have made tremendous strides to claim equal social rights since the post-war period, Schodt points out that female readers still demand tales of love in their comics. He quoted from Minami, “Today the prison door is open, but the legacy lives on” (p. 98). Whilst it is possibly true that today's female artists and their readers cannot escape the influence of patriarchal ideologies pervaded in society over time, it is worth exploring to what degree the heroine of modern *shōjo* manga reflects what its creator(s) believe(s). Prough (2010) points out that there is a gendered division of labour in the production of *shōjo* manga: 99 per cent of the artists are women, and 75 per cent of editors are men. Editors in manga industry, whatever demographics, have a great influence and control of the content and style. They do not simply proofread the text, but work with the artist at every stage, from coming up with story lines and characters to approving the final drafts, so as to make sure that the final product will sell. Prough comments, “Because manga editors play such a strong role in the creative process, the making of manga is generally understood – for better or worse – as negotiation between artists and editors” (p. 99). In other words, *shōjo* manga is usually created through the cooperation of female artists and male editors. Whose desires, and to what extent, have been projected to the heroine is still a question to ask. Nevertheless, the emergence of

female fighters in *shōjo* (and *shōnen*) manga indicates a transition of gender roles in Japanese society.

A prominent phenomenon of gender transition can be observed in a distinct sub-genre of *shōjo* manga called *shōnen-ai* (boys' love). This genre started to develop in the 1970s (Ito, 2008). It is primarily written by female artists and for female readers. As a reflection of the reconstruction of gender identities in contemporary Japan, the story usually deals with platonic relationships between young men. *Shōnen-ai* leads to the emergence of another sub-genre, *yaoi*, which is often created by fans. *Yaoi* is a parodic work of existing manga or anime. It features homoerotic romantic or sexual relationships between male characters. According to Bouissou (2010), the effeminate young boys in these stories are a strategy that female artists adopt to dissipate the anxiety of their readers who cannot stand on an equal footing with men in a love relationship. Toku (2007) suggests that these stories eliminate the power structure between couples of different genders. He says, "In heterosexual love relationships, it is extremely difficult to exclude the normal power structures in which men are strong and women are weak. Using male couples makes it possible to describe a more equal relationship between two individuals" (p. 29). McLelland (2010) agrees that boys' love stories reflect "the limitations of heterosexual relationships and the negative constraints on female sexuality in contemporary Japanese society" (p. 90). He claims that these stories "say nothing about how gender is, but much about how it ideally should be" (p. 88). These effeminate male characters are androgynous figures that own men's power and women's gentleness.

The boys' love stories have also made their way to the overseas market. Madeley (2010) interviewed manga readers in Canada and found that several female participants were particularly attracted to the 'pretty boys' in *shōjo* manga and *yaoi*. One of her interviewees said, "I like the guys that are pretty; I don't like the girls to be girly, but I like my men to be girly" (p. 10). Madeley concludes, "They [The female participants] enjoyed complex characters that embodied a mix of strength and vulnerability all wrapped up in a pretty *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) wrapper" (p. 14). Martin (2012) observed the same phenomenon among some female readers in Taiwan. He discovered that the distance between boys' love and the female readers' real life gave space for imagination and the possibility to look for a kind of analogy or substitution of the roles that these female readers rejected in reality. As McLelland (2010) says, "The 'beautiful

boy' embodies all the most attractive features of female gender, while able to move through the world unencumbered by the burdens of the female sex" (p. 90). Female readers who enjoy reading about 'pretty boys' can project themselves on them because of the qualities they share and the strengths they desire.

The contrast between the fluid gender roles in boys' love stories and the rigid ones in Japanese society is an expression of the new generation's dissatisfaction with the traditional social values that have been imposed on them. Galbraith (2011) points out that girls who enjoy reading *yaoi* call themselves *fujoshi* (rotten girls). They live heteronormative lives despite their queer fantasies. However, they are criticised as 'rotten' because of their attraction to fantasies of sex that are not productive of children. This criticism shows a fear of the breakdown of fundamental social values. However, it also brings attention to contemporary Japanese' girls' changing attitudes of marriage and child rearing. A similar term, 'parasite singles', was used by sociologists in Japan to describe young girls in their twenties living at home, working as office ladies, and spending most of their income on the consumption of luxury goods (Pennington, 2000). This term explicitly attacks these girls' life styles, which are perceived as "selfish and a drain on society" because they do not live for the family (*ibid.*, p. 203). The transition of gender roles is also perceived among a new generation of men who call themselves 'herbivores'. Unlike traditional Japanese men who are expected to live for the family, the company, and the nation, these new men live for themselves. They are not particularly keen on finding a girlfriend, making expensive purchases, or dedicating their lives to a full-time job. They live with an individualist attitude that is totally the antithesis of Japanese hegemonic masculinity (Deacon, 2013). Nakamura (2003) and Gwynne (2013) both suggest that there is a growing feeling of inadequacy among Japanese young men. They are not able to meet the traditional expectation on them, and are anxious about their lack of masculinity. This phenomenon in contemporary Japanese society brings us to consider whether the advent of female fighters and boys' love stories is a reaction to women's disappointment in men who fail to fulfil their needs of nurturance, protection and heterosexual sex, or/and if it is a reflection of their struggle for power in a patriarchal society.

As a popular culture text, manga appears to reflect a certain degree of what their readers want and what artists and editors think their readers want or should want. *Shōnen* manga presents a hero that is brave, upright, benevolent and persevering. His personhood, or

masculinity, is developed as he defeats enemies and overcomes challenges to achieve his goal of standing on the top of whatever field he is dedicated to, be it sports or salvation missions for all mankind. The hero is a man that his reader is expected to be like or to want to emulate. Similarly, *shōjo* manga projects a heroine that shares certain personal qualities of the hero in *shōnen* manga, except that her cause is to win an ideal love rather than to be the best of the best in the world. Her personhood is formed as she resolves problems in her relationships. Although the creative process of manga involves a triangular relationship between the artist, the editor, and the reader, the portrayals of gender roles in both demographics open up ways to examine existing social ideologies and the reproduced versions in manga. They also allow us to explore the implied reader's primary interest and the real reader's responses. Although the consequences of the male character's gaze seemingly discourage the practice of scopophilia, the sexually attractive females in *shōnen* manga gratify the male reader's sexual desires in a fantasizing context. The emergence of female fighters and pretty boys in *shōjo* manga indicates a transition of gender identities in the Japanese society, whilst granting the female reader's wish to possess masculine power as well as maintaining feminine qualities.

As manga is created primarily for the Japanese audience (Prough, 2011), one question that is worth asking is 'what foreign readers want' from a transnational text. To what extent can foreign readers find relevance in the portrayals of gender roles and culturally specific issues in manga? As manga has historically received cultural influence from the Western countries, some elements in manga can be familiar to Western readers. How, then, do they respond to a hybrid text that is both alien and familiar to them? In the next section, I will outline a brief history of manga with reference to the mutual influence between Japan and the Western world in terms of the creation of manga and foreign readers' reception.

2.1.3 Manga – a Hybrid of the East and the West

Japanese people have a long-standing appetite for pictorial art, which may be traced back to as early as the end of the seventh century in the *Hōryūji* Temple where some irreverent drawings were etched on the back of the temple's ceiling planks (Koyama-Richard, 2007). The most famous early caricature, which is generally believed by

scholars to be a prototype of manga, is *Chōjū giga* (The Animal Scrolls) from the twelfth century. It is a four-volume monochromatic picture scroll that satirises the clergy and nobility (Schodt, 1996; Gravett, 2004; Ito, 2008; Briel, 2010). The way a story is read, as the scroll unfolds from right to left into a long strip of paper⁷, is believed to have influenced the way contemporary manga and anime tell stories. Gravett (2004) suggests that most manga have vertical gutters narrower than horizontal ones, because it in effect makes each row of frames more readable, like the way a scene is painted onto a folding scroll. Koyama-Richard (2007) also points out that the way the ancient illustrated scroll is gradually unfolded to reveal the successive scenes produces an impression of time flow and of progression in action, which shares the same concept of how sequential panels and pictures work in manga and anime respectively. In addition, the depiction of time flow and of movement in manga and anime is often in such detail in order to build a mood of tranquillity, melancholy, or tension that it becomes a hallmark of the media.

Japanese pictorial art continued to develop on its own, and satirical cartoons of caricatured pictures became accessible to the common audiences in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century through the use of woodblock print. During this period, Japan closed its door to most other countries under *Sakoku* policy (Chained Country Policy) in the Tokugawa shogunate. It was not until July 1853 when Japan was forced by the American Commodore Matthew Perry to open its door that Western culture started to pour into the country, which greatly influenced every aspect of Japanese people's life, including the industry of manga.

The first Western impact on Japanese comics came from the political cartoons in the magazine *Japan Punch*, issued by British correspondent and cartoonist, Charles Wirgman, in 1862. *Japan Punch* was a derivative of the British *Punch Weekly* magazine. It introduced Western-style satirical drawing (Bouissou, 2010) and the use of word balloons to Japanese comics (Ito, 2008). According to Ito, a French magazine *Tobae*, published later on in 1887, brought in the style of constructing cartoons in a narrative sequence, which along with Wirgman's word balloons established the format of manga. Bouissou (2010), however, holds different opinions. She believes that Japanese artists picked up the use of speech balloons and frames from American newspapers that started

⁷ The unfolded scroll can reach about 49ft. (15m) in length (Koyama-Richard, 2007).

weekly supplements featuring cartoons in the middle of the 1890s. To Ito (2008) though, the American influence on manga is best proved by the career life of the two artists, Rakuten Kitazawa and Ippei Okamoto. Both of them helped popularise American cartoons and comic strips in Japan. Rakuten was inspired by the comic strips *Yellow Kid* in the American newspaper *The New World*. Later, he started a Japanese version of *Yellow Kid* in the newspaper *Jiji shimpō*. Rakuten started promoting the use of the word ‘manga’ to refer to comics in a new form that was learnt from the West (Stewart, 2013). The word ‘manga’, although originating in Japanese language, was used to refer to comics drawn on foreign models for a while, rather than comics that were indigenous to Japan.

The second wave of Western influence on manga relates to Osamu Tezuka, by whom the contemporary story manga is believed to have been established. Tezuka cemented his status as “the God of Manga” through the innovative art skills and sophisticated philosophical issues in his manga that influenced numerous artists (Gravett, 2004; Koyama-Richard, 2007; Ito, 2008; Phillipps, 2008; Palmer, 2009; Bouissou, 2010). As mentioned earlier, his introduction of cinematic techniques into the creation of manga was revolutionary in the history of manga. However, according to Gravett (2004), the skills of shifting camera angles and rapid cutting were already widely employed in American comics and films by the 1930s. Japanese artists were not able to catch up on these innovative skills of visual storytelling because of its isolation by the war. It was not until after the Second World War that the theatrical approach to comics was challenged and subverted. Instead of always presenting characters in full figures, as if the reader was watching actors perform on stage, Tezuka started to use a great number of close-ups and unconventional perspectives to capture characters’ psychological states and their movements. His use of these new skills was particularly inspired by American films. A record in his autobiography says, “Why are American movies so different from Japanese ones? How can I draw comics that make people laugh, cry and be moved, like that movie?” (*ibid.*, p. 26). The motion and emotion of Hollywood movies gave Tezuka ideas to inject them into his comics. Although cinematic techniques had been used by American artists in their comics long before Tezuka, the limited space given to them did not allow them to lavish details on characters’ movements and psychological development in several panels and pages like Tezuka was free to do, at least not until the recent advent of graphic novels (*ibid.*, 2004). With the freedom to develop the visual narrative in detail, Tezuka was able to utilise cinematic techniques in ways that his

Western counterparts could not do. Through Tezuka, these Western-learnt skills were indigenised and became a quintessential feature of manga.

In addition to cinematic skills, Tezuka was stimulated by the stylistic figures in Disney animation. This could be seen in the big eyes of his childlike characters and their distorted physical features (Kinsella, 2000). For example, one of his world-famous manga characters, Atom Boy, is believed to have a hairstyle that resembles the shape of Mickey Mouse's ears⁸ (Koyama-Richard, 2007). As mentioned earlier, Disney influence is also observed in his heroines, who usually own enormous eyes and slim figures. This style was later passed down to *shōjo* manga. Schodt (1983) compares this style with the "smaller-than-life" eyes in old scroll paintings and woodblock prints (p. 92), and points out that Japanese standards of beauty have shifted to the ones of the West, particularly after the war. Wilson (1999) further points out that the blond hair and the Barbie doll-like females have the appearance of the 'other'. She says, "It is almost as if the entire nation has conspired to change its face from Asian to Caucasian." (p. 54). As Tezuka has been elevated to the rank of "national treasure" by Japan (Bouissou, 2010, p. 30), his influence in the world of manga has been foreseen to continue for generations. From Charles Wirgman to Osamu Tezuka, Western culture has come into interplay with the Japanese spirit, and turned manga into a hybrid of the East and the West.

This hybrid text is both familiar and alien to Western readers. Goldberg (2010) points out that manga, although looking like American comics in some ways, have different conventions in the storytelling. Publishers have to acknowledge and prepare their readers for qualities that are foreign to American audiences, such as Japanese stylistic quirks and idioms. Moreover, since most manga today are published in Japanese format, the English-translated manga has somehow become an "awkward hybrid format" because the left-to-right direction of English text fundamentally conflicts images and panels that are organized in a right-to-left direction (Schodt, 2013, p. 23). The Japanese root has not only won out in the arguments over issues of authenticity when it comes to the decision of whether to flip manga or not (Prough, 2011), but it is also present in any manga work where Japanese norms, culture, and ideology are communicated by artists. Although scholars question that it is the 'otherness' rather than 'Japaneseness' that is

⁸ Atom Boy's hairstyle is noticeable for its two sharp spikes, which may have been the result of an inspiration by Mickey Mouse's two big black ears.

fundamental to Western audiences' responses to their experiences of manga and anime⁹ (Napier, 2001; Fennell, Liberato, Hayden, & Fujino, 2013), it is dubious that 'Japaneseness' cannot be part of the audiences' experiences simply because it is not articulated. Hills (2002b) believes that 'Japaneseness' is drawn on by anime fans without explicit recognition. He also argues that the fact that Western fans develop a wider interest in Japan and Japanese culture shows that 'Japaneseness' has constructed a fundamental part of fans' experiences of anime. Similarly, Pellitteri (2011) argues that the cultural odour of manga and anime cannot be erased. There is never a deliberate intention to camouflage Japaneseness in manga or anime because the primary reader/audience is Japanese. Moreover, 'Japaneseness' is inherited in manga artists and not possible to be rooted out. Therefore, manga renders Western readers with experiences that are fundamentally exotic or Japanese to them, despite some commonalities that manga share with its Western counterparts due to historical influences.

As manga successfully entered overseas markets, a phenomenon of indigenisation has started to form due to its popularity. Not only has the art style of manga been adopted in picturebooks (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2013), but Western artists have also started to draw comics in manga style – that is, Original-English-Language (OEL) manga. The appearance of OEL manga has to do with the success of *How to Draw Manga* guides. According to Kümmerling-Meibauer, these books signify that Japanese cultural industries not only export their products, but “the process of making the product” (p. 108). These books standardise the manga approach to comic creation, which allows anyone to use it as a tool kit to create comics in manga style (Bainbridge & Norris, 2010). Bainbridge and Norris argue that *How to Draw Manga* guides allow consumers to appropriate and consume manga by indigenising them. For example, an OEL manga that is adapted from Western literature is a reproduction of Japanese culture with local flavour. *Manga Shakespeare*, created by UK-based artists, is one of these OEL manga. The growth of OEL manga industry verifies the soft power¹⁰ of manga that has not only attracted large readership overseas, but also drawn numerous fans to learn Japanese and

⁹ Manga and anime are side-by-side products. Popular manga works are often adapted into anime, and sometimes vice versa. Thus, findings of research on audiences' responses to anime can also be applied appropriately to research on readers' responses to manga.

¹⁰ Soft power was first coined by professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr. of Harvard University to define “a country's ability to achieve its goals by attracting rather than coercing others” (Yasushi and McConnell, 2008, p. xvii). Tutomu (2008) suggests that the soft power of manga and anime may have been the cause of the increase of overseas study of the Japanese language (an increase of 83.5 per cent from 1993 to 2006).

pursue other Japanese cultural experiences, such as calligraphy and kendo. This transcultural phenomenon has raised scholars' interest in the followers' sense of nationalism. Allison (2000) points out that the craze over manga and anime is part of the J-trend that has swayed over America. The American youth who embrace the original Japanese cultural products or the American-made ones show "a willingness to go beyond the cultural orbit of 'Americanness' and the hegemony of the global imagination it once held" (p. 110). The attraction of J-cool has contributed to the eccentricism of a big nation like America, and the truly multi-odoured globalism.

Japan was once in an extreme pursuit of westernisation after the war. According to Prough (2011), there was a trend after the war to draw stories in Western settings and have characters that possess Caucasian features. This trend was especially prevalent in *shōjo* manga. Schodt (1983) also points out that one thing that is in common among manga magazines of different demographics is that they all have English words in the title as "an unstated requirement for success" (p. 13). In the 1980s, Japan began to gain international prominence and revive the nation's pride. Along with the restoration of the nation's confidence, the exotic settings in manga started to shift to everyday life in Japan (Prough, 2011). Today, manga is not only regarded as a text of Japanese cultural inheritance, but it has gained its legitimacy in the country. The School of Cartoon and Comic Art was set up in Seika University in Kyoto in 1999, and Manga Day is celebrated annually on 3 November (Ito, 2008). The government is also dedicated to promoting manga as a Japanese brand in the Cool Japan Movement overseas, along with other Japanese pop culture, such as anime and music (Tutomu, 2008; Schodt, 2013). In addition, international prizes have been established by the Foreign Ministry in Japan to reward talented manga artists. Manga and anime are now regarded as cultural ambassadors by the Japanese government. They have become a Japanese brand that attracts followers from all over the world.

Conclusion

Manga is a distinct form of sequential art that is exotic to Western readers in several ways. In term of format, it is dull in colour and awkward in reading direction. Yet, the Japanese artist's exceptional skills in using lines, symbols, shade, and multi-dimensional views to heighten the moment and express the character's internal state

make the reading of manga a visually and emotionally engaging experience. Manga is a cultural material that reflects Japanese society and its people. It shows ideologies and norms that have existed historically in the society and been reproduced in manga. Moreover, it allows us to explore the progress and transition of gender roles, as well as women's struggle for power in society. In addition, common human experiences and social issues that are shared across nations allow overseas readers to find relevance in manga, despite its otherness. In fact, it is possible to assume that the elements of relevance and otherness (or Japaneseness) has contributed much to the popularity that manga has gained overseas. Under strategic promotion by the Japanese government as well as local and overseas publishers, manga has been successfully turned into a global product, and indigenised in Western countries. Slowly, but surely, manga is gaining recognition for its cultural, political, artistic, and literary values, both in local and international contexts. In the next section, I will explore the fundamental elements in manga's power to engage readers across borders.

2.2 Text and Reader

Throughout human history, we have shared an interest in telling stories. From folk tales to printed stories such as novels and comics, we tell of our concerns for ourselves, others, and the wider world. Stories are passed down because people somehow see themselves in the tales and find connections with them. Stories have the power to draw our attention and engage our cognitive and emotional faculties. However, various formats and structures of stories can render different aesthetic experiences. In this section, I will first look into meanings that may potentially be produced when readers encounter texts. By reviewing theories of reader response as a background, I will then draw a focus on the emotional aspects of a literary experience, and discuss how manga artists make use of the unique format and structure of manga to engage readers.

2.2.1 An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism

Literary works are important media used to communicate human thoughts and emotions. The Russian linguist, Roman Jakobson, suggests that any form of communication requires six elements: addresser, context, message, contact (medium),

code (usually a language shared by addresser and addressee) and addressee. For the purposes of discussing literature, Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2005) replace 'message' and 'contact' by 'writing', because the 'contact' usually relies on printed words, and the printed words are the message itself. They propose the following diagram as a model of communication through literary works (Figure 1):

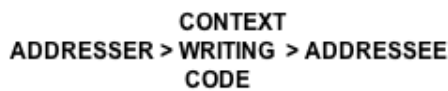


Figure 1. A model of linguistic communication for literary purposes (Selden, *et al.*, 2005, p. 5)

Selden and colleagues suggest that the viewpoints we take up from this model give different attention to the role of each agent. If we take up the addresser's viewpoint, we draw attention to the author's intention and expression of language; if we focus on the context, we examine the referential use of language from a historical dimension at the time of the work's production; if our principal interest is in the addressee, we explore the reader's reception of the message and the reproduction of the text at the moment of the reader's reading. Reader-response critics reject formalist theories that concentrate on the nature of the writing itself. They see the reader in the centre and argue that the meaning of a text is made complete by the reader. Selden *et al.* suggest,

From this angle, we can say that the poem has no real existence until it is read; its meaning can only be discussed by its readers. We differ about interpretations only because our ways of reading differ. It is the reader who applies the code in which the message is written and in this way actualises what would otherwise remain only potentially meaningful (*ibid.*, p. 46).

In this quotation, Selden *et al.* make two fundamental points about reader-response criticisms. First, the reader brings life to a text by activating meanings of the shared codes between the reader and the author. Second, the difference between each individual reader leads to multiple interpretations of a text. The core belief is that the reader is not a passive recipient of the formulated meaning in a text, but an active agent in the making of meaning. Culler (1983) explicates reader-response criticism by accentuating attention on the reader. He quotes from French literary theorist, Roland

Barthes, “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author,” and that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (p. 32). Culler points out that the interest in readers and reading is an orientation encouraged by structuralism and semiotics. They attribute the production of meaning to structures and codes by paying attention to the reading process and its conditions. On the basis of relevance for this research, I have selected the analyses provided by four influential reader-response theorists to discuss the dynamics between reader, text, and context. The following table summarises the key notions of these theorists’ criticisms (Table 2):

Table 2. A summary of four reader-response theorists’ criticisms

Reader-response theorists	Key criticisms
Louise Michelle Rosenblatt (1904 – 2005)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a transactional relation between reader and text. 2. The reader conducts efferent or/and aesthetic reading according to different attention paid to a text. 3. The relation between text and reader is situational.
Wolfgang Iser (1926 – 2007)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The realisation of a literary text involves dynamics of both an ‘artistic pole’ and ‘aesthetic pole’. 2. The reader’s past experiences of literature form certain expectations that may be challenged, modified or collapsed during the inductive and deductive operations in making meaning of a text. 3. The reader’s judgements of a text reflect his or her social and historical contexts 4. Literary gaps that are circumscribed by the text invite readers to participate in the construction of meaning.
Umberto Eco (1932 – present)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meanings are inscribed in the text, and the reader is the activator of them. 2. A text is more or less open or closed. An open text expects unforeseen interpretation from the reader,

	whilst a closed text predetermines the reader's responses.
Stanley Fish (1938 – present)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meaning is constructed in a linear process. It is fluid rather than fixed. 2. The reader is the site of meaning. The apprehension of meaning is an act of extraction. He/she enacts the author's will. 3. Meaning is governed by, and consented within a community.

Rosenblatt rejects formalist notions of the reading process as an objective activity that happens in a historical or cultural vacuum (Davis & Womack, 2002). She believes that both the creation and reception of a text occur in a social matrix. Her interest is particularly in the mind and emotions of the reader who responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text (Rosenblatt, 1970). She suggests that there is a transactional relation between the reader and the text. The reader brings certain expectations to a text based on his/her existing knowledge; meanwhile, the text has its agenda of what to offer. When the reader meets the text, a process of meaning-making occurs. The reader draws on what he/she has read so far to understand what is new. Sometimes, a reinterpretation of the earlier parts of the text may be necessary. In addition to knowledge of the previous reading experience, the time and place where the reader lives in also affect his/her interpretation of a text. Rosenblatt (1978) argues that the “relation between text and reader is situational not linear” (p. 16). Reading is like an electric circuit, in which “each component of the reading process functions by virtue of the presence of the others” (*ibid.*, p. 14). These components include a specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place. Changing any of these components will produce a different circuit; that is, a different reading experience. Rosenblatt leaves out the influence of the author, and focuses on what happens at the moment when the reader encounters the text.

Rosenblatt contends that the literary process of reading is characterised by *aesthetic reading* and *effortful reading*. The former denotes reading that focuses on living-through experiences with the text; that is, what happens ‘during’ the actual reading event. The latter implies that the reader gives their primary concern to “what will remain as the residue after the reading” (*ibid.*, p. 23), so as to acquire certain information or solution

to a problem. Therefore, *aesthetic reading* and *efferent reading* are distinguished by the selective attention that the reader pays to a text. During *efferent reading*, readers care less about what they can add to the meanings of the text, but what they can take away from the text. On the contrary, *aesthetic reading* heightens readers' awareness of words as signs and symbols, and requires that they decode these by evaluating the referents from their "own fund of experience and sensibility" (*ibid.*, p. 43). The two modes of reading can happen side by side, although it is possible for one to be more prominent than the other. Rosenblatt emphasises that there is a two-way process between the reader and the text. She advocates that meanings of a text occur in dynamic relationships between the text and the reader.

Similarly, Iser (1974) believes that it is the convergence of text and reader that brings a literary work into existence. The text offers the reader various perspectives and the reader relates them to what he/she already knows. According to Iser, the reader sets the work in motion during this process, which ultimately results in "the awakening of responses" within the reader (p. 275). Iser contends that the interdependent relationship between text and reader proves that every literary work is situated somewhere between the 'artistic pole' and the 'aesthetic pole'. The former is the author's text; whereas the latter is the realisation formed by the reader. Iser's 'aesthetic pole' is similar to the idea of Rosenblatt's 'aesthetic reading' – both emphasise that the reader brings meaning to a text. Therefore, a literary work, e.g., a poem, is not identical to the author's text, but is always more than the text. It is a recreation of the text, and the reader creates it.

Selden *et al.* (2005) suggest that Iser decontextualises and dehistoricises his arguments so as to focus on the dynamics between text and reader. He points out that there is oscillation between the power of the reader and of the text in Iser's notions. Meaning lies in the reader's experience of adjusting and revising their expectation during the process of reading. The reader negotiates with what the text offers and what they believe. As Iser (1980) asserts, "We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation" (p. 62). Although Iser seems to limit his exploration of meaning to the interaction between the reader and the text, he recognises that a text is potentially capable of several different realisations as it may be read differently by different readers, or by the same reader during the process of rereading. Iser (1978) points out that there is a hypothetical

reader (implied reader) in the author's mind when a text is created. All the possible actualisations of the text are projected upon this hypothetical reader. However, the real reader, who actually interacts with the text, may not be the ideal reader, who fulfils the text in the same way the hypothetical reader is expected to. In fact, Iser contends that the real reader cannot be separated from his or her social and historical contexts. As the author and the hypothetical reader are subject to the socio-cultural ideologies of their time, the real reader is also conditioned by the attitudes and norms of society in his/her time, and hence the judgement of a text varies between readers. Moreover, since one reader does not have experiences and sensibility completely identical to the other, there can be variant interpretations of the same text, especially when it comes to the realisation of literary indeterminacy.

According to Iser (1974), a literary text engages the reader's imagination through indeterminate elements. Whenever an unexpected turning or incompleteness interrupts the flow of reading, the reader is invited to fill in the gap and participate in the construction of meaning. The reader draws upon perceivable clues to fill in gaps and bring ideation to the unperceivable/ indeterminate. During this process, the reader registers meanings to the text, which in turn brings them reading pleasure. Iser's notion of literary gaps, although confirming the active participation of readers during the process of reading, seems to depend on the ultimate authority of the author who makes use of literary gaps as a tool to engage readers. This suggests that reading is an actualisation of the author's intention. Tompkins (1980) explicates Iser's theory, saying that the infinite interpretations of a text as a result of the reader's creativity, in fact, points to the text's inexhaustibility. "The text's intentions may be manifold, they may even be infinite, but they are always present embryonically in the work itself, implied by it, circumscribed by it, and finally traceable to it" (p. xv). That is to say, a literary work can never be a mere subjective fabrication of the reader's. Meanings of a text are potentially inscribed into a text, and the reader activates them. Culler (1983) contends that one can still argue that there is no clear distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies since, according to Iser, literary gaps appear as a consequence of a particular interpretative strategy. An author may have deliberately placed gaps in a text, but it is the reader who perceives and reacts, or who does not. Just as Iser (1980) claims that the convergence of text and reader must always remain virtual, it is never possible to pinpoint precisely whether it is the reader who submits to the authority of a text or the other way around. Nevertheless, all the scholars above agree that meaning

occurs at the moment of the reader's encounter with a text. Iser (1989) asserts, "with every text we learn not only about what we are reading but also about ourselves" (p. 29). Whether the reader perceives or does not perceive, accepts or rejects the intentions of the text, he/she is given certain freedom to make a text meaningful by bringing personal interpretations to it.

Iser's concept of literary gaps shares some ideas with Eco's (1979) *open text*. According to Eco, an open text invites unforeseen interpretation from readers. It may juxtapose itself with the reader's knowledge of contemporary culture and play against conventions. The openness of a text can be constituted by literary gaps, which is a purposeful strategy to encourage the reader to participate in the production of meaning. In this way, the reader may turn from a consumer to a producer of a text, and variations in individual readers' interpretations of a text are not accidental, but normal (Culler, 1983). However, Eco reminds us that an open text does not afford free interpretations. The reader plays the role of actualising a given text that is made of a system of codes and sub-codes that constitute the world. The reader chooses which codes to apply. There is a call for collaboration on the side of the reader to construct the literary work.

In contrast to *open texts*, *closed texts* lie on the opposite end of the spectrum. According to Eco, a closed text elicits expectations that the future course of the story will precisely satisfy. The text is structured as an inflexible project. It expects foreseen interpretation from the reader. Eco uses *Superman* comic strips as an example of closed text, in which there is an aim to pull the reader along a predetermined path, to arouse pity or fear, and to incite excitement or depression at the due place and at the right moment. In spite of the inflexibility of a closed text, it is open to possible aberrant decoding because the real reader cannot be inflexibly planned. The average addressee that the author has in mind does not live in exactly the same social or historical context as the real reader. Therefore, however closed a text may seem to be; one reader may interpret it differently from another reader to some extent. Although Eco's discussion of closed text seems to agree that the reader ultimately decides what a text means, he believes that meanings are inscribed in a text. A text postulates its model reader, and the real reader, although having the freedom to activate the text in ways that are relevant to themselves, is subject to the textual structure predetermined by the author.

Unlike Iser and Eco, Fish (1980a) places emphasis not on the established structure of a text and how it conditions the reader's response, but stresses that the reader is the site of meaning, and meaning occurs as an event that takes place in the reader's mind. From a linguistic perspective, the meaning of a sentence is the experience of the utterance. In this sense, there is a "temporal flow" of a reading experience when it comes to interpretation (1980b, p. 74). In this linear process, the reader develops responses in relation to the words of sentences as they succeed one another. Selden *et al.* (2005) explain that "The reader's expectation of meaning is thus continuously adjusted: the meaning is the total movement of reading" (p. 55). In other words, meaning dwells in experience. Tompkins (1980) explicates that Fish's concept of meaning is not a property of a text, but a product of the reader's activity. Instead of asking what poems mean or do, Fish asks how readers make meaning. Tompkins clarifies, "The important point is that literature is the activity that the reader performs and not a stable artefact: 'it refuses to stay still'" (p. xvii). To Fish, literature lives in reader's mind. It is actualised according to the reader's linguistic and literary competence.

However, Fish (1980a) does not deny that words have meanings of their own. In fact, he believes that meaning is already made when the listener hears it. The apprehension of meaning is an act of extraction rather than creation. The reader is not a producer of text, but an enactor of the author's will. The shared understanding between the addresser and the addressee within a social community decides the meaning of words. Davis and Womack (2002) explore this idea, pointing out that the creation of literature involves a collective decision regarding a set of signs agreed to by the community, and by the author and the reader. Therefore, meaning has to be acquired in the context of an activity. To Fish, meaning is already calculated within a structure of social norms. It is situational and institutional.

The theorists mentioned above all share the belief that the reader brings completion to the meaning of a text. However, since reading is by nature a virtual experience, Selden *et al.* (2005) point out an unsettled problem in reader-response criticism: does the text itself trigger the reader's act of interpretation, or do the reader's own interpretative strategies impose solutions upon the problems thrown up by the text? Cocks (2004) argues that meaning is predetermined in the text, but open up for negotiation. He uses 'dualism' to describe the inter-dependent relationship between reader and text. According to Cocks, the author guides the reader towards the potential meanings in the

text. “The actual reader can choose to give themselves up to the text in order to gain access to the ‘true meaning’ of the text” (p. 95). The real reader may align themselves with the implied reader temporarily even though they have different abilities and sensibilities. In this sense, the real reader immerses themselves in the text, being carried away by a flow planned by the author. However, as Iser (1978) argues, the real reader’s own disposition will never disappear completely: “it will tend instead to form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending” (p. 37). No matter how deeply immersed the reader is in their reading, their interpretation of the text will never be completely manipulated by the text, or the author’s intention. Instead, the reader has established certain beliefs and interpretative skills through previous experiences of literature and life. Their prior experiences decide what types of reader they are and how they may respond to the particular text.

Jonathan Culler believes that the reader is formed within a particular institution, where agreed signs and conventions have been internalised in the reader and form a system of principles of textual interpretation. Therefore, it is the institution that teaches the reader to read (Tompkins, 1980). Based on his/her experiences as a reader of literature and a member of a social community, the reader can produce a wide range of variant interpretations of a text (Davis & Womack, 2002). Research on children’s responses to texts has shown that readers apprehend meanings of a text by drawing upon what they already know. Maine (2013) finds that readers tend to make connections between the world of the text and the real world in order to make sense of what they read. She argues that there is a dialogic process between reader and text. This process is situational because readers’ interpretations are affected by time, place, prior knowledge and experiences. As a result, meanings of a text are never fixed. Mackey (2011) also observes the same phenomenon among readers. She argues that readers interpret texts in ways that are relevant to themselves. They build affective linking to a text, which rivets their attention to their personal lives and private experiences. She asserts, “We infuse the words with life but it is partially *our own life*” (p. 123). Similarly, Arizpe and Styles (2003) discover that children often make personal connections in their reading. They describe the children’s emotional responses to picturebooks, “Children frequently used personal analogy to try to understand the feelings of characters or animals in the books and their responses were often sympathetic and thoughtful.” (p. 225). However, although readers may try to draw relation between themselves and what they read, the linkage sometimes fails. Sarland (1991) discovers in his interviews that some young

readers rejected a text because the ways characters behaved in the book were too foreign, given their own experiences. These readers rejected the text because they were not able to apply their knowledge of the norms in their world to the world of the text. This is an example where the real reader disagrees with the implied reader when his/her internalised system of interpretation and judgement is too different from the implied reader's.

Research has also shown that readers' experiences of literature have effects on their interpretations of a text. Arizpe and Styles (2003) point out that readers use metacognitive skills gained from their previous literary knowledge to make sense of a text. They discovered that young children employed their textual knowledge of comics to understand the symbolic meanings of lines and texts in the pictures in their chosen picturebooks. Similarly, Gibson (2010b) finds that intertextuality is one of the characteristics of comics, manga, and graphic novels. These texts reward readers who have a wider knowledge of comics and other texts, such as literature, film, and fine art. Consequently, comic readers are passionate about reading and engaging with other media, so as to make sense of the intertextual elements in comics. Rosen (1996) also points out that British children's comic, *The Beano*, is full of intertextuality that requires his son to draw on knowledge of the previous issues to be able to understand certain jokes. Hence, the text has potential meanings inscribed by the author. However, individual readers' literary experiences have equipped them with different interpretative strategies that render variant interpretations of a text.

To sum up, reader-response theorists are concerned with the reader's cognitive and emotional engagement with a text. They are interested in the varieties and richness in the reader's interpretations of a text, and the relationship between reader, text, and context. The dynamics in this triangular relationship allow us to explore how a text comes to meaning on encounter with the real reader. Researchers have noticed that readers often draw connections between the world in the text and the real world in order to make sense of the text (Sarland, 1991; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Mackey, 2011). Whilst this process requires readers' cognitive abilities to make critical judgements, it often involves affective responses that are highly personal and private. In the following section, I will bring attention to the role of literary emotions in readers' experiences of engagement with a text.

2.2.2 Emotion, Identification, and Engagement

In discussions of readers' 'aesthetic reading' (Rosenblatt, 1978), we need to bring emotional experiences to the fore. Oatley (1999) asserts that one of the goals of writing fiction is to arouse specific emotions in the reader. Thus, reading literature can often be an emotional process. The common human experiences of emotions allow literature to communicate beyond history and culture. Therefore, literature has the potential to engage readers of different socio-cultural backgrounds by evoking their memories of emotions. These memories help the reader to empathise with the character, and sometimes even to develop identification. Although such literary experiences are fundamentally imaginative, they allow the reader to learn from other people's experiences without actually experiencing them. Moreover, they reduce the distance between the reader and the fictional character, and hence increase the probability of literary engagement.

It is believed that literature communicates human thoughts and emotions. Hogan (2011) claims that people have a deep need to share their emotional experiences. It is because of this need that authors/artists compose works to share their feelings, and readers/audiences willingly come to share the authors'/artists' feelings and respond to them. Evans (2003) asserts, "Our common emotional heritage binds humanity together, then, in a way that transcends cultural difference. In all places, and at all times, human beings have shared the same basic emotional repertoire" (p. 8). He argues that human beings are born with basic emotions that are hardwired, etched onto their neural circuitry by genes. Thus, part of the basic mental design is common to us all. It allows us to communicate with the same emotional language not only through everyday interaction with people, but also through literary works.

As literature is capable of evoking emotional responses in the reader, it provides the opportunity for cultivating emotional intelligence, which includes the ability to recognise certain emotions in oneself and in others, to be able to empathise with others, and to respond with appropriate actions. Although there has been no sufficient empirical evidence to prove a causal link between reading and the development of empathy or moral development in readers (Keen, 2007), studies on readers' responses to literature generally hold a positive view on this aspect. For example, Hogan (2011) believes that literature plays an interpretative role in communicating the experiential aspect of

emotion. He suggests that reading literature “contributes to the formation and operation of our emotion systems in a range of ways” (p. 288), and the emotional memories of literature may inflect our responses to the real world. Nikolajeva (2012) is also confident about the potential of literature to assist the development of young readers’ empathy and ‘mind-reading’ abilities in real life. Literature represents fictional characters’ emotions and their interpretations and reactions to each other’s emotions. As young readers have limited life experiences of emotions, these vicarious emotional experiences expose them to certain situations and elicit emotions before they have such opportunities in real life. Nikolajeva contends, “The knowledge and understanding of other people’s minds are essential social skills, and if literature can help children develop these skills it would be a major tool for socialization” (p. 274). Similarly, Keen (2011) believes that learning human emotions by reading literature is a particularly valuable experience for readers who have deficient emotional intuition. As manga artists are known for dedicating every stroke to the poignant feelings that characters experience (McCloud, 1994; Brenner, 2007), it would suggest that reading manga can be a valuable experience to readers in terms of the development of their emotional intelligence.

The visual stimuli available in multimodal texts are believed to be more immediate and visceral than verbal stimuli in communicating emotions. Nikolajeva (2014) argues that our visual skills are hard-wired in the brain, whilst linguistic skills are not. When we see a person’s facial expressions or bodily postures, our brains recognise them as external tokens of emotions, and respond to them immediately. Keen (2011) also contends that illustrations of emotions in graphic narratives can “capitalize on the availability of visual coding for human emotions, eliciting readers’ feelings before they even read the accompany text” due to the brain’s natural behavior (p. 135). Although the process of understanding emotions in reality depends on both visual and linguistic communication, these two scholars believe that graphic presentation of emotions in literature can greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of communication with readers. On the other hand, as visual messages are generally easier and quicker to access without special training required, images in multimodal texts have the advantage of helping struggling readers better grasp meanings of words, and hence achieve better comprehension of the development of characters as well as the storyline.

Visual representation of emotions in multimodal texts requires readers to recognise visual clues, recall their emotional memories and register meanings. Nikolajeva (2014) uses ‘indexical signs’ to describe emotional conventions in real life and in visual narratives – they point to the signified rather than directly represent it. For example, a zigzagged mouth and hair on end can both imply fear. Indexical signs of emotions are commonly recognized and agreed upon in a society because of shared experiences or established conventions. The ability to draw connection between visual signs and their represented emotions becomes a crucial social tool. In another article, Nikolajeva (2012) uses the picturebook *The Red Tree*, as an example to illustrate the figurative language that images adopt to communicate emotions in a metaphorical way. At the end of this picturebook, the protagonist’s mouth appears on her face for the first time to indicate her joy. It shows that artists can use visual clues as a figurative language to describe and to evoke emotions. They may also deploy artistic conventions, such as colours, shade, and the composition of images, to imply targeted emotions. Readers are expected and trusted to recognise these visual clues and register emotions to them. However, whilst some indexical signs of emotions are shared across cultures, e.g., an up-curving mouth signifies happiness, and a down-curving mouth refers to sadness, there are conventions that may only be recognised by people who share the same cultural background. For example, Japanese artists have developed a bank of emotional symbols to convey characters’ emotions in manga (see 2.1.1 *What is Manga?*). To be able to identify these culturally specific conventions, readers need to draw on their knowledge of visual signs in a manga-specific context before they can connect them to their own emotional experiences. Therefore, visual signs of emotions in manga require a learning process for the uninitiated before they can fulfil the communicative purpose.

The visual figurative language of emotion plays an important part in the narrative of manga. The artist makes use of it to induce emotional responses from the reader. Keen (2011) coins the phrase, ‘strategic narrative empathy’, to describe ‘visual codings’ for human emotions in comics and graphic narratives. She argues that characters’ faces and postures can elicit readers’ feelings because they are presented in ways that are deliberately designed by the artist to try to manipulate the implied reader’s emotional responses. For example, cinematic techniques in manga have been employed historically to depict characters’ internal states. Close shots, especially, are used pervasively to focus the reader’s attention on the character’s emotion or imminent

action at a particular moment. As close shots add visual weight to whatever is framed, they can intensify the portrayed feelings and call for the reader's emotional responses.

Cognitive psychologists suggest that children at the age of four have developed the ability to empathise with another person's feelings (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2012). An empirical study conducted by Arizpe and Styles (2003) has shown that young children can comprehend sophisticated messages in picturebooks and respond with emotional attachment. In reading Anthony Browne's *Zoo*, a 5-year-old girl responded with empathy to the gorilla in the cage, "It's like a cross... makes me feel sad..." (p. 91). The page is presented in four juxtaposed panels. The bottom two panels are two thirds longer than the top two. Each panel is framed with a thick dark line. Together the four panels constitute a close shot of the gorilla's face. The white gutter between the panels forms the shape of a cross. The gorilla's eyes are looking outside of the cage, and its mouth is drooping down. This image is an example of the artist's intention to use an extreme close shot to convey the caged animal's loneliness and sadness in captivity. Whether or not the artist intends to draw connection between the gorilla's fate and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross, this young reader demonstrates that she drew upon her knowledge and the emotional memory of this religious symbol to make meaning of the gorilla's situation, which enabled her to empathise with the gorilla.

The experience of empathy during a reading process often involves identification with characters. Several researchers have tried to explore this imaginative bond between the reader and the fictional character. Nikolajeva (2014) asserts, "We care about literary characters because we are naturally (evolutionarily, if preferred) inquisitive about ourselves and other human beings" (p. 77). Fiction reproduces human experiences through characters, and readers project themselves or others onto these imagined beings as they try to make sense of their emotions and actions. As Nikolajeva (2012) points out elsewhere, fiction creates situations in which emotions are simulated. The shared emotions become a bridge through which the reader can enter the fictional character's mind. She argues:

[T]he reason we can engage with fictive characters is because of the connections between the mediated experience of the text and emotional memories stored in the brain. We engage with literary characters through vicarious, or proxy experience (p. 276).

In fact, this is not different from how we communicate with people in reality. The shared experiences or memories of emotions allow us to empathise with people without being in the same situation. However, fictional characters seem to have the power to engage our attention as much or even more, even though we know they are not real. Keen (2007) suggests that the fictiveness of characters disarms our caution, which opens the way to easier empathy. In an experiment, she gave students three different texts to read – an email, a hand-written letter, and a novel excerpt. All of these texts appealed to sympathy of their audience in first person narration. The result showed that the students were more inclined to empathise with the character in the novel rather than the ‘strangers’ of the other two texts. The safe distance between the reader and the fictive character allows them to rid of their suspicion of strangers. Drawing on the same point of fictiveness, Day (2013) argues that literary intimacy is developed on the premise of the impossibility in the narrator-reader relationship. The fact that the (first-person) narrator and the reader inhabit two different spaces renders a safe zone in which the narrator can be free to share his or her personal secrets without fear of betrayal, and the reader is free to listen without worrying about a reciprocal disclosure of his/her own secrets. It is in this safe space that trust is developed, and intimate disclosure is made possible. Paradoxically, it is also the established literary intimacy that blurs the boundary between the narrator and the reader, which can render vicarious experiences and a sense of identification.

A common strategy to engage readers and to evoke identification with characters is the employment of inside views. Keen (2007) points out two possible ways to provide inside views in novels: quoted monologue and psycho-narration. The former is the character’s interior monologue that reveals his/her thoughts and feelings; the latter is the narrator’s generalisation about the character’s mental states and thoughts. Both techniques give the reader access to the inner life of the character. In manga, the artist also makes use of these methods, but not exactly in the same way. As the narrative in manga is aimed to simulate real-life conversation, all the narrators are the characters involved in the conversations. They seldom break natural conversations to speak to the reader, nor do they have the ability to penetrate each other’s mind. Hence, inside views are usually seen in characters’ interior monologues. Almost every character, even the villainous character, is given the opportunity share his/her own thoughts and feelings with the reader. However, even though psycho-narration is not usually available in the

verbal narrative due to the lack of an omniscient narrator's voice, an invisible narrator seems to 'show' the reader what is going on inside characters through visual narrative. For example, lines, icons, shade, and background can hint at the character's psycho-state. More directly, cinematic framing can focus on the character's facial expressions and bodily postures to allude to their emotions and thoughts.

The common link between reading texts of different formats is that the experience of character identification is generally pleasurable. Stockwell (2002) believes that readers achieve pleasure when taking on a trans-world identity, dressing in someone else's ideas. Rosenblatt's (1970) *compensatory mechanism of identification* idea provides a perspective to explore this experience. According to Rosenblatt, every reader is guided by their preoccupations at the time they read. Their real-life problems and needs make them focus on particular characters and situations. By identifying with the character and imagining oneself in the character's situation, the reader can potentially achieve a sense of satisfaction. Rosenblatt contends that it is because of "the possibility of compensating for lacks or failures through identification with a character who possesses qualities other than our own or who makes fuller use of capacities similar to our own" (p. 41). She goes on to say, "[T]he force of the reader's emotional reactions will be channeled in ways dictated by his sense of his own lacks" (p. 41). In this way, literature may allow the reader to reflect on their real-life issues from a detached position, or temporarily escape from stress and frustrations in contemporary reality

The development of empathy and identification with a character involves both the reader's affective faculties and reasoning faculties. The reader judges the actions that the character takes by relating himself/herself to the character's situation. This is not always easy, as the reader may not have experienced the same situation. Oatley (1999) believes that the depiction of emotions can help the reader to make sense of the character's decision, motivation, and situation. He claims:

Emotions are at the center of literature because they signal situations that are personally important but that might be either inchoate or just beyond the edge of easy understanding. The simulations that are novels, plays, movies, and so forth can allow people to find out more about the intimate implications of their emotions. They offer a laboratory space that, relative to real life, is safe and can make the relations of emotions to goals and action easier to understand (p. 112).

Literature makes personal or social issues easier for the reader to access by presenting them through someone else's story. More importantly, by relating to the character's emotional responses to the depicted situation, the reader may be able to imagine themselves in the character's position. Rosenblatt (1970) also points out that literature can develop the reader's ability to think rationally within an emotionally coloured context. It offers the reader an emotional outlet whilst encouraging the reader to make critical judgement on what they read. The emotional experience of literature always comes side by side with a complex process of cognitive operation.

It is believed that there are mutual relations between emotional response and ethical judgement. Hogan (2011) claims that literature is valuable because it deepens our comprehension of these relations. They may become complicated and ambiguous when the character is given more than one dimension in its personal qualities. A character that is hard to categorise as good or bad may elicit different emotional responses from the reader depending on their own beliefs and moral codes. Nevertheless, Kümmerling-Meibauer (2012) suggests that two-dimensional characters may have the potential to elicit empathy in the reader, even though they may be morally condemned at the same time. These paradoxical characters often challenge readers to reflect on the social forces and political powers under which their character qualities are formed. Mashi Kishimoto, the author of the corpus text, *Naruto*, once said in an interview about the ambiguous villain, Itachi:

Itachi, Sasuke's brother, is my favorite. The Akatsuki is an anti-hero group who are pitted against the main characters in *Naruto*. But I didn't want to make them just villains, because I thought there should be different reasons as to why they became outlaws against society. I wanted to explore their backgrounds just as much as I would for the heroes. (Kido & Bae, 2012)

Instead of creating an absolutely evil character, Kishimoto develops a character that struggles and makes mistakes, just like an ordinary person. Through this character, Kishimoto challenges his reader to understand a character's development before jumping into a hasty conclusion based on any presumption of 'evilness'. Thus, a paradoxical character like Itachi may invoke both love and loathing in the reader.

Although literature is capable of engaging the reader emotionally, Nikolajeva (2012) points out that mature readers do not let emotions overwhelm them and trap them in the fictional world. A mature reader understands that any emotional discourse in literature is merely a representation. The reader may put themselves in the character's shoes; notwithstanding, the reader is also able to separate their own emotions from the character's feelings. It is an exercise of emotional intelligence, with which the reader is able to strike a balance between emotion and reason, without letting either one be completely in control (Evans, 2003). Readers fuse their imagination and emotions into their reading, in which reason is not absent, but a tool that allows the reader to employ knowledge of reality in making meaning of the fictional world.

Three elements – reason, emotion, and imagination – are intertwined during the process of reading literature. As Stockwell (2002) believes, the experience of literature involves rational decision-making, creative meaning construction, and emotional processes. Literature elicits our inclination to emotions, sharpens our sensitivity to emotional relations, enriches our real-world knowledge, and provides space to soothe our dissatisfaction with the everyday world. Our experience with emotions in literature is not simply an aesthetic experience, but also a virtual practice of our social skills and critical analysis. In the next two sections, I will focus on the textual structure of manga and the strategies that artists deploy to engage readers emotionally and cognitively.

2.2.3 Fragmentation of Manga

Literary gaps are a strategic tool that invites active participation from the reader to join the construction of meaning. Literary gaps work in a complicated and creative way when the narrative is constructed by both words and images. As a form of multimodal text and sequential art, manga comprises a series of panels that contain both verbal and visual information, and are structured in a formulated order. McCloud's (1994) definition of comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (p. 9) distinguishes this format from other multimodal texts, such as picturebooks and films, despite the commonalities shared between these formats. Like picturebooks, there is an interdependent relationship between words and pictures in manga, and the boundaries between the two modes are not always clear. However, the composition of page layout in manga leads to a different structure of narrative from the one in

picturebooks. In the former, there is a sense of time and flow in each page, depending on the presentation and juxtaposition of panels, whereas in the latter, each page is traditionally composed of one picture that represents a timestamp. In other words, the role of each page in a picturebook is parallel to the role of each panel in a page of a manga when it comes to the flow of the narrative. In this section, I will look at literary gaps in manga, including gaps between words and images within the panel, and gaps between panels. Based on McCloud's (2006) statement that "Comics is a medium of fragments, a piece of text here, a cropped picture there, but when it works, your readers will combine those fragments as they read and experience your story as a continuous whole" (p. 129), I argue that fragmentation is the key to the engaging power of manga. It calls on readers to be actively and constantly making meaning by piecing together bits of information, using their imagination and knowledge of shared human experiences to make a meaningful and continuous whole.

The first fragmentary aspect of comics lies in the two modes of communication – words and images. Readers are required to fill in gaps between the two distinct modes to produce an overall meaning. Picturebook theorists have tried to explore the dynamic relationships between words and images. The linear nature of words and the non-linear nature of images allow the two modes to tell stories in different ways (Kress, 2003). When the two modes work together, the combined effect is greater than the sum of the separate effects. Sipe (1998) uses 'synergy' to explain the relationship between words and images in the construction of narrative. Lewis (2001) uses 'ecology' as a metaphor to illustrate that the two modes rely on each other; both come to life in the context of the other. Granham (1990) uses 'concerto' to describe a harmonious performance given by words and images together. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) categorise the interplay between words and images into four relationships: *symmetrical* (words and images repeat the same information), *complementary* (words and images fill each other's gaps), *enhancement* (images significantly amplify the meaning of words or occasionally words expand images), and *counterpoint* (words and images are mutually dependent and provide alternative or even contradictory information). These scholars highlight the cooperative relationship between the two types of narrative modes in picturebooks.




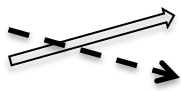
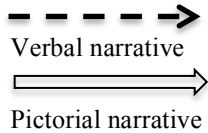



Similarly, McCloud (1994) uses the metaphor of *dance* to describe the cooperation between words and images in comics – "In comics at its best, words and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading. When both partners try to

lead, the competition can subvert the overall goals, though a little playful competition can sometimes produce enjoyable results” (p. 156). He proposes seven types of relationships between words and images in comics:

1. *Word-specific*: pictures illustrate, but do not significantly add to, the largely complete text.
2. *Picture-specific*: words do little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence.
3. *Duo-specific*: both words and pictures send essentially the same message.
4. *Additive*: words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa.
5. *Parallel*: words and pictures seem to follow very different courses without intersecting.
6. *Montage*: words are treated as integral parts of the picture.
7. *Inter-dependent*: words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone.

The seven relationships can also be applied to the ways words and images work in picturebooks. However, the montage relationship, in particular, shows a distinct feature of comics where words, such as a character's speech and ambient sounds, are pictorialised and integrated into pictures so as to imply the qualities of sound, tone, and the character's internal states. Based on the seven categories, I created the following diagram to understand the interaction between the two modes of communication (Table 3).

Table 3. Diagrams of the interplay between words and images in comics

Word-specific	Picture-specific	Duo-specific	Additive
			
Parallel	Montage	Inter-dependent	
			

The dotted arrow represents the verbal narrative, and the hollow arrow represents the pictorial narrative. They may take turns to lead the narrative, repeat, or enhance each other. It should be noted that the discussion above concerns only a single panel. As comics contain several panels in a page, it is possible to see different types of interaction between words and images on the same page. The significance of this diagram is to show us that words and pictures work together closely in constructing the narrative of comics. This means that the reader's understanding of one of the modes may help him/her grasp the meaning of the other because of the close relationship between them. Moreover, a considerable element of redundancy between the two modes means the reader can scan quickly without losing the essential sense of drama. Hence, the cooperation of words and images in comics allow the reader to comprehend the overall meaning more effectively and efficiently. In the previous section, I have argued that images have the advantage of communicating emotional messages immediately and directly. However, we cannot overlook the fact that words have the advantage of pinpointing the meanings of images. The flow of reading comics depends on a harmonious relationship between words and images, and the reader plays an active role in coordinating these two modes. Gallacher (2011) draws on an analogy of alchemy to describe the reading of manga. The reader transmutes the fragmented texts by forging words and images to produce something meaningful. For example, the onomatopoeic word – GRM RM RMB – makes sense only when the reader draws connection between it and the dark clouds alongside. The meaning of a panel that presents such information relies on the active imagination of the reader who assembles and relates the words and pictures dispersed on the page. In this way, the reader produces a meaningful text with elements that are presented to them. Such a process resembles the practice of alchemy, which involves a process of combination, transformation, and creation.

Although words and images are equally important in the narrative of manga, the artist seems to give more space to images and less to words. As mentioned in the last section, the psycho narration in manga is often presented through lines, icons, shade, and background, in addition to the character's facial expressions and bodily postures. Whilst shared experiences of emotions give us quick access to a character's facial and bodily expressions, the other visual metaphors require knowledge learnt from literary experiences and other narrative conventions. Thus, without words to specify the meaning, the reader has to fill in the gaps by relying on their imagination and existing knowledge of the visual conventions. For example, McCloud (1994) points out that an

expressionistic background in manga that represents the inner landscape of a character's mind and emotional state expects the reader to understand the 'representativeness' of reality in the picture, without words giving specificity. Thus, the lack of clarity demands active participation from the reader, who is expected to draw correct connections between each visual symbol and its denoted meaning, e.g., flowers and romance, sweat drops and embarrassment, open cross and anger, *Chibi*¹¹ and the emotion that overwhelms the character at the moment. Cools (2011) argues that *Chibi* is a stylistic rupture, which brings the character's emotional reaction to the foreground; meanwhile, it causes destabilisation of the overall style. She believes that the momentary transformation of the character's normal figure disrupts the flow on the visual level and produces fragmentation. Cools' use of the term – fragmentation – implies a form of literary gap. The reader is supposed to fill it with an interpretation of the character's emotion and the intended comedic effect. In this way, the reader completes the job that is left by words – specifying meanings of images.

The fragmentary nature of manga is particularly manifest in the physical and conceptual structure of panels. Each panel shows a 'piece' of the represented reality in the story. The artist makes the decision to include parts of this 'reality' and exclude the rest according to his/her interest. Thus, a frozen instant captured in a panel is also a representation of a bigger world. As if playing a jigsaw puzzle, the reader has to form a complete image of the puzzle in their mind by imagining how each panel is related to a bigger picture, and piecing together the information of each panel in the right order. To understand how fragmented panels construct the narrative in manga, we will first look at the role of the frame.

The general function of frames is to enclose and to exclude. Bazin (1967) points out that the function of the surrounding frame of a painting is to "emphasize the difference between the microcosm of the picture and the macrocosm of the natural world in which the painting has come to take its place" (p. 165). In other words, the frame presents a portion of reality that is reproduced by the artist from a particular point of view. Thus, what is captured and perceived coexists with the excluded and unperceived in different spaces. The audience is invited to see this represented portion of reality from the artist's

¹¹ *Chibi* is an artistic technique that transforms the character into a child-like figure. It is sometimes accompanied by animal traits, such as a dog's tail or a cat's ears. See 2.1.1 *What is Manga?* for the chart of other commonly used visual symbols in manga.

selected perspective, with the recognition of the existence of a complete version of reality. Similarly, framing techniques allow manga artists to use a picture of selected items to represent a bigger environment. Thus, each picture can be broadly treated as an 'indexical sign' as it is indicative of a bigger scene (Magnussen, 2000). The meaning, however, is fulfilled by the reader's faith in reality. According to McCloud (1994), we perceive the world through the experience of our senses. Even though we may not be able to travel to every corner of the world, we can still perceive the world as a whole based on fragments of our personal experiences. This is an act of faith. Following this logic, McCloud argues that human eyes can perceive the whole by simply observing the parts. We mentally complete what is incomplete based on our past experience. This ability is called 'closure', and it is key to our apprehension of a sequential narrative. McCloud points out, "Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (p. 67). Therefore, on seeing two juxtaposed panels of a character holding up an axe in one panel, and a screaming sound in the other panel, the reader's imagination of the incident makes him/her an 'accomplice' who aids the crime in his/her own way.


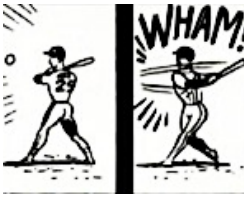




In line with Bazin (1967), Cavell (1979) suggests that a picture frame limits a world in the painting – the world within the frame is complete, not continuous. However, unlike Bazin who believes in a complete version of reality beyond the painting in a different space, Cavell thinks that there is no sense in asking what lies beyond an area portrayed in a painting. Instead, one may ask the same question about the objects in a photograph because it is a picture cropped out of the world by the camera – it has answers in reality. He argues, "A painting *is* its world; a photograph *is of* the world" (p. 24). The implied presence of the rest of the world is as essential as what is explicitly presented in a paragraph in terms of the viewer's experience. Therefore, when it comes to films, the moving photographs not only give a sense of reality, but also attract perfect attention because of the altering frames. According to Cavell, the only difference between films and reality is that the projected world does not exist at the moment of viewing, even though it feels so real.

Cavell's theories seem to challenge McCloud's arguments that 'closure' allows us to construct a continuous, joined reality in the mind even though comics only present unconnected moments in the drawings of panels. One way to address the question of

whether comics are completely in vacuum of reality in the reader's experience is perhaps to look at the transitional relationships between panels. Although comics are composed of drawings, which by nature are not as realistic as photographs, the fact that its narrative is constructed in sequential panels means every panel is connected to another. The juxtaposition of two or more different frames can generate meanings that neither frame offers on its own. In other words, the drawing of each panel has a sense of continuity; the moment captured in the frame is infinite. The drawing does not limit the audience's attention to the world within the frame, but pushes the reader to imagine what has been cropped out so as to anticipate what may come up next. Whilst sequence breaks the limit of frames in manga, cinematic editing contributes to the sense of reality. It allows the reader to see pictures over 360 degree views at varied distances, just as we view the real world. This technique may lead to a vicarious experience, which enables the reader to suspend his/her disbelief in the fictionality of the world in the drawing.

For a sequence of panels to make sense, the reader needs to perceive the relations between panels so as to connect the fractured time and space to form a continuous event or a unified picture. In other words, the reader has to bring meanings to the gutters that physically separate two panels, but in a more abstract sense – connecting the two worlds that are framed in them. Thus, there are meanings that dwell in the concrete as well as abstract gaps in comics. These meanings may be fulfilled according to the transitional relationships between two panels. McCloud (1994) suggests six categories of panel-to-panel transitions (Table 4):

Table 4. Panel-to-panel transitions, McCloud (1994), p. 74.

Moment-to-moment	Action-to-action	Subject-to-subject
		
Scene-to-scene	Aspect-to-aspect	Non-sequitur
		

Moment-to-moment transition shows a short amount of time passing between panels, while *action-to-action transition* features the progress of a character's actions. *Subject-to-subject transition* presents different subjects separately within a scene or in relation to an idea, and *scene-to-scene transition* transports readers across the distance of time and space. In contrast, *aspect-to-aspect transition* frames different angles of a place, idea or mood and is not restricted to time. Finally, *non-sequitur transition* offers a non-logical relationship between panels and is rarely used. Among the six types of relationships, McCloud identifies *action transition* and *subject transition* as appearing most frequently in American, European and Japanese comics. He speculates that it may be because these transitions show things happening in the most concise and efficient ways. However, McCloud also finds that *moment transition* and *aspect transition* take up a comparatively higher proportion among all the types of transitions in manga than in Western comics, particularly *aspect transition*, which is "a type rarely seen in the West" (p. 78). McCloud's observation of this phenomenon points out a quintessential feature of manga – the reliance on close shots to focus the reader's attention on nuances of emotions, mood, and actions.

Panels of the *aspect transition* normally do not require much verbal explanation. In fact, manga artists sometimes let these visual details tell the story without using any speech bubbles. This creates interval silence in the narrative and makes time seem to stand still. The effect is that a particular mood or a sense of place can be established. In *aspect transition*, sequence is less important than in other transitions. Readers are given the task to assemble the scattered fragments to a single moment. McCloud explores this particular phenomenon in manga and proposes two possible explanations. First, the less restricted length of pages gives manga artists freedom to portray slow cinematic movements and to set a mood. Second, Western art and literature tend towards a "goal-oriented culture", whereas Japanese comics often emphasise "being there over getting there" (p. 81). McCloud then claims that manga is an art of intervals. It inherits traditions in Eastern art where the omitted is as important as the included. This tradition is shown in the greater emphasis on negative space in paintings and the role of silence in music. It is in the omitted, or the intervals, that the established mood lingers.

Cohn (2011) re-examined the relationships between McCloud's panel transitions and the content of each panel by comparing 300 panels in each of twelve American and twelve Japanese comic books. He inspected variations of entities (characters or objects)

included in each panel, and categorised them as *macro* panel (containing more than one entity), *mono* panel (showing a single entity), and *micro* panel (including less than a single entity). He discovers that there is significant difference between American comics and manga with regard to their framing of entities in panels. American comics use twice as many *macros* as the other two types. That is to say, they show full scenes in panels more often than partial scenes that focus on one single entity or part of it. By contrast, the combination of *monos* and *micros* in manga outnumbers the use of *macros*. This means manga focuses on detailing aspects of the broader environment so as to give greater specificity to each of the depicted details. This not only focuses the reader's attention, but also forces them to imagine what is unseen and to construct the whole environment in their mind. With this discovery, Cohn affirms McCloud's finding that manga uses comparatively more *aspect transition* to break up the single environment into smaller parts so as to give a sense of place or mood.

Cohn goes on to argue that the domination of *macros* in American comics is what motivates McCloud's finding that *action transition* appears to be the predominant panel transition in American comics. He asserts, "Since they [*macros*] show a full scene, these panels are more likely to depict full actions, especially when more than one entity is involved" (p. 127). By contrast, Cohn points out that manga features a larger quantity of *monos* and *micros*, which tend to individualise the entities of the scene and contribute to a higher proportions of *subject transition* and *aspect transition*. It is true that McCloud's study suggests that manga shows relatively higher frequency of *moment transition* and *aspect transition* compared to the other types of transitions. However, as mentioned earlier, McCloud identifies that *action transition* and *subject transition* appear the most frequently not only in American comics, but also European and Japanese comics, because of its efficiency in conveying ideas. Therefore, the quantity of *macros* does not necessarily correlate with the number of action scenes. In fact, mainstream *shōnen* manga is often action oriented. What distinguishes the depiction of action in manga from that in American comics is not the number of panels, but the presentation – manga artists favour *monos* and *micros* whilst American artists prefer *macros*. Instead of lavishing full scenes on actions, manga artists often choose to break up a character's action into a number of panels so as to detail the movements.

The phenomenon of fragmenting a setting, a character's face or body, and an action into continuous panels pervades in manga. In this way, the panel acts as a camera's eye that

zooms in to focus the reader's attention on individualised details. The cinematic technique – close shot – is an essential tool to present pictures in a fragmentary style. However, neither Cohn nor McCloud investigates this technique in manga. Cohn intentionally focuses his theories on entities included in a panel in order to examine the way information is highlighted in manga. McCloud does not limit his *aspect transition* to panels of close shots so as to include any panel, regardless of the distance, that presents aspects of a place, idea or mood. However, it is noteworthy that McCloud's examples of *aspect transition* and Cohn's *mono* and *micro* panels are predominantly presented in close shots. Brenner (2007) believes that the effect of the abundant use of close shots in manga is that readers can take time feeling the character's emotions and movements, as well as appreciating the telling details of the surroundings. She points out that the concentration on emotions results in a slower narrative in manga where a substantial part of the story is spent on building characters and establishing the setting. Similarly, Clarke (2004) affirms the emphasis of expression in Japanese narrative, and attributes it to a strong affiliation with a lyric tradition, in contrast to the epic tradition of Western narrative. Cools (2011) also identifies the same feature in manga. She claims that manga artists spread out information over several panels so as to slow down the visual narration to enhance the suspense, or to prolong and highlight the moment. Ultimately, the goal of this technique is to invite emotional responses from readers. Thus, close shots are an essential element in *aspect transition*. They focus the reader's attention on fragmented information that creates a powerful visual impact and a vicarious experience when combined.

Multimodality and sequential panels not only form the narrative structure of manga, but also contribute to the distinctive feature of fragmentation. Artists exploit images to depict poignant emotions and to imitate common human experiences. Whilst images can convey messages more immediately and directly, they still depend on words to provide specificity. The combination of the two communication modes in manga challenges the reader to bridge the gap in accordance with the different roles they play in the narrative. The structure of manga in sequential panels renders a sense of continuity between each picture, which enables the reader to construct a continuous and unified reality out of the disconnected drawings. Whilst the artist makes the choice of what instants to capture and present within frames, the reader completes what is left out. The gap between panels is filled up by the reader's imagination. According to the content of each panel, the reader identifies the relationships between panels, which

enable them to piece multiple panels into a meaningful picture or a continuous event in their mind.

The extensive use of close shots to heighten the emotional life of the story is also a key fragmentary aspect of manga. With a minimum of visual information available to him/her, the reader is directed to look at individualised details, which may also serve the purpose of prompting the reader to imagine what has been excluded. Essentially, manga reading involves an inductive process of comprehension. The reader makes connections between the information that is apprehended from words, pictures, and individual panels as reading proceeds. It requires the reader's active participation in combining elements provided by the artist and constructing meanings out of them. Among these elements, we can see that manga artists are primarily concerned with the development of emotional life in the story, especially from the deployment of cinematic framing in the presentation of each panel. In the next section, I will investigate how this strategic device may be used in manga to engage the reader.

2.2.4 Strategic Engagement – Cinematic Techniques

In Cohn's (2011) analysis of panels in American comics and manga, he makes three major findings. First, manga use *monos* and *micros* to depict a single entity or only a portion of the single entity more than American comics. Second, manga use more subjective viewpoints (from a character's point of view) to present panels. In addition, subjectivity has positive correlation with *monos*. Third, angle of view variation is more extreme in manga, although lateral viewpoints dominate in both manga and American comics. Cohn's purpose in this research is to use quantitative coding to test McCloud's theories of panel transitions and subjective views in comics, and Masami Toku's observation of children's drawing in which she discovers that Japanese children use aerial and close-up viewpoints more than American children. However, the findings of Cohn's research indirectly prove that cinematic techniques are more actively employed to present images in manga than in American comics, as the results indicate that there are more variations in framing, point-of-view editing, and angles in manga. Indeed, a quasi-cinematic experience is fundamental to the reading of manga. The artist uses his/her pen as a camera to bring the reader to 'see' the story and experience it vicariously. In the visual narrative of manga, every choice of framing and cutting

reflects the artist's intention for a strategic engagement. Although manga is by nature a different media to film, manga artists utilise the concept of cinematic framing in the presentation of images so widely that I will focus this section on cinematic theories relating to the visual narrative of manga so as to examine this specific strategy and readers' engagement.

Cinematic theorist, Noël Carroll (1996), contends that movies have great power in reaching the mass audiences because of three key elements that make them highly accessible: pictorial representation, framing, and narrative. Among these elements, framing allows the filmmaker to have potential control over the audience's attention by putting them in a position that can direct their attention to "exactly what is significant in the action-array or spectacle on screen" (p. 84). As a result, the audience will potentially attend to the right details and thereby comprehend the plot, nearly effortlessly. More importantly, the element of "cognitive clarity" gratifies the human mind's quest for order, and hence makes films engaging and popular (*ibid.*, p. 84). When this technique is adopted in manga, it greatly increases the accessibility of the story and consequently enhances the reader's engagement. Although angles, distance, and point-of-views are three equally important topics to consider in discussions of cinematic editing, I have chosen to focus the following discussion only on close-ups and subjective points of view as they stood out as particularly salient features of cinematic storytelling in manga to participants in this study.

According to Carroll, close shots can enhance the importance of the object being framed at a moment in a movie. By enlarging the screen size of the object, the director specifies the attention that ought to be paid to it. Hayward (1996) points out that cinematic shots have objective and subjective values: the further the shot, the more objective its value; conversely, "the closer the shot, the more subjective its value, the more the meaning is inscribed from within the shot" (p. 319). The subjectivity, however, is not from the character, but from the filmmaker who predetermines and selects what information to reveal or to emphasise. When it comes to a close shot of a character's face, the nuances of this character's emotions may be the primary information that the director intends to communicate to the audience.

Close shots often communicate messages that are under the surface. Balázs (2004) claims that close shots put the spectator in a new dimension that is beyond the physical.

When a man's face is all the audience can see on the screen, what they see is not a figure of flesh and bone, but an expression of emotions, moods, intentions and thoughts. In other words, as Hayward (1996) asserts, close shots have a symbolic value, the spectator has to perceive what a particular close shot signifies, be it an indication of a character's internal state, a prediction of an imminent action or the importance of a character or object in the development of the narrative.

As close shots limit the visual range to a minimum, there is great potential for the interplay between the visible and the invisible. In cinematic studies, the invisible is discussed under various terms, including "blind space" (Curry, 2010), "bracketed" (Carroll, 1996), "masked" (Bazin, 1967) and "off-screen space" (Burch, 1973). Theorists explore the interaction between what is within the borders of the screen and what is outside. The latter is unperceivable and therefore understood as 'blind', being 'bracketed' and hidden under a 'mask' that only allows a part of reality to be seen. Thus, the on-screen and off-screen space, although appearing to be two separate domains, are closely related and constantly interact with each other. According to Burch, there are three ways to define off-screen space: by physical borders of the screen frame, by a character's gaze towards someone/something that is not on the screen, and by leaving out parts of a character's body from the screen. As off-screen space is purely imaginary, the filmmaker can use it to sustain tension. For example, positioning a serial killer outside the screen space, but showing the killer's hand holding a knife on the screen can leave the audience to speculate to whom this arm belongs. The filmmaker may also choose to leave out the killer completely and let the victim on the screen gaze towards the edge of the screen. The victim's facial expressions and glance will bring the audience's attention to the unperceivable killer in the off-screen space. In this way, the interplay between on-screen and off-screen space engages the audience with their imagination. Applying the theory of off-screen space to manga, we can see each panel as a film screen. The close-up images not only serve to engage the reader's attention with the specific details shown within the panel, but also with the invisible outside the panel. With a minimum range of view, the reader can be left in great suspense as a consequence of their lacking sufficient knowledge of the overall situation at this moment of the story.

Another cinematic technique – point-of-view editing – directs the audience's attention in a different way. It encourages the audience to imagine themselves to be someone else

or to be in someone else's situation. When the view is taken from a particular character, it is subjective and yet effective in drawing the audience's identification. Carroll (1996) asserts that point-of-view editing is a medium of communication. It is based on a structure of gaze and gaze-to-object. This structure exists in a communicative practice that happens naturally when we try to collect information about our environment. As cinematic cutting and editing simulate human experiences, this innate information-gathering procedure is translated into point-of-view editing. That is why this device can be highly communicative and engaging. Mass audiences can assimilate and apply it quickly without any particular training. It is a biologically innate information-gathering mechanism that drives us to explore another person's glance for information. When the camera seems to position us to look through someone's eyes, we are likely to feel as if we were the person.

The finding by McCloud (1994) and Cohn (2011) that the use of *subject transition* in manga is comparatively higher than in American comics highlights how manga artists shift between two interlocutors' perspectives more often than showing both interlocutors in one scene. By adopting a subjective point of view for multiple characters, the artist constantly positions the reader as a participant of the world in the story. In cinematic theories, the device to shift between two interlocutors' perspectives is called a reverse-angle shot. Hayward (1996) explicates Jean-Pierre Oudart's theory of *suture* which sees reverse-angle shot as a device "to stitch the spectator into the filmic text" (p. 371). According to Hayward, a series of reverse-angle shots establishes the points of view of two characters in a conversation. Through an eye line match, the spectator adopts character A's position as the one looking. When the next shot reverses the camera's view to the viewpoint of character A's object, character B, the spectator adopts the position of character B who is now the one looking. As the camera's view reverses, what was previously in the off-screen space (character A) comes into view on the screen. Thus, reverse-angle shots turn the off-screen space from 'imaginary' to 'concrete' (Burch, 1973), which stitches the spectator into the film as he/she makes sense of the off-screen space.

As the subjective view of the camera aligns the spectator with a character's viewpoint, it renders dual identification with the character who sees and the one being seen. According to Phillips (2003), the alignment with a character can generate a close bond and identification, as the spectator grows to depend on the character for his/her 'take' on

the film. Meanwhile, the spectator evaluates the character on the screen; that is, the one under perception. The spectator may form allegiance with the perceived character, based on their personal judgement of the character's morality and credibility. Thus, the spectator develops identification with both the character seeing and the character being seen. In this way, a subjective view of the camera places the spectator in a double structure of viewer/viewed (Browne, 2004). The spectator develops identification with both the one viewing and the one being viewed. As Browne puts it,

Evidently, a spectator is in several places at once – with the fictional viewer, with the viewed, and at the same time in a position to evaluate and respond to the claims of each. This fact suggests that like the dreamer, the filmic spectator is a plural subject: in his reading he is and is not himself. (p. 116).

One may argue that the spectator does not identify with the camera, but a particular character that he/she forms allegiance with since the latter is more consistent (the audience's identification with the hero does not change even when the camera takes up another character's point of view). It is true that when someone talks about identification with a particular character, they are usually talking about a character that they decide to form a relationship of allegiance with during the viewing experience. However, it is important to point out that the experience of identification with a character whose view is aligned with the spectator plays a primary role in the spectator's vicarious experience during the film viewing. Reverse-angle shots allow the spectator to try out different identities at the same time in aligning with different characters' views or forming allegiance with them. When reverse-angle shots are combined with close shots in manga, the artist achieves two purposes at once. First, the artist invites the reader to identify with the character who sees, so as to gain a vicarious experience of 'being there' in the world of the story. We may call this experience a *situational identification*. Second, the artist engages the reader by showing a character that is capable of inducing empathy in the reader, which can potentially evoke a sense of *ideological identification*.

In short, the employment of cinematic techniques has the benefit of increasing the readability of manga. The skills of framing and editing allow the artist to communicate effectively with the reader about what is significant in the development of the story and what should be paid particular attention to. The manipulation of the reader's attention,

however, does not encourage passive reading. Close shots and subjective points of view both encourage the reader to activate his/her imagination to be able to enter the character's mind and world. The adoption of close shots requires the reader to imagine what is lying beyond the perceivable; whereas the employment of subjective points of view 'stitches' the reader into the narrative, while inviting the reader to judge the perceived character's credibility. Cinematic framing and editing in manga allow the artist to tell a story in the most vivid way, and to immerse the reader into the world of the boxes.

Conclusion

Reader response theories have raised our awareness of the dynamics between the reader and the text, particularly meanings that reside in the encounter of these two. Whilst some textual meanings are imbedded and predetermined, they have to be activated by a reader. In fact, every reader also brings personal meanings to the text as they try to interpret it in a way that can relate to themselves personally. An engaged experience of reading is foregrounded by a transactional interaction between the reader and the text – the latter offers, and the former responds. In order to invite the reader to participate in constructing the literary work, the author leaves literary gaps for the reader to complete the meaning. The fragmentary nature of manga creates such literary gaps, requiring the reader to make meaning by forging two modes of texts, connecting panels of information, and imagining what is unspecified or unperceived.

A noticeable feature of manga is the emphasis on the emotional life of the story in the visual narrative. Apart from conventional symbols, lines, background, and other visual effects, the artist employs close shots extensively to portray the character's emotions and actions by individualising the details in several panels. This technique has great potential in establishing story moods and invoking the reader's emotional responses. In addition to close shots, subject point-of-view editing is capable of inducing the reader's identification with the character. By presenting the picture from a particular character's point of view, the artist aligns the reader's view with this character to stimulate a vicarious experience. Meanwhile, inside the picture the artist presents a character that has the potential to evoke empathy in the reader. This double structure of identification makes manga reading a highly engaging experience, both emotionally and vicariously.

In this section, I have discussed the techniques that manga artists deploy to engage readers. In the following section, I will continue to explore how readers engage with manga by discussing their participation in fan activities and the significance of fandom.

2.3 Popular Culture and Manga Fandom

A tendency within populist discourse to position manga readers as fanatic consumers has led to concerns about the relationship between market consumption and the child reader's autonomy. Hills (2002a) admits that fans are ideal consumers whose consumption habits are highly predictable. However, he points out that fans also express anti-commercial beliefs because these beliefs are not entirely aligned with the cultural situation in which fans find themselves. Instead, fans appropriate popular texts and redefine them, even though they are simultaneously caught up in the system of exchange-value (the value of an object when mediated through money). Hills says:

The fan's appropriation of a text is therefore an act of 'final consumption' which pulls this text away from (intersubjective and public) exchange-value and towards (private, personal) use-value, but without ever cleanly or clearly being able to separate out the two. It is for this reason that fan 'appropriations' of texts or 'resistances' to consumption can always be reclaimed as new instances of exchange-value (p.35).

Hills explains that many commodities are worthless according to the conventional logic of use-value (the functions of an object) and exchange-value. However, the subjective values or popularity that fans assign to them result in new exchange-values of these commodities among the fans. Hills further points out, "These fan-based 'use-values' interact with systems which belong to the economy 'proper', meaning that the existence of a marketplace for media-related collectibles is underpinned by the lived experiences of fandom" (p. 35). In other words, commercial organisations do not have absolute control over values of goods. Fans may decide how to use commodities to serve their own interests in expressing their passion for a cultural text or satisfying their desire to own merchandise. Fans' consumption of a text is individualised as each person finds his

or her own meanings in the text. They are not only consumers, but also producers who decide the final use-values and exchange-values of the texts.

Unfortunately, fans' excessive passion towards their culture sometimes makes fandom a cult in outsiders' eyes, prompting association with negative impressions, such as hysteria, fanaticism, obsession, deviance, and subversion. Jenson (1992) urges that the fear of fandom as pathology must be abandoned; otherwise, inquiry into the nature of fandom can hardly bring us to see how people engage themselves in this world. Brown (2012) also argues that textual analysis alone cannot tell us what comics mean to fans in terms of social and personal values, including communal affiliation, ideological identification with characters, and how fans use the genre to project a sense of their core personal identity. In short, fandom tells a great deal about those who practice it, and exhibits the relationships between a popular culture and the official culture to which it is opposed. In this section, I will explore the values and meanings of manga to its fans, in terms of their practices of fandom. The discussion is constructed under a theoretical framework of John Fiske's concepts of popular culture, which develops, in part, from Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories. I will draw on research on popular culture in all forms to explore the culture of *otaku* – a Japanese word that originally describes fanatics that have an obsessive interest or hobby, and is nowadays used to describe anime and manga fans (Hills, 2002b).

2.3.1 Formation of Popular Culture

Culture expresses beliefs, values, and ways of living that are shared by a particular group of people. These shared codes bring cohesion to the group, whilst marking out its distinction from other groups. Swartz (1997) explicates French ethnographer Pierre Bourdieu's sociological ideas that locate cultural conventions within the social structure, using the term – *Habitus*. Bourdieu's *habitus* represents a system of circular relations that connect social structures and the practices within them. Fiske (1992) explains this concept by including “the notion of a habitat, the habitants and the processes of inhabiting it, and the habituated ways of thinking that go with it” (p33). The external structures of our social environment are internalised as a result of socialisation experiences. The internalised dispositions shape our thoughts and choose what is ‘for us’ to do. On the one hand, *habitus* conditions our actions and sets out

expectations. On the other hand, it produces aspirations that lead to actions. Thus, *habitus* is what forms a culture that is produced, practised, and reproduced by a particular group of people in a stratified society.

Swartz (1997) points out that culture is an expression of political content in Bourdieu's sociological theories. The unequal distribution of resources stratifies a society into fields of power. Individuals and groups in this stratifying structure struggle over social resources and pursue their own interests. These interests motivate actions and draw out social distinctions that are maintained by strict discrimination between social groups. Therefore, culture can be classified as highbrow culture and popular culture because of the unbalanced share of power within society. Fiske (1989a) claims that popular culture is a place where the hegemonic power and the subordinate power negotiate. The subordinate or the disempowered people develop their own culture that allows them to make meanings of their interests that are not usually valorised within the dominant ideology. The act of producing meanings of their own affords pleasures to the participants in a popular culture because it is fundamentally resistant to and evasive of the dominant ideology.

To produce meanings that resist the dominant ideology, participants in a popular culture need to first find relevance in the texts so as to draw links between the textual and the social (*ibid.*). Thus, readers who find themselves in a popular text produce meanings that function in their personal lives. For example, Lusted (2000) observes children's popular culture and points out that an American cartoon series, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, speaks to its child audience in ways that cannot be heard or understood by the dominant lobbies or the elite social groups. This television programme deals with matters that the young audience are concerned with. Thus, watching this programme becomes a conscious or unconscious act of resistance that the child audience demonstrates in response to the dominant ideology that has different interests from theirs.

We can argue that the force of resistance is displayed both internally and externally. Internally, the participants in a popular culture find relevance in the text that fulfils their desires to be who they want to be, rather than what the dominant power expects them to be. In other words, popular culture liberates the powerless to some extent from the oppression that comes from the top of the social hierarchy. It grants "semiotic

resistance” to refuse the dominant meanings, and produces opposing ones that serve the interests of the subordinate (Fiske, 1989a, p. 8). Externally, popular culture attracts the subordinate because it opens up a way to oppose the dominant power. It allows subordinates to show their identity and resist incorporation into the dominant power that attempts to discipline and control them.

The freedom to emancipate their oppressed desires by performing certain activities or rituals of popular culture grants fans an evasive pleasure. McDonnell (1994) claims that “pop culture is the repository of pleasure, of the forbidden, of gratification and freedom from inhibition” (p. 114). She suggests that popular culture allows children to create spaces where “they can be in control, where they can resist domination and maintain their own sense of identity” (*ibid.*, p. 127). The feeling of being in control rather than being controlled is also mentioned by readers who choose to read texts that are discouraged by adults. Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) conducted extensive research, looking at personal patterns of literacies among teenage Japanese readers of manga. They point out that manga is frowned upon at school; hence, there is enjoyment of secretly reading this forbidden text in class. Similarly, Gibson (2008) observes comics culture in Britain, and points out that “comics are read by younger readers in an act of reading as rebellion, to antagonise those who disapprove” (p. 113). Thus, the participation of popular culture is an active response of resistance to the dominant power.

The concept of opposition to the dominant power brings us back to Fiske (1989b) who claims that popular culture is contradictory to its core because it must encompass both the one to be resisted and the one resisting it. Meanings of popular culture are produced at the points of resistance where the top-down power meets the bottom-up power. The formation of popular culture is not to change the social system that subordinates particular groups of people. Rather, it is to improve the lot of the subordinate by offering them tactics in making do within and against the existing social system.

According to Fiske (1989a), evasion is the foundation of resistance. In objection to the control by the dominant power, the subordinate seeks for an experience of immersion in the popular text so as to block out their concerns and temporarily escape their frustrations and pressure in reality. In other words, the subordinate negotiates power through the experience of escapism. They gain pleasures from the loss of selves in the

text, as it allows them to escape an unsatisfying reality, and perhaps to experience temporary power that can only be imagined through the experience of the text. Radway's (1984) study of women reading romance stories shows that the participants spiritually escaped from their household chores and roles of mother and wife by entering another world which existed in reading itself. In this sense, Radway claims, reading "connotes a free space where they feel liberated from the need to perform duties that they otherwise willingly accept as their own" (*ibid.*, p. 93). The experience of escapism in their reading is a form of resistance to the dominant expectations of their roles in society. Wolk (2007) identifies similar experiences among young readers of Superhero comics. He discovered that these readers built their own fortresses of solitude during the experiences of immersion in the books. They isolated themselves from the rest of the world and identified with the superheroes that possessed great power. In this way, young readers resist being positioned as a marginalised and powerless group in society. They seek power in vicarious experiences of a fictional world. Although experiences of escapism are not limited to the reading of popular texts, the fact that popular texts fundamentally serve the interests of the subordinate group means that their targeted readers can easily find relevance in the texts, whilst resisting the dominant views that are imposed on them.

Fiske (1989b) argues that popular culture affords pleasures that consist of "offensive pleasures" of "resisting the structures of domination" and "producerly pleasures" of "making one's own culture" (p. 58). Producerly pleasures derive from the productivity of popular culture. Readers with different social experiences relate to a popular text in different ways. However, by connecting the textual to the social, they drive the productivity beyond textual control. That is to say, productive meanings are made at the reader-text interface, and popular texts may yield certain freedom for the reader to construct meanings that serve his/her own interest. Debates on values of popular culture texts tend to question their aesthetic quality in comparison to high culture texts. Whilst it remains a contentious issue whether popular culture texts can enable the cultivation of literary sensibilities and an aesthetic sense of language with their seeming crudeness and simplicity, fans' concern is with the elements of relevance to their social situations, and the pleasures of reproducing meanings that involve "day-to-day negotiations of unequal power" in society (*ibid.*, p. 53). Through this process, the reader may feel a sense of ownership and control over the text.

Fiske treats popular texts as media through which subordinates may resist but not subvert the dominant power. His definition of producerly pleasures is based on the satisfaction that participants achieve in finding relevance and meanings in texts that speak to them personally. Such meanings are usually in conflict with dominant views, and therefore regarded as valuable by the subordinate in allowing them to oppose the dominant power. In this sense, Fiske's producerly pleasures fundamentally lie in opposition between different social groups. For example, Bitz (2009) points out that achievements on the creation of comics allow fans to build up self-esteem, which can be personally meaningful and rewarding to fans, but often overlooked by the dominant power.

Popular culture is an expression of political struggles in societies where power is owned by those who possess the most capital. According to Swartz (1997), this concept derives from a Marxist belief that power is determined by possession of money and property. More importantly, it inspires Bourdieu's metaphor – cultural capital – which describes the relationship between cultural knowledge and political power in society. Swartz explains that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital covers a wide variety of resources, including facilities, awareness, preferences, institutions, and credentials that are related to culture. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital may exist in an objectified form, such as books, works of art, and scientific instruments that require specialised cultural abilities to use. Individuals and groups employ strategies to accumulate cultural capital in order to maintain or enhance their positions in the social world. Fiske (1992) points out that the accumulation of capital in popular culture can be best represented by fans' specialised knowledge of the particular culture text. For example, Brown (2012) noticed in his study that there is a hierarchy within a fan group based on individual fans' knowledge and experience of comics. The fans felt good when their expertise was recognised by people who asked them for their thoughts about the comic books that they read. They also enjoyed being seen as experts of superhero comics because of their clothing – the superhero T-shirts that indicated a higher level of popular cultural capital possessed by them in comparison to those possessed by more casual fans.

Fiske (1992) distinguishes the purpose of accumulating knowledge in official culture groups and popular culture groups – the former is to enable the members to discriminate critically between texts, whilst the latter is to enhance the members' power over, and the participation in the original text. Thus, a fan may memorise every line of a movie well

enough in order to rewrite it, rather than to distinguish it from another movie. Further, Freedman, Heijnen, Kallio-Tavin, Kárpáti and Papp (2013) point out that “insider knowledge” is about its cultures of practice. It is not simply knowledge about the text, but also about ways to practise it. One of the female Cosplayers (participants in costume play) that they interviewed said, “Reading books is okay for outsiders, but if you want to enter the culture, to really get inside, you have to do things and be things” (p. 110). Whilst knowledge of a particular culture gives people membership to enter this cultural group, the degree of knowledge that members have accumulated draws distinction between them. The different standards that fans use to evaluate each other lead to discrimination between the insiders.

Hills (2002a) also extrapolates Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in his study of fan cultures. He proposes an image of fans as ‘players’ who compete over their knowledge and access to the object of fandom and the status that they obtain in a social hierarchy of the fan community. According to him, fans ‘play’ under the same set of rules that are agreed to and recognised in their groups. Their competition is underlined by the ambition to draw out their distinction from others through building up expertise of a particular culture. Although competition and discrimination exist in fan groups, there is also a supportive culture present. In their ethnographic research of fans’ consumption of anime¹², Fennell and colleagues (2013) discovered that the fans helped each other gain knowledge of anime. They translated words, interpreted cultural issues and explained the clothes that characters wear. In this way, the more experienced and knowledgeable fans taught the less experienced ones knowledge of a particular anime. As the beginner fans accumulated their knowledge by talking to other fans, they gradually became more knowledgeable and qualified to be in the position to teach others. Thus, fans’ knowledge is converted to social capital as they exchange their expertise for a senior and respectable status in the fan community.

Ultimately, popular culture reflects a human desire for power in a social structure. It is a site for the subordinate to negotiate power, and to find satisfaction in meanings that they produce to serve their interests. Paradoxically, the relationship between fans is both competitive and supportive. They help each other to achieve knowledge of a popular culture text so as to sustain the collective culture of fandom. Meanwhile, they compete

¹² The data of fans’ perspectives in this study is based on two public English-language Internet forums, covering 2006 to 2009.

with each other by using their expertise to obtain a better social status in the community. This contradictory nature characterises manga fandom. In the next section, I will discuss fans' attachment to manga in social, psychological, and cultural aspects so as to probe the significance of manga fandom to its participants.

2.3.2 The Fan Culture of Manga

Reading affords private as well as collaborative pleasures. Arthur (2005) claims that popular culture texts encourage readers to engage in collaborative experiences so as to “extend their shared understandings and demonstrate their literacy expertise” (p. 178). In addition to deepening their knowledge and seeking recognition, fans get together to express their passion through having fan talk and performing rituals. These activities allow fans to circulate meanings of a popular culture text, through which they may attract more people to join the community. This phenomenon explains why children's reading behaviour of manga is especially influenced by their peers and siblings (Rosen, 1996; Bromley, 2000; Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005). Marsh and Millard (2000) use “shared bond” to describe the relationship between members in a popular culture group (p. 90). Fan communities are based on such bonds, which create an environment for the exchange of ideas and resources, and allow for psychological and social support to be sought from fellow fans.

The exercise of idea exchange between fans is partly sustained by the repetitive nature of popular culture texts – there is often a regular pattern of format, content and publication. Fiske (1989b) argues that seriality and repetition in popular texts allow them to easily fit into the routines of our everyday life. For example, soap operas are broadcast in series episodes that are updated regularly. The audience are obliged to follow the cycle of the release of each new episode, and eventually become accustomed to this. In return, their loyalty to this popular text is repaid with a continuous supply of fresh topics to talk about in the fan community. This is crucial to the development of a popular culture because meanings of a popular text have to derive from the practice of them. It is in the the participant's encounter with the texts that meanings are produced. Repetition allows a constant circulation of meanings among fans, which keeps the culture thriving. Similar to soap operas, manga is produced in a series of episodes on a regular basis. Readers who follow one or more manga magazines develop the routine of

getting the supply of new episodes weekly, biweekly or monthly. Between each new release, fans actively discuss and criticise what happened in the latest episode and predict future developments whilst awaiting the next episode.

The repetitive nature of manga attracts readers in ways similar to that of series fiction. Watson (2000) and Daniels (1996) both argue that readers' familiarity and intimacy with characters are key to their commitment to series fiction. The former allows them to gain confidence by being able to recognise and make predictions about familiar characters, whilst looking forward to being surprised by unfamiliar elements. The latter is developed and increased over time by observing the same characters, which makes each reading feel like a visit to old friends. Series novels usually offer closure at the end of each volume so as to give readers a sense of completeness, whilst also allowing "the renewal of acquaintance with familiar much-loved characters and situations" (Watson, 2004, p. 541). These features are identified in manga and their readers, except that there is seldom closure to an instalment of a manga series. This arrangement is meant to keep readers curious about what is to come in the next episode so as to maintain the readership over time. For example, Bitz (2009) noticed that many female members of his comic book club avidly waited for a new episode of their favourite manga series to be released. They fervently discussed the decisions that the heroine might make with other club members. They came to know the characters as "companions" about whom they had read over time (p. 33). Thus, manga ensures readers' loyalty not only through its repetitive patterns of publication and the regular updates of new materials, but also through the familiarity and intimacy that develop between readers and their favourite titles. More importantly, the attachment to manga that fans have developed over a long period of time strengthens their loyalty and feeds into the dynamics of fan communities, in which fans circulate meanings individually and collaboratively.

Meanings that fans make of manga are tied to the productivity of this popular culture. Fiske (1992) argues that participants in a popular culture are producers rather than recipients of the culture and the meanings within it. He suggests that there are three types of productivity in popular cultures – *semiotic productivity*, *enunciative productivity*, and *textual productivity*. *Semiotic productivity* involves the making of meanings out of one's social identities and experiences from semiotic resources of the cultural commodity. For example, Madeley's (2010) study with manga readers in Canada shows that female readers enjoy reading about 'pretty boys' in manga because

they are “strong and powerful, yet sensitive and vulnerable” (p. 14). These boys embody a mix of masculine strength and feminine sensitivity. One of the participants says, “They [manga] show more emotion than American characters-comic superheroes. They [manga] show males that cry” (p. 13). McLelland (2010) believes that the popularity of boys’ love stories among female readers is because these androgynous figures own both men’s power and women’s gentleness. They allow female readers to project their ideal selves on the character. In this way, the female readers could share equal power in a heterosexual relationship in an imaginary sense. By identifying themselves with the effeminate boys, the female readers produce meanings that speak to them personally because of their own struggles for power in society.

Enunciative productivity is the use of *semiotic productivity* in a public form.

Participants speak about and share meanings that are specific to them within a face-to-face or oral culture. For example, manga fans often get together in school or on forums to share their reflections on the latest episode after reading it. Apart from oral enunciation, lifestyles that fans choose in relation to their passion for a popular culture text is also a form of enunciative productivity. For example, wearing T-shirts with prints of manga characters, using manga spin-off products, playing manga-adopted games, visiting conventions and online forums, and joining in Cosplay (costume play) are ways that fans enunciate the semiotic meanings that they make from manga. Among these activities, Cosplay is a ritualised activity that allows fans to circulate meanings with their bodies.

Cosplay usually happens in social settings like conventions. Fans dress up to imitate characters from manga, anime or video games. Likeness and aesthetics are the key focus of imitation. This activity renders personal and public pleasures. In terms of the former, Cosplay is an expression of an individual fan’s passion towards particular characters that allows fans to enact their imagined identities using costumes. Cosplayers enjoy a sense of agency for being able to ‘bring to life’ characters that are fictional and unreal (Gin, 2011). The imitation of a fictional character gives fans an avenue to try out a different identity. Moreover, it provides fans a way to emancipate their desires by subverting social and gender norms. For example, Cosplay can take the form of ‘Crossplay’, in which the Cosplayer masquerades as a character that is at odds with the Cosplayer’s gender (Winge, 2006). Thus, Cosplayers convert their bodies into an avenue where their subjectivity is reconstructed. Audience is an essential element in this

ritual. Winge asserts that Cosplay would be pointless if it were not for the spectators who often “use applause, verbal cues, and laughter to encourage [C]osplayers to perform and interact” (*ibid.*, p. 69). More importantly, it facilitates social interactions for fans to meet people who share the same passion or appreciate the same popular culture text. Lunning (2011) argues that Cosplay is a way fans seek for collective identities. This ritual not only offers fans opportunities to explore their own identities, but also to form fellowship with people who agree or appreciate the meanings of manga/ anime to them. Through the performance of Cosplay, fans publicly assert their affective relationships with manga/anime. This activity reflects fans’ personal values and announces their status in the fan community (as serious fans). Thus, Hills (2002a) argues that Cosplayers turn their bodies into commodities that have “private or cultic use-value” as well as “communal and cultural exchange-value” (p.170). They use the masquerade of imagined characters to enunciate their real-life identities and their ideal identities. Through disguising and displaying, fans materialise their bodies in exchange for social benefits.

Textual productivity is the activity of producing fan-based texts. Drawing and creating fan manga¹³ are common practices of committed fans. These fan-based texts are not produced for money, but to circulate meanings and pleasures. Bitz (2009) finds that the students in his comics clubs (a lot of them are manga fans) produced works that reflected stories of their lives. The female members found that the creation of manga was an outlet for their personal creativity and expression. They reflected on their own personal and cultural identities, and used the space of creation to challenge stereotypes. In fact, manga fans often self-publish their works to facilitate interaction with other fans (Galbraith, 2011). They circulate their works within their fan group in schools, on on-line forums or sell them at comics/animation conventions. In this way, *textual productivity* of a popular culture reflects its *enunciative productivity* both on personal and public levels. Fans produce or reproduce manga stories that suit their own interests. On a personal level, they are able to express beliefs and desires that may be forbidden in reality. On a public level, their works get to circulate the reproduced meanings among fans. In addition, the ability and opportunity to show their passion and expertise through self-produced works induce psychological benefits. For example, Gibson (2007b) finds that a group of teenage readers who were not previously being seen as outstanding

¹³ Fan-manga stand as a separate genre called *dōjinshi*.

pupils changed their perception of themselves through developing their own manga – they realised that they had knowledge and skills. The process of creating fan-based texts allows fans to explore themselves, to gain a sense of achievement, and to build up self-confidence.

Fiske's (1989b) conceptualisation of productivity within popular culture centres on the meanings that fans construct of their selves, social identities and social relations. These meanings are key to young readers' participation in the popular culture of manga. Scholars who study young people's popular culture have found that many children gain self-confidence, establish self-identity, and seek for friendship in their peer groups where the members share the same interests (McDonnell, 1994; Lusted, 2000; Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005; Marsh, 2005; Gibson, 2007b; Freedman *et al.*, 2013). Compared to classic literature, comics are often regarded as low literature. As adults' prejudice towards comics can influence how children see their books, those who enjoy reading comics may feel that their hobby is inferior or less legitimate. In her study of Malaysian undergraduates' motivation for reading, Chong (2011) found that one of the interviewees did not consider her enjoyment of comics as an act of reading and was embarrassed to discuss it. The sense of shame for being a lover of comics can be washed away when the reader meets other people who recognise this interest. Bitz (2009) discovered that the students in his comic book clubs gained self-confidence and comfort by being accepted by other members. They supported each other's interest in comics by exchanging their reflections on the stories they read and giving feedback on each other's art and writing works. Thus, fans develop "embattled fellowship" (Wolk, 2007, p. 64) which strengthens their shared interest in an 'illegitimate' culture text, and provides a sense of belonging.

There is a close connection between young people's self-identity and the groups of people that they associate with. Steinberg (2008) claims, "adolescents judge one another on the basis of the company they keep, and they become branded on the basis of whom they hang out with" (p. 178). According to him, the groups that adolescents are associated with are "crowds". They serve as reference groups that provide their members with an identity in the eyes of other adolescents. Different from crowds, cliques are small groups that provide closer friendship and the main social context within which adolescents interact with each other. Fan communities of manga can be seen as crowds that teenagers choose to be associated with because of a shared interest.

For example, participants of manga book clubs, online forums, and conventions form individual fan communities. It is also common that teenagers introduce manga to other members in their established cliques. By cultivating a shared interest, they strengthen their friendship. For example, Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) find that readers of manga maintain and deepen their friendship with people in their cliques by sharing and discussing manga. They swapped manga at school and encouraged each other to read the same type of manga so as to have common topics to talk about. This finding leads to their claim that “manga reading is communally initiated and communally maintained” (p. 272). That is to say, fans’ commitment to manga is not simply a result of private pleasures that they gain from reading the text, but also of the social benefits that manga bring to their pursuit of identity and friendship.

The sense of identity constructs the image of self in relation to others. Fan identity for British readers not only involves a relational comparison between fans and non-fans within the national context, but also poses a challenge to British readers’ national identity, as they embrace and prioritise the exotic culture of manga over the local culture. Hills (2002b) points out that Western fans play down and deactivate their national identity as they develop a wider interest in Japan and the Japanese culture on the basis of their manga/anime fandom. However, he also argues that Western fans implicitly or explicitly perform their national identity when they draw on stereotypical connotation of Japaneseness, including technologised power, flawed heroism and fanaticism. By doing so, they legitimatise manga/ anime fan culture as transcultural. On the one hand, they support this fandom’s cultural values by pointing out national differences; that is, elements of ‘otherness’ in their eyes. Fans infuse ‘self’ and ‘otherness’ into a new identity of *otaku*. Therefore, according to Hills, “The term ‘otaku’ becomes, in its transcultural circulation, a ‘shifter’: a mobile sign of self and other, simultaneously exoticising and legitimating the self-as-other and the other-as-self” (p. 13).

On the other hand, there are relative homologies that can pass across national contexts, and thus seem to obscure social and cultural distinctions. Apart from basic morality and emotions that are shared in texts and readers’ day-to-day experiences across borders, the passion for a fan culture and disapproval from the hegemonic power are experienced by fans regardless of their nationalities. Hills argues that the nature of marginalisation forms subcultural homologies that pass through nations and become transcultural

homologies. Thus, the common cultural marginalisation of fandom marks out the differences of fan cultures from hegemonic cultures, whilst diminishing national differences. Hills says, “The dimension of national identity is thus tactically deactivated or backgrounded in such practices, rather than forming a powerful/determining context to fans’ readings, pleasures and attachments” (*ibid.*, p. 13).

Whilst it is true that the homology of marginalisation of subcultures seems to bridge the gap between fan communities across nations, it is arguable whether the transcultural homology would necessarily weaken readers’ national identity when they encounter exoticness/ otherness during the process of reading. Bruner (1990) asserts that the construction of ‘self’ is never separated from others. It always carries a perception of ‘others’. In other words, Western readers’ perception and interpretation of Japaneseness or otherness in anime and manga always reveal aspects about themselves, whether or not they are aware of it. Their enjoyment of anime and manga is closely linked to the perceived elements of exoticism. The identity of transcultural fans, thus, includes dual dimensions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ that are formed nationally and internationally. In the national context, the fan identity of manga is formed based on the distinction between people who share or do not share the same interest in this popular culture text. In the international context, the fan identity of manga involves the recognition and appreciation of the difference between the local culture and the Japanese culture.

Manga reading is usually associated with collaborative activities. Fans are drawn together to share their passion and to enhance their knowledge of this particular text. Socially, a fan group of manga provides friendships, which are maintained by shared topics and interests. Psychologically, fans gain pleasures from producing meanings out of a text in relation to their own social situation. In addition, their participation in a fan group allows them to achieve a sense of belonging. Culturally, readers in Western countries form a transcultural identity as they embrace the exotic culture of manga and appreciate its differences from the local culture.

Conclusion

The participation in fandom itself is an expression of fans' passion for a form of popular culture. As popular culture is, by nature, in opposition to highbrow culture, it renders the participants' evasive pleasures as they resist the dominant power's control over them, through their 'rebellious' participation in a popular culture text or the experience of escapism with the text. Ironically, fans are not able to escape being trapped in another hierarchical system within a fan community where fans compete with each other for a better social status by using their accumulated knowledge of the popular culture text. However, fans also support each other's interest, which is often in opposition to the dominant power's. This self-conflicting culture exists in manga fandom where members develop companionship as well as rivalry. Manga fans participate in collective activities, such as fan talk, conventions, and Cosplay, to express their passion and seek recognition. To teenage readers, participating in manga fandom brings both social and psychological benefits that serve their needs at this particular stage of their lives. To Western readers, participation in manga fandom induces a transcultural identity, which reflects the success of manga in the overseas market, and leads to interesting questions of how Western fans perceive and prioritise the local culture and the foreign culture.

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of manga in terms of its historical development, storytelling styles, narrative structure, embedded ideologies in *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga, and the mutual influence of Japanese and Western culture. I have also discussed the dynamic relationships between readers and manga, drawing on theories of reader response, literary emotions, comics studies, and cinematic studies. In addition, I have examined readers' engagement with manga in their practices of fandom, which allows the negotiation of social power, grants a sense of identity, and provides the experience of a transcultural text. In the next chapter, I will introduce the methodology that I adopted in this study to explore the issues that I have discussed thus far.



This drawing is Fiona's response to *Naruto* volume 6.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To understand young British readers' engagement with manga, I posed three research questions at the end of the introductory chapter:

1. What engages young British readers with manga in terms of literary and aesthetic qualities?
2. How do readers respond to manga, both cognitively and affectively?
3. What are the social and cultural dimensions of young British readers' engagement with manga?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I conducted an empirical study that was carefully designed under a theoretical framework for qualitative research. These methods allowed me to collect insiders' perspectives and evaluate them systematically. In this chapter, I will explain why I selected certain approaches with which to conduct this study, how these approaches worked at the research sites, and how I analysed the data collected. In addition, I will discuss the limitations identified regarding the methods that I used, and reflect on ethical concerns.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Having observed the cultural phenomenon of manga among young people in the UK, I started to think about two ontological questions that are concerned with ‘what knowledge is’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 2005; Taber, 2007):

1. What is the nature of manga?
2. What is my knowledge of young readers?

Positivists believe that reality lies in observable characteristics of things, while *relativists* argue that reality also involves different sets of meanings that people bring to the world (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Robson, 2002). As this research project is particularly concerned with each participant’s subjective experience with manga, I have chosen relativism as the research lens through which I investigate the relationship between texts and readers.

In order to pursue knowledge, researchers deal with *epistemology* by asking, ‘how’ we know what we know (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 2005; Taber, 2007). Therefore, I asked:

How can we seek knowledge of manga and its readers?

In consideration of *epistemology*, social researchers believe that reality is not simply what people perceive, but also what they construct through experiences and interpretations that are culturally defined and historically situated. Based on this belief, *constructionism* emerges in opposition to *objectivism* (Schwandt, 2000; Crotty, 2005; Sarantakos, 2005). The former emphasises that human intervention should always be taken into consideration when social research is conducted. The process of construction and reconstruction of meanings relies on personal inputs that are affected by socio-cultural interaction between people and their own environment (Robson, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 2005). In order to understand meanings that young readers construct from reading manga and interacting with other people in a readers’ community, I decided to take up a stance of *constructionism* as a researcher.

Constructionism is usually linked with *interpretivism*. Researchers taking this theoretical perspective emphasise that meaning is constructed on the basis of cultural and historical interpretation (Crotty, 2005; Sarantakos, 2005). People perceive reality by experiencing the world and interpreting their experience. This experience is subject to individual factors as well as cultural and historical contexts. Crotty (2005) reminds us that culture teaches us how to see the world. In conducting this study, I am aware that the manner in which data is interpreted and presented can be subject to my personal beliefs, which have been formed by my theoretical knowledge and personal experiences of manga. Moreover, the data that I collected can only present views from a particular group of readers who have their own personal and cultural backgrounds. However, this research project set out to explore the subjective elements regarding meanings that individual readers construct from their own reading of manga. Walliman (2006) points out that an interpretivist observes a phenomenon from inside the system in which the phenomenon exists. The interpretivist is bound to the human situation that is being studied. I tried to observe the cultural phenomenon of manga in the UK by putting myself in a group of young readers and listening to their voices. Through investigating young British readers' views of manga, I aim to present a report in which meaning is constructed both by the child readers and myself. In the next section, I will expound how I conducted this investigation.

3.2 An Overview of the Research Design

In order to explore and seek understanding of the cultural phenomenon of manga and its participants in the UK, a qualitative approach was adopted to examine qualities, processes, and meanings that cannot be measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Unlike quantitative researchers who strive to carry out investigation in a "value-free framework" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 17), qualitative researchers value subjective comments from the participant. A qualitative study is intrinsically exploratory and explanatory. It intends to provide an understanding of perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and motivations from a stance that is close to the participant's (subject's) perspective (Walker, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). With the same intention, I used a qualitative approach to conduct a case study. Data collected in this study comprises group and individual interviews, along with students' reading

journals that are designed to allow reflective feedback. Sixteen students from two secondary schools in London were invited to participate in this study, with each student receiving two manga to read. The students were put into four groups, and 12 group interviews were conducted in total (three interviews with each group). Following this, each student received an individual interview, leading to 15 individual interviews (one student dropped out in the middle of the study). The investigation was driven by the aim of presenting young readers' engagement with manga in literary, social, and cultural aspects. These aspects became the main themes that guided my analysis of the corpus and the collected data. An overview of the research design is shown in the following diagram (Figure 2):

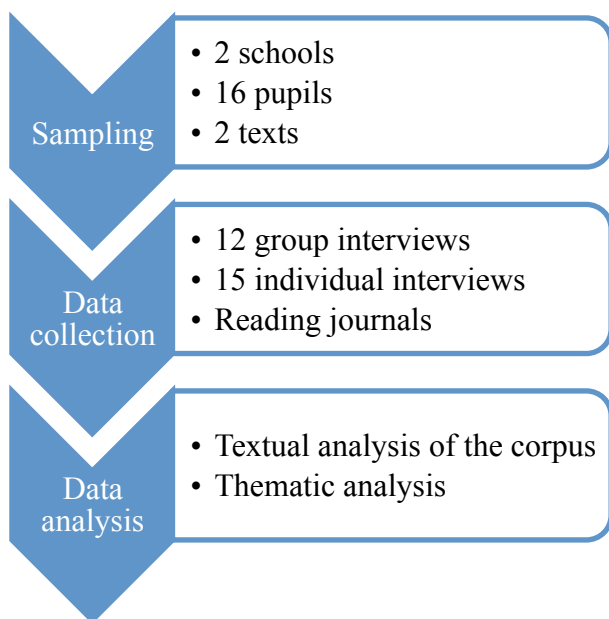


Figure 2. An overview of the research design

The rationale behind this research design will be explained in detail in the following sections.

The research design was refined by three pilot studies that had been conducted since 2011. The first pilot study was an individual interview with a keen 12-year-old manga reader, which aimed to generate and formulate ideas for the main study. The second pilot study was conducted in a school setting where I met four keen manga readers who were between the ages of 12 and 15. I had two group interviews with all the students, and a pair interview with the boys and the girls respectively. The goal of this study was

to test the research design of the main study. The third pilot study was an individual interview with a keen 15-year-old manga reader. The aim of this meeting was to follow up on themes emerging in the previous pilot study. A summary of these pilot studies and the research findings is included in *Appendix A*.

Some of the themes that I explored in the main study were based on the findings in these pilot studies. For example, the participant in the first pilot study showed particular interest in the way emotions are presented in manga. This led me to investigate particular artistic techniques such as lines, symbols, background, and cinematic framing. The participants in the second and the third pilot studies particularly mentioned *Chibi*-style humour when they talked about the funny parts of the stories and manga-specific elements. In addition to this, they also pointed out that there were often unanswered questions in manga narratives, which kept their interest and motivated them to read on. These findings drew my attention to the literary gaps that manga artists carefully insert to invite the reader to actively participate in constructing meanings of the text. In terms of research methods, the second pilot study gave me the opportunity to test the envisaged research design. For example, I was able to confirm the benefits of grouping the participants by gender, using a camera to collect data, and including a third manga of the participants' own choices in the discussions. In addition, the original plan to recruit participants from the age group of 13 had to change due to the difficulty in recruiting suitable participants. Therefore, I extended the age range of the participants to cover ages 11 to 15; that is, Years 7 to 10 in the UK education system. The three pilot studies also helped me refine and refocus the interview questions that I used in the main study. In the following discussion, I will focus on the final decisions made to carry out the main study and the rationale behind these decisions.

3.2.1 Case Study

This study was carried out as a case study, which allowed an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2009). In order to gain a richer understanding of a phenomenon, researchers usually explore one or more cases in a real-life context in which a boundary is drawn for the specific case(s) and for the special phenomenon being studied. The boundaries that I drew during the process of sampling included the participants' ages and experiences of manga. This

study was carried out as a *multiple case study* in order to capture as many perspectives as possible. According to Yin, a multiple case study contains more than one case and it follows a “replication” design – the conditions of the original experiment are replicated and one or two experimental conditions are altered to see whether the original findings can still be replicated in the other cases (*ibid.*, p. 53). The advantages of conducting a multiple case study are that the researcher does not risk putting all their eggs in one basket. Robson (2002) also suggests that with the understanding of multiple cases, better theorising about a larger collection of cases may be possible. In consideration of these substantial advantages, I decided to sample students from two schools. In each school, I recruited eight students with genders represented equally, and divided them into two groups by gender. Each group and each individual participant is treated as a case in this study. The following diagram provides an overview of the sampling (Figure 3):

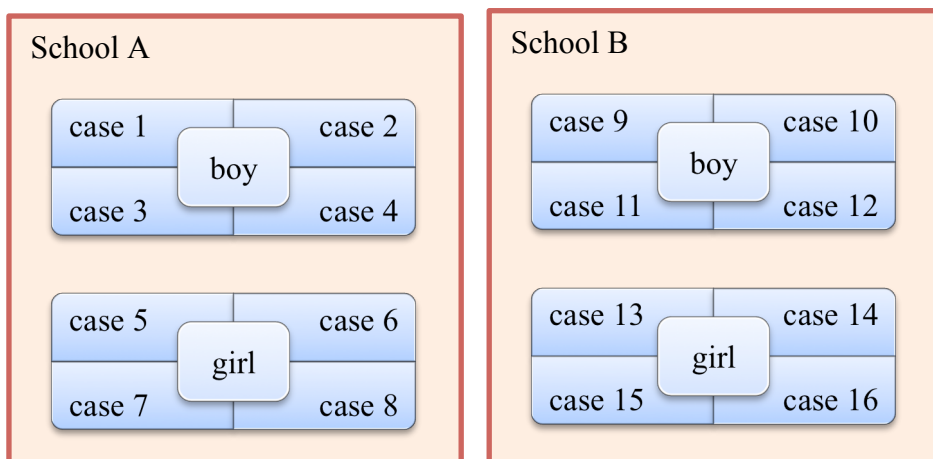


Figure 3. An overview of sampling

The nature of a case study is believed to be highly reflective of the local meanings; that is, the insider’s views. However, it is this very nature that has been criticised for the lack of a scientifically objective view (Stake, 2000), and the unreliability of drawing a general conclusion from a single case or a small number of cases (Taber, 2007). As the goal of a case study in qualitative research is to explore individual cases in depth, it is necessary and defensible for the researcher to use a smaller number of samples than would be needed for quantitative work. Stake (1995) asserts, “The purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (p. 448). However, with the in-depth investigation of the limited cases, the researcher may be able to shed light on the understanding of a bigger population and a general phenomenon. I am aware that

my study is not meant to be universally representative, but reflects particular cases from two schools. However, with the insider's views from the selected cases, I hope to bring new understanding of a particular cultural phenomenon of manga that has been observed among young people in the UK. In the next section, I will explain the sampling process of the schools, the participants, and the corpus texts.

3.2.2 Sampling – Schools, Pupils, and Texts

The methods of *opportunistic sampling* and *snowball sampling* (Tracy, 2013) were adopted when I selected schools. According to Tracy, *opportunistic sampling* is also called *convenient sampling*. With this method, samples are chosen because they are convenient, easy, and relatively inexpensive to access. Another method, *snowball sampling*, is used to reach difficult-to-access or hidden population. The researcher first identifies one or more participants, and then asks the participant(s) to suggest a colleague, a friend, or a family member that is suitable to join the study. I first gained access to one academy school in London through an acquaintance. The librarian in this school had introduced manga to the library because of the students' requests. Through this librarian, I was introduced to another two librarians who also supported students' interest in non-mainstream reading, including manga. These two librarians worked in another two academy schools in London. All three schools encouraged students to read broadly. They also had substantial collections of manga in the libraries and held manga clubs where keen readers could get together to discuss or draw manga. In these libraries, excellent works from 'manga drawing competitions' were hung on the walls. I chose one of the three schools to conduct my second pilot study, and the other two to conduct the main study. The two schools are located in North West London and South East London respectively. In both schools, the number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much higher than in most schools of this size, and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average. However, all the students who participated in this study grew up in the UK, except for one student who moved to this country two years before the study was conducted. Although these students were from immigrant families, they had received substantial cultural influence from Britain, including their participation in the manga youth subculture.

When selecting the participants, *purposive sampling* was used to identify eligible participants who met the needs of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Walker, 1985; Morgan, 1998). I selected participants mainly by their experiences of manga. This method seeks to “maximise the depth and richness of the data to address the research question” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). To identify the most suitable participants, I asked the librarians to distribute a ‘screening questionnaire’ (Hennink, 2007) to students who have shown interest in reading manga (see *Appendix B*). This questionnaire asked students to give information about the history and frequency of their reading of manga, and to list their favourite titles and the titles that they were reading at the moment. In addition to questions that identified the students’ eligibility for this study, this questionnaire also investigated students’ general reading habits and their interest in participating in the study. I identified keen and experienced readers of manga by the number of manga that they had read and the depth of the answers that they provided in explaining why they liked certain manga.

There were two reasons for choosing experienced readers to participate in this study. First, a case study requires longer participation (Yin, 2009), and thus the participants’ interest in manga was crucial in sustaining their attendance and their willingness to make contributions to the discussions. Second, as this study aims to explore what attracts readers to manga and how they appreciate manga’s literary, social, and cultural values, it is necessary that participants not only show great interest in manga, but also have substantial experience of it. However, during the process of recruiting participants, I encountered a difficulty in balancing the male participants’ and female participants’ overall experiences of manga. According to the librarians, there was a bigger population of male pupils than female pupils in both schools. The unbalanced gender population may have partly caused an unbalanced gender ratio among manga readers in these schools. Therefore, it was easier to recruit experienced male readers than female readers. Although the female students that were chosen in the end also had certain experiences of manga, the average number of manga that they had read was much smaller in comparison to the male participants. As a result, there was more interaction between the students in the male groups during the discussions than in the female groups. Moreover, discussions in one of the female groups tended to be dominated by a single girl who was more experienced with manga than the others in her group. I often had to encourage the other girls to share their ideas, as they seemed to feel less confident in the presence of someone who knew much more about manga than they did.

I recruited participants from students in Years 7 to 10 because the librarians had observed that it was the most concentrated group of manga readers in their schools. In addition, the second pilot study that I conducted earlier in another school shows that age difference between participants in these Year groups did not have obvious effects on group dynamics and discussions. It seemed to me that during the pilot study, the students' participation in the group discussions had more to do with their experience and knowledge of manga than with age. I recruited four participants of each gender from each school, so as to ensure that if one participant was absent, the other three participants could still form a group. I decided to divide the participants into groups by gender for two reasons. Firstly, as the two chosen texts are marketed at readers of different gender groups, I was concerned that the participants might feel self-conscious when talking about a text that was targeted at readers of the opposite gender or when talking about more sensitive issues¹⁴. Secondly, researchers have found that male speakers tend to use more dominant speaking styles than females do in a group (Tannen, 2001). Therefore, I decided to separate participants by gender so as to hear equal views from both genders and to reduce any possible discomfort that the participants may feel when sharing their personal opinions and feelings. An overview of the participants (names are pseudonyms) is as follows (Table 5):

Table 5. An overview of the participants

School A (located in North West London)								
Groups	Male				Female			
Pupils	Olaf	Travis	Arthur	Harris	Elsa	Becky	Rena	Hilary
Years	10	10	9	8	9	7	8	8

School B (located in South East London)								
Groups	Male				Female			
Pupils	Wesley	Alvin	Alistair	Abel	Fiona	Ophelia	Lois	Zoe
Years	7	9	8	9	9	9	7	9

¹⁴ Although the two boys in the second pilot study showed liberal attitude toward *shōjo* manga during the group interview, one boy that I met in the same school said that *Vampire Knight* was girly and expressed disdain. In addition, when I performed pair interviews with the two boys and girls separately, they all raised sex issues in manga, while none of them mentioned these issues in the group interviews.

I decided to use one *shōnen* manga and one *shōjo* manga as the corpus texts because they were the two demographic categories that are aimed at teenage readers. In order to increase the richness of data, I decided to choose titles that had gained wide popularity, not only in Japan, but also in the overseas markets. As manga is characterised by certain artistic styles and common themes that are shared within or across demographics (see 2.1.2 *Shōnen Manga and Shōjo Manga*), I looked for titles that can represent the mainstream *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga in terms of these characteristics. Having consulted a number of fan-based websites and the official website of VIZ Media, which leads the publication and distribution of manga in English speaking countries, I selected *Naruto* (*shōnen* manga) (Kishimoto, 2011) and *Vampire Knight* (*shōjo* manga) (Hino, 2010) to be the research corpora. Written by Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto* has been serialised in the manga magazine, *Shonen Jump*, for 15 years, producing 700 episodes in 72 volumes. *Vampire Knight* is written by Matsuri Hino, and has been serialised in the manga magazine, *Shojo Beat*, for 9 years, at total of 93 episodes in 19 volumes. Both series have been translated into English, and made into anime TV series for both local and overseas audiences. In addition to popularity, there are two main reasons for choosing these two manga. Firstly, they belong to the mainstream genres in *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga respectively – *Naruto* is an action story and *Vampire Knight* is a romance one. Secondly, the themes potentially invite discussions on cultural issues – *Naruto* tells stories of ninjas, which exist in Japanese history and folklore; *Vampire Knight* tells stories of vampires, which are historically known as a Western European superstition and the theme has been adopted in various forms in literature. I chose the two manga to initiate discussions of Japanese-specific elements in manga and the mixed elements of Japanese and Western cultures.

From each of the two manga series, I chose a volume that could well represent the artistic and literary techniques that I intended to explore in terms of how they might or might not engage readers. For example, in terms of artistic skills, the chosen volumes have good use of cinematic techniques, emotional symbols, expressionistic backgrounds and *Chibi* drawings. With regard to the common topics shared in mainstream *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga, both titles encourage the idea of sacrificing one's own benefits for the sake of friendship or romance. In addition to this, they present female characters that are given power to fight, but ironically all have to be rescued at the end.

In order to generate appropriate interview questions to understand how participants might respond to the techniques that manga artists deploy to engage readers, and the ideologies that are embedded in the stories, I performed a textual analysis of the chosen texts before the stage of data collection. The analysis focuses on the stylistic and narrative features of the two corpus texts, as they are essential elements in the engaging power of manga. The results of the analysis will be presented in the next section.

3.2.3 Textual Analysis of the Corpus – *Naruto* Vol. 6 and *Vampire Knight* Vol. 4

3.2.3.1 Synopsis

Naruto volume 6 (*N6*) continues the previous story of the *Chūnin* Selection Exam that the hero, Naruto, and his teammates, Sasuke (male) and Sakura (female), are participating in. This exam tests the ninjas' abilities to determine if they can be promoted to *Chūnin* (the middle rank of ninja). The story has progressed to the second stage of the exam. Each ninja team is given one scroll. Their task is to steal the second scroll from another team using any means necessary, and to reach the tower in the centre of the Forest of Death with both scrolls. In this volume, Naruto's team meets the villain, Orochimaru. In order to save his life and his teammates', Sasuke decides to give up the scroll that his team holds. However, Naruto stops Sasuke and tries to fight Orochimaru. After Naruto is defeated, Orochimaru puts a curse mark on Sasuke's neck, which then leaves him unconscious. Having obtained the scroll from Naruto's team, Orochimaru leaves, and Sakura fights other enemies alone to defend her two unconscious teammates.

Vampire Knight volume 4 (*VK4*) continues the story of the ambiguous relationships between the heroine, Yuki, and the two male characters, Zero and Kaname. Yuki and Zero are the guardians of the Day Class in Cross Academy. Their responsibility is to protect human students in Day Class from vampire students in the Night Class. Zero was previously a human, but has been turned into a vampire after a childhood tragedy. As an ex-human, he will eventually go mad with his blood lust. Kaname, the president of Night Class, is known as a pureblood vampire who owns the supreme power. In this

volume, Yuki finds out that Shizuka is the vampire who took Zero's human life and killed his family. In order to pay the price for a solution to save Zero, Yuki agrees to offer Shizuka her own blood. Zero arrives in time to stop Shizuka from sinking her fangs into Yuki. In the middle of the fight, Zero's long lost twin brother shows up to fight for Shizuka. Shizuka leaves the fight but then gets killed by Kaname who claims that he can do anything for the sake of the one he loves.

3.2.3.2 Character Archetypes

Like most protagonists in mainstream manga, Naruto and Yuki are portrayed with personal qualities of courage and perseverance. These dispositions are essential for manga heroes and heroines to deal with their personal struggles and external challenges. Their shared motto is, 'Where there is a will, there is a way.' It is also a stereotype of protagonists in manga that the hero and the heroine are more concerned with the well-being of others than of themselves. It is this quality of altruism that motivates the hero to bring peace to the world and the heroine to save her lover. In fact, the willingness to save others at the cost of one's own benefits or even life defines a 'good character' in manga. Any character who is not a villain has to be prepared for a certain degree of self-sacrifice for the sake of friendship or love. In *N6*, Naruto prioritises his task before his life. Instead of giving up the scroll, he chooses to risk his life fighting a seemingly invincible villain. Before he is defeated, he manages to save his friend, Sasuke, whom he teases as being a 'coward' for trying to run away from the villain. Similarly, in *VK4*, Yuki does not show a bit trace of fear in front of the powerful vampire, Shizuka. When she is offered a choice of sacrificing her own life or Kaname's in exchange for a solution to save Zero, she makes a decision that can save both of the men she cares for.

It is not uncommon that a character in manga struggles with the memory of a damaged past and the ambiguity of self-identity. These struggles motivate the character to 'do something good' or 'be good at something' in order to prove his/her personal values. *N6* mentions Sasuke's childhood trauma in a short flashback. The recollection of the massacre that happened to his entire clan spurs him on to face the dangerous enemy. Similarly, *VK4* includes a backstory of the tragedy that happened to Zero's family when he was young. The sorrow over his dead parents and missing brother drives Zero to train himself up to hunt this vampire murderer, Shizuka. Like these two characters,

Naruto and Yuki share a similarly devastating past, although it is not shown in the chosen volumes.

A shadowed past is not exclusive to good characters. Villains in manga are often given the chance to talk about their distress so as to make an attempt at justifying their brutality or to ask for empathy from the reader. The backstory of the tragedy in Zero's family portrays Shizuka as a killer in deep sorrow. The tears that stream down her face show her mourning for the death of her lover who was killed by Zero's parents. Similarly, Orochimaru is given this opportunity to recount his tragic past, although not in the chosen volume for this study. Allowing the villainous characters to speak for themselves, manga artists seem to challenge readers to re-examine stereotypes of the society represented.

Manga may not only challenge the stereotypes of villains, but also gender roles. The images of heroines in modern manga are seldom completely weak or passive. They are empowered with the ability to fight in battle or the confidence to express themselves in front of the male characters. Paradoxically though, these heroines seldom escape the destiny of awaiting their princes to deliver rescue. In *N6*, both of the female characters, Sakura and Ino, are fighting ninjas, and neither of them tries to hide their affection for Sasuke. In *VK4*, Yuki is a student warrior who owns a special weapon to fight vampires. However, neither Sakura nor Yuki is given any opportunity to prove their abilities. Instead of joining Naruto and Sasuke in the fight against Orochimaru, Sakura simply gives her teammates warning or encouragement, as if she was a cheerleader. Occasionally, she leads the audience's emotions by showing expressions of fear or shock. Even when she eventually has to fight to protect her unconscious teammates, she is not given as much space to demonstrate her ninja techniques as the male characters. In fact, she is depicted trying to 'bite' into her enemy's arm when her rescue team arrives. Similarly, Yuki's warrior dress does not give her any real power. She is given a chance to show her weapon, but not to use it. She is supposed to save Zero's life, but ends up being saved by him. These paradoxical heroines show both male and female manga artists' attempt to break gender stereotypes and their failure to completely give up the traditional social expectations of women.

3.2.3.3 Cinematic Techniques

Panels function as cinematic shots. Each choice of angle, perspective, and distance in presenting a picture serves an intention to tell the story in a particular way. According to Eisner (2008), high angles give a feeling of superiority and low angles render a feeling of inferiority. A character positioned in a high angle implies that he/she is advantaged, whereas the one in the low angle is disadvantaged. In the following panel (Figure 4), Orochimaru is looking down at Sasuke and Sakura. It shows that Orochimaru is in power whilst Sasuke and Sakura are under his power.



Figure 4. Cinematic technique – angle, *N6*, p. 32 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

Perspective describes the point from which the audience views the scene. A third-person point of view usually gives an objective perspective and a more detached sense, as the audience is watching from an outsider's (the narrator's) view rather than from that of an insider (a character). By contrast, a first-person point of view shows the audience things from a particular character's perspective. Film theories categorise this as a 'subject shot' which attempts to encourage identification with the character (Walker & Chaplin, 1997). The image above (Figure 4) is a subject shot that shows what Sakura and Sasuke see. The reader is aligned with the two characters' views, which can make the reader feel as if he/she was the one being threatened by Orochimaru. The direct gaze from Orochimaru further intensifies the tension, as the gaze seems to demand a direct response from the audience.

Alternating the distance of shots in manga enables artists to focus readers' attention on specific information or details. Whilst long shots often give information about the

setting, middle shots describe the relationship between characters. Close shots allow close observation of a character's facial expression or action that communicates the character's feelings and thoughts (Nodelman, 1988). I have noticed that a large amount of panels in the two chosen texts are presented through close shots. Among the 984 panels in *N6*, almost a third of the total panels are close shots (Figure 5), whilst among the 798 panels in *VK4*, almost half are close shots (Figure 6).

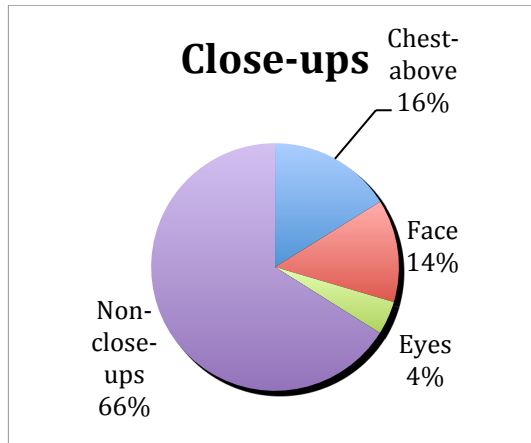


Figure 5. Close-ups in *N6*

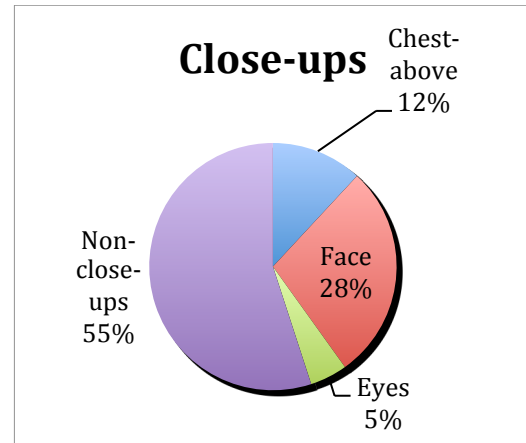


Figure 6. Close-ups in *VK4*

These figures show that manga artists lavish details on the character's facial expressions with close shots. The fact that more close shots are adopted in *VK4* than in *N6* reflects the focus of romance stories on the character's psychological development and internal struggles. It is also noticeable that extreme close shots on 'face only' and 'eyes only' comprise a significant amount of panels in both books. This technique is adopted less in mainstream movies due to disturbing feelings that may result from overly intimate distances. However, the fictionality of characters in manga seems to render a safe distance that allows the reader to inspect the character's expressions closely and possibly even to empathise with the character. Whilst close shots are typically used to depict emotions, it is important to note that manga artists also tend to employ a number of close shots to break up a character's action to individualise the details.

One double spread in *N6* presents seven continuous close-ups that show the same emotion on different characters' faces (Figure 7). This repetitive information intensifies the feeling of surprise and the tension at this particular moment in the story.



Figure 7. Close-ups of a repetitive emotion, *N6*, pp. 164-165 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

In *VK4*, two close-ups of Zero's face combine to show his emotional change at the sight of Shizuka and Yuki (Figure 8).

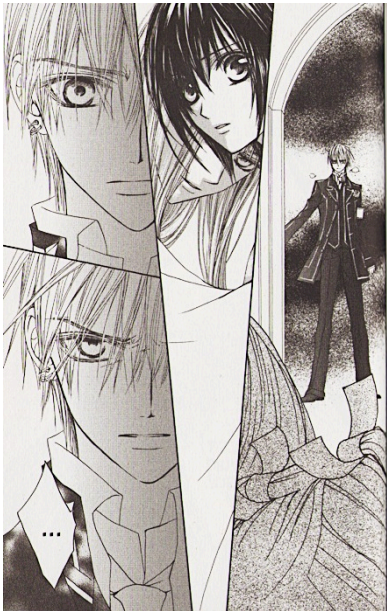


Figure 8. Close-ups of changing emotions, *VK4*, p. 115 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

In order to emphasise the significance of a character's action, manga artists break up movements into several close shots. In *N6*, after a dramatic moment when Sakura cuts

her hair off to escape the grasp of the enemy, the artist uses five close-ups of Sakura's action to show her determination to fight back (Figure 9).

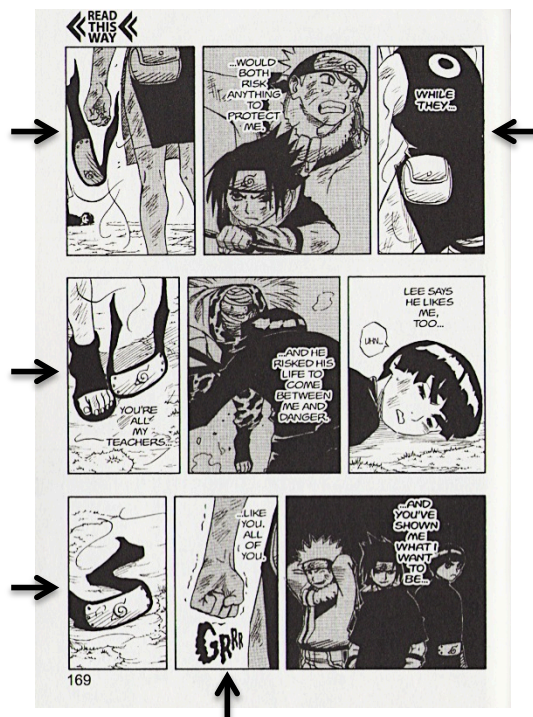


Figure 9. Aspects of Sakura's action, *N6*, p. 169 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

The examples of close-ups presented above also demonstrate the tradition of a manga narrative that relies on visual clues rather than long verbal texts to tell stories.

3.2.3.4 Background, Emotional Symbols, and *Chibi*

Examples of streaked backgrounds in *shōnen* manga and impressionistic backgrounds in *shōjo* manga are present in the two chosen texts. Manga artists heighten the perceived speed of actions and dramatic tension by streaking the background. This technique is powerful in a monochromatic text like manga that relies on lines and shade to tell stories. The following image demonstrates how speed lines are adopted to depict the background in *N6* (Figure 10):



Figure 10. Streaked background, *N6*, p. 83 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

Instead of showing a detailed setting, the artist focuses on the speed and dramatic impact of each action. In the top left panel, the converging lines direct the reader's attention to Sakura's facial expression, and the density of lines reinforces her shock, whereas in the bottom right panel, the converging lines show the direction of the action, and the density of lines intensifies the speed. In the bottom left panel, there is only a biting sound with a streaked background, which suggests that Orochimaru's head moves at such a high speed that even eyes cannot catch its movement. As the source of the sound remains unknown, tension accumulates to the highest at the page-turning point.

The most potent symbols in *shōjo* manga – flowers – are used in the background occasionally to imply Shizuka's beauty and her noble status¹⁵ (Figure 11).

¹⁵ Like Kaname, Shizuka is one of the few pureblood vampires that are highly respected in the vampire society because of their rare bloodline.

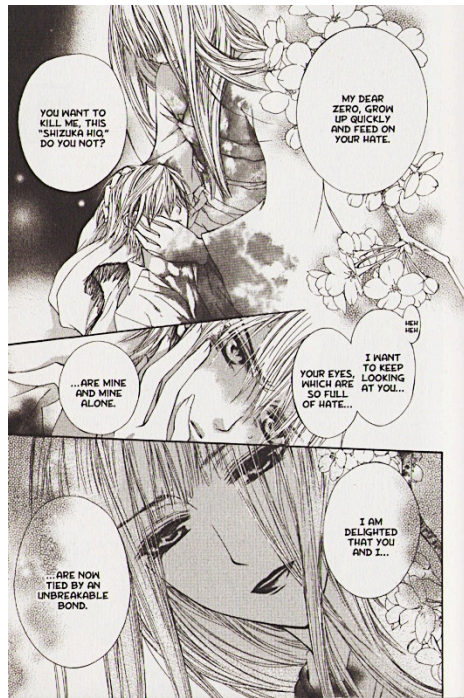


Figure 11. Impressionistic background, *VK4*, p. 1 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

In this page, Shizuka is surrounded by cherry blossoms, which connote transient beauty. Her shaded face and the dark foggy background in the corner give an ominous and mysterious tone. The two speech bubbles in the bottom panel are also shaded in accordance with her evil nature. All of these visual clues are meant to assist the reader's understanding of the story mood and the character's personal qualities.

Another manga-specific visual clue – emotional symbols – is present in the chosen texts (more in *VK4*). They usually serve comic effects at light moments or indicate an overwhelming emotion that the character is experiencing. For example, in *VK4*, a schoolgirl is drawn in a *Chibi*¹⁶ figure to imply that she is flooded with jealousy and anger towards Yuki (Figure 12).

¹⁶ Manga artists transform characters' figures into child-like or more caricatured ones at split-second moments for humour, especially at awkward moments or when the characters are exhibiting an extremely emotional status, such as anger (see 2.1.1 *What is Manga?*).



Figure 12. Emotional symbols and *Chibi*, *VK4*, p. 12 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

This school girl has a round face and beaded eyes instead of the typical *shōjo* girl's appearance – a sharp chin and galaxy eyes. There is no nose on her face, and her mouth extends over her jaw. The sweat drops on her face are to intensify her hysteria. There are also sweat drops on Yuki's face and in one of her speech bubbles. They indicate her frustration. The combination of *Chibi* and visual symbols amuses readers and softens the tension.

In this section, I have presented an analysis of the two corpus texts, focusing on stylistic and narrative features that can best represent the storytelling styles in *shōnen* manga and *shōjo* manga. Based on this analysis, I generated questions for the first two group interviews. With these questions, I tried to explore what interested or did not interest the participants about these two books, how they interpreted certain techniques used by the artists, what affected their identification with characters, what strategies they adopted to understand the stories, and what they appreciated or did not appreciate about manga that were marketed at readers of the opposite gender. In the next section, I will explain the process of the data collection, and give more details about questions that I asked in the interviews.

3.2.4 Data Collection

In seeking in-depth understanding of young readers' reading of manga, I rely on three data sources – group interviews, individual interviews, and reading journals. Collecting data from multiple sources allows the consistency of certain phenomena to be observed in different circumstances and for insights to be gained from the participants' responses through different tasks. This method is called 'data source triangulation' (Stake, 1995), which can contribute to the validity of a qualitative case study. In this section, I will explain the strengths and limitations of the three sources and how I collected data from each source.

3.2.4.1 Three Sources

A group interview is sometimes called a focus group as it often takes place with a group of people who share a certain commonality that interests the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). According to Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011), adopting this method can contribute to the richness of data in several ways. First of all, group homogeneity encourages dynamic interaction within the group because people are more inclined to share their views and experiences with similar participants. In fact, participants who share common experiences may gain a sense of group identity. When a dynamic discussion is occurring, "each participant is essentially probing other participants for more information, explanation, or justification about the topic discussed" (p. 158). Secondly, when a dynamic discussion leads to agreements or disagreements among participants, the researcher is able to confirm certain issues or access differing perspectives between the participants. Third, by comparing data collected from different focus groups, the researcher can identify whether or not issues cluster by different types of participants. With these strengths in mind, I decided to conduct interviews in focus groups. During the interviews, I noticed that the participants often took the lead in discussions after I threw out a question. They also responded to each other's opinions and questions. Sometimes, the participants raised new issues among themselves. At the end of the study, I sought students' reflections on this method. Several students pointed out that they enjoyed the discussions in a group because they could share their knowledge and passion for manga, and because 'it was interesting to hear other people's views'.

Although group interviews allow group dynamics to stimulate conversation among participants, there are limitations to this method. Hennink and her colleagues (2011) point out that the context of group interviews lacks confidentiality. Group discussions are not ideal for seeking personal experiences of participants. As this study involves an enquiry into the participants' personal experiences as fans and how people around them respond to their interest in manga, a more private context is needed to conduct such an investigation. Although participants can stimulate each other in a group, some participants may tend to lead discussions. As a result, less articulate participants may not be heard. For example, in the feedback survey that I conducted at the end of the study, one of the participants mentioned that they felt more 'shy' with the other pupils than with the interviewer alone. Still another limitation to consider is that participants may modify their responses due to peer pressure in a group. Therefore, I included individual interviews to give the participants as much space as possible to express their own views and feelings.

Although an individual interview allows all the attention to be paid to a single interviewee, this context may have potential pressure on the interviewee. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest that the interviewer and the interviewee need to share trust and respect. Such a rapport needs to be built to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for the participant to share personal experiences and attitudes. Being aware of this issue, I conducted individual interviews after the stage of group interviews so that the participants and I could have some time to build relationship before meeting alone. Moreover, this plan allowed me to further explore ideas and issues that emerged from group interviews and students' reading reflections.

The third source of data is a reading journal that comprises five reflective feedback forms (see *Appendix C*). I inserted two additional feedback forms and extra blank pages in case the participants had more to share about their reflections of the chosen texts or other manga. The participants were encouraged to share their reflections in words as well as through drawing. However, the latter was optional. An example of how to use these forms to give feedback was provided in the journal. I also included two pages of instructions to explain how to use this reading journal and what they should know about their participation in this project. The reading journal can provide rich and significant information about ideas that occur during or after a specific reading. For example, Cliff-

Hodges, Nikolajeva, and Taylor (2010) find that reading journals can show readers' individual reading trajectories and responses to a text in the actual and imaginative spaces of the reading itself. With regard to the purpose of my study, I decided to use reading journals for four reasons. Firstly, reading journals could show me things in manga that particularly interested the participants. Secondly, the participants could use this space to reflect on thoughts that occurred to them during or after their reading of the chosen manga. Thirdly, this method could provide participants alternative ways to express themselves, especially to those who felt shy in interacting with the interviewer and other participants in the group. Finally, as many fans were interested in drawing manga, the reading journal could allow me to investigate the participants' responses to the selected manga in a visual format. Overall, the purpose of using reading journals in this study was to capture the participants' interest in particular topics, characters or images of the texts and to explore different dimensions of readers' engagement with manga using their verbal (and visual) reflections.

3.2.4.2 Procedures

I started to approach the selected schools in May 2012. The process of recruiting participants started in April 2013. Having selected suitable participants, I had a brief meeting with all of them to explain what their participation in this study would involve and to make sure that they were aware of their rights as research participants. I gave every participant the two chosen manga, and asked them to read an additional manga of their own choice. Asking the participants to read or reread a manga that they liked allowed me to explore their views about what made a good story/manga and why they liked certain manga more than others. Moreover, as this study explored readers' engagement with manga, it is important that each participant was given the opportunity to talk about a manga that interested them, rather than manga chosen by me¹⁷. Participants were asked to keep three reading journals based on the three manga that they had read, and to attend three group interviews. Following that, every participant was required to attend an individual interview. I also asked the participants to bring the completed reading journal to each interview so that I could track their ideas and they could talk about them in the group discussion. At the end of each participant's

¹⁷ One of the participants reflects on the discussion of the self-chosen manga in the feedback questionnaire: "I knew the book back to front so it was easier to discuss what I liked".

individual interview, I gave out a feedback questionnaire to evaluate the participant's experiences and feelings about their participation in the study, and to look into the impact of this research project on the participants (See *Appendix D*). Questionnaires were completed anonymously and collected by the librarians. By seeking for the participants' feedback on their own experience of this research project, I intended to position them as 'co-learners' (Taber, 2002), who might learn or benefit from their experience of this study. The procedure of data collection was as follows (Figure 13):

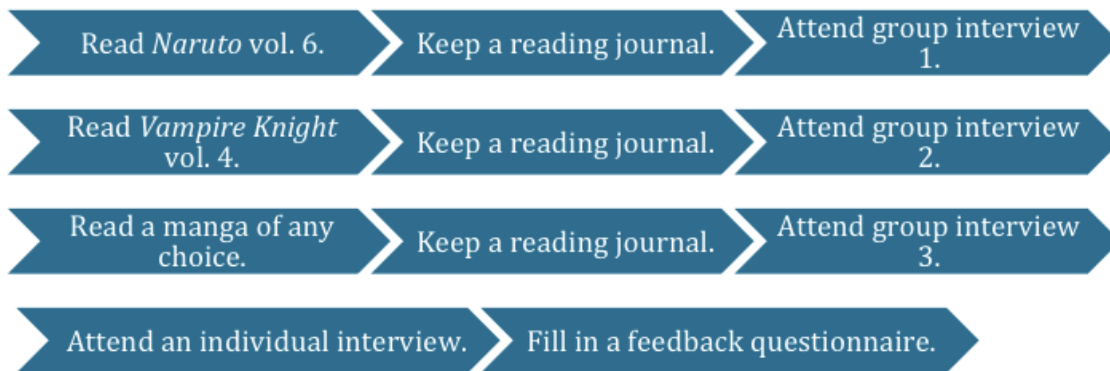


Figure 13. An overview of data collection

The whole process took two months from May to June 2013. Group interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, while individual interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes per student. All interviews were 'semi-structured'; that is, a set of open-ended questions that are predetermined, but can be modified, reordered, omitted or added to based on the interviewees' responses and the interviewer's perception of what seems to be the most appropriate (Robson, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). After each interview, I reflected on the process and made any necessary adjustments to the same set of questions with another group or I modified the new questions of the next interview. Changes that I made included adding appropriate probes to elicit the participants' responses, rephrasing questions to make them clearer, and adding questions emerging from the dialogues I had in the previous interview. Hennink and her colleagues (2011) point out:

A key characteristic of qualitative data collection is to use the key issues that are identified in one interview to refine questions and topical probes in a following interview. In this way you make inductive inferences and are able to go deeper into the issues with each subsequent interview. (p. 111).

Thus, the process of data collection in this study was cyclical and reflective. Although the focus of each interview remained the same, small changes were made to refine the questions.

As mentioned earlier, questions asked in the first two interviews were intended to explore what interested the participants about the texts, how they interpreted the verbal and visual narratives, and what their attitudes were towards certain topics, such as gender roles, cultural elements, the presentation of personal relationships, and so on (see *Appendix E-1 & 2*). The third group interview explored similar aspects about the manga chosen by the students themselves. In addition to that, I asked questions regarding the participants' views and knowledge of manga in general, their reading habits, and their own attitudes to and involvement in fan-related activities (see *Appendix E-3*). The individual interview followed up on questions that had been asked previously, but on a more personal level. I also used this interview to ask individual participants to explain what they wrote (and drew) in their reading journals, and to clarify or further explore ideas and issues that emerged from the previous dialogues with them (see *Appendix E-4*).

All the interviews were audio and video recorded. The main reason for recording the interviews was because I could not be an interviewer and a 'note taker' (Hennink, 2007) at the same time, which means substantial data would be lost without a written record of the key issues raised in the discussion. In order to solve this problem, it was necessary to record the discussions with the students. Silverman (2000) suggests three reasons for the use of tapes in qualitative research. First, tapes are public records, available to the scientific community, but field notes are not. Second, it is impossible for a researcher to remember or note at the time such matters as pauses, overlaps, in-breaths and other performance of language that may suggest the participants' attitudes or emotions. Third, the tapes can be replayed and the transcripts can be examined closely. For this point, Edmunds (1999) also notes that recordings allow the reporter to include pertinent quotations that are precisely what the interviewee says. Moreover, researchers can revisit the record unlimited times and can choose different tracks to focus on. During each visit of data, new insights may be achieved. Although audio recordings alone have all the benefits listed above, they cannot show participants' non-verbal reactions, such as body language. However, Edmunds suggests that verbalised communication may

sometimes be replaced by non-verbalised one. For example, one participant may voice his/her disagreement while another participant may simply sit back, fold arms or shake his/her head. Jones (1985) also points out that non-verbal data, such as posture, gesture, voice intonation, facial expression, and eye contact can communicate feelings such as interest, boredom, approval, disapproval, enthusiasm or indifference. Videos can provide us access to various modes of verbal and non-verbal communication. Therefore, in addition to audio recordings, I used video recordings so that I could better identify different speakers, especially when the participants' conversations overlapped each other. Moreover, videos allowed me to see pages that participants tried to show me when they explained certain ideas. In fact, when I transcribed the interviews, I also realised that many students gave 'silent agreement' to other people's opinions or my questions simply by nodding their heads. Without the videos, I would not have been able to capture these participants' 'silent' responses. Thus, with both audio and video recordings, I could record information that would have otherwise been lost due to poor recall or the limitations of observation onsite. Furthermore, having two types of recordings could prevent data loss if technical problems were encountered.

After the main stage of data collection was completed, I transcribed the interviews and performed an in-depth analysis of all the data collected. Some new themes emerged during this process, whilst others turned out to be in need of further clarification. For example, some of the participants tended to relate characters in manga to specific archetypes when they described what they liked or disliked about them. As I analysed the interviews, I started to see such patterns emerging. It made me wonder about the role these 'stock characters' play in regard to readers' comprehension of manga and the pleasure of reading. As a result, I revisited the participants in March 2014 to explore these themes further. The visit was informal and short. The group interviews lasted between 25 and 30 minutes. Some students were selected to join individual interviews, and each of these lasted between 5 and 10 minutes. Questions that I asked in the groups are included in *Appendix E-5*. Due to the students' school schedule, I was not able to separate the students by gender in one of the schools on this follow-up visit. Nevertheless, it was a fruitful visit as some new insights were gained from analysis of this additional set of data. These findings are included in the next chapter. In the next section, I will explain the methods that I used to analyse data at different stages.

3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis occurs concurrently with data collection so that the researcher can generate an emerging understanding about research questions and make necessary adjustments to increase the depth of the investigation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this section, I will expound how the semi-structured and exploratory nature of the research design shaped the way I performed data analysis.

3.3.1 An Overview of the Data Analysis

The analysis of data involved several stages in this study. In the first stage, I listened to the audio recording immediately after each interview, and noted anything interesting that the participants said or any idea that emerged. This was often done on the tube and train. I listened to the recording when my memory was still fresh, and kept a 'post-session field note' of things I heard or recalled. This compensated for the fact that no note-taker was present during the interviews. Some preliminary findings at this stage helped refine the same set of questions with another group, or new questions for the next interview. For example, the participants showed particular interest in the depiction of character's hair in the second group interview. This finding led me to explore the significance of this artistic aspect to the participants' reading experience of manga further in the third group interview. The second stage was transcribing the interviews. I started with video recordings to focus on the content themes and any non-verbal communication that the participants used to explain their ideas or feelings. After having worked on all the interviews with the same method, I then worked on each interview again using the audio recording. The goal of the second transcription was to give a verbatim account of what the participants said. With the audio recordings, I was able to hear words more clearly than with the video recordings due to the better sound quality of the former.

The third stage occurred concurrently with the second stage. I kept notes of the initial findings according to each interview question. I then organised these in a matrix of four groups to compare the findings of the same interview with different groups. Using the same method, I created matrices to compare the findings of the eight individual

interviews, for both male and female participants respectively. This is a process called ‘cross-case analysis’ that follows after ‘within-case analysis’ when dealing with multiple cases (Creswell, 2007). At this stage, the analysis of the data was mostly descriptive. Some questions emerged and some speculations were made. They guided the development of a coding system in the next stage. For example, the students’ particular interest in characters’ appearances and the little details that mark each individual character’s identity was identified at this stage. It led to a question: “To what degree does the visual representation of characters play a significant role in readers’ aesthetic engagement with manga?” To investigate this question, I then adopted ‘visual representation’ as a sub-code under the code ‘character type’. It was also at this stage that I identified different aspects of the participants’ engagement with manga on artistic, literary, cultural, and social levels. These aspects informed the main categories and sub-categories of codes in the coding system.

The fourth stage aimed to reduce data by marking it with thematic codes, which are classified into categories. Creswell describes the categories as families, and within each family there are children (sub-codes) and grandchildren (sub-sub-codes). Using the coded data, I inspected the distribution of the codes over each case as well as across different cases. Both interview transcriptions and students’ reading journals were coded, with notes taken throughout this stage. I will give details regarding the development of codes and the process of coding in the next section. The last stage of data analysis was conceptualising the findings. I returned to the research questions to refocus the analysis, and revisited and updated relevant literature to interpret the findings. At this stage, I sought to achieve ‘internal coherence’ by drawing parts of the arguments together, and obtain ‘external coherence’ by fitting the interpretation of data into existing theories appropriately (Hodder, 2000). Tracy (2013) calls this process an ‘iterative analysis’, through which the researcher alternates between emic (emergent) readings of data and etic (external) use of existing theories. According to Tracy, it is “a reflexive process in which the researcher visits and revisits the data, connects them to emerging insights, and progressively refines his/her focus and understandings” (p. 184). In all, the five stages of data analysis led from one to another. There were constant revisits to the notes generated in the previous stages when ideas and arguments were formulated. The following diagram summarises the five stages (Figure 14):

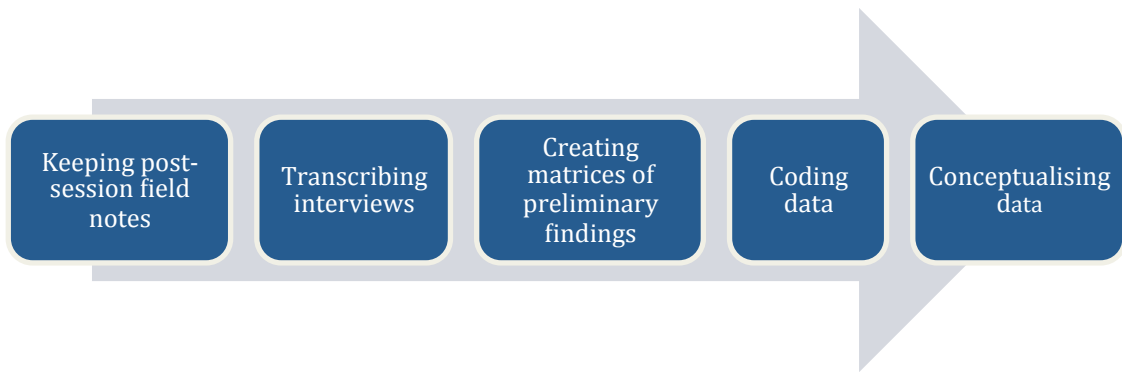


Figure 14. Five stages of data analysis

In the next section, I will explain the fourth stage in detail.

3.3.2 Coding and Conceptualising Data

Qualitative data analysis is characterised as inductive and cyclical (Sarantakos, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Hennink *et al.*, 2011), moving from describing to interpreting the data, and then back to re-examining it. This repeats until saturation has been achieved.

During this process, the researcher reduces and organises data systematically through observing patterns, comparing and classifying data. A coding system is usually adopted to assist the researcher in interpreting the data. In order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of my data analysis, I used NVivo qualitative software to code the data.

Although using software to assist data analysis is criticised for the danger of distancing the researcher from the data, Bazeley and Jackson (2013) argue that a software program like NVivo can increase ways of examining the meaning of what is recorded. They argue, “The computer’s capacity for recording, sorting, matching and linking can be harnessed by researchers to assist in answering their research questions from the data, without losing access to the source data or contexts from which the data have come” (p. 2). Bearing these advantages in mind, I decided to use NVivo to analyse data for several reasons.

Firstly, the codes and data could be organised systematically. Secondly, it allowed a quick retrieval of data. For example, I could examine all the phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that were categorised under the same code across cases at once. I could also annotate ideas that emerged during the process of coding and easily retrieve these together with source data. Thirdly, it showed the frequency of a code being used in a single case as well as in different cases. Fourthly, the query function allowed me to

create matrices and diagrams to compare the connections between codes. For example, a query showed that there is a certain relationship between the code of ‘visual representation’ and ‘personality’, because the participants often drew upon the visual details of a character’s appearance to explain his/her personality.

The codes that were used to analyse the data of this study were developed over the time as my knowledge of this research topic accumulated from reading existing literature, analysing the research corpora, and examining the findings of the pilot studies and the current study. Hennink and colleagues (2011) suggest that a mix of deductive and inductive codes is usually generated to analyse a qualitative study. The former derive from “issues, theories or concepts included in the design cycle” (p. 219), whilst the latter are developed from issues identified by the researcher through active reading and rereading of the data. In the early stage of this study, the codes generated were limited to my textual knowledge of manga. The main codes include ‘artistic techniques’ (such as cinematic effects, panels, background, and speech bubbles), ‘cultural aspects’ (such as language and places) and ‘characterisation’ (such as personality and personal relationships). After the three pilot studies, I identified some prominent themes in readers’ engagement with manga, such as emotional experiences, social meanings, elements of humour, the portrayal of fighting, the relation of a story to the reader’s real-life experiences, and the fragmentary nature of the narrative. These findings led to a new set of predetermined codes before I started to collect data of the main study. Eight first-level codes were generated as follows: ‘artwork’, ‘humour’, ‘gaps’, ‘characters’, ‘fan-based pages’, ‘interaction with the implied author/artist’, ‘interaction with the characters’ and ‘interaction with the manga’. Under these codes, there were 100 sub- and sub-sub-codes. After I finished the phase of data collection and the third stage of data analysis (creating matrices of preliminary findings), I modified the existing codes by adding new ones and deleting or rephrasing old ones. After the rearrangement, there are five first-level codes: ‘interaction with artwork’, ‘interaction with characters’, ‘interaction with story’, ‘interaction with manga’, and ‘interaction with people’.

The category of ‘interaction with artwork’ comprises codes that were used to identify the participants’ responses to the visual presentation of background, emotions, humour, panels, sound effects, speech bubbles, and the relationships between words and images in manga. ‘Interaction with characters’ was used to identify participants’ responses to characters, including their personality and personal relationships, and participants’ own

emotional responses, such as empathy, agreement/disagreement, disgust, and identification. The 'interaction with story' category explored participants' responses to the literary gaps, the elements of humour, the structure of narrative, and the paratext, whilst 'interaction with manga' was used to look into participants' general reading behaviour and attitudes regarding manga, such as experiences of escapism, particular knowledge learnt, understanding of manga in comparison to texts in other formats, participation in manga-related activities, and how they accessed and read/reread manga. Finally, the category of 'interaction with people' was used to investigate the participants' responses to the artists' decisions, how people around them viewed manga, and how they used manga as a tool to socialise with people.

During the process of coding, changes of codes and rearrangement of categories still happened because of new insights that I gained from reading and rereading the data. The final version of codes that I used to analyse the interview transcripts includes four levels of codes, with 159 codes in total (see *Appendix F-1*). The participants' reading journals were analysed with the same set of codes to understand their verbal responses. However, the visual responses (drawings) required a different set of codes. Twelve codes were generated under two first-level codes: 'copy from the manga' and 'create something new'. These codes were used to identify what particularly interested the participants, through inspection of their chosen drawings (see *Appendix F-2*). All of the codes used in this study represent particular themes that are pertinent to the research questions. This thematic analysis incorporates the traditions of two analysis methods that are often used in social sciences. In the following section, I will explain these two methods – content analysis and discourse analysis, and how they have been incorporated in this study.

3.3.3 Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis

Content analysis is a method of analysing documents in social research. According to Sarantakos (2005), it looks at "the content of texts, pictures, films and other forms of verbal, visual or written communication," with attention paid to "the purpose of communication, and the underlying cultural patterns, attitudes, prejudices, norms and standards that are encoded in the message" (pp. 299-300). Thus, the researcher extracts and interprets the latent meanings in order to understand the contextual impact on

people's behaviour. More specifically, Grbich (2013) explained how to apply this method to make sense of data. She said:

Content analysis is a systematic coding and categorising approach you can use to explore large amounts of existing textual information in order to ascertain the trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships and the structures, contexts and discourses of communication (p. 190).

She introduces two forms of content analysis: the enumerative content analysis and the ethnographic content analysis. The former looks at the repetition of words to attribute different levels of importance to them in documents. Based on the word frequency, the researcher investigates the manifest and latent meanings embedded in the documents. This process also allows the researcher to turn a large set of data into something manageable and meaningful. However, as this method can be overly positivist and decontextualising in orientation, the researcher often combines it with ethnographic content analysis, with which the researcher analyses documents for their significance and meanings in context.

In this study, enumerative content analysis is performed through coding transcriptions and reading journals. However, instead of seeking for repetitive words, I looked for recurrent themes. These themes were developed into codes to attribute meanings to the data. In addition to this, based on the participants' choices of words, I tried to apply ethnographic content analysis to investigate their meanings within their social contexts. For example, when the students used 'normal books' to refer to 'novels', I examined the latent meanings of this term in their particular social context. As the participants told me that their teachers and parents encouraged them to read more novels and less manga because the former could improve their reading abilities but the latter could not, it was likely that the students used this term because novels represented legitimate reading at school.

Discourse analysis is a precise application of content analysis. Particularly, it considers how language functions in human communication within different contexts (Gee & Green, 1998; Wooffitt, 2005). Sarantakos (2005) puts it as follows:

Discourse analysis deals primarily with language, but especially with its constructive and action-oriented nature; language and discourse are more than words and sentences. They are ways in which individuals present themselves (p. 309).

In other words, discourse analysis allows the researcher to examine rules, norms and conventions that have been developed historically in a particular cultural group. Researchers look at meanings and expressions of a language used by members of a particular group. From a social linguistic point of view, every social context is a 'field of power', and "power (and power differences) is the generative principle producing linguistic form and difference" (Kress, 2010, p. 36). Human discourses have evolved to perform particular social functions, and how language is used reflects an attitude and an evaluation of the social context. Discourse analysis was also used to examine the students' choice of term to refer to novels. The authority's (adults') attitudes towards different texts might have affected how the participants thought about the books they read – what was normal and what was abnormal. This term, 'normal book', did not only refer to a physical object, but also a general attitude and evaluation of this text in the participants' social context. Similarly, discourse analysis suggested that the boys' usage of the term 'girly' in describing *shōjo* manga could be a way of announcing their social identity.

The analysis of this study is driven by selected themes that were established at an early stage or emerged when the study was carried out. These themes derived not only from the content of the participants' responses, but also from the way language was used by the participants to convey certain meanings. Content analysis and discourse analysis were tools and methods that I employed to interpret the participants' literary, aesthetic, cultural, and social engagement with manga.

In the next section, I will discuss the limitations of this study and the difficulties that I encountered during the phase of data collection.

3.4 Data Quality and Study Limitations

A common issue that all qualitative researchers try to deal with is the danger of bias. Humans as ‘natural analysts’ unavoidably have deficiencies and bias towards the issues or phenomena that they observe (Robson, 2002). To address this issue, a systematic approach has been adopted in this study to minimise bias. As mentioned previously, the method of multiple-data-source triangulation and multiple-case triangulation were employed to increase the validity of the study. Moreover, the data analysis has been carried out with a well-structured coding system and computer software to increase effectiveness and efficiency. However, I am aware that a qualitative study requires the researcher’s constant reflection on the validity and reliability of the data and the analysis. Silverman (2000) claims, “Every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (p. 825). Whilst a coding scheme can be helpful in organising data, it may also limit what the researcher sees. Therefore, I have been revisiting the data and reflecting on current literature and theories to achieve ‘theoretical coherence’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

With respect of the issue of human subjectiveness, Jones (1985) suggests, “We use our ‘bias’ as human beings creatively and contingently to develop particular relationships with particular people so that they can tell us about their worlds and we can hear them” (p. 48). Therefore, I tried to build a rapport with the participants using our shared interest in manga. I introduced myself to the participants as ‘a PhD student and a manga fan’, rather than positioning myself as a teacher. By doing so, I tried to induce a sense of similarity so that the students might be more willing to share their own experiences of and passion for manga with me. I tried to make them see themselves as manga experts so that they might see the importance of their role in the study and feel that they were on an equal footing with me. Although the librarians constantly reminded the participants to respect me as a ‘Miss’, I discovered that the participants were genuinely interested in telling me things they knew about manga. Many students’ final feedback says that they enjoyed being able to tell people about why they liked manga and why it was important to them. When I wrapped up the individual interview with Olaf, I asked him if there was anything else he would like to share. He said, “Not really. Um... What types of manga do you like to read?” With that question, we had a fan-to-fan conversation on manga for another five minutes.

The age gap between the participants and myself, however, set a limitation of the topics that could be discussed. At the early stage of this study, I had identified sexually explicit elements in some manga. However, I did not set out to investigate the participants' views of these elements, even though it could be argued that they might be part of what attracted teenage readers to manga. I did not particularly or explicitly explore this aspect because it could be too sensitive for an adult researcher to initiate discussions on this topic with teenage participants. Moreover, teenage participants might not be willing to talk about this issue with an adult, or they might give dishonest answers to evade possible condemnation. For example, during my individual interview with Alvin, he mentioned that teachers might not like students reading 'bad' manga that were bloody or rude. After several probes, Alvin finally told me that the rude elements were 'women stuff'¹⁸. It was very clear that Alvin was hesitant to talk about it when I tried to clarify what he meant by 'rude' pictures. Even when I tentatively asked him about his view of the possible influence of the violent and sexual elements on readers like him, he asserted that pictures of these elements in manga had no negative influence on him. This example shows that it could be difficult for an older person to discuss certain sensitive topics with school children. Nevertheless, I asked the participants other questions with an implicit intention to tease out their views on the negative criticisms levelled on manga. For example, I asked them, "To you, is there anything bad about reading manga?" and "How did you deal with this problem?" Although my methodology was not set up to pursue the influence of these negative elements on young readers, it potentially is an important issue that is worth exploring in future under an appropriate research design that has taken account of the concerns mentioned above.

Although the differences between the researcher and the participants unavoidably lead to certain limitations, 'sameness' does not need to be a premise to conduct a qualitative study. Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, and Ireland (2009) suggest that differences between the researcher and participants may allow the researcher to tease out meanings and assumptions that may otherwise be taken for granted. Although cultural differences between the participants and me had been a concern at the early stage of my study, this difference pointed me to see the participants' particular interest in the depiction of characters' hairstyles, which was never particularly special to me in my own reading

¹⁸ Alvin did not explain what 'women stuff' was depicted in the manga that he read. I did not pursue further as I could sense his hesitation in discussing this topic. The manga that he talked about was a *shōnen* series called *Fairy Tail*. In this manga, several female characters were portrayed voluptuously, wearing revealing clothes. I speculate that Alvin might be referring 'women stuff' to this aspect.

experience of manga. I then realised that, as a Taiwanese woman, the mutual influence of culture between Taiwan and Japan had made me take for granted what could feel alien to the participants. Heath and her colleagues also point out that age gaps are always an issue when conducting research with young people. However, they argue that the researcher's interest in 'listening to the young people' can bridge the gap. During my individual interview with Arthur, he commented that his experience of the previous group interviews was good because I asked him questions that he 'wanted to answer' – questions that his friends already knew the answers to, but I did not seem to know. Although I might have been seen as simply a visitor to the students, the interest that I showed in hearing their thoughts and feelings about manga allowed me to build a rapport with them.

As a non-native English speaker, the issue of language was considered when I started planning this study. I apologised to the participants in our first interview that I would need to clarify with them when at times I failed to understand them. All the students showed understanding in this respect. Sometimes they would help each other to clarify what they were trying to communicate. In order to make sure that I understood the participants well, I transcribed all the interviews verbatim so that I could ask native speakers to check my understanding later on.

Although using a video camera to collect data can obtain rich visual information in terms of participants' facial expressions and gestures, this method is criticised for bringing intrusiveness to the environment and causing uneasiness in the participants (Hennink, 2007; Taber, 2007). Even though all the participants and their parents agreed that the interviews would be recorded, one participant put in the feedback questionnaire that they were not into cameras. Nevertheless, the same participant gave very positive ratings regarding their experiences of most of the interviews because they could share their own opinions and talk about manga. The only interview that this participant did not enjoy much was the second interview, and their reason was that they were not "a fan of *shōjo*".

Video recordings proved to be challenging in terms of technical issues. It was not easy to find suitable angles to position the camera due to the limited field of view that one camera could cover. In order to capture the participants' faces when they talked to me, I always positioned the camera behind rather than in front of myself. However, it was not

always possible to avoid blocking any participant. Factors include the length of the table, and the participants' and my constantly changing postures. There was no additional researcher or assistant to adjust the camera angle during the interviews. It was also not possible to take close shots to focus on individual participants when they spoke. In addition to camera positioning, the sound quality was not guaranteed. Not all the interviews were conducted in a completely quiet environment. Some of them happened in the school library and the computer lab where a couple of students and teachers were around. One of the classrooms where I usually met one of the groups was next to the playground. All of the external noises were beyond my control as there was either no better place available in the schools at the time of the interviews or no time to change venues. Although the sound quality of videos was not always good, the audio recordings were usually clear, as the device was placed on the table, right between the participants and myself. Therefore, noise did not become an issue when it came to transcribing the interviews. Having the audio recordings also aided when I once encountered a technical issue with the video recording, and realised after finishing the first interview with one of the groups that the video recording did not work. Although I lost the visual data of that interview, the audio recording provided me with the complete audio information of the participants' responses.

There were other issues that emerged during the process of data collection. Firstly, one of the female participants (Zoe) transferred to another school after the first group interview. As it was not possible to replace her by another pupil in the middle of the study, only three participants remained in the group. Secondly, three students (Olaf, Lois and Abel) were not able to join the group interviews fully due to sick leave or commitment to other schoolwork. I conducted longer individual interviews with Olaf and Lois so that I could still ask them questions from the interview that they missed. Abel missed the third group interview. He was sent by the librarian to join the female group later the week. He walked into the classroom when we already started the interview. Not knowing this arrangement in advance nor having time to pause the interview¹⁹, I could only welcome him to join the group. Although it was meant to be a group interview with 'girls only', the limited availability of students at school left me no choice but compromising the research design accordingly in this case. However, this

¹⁹ The interviews with this female group were arranged at lunch break. After the students had had their lunch and were ready to start the interview, there was usually just enough time left to finish the discussion of the chosen text.

‘accident’ brought me to re-examine the decision of separating participants by gender, and my original consideration of the potential tension in a mixed-gender group.

Although this interview still rendered fruitful findings, the presence of Abel proved to cause tension during some discussions. For example, Abel pointed out that girls would “freak out” if they saw the bloody scenes in the manga that he brought to share. He also commented that girls liked more kissing plots, and teased Ophelia for loving “kissing romance”. Later in the same interview, Ophelia tried to clarify that bloody scenes or fighting did not scare her, and she liked the manga that Abel brought too. In the previous interviews with the male groups, the students showed a clear attitude that boys were usually attracted by action, and reading *shōjo* manga could be ‘girly’. Some of them tried to prove their masculinity by drawing a clear line between the readership of *shōnen* manga and *shōjo* manga. Abel’s comments and Ophelia’s defence in this interview show that peer pressure may cause participants to present themselves in ways that can avoid the labelling of ‘abnormality’ or ‘weakness’.

Another issue that emerged during the preparation stage of the study was regarding the choice of the corpus texts. Although both *Naruto* and *Vampire Knight* were published in multiple volumes, it was only possible to choose one volume of each to work with the participants due to the limitations of time and budgets. Even though there was a synopsis of the previous story in each volume, I realised that the participants might not be able to understand the story fully if they had never read the previous volumes. Therefore, the decision to let the participants choose a manga to discuss also served the purpose of allowing the students to talk about a manga that they already knew well. The issue of lacking knowledge of the previous volumes did not seem to be a problem to the participants regarding their reading of *Naruto* vol. 6, because all the boys had read it before. Some girls had not read it before but did not find the story difficult to understand. However, several students pointed out that some parts of *Vampire Knight* vol. 4 were confusing to them because they did not know what happened in the previous volumes. Nevertheless, only some boys found it difficult to follow the story. It led to a speculation that the participants’ familiarity and unfamiliarity with the format of a text might have impact on their overall understanding of the text, because those boys who found the story hard to understand were also the ones who pointed out that the collage-style panels in *shōjo* manga was confusing compared to the rigid square panels in *shōnen* manga.

Although the feasibility of this study had been tested in the previous pilot studies, it is clear that there were unforeseen or uncontrollable problems that happened during the process of data collection. I tried to pay attention to any impact caused by these issues. Sometimes these unwelcomed problems led me to surprising findings. I tried to be reflective during the whole process of data collection and data analysis. After conducting a new interview, I examined whether any of the questions was in danger of leading the participants' answers or in need of further prompts or clarification. When analysing the data, I tried to distinguish my own views from the participants' views.

Qualitative studies can never be immune to bias. In fact, researchers rely on certain bias to build a rapport with the participants so as to present their stories from a particular angle. In this study, the angle and the bias that I took into the research was my personal viewpoint that manga has positive values despite the criticism levelled on it. I set out to investigate what these values are what they meant the participants personally regarding their engagement with manga in every aspect of their lives.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

According to the UK law, unsupervised working with children requires a criminal record check. I passed the check with the Criminal Records Bureau before meeting the students. In order to make sure that all the participants were aware of their rights and responsibility during their participation of the study, I arranged a short meeting with them all before the interviews started. I explained the purpose and the goal of this project to them, what tasks were required, and how they might benefit from the participation. I told them that all the interviews would be audio and video recorded, but their identity would be protected when I made reports about the findings in my thesis and academic publications. I informed them that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any or no reason (BERA, 2004). All the points mentioned above were included in the guidance of the reading journal and the parental consent letter (see *Appendix G*). The participants were encouraged to participate in the study fully, and allowed to keep the two chosen manga after the study. All the participants returned the parental consent letters to me with their parents' signature showing agreement to their

participation. During the stage of data collection, I made sure that the participants were comfortable about their participation by consulting them and the librarians. At the end of the study, I gave out a feedback questionnaire to the students to determine their feelings about each task that they were involved in. Thirteen out of fifteen questionnaires were returned. Some participants mentioned that they felt shy or scared in the beginning because they did not know the other members in their group. Nevertheless, all the participants that returned the questionnaire chose ‘strongly agree’ when asked if they had enjoyed their participation in this study.

3.6 Conclusion

This case study has been designed to answer three research questions listed at the beginning of this chapter. I adopted a qualitative approach to construct the process of data collection and analysis in order to investigate young British readers’ engagement with manga. The research data was collected from three sources – reading journals, group interviews, and individual interviews. The interview questions were generated based on the result of a textual analysis of the corpus texts before data was collected. I then employed a thematic analysis to examine the data collected from the participants. In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of the theoretical framework of the chosen methods that I used to carry out each stage of this study. I have also reflected upon the validity and reliability of these methods. Before I present the findings of this study in the next chapter, I will provide a summary of the research design and the thematic guidance of the analysis as follows (Table 6).

Table 6. An overview of the research design and analysis

Cases: 16 participants (2 male groups and 2 female groups)

Types of data	Process of data collection	Purpose	Questions that guide the analysis
Reading journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students received the handbook of the reading journal and the two chosen manga. Participants read the two chosen manga and one additional manga of their own choice. Participants recorded their reflections of the three manga verbally (and visually). Participants brought the reading journal to the group interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To trace the participants' thoughts and feelings that occur during or after their reading. To understand what elements of the book appear to be particularly interesting or important to the participants. To compare the participants' self-reflection of the books in the formats of writing, drawing, and group discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What interests the participants about the book? How do they show it in their writing or drawing? Is there any comment on authorial strategies or artistic skills? What strategies do the participants use to comprehend the story? To what degree does the participants' responses show their emotional involvement in reading the story? How do they describe their reading experience in general?
Group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: 45-60 minutes. Video and audio recorded. Four participants of the same gender in a group. Four groups in total. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand what elements in the chosen texts particularly engage the participants' interest. To observe how the participants comprehend the verbal and the visual information in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What interests the participants about the book? How do they respond to the characters' decisions? How do they respond to the author's/artist's decisions? Is there anything in the book that confuses the

Types of data	Process of data collection	Purpose	Questions that guide the analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three interviews with each group. Twelve interviews in total. • Books for discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1). <i>Naruto</i> vol. 6 (2). <i>Vampire Knight</i> vol. 4 (3). A self-selected manga 	<p>chosen texts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore the participants' critical views of the chosen texts. • To understand the strategies that the participants employ to help themselves understand the chosen texts. • To investigate the ways participants engage themselves with manga in their daily lives. 	<p>participants? How do they deal with it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they make sense of the verbal and visual narrative? • What are their reading experiences of texts in different formats (shōnen vs. shōjo; manga vs. texts in other formats)? • What is their general experience and knowledge of manga?
Individual interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length: 25-40 minutes. • Video and audio recorded. • Questions were asked to follow up on previous interviews. • Each participant received one individual interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand individual participants' views on manga and their personal experience of it. • What does manga mean to the participants personally? • To clarify or explore further the participants' feedback from the previous interviews and their reading journals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is special about manga to the participants? What keeps their interest in it? • What does the reading of manga mean to the participants personally? • How do the participants reflect on the impact of manga on themselves in comparison with the views from people around them? • How do the participants perceive themselves as fans?



This drawing is a character of Travis' creation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Chapter 2, I introduced the format and storytelling styles of manga. I also discussed reader-response criticisms as part of the theoretical background, and looked into the representation of emotions in literature and its potential for evoking affective responses in readers. In addition, I have considered meanings of manga fandom to its participants. These discussions shaped the analysis of the data collected from the interviews and the students' reading reflections. In this chapter, I will discuss the students' engagement with manga in three parts. Section 4.1 *Visual Power of Manga* will present the students' responses to the visual techniques that make manga reading a highly visual and imaginative experience. Section 4.2 *Getting into the Story* will show the students' involvement in anticipation, retrospection, negotiation, and immersion in an engaged reading experience of manga. Finally, Section 4.3 *Call Me a Fan* will demonstrate the students' engagement with manga through their fandom participation.

In the following discussions, I will use acronyms to refer to the two corpus texts – *N6* for *Naruto* vol. 6 and *VK4* for *Vampire Knight* vol. 4. Participants' names have been replaced by pseudonyms. I used AB and AG to refer to the boy group and the girl group respectively in the first school; and GB and GG to refer to the groups in another school. Further, as the participants tended to use the word 'like' excessively in their speech without necessarily attributing particular meanings to it, I have edited out this word on occasion for reading convenience.

4.1 Visual Power of Manga

You can go deeper with the story [...] You can see emotions on people's face, how the atmosphere was [sic], the tension.... Yes, that's what I like.

(Travis, Individual interview)

When participants were asked to compare the storytelling styles of manga and of books in other formats, they often described manga as “more visual”, “more detailed”, or having “more effects” and “more impact”. As I tried to explore this point further, I discovered that many participants found manga attractive because of its distinctive art styles. I also found that manga artists rely on certain visual techniques to communicate intangible feelings, thoughts, and sensory experiences. They adopt cinematic techniques to slow down narrative development in order to focus on the expression of characters’ internal states and significant movements. As manga was essentially exotic to the students, they took particular interest in characters’ visual appearances, which exhibited elements of Japanese culture. In this part of the finding chapter, I will discuss what engages the participants with manga in terms of the expressive devices used to construct the visual narrative. I will present the participants’ responses to the visual effects, and how they made meaning of these devices. Initially, I will discuss the symbolic aspect of storytelling through the visual depiction of background, sounds, speech, and emotions. Following this, I will show particular cinematic techniques that are employed in the chosen manga. Finally, I will discuss the visual representation of characters and their cultural meanings.

4.1.1 Symbolic Storytelling

The adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” is a fundamental principle of the creation of manga. Johnson-Woods (2010) says, “The words are few – manga relies more heavily on visual cues...” (p. 6) Although words and pictures share the responsibility for telling stories, manga artists tend to avoid using lengthy sentences. Instead, they lavish details on the visual narrative, which makes manga reading a visually rich experience. Cohn (2010) claims that manga uses its well-developed visual system as a language in itself. Readers who are engaged with manga will grow to be

“visual speakers” and thus be capable of participating in a rich graphic system (p. 200). The following discussion will focus on how participants in my study interpreted certain artistic techniques that manga artists use as expressive devices to depict sensory experiences and psychological states.

4.1.1.1 Background

In manga, the background actually means something.

(Wesley, ABG Return visit)

I think that the artist is very good at putting me into the story with just lines and shades of colours.

(Elsa, Reading reflection of N6)

Background is often exploited to imply or establish a sense of mood in visual texts. In terms of manga, background is tied to the development of storyline and characters in a highly symbolic way. It can go beyond a representation of geographical setting to provide a ‘psycho-narration’ of characters’ internal states. Clarke (2004) believes that a lyric tradition in Japanese narrative has resulted in this phenomenon, where much attention is paid to the expression of feeling and the crystallisation of perception. As manga is monochromatic in nature, the presentation and variation of tone, lines, and symbols become primary sources that readers rely on to unfold the psychological atmosphere and abstract feelings.

During the group interview about the participants’ reading of *VK4*, Elsa told me that she liked the way the artist depicted personal relationships using visual means. She picked a picture in this book to show me how a romantic relationship between Zero and Yuki is depicted (Figure 15).



Figure 15 VK4, p. 27 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

She said:

It's very light, you know, in a very good atmosphere and stuff like that. Then you see them holding each other, so you see something, you know, their relationship is going on.

(Elsa, GG group interview 2)

Elsa's response suggests that a glamorous aura is conveyed through the brightness of the background. She made sense of the two characters' relationship not only through their gestures, but also the contrast of tone in this picture.

At another group interview about the participants' chosen manga, Elsa demonstrated how she incorporated words and background to understand what is going on between the characters (Figure 16):



Figure 16. Ueda (2010), *Stepping on Roses*, vol. 1, p. 26 (HADASHI DE BARA WO FUME © 2007 by Rinko Ueda/SHUEISHA Inc.)

This one helps me understand the writing and the pictures because, first of all, you see the background, you see the artist does that, and you think, "Oh they're good moments. " And then you read what he says [....] He says, "Take care!" And you see this must be a meeting of romance.

(Elsa, GG group interview 3)

The patterns and shade in the background gave Elsa the feeling of a dreamy atmosphere. They were created using screentone sheets – a common tool used by manga artists to create backgrounds to convey particular moods (especially in *shōjo* manga). Whilst the abstract background implied a romantic encounter between the two characters, the speech enhanced Elsa's understanding.

In addition to the variation of tone and texture of the background, flowers are also used frequently as a symbol of romantic relationships in manga, particularly *shōjo* manga:

Wesley: When I look at the background, it kind of tells me what's gonna happen. For example, in Vampire Knight, when I look at the background, I knew straightaway that it's gonna be about romance or something.

Interviewer: Just by looking at the cover?

Wesley: Yeah, because you can see petals everywhere.

(Wesley, AB Group interview 3)

Elsa also said:

When you see a rose or a kind of petal, it's saying 'sad' or something, um, being romantic.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 3)

As an indicator, flower petals in the background prepare readers for sentimental and poignant feelings that characterise most romance stories. At the return visit to the students, I tried to explore how they made connections between flower petals in pictures and romance. Wesley told me that he could get the meaning from the “context” of the story. It implies that the reader has to read between words and pictures to pick up or

confirm allusive references. Wesley also pointed out that the connection between flowers and romance was “common sense” that he learnt from other media, such as books and TV. Similarly, Olaf pointed out that the connotation of flowers is established in the everyday life. These two students' responses suggest that the symbolic representation of flowers is culturally informed and shared across some nations. Williamson (1978) explicates the symbolism that an advertisement creates out of a product. According to her, once the connection between the symbolic meaning and the material product is established, buyers take the sign for what it signifies. That is, they see the symbolic meaning when they see the product; they take the thing for the feeling. With regard to the participants' interpretation of flower petals in manga, established cultural knowledge enabled them to perceive the generic meaning of romance beyond its material meaning.

The ‘context’ that the participants relied on to decode certain visual signs was not simply based on the synergy between words and pictures, but also the sequence of panels. As comics are based on a structure of juxtaposed images in deliberate sequence (McCloud, 1994), the meaning of a manga story does not dwell in individual panels, but in the relationships between them. The process of meaning making is inductive as the reader incorporates information from words and pictures in consecutive panels. The participants told me how they understood the symbolic meanings of backgrounds by reading between panels:

If the background turns, like, one shade, you know it's like [...], um, something is happening, really.

(Olaf, GB return visit)

By the pictures – the way the pictures are, and the way the pictures are leading to that kind of scene.

(Becky, GG return visit)

Olaf's response suggests that background has a *proleptic* narrative function – the change of background between panels implies that a new event or problem will be or has been introduced. Similarly, Becky's response suggests that the meaning of a background in one panel may be indeterminable without the subsequent panel(s). This alludes to the fact that the sequential and fragmentary nature of manga plays a primary

role in driving the reader to read on. The more information the reader obtains as reading proceeds, the better his/her understanding develops, but the more new questions he/she will also encounter. It is the human mind's tendency to fill in the knowledge gap that drives the reader to read one panel after another. The knowledge that is accumulated from the previous panel(s) helps the reader to comprehend the new panel, whilst the new panel clarifies what was unclear in the previous panel(s). Thus, although the sequential panels tell the story linearly, the process of meaning making may be circular when the reader tries to recall what he/she has learnt previously.

Speed lines are another expressive device that manga artists employ extensively to heighten the emotional life of a story. As *shōjo* manga is characterised by its expressionistic backgrounds, *shōnen* manga is marked by 'streaked background', which is filled up by parallel or convergent lines in a high density. McCloud (2006) points out that streaked background is one of the distinct storytelling techniques in manga²⁰. It borrows the idea of 'tracking shots' in cinema to involve readers in the depicted movement by making them 'move with' the moving object rather than watch the motion from the sidelines. He calls this technique a "subjective motion" (1994, p. 114), as readers are positioned as if they were holding a camera and moving with the object side by side. As a result, the moving object stays focused whilst the environment becomes streaked. This technique is often employed at action scenes to express the speed of a movement, increase tension, and focus the reader's attention. For example, Harris described a fighting scene in *N6* (Figure 17):

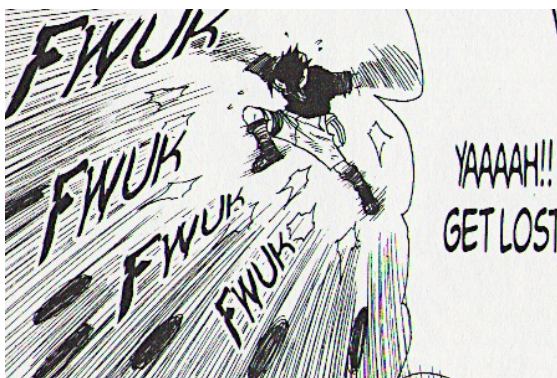


Figure 17. *N6*, p. 43 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

²⁰ According to McCloud (1994), Japanese artists started using streaked background in manga in the late 60s. A few American artists began to adopt this technique in comics in the mid-eighties. In his later work *Making comics: storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels* (2006), he claims that subjective motion (using the streaked background) is one of the eight storytelling techniques in manga.

You see it's coming towards something [...] You can see the lines here. You can just tell the characters are moving quite fast [...] You can actually feel [it].

(Harris, GB Group interview 1)

This battle scene depicts the character throwing swords at the enemy. With lines completely covering the background, the density intensifies the sense of speed and time. With the streaked background to indicate the direction and the power of the movement, the artist can present words in the most succinct way to enhance the potency of the moment. The streaked background also allows the reader to imagine the character's action more vividly. As the words suggest that the character is fighting back, they clarify that the converging lines are shooting outwardly. Thus the reader, who is placed alongside the enemy's position, may experience the full force imaginatively.

The same technique is employed in another battling scene of the book (Figure 18).



Figure 18. *N6*, p. 24. (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

Arthur said:

You can notice that the lines are coming towards you. Um...yeah, makes you imagine that you're the enemy.

(Arthur, GB Group interview 1)

Although there are no words in this panel to indicate the direction of the lines, the close-up of the sword shows that it is flying towards the enemy, with whom the reader is aligned. Thus, Arthur's attention moved from the centre towards himself, as the sword

seemed to fly along the shooting lines to him. This kind of picture demands direct interaction from the reader. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) believe that a picture like this constitutes an ‘image act’, as the participant in the image uses gaze or gestures to invite the viewer to enter into an imaginary relationship with him/her. Thus, the combination of a subjective perspective and converging lines in the picture above can render a vicarious experience as the reader imagines himself/herself to be the object of this ‘image act’.

As mentioned above, the density of lines in the background conveys a sense of high speed and enhances tension at the depicted moment. Olaf’s response to this expressive device shows his precise reading of the implied meanings (Figure 19):

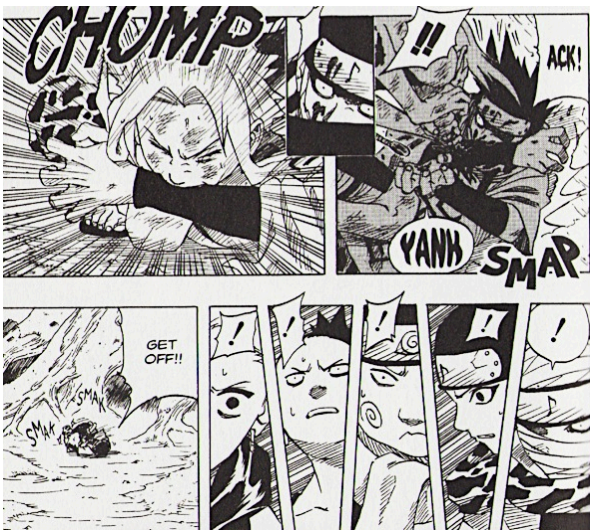


Figure 19. N6, p. 175 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

It's like they use these lines to show the moment, like how this is quite shocking-ish [sic]. And here, she bites him. That's shocking [...]. When the background isn't as important as what's going on in the middle, they [manga artists] shadow out the background, so you can only see what's going on. So, in here, you don't know what the background is, but what you need to know is their facial expression after she has bitten him.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Olaf’s response to the converging lines on the top left panel shows that the streaked background enhanced the visual impact of the character’s action. His interpretation of the following five panels further points out that he was aware of the purpose of this expressive device in heightening action or psychological states.

The streaked background in manga shares ideas of speed lines and direction lines in Western comics, even though manga artists tend to use speed lines in a much higher density. Similarly, using flowers in the background to allude to romance, although regarded as a distinct technique in (*shōjo*) manga, is not a completely alien idea to the students given shared cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, the students showed that meanings of these cultural-specific or manga-specific elements could be confirmed through 'reading in the context'; that is, by incorporating words and pictures in sequence. Thus, as the reader gains more experience of manga, he/she develops more mature skills in integrating different modes of information in a meaningful form and order.

4.1.1.2 Pictorialised Texts and Emotional Symbols

It [Ambient sound] kind of makes you imagine the sound in your head, so it makes it like easier and more imaginative to read.

(Fiona, AG Group interview 1)

The facial expression changes so much [that] you cannot even see their noses or mouths, so that makes you feel funny.

(Alistair, AB Group interview 2)

Pictorialised texts and emotional symbols are two expressive devices that manga artists use to depict our sensory and emotional experiences. The former includes ambient sounds that are inserted into the background, and speech texts that are presented through variant forms of speech bubbles. The latter are symbols that are used as an artistic convention in manga. They are adopted particularly for comedic effects (see 2.1.1 *What Is Manga?*). These visual cues can communicate effectively and efficiently with readers who share the knowledge of these artistic conventions.

In McCloud's (1994) seven types of relationships between words and images in comics, 'montage' is a category where words are treated as integral parts of a picture. This refers to the concept of piecing together two different modes of texts to form a new composite. Eisner (2008) also claims that lettering in comics can function as an

extension of imagery when it is being treated graphically. Hence, the reader is expected to take graphical lettering not only for its linguistic meaning, but also for the expressive meaning of the visual representation. The participants pointed out that the typography of background sounds could imply the power of action. For example, Wesley and Elsa provided examples from their chosen manga (Figure 20 & Figure 21):



Figure 20. Oda (2006), *One Piece*, vol. 7, p. 182 (ONE PIECE © 1997 by Eiichiro Oda/SHUEISHA Inc.)

It shows that he's powerful because when he shoots it, it shows the sound... and the lettering.

(Wesley, AB Group interview 3)



Figure 21. Ueda (2010), *Stepping on Roses*, vol. 1, p. 44 (HADASHI DE BARA WO FUME © 2007 by Rinko Ueda/SHUEISHA Inc.)

It looks like it's gonna break, like the way he's holding it. And it says, "grp," as well, and you see the strength.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 3)

In both examples above, the characters' speech does not describe the degree of power inherent within the action. However, the ambient sounds clarify the expressive intensity of the actions contained within the images. The typographic presentation of sounds in both pictures is chosen to imply force and dramatic intensity. Whilst 'ka-boom' denotes a sound of explosion, the word 'grp' comes from the verb 'grip' to give a sense of a sound that does not exist in reality. As mentioned previously²¹, English translators often have to create new words for sounds that do not have equivalent counterparts in English, especially sound effects that are created to describe silent activities and emotions in manga. The translation of 'grp' may have been a technique of ellipsis that the translator uses to express extreme pressure by contracting the word. As the picture has already conveyed the linguistic meaning of 'grip', this translation did not seem to cause any confusion for Elsa.

Another student, Olaf, came across a panel in his chosen manga where the ambient sound was incomprehensible to him (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Kubo (2014), *Bleach*, vol. 25, p. 160 (BLEACH © 2001 by Tite Kubo/SHUEISHA Inc.)

²¹ See 2.1.1 *What Is Manga?*.

He said:

I don't know that sound, but I think that's just the mask dropped off.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Olaf's response to this image shows that even though the linguistic meaning of some sounds in Japanese cannot transfer to a different language, the content of a picture allows the reader to infer the possible meaning. Moreover, as typographic presentation of sounds is meant to reflect our sensory experiences in reality, the shared human experiences and artistic conventions (e.g. the correlation between the size of font and the volume of sound) may still allow the non-Japanese reader to imagine the quality of the sound.

As ambient sounds are presented in the background, the participants treated them as part of a picture, rather than as texts. Some students told me that they did not always 'read' the sounds. Alistair said:

I skip all the sounds. Sometimes, when I just look and it shows that it's interesting, you just forget about the sounds. It just comes into your head, and you don't need to read it.

(Alistair, AB Group interview 1)

It seems to Alistair that seeing was hearing. His description of this experience shows that it was an instant and effortless process. Whilst it is not my intention to analyse how the reader's perception of onomatopoeic words can transfer into images or sound in the mind, it seems to me that the visual representation of sound in manga provided stimuli to Alistair so that he could gain an aural experience in a vicarious sense. Moreover, Alistair felt that he did not need to 'read' the onomatopoeic words, but to 'look' at them. It can be argued that the visual connotation of ambient sounds in manga weighs more than linguistic meanings when the latter are not available to the reader (as Olaf's response shows previously), or when the reader could already infer possible sounds from what happens in the picture. For example, Olaf said:

I only read it [sound] if the picture doesn't tell me already.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

In other words, sounds are inserted in the background not only to convey its linguistic meaning, but also to stimulate the reader's memory of certain sensory experiences. To the participants, ambient sounds were primarily treated as an expressive, rather than interpretive, dimension of the text.

In addition to background sounds, verbal narrative in manga is also constructed in a pictorial format – a speech bubble. Artists play with creativity and artistic conventions to create visual effects that connote meanings beyond the linguistic value of the presented speech. Through varying fonts and the tone, shape and outline of a speech bubble, the artist can hint at a character's personality and psychological states. In addition, the visual effects can imply the volume and quality of the character's speech. They can also indicate the type of speech, such as retrospection, monologues, or conversations. Sometimes manga artists also insert emotional symbols like sweat drops or an open cross in speech bubbles to imply a character's emotions.

Fiona mentioned that the representation of Shizuka's speech bubbles in some panels reflected this character's nature (Figure 23).

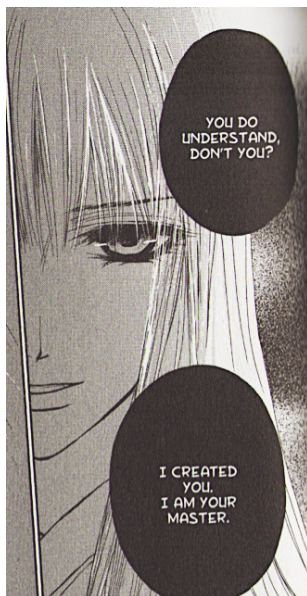


Figure 23. VK4, p. 131 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

They black out the speech bubble and make it [into] white writing, so [it] makes it seem a little bit more serious, more mysterious. Like, if you just look at the character itself, it doesn't seem [to be]

that intimidatingly evil, but when they add pictures and shading, and the way they did the text box, it makes you more intimidated. Evil!

(Fiona, AG Group interview 2)

In this panel, the visual effects of the speech bubbles enhance the character's threatening tone. This function is similar to the additional remark added after a direct speech to describe the speaker's manner in novels. For example, the speech above could be presented as "I created you. I am your master," says Shizuka *threateningly*'. However, in manga, speech bubbles replace quotation marks, and their visual representation gives the sense of the speech and the speaker without an adverbial qualifier. Fiona's response shows that she felt the threat of the character not from her appearance or her speech, but the shade and colour in the image. Later in the same interview, Fiona said:

In this book, there's like, for different characters, they do different things. So, they keep the same font, but they would either change the colour of the box or the speech bubbles [...], so they have the white outline to the writing. You see the different characters, you know which character is talking and when. It kind of tells you what the characters are like based on their speech. You kind of imagine their voices in your head when you read it.

(Fiona, AG Group interview 2)

Whilst the design of speech bubbles may be a device to distinguish the speakers, it also offers information about characterisation. Similarly to the symbolic representation of background and ambient sounds, the visual effects of speech bubbles communicate expressive meanings that can only be realised through the reader's imagination.

Another distinct expressive device used in manga involves emotional symbols. These are usually attached to characters' faces or speech bubbles, and are used as shorthand to indicate emotions and create humour. McCloud (2006) points out four primary elements in the depiction of emotions in comics: realism, simplification, exaggeration and symbolism. Realism focuses on replication of real-life experiences in realistic tone and details; simplification conveys an emotion using key lines or shapes; exaggeration amplifies key features to make an emotion clearly recognisable; whilst symbolism does not necessarily have real-world resemblance but focuses on the symbolic expression of emotion. Manga artists make use of these elements to develop a system of emotional symbols to communicate about the character's emotions in an efficient way:

They [manga artists] draw the characters in detail, but if it's a funny bit, they take away most of the details, like, you know, shadows and nose [...] When your vein pops, they either do that beside your head or in the corner.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 2)

Elsa's description points out three of the elements that McCloud mentioned – realism, symbolism, and simplification. When a character is overwhelmed with anger, the artist omits details of the character's facial features so as to make the depicted emotion stand out. A common symbol to connote anger is 'open cross', which has a realistic connection to a popping vein. The following image is an example from *VK4* where the annoyance of the female character is implied by marks of an open cross and a sweat drop in her speech bubble (Figure 24).

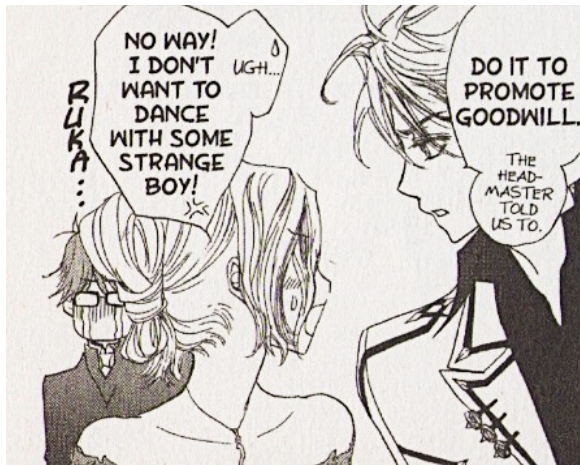


Figure 24. *VK4*, p. 83 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

Wesley mentioned a similar comedic effect in a manga (*Dragon Ball*) that he read:

Goku, when he fights someone in the palace, they express the way he walks around, like Chibi – when the hands are, like, just circles, and bubbles... It's kind of funny.

(Wesley, AB Group interview 1)

Chibi is an artistic style that presents a character in a child-like figure. It is probably better described as a 'sign' rather than a 'symbol'. Wesley's description points out two of the elements that McCloud mentioned – simplification and exaggeration. In order to

create humour, the artist simplifies the character's hands to circles. The transformation of the character's body is an exaggeration of the psychological states that he experiences. The following image provides an example of *Chibi* (Figure 25). The heroine, Yuki, is feeling scared by the threat from the crowd behind her. This overwhelming emotion is hinted through the transformation of her appearance. Unlike her normal appearance (Figure 26), her face is drawn with rounder lines, her eyes are beady, and her nose has been omitted.

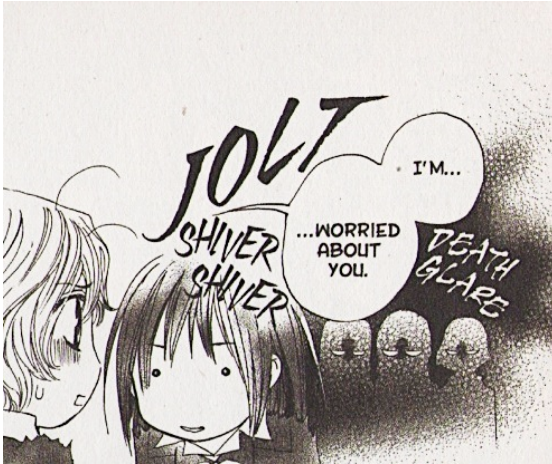


Figure 25. *VK4*, p. 14 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)



Figure 26. *VK4*, p. 24 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

According to McCloud (1994), some of the emotional symbols in manga have become familiar in English language comics, but many other symbols are still alien to the Western readers. At the return visit to the students, I tried to find out how the participants learnt to read these culturally specific symbols and styles. Wesley was the only student who confessed that he asked a friend about the meanings when he first came across these symbols. All the others claimed that they never had a problem understanding these symbols, or they somehow 'got used to' them:

If you read it, you have a joke or a funny moment, and then you understand why their faces are like that.

(Olaf, GB return visit)

I can tell from the situation, what it meant.

(Lois, ABG return visit)

In fact, Wesley also told me how he learnt about the meaning of *Chibi* by context:

The joke they were saying was funny, so I knew it's supposed to be funny. And they look like kids, it makes it kind of more funny because they can "hand wave" or something like that.

(Wesley, ABG return visit)

The participants interpreted obscure symbols and signs by incorporating verbal and visual information, in a similar manner to the way they made sense of the expressionistic background, as discussed in the previous section. As their experience of manga increased, they gradually picked up on the meanings of these expressive devices. Wesley's response particularly points out the dynamic relationships between words and images – the joke told in the verbal text sets up the mood of the image, and the drawing style in the image enhances the humour. The strategy of reading by context enabled the participants to access meanings that might seem obscure due to cultural barriers.

In this section, I have discussed various artistic techniques that manga artists employ to describe sensory experiences and psychological states. These intangible feelings are translated into visual signs, and their meanings are realised by the reader's imagination. The participants picked up on and confirmed the meanings of these expressive devices through reading in a context constituted by words, pictures, and sequences of panels. This is a common strategy that the participants used to make sense of artistic conventions in manga. In the next section, I will discuss another artistic technique that is used distinctively in manga to tell stories – the cinematic framing.

4.1.2 Cinematic Storytelling

The tradition of presenting images by varying distance, perspectives, and angles in manga is believed to start with Osamu Tezuka, the most influential artist in the modern history of manga (Gravett, 2004; Thorn, 2005; Palmer, 2009; Johnson-Woods, 2010). Hui (2013) comments, "[M]any manga artists often refer to the cinematic angle, when describing the composition of their layout, as if it is a necessity rather than an option" (p. 234). For example, Masashi Kishimoto, the author of the corpus text, *Naruto*, admitted that he was often inspired by movies and would borrow film techniques to

create visual effects in his comics (Solomon, 2008). This technique gives the artist more freedom to present a story in depth, and to focus the reader's attention on the most important aspects. Several participants in my study have mentioned the quasi-cinematic experience of manga. For example, Hilary, Olaf, and Wesley said:

You know, pictures, every movement, they look like cartoon watching on TV.

(Hilary, Individual interview)

I think, in a battle scene, it'll tell you a lot. Like, it will let you imagine how it is going on, so you can almost play [it] out as if it's a video.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

When I'm reading manga, I imagine it actually happening, like, for example, in anime [....] I make it as if it's in my head, so that's why, manga makes you have to watch it.

(Wesley, Individual interview)

The students above suggest that the way images are presented in manga gives a sense of motion, which stimulated their imagination. As Iser (1978) points out, a literary text can provide eliciting conditions which lead the reader to turn what he/she perceives into idealisation – that is, forming images that only exist in the reader's mind, not in reality. Cinematic framing in manga provides visual stimuli, which spur the reader to bring static images into motion in their mind.

Cinematic techniques have potential for increasing manga accessibility and deepening the reader's engagement. According to Carroll (1996), *variable framing* is one of the characteristics that contribute to the widespread accessibility of films²². This technique has potential power over the spectator because it can direct the viewer's attention to details that are significant in the action-array or spectacle on screen. Similarly, manga artists present pictures as if they were movie directors, holding an invisible camera in their hands. They utilise close shots to depict the nuance of emotion, the power of an action, and the build-up of tension between panels. In order to simulate real-life conversations, manga artists often frame one of the two (or more) interlocutors using

²² Carroll suggests that films are addressed to common cognitive and perceptual capacities that we share through pictorial representation, variable framing, and erotic narrative. The power of movies is attributed to the direct connection between these three features and human minds, and hence transcends class, culture, and education.

reverse-angle shots, rather than showing all the interlocutors in one shot. As a result, subjective points of view are employed extensively to present images, which allow the reader to see through various characters' eyes. This technique invites the reader to participate in the story, as if he/she was one of the characters. In this section, I will discuss visual effects of cinematic framing in the selected manga, and their impact on the participants. Whilst distance, perspective, and angle all play a role in cinematic storytelling of manga, the following discussion will mostly deal with the first two aspects, given that the participants responded to them the most.

4.1.2.1 Close Shots

When we are really close to them, it feels like we are actually near them.

(Zoe, AG group interview 1)

Close shots have the advantage in implicating emotions, thoughts, and what seems to hide under the surface. A close distance renders a limited view of the represented participant, so that the viewer will attend to the right detail at exactly the right time. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) point out that this distance shows the represented participant in a way that encourages the viewer to identify with it. They argue that close shots imply a close personal distance between the one gazing and the one being gazed at, because non-intimates cannot come this close to each other in reality. Rowe and Wells (2003) also suggest that close shots permit readers to "know intimately the faces of leading characters, and hence by implication to read their thoughts and feelings" (p. 71). Thus, close shots have great potential to engage the viewer with the character's psychological states. For example, Travis said:

For example, say, I slaughtered my clan and then la la la... and you see sadness in his face, like shocked [...] That was telling you that "Oh, the story can hit you." And then you'll be more gripped to the story. I like a lot of moments like that.

(Travis, GB Group interview 3)

Travis showed particular interest in the depiction of emotional moments in manga, especially how manga artists can make a character's facial expressions stand out. Later

in his individual interview, he told me what he found unique about the way emotions are presented in manga:

It shows the key, like, trigger. Words and phrases trigger you to [think] like, "Yes! This is it! He's angry or what." I like how the manga artist shows the key moments, like, how key moments are out there.

(Travis, Individual interview)

With minimal words used to build tension, close shots have been used extensively in manga to create such 'key moments'. However, they are not limited to describing a character's feelings, but also the particular movement that the character makes. In one of the pages in *VK4* where Zero confronts Shizuka, the artist adopts three extreme close shots to express the characters' inner states (Figure 27).



Figure 27. *VK4*, p. 40 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

Olaf and Elsa interpreted this page:

He looks kind of nervous-ish [sic] because of the way he is holding the gun, and that really tells you what he is going through at the moment.

(Olaf, GB Group interview 2)

He's scared [...] He doesn't know what's going on. He's like, "What?! What's going on?" And he recognises that his finger is not moving.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 2)

The first two extreme close-up panels function as annotations of the close-up panel in the middle of the page. The image of Zero's eyes draws attention to the intense emotion that he is undergoing, whereas the image of his shivering hand seems to suggest that he is hesitating or struggling to pull the trigger. Instead of using verbal texts, the artist makes use of close shots to communicate this character's emotion and thought process. The final panel and Shizuka's speech – "Are you surprised that you can't do it?" – complements the meanings of the first three images, explaining Zero's facial expression and action. If the artist had not included the two extreme close-ups, nothing would have changed in terms of the storyline. However, the artist inserts the two images for a number of visual effects.

First, they emphasise what is going on inside the character, which explains the focus of Olaf's and Elsa's interpretation of this page. Without this device, the reader may only give attention to the progress of the event and lose insights of the psychological development of the character. Secondly, with extreme close-ups, the artist adds visual weight to what is framed, and hence the significance of it. Whilst this technique is not normally adopted in cinematic traditions, except for avant-garde, it has been used extensively in manga to focus the reader's attention on one aspect at a time. As mentioned in the analysis of the corpus texts (see 3.2.3.3 *Cinematic Techniques*, Figure 5 & Figure 6), 4 per cent of panels in *N6* are extreme close-ups of eyes and 14 per cent are of faces, whilst in *VK4*, 5 per cent of panels are of eyes and 28 are of faces. Although this analysis does not consider extreme close-ups of other bodily parts, the result shows that manga artists fragment images to single out individual details. The isolation of the two images from the background also makes them function like a "silent soliloquy", which, according to Balázs (2004), takes the most observant eyes and mind to "see to the bottom of a soul" (p. 318). Without words explaining images, the reader is expected to examine every tiny detail of the facial expression and the movement, so as to understand what is under the surface of the perceived. Finally, by limiting the visible range, the artist can keep the reader in suspense until a further shot gives more information about the whole situation.

The two extreme close-ups provide good examples showing the emphasis on psychological expression and the power of silence in manga. Clarke (2004) and McCloud (1994) attribute this phenomenon to the Japanese lyric tradition that manga inherits. These two features are powerful in rendering an emotional reading experience. Elsa told me that manga is interesting to her because the stories are emotional and visual. She explained why she could relate to manga better than novels:

The thing about manga [is that] you can just see it visually and how it relates to people. It's their feelings and emotions.

(Elsa, Individual interview)

Hogan (2011) claims that readers readily respond to literary emotions because the depiction of emotions provides an eliciting condition, which prompts readers to recall past experiences (memories of similar emotions or situations), to think and judge (whether the character is convincing or worth), and then to respond with or without empathy. Nikolajeva (2012) exalts the power of images in communicating literary emotions. She contends that images allow more direct and immediate access to emotions than words. Elsa's response shows that the visual depiction of characters' emotions can build a rapport with the reader. The extensive use of close shots, especially extremely close shots, is key to a manga narrative that calls for the reader's emotional response.

In order to direct the reader to individual aspects, close shots narrow the visual range to a minimum degree. As a result, the reader can only access limited information, which allows the artist to build tension in the unperceivable space – the off-panel space. By isolating individual aspects, close shots exclude most parts of the depicted object, person, or place, and leave the viewer to imagine what has been cropped out. McCloud (1994) believes that humans have the ability of 'closure' to imagine what has been excluded from what is shown. With this ability, they can put cropped images together to form a full picture in their mind. Therefore, what is excluded remains active and significant outside the frame of a panel when the reader tries to make sense of what is inside. Similarly, the audience of a film have to predict and imagine what is happening outside the film screen. This imagined space is often called 'off-screen space' or 'blind space' in cinematic studies. The on-screen space and off-screen space work together

closely to engage the audience. In terms of manga, close shots limit the reader's knowledge to a micro level so as to bring what remains unseen to the foreground of the reader's reading experience.

A fighting scene in *N6* relies on the interaction between panel space and off-panel space to create tension (Figure 28).

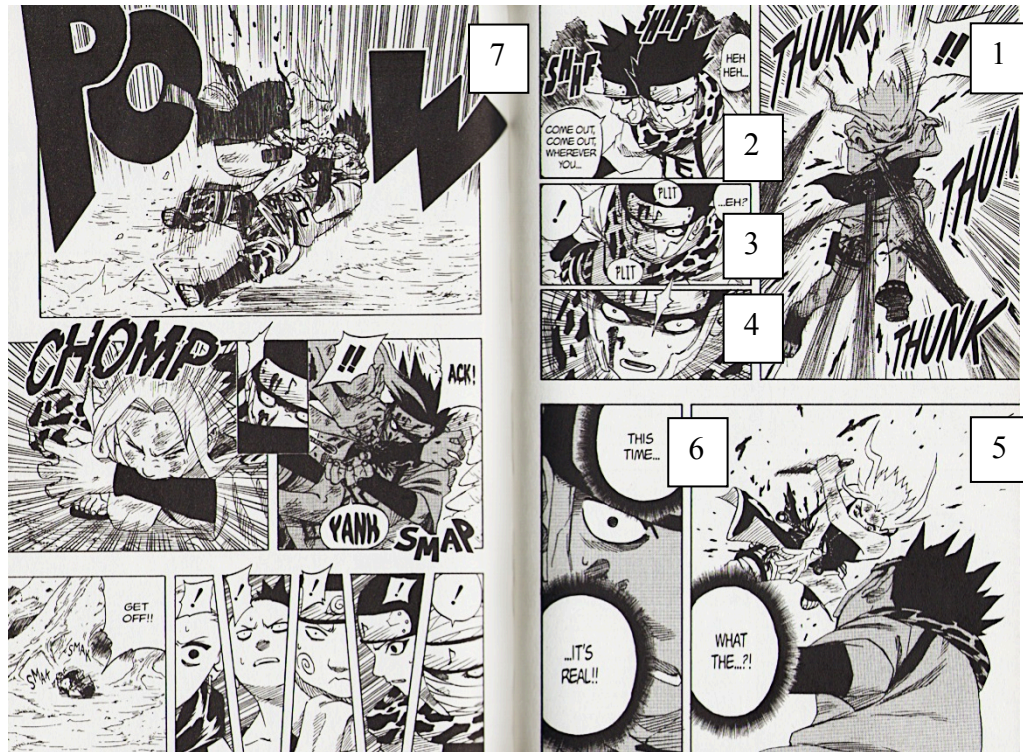


Figure 28. *N6*, pp. 174-175 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

Wesley interpreted these two pages:

This part was talking about when she does “Substitute”, for example, to cheat him... [panel 1], and then he [the artist] shows the way he's turning around [panel 2]. But then it zooms in onto his face to show how scared he was [panel 3-4]. Then it shows Sakura on top of him, like, to [let us] know why he's scared [panel 5] [...]. And then you know how scared he is, and what he's feeling, everything [panel 6]. And you know how she feels, and in the end, it shows from the side – how she got him [panel 7].

(Wesley, AB Group interview 1)

On this double spread, panels 2, 3, 4, and 6 zoom in on the character's emotional reaction to Sakura's attack, whilst leaving out the object that this character perceives at

the moment. The extreme close-ups of panel 4 and 6 directed Wesley to the character's emotional states. Carroll (1996) calls this kind of shot a *point/glance shot*, which conveys a character's feelings in order to engage the viewer's innate capabilities to recognise them. It is usually followed by a *point/object shot* that shows the object or cause of the emotion. Although panels 5 and 7 are not exactly *point/object shots*, as they are not taken from the character's point of view, they explain the character's facial expression presented in the previous panels, just as Wesley's interpretation of panel 5 has also pointed out. By arranging *point/glance shots* (panels 4 and 6) before revealing the objects of the glance (panels 5 and 7), the artist presents an emotional assessment of the character's reaction before showing the situation he finds himself in. In this way, the artist keeps the reader in temporary suspense between panels. Thus, tension releases when what was previously in the off-panel space becomes visible in the panel space – the reader is not able to know what the character sees in panel 4 until the next panel shows Sakura on top of him. In this way, the artist turns the 'imagined' (in the off-panel space) to 'concrete' (in the panel space) in the subsequent panel (Burch, 1973). This also shows how manga artists alternate close shots and long shots to accumulate and release tension in every page.

The same strategy is used in *VK4* to create tension in a double spread where Zero confronts Shizuka (Figure 29).



Figure 29. *VK4*, pp. 34-35 (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

Wesley interpreted the recto:

I think it shows, like, that part is fast. It shows bits, bits, and bits, instead of showing one whole scene [....] It tries to focus on one part to show you that it's kind of important [....] It shows what happens. And in the end, for example, it just creates tension [that is] gonna come, like something is gonna happen.

(AB Group interview 2)

The recto of this double spread comprises five extreme close-ups that show Zero's hasty steps and Shizuka's emotional response to it. Tension accumulates, as Zero's identity remains unknown. As the verbal texts and Shizuka's facial expressions suggest that she is not only aware of the person who is approaching, but also not afraid of her own situation, it leaves the reader to wonder what this unknown character will do to Shizuka. Tension reaches the highest point at the final panel when this person is about to catch Shizuka. As Wesley pointed out, the final panel hinted at an imminent action. It kept Wesley in suspense until he continued to the next page. As the middle shot in the next page reveals Zero, the tension dwindles slightly because what was previously abstract and imagined in the off-panel space has now been brought to concrete view.

Thus far, I have tried to show that manga artists excessively employ (extreme) close shots to express characters' emotions and to build tension in the off-panel space. The number of (extreme) close shots used in manga is distinctively higher than any other format of sequential art, including Western comic books, graphic novels, and films. This highlights manga artists' interest in the expression of characters' feelings, thoughts and movements through images. Moreover, this device is often repeated in a series of panels, so as to give a sense of progress or to present subtle changes. In order to analyse the relationship between panels that are presented using this device, I tried to apply McCloud's (1994) panel-to-panel transition theory to examine panel relations (see 2.2.3 *Fragmentation of Manga*). It turned out that this theory is inadequate when applied to explain a series of close-ups that present one character's emotional changes. For example, Figure 28 shows three consecutive shots of Sakura's enemy when Sakura disappears from his sight (panel 2 to 4). The three panels show the movement of the disembodied camera zooming from a middle shot to an extreme close shot. None of McCloud's six panel-to-panel transitions can explain the relationships between these

panels. There is no shift between subjects (*subject transition*), actions (*action transition*) or scenes (*scene transition*), yet there is clearly a logical relationship between these panels, which excludes the *non-sequitur transition*. Although the three shots are arranged chronologically, they are not intended to express the passing of moments (*moment transition*), but the change of the character's feelings of his situation. The last transition – *aspect transition* – is not sufficient to explain these panels either, as neither are they viewed from a 'wondering' eye, nor are they 'scattered' fragments 'beyond the restriction of time'. Although McCloud's transition theory explains the construction of narrative in comics well, it has limitations defining relationships between panels that focus on a particular character's emotional progress. This finding suggests that the theory of panel transitions needs an '*emotion-to-emotion transition*' to examine expressions of characters' feelings in comics, especially manga.

In this section, I have demonstrated that manga artists depend on close shots to engage readers by inviting them to see and to imagine the inner world of characters. This technique particularises what may otherwise seem general. Meanwhile, it limits readers' knowledge so as to engage them in suspense and to encourage them to fill the gap of information with their imagination. In the next section, I will continue to examine the employment of cinematic techniques in manga by taking point-of-view editing into account.

4.1.2.2 Perspectives

If you combine all these panels, it's like you have a three sixty view of what's going on.

(Arthur, GB Group interview 1)

Point-of-view editing can place the audience in different characters' positions and enable them to see through different characters' eyes. Carroll (1996) asserts that point-of-view editing serves the purposes of movie narration and guarantees "fast pickup and a high degree of accessibility to mass untutored audiences" (p. 134). In other words, point-of-view editing makes films easy to access and to engage with. By aligning the audiences' views with the actor's, the movie director attempts to blur the boundary between the actor and the audience. The audience may feel as if they were in the same place as the character, or even as if they had taken on the role of the character. This

renders a sense of identification that is *situational* rather than *ideological*. *Ideological identification* tends to be more consistent because it usually involves the audience making evaluations and judgements on characters' beliefs and qualities, and allying with characters that they share the most personal values with. By contrast, *situational identification* is less consistent, and is dependent on the perspectives that are chosen to present images. In other words, *situational identification* is subject to the camera, and likely to stop at the moment the film is over – the audience feel as if they wake to reality. The two types of identification do not conflict with or exclude each other. The audience can develop *ideological identification* with one character, and in the meantime form *situational identification* with another character whose point of view is taken up by the camera. According to Browne (2004), there is a double dimension of identification in a filmic experience because the audience is positioned both as the viewer and the viewed. Whilst the camera displaces the audience's subjectivity onto the viewing character (through whom the audience sees the world presented), the viewed character (the one shown on the screen) keeps the reader's attention, and possibly asks for empathy by disclosing his/her personal stories. This double structure stitches the audience's subjectivity to the character(s)', and hence produces a highly engaging experience. In this section, I will discuss the similar effect that point-of-view editing creates in manga.

Perspectives in literature are based on the literary device of focalization, which limits the information that is allowed to reach the reader. According to Nikolajeva (2002), a focalizing character is the one who sees, whereas a focalized character is the one who is seen. A first-person narrator can also be a focalizing character through whose eyes, mind, and voice the reader learns everything about the character's world. As the narrative of manga is based on dialogues, each interlocutor is a focalizing character who pushes the actual narrator (the manga artist) to the background. The reader is exposed to more than one character's interests. Thus, reading manga may feel like having conversations with each of the characters. For example, Travis said:

I like the fact that it's not like "Then I said, then he said." Like, "He shouted, I shouted." It's like normal dialogues [...] You know the whole different range of it, like you can see different perspectives [...], like it's from different people's points of view. Yeah, that's why I like it.

(Travis, AB Group interview 1)

According to Travis, variable perspectives available in manga allow him to experience each character's story directly, without needing a narrator to mark the turns of dialogues between two interlocutors. However, the form of 'natural conversation' is less clear without images showing the speaker and the listener. The reader relies on the direction of the speech bubble to distinguish the speaker from the listener. When reverse-angle shots²³ are employed (the disembodied camera takes up the listener's viewpoint), the reader is placed as the listener, participating in the conversation. This technique has the potential to induce *situational identification* with the character, resulting in vicarious experiences for the reader. However, the double structure of perspectives – one from the camera (the viewing character) and one from the image (the viewed character) – often complicate the reader's experience of identification. For example, the participants' reading of page 164 in *N6* shows how this double structure of perspectives affected their experiences of the story (Figure 30):

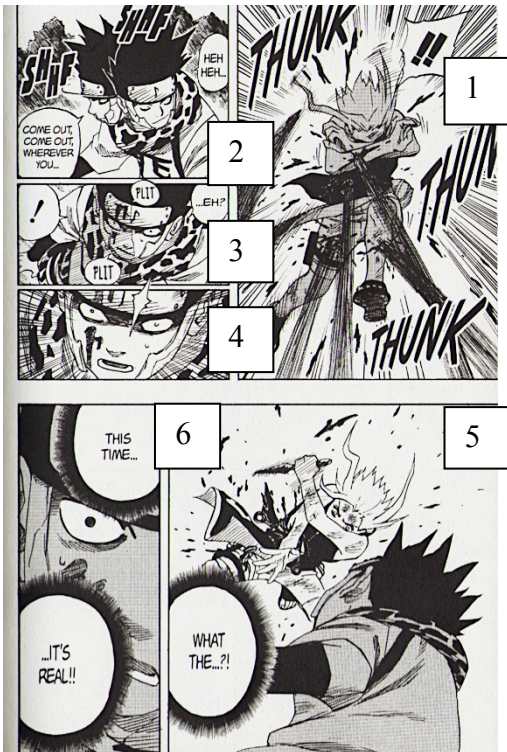


Figure 30. *N6*, p. 174 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

Travis: Sakura is almost like the hero in this one. Here is the good side [Sakura], that's the bad side [Sakura's enemy]. You get to see from the enemy's point of view [panel 1]. That's the narrator's view. You can see everything. She just looks like that [panel 5]. But this [panel 6] shows that you're

²³ According to Hayward (1996), a reverse-angle shot is a cinematic device that alternates the camera's perspectives between two interlocutors.

looking through the enemy's eyes – what the enemy would see. It helps you imagine, like, 'Wow! That's what it would look like. She's coming at me!'

Interviewer: Right, how does that make you feel?

Travis: It makes you feel like more inside the story.

[.....]

Arthur: Yeah, it's like you are Sakura basically, and you are coming towards the enemy, and the enemy is looking right at you [panel 2-4].

Travis: It gives you both points.

(GB Group interview 1)

Travis seemed to be in a detached position when he interpreted the first and the fifth panels. However, when it came to the last panel, the extreme close shot of the enemy's facial expression invited Travis to respond with empathy, as if he were the character in shock apprehending the coming danger. Whilst Travis was very clear about the perspectives of the first and the fifth panels, he seemed to be confused by whom he was looking at and through whom he was seeing when he interpreted the sixth panel. Instead of looking 'through' the enemy's eyes, he was actually looking 'at' the enemy through Sakura's eyes. Travis identified himself with the viewed character (the enemy), rather than the viewing character (Sakura). On the contrary, Arthur identified with the viewing character (Sakura) when he interpreted the second to the fourth panels. The two students' reading experiences of this page show that both the viewed character and the viewing character have potential of inducing *situational identification*.

As the reader is placed in this double structure of the viewer/viewed, it is likely that the reader's *situational identification* with the viewer/viewed shifts as the perspective in each panel changes. Wesley's interpretation of the same page demonstrates this process. His absorption into the characters is shown in the frequency of the word 'we' in the following quote:

Um, the way in this one, it shows how we are on his side. We're in his shoes. [It] show[s] how scared we are [panel 2-4]. And that [panel 5], it shows that we've got, we've got him that way. We are kind of excited, but then next, you really know, we're gonna get killed [....] You realise afterwards, like, the tension [...], like, "Oh, someone is on top of me." But then you realise it wasn't you, because of the way he [the manga artist] shows it.

(Wesley, AB Group interview 1)

Wesley's reading of panel 2 to 5 shows that he identified himself firstly with the enemy, then with Sakura, then back to the enemy, and finally he shifted back to his own disposition and detached himself from both characters. Emotional contagion drew Wesley to empathise with the viewed character. However, as the omniscient view of panel 5 showed both characters, Wesley's *situational identification* with the character became inconsistent. Firstly, his identification shifted from with the enemy in the previous panels to with Sakura. Perhaps it was because of the reading direction (up to down), his attention was quickly turned from Sakura back to the enemy. He put himself in the enemy's position again. Shortly after, realising that both characters were presented in the picture detached Wesley from identifying with either of them, as he became aware that he was not seeing through any of these two characters' eyes – he was an observer rather than a participant in the battle.

Wesley's interpretation of this page shows that the disembodied camera's point of view in manga can affect a reader's identification with characters. When the camera takes up a character's point of view, the reader may feel as if he/she was looking through this character's, which can potentially induce *situational identification* with this character. However, it is also possible that the reader, instead of identifying with the viewing character, identifies with the viewed character who speaks directly to the reader, revealing his/her thoughts and emotions. When the camera shifts its perspective to an omniscient one, the reader's *situational identification* may recede whilst his/her reader's disposition becomes more prominent. As Iser (1978) argues, readers never completely lose their attachment to reality even though they are expected to be preoccupied by the fictional world. Wesley's last sentence suggests that his disposition remains as a frame to provide him with knowledge to interpret the composition of the image.

In this section, I have demonstrated that point-of-view editing in manga has great potential for inducing *situational identification*. As reverse-angle shots are frequently adopted to present dialogues between two or more interlocutors, the reader is constantly

placed in a double structure of the viewer/viewed. This structure renders a highly engaging experience. Hayward (1996) points out that the system of reverse-angle shots is a primary *suturing* device in classic films, as they inscribe the spectator into the filmic discourse by placing them in the positions of both interlocutors. The same effects work in manga, as the participants mentioned above have shown. However, no matter how much the reader is engaged in the imagined world, their identity remains to guide them to observe, evaluate and predict during the process of reading. In the next section, I will continue to look at visual effects of cinematic framing by considering *demand* images that incorporate effects of close shots and subjective perspectives.

4.1.2.3 Demand Images

Pictures that are presented using reverse-angle shots in manga may demand that the reader enters into some kind of imaginary relationship with the represented character who casts a direct gaze or gesture towards the reader. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) define this type of picture as a *demand* picture, in contrast to an *offer* picture that is objectified for the viewer's scrutiny without interaction involved. When combined with close shots and subjective perspectives, the *demand* picture in manga renders great power to the represented character who demands a response from the reader. A double spread in *N6* contain two *demand* images (Figure 31):



Figure 31. *N6*, pp. 32-33 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc.)

The first *demand* image is the first panel on the recto. It is a close-up of Orochimaru swallowing a scroll. This image is presented from Sakura's and Sasuke's points of view, which are in line with the reader's. Orochimaru is framed through a high angle shot, which enhances the sense of his power. The second *demand* image is on the verso. It is presented through the same point of view as the first *demand* image, but doubled in size. The extreme close-up of this image renders a disturbing feeling due to the unnatural distance and the character's fierce glare. The size of the panel intensifies the visual effect. The participants responded to these two *demand* images with trepidation and disgust. For example, Elsa interpreted them:

It [The first panel on the recto] scared you 'cos he's watching, like, it felt too overpowering [...] It looks like he's watching down on you.

It's a scary picture [the verso][...] He's looking straightforward at you. You're reading this book, and you see some huge finger, and you see some huge eye. Obviously, that's his eyeball. That's disgusting [...] It gives you a feeling that this is gonna be dangerous.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 1)

As the disembodied camera takes up Sakura's and Sasuke's points of view to show the two images, it displaces Elsa's subjectivity onto the two characters. However, instead of being a gazer, Elsa is positioned as the one being gazed at, and hence subject to the character's power. Previously, I have discussed the idea that close shots of characters' facial expressions are powerful in inducing empathy. However, such shots can also cause a sense of threat, as shown by the two *demand* images above. Instead of responding with parallel emotion to Orochimaru's anger, Elsa felt 'scared' and 'disgusted'. Hogan (2011) calls this kind of emotional response a complementary one, in opposition to a parallel response to contagious emotions, such as happiness and sadness. Although the reader is the one inspecting Orochimaru, this character's gaze seems to reverse the power situation between him and the reader. The reader no longer appears to be the observer, or the voyeur, but the one being observed. Therefore, gaze comes with power. The one being gazed at is normally perceived as being in a powerless position, whereas the one gazing is generally the more powerful. Combining a close shot, subjective perspective, and direct gaze, the artist endows the character with great power to forge an imagined relationship with the reader.

Thus far, I have discussed the visual techniques that manga artists deploy to allow the reader to experience the character's psychological states and situations. In the next section, I will discuss the participants' perception of 'Japaneseness' in the visual representation of characters.

4.1.3 Visual Representation of Characters




I think how you draw manga is very Japanese [...] Like the types of hair, the eyes, and how they look.

(Lois, Individual interview)

Whilst description of a character's appearance constitutes an essential part of characterisation in literature of all forms, the visual representation of characters in manga, including eyes, hair, clothes, accessories, and weapons, embodies Japanese elements, which make manga exotic and attractive to the participants.

The depiction of eyes in manga serves two primary purposes – to hint about the character's personality and to express his/her emotions. Brenner (2007) suggests that the shape of a character's eyes reflects the character's internal quality. For example, large and round eyes imply innocence and youth whilst narrow and squinty eyes suggest evilness. Whilst this artistic convention is shared across cultures, manga artists intensify this contrast almost to such an extent that there is a formula of eyes to follow according to the character's personality²⁴. For example, Abel pointed out that characters' eyes in *VK4* define their personality (Table 7):

Table 7. The depiction of characters' eyes in *VK4* (VAMPIRE KNIGHT © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.)

Maria/ Shizuka, <i>VK4</i> , p21	Zero, <i>VK4</i> , p. 21	Yuki, <i>VK4</i> , p. 4
		

²⁴ Manga guides often provide tutorials of ways to draw characters' eyes according to their personality.

They show that she's [Shizuka] a really, you know, a serious woman who gets revenge. [...] And then he's [Zero] like, maybe he's really serious. Yuki, they show you in the start [the introduction page of characters]. It shows that she's a happy person.

(Abel, AB Group interview 2)

Although Abel did not articulate the reasons why these characters' eyes imply such personality, there is significant difference between the shape of their eyes. In his drawing guide of manga, Yadao (2009) says, "The larger and rounder the eyes are, the more innocent and pure the character is supposed to be" (p. 59). Yuki's big, round eyes indicate an optimistic temperament that is shared by almost every heroine in *shōjo* manga.

By contrast, the villainous character in *N6*, Orochimaru, has a pair of snake-like eyes. They provide clues about his ninja ability²⁵ and imply that he is cunning. Olaf and Travis both chose to draw Orochimaru in their reading reflections, with a particular focus on his eyes (Figure 32 & Figure 33):

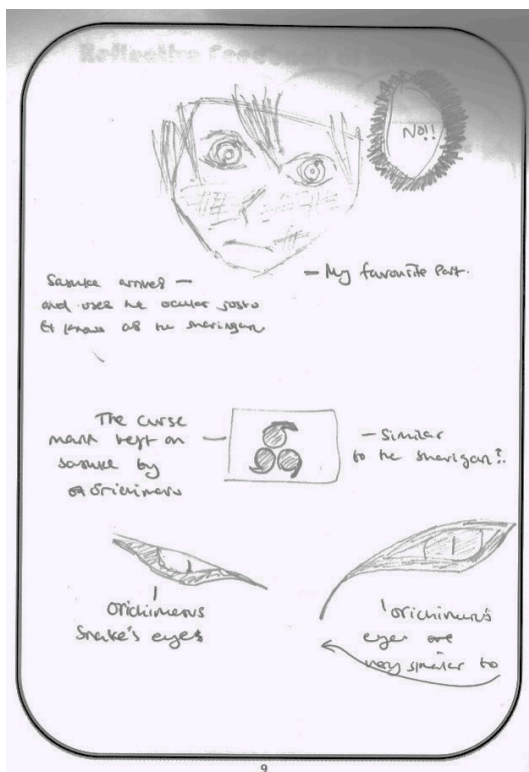


Figure 32. Olaf's reading reflection of *N6* (drawing)

²⁵ Orochimaru is known for the ability to summon snakes to battle.

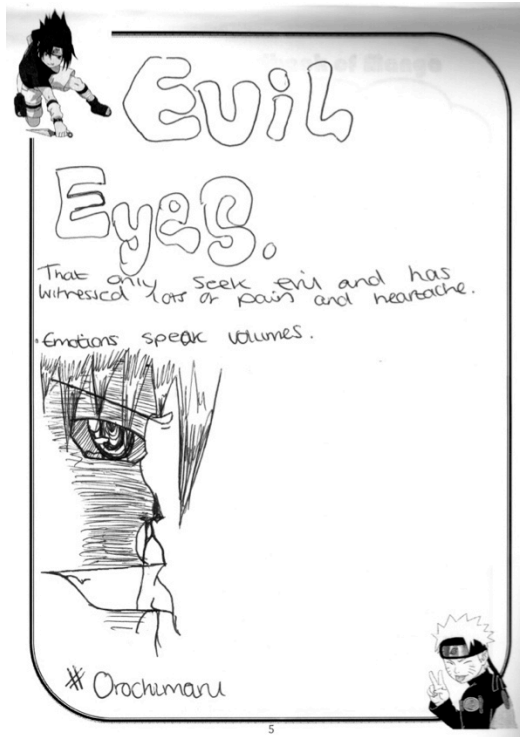


Figure 33. Travis's reading reflection of N6 (drawing)

Olaf explained his drawing:

His eyes are really good, like they are snakes. They really show the type of person. If somebody is like a snake, they're really like, you know, they're mysterious and they're always, like, double crossing and stuff.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

In N6, Orochimaru is disguised as a candidate of the *Chûnin* Selection Exam. His snake features and eyes are not shown until later volumes. Olaf drew these eyes based on his memory of the later volumes. His explanation suggests that Orochimaru's eyes are the most visible indicator of his personality.

Similarly, Travis expressed that Orochimaru's shady eye implies his evilness. He annotated his drawing with these words:

Evil eyes that only seek evil and has [sic] witnessed lots of pain and heartache.
Emotions speak volumes.

In his individual interview, Travis explained this drawing:

What I'm trying to show is that this person could look good, but he has been evil [....] His eyes are now full of rage, anger, because of the things and life experiences that he has had [....]

(Travis, Individual interview)

Travis told me that Orochimaru represents anyone who can be born good, but turn evil because of tragedies that happen to the person in life. He deliberately drew only half of Orochimaru's face to show the shady side of his character. His annotation on the reading journal suggests that this character's eye expresses both his emotions and personality.

As eyes are a device to express a character's internal quality and feelings, they can also be used in a way that conceals such information. For example, Zoe said:

Sasuke, his hair covers his eyes, so he is like the [type of] guy that hides his emotions.

(Zoe, AG Group interview 1)

The participants' particular interest in the depiction of characters' eyes in manga is perhaps due to the emphasis of expressions of characters' psychological states through the depiction of their eyes in manga. For example, Abel observed:

They [manga characters] have description in the eyes.

(Abel, Individual interview)

Although using eyes as an expressive device is shared across cultures, manga artists focus on the character's emotional life to such an extent that the way eyes are depicted in manga becomes a trademark and an attraction to readers outside Japan.

Another feature that the participants identified as containing Japanese element is the depiction of hair. In reality, hair can be a visual indicator of a person's identity with regard to gender, sexuality, race, religion, social status, and cultural group. In manga, a character's hairstyle carries a similar function, in addition to marking out the difference

between characters. Spiky hair is a feature of boys' hair in *shōnen* manga, whereas flowing, feathery hairstyles are worn by both boys and girls in *shōjo* manga. The presentation of characters' hair in manga, although not exactly a realistic portrayal, is standardised to such an extent that the participants recognised hair as a key indicator of its Japanese origin. For example, Olaf and Arthur commented on characters' hairstyles in *shōnen* manga:

Olaf: You don't see everyday people from America or England with hair [growing] in a certain way like that.

Arthur: Yeah, like spiky.

(GB Group interview 3)

Although spiky hairstyles are more an artistic style in manga than a fashion style in Japan, this feature has contributed to the 'otherness' of manga, which the participants often treated as the same as 'Japaneseness'.

Elsa also showed interest in the depiction of characters' hair in manga, particularly girls'. She told me that she 'hates' shorthaired girls even though she herself wore short hair. Although she was not able to provide a specific reason for this preference, her response seems to suggest that there is a certain aesthetic value in female characters' long hair:

I'm not gonna lie, I see more long hair characters in manga, 'cos they always have a sword, and then things, and then they have some kind of suit, and then they have hair flowing when they go like this [ran through her hair to make it flow], and you see some wave[s].

(Elsa, GG Group interview 3)

Elsa's description refers to images of female warriors in manga. Whilst such a portrayal seems to celebrate the combination of femininity and power, Elsa mainly paid attention to the visual effect of the depiction of hair.

Fiona also mentioned the potential of ‘long hair’ for creating visual allure:

I think the hair is also important [....] If they [characters] have long hair, they [manga artists] use a double page. They can show, like, make it effective. They put it on a double page. They make it seem like that character is important. And the fact that they make their hair go all the way [swept her hand across a double page], it makes [it like] a scene.

(Fiona, AG Group interview 3)

Like Elsa, Fiona attributes this artistic design to the visual effect that it renders. A similar effect is seen at a dramatic scene in *N6* where Sakura cuts her long hair to free herself from the enemy’s grip. As the flashback of her childhood memory explains, Sakura has been wearing long hair for years to impress Sasuke; hence, the sacrifice of her hair shows determination to protect her unconscious teammates, as well as her potential to fight in a battle. This plot arrangement arguably suggests that long hair, as a symbol of femininity, conflicts with masculine power – Sakura has to give up her hair to be truly independent in the battlefield (rather than depend on her male teammates as she used to). Although such an interpretation did not come up among the participants, they pointed out that it is one of the most dramatic scenes in this volume. Lois and Wesley both chose to draw this incident in their reading reflection (Figure 34 & Figure 35):



Figure 34. Lois' reading reflection of *N6* (drawing)



Figure 35. Wesley's reading reflection of *N6* (drawing)

Wesley explained his choice of drawing:

When I was reading it, I like the picture. I looked at how they put the picture. I saw the hair in the background, and then I saw [that] her hair was blowing [...] I wanted to do that, so I just started drawing it, because I did the hair.

(Wesley, Individual interview)

Wesley's explanation shows that the depiction of Sakura's scattered hair in this image left a strong visual impact on him. As Elsa's and Fiona's responses have shown earlier, manga artists make use of a character's long hair to create visual effects and to intensify dramatic moments. These participants perceived the aesthetic purpose of this visual device, but their responses did not show that they read gender implications into it.

Like hairstyle, characters' clothing and things they wear usually define their identity. These elements are noted to have significant cultural meanings in the participants' experience of manga. As school themes are common in both *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga, both the students from the pilot study and the main study mentioned that the uniforms

that characters wear reminded them that they were reading ‘Japanese works’. For example, Gwyn from the pilot study said:

You never find school uniforms that cool [in the UK]!

(Gwyn, Pilot study 2, Group interview 1)

Fiona told me why she liked to read manga with school themes:

Most of [the] time I like their school uniforms because they are really cute.

(Fiona, Individual interview)

Her drawing in the reading reflection of *VK4* also shows this particular interest (Figure 36):

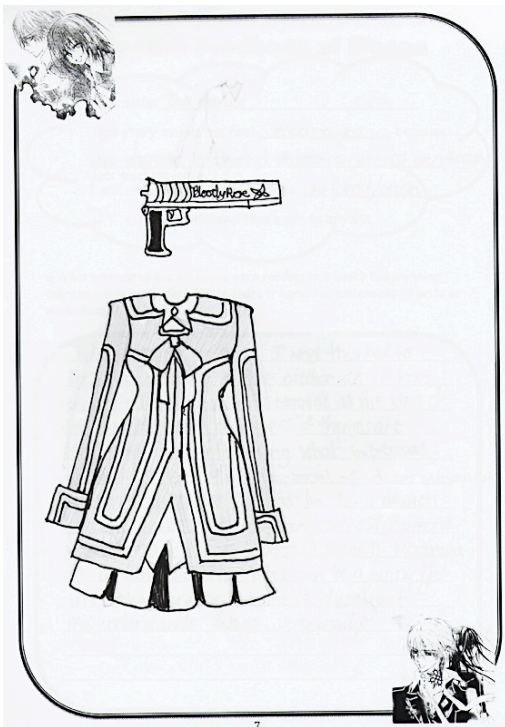


Figure 36. Fiona's reading reflection of *VK4* (drawing)

In addition to the girl's school uniform, Fiona drew a vampire hunter's gun because it was “cool”. Fiona's drawing in the reading reflection of her chosen manga also focuses on weapons and items that the characters carry. According to her, these items are significant and important because they are always with the characters. In other words,

costumes, weapons and accessories are signatures that represent characters' identities in manga. Readers come to know characters not only by what they do but also what they wear.

Olaf told me how he started reading *Naruto* because of the characters' costumes:

I remember my friend told me about Naruto, and how they had headbands and stuff, and how cool that is in ninjas. And I thought ninja was fun.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

In the previous group interview, the other boys shared the same opinions with him:

Olaf: Naruto and Bleach. They have small things, like the headbands. And that, as a kid, really got me hooked, 'cos, like, now you've got Leaf village on your head. It's like... [Drew a leaf shape on his forehead with his finger].

Travis: Yes, that's what I like. That's what I like.

Arthur: Yes.

(GB Group interview 3)

Headbands in *Naruto* represent different ninja villages, and hence the characters' identities. The connection between headbands and ninjas seems to make it a culturally significant element in Olaf's (and other students') engagement with this manga series.

The participants in this study often attribute Japanese elements of manga to the depiction of characters' visual appearance. It is arguable that Japanese themes and cultural elements play a key role in Western readers' engagement with manga. Yukari (2013) points out that manga series, *One Piece*, leads the sale of *shōnen* manga in Japan, whereas *Naruto*, which has only sold half of that of *One Piece* in Japan, gains more popularity in North America and Europe. Yukari speculates that the ninja theme may be one of the reasons why *Naruto* attracts more Western readers than *One Piece*, which features pirates. Yukari's claim suggests that Japaneseness is a fundamental part of the appeal of *Naruto* to Western readers. It may also explain why participants in this

study showed particular interest in manga characters' visual appearance. Although it is possible to trace gender stereotypes in the depiction of characters' eyes, hair, clothing, and accessories in manga, cultural and aesthetic meanings that are embedded in the visual presentation of the character seem to be more prominent to the participants.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that manga reading is a highly visual and imaginative experience for the participants. Manga artists develop verbal texts in the most succinct way, whilst lavishing all the possible details in pictures. They use expressive devices such as visual tone and symbols to build psychological atmosphere and imply a character's feelings, personal qualities and relationships. In addition, they rely on visual cues such as lines and typography presentation to depict sensory experiences. These devices are based on artistic conventions that do not necessarily transcend cultures. I found that when there was a comprehension gap for any culture or manga specific convention, the participants would look for clues by incorporating messages from words and pictures, and from the change between panels. In this way, they picked up specific knowledge and skills that are required to understand manga. Concurring with Allen and Ingulsrud's (2005) claim that readers learn to read manga from repetitive reading and help from other readers, the participants' responses show that most of them self-taught manga reading, whilst one of them confessed to having consulted a friend. The strategy that the participants used to make sense of unfamiliar elements in manga shows that there is a dynamic relationship between words and pictures, and between panels. The participants demonstrated competence at orchestrating different modes of information to gain understanding of a manga story.

This study also shows that the cinematic style of storytelling has great potential in bringing about vicarious experiences for the participants. Applying cinematic techniques to present pictures, manga artists increase the accessibility of the text's meaning, and provide the reader with a quasi-cinematic experience. Employment of close-ups is powerful in expressing psychological states and invoking emotional responses from the participants. It also allows tension to build, to heighten moments of the story, and to lure the reader to read on. Whilst McCloud's (1994) panel-to-panel transition theory is useful in examining relationships between panels in comics, this

study shows that the emphasis on the character's emotional life in manga requires an additional transitional relationship – *emotion-to-emotion transition* – to describe the emotional changes of a character between panels.

The dialogue-based narrative renders extensive use of reverse-angle shots in manga, and hence a pervasive employment of subjective perspectives to present pictures.

Consequently, the reader is constantly placed in a double structure of the viewer and the viewed. This stitches the reader into the narrative by aligning their subjectivity with the character in an imaginative sense. When combining a close-up, a subjective perspective, and a character's gaze, the artist creates a *demand* picture that forces the reader to enter an imaginary relationship with the presented character.

As a cultural product, manga attracts the participants not only with its literary and artistic content, but also cultural elements. This is observed in the participants' particular interest in the description of characters' eyes, hair, clothing, and accessories. Although there are elements of gender stereotypes in the visual presentation of characters in manga, the participants did not respond with critical opinions to the represented social expectations of gender roles. Instead, their responses focused on aesthetic and cultural values of these elements. Nevertheless, when it comes to the roles that boys and girls take up in the selected manga stories, girls, especially, were able to relate to the heroine's social status and comment more critically on this aspect. I will discuss this in section 4.2.2.2 *Girl Power*.

Thus far, I have tried to analyse the visual power of manga in terms of the participants' responses to visually expressive devices, cinematic techniques, and cultural elements. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore the reading experience of manga with respect to the cognitive process and the immersive state.

4.2 Getting into the Story

The meaning of reading lies in the interactive relationship between the text and the reader. Rosenblatt (1978) defines this relationship as 'transactional'. The text stimulates the reader's interpretation, and the reader contributes meanings to the text based on their

personal experiences. Iser (1978) suggests that the reader's existing knowledge and experiences generate anticipation of events when they come to a text. Moreover, the reader continues to draw on a repertoire of existing knowledge to adjust their understanding, to make predictions and to judge the credibility of the character and the story. The on-going dialogues between the text and the reader characterise engaged reading. The ultimate engagement is a state of immersion when the reader feels as if they have lost themselves in the book. In this part of the finding chapter, I will discuss the participants' affective and cognitive responses to manga, using reader-response criticisms as the main theoretical framework. I will first look at elements in manga that encouraged the students to join the construction of meanings of the text. This process often involved the students responding to stimuli in the text with anticipation of what was to come and retrospection of what was known. However, this process proved to be challenging when the students encountered an unfamiliar text. The lack of required skills to comprehend *shōjo* manga resulted in some boys' rejection of this text. Following this discussion, I will explore the participants' responses to paradoxical roles of villains and heroines in the chosen manga. Whilst invincible characters generally attracted the students, they made critical judgements on the characters' motivations, and reflected on existing stereotypes in the represented reality. Finally, I will discuss the participants' experiences of escapism with manga. By immersing themselves in the story, the participants seemed to gain strength and insights to face their own realities, which they sometimes found burdensome or intimidating. They made efforts to get into the story and purposefully sought pleasures from the experience of immersion in manga.

4.2.1 Anticipation and Retrospection

Iser (1974) contends that every reading act involves an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection. Meek (1988) also claims that "the artist or storyteller 'recruits' children's imaginations by presenting them with the familiar in a new guise, or by making a 'logical' extension of the real" (p. 14). I noticed that the participants in my study often looked for familiar elements in manga to make sense of new or unfamiliar elements. Based on the familiar elements, they could imagine and predict how the story might proceed. In the following discussion, I will first look at how the participants tried to understand new characters using schemas of character prototypes.

Then, I will discuss the participants' engagement with manga through a joint construction of meanings with the artist and through developing reading strategies of their own. Following this, I will detail reasons explaining why some boys became frustrated reading *VK4*, and explore various possible implications in terms of the relationship between boys' reading habits of manga and their comprehension of an unfamiliar genre.

4.2.1.1 Stock Characters

As mentioned in section 3.2.3.2 *Character Archetypes*, characters in *N6* and *V4* are drawn from certain types that can be found widely in mainstream *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga. The following table includes the main characters of the two chosen manga and associated personal qualities that the participants identified (Table 8).

Table 8. The students' observation of the stock characters in *N6* and *VK4*.

	Character types	Characters	Personality
<i>Naruto</i> vol. 6	Hero	Naruto (M)	Brave, protective, funny, determined, cheerful
	2 nd leading character	Sasuke (M)	Brave, serious, smart, quiet
	2 nd leading character	Sakura (F)	Brave, protective, funny, determined, passive
	Antagonist	Orochimaru (M)	Calm, serious, smart
<i>Vampire Knight</i> vol. 4	Heroine	Yuki (F)	Brave, protective, funny, determined, cheerful
	2 nd leading character	Kaname (M)	Brave, calm
	2 nd leading character	Zero (M)	Brave, serious, quiet
	Antagonist	Shizuka (F)	Calm, serious, smart

This table shows that the students observed much similarity between the main characters in terms of their personality types. For example, the hero and the heroine in

the two books were both depicted with a certain degree of clumsiness, which is sometimes exploited by the artists to create a comedic release of tension. The students also pointed out the fact that some personality types are commonly shared by characters across different manga. For example, Olaf said:

They [manga] always have a great person, but they [characters] always have little flaws, and certain things that they're not really good at.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Elsa used this phenomenon to describe typical features of *shōnen* manga:

Typical shōnen is when the boy is always kind of failing in life, and then they do something.

(Elsa, GG Group interview2)

In fact, presenting a character as an imperfect human can be a deliberate design to induce a sense of identification or empathy in the reader, who sees the character as an ordinary person who is similar to themselves in some ways. For example, in his e-mail interview with Solomon (2008), Masashi Kishimoto, the author of *Naruto* manga series said:

Perfect heroes are cool, but no one can really empathize or identify with them. Naruto often makes blunders, and he has weaknesses. Naruto feels inferior to his peers, but he hates to be a loser. Although he doesn't think about it too much, he knows he hates to lose, and we all know what that feels like. I think readers see themselves in Naruto, and that's what appeals to them: They can empathize with him and his weaknesses (para. 2).

Kishimoto's intention behind the character design of *Naruto* explains why flawed heroes and heroines are often found in mainstream manga.

In addition to flawed heroes/heroines, there are other established character types that serve different narrative purposes. For example, a cunning, evil character poses problems and challenges, whereas a character with suppressed emotions gives a mysterious feeling. These character types form a schema, which guided the participants'

interpretation of new characters that they encountered. Fiona told me how she made sense of the heroine's development in *VK4*:

As the book progresses, she [Yuki] kind of becomes more serious in the book and she seems like a brave character by the end of it [...]. It makes the story a bit more complete in a way, 'cos there's usually these characters in a story. There is a joker, there is a serious person, there is a brave one, so it seems like that type of story.

(Fiona, AG group interview 2)

According to Fiona, this character's demonstration of bravery not only shows her character development, but also fulfils the need for a specific type of character in the narrative.

Olaf also showed that he relied on this schema to understand unfamiliar characters in a new story. He said:

Nowadays, I'm always like, who in this manga is gonna be like the Naruto character, who's gonna be the Sasuke character, 'cos it would be, who is gonna be the good guy who is really like, yes, he's clumsy, but who is going to be really like [a] cool guy, who is going to be the one that's gonna go kind of dark, sometimes. And like, Ichigo is more like, he's kind of a mix between Sasuke and Naruto because he's really dark sometimes, but he's also messing around.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Olaf pointed out that by mapping new characters on to the characters that he was already familiar with, such as Naruto and Sasuke, he was able to register each character's role in the narrative. In the return visit, Olaf told me how character prototypes in manga helped his understanding of a story:

If you're reading a new manga, you can start, like, easily guess[-ing]. If there are two similar characters, you can just guess and understand the story better, because you know he shares this sort of similarity with Naruto or something like that.

(Olaf, GB Return visit)

Olaf's responses show that character prototypes provide elements of familiarity in the story, which allowed him to make predictions of characters' development.

Elsa pointed out that identifying familiar elements in a new character could be pleasurable:

It brings some fun to it.... It's just good that you can draw links between.... Yeah, it's just, like, unconsciously you're just saying it, like, "Oh yeah, this one reminds me of this character!"

(Elsa, GG return visit)

Douglas and Hargadon (2000) claim that readers get satisfaction when the narrative brings their expectations and prior knowledge of other texts into play. The participants mentioned above evaluated new characters by drawing on knowledge of their internalised character schema in manga. This process helped them understand the story better, and thereby provided rewarding feelings.

In contrast to the determinable elements like character prototypes, there are indeterminate elements in manga that create gaps of information and arouse the reader's curiosity about what is to come. In the next section, I will discuss how indeterminacy in manga enhanced the students' participation in the text.

4.2.1.2 Indeterminacy and Co-authorship

According to Iser (1974), elements of indeterminacy in a text enable the text to communicate with the reader, and allow a spectrum of actualisation in terms of meanings that readers make of the text. Iser (1978) also argues that every text sits between artistic and aesthetic poles. Decisions made by the author (the artistic pole) are associated with certain expectations of the implied reader. The expectations can only be realised, although selectively, by the actual reader (aesthetic pole) who interacts with the text. Therefore, indeterminate elements in a text can serve as a stimulus to trigger readers' imagination whenever the flow of reading is interrupted. In *4.1 Visual Power of Manga*, I suggested that the visual format of manga is fragmentary by nature, which serves the fundamental purpose of engaging the reader's imagination, as the human mind tries to fill in the gap left by missing information. For example, the ability of *closure* draws the reader's attention to the off-panel space and forms a complete picture in the reader's mind. In this section, I will discuss fragmentation in terms of the

information that manga artists provide and withhold. This leaves the meanings of events undetermined, and requires the reader to tolerate or enjoy a state of uncertainty until more clues are offered and questions are answered at a later stage of reading.

When I asked the students whether words and pictures in *N6* sometimes made them ask questions, some students said:

Arthur: It depends on what the dialogue is. If it's a clue, it makes you think what could happen [...] I mean something like, a character revealing slightly of [sic] what happened, but not the full story, so you want to know the full story of what happened.

Interviewer: O.K. So they don't give you the full story. They only give you....

Harris: Few bits.

Arthur: The fragments.

Harris: Like fragments.

(GB Group interview 1)

The students' responses suggest that the artist sometimes withholds certain information from the reader, which required them to piece together the available clues and fill in the gap of the unknown with their own imagination. The gap inevitably put the students into a state of uncertainty, which constituted part of their aesthetic experience of manga. Such an aesthetic experience, according to John Keats, is based on human's *negative capability* – “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason” (Keat's-Kingdom, 2015). Several students showed *negative capability* in their requests for ‘mysteries’ in the story. For example, Gwyn from the second pilot study said:

Gwyn: One thing I don't like about English comics is that, you know, instead of gradually revealing this guy's past, they go like, “Oh, how do you know this guy.” And it's like, “Oh, it started at 1908 when I was back in the school.” And it's kind of like, they reveal everything, and it's like... Ugh....

Interviewer: How do they do it here [N6]?

Gwyn: They just show Itachi in the background. Sometimes, they just show little murmurs. They give you these questions like, "Why did Itachi kill his clan? Why?"

(Gwyn, Pilot study 2, Group interview 1)

Gwyn pointed out that a partial flashback about the character left him with questions and anticipation, whereas a detailed recount of the character's past spoiled the pleasure of raising questions and finding answers during the process of reading.

Similarly, Travis criticised *VK4* for failing to sustain his interest:

When zero sees his brother, there is nothing to indicate that it's his brother. "How come that guy looks like him?" But then it says, "Oh, that's his brother." He [artist]²⁶ could have left it. He could make the story, "Ah, who was that guy? Who was this?" And carry on.

(Travis, GB Group interview 2)

According to Travis, the artist fails to maintain suspense as to the character's identity in this scene. Even though the introduction of Zero's twin brother made Travis ask questions, they were answered too quickly to leave him enough space to enjoy the pleasure of co-creating the story.

Wesley also mentioned that temporary suspense is key to an engaging experience of a story. Unlike Travis, he did not find *VK4* too quick to reveal answers:

Abel: This story, it makes you ask questions.

Wesley: Yes, that's confusing.

Interviewer: Do you find it uncomfortable being left in suspense too much?

²⁶ The author of *VK4*, Matsu Hino, is a female artist. However, several participants, both boys and girls, tended to use the pronoun 'he' to refer to the author. It could be that the participants were not able to tell the artist's gender by her name, so they assumed that the artist was male.

Abel: No, I actually like it.

Wesley: No, I kind of like it, because it makes you want to read more, but in the end, it always answers your questions. For example, it creates tension, so you can read more, and then in the end, it releases your tension.

(AB Group interview 2)

Wesley's response shows a sense of faith in having his questions answered as reading proceeds. This faith enabled him to bear the temporary uncertainty, and to look forward to the moment when a mystery would finally be resolved. Fish (1980b) argues that there is a "temporal flow" of a reading experience when it comes to interpretation. The reader's interpretation of a text is continuously adjusted in relation to how words of sentences succeed one another. In other words, the reader collects information along the path of reading, and such an inductive process allows him/her to gradually make meaning of what has been read. The linear nature of a reading act gives the reader faith to look forward to having their questions answered by the end of the text.

However, the serialised format of manga means that not all questions will be answered in one episode or volume. Travis and other students pointed out that there were micro and macro types of questions raised by fragmented information in manga:

Travis: Yeah, I like it [fragmented information]. I like that.

Arthur: The small...

Olaf: The simple ones, the short ones that give you a hint.

Travis: The long ones as well.

Interviewer: What do you like about that?

Travis: Basically, for example, I remember the big one, like, in the school, it was, um, finding out who Tobi was. And no one knew who Tobi was, so everyone [had] their bits [...]. Some people started calling him being [sic] Madara. Some people said, "It's Hitachi." Some people said, "It's

Sasuke.” [...] It makes you argue that, “No, it's this person. No, it's that person.” And then I eventually [was the] one guy who told people [that] he was Obito, and then he was.

(GB return visit)

The students' responses suggest that fragmented information stimulates conjecture. Depending on the narrative design, the posed question may be a micro one, which is to be answered shortly, or it may be a macro one, which remains unresolved for several episodes. The macro question, in particular, can initiate discussions among readers, as they await a new episode to reveal the answer. Travis' response shows that there was a sense of satisfaction and pride when his speculation about the character's identity was proved correct.

This study finds that the participants actively sought to partner with the artist in authoring the story. Arthur said:

Sometimes when I read a chapter, I can come out with imaginary, like, something that could happen next, 'cos it's so good that I just want to make it my own thing. 'cos sometimes, the author he changes it. It doesn't [look] like [how] I imagine something. It doesn't happen that way.

(Arthur, GB group interview 3)

Arthur's response shows that his engagement with manga generated a desire to own the story. Smith (1988), similarly, encourages children to read with a writer's mind. He points out, “We anticipate what the author will say, so that the author is in effect writing on our behalf, not simply showing how something is done but doing it with us” (p. 25). Arthur demonstrated such ‘writerly’ reading, but also refuse to submit himself completely to the predetermined meanings in the text; that is, to the artist's original intentions in the narrative. This phenomenon concurs with Fiske's (1992) claim that meanings fans bring into a popular text sometimes render a sense of possession, which makes fans feel that they can write better storylines than the author. Arthur's response shows his enthusiasm for an alternative version of the story that is in line with his own sense of how the narrative should properly develop.

Similarly, Alistair said:

Sometimes when I read manga, when it's like, happening, something new [happening], I just stop reading it and start dreaming about [it]..., like my own manga or something.

(Alistair, Individual interview)

Alistair also expressed a desire to turn the story into his own by strategically pausing in the process of reading and letting his own imagination continue the story. In this case, the divergent interpretation is not a result of an authorial design, but the reader rejecting the role of a passive follower of the artist's chosen story path.

Travis also told me how the story of *Naruto* should develop:

Me and my friends already decide what's gonna happen. Well, we hope, basically, that Sasuke comes, and then he just kills everyone, like, he just goes on the rampage and just knocks out everyone.

(Travis, GB group interview 3)

Like Arthur and Alistair, Travis expressed confidence in the version of the story that he and his friends came up with. As Fiske (1992) argues that fans accumulate knowledge of a popular culture so as to enhance their power over, and participation in the text(s), the confidence that the three students showed here may have come from their accumulated experience and knowledge of manga. However, by claiming aspects of stories as their own, the students did not mean to reject the original stories. Instead, such a sense of possession asserts their profound engagement and active interaction with these texts.

These students demonstrated autonomy by co-authoring texts and taking up particular reading strategies, as Alistair has shown above. Similarly, Elsa deliberately took off on her own direction, developing a 'skipping strategy' to keep a manga story fresh and enticing for the next visit.

When I get a book, I'd just skip some words, so that I can feel like to read it again later on [...] If I see some long paragraphs of words, I just skip it. And if it looks important, I skip it as well. I want

to save it for another moment [...] You're skipping the story, so you're gonna be a bit unsure, but I knew I did it on purpose.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 1)

Instead of endeavouring to interpret every detail that the artist puts into the story, Elsa strategically preserved the pleasure of greater uncertainty by restricting her own access to parts of the story. She bore with potential confusion, tolerated uncertainty, whilst knowing that it was under her own control. In contrast to the boys mentioned above, Elsa did not strive to create her own version of the story. What was significant about her reading strategy was that she extracted meanings from the text in a way that could sustain her interest and provide opportunities for her to revisit the text afresh, without having exhausted its interpretative possibilities. This concurs with Fish's (1980a) argument that the reader is the site of meaning. The reader enacts the author's will, but not necessarily in a way that serves the author's original intention. The reader extracts meanings that serve his/her interest. Even though Elsa's selective reading is likely to result in incorrect interpretation of a text, this strategy shows that Elsa did not simply read manga for information, but to enjoy what 'lives through' her own process of reading and rereading. Rosenblatt (1978) terms this process *aesthetic reading*.

In this section, I have suggested that the nature of fragmentation in a manga narrative plays a key role in keeping the participants' interest in the story. I have also argued that the participants' engagement with manga is shown in their active participation in co-authoring the story, their sense of possession over the story, and the reading strategies that they developed to maximise the pleasure of reading and rereading. This provides evidence that an engaging experience of manga involves the reader actively predicting the possible development of the story. The reader may gain a sense of satisfaction or frustration depending on whether their predictions are met. In the next section, I will discuss how an unfamiliar text can cause confusion and frustration, which eventually leads to the reader's rejection of the text.

4.2.1.3 Readers Not Getting into the Story

I have observed that all the boys' reading of manga was exclusive to *shōnen* manga, whilst the girls' reading crossed the two gender demographics, including both *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga. Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) observed the same phenomenon among teenage Japanese readers of manga. They suggest that it is socially unacceptable for boys to read romance texts. In one of the interviews I conducted, Alvin admitted that he watched a few episodes of *Vampire Knight* on TV and it immediately stirred up surprise in the group. Although Alvin explained that he watched *Vampire Knight* only because he was bored and randomly picked an anime to watch, the other boys' reaction and his own constantly describing *shōjo* manga as girly reflected an existing social stigma regarding what boys and girls should read. For example, Abel told me that the cover of a manga affected his decision of whether to read it or not:

Maybe the cover [is] more girly, and all that stuff. But for boys [...], they need the fighters, maybe. That's what I think.

(Abel, Individual interview)

Almost all the boys said that *VK4* was the first *shōjo* manga that they had ever read. The most common reasons offered as to why they rejected reading *shōjo* manga were either that they did not like romance or that romance was 'meant for girls'. Whilst some of the boys had tried to explore what *shōjo* manga were about to the extent of reading the blurbs on the covers, others had never made any attempt to pick up the books because of the reasons mentioned above.

Millard (1994) also points out that boys tend to read fewer stories that explore emotions, whilst girls not only read fiction that explores emotions, but also narratives containing male heroes, which according to Millard, attract girls with the heroes' qualities of bravery. Regardless of whether authors originally attempted to target their stories in a gendered way, it is generally believed among readers that romance stories are for "girls only" and that stories that feature male protagonists welcome readers of both genders, even though male readers may predominate. In my study, this social stigma had a significant influence on the boys' reading choice. It limited their experience to one singular type of manga. Thus, when they were forced to engage with

the girls' genre in detail, the boys' unfamiliarity with the distinct format and narrative style of *shōjo* manga seemed to cause a barrier to their comprehension of *VK4*.

In addition to complaining that characters all 'look the same' in this book, some boys pointed out that the storytelling of *VK4* was unclear and over complicated.

Olaf: I didn't really understand it. Like this bit, he has got... he's trying [to] kill someone, and that person says, "You have to bite me to save him." It's like, there are too many things going on at once, and there's also romance at the same time.

[....]

Arthur: Too much at once.

Harris: They try to put too much into the story at the same time.

(GB Group interview 2)

The students above seemed to suggest that romance complicated the conflicts between the characters, which made this fighting scene hard to follow. As *shōjo* manga primarily deals with personal relationships, fighting is usually a subordinate plot, in contrast to *shōnen* manga. Elsa said:

Boys' [manga] are going to be like... more actions, but a little bit of romance.

(Elsa, GG Group interview 2)

The male participants' previous reading experience of exclusively *shōnen* manga may have led them to form a certain expectation regarding fighting scenes. As the depiction of fighting in *VK4* failed to meet their expectations, a sense of dissatisfaction occurred.

Later, in the same interview, these boys went on to criticise the art style for lacking clarity:

Olaf: And, like, the artwork. You can see like, Naruto has this white space to separate things to see more clearly [pointed at the gap between panels in a page of N6]. This one [VK4] is more sketched out.

[...]

Arthur: Sometimes, I have to take my time to read through the panels and stuff [...], because the panel was like, they cut too fine, too much...

(GB Group interview 2)

Compared to the rigid square frames in *shōnen* manga, panels are more fluid and flexible in *shōjo* manga. They may appear in various shapes, resulting in a collage-style layout. According to Prough (2011), this 'heartfelt style' allows *shōjo* manga artists to express characters' emotions more freely. Schodt (1983) also points out that the emphasis of emotions on *shōjo* manga is reflected in the impressionistic art style, which, to the uninitiated, may make for confusing reading. Although Olaf and Arthur are both very experienced manga readers, their unfamiliarity with the format of *shōjo* manga made *VK4* challenging for them to read.

Similarly, Welsey said that panels in *VK4* are like 'triangles', which made the story more difficult to read than the 'square' panels in *N6*. However, he also identified that panel styles serve different narrative purposes:

It [The panel style] kind of matches it [the story], because in this book [VK4], it doesn't have that much fighting, so these types of panels are not suitable for fighting.

(Wesley, AB Group interview2)

In contrast to the boys' struggle with the format of *VK4*, the girls found it effectively adding depth to the story. For example, Elsa compared the panel styles in *N6* and *VK4*:

Elsa: It shows how much detail it is in it, 'cos the thing about Naruto is, it's so clear and simple [drew squares with fingers]. It's obviously gonna..., we know the book is gonna be simple [...]. And if they're going like, you know the slash sign on the keyboard, a slash, a diagonal line like that? Okay, if they go like that in different ways, you think, "Oh my god, what's going on?" And you know

that something is going on 'cos the way..., 'cos they have to fit the picture inside that little diagonal line. And you know, it's all collage and stuff like that.

Interviewer: It makes the story more complicated?

Rena: [Nod.]

Becky: Mysterious.

(GG Group interview 2)

Rather than feeling confused, the girls mentioned above found this panel style helpful in building up the mood and pace of the story. This contrast brought my attention to the relations between schemas of genres and readers' expectations of a text. According to Iser (1974), the reader is inclined to place a text in a particular genre according to the features identified. The schemas of genres shape the reader's expectation and hence interpretation of the text. This interpretation dominates the reader's creation of a 'virtual text' – a recreation of the world that the text presents – in their mind. Bruner (1990) extrapolates this idea and argues that some things in the plot may trigger a 'genre conflict' in readers. The reader begins by placing a story in one genre, but as their expectation of a genre fails, they change their interpretation of the text. Thus, the virtual text changes constantly in the act of reading, even though the actual text is unchanged. The boys mentioned above seemed to try to interpret *VK4* using their existing knowledge of *shōnen* manga. Since it was the boys' first time reading a *shōjo* manga, the repertoire of their textual knowledge lacked an appropriate genre category for them to place *VK4*. As a result, the incorrect schema that they used to interpret *VK4* led to the readers' confusion and frustration.

In Sarland's (1991) study of young people's reading of popular culture texts, he discovered that some readers were not able to relate to stories where the gap between the characters' beliefs and their own was too large. As a result, he argues that the reader has to decide "whether to abandon the attempt or to take pains to acquire sufficient repertoire to take on the text" (p. 94). Whilst the male participants in my study were not able to engage with *VK4* not because of what the characters do, but how the story was structured and presented, they also faced the challenge of acquiring a new set of skills to

be able to comprehend a story in a *shōjo* manga format. However, as social stigma suggested that it was more unacceptable for boys to read books that were written primarily for girls, the boys might have chosen to reject *VK4* as a way of asserting their gender identity.

Thus far, I have argued that the act of engaging with reading is characterised by the reader's active participation in the construction of meaning by looking backwards to what they have known, and looking forwards to what is new. Whilst this discussion focuses on the relation between the participants' interpretation of the corpus texts and their existing knowledge of manga, I will continue to explore how the participants' responses to these texts might be shaped by their existing knowledge of the world.

4.2.2 Negotiation

According to Nikolajeva (2014), approaches to fictional characters have contained two main aspects since Aristotle: *semiotic* and *mimetic*. The *semiotic* (or *thematic*) aspect focuses on characters as “purely textual constructions” that serve as “plot engines, ideological mouthpieces, or aesthetic expressions”, whereas the *mimetic* aspect treats characters as individuals who have physical traits and states of mind similar to people in reality – who have “thoughts and feelings that motivate their actions” (p. 76). We may try to understand participants' interpretations of characters by the two aspects. The participants paid attention to the functions of various characters in the narrative, and meditated on the relationship between characters' behaviours and motivations. They drew upon their understanding of people in reality to make sense of characters' actions; in return, the characters may bring new insights into their perception of the wider world. Cocks (2004) points out that readers constantly weigh their prejudice, belief, and knowledge against what seems to be normal or correct in the story so as to decide whether the character's representation is convincing or if the development of events in the story makes sense. When it comes to the depiction of forgivable villains and powerful/weak heroines, the participants also demonstrated critical evaluation of the represented norms and stereotypes as they negotiated the meanings in the story by drawing on their own beliefs and experiences. Meanwhile, these characters allowed them to reflect on their own social situations and norms.

4.2.2.1 Forgivable Villains

The psychological development of characters is one of manga artists' primary interests in the creation of a story. They often explore characters' backgrounds to provide explanations for the behaviours of both good and bad characters by drawing upon their circumstances and characteristics. Napier (2001) examined personal qualities of characters in anime²⁷. She claims, "The good guys have bad qualities and the bad guys have good. The characters in anime are human" (p. 251). The line between good and evil is not always neat and clear in manga. The reader is challenged to weigh their own beliefs and knowledge against what is claimed to be right in the world represented. The attitudes that I observed among the students in the present study, with regard to their responses to the villainous characters in the chosen texts, include admiration, empathy, and condemnation. They sought to be entertained by a character of evil qualities, but were ready to give a verdict on the character.

Several boys expressed interest in evil characters in manga. Apart from attributing their admiration to these characters' power, Olaf and Travis particularly mentioned that a scheming nature is important to these characters:

He [Orochimaru] is serious and he is not common [sic] bad, like, kill[s] people for no reason.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

I like evil characters, evil plans, but the way they go about it is not simple. I like very deep plans, so like, everything has to be planned. Everything is in detail.

(Travis, Individual interview)

Olaf and Travis evaluated cunning and evil characters by their potential to bring drama and complexity to stories. During the discussion of *N6*, Travis also expressed interest in a controversial character, Sasuke:

I like Sasuke [...], 'cos he's like... in this book, he is the hero. But he is bad²⁸. What I like is his power.

(Travis, GB Group interview 1)

²⁷ Anime and manga are side-by-side products. One is often adapted from the other.

²⁸ In later volumes, Sasuke sought power by forming an alliance with Orochimaru and other villains.

Travis' response to this character shows that there was a negotiation of 'ethical judgement' in him. Knowing that Sasuke's behaviour deserved moral condemnation, Travis suspended his judgement so as to enjoy the drama incurred by this character's power. Iser (1989) argues that the lack of consequence in fiction enables the reader to experience things that would otherwise be inaccessible or unacceptable. Thus, a villain's function in the narrative is perhaps not only to create drama, but also to satisfy the reader's forbidden desires.

Whilst both Olaf and Travis responded to the *semiotic/thematic* aspect of villains – bringing complexity to the narrative, they also examined the *mimetic* aspect of these characters by analysing their motives and social situations. For example, they expressed empathy towards Orochimaru when reflecting on their own knowledge and beliefs about how people fit into a society:

Olaf: I think they are trying to tell you that there is [sic] no bad people in the world, but good people that make bad decisions.

Travis: Yes, and it's the people they meet along the way [that change them].

Olaf: Yeah.

(GB Group interview 2)

Orochimaru, he has been through a lot, so, like, emotions and feelings. And people you meet can change you differently [....] If you are... all good, and you see lots of people are burning things, fighting, you would be like, "How come I'm the only one not like them?" [....] And then you are gonna do what they like, what they're doing.

(Travis, Individual interview)

Both Olaf and Travis identified the conflicts between Orochimaru's behaviour and what was considered as right in their own reality. However, as this character's backstory recounted the causes of his psychological development, it encouraged Olaf and Travis to judge Orochimaru not simply by his action, but by what directed his behaviour from within. The two students' responses also show that the 'forgivable villain' can be one of

the character models that manga artists provide for readers to reflect on what happens in the world they inhabit.

Similarly, Wesley described the impact of a repentant villain's backstory in his self-selected manga:

They call him the devil man, and then they show his background, and then they make him change, so it's like a dramatic impact. It kind of makes you think about it, and then you know him more, and then it kind of affects you.

(Wesley, Individual interview)

Bruner (1986) argues that characters are Gestalts that are constructed according to some sort of theory about how people are. They have core characteristics that direct their behaviours from within. Manga artists often use a villain's backstories to explain the development of these core characteristics. Whilst this technique has great potential in evoking empathy, the incompatible elements in 'forgivable villains' can still lead to a feeling of revulsion towards the character. For example, Ophelia responded to Shizuka's backstory where she pursues Zero's parents for killing her lover:

I kind of see her as evil, 'cos she's kind of horrible to Zero [...] You feel sorry for her, but he [Shizuka's lover] might have done something to make them kill him.

(Ophelia, AG Group interview 2)

Even though Shizuka is portrayed as a tragic figure in her backstory, she is set up to be the evil force in the story. Thus, Ophelia chose to justify Zero's parents' act of killing rather than Shizuka's. Her ambivalent judgement on Shizuka shows that it is possible for a reader to empathise and hate a character at the same time.

In another interview, Ophelia explained that moral verdicts should be made based on a character's behaviour, even if the character seemed to be worthy of sympathy:

It [Shizuka's backstory] helps you understand the story better, and it depends how bad the character does [sic] first, what their reason is for acting the way they do. If you agree with why the characters act in that way, then you feel sympathy for them, but if you don't, you just think [that] they're evil.

(Ophelia, AG Group interview 3)

Ophelia's response shows that her own beliefs and moral codes guided her judgement of the character, despite the artist seeming to make Shizuka a pitiful character.

The students mentioned above showed that their own views of the world shaped their interpretation of the villainous characters' behaviours, as they weighed their beliefs against the sense of right and wrong in the world represented. Meanwhile, they seemed to be able to suspend their judgement and to enjoy the excitement and tension induced by characters' undefeatable power and crafty plans. This phenomenon concurs with Iser's (1974) argument that reading involves the interaction between the reader's 'alien me' and 'real me'. The former is a self that absorbs a character's thoughts, whilst the latter is the reader's own individuality. There is a continuous process of negotiation between the 'alien me' and the 'real me' during the act of reading. In the next section, I will continue to discuss such interaction, focusing on the participants' responses to the aspect of girl power in the chosen manga.

4.2.2.2 Girl Power

She wanted to protect them, so she gave up everything she had. Even though she was like outnumbered – there were too many people there – she still tried to protect them. I like reading that bit of this story.

(Ophelia, AG Group interview 1)

Both of the two main female characters in *N6* and *VK4* are portrayed as fighters. Whilst they possess an altruistic nature, as typical manga heroes and heroines do – being prepared to sacrifice oneself for the other's benefits, they also embody traditional stereotypes of girls – depending on rescue from males and seeking happiness in romance as their primary goal. Comparing the heroines in the two corpus texts, Sakura is given a particular moment to demonstrate her determination and courage during the fight against her enemy, whereas Yuki is not given any opportunity to prove her power

– given that both of the two main male characters try to stop her from getting involved in any fight. As a result, the participants mostly responded to Sakura’s role in *N6* and the whole manga series²⁹, rather than to Yuki’s role in *VK4*, when it came to the discussion of girl power. Whilst participants mostly focused on the *semiotic/thematic* aspect of this character in the narrative, some of them indirectly pointed out stereotypes of girls in their own reality.

Whilst most girls responded to Sakura positively, views of this character were polarised among boys. Abel and Wesley both approved the strong will that Sakura showed in the story.

I like Sakura ‘cos she shows her feeling. Like, when she says [that] she wants to protect Naruto and Sasuke, she really means it.

(Abel, AB Group interview 1)

Sakura, she really wants to protect Naruto and Sasuke, so he [the artist] shows, for example, make[s] it like she does what she says. For example, she says like, “Now it’s your turn to watch my back.” She cuts her hair, so it shows she has been trying, really...

(Wesley, AB Group interview 1)

The boys from another group, however, claimed that Sakura was not a functional character in this manga series because she did not have any significant influence on the development of the story. When they discussed among themselves about the latest episode where the artist seemed to work on developing this character’s ninja power for the first time, they criticised that the artist “made a mistake” by delaying this decision:

Olaf: A lot of people say that Sakura is just there.

Travis: She’s just there.

Arthur: I don’t like it.

²⁹ In fact, *N6* is the only volume in the whole series where the artist particularly focuses on Sakura’s story. The cover of this volume reflects the emphasis. It shows Sakura and her female rivalry friend, Ino, in full colours, holding swords in a battling position, whilst the male characters are presented in the background as monochromatic figures.

Olaf: She's just there because of the storyline.

[....]

Arthur: I think he [the artist] should have originally kept her strong as them [Sasuke and Naruto], maybe, but then the storyline wouldn't be as it is now.

Travis: Yeah.

Olaf: [....] And now I think what happens is, she's gonna go into the war. She's gonna help somehow, and she might die or something. She'll get really injured, and Naruto and Sasuke probably will go revenge her or something.

(GB Group interview 3)

These students' responses suggest that they disagreed with the artist's portrayal of Sakura as a relatively passive role when she was supposed to show power as a ninja. Olaf's prediction of Sakura's possible development somehow suggests that this character cannot make a real fighter, but a motivator of the male characters' 'real fight', which may have been based on his impression of the artist's portrayal of this character in the previous storyline. In his individual interview, Olaf commented on Sakura's role in the story:

Olaf: I think she's just there to slightly motivate Naruto, 'cos in the beginning, he wants to show that he likes Sakura a lot. He wants Sakura to like him back.

Interviewer: Do you think the story would be better if Sakura was depicted as a stronger female character?

Olaf: Yeah, if she wasn't too giddy over Sasuke [...], slightly less love Sasuke, 'cos she looks like a typical girl. You can easily just make her wear a pink and have Barbie dolls and stuff. But she's a ninja, and then, like, in the cover, she has the sword. I don't think this is the best cover ever.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Olaf suggested that the only element that Sakura brought into the story was romance. She was not a character of substance in herself, as the male characters were. She was a typical support role, whose only function was to spur the male characters on to complete their journeys. In addition to analysing the *semiotic/thematic* aspect of this character in the story, Olaf also pointed out the *mimetic* aspect of Sakura by suggesting that she was a representation of a 'typical girl'. Although Olaf's comments about Sakura point out the gender stereotypes that the artist places upon this character, he and the other students mentioned above seemed to reject the passive image of this character because of her function in the narrative, rather than a reflection on what 'girls' are supposed to be like in a story or in their own contemporary societies.

Some of the girls, however, expressed the view that they could relate to Sakura's personal development, and were encouraged by her strength. For example, in her reading reflection of *N6*, Fiona mentioned that she liked the way the artist makes the vulnerable feminine character Sakura turn into someone fearless and heroine-like. She told me how she was encouraged by Sakura's determination:

The time when Sakura thought she was all lonely, and she was weak, everything, and then she didn't give up. It makes you think that you shouldn't give up either, and you should actually try like her.

(Fiona, AG Group interview 1)

In her individual interview, Fiona explained why she liked female characters who show their strength:

Some people have a stereotype of girls being weak, but when they show manga, they show girls being weak and become strong, It kind of breaks that stereotype and makes it show that girls aren't that [sic] weak as we are.

(Fiona, Individual interview)

Fiona's response seems to agree that girls are the weaker ones in the power structure of the society. However, it was this very recognition of her own social situation that allowed her to identify with these female characters in manga. Her interpretation of the characters' development shows a *semiotic resistance* (in Fiske's term) to the social stereotypes of girls. According to Fiske (1989a), *semiotic resistance* "results from the desire of the subordinate to exert control over the meanings of their lives, a control that

is typically denied [from] them in their material social conditions" (p.8). The development of strength in Sakura encouraged Fiona to adopt a critical stance towards social stereotypes of girls' passivity and weakness and to embrace positive alternatives.

Similarly, Elsa told me that Sakura was depicted as a "burden" to the male characters who had to protect her all the time. However, the decision that Sakura made to fight back the enemy at the end of the book was encouraging to her as a reader:

She is someone you can relate to. I was incredibly happy when she had an important big role.

(Elsa, Reading reflection of N6)

I enjoyed the book. It's like one of my favourite volumes of Naruto [...] It shows her strength, 'cos before she was just like a character that was just there, just there. Then after, yeah, when you see her take the role in this volume, you get a bit excited. You see something that you would expect [...] I can't be thinking like, "Oh, she's just a girl."

(Elsa, GG Group interview 1)

Elsa's description of Sakura's previous role as "just a girl" shows that she identified an implied relationship between 'girl' and 'weakness' in the depiction of this character. Her attitude shows a rejection of this stereotypical connotation of 'girl' that is presented through Sakura in most of the series.

Although it is debatable whether Sakura strengthens the stereotypes of girls or emancipates the female reader's desire for equal power in a social structure where men dominate, the participants' responses suggest that both boys and girls rejected passive female characters. Whilst the boys seemed to focus more on the narrative function of Sakura (the *semiotic/thematic* aspect of the character), the girls could relate their own social situations to this character's, and refused the patriarchal expectations imposed on them. Nevertheless, both boys and girls were generally inspired by the strength and purposefulness (which are qualities traditionally viewed as masculine) that Sakura shows in response to adversities. This brings our attention to the pleasure that readers achieve through immersing themselves in an imaginary realm where an alternative version of reality seems to provide them with a shelter from pressures and threats in reality.

4.2.3 Escapism – Immersion and Pleasure

If I read a manga, I can really get into it [...] Say if someone is calling me, I wouldn't hear them...

(Harris, Individual interview)

Sometimes when I read manga books [sic], it was like I'm that person, like I'm in that story.

(Rena, Individual interview)

Escapism is often characterised by a state of immersion in which the reader experiences a sense of self-loss. Therefore, when the reader closes the book, the reader feels as if they were awakening. The quote from Harris above shows that he blocked out the real world when he was so immersed in a manga book. Spufford (2003) describes his own experience of immersion in a similar way, “As my concentration on the story in my hands took hold, all sounds faded away” (p. 1).

Escapism implies a way of avoiding boring, challenging, or unpleasant aspects in life. People seek escapism in different forms to find a shelter from unpleasant realities. Radway (1984) interviewed women reading romance and found that reading provided them with free space where they felt liberated from the need to perform their social duties. In addition, the vicarious experience that they gained from reading induced pleasure, which sustained them at least temporarily, and provided them with “renewed hope and greater energy” to fulfil their duties in life (p. 100). In this sense, escapism is not merely a passive rejection of an unpleasant reality, but can be a mechanism that prepares people to better face challenges or difficulties in life.

Appleyard (1994) found that teenage readers tended to give three kinds of answers regarding their reflections on stories that they read. These answers include their experience of immersion and identification with characters, the elements of realism in the story, and whether the story makes them think. These aspects were also identified in the participants' responses to manga in this study. The students actively sought the experience of immersion in manga, through which they gained certain pleasures and insights. In this section, I will first present the participants' description of their experience of immersion in manga stories, and explore what made this experience

pleasurable to them. I will then discuss how the participants evaluated elements of realism in the story, and made meaning from the absence of them.

Immersion in a book is generally described as a pleasurable experience.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) draws on the analogy of 'flow' to describe an optimal experience of a state in which "people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p. 4). The sense of self emerges stronger than before immersion after the flow experience is over. The participants in my study expressed that manga was enjoyable partly because it offered them such an experience – a feeling of being taken out of reality. For example, Alistair told me that he could relax and forget problems in life when he read manga. He drew on an analogy to describe this potential of manga:

It's like alcohol.

(Alistair, Individual interview)

Indeed, the experience of immersion in a book is pleasurable and often addictive. Becky said:

Manga book [sic], it makes me want to read more. And when it finishes, you kind of feel sad that it's ended.

(Becky, Individual interview)

Elsa also expressed a sense of regret when she described her experience of finishing a manga:

*If I was reading this manga, first of all, it had to be in this perfect moment to read this manga [...]
Like, I just clean up my bed, make it clean, [...] I put my music on repeat. I know it's gonna finish in a few minutes [if not in the repeat mode], and I'd be like, I'm not finishing the book in a few minutes! [...] And when I finish this book, I'd be like, "Oh, my god! I've finished it!" Then I get all angry and stuff.*

(Elsa, GG Group interview 1)

Elsa's description of her preparation before reading a manga shows that she tried to make sure nothing could interrupt the 'flow' that carried her away to the world in the

book. When the book finished, and the flow ended, Elsa experienced a sense of irritation because of the discontinuation of pleasure.

The students generally enjoyed four aspects of the experience of immersion: first, it provided them a temporary shelter from worries and pressure in life; second, a character's achievement compensates for their own lacking or failures in reality; third, they could experience dramatic emotions by identifying with the character; and fourth, they felt that they gained insights to issues or potential problems in reality.

Olaf said:

I can forget about what life is right now. I can just, I can join their world almost, to jump in and know what's going on, like, befriend with [sic] Ichigo³⁰ and stuff like that. So I can just be in there, in a world not mine at the time. I immerse myself, so I can imagine myself.... If I was like a soul reaper and stuff, how would life be.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Like Alistair, Olaf found that manga allowed him to have a feeling of temporary detachment from reality. He could try out a different identity, and explore other possibilities in the fantasy. It was the “evasive use of readings” (Fiske, 1989b, p. 32) that allowed Olaf to find a temporary shelter from any pressure or frustration in his world.

Similarly, Travis told me that he would probably be an ‘angrier person’ if he could not read manga. He explained:

I think it's [reading manga] a good way to calm down [....] Say if you have stress or anything, [....] It's a way to take yourself out of the world, like, detach yourself and bring yourself into another person's world.

(Travis, Individual interview)

³⁰ Ichigo is the protagonist in manga series, *Bleach*. He is a Soul Reaper who defends humans from evil spirits and guides departed souls to the afterlife.

Travis' response suggests that reading manga could be a therapeutic process to him, as the experience of immersion seemed to grant him some kind of rest through disconnection from worries in reality.

Manga is enjoyable partly because the elements of fantasy potentially compensate for limitations in reality. Rosenblatt (1970) argues that there is a compensatory mechanism of identification working in the process of reading literature. The reader may gain satisfaction by identifying with a character who possesses qualities that they lack. My study shows that this mechanism brought the participants some pleasures when reading manga. For example, as mentioned previously, the students are generally attracted to characters who own great power, be they protagonists or antagonists. Rena also said:

Sometimes you want to be in that manga book [sic]. And you just feel like this life is way better than mine.

(Rena, Individual interview)

To Rena, identifying the gap between her life and the fictional character's life made the experience of immersion appealing to her.

In addition to pleasure induced by the compensatory mechanism, several participants have mentioned that the depiction of emotion in manga stood out as an important feature to them. Travis and Elsa, in particular, expressed their interest in emotional stories:

When I read something, I want to feel something as well, so... it draws me to the book. If it has something, like, it appears to have emotions in it, then it's a good book.

(Travis, Return visit)

I like sad bits, like, "Oh my dear! Emotional bits!"

(Elsa, Return visit)

During one group interview, Elsa described her experience of a sad manga to me:

I read it, I cried, cried, "Look at how sad it is!" And I was like, "Oh, my gosh!" Then I just cried and yeah, that's why I was reading [that book] [...] They make it really sad, like, gives you impact like, "Sigh! It's very sad..."

(Elsa, GG Group interview 3)

Both Travis and Elsa expressed a desire to experience intense emotions by reading manga. Iser (1989) points out that literary texts afford readers the freedom to experience extremes of pleasure and pain without consequence. A story creates a safe and imagined space where readers can develop temporary, provisional beliefs of what they know is not real. Whilst the reader can suspend disbelief and respond with real emotions to imagined characters and their situations, the reader is aware of fictionality of the story and the characters. In fact, it is the awareness of the make-believe elements that makes pain endurable and even enjoyable to the reader.

In addition to emotional experiences, manga also brings insights to the students' perception of their own world. Several students mentioned that they learnt things from reading about someone else's story. For example, Olaf said:

I always want to understand how the world is, what happens in this world that we live in, like how countries are, what might happen, or, "Why is this happen[ing]?" "How would we do all the reacting and stuff?"

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Olaf told me that there were always certain elements of realism in fantasy, from which he could enjoy the super power as well as learn from characters' experiences and situations that might be parallel to those in the real world:

The challenge that they [characters] face, it's similar to the challenge [that] we face.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Elsa also mentioned that she learnt about how she could possibly react to adversities in her life by reading manga:

Say the story I read is about the girl, she got raped by her friend's boyfriend [...], and [I think about] how I can react to, and I see what they do to finish this situation.

(Elsa, Individual interview)

The example that Elsa gave showed that manga allowed her to imagine herself in a situation that would otherwise be too difficult and harsh to deal with in reality. Appleyard (1994) points out that teenagers like books that make them think because such books inspire them to discover their own judgements and feelings as they examine the motives of characters' actions and evaluate how problems are solved. Although the selected, simplified, and sometimes distorted lens that fiction models for resolving problems in life can be problematic in translating the experience to reality³¹, Olaf's and Elsa's responses show that reading about how characters deal with problems inspired them to think about how they could deal with similar problems in reality.

In fact, several students mentioned that elements of realism in manga, such as the depiction of school life in both *N6* and *VK4*, were essential in their engagement with stories, because they made stories more convincing. For example, Travis said:

It [Realism] shows you what can happen [....] It gives you a believable feeling.

(Travis, Individual interview)

However, on reflection of their experience of manga, the students also identified the untruthfulness of the represented reality in comparison to their own experiences in life. Becky commented on the depiction of ideal friendship in *N6*:

I just wish people [could] protect each in the real world instead of running away. And it's kind of..., her [Sakura] [sic] makes me happy to see that she didn't run away.

(Becky, Individual interview)

There was a sense of frustration in Becky's response as she realised that friendship in her own world was far from satisfying. This retrospective evaluation points out that the better version of friendship in manga was enjoyable to Becky because it compensated for the lack of 'ideal friendship' in her own world.

³¹ For example, Alvin pointed out on his reflection of *N6* that the represented friendship between the characters was too ideal and aberrant from his own experience of friendship.

Although it is a cliché in manga to celebrate friendship through self-sacrifice to an extreme extent, the idealism in such drama often inspires the reader. Fiske (1989b) argues that clichés in popular culture, although abhorred by critical values, reveal the gap between an unattainable norm and everyday reality. The recognition of the gap gives the reader the right to deny the difference between fiction and reality. In order to increase the textual pleasure, the reader chooses to treat the representation as if it were real. This experience is pleasurable because it is under the reader's control. As Mackey (2011) also argues, the reader puts efforts into 'creating belief' during the process of reading so as to satisfy their desire to experience immersion. It is arguable that whilst elements of realism enable the reader to better relate to the character, the idealised version of reality has the potential to attract the reader to suspend disbelief, and immerse in a world that compensates or liberates restrictions in reality.

Generally speaking, the participants actively and purposefully sought the experience of immersion in manga. They gained rest, renewed hope and strength, and obtained insights to face their own realities. The students identified the gap between the real and the imagined realms. However, it was in this gap where they seemed to gain pleasure, by putting themselves in a make-believe world.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have shown that the participants actively looked for meanings during the process of reading manga. They looked for clues to support their predictions and welcomed gaps that kept them in suspense and inspired their imagination. They eagerly took part in the construction of the story, showing a desire to manipulate the plot line, and expressing a sense of ownership over their own version of the story. The knowledge that the participants had accumulated from following a manga series built up their confidence, which allowed them to judge the artist's decisions. On the other hand, the lack of experience of *shōjo* manga led some male participants to struggle with the text. Whilst this finding shows that the boys defined their identity by their choice of books, it poses a question about the relationship between the range of texts that the reader is exposed to and the reader's competency and motivation to understand texts in different formats.

The participants' active participation in making meaning of a manga text was also observed in their negotiation with the represented norms and values in the story. Whilst forgivable villains challenged the students to re-examine the concepts of good and evil, the seemingly powerful heroine in *N6* brought up discussions on the character's strength and passivity. Although both the boys and the girls sought active heroines from the narrative, girls could better relate the heroine to their own social situations and reflect on the existing stereotypes of girls, both in the story and in reality.

The participants' optimal experience of manga stories was described as a temporary detachment from reality that freed the students from constraints in reality. The temporary, absent, and imagined world, although frustrating the students when compared to their own realities, inspired and induced positive power that enabled them to better face their contemporary reality. Whilst elements of realism seemed to bridge the gap between the fictional world and the real world, a certain gap still remained in the idealised version of reality in the story. However, the students' awareness of the fiction in the story showed that their experience of immersion was a result of a deliberate decision to suspend their disbelief so as to maximise the pleasure of reading.

In this part of the finding chapter, I have discussed the characteristics of an engaged experience of manga reading. In the next section, I will explore how the students engage with manga through their fandom practices.

4.3 Call Me a Fan

Popular culture is inherently political as it centrally involves the distribution and redistribution of various forms of social power. According to Fiske (1989a), the subordinate group in a social structure forms a popular culture that is fundamentally against the hegemonic culture, so as to exert control over their lives within the social system. As teenagers are experiencing a transition into adulthood, but are not yet included in the dominant power grouping in society, popular culture plays an important role in adolescence. It provides a platform for teenagers to negotiate social power that is generally held by adults. They find relevance in popular culture, make meanings that

oppose the dominant power's interest, but serve their own, and perform the culture as a form of resistance to the control over them in a social structure. They seek "offensive pleasure" (resisting the structure of domination) and "producerly pleasure" (creating their own culture) individually and collectively (Fiske, 1989b, p. 58). By meeting up with members in the same popular cultural group, teenage fans express passion for the popular culture, enhance their knowledge of it, seek recognition from each other, and announce their chosen identities. This phenomenon was observed among the manga readers in this study. To them, manga was more than a hobby. It formed a significant part of their social life and the youth culture that they participated in. In this part of the finding chapter, I will first present my observations of the characteristics of a particular manga fan community and its members. Thereafter, I will look into social meanings of manga to these students.

4.3.1 Characteristics of Manga Fan Communities

Exclusivity is essential to the nature of a popular cultural group. Marsh and Millard (2000) contend that the term 'culture' is used to "describe a tangible set of ideas and practices which are exclusive to particular groups of people" (p. 11). The students in this study identified themselves as fans of manga who showed zealous interest in the text and performed certain rituals of this culture. Their definition of manga fans shows that passion and knowledge are indicators that they used to include like-minded people and exclude others. The two indicators are two sides of a coin. A fan's extreme passion for manga leads to their active participation in the text, which builds up the fan's knowledge of manga. The knowledge that the fan accumulates becomes a form of 'cultural capital' (Swartz, 1997), which allows them to secure social status in the fan community. Thus, the fan community of manga is a mirror of a larger society, where distribution of power and resources stratifies the structure. Whilst fans compete with each other over the knowledge of manga, their loyalty to this text unites them in defence against external criticisms. In the following discussion, I will first present the students' own definitions of fans, from which I will then discuss implications of manga fans' struggles for power within the fan community and within the greater society. Following that, I will explore the students' 'fan demands' for specific cultural elements in manga.

4.3.1.1 Fan Identity

All the students identified themselves as fans of manga, except for Hilary³² who could not answer what a 'manga fan' was like. Wesley viewed himself as a 'big fan' and Becky called herself a 'manga geek'. They described manga fans through activities that they would be involved with:

Someone who likes manga, and then he likes to read it, and he is always talking about it, or he just talks with his friends and then he meets up with this type of people.

(Wesley, Individual interview)

A manga fan is like, crazy about manga, non-stop talking about it, and always watching the films and reading the books, and collecting manga, toys and stuff like that.

(Becky, Individual interview)

The students' responses suggest that fans fill their daily conversations with topics of manga to some extent. They not only enunciate their passion orally in public, but also express it by collecting manga and its spin-off products.

Elsa further pointed out that a fan shows commitment to manga, which allows them to gain specialised knowledge of the text. She told me that her own knowledge of manga distinguished herself from the other girls in her group:

To be a fan, you need to be committed to reading manga a lot, and you'll know a lot about manga. Some of them [other girls in her group] didn't even know what 'shōjo' was, and like, even I didn't know what 'shōjo' was [before]. But when you read different pieces [of works], you start to learn a little bit more about shōjo, and you'll know what most of the words mean.

(Elsa, Individual interview)

Freedman, *et al.* (2013) point out that insiders of a cultural group see knowledge of its particular field as "a membership card" (p. 110). This membership is earned through accumulated experiences. According to Elsa, she did not see the other girls in her group as fans because they did not have sufficient knowledge nor did they read enough manga.

³² Hilary started reading manga only a year before she was interviewed. According to the librarian, Hilary was a very quiet student and often needed encouragement to contribute to discussions. During the interviews, she sometimes struggled to express herself or elaborate her ideas.

Her response reveals the exclusive nature of fan culture and a sense of superiority over those whom she excludes from the fan group.

Similarly, Alistair used 'knowledge' as a criterion to distinguish fans from outsiders:

If you're a manga fan, you have to know everything about manga. And if you know everything about manga, you're a manga fan.

(Alistair, Individual interview)

The students above suggest that the title of 'manga fan' is exclusive to people who have great passion for and specialised knowledge of manga. By calling themselves fans, the students identified their own differences from non-fans. According to Bruner (2002), the uniqueness of oneself constructs the concept of identity. The students' definitions of fans expressed part of their self-identities.

Paradoxically, the identity of fan, although establishing a sense of uniqueness, can induce rejection from people who do not belong to this fan community. For example, Fiona said:

Some of my friends actually call me things like manga head [....] Sometimes, well, sometimes I can feel a LITTLE upset about it, but most time, I don't know, I [feel] quite happy. It's like, I have something that people know me for.

(Fiona, Individual interview)

Fiona's response shows mixed feelings of frustration and satisfaction. Friends' negative attitudes to her interest in manga revealed the existing tension between manga fans and non-manga fans. However, as Bruner (*ibid.*) claims that people establish their uniqueness by comparing their accounts of themselves and the accounts that others give them of themselves, Fiona's friends' recognition of her difference contributed to the construction of her sense of self.

Similarly, Arthur and Travis mentioned the tension between themselves and friends who do not share the interest in manga:

I'm not like open, always talking about manga. No. That will just make me embarrassing.

(Arthur, Individual interview)

I think I'm good at, like, say things at the right time, 'cos with my friends who don't really like manga, I won't talk about it, like this this this this... so they don't have anything to differ [with] me about.... But with friends who do like manga, I'd talk a lot about manga.

(Travis, Individual interview)

Brown (2004) observed that many teenagers had multiple cliques of friends that they sometimes hesitated to combine. One of his interviewees pointed out that this deliberate separation was to prevent his worlds from colliding. Arthur's and Travis' responses show that they were aware of the possible collision between groups of people whom they were associated with. Meanwhile, they strived to maintain the balance of their social networks by 'concealing' their fan identity when interacting with non-fans.

To sum up, the students used passion and knowledge as their main criteria to filter manga fans. Whilst their own interest in manga helped them establish a sense of self, they struggled for recognition and acceptance outside the fan community. These struggles continued within the fan community, and became competitions over each other's expertise. As Elsa's last response shows an exclusion of the other girls in her group, I will explore the divisions within a manga fan community in the next section.

4.3.1.2 Social Hierarchies in Fan Communities

Although passion and specialised knowledge bring manga fans together, they also create factions within the fan community. Those that make a great commitment to participating in this particular culture are often the ones being perceived as especially knowledgeable. Brown (2012) argues that comic fans' knowledge and experiences can transform to a form of cultural capital, with which fans compete to gain a status within the fan community. This competition leads to a degree of opposition between elite fans and those with less experience of comics. For example, Alistair's description of manga fans reveals factions in this cultural group:

*If he has no life, like, what he does is read manga, he is [an] otaku. He'll be like, wear glasses [....]
If he's just like a normal person who likes manga and reads a lot, he's just gonna look like a normal person.*

(Alistair, Individual interview)

In Japan, *otaku* refers to people with obsessive interests. A manga *otaku* is known as someone who spends most time reading manga. A common stigma presents *otaku* as a person who wears big, thick glasses, and does not care much about his/her appearance. Alistair's categorising of fans into 'otaku' and 'normal' people implies a judgement on *otaku*'s abnormal obsession with manga.

Factions in the fan community were also observed among other boys when they talked about their interaction with friends who were less experienced with manga:

Travis: Sometimes I get frustrated. They all ask you questions like, "What happen[s] after this?" And then I say, "That's like two hundred episodes behind from where I am." And I am like, "Okay, it just happens". And then, [they ask] not where this happens, but "Oh, why did this happen?"

Arthur: Yeah.... That happened to me.

Travis: And I just get angry, "Let's spoil it!" Like, "Then this happens, then he kills them, and that happens, and that happens."

Olaf: And then they ask you, "Why? Why this happen[s]?"

Arthur: Then you spoil it for them. They cannot like... they don't feel like reading it or something.

(GB Group interview 3)

Although these students told me that they liked introducing manga to friends and enjoyed talking about manga with friends, they felt irritated when some beginner readers seemed to make no effort to build up their knowledge of manga. The different degrees of passion that these students and their friends showed divided them into sub groups within the fan community.

The students' knowledge of manga determined their status in the hierarchical structure of the fan community. It also affected their practices of fandom. Olaf told me about his experiences of visiting online forums when he was still a beginner reader of manga:

I used to go to the forum when I was slightly younger. When I [first] got into Naruto, I didn't really have the courage to post anything.

(Olaf, GB Return visit)

Being conscious of his own status (as a beginner), Olaf limited his participation in forum discussions. Fisk (1992) claims that fans' knowledge of a popular culture enhances their power over and participation in the popular text. The students mentioned above showed that the more knowledge of manga they accumulated, the more freedom and power they had in their fandom practices.

Although the knowledge of manga that fans possess leads to different social status in the fan community, the opposition to the hegemonic culture unites fans as they defend manga against populist criticisms. In the next section, I will explore fans' loyalty to manga, drawing on the students' responses to external criticisms of manga.

4.3.1.3 Fans' Defence and Rebellion

In addition to consistent commitment to a popular culture text, fans show loyalty in defence of the text. Hills (2002a) points out that fan groups strive to present justifications for their passions toward the particular culture as a way to defend their attachment against external criticisms. I found that the students also tended to justify their interest in manga when their peers or adults showed negative opinions towards it. Harris and Rena said:

Some people thought like, "That book is weird, why are you reading it?" [...] I just said, "It's a book that you read. It's like, it's a normal book. It's not like it's a book for crazy people. It's a book!"

(Harris, Individual interview)

When people say, "Oh, I hate manga," you just say "I love manga!" You just express yourself [...] Sometimes because people just read normal books and they said, "Oh, I'm reading this book." But

when I'm reading this book [manga], I'm just like, "Okay, I'm reading this picture", and people would say, "Oh why are you reading a childish book? That is just for kids." And I'll say, "No, it's not for kids! It's just [that] the drawing is nice!"

(Rena, Individual interview)

As mentioned previously, the students often called novels 'normal books'. However, Harris used this term here not to refer manga to novels, but to defend manga as 'normal' when compared to books in alternative formats. In contrast, Rena used the same term to refer to novels when she described the negative views about manga from people who only read novels. Rena justified manga against one of the common criticisms that comics were meant for young children or less literate persons due to the picture-dominant narrative. Both of the students showed that they were ready to speak up for manga when encountering criticisms of this text.

Other common criticisms of manga that the students mentioned include vulgar language, sexually explicit elements and violence. What is interesting is that none of the students thought that these elements could have bad influence on them, but only on 'others'. Alvin mentioned that there were 'rude pictures'³³ of women in the manga series, *Fairy Tail*, but claimed that they did not have any negative influence on him. Similarly, Abel told me that violence in manga did not make him more inclined to fight, although it might influence the 'younger ones'. He said:

Only to younger people, maybe they want to fight. Um, other people they maybe want to copy Naruto's techniques [...] But I didn't like fight, like, you know, I wasn't influenced by the fighting. I just like their fighting.

(Abel, Individual interview)

Abel tried to clarify that he liked the aesthetic aspects of fighting images rather than real violence. His response seemed to imply that he was mature enough to separate fantasy from reality. Similarly, Zoe and Fiona saw themselves as mature readers who would not be affected by the vulgar language, whilst "little children" or "ten-year-olds" would struggle to understand the words. These students did not deny the 'sins' that manga was charged with in populist discourse. However, they tended to position themselves as the unsusceptible ones to defend their attachment to manga. The students' responses show

³³ Female characters are sometimes portrayed voluptuously, wearing revealing clothes in manga marketed at male audiences, such as *shōnen* manga and *seinen* manga.

fans' intolerance of criticisms of their popular culture. It also shows their instinct to defend manga and themselves in facing the authority that is represented by the adult researcher.

Adults' disapproval of the students' attachment to manga marks it as illegitimate reading. Fiske (1989b) argues that popular cultural text is usually devalued by the hegemonic because its art value is considered as cheap in comparison to fine art and literature. Several students mentioned that their teachers and parents discouraged them from reading manga because it would not help their reading abilities. For example, Olaf described manga as a "guilty pleasure". He explained why he used this term:

Most people look down on it [manga] [...], So, like, English teachers, they don't say manga is good. Most of them say, "It's good if you want to read it on your own, but in your spare time. Make sure you get all you need to do first, and then go into manga."

(Olaf, Individual interview)

The English teacher's priority of what Olaf should read classified books of different formats in terms of their literacy value. Therefore, reading manga could induce a sense of guilt in Olaf when his priority was different to his teacher's. However, it could also feel like a rebellious act against the dominant power, which rendered him "offensive pleasure" from resisting the dominant power (*ibid.*, p58).

Similarly, Hilary mentioned that her English teacher discouraged her reading of manga because it would make her "level down". However, Hilary confided that she sometimes hid manga inside a novel to read. Becky also told me that she sometimes read manga late at night to avoid her parents' attention. Aware of adults' disapproval of manga, these students chose to rebel against authority. McDonnell (1994) contends that popular culture may challenge adult authority over children. However, it is this very challenge that turns popular culture into a repository of pleasure and freedom from the forbidden. By choosing to read manga, these students created spaces where they could be in control.

In fact, when I asked the students what they learnt from manga, some students tried to tell me that manga helped their reading. For example, Harris struggled with reading

because of dyslexia. He told me that he was not able to read books until his cousin introduced him to manga. He said:

I thought that if no one wants to read in class, you just give them a manga, 'cos like, at first, I didn't used to want to read books, but then I started reading manga, and I always read books now.

(Harris, Individual interview)

When I asked him whether he found the manga series, *Death Note*, challenging since the verbal text was comparatively longer and more complicated than most manga. He said:

It does hurt your brains a bit because there's [sic] a lot of words, but you start to really get into it, so yeah, you just carry on reading.

(Harris, Individual interview)

Similarly, Alistair, who spoke English as a second language³⁴ explained why he believed that manga helped his English:

Actually, I read most of [sic] manga in English [...] In some other books, it's not really interesting. If I don't know words, I just skip it [sic] , and it doesn't help for me. But manga, I have to know what it means, so I am not gonna lose the storyline [...] It helps me to continue reading manga, not just skip it.

(Alistair, Individual interview)

Like Harris, Alistair was engaged with the storyline, which motivated him to continue reading despite the language barrier. This made me wonder why these two students found it easier to get into a story in a manga format than other formats. A conversation with Hilary and Elsa provided me with a possible answer. Hilary mentioned that she learnt long words in manga, but struggled to explain how. Elsa helped her explain it:

If it's novels, they use too many big words, so you're just getting tired of it, so you just skip the sentences, [but] sometimes you have to read the sentences to understand that word, whilst in

³⁴ Alistair's first language is Russian. He did not learn to speak English until two years prior to the study. When he read manga online, he read them in Russian. However, he said that he enjoyed reading paper books more than online manga, and all the paper books that he could get here were in English.

manga, they don't use a lot of words, like big words, but if they do, you learn something new. It stands out.

(Elsa, GG Return visit)

According to the librarians' reports of the participants' academic backgrounds, the four students mentioned above were identified as struggling readers. It seems that manga was a less intimidating format to them because images shared the responsibility of storytelling. Bitz (2009) claims, "visual narratives help kids crack the code that allows literacy to flourish, and many of the issues that stump struggling readers are instantly clarified by comics' inviting format" (p. x). To struggling readers, the multi-modal narrative in manga seemed to enhance the accessibility of meanings. They were able to immerse themselves in manga, and experience the pleasure of reading, which they seemed to fail to obtain from novels. Whilst it is true that novels have high value in cultivating readers' sense of a language and literature, this option often frustrated the struggling readers, rather than build up their confidence in reading.

The students demonstrated loyalty towards manga when friends, parents, or teachers frowned on their interest in this text. Meanwhile, they tried to justify their interest, despite the awareness that manga reading was considered as non-conformist and had low status with authority figures in their social environments. In the next section, I will continue to investigate the students' passion for manga by looking at its cultural elements.

4.3.1.4 The Demands for Japanese Elements

Fans often pay much attention to small details that make up a particular character, place, or life style in a story. To Western readers of manga, Japanese elements are essential to these details. The students in my study explicitly pointed out that certain elements in manga carried Japanese cultural characteristics. Travis found the depiction of Japanese life especially interesting:

It's always like ramen, like... village thing [...] It helps you to be reminded that it's set in a Japanese place.

(Travis, GB Group interview 3)

In his individual interview, Travis explained that manga presented a Japanese society that was less culturally and ethnically diverse. To him, the pure, distinct elements of Japanese culture were essential qualities in manga:

Here [England], it's a mixture of lots of different cultures, but they [Japan] are like, it's simplistic, like, the old culture, being a public Buddhist, go to the temples....

I like the aspect of villages [...] because it's like manga. It's the closest thing to manga. [...] Manga is set in Japanese setting[s], like, mostly Japanese setting[s], and then they've got weapons, swords, ninja[s].

(Travis, Individual interview)

Manga opened up a way for Travis to experience an exotic culture without him having to travel to its country of origin. Manga was not simply a world of make-believe. It exposed him to the culture in a place that existed in reality. According to him, manga had to reflect its Japanese origin:

I don't think it [vampire] should be associated with manga. I don't think that should be a topic that you should base your manga on. I don't know where vampires came from, but it doesn't really seem like, [fit] in a Japanese thing [...]

(Travis, Individual interview)

Similarly, the students insisted that the Japanese root of manga must be retained in the choice of characters' names. Even though they often struggled to remember characters' names correctly, they told me that they preferred characters' names to be phonetically translated from Japanese rather than replaced by English ones:

Abel: It [The Japanese name] makes it unique.

Wesley: Yeah, that's why I like manga, because it has these, these all sorts of names....

(ABG Return visit)

Arthur: It's meant to be Japanese.

Travis: It'll be like, "Oh, Bill! Dude! Do this Rosengan"³⁵!"

Olaf: It wouldn't fit.

(GB Return visit)

Elsa: If she's called Amy, You're just going to be like, "No, this is not manga!" It's Japanese drawing. You cannot just say....

Rena: 'Cos it has to be linked to Japanese. And if it's [an] English name, it's going to be boring. I'll be like, "Oh, why is it called Amy?"

(GG Return visit)

Fiske (1989b) points out that fandom is characterised by discrimination. Fans “draw sharp and intolerant lines between what, or who, they are fans of and what they are not” (p. 147). In other words, fandom is a closed culture that rejects mixing with anything that does not belong to this culture. For the students mentioned above, manga has to retain its Japanese elements to be authentic. They came to manga with expectation of encountering things that were alien to their home culture. Although manga is fundamentally a hybrid text given the historical influence from the West on the creation of manga (see 2.1.3 *Manga – a Hybrid of the East and the West*), the local elements seemed to stand out to the students given their exoticism. When I asked the students what elements in manga felt Japanese-specific to them, they mentioned drawing styles (particularly characters’ eyes and hair), reading direction, the emphasis of fighting, the depiction of places and lifestyles in Japan, and Japanese language (retention of honorifics, phonetic translation of names, and Japanese words that remain untranslated in the background). In fact, not all of these elements reflect ‘Japaneseness’, but the students seemed to interpret anything that is alien to them as a Japanese element. Napier (2001) discovered in her study that it was the ‘otherness’ of anime rather than its specific ‘Japaneseness’ that appealed to Western fans, whereas Fennell, *et al.* (2013) argue that ‘Japaneseness’ lies in the origin rather than the presentation, as fans suggested

³⁵ *Rosengan* is a ninja technique in *Naruto*.

that characters were Japanese whether they looked like real Japanese people or not. It seems that to the students in my study, elements of ‘otherness’ were regarded as ‘Japaneseness’ because of the provenance of manga. To them, any encounter with ‘otherness’ in manga is an encounter with ‘Japaneseness’. These elements satisfied their expectation of experiencing things that were absent in their lives, and highlighted the cultural experience of manga. At the same time, they legitimated their fan identity as transcultural.

4.3.2 Meanings of Manga Fandom

According to Fiske (1989a), meanings of popular texts are never complete in the texts themselves. Instead, they lie in fans’ creative use of the text. Popular texts are provokers of meanings and pleasures when fans insert them into their everyday lives and activate them in their social relations. The students in my study used manga as a social tool to make friends in their social circles. In addition, they participated in fandom practices to express their passion for manga. They enjoyed the agency to exert power over the activities that they were involved in. Meanwhile, they explored their potential identities and sought for recognition in the fan community. In this section, I will discuss how the students appropriated the use-value of manga through their participation in fandom practices.

4.3.2.1 Fan Talk

All the students in this study were involved in one or more social networks that were formed based on a common interest in manga. These networks included members in families, online forums, conventions, and schools. Within each network, members enhanced each other’s knowledge and pleasure of manga by exchanging ideas and manga. Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) claim that sharing and discussing manga lead to a deeper friendship between the students and their peer friends. The students that I interviewed also pointed out that manga maintained part of their social life at school. Olaf told me that without manga, he would be less socially active and spend more time on the computer instead. He said:

Manga is like, we always talk about it, so there's always gonna be a topic.

Manga is almost... I'll say 40 per cent of things I talk about with certain friends.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Harris also said:

When I'm with my friends, they mostly talk about manga. If I never read manga, I wouldn't know what they're talking about.

(Harris, Individual interview)

Mackey (2007) suggests that there are social roots in the acts of sharing and talking about a popular culture with fans who share the same interest. Manga contributed to common topics in Olaf's and Harris' conversations with friends and maintained their friendships. According to them and other students, fan talk was not only a way to express their passion, but also to share fun with friends. They introduced each other to new titles, and updated each other about the latest episode of a particular manga. They looked for collective pleasure of manga. Travis and Olaf said:

Travis: I was like, share the fun. I have fun enjoying manga, and why don't I let someone read it and enjoy it? You can talk about it.

Olaf: It's like another thing to talk about with your friends, like [a] football match or just another thing to do.

(GB Group interview 3)

The shared value of manga allowed Travis and Olaf to use it as a social tool. Moreover, by introducing manga to friends, they expressed their passion and looked for recognition from peers. In this way, they recruited members to form or join a fan group.

Part of the shared value of manga is sustained by its nature of seriality. The regular publication of manga episodes guarantees readers that there is always something new to talk about. For example, Olaf compared the publication of novels and manga:

Manga is always there. It'll take quite longer than the normal books [will take to] end [....] It comes out [...] once every week, and then you'll talk about them.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

As Fiske (1989b) argues that repetition and seriality enable popular culture to easily fit in the routine of fans' everyday life, following the latest episode and talking about it with friends after reading became part of Olaf's life routines.

Long-run manga series kept the students' loyalty, not only because it was inscribed in their daily routines, but also because it is pleasurable to revisit a familiar character.

Ophelia said:

If you like the characters well, you would like to... want to read them – keep on reading [about] the same characters.

(Ophelia, Individual interview)

Watson (2000) argues that serial stories guarantee pleasures that the reader gained in the previous reading. To Ophelia, following up a manga series is not only to visit an 'old friend' in the story, but also to repeat the pleasure of reading about a particular character.

To the students, manga is both a personal hobby and a tool to facilitate social interaction with friends. Seriality of manga fed new topics to their fan talk, and fan talk allowed them to maintain friendship through 'gossiping' about characters' latest developments in stories. In the next section, I will continue to explore other fandom activities that the students were involved in.

4.3.2.2 Drawing, Gaming, and Cosplay

It's a completely brand new world. I get into it. I can talk to other people about it. They can talk to me. I can play a game. I can dress up.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

Meanings of popular texts are circulated intertextually. In addition to meanings that derive from primary texts (the original texts) and secondary texts (criticisms and advertisements), Fiske (1989b) suggests that there are meanings in tertiary texts; that is, fans' practices in everyday life, such as conversations, choices of clothes and hairstyles. These meanings can also be understood as a form of productivity, which Fiske (1992) defines as 'enunciative productivity' – a public form of speaking and sharing semiotic meanings that fans make from a popular text. As discussed in the previous section, the students actively participated in fan talk as part of their social life at school. In addition to that, they were involved in other activities, such as drawing manga, playing manga-adapted video games, and Cosplay.

Although not all the students drew manga frequently, half of them mentioned that they enjoyed drawing their favourite characters or creating new ones. They explained why they enjoyed doing it:

It's your own, like, you get to do anything you want.

(Abel, Individual interview)

What I like about [it] is the ability to do anything equivalent.

(Travis, GB Group interview 3)

I think it's a feeling that you've drawn what this manga artist has drawn.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

It's just the fact that I improved my drawing skills and just like, I achieved something.

(Fiona, AG Group interview 3)

Gibson (2007b) asserts, "Young people's engagement with manga includes a sense of ownership and the worth of their expertise" (p. 14). The pleasure of having the freedom to create something of their own and having the competence to produce a manga-style artwork was identified in these students' responses. Some of them imitated the artists' drawings, whilst some took an advanced step to create their own characters. That the students read and drew as artists shows the productivity of their engagement with

manga. It is likely that their passion for particular manga and characters made them want to ‘own’ them, and therefore encouraged their own creation of manga.

The sense of ownership and being in control was also enjoyed by the students through their participation in manga-based video games. More boys than girls were involved in this activity. The students told me what they enjoyed about playing these games:

You get to be in that character's position, and get to feel how they feel.

(Becky, GG Group interview 3)

I like [it] ‘cos you can do the moves.

(Arthur, GB Group interview 3)

*You can make two characters, like, friendly characters fight, and you can watch who's gonna win
[....] You play as a character. You can throw him. That's, like, makes it a bit interesting.*

(Alistair, Individual interview)

As these games were usually role-play games, the students could play as if they were the characters, controlling the characters’ decisions and actions. Mackey (2007) says, “One of the most common and important meanings of the word ‘play’ involves some kind of make believe, the shift to the world of ‘as if’” (p. 182). These students’ responses suggest that they could immerse themselves in the roles onscreen, whilst physically participating in the fight through flicking the controls or clicking the computer mouse. The simultaneousness of players’ and characters’ physical movements facilitates the shift to the world of make-believe. This vicarious experience engages players in the fictional world, whilst the movements of their hands engage them in reality. They fight both as characters and as players. The more skilful they are as players, the more powerful they are as the characters. As Roth (2013) points out that players are given the power to intervene and to collaborate in characters’ development with the original creators (manga artists or game designers), Alistair’s response shows such pleasure of being able to manipulate characters’ relationships in a way that is different from its original design in the story. Thus, in the world of games, characters are subject to players who own them and control them. The students gained pleasure and satisfaction from the agency and power that they exerted over the characters.

The ability to control characters is also enjoyed by fans in the performance of Cosplay. This is a collaborative activity where everyone dresses up as a character from manga or anime. It is often held at comics and animation conventions. Fans take this opportunity to display their creativity and to meet up with people who share a similar interest. Moreover, it allows fans to enjoy the agency of bringing fictional characters to life, and to try out alternative identities. To the students in this study, their participation in Cosplay mainly expressed their passion and affiliation:

Olaf: In Cosplay, if you go to a Comic Con or something, you move with other people like you, they dress up just like you, and you can get to talk [to them].

[.....]

Travis: When there's an expo, you'll go in, and then like, I feel good because there's a lot of other people like me.

(GB Group Interview 3)

[If] you went to a party, and then you're the only one dressed up like that, and everyone looked at you, it's a bit weird. But you go there [a convention where Cosplay is held], everyone is like, properly dressed up, like the whole thing and everything, so it's not that bad.

(Harris, Individual interview)

According to these students, Cosplay is a platform where their passion for manga could be recognised by like-minded fans. As Harris described, he felt like he was part of the crowd, rather than being excluded. Brown (2012) points out that fandom activities show how fans relate themselves to popular texts and to each other. Cosplay allows fans to present an idealised version of themselves and to earn communal affiliation. It is a performance of imaginary identities that grants fans symbolic control and agency to be who they want to be (Lunning, 2011). The choice of roles to act out is rooted in the relevance fans find between themselves and the characters. It is the ambiguity and fluidity in the nature of Cosplay that opens up a space for fans to explore their identities. Thus, fans turn themselves into “walking indices of their social and cultural

allegiances” (Fiske, 1989b, p. 147). Their participation in Cosplay is a way to display meanings of this popular culture and announce their identities publicly.

Fandom activities, such as drawing, playing video games, and Cosplay, potentially transfer the authority of the original creators of manga to fans. The students gained pleasures from exerting agency and being able to do things that were almost equivalent to what artists or characters do. There is a sense of achievement and self-confidence observed in the students’ responses regarding their participation in these fandom activities. Moreover, their participation in collective activities like Cosplay allowed them to seek acceptance from other fans, which is fundamental to the social functions of a fan community.

Conclusion

The students’ involvement in manga fandom shows relationships between fans’ passion, knowledge, and social status in the fan community. A manga fan is identified by the degree of their passion, which decides their engagement with the text, and hence the knowledge they obtain. The exclusive nature of the manga fan community gives members a sense of identity. However, the opposition between those who belong and those who do not belong create tension, which made the students feel both proud and ashamed of being manga fans. Whilst their fan identity marked their uniqueness, they strove to balance their roles in different networks of relationships that collided with each other to some extent. Such conflicts and exclusiveness not only existed between fans and non-fans, but were present within the fan community. The students placed themselves and others in different status groups according to their commitment to manga and knowledge of it. Thus, the knowledge that they accumulated about manga became a form of cultural capital that decided the power and freedom they owned over the text. Inwardly, they competed with each other as “players” (Hills, 2002a, p. 46); outwardly, they acted uniformly to defend manga against external criticisms and to resist the dominant power’s control. As a transcultural text, manga provided the students with experiences that were fundamentally exotic, other, and Japanese. These elements were essential to the students’ engagement with manga, as they formed part of the students’ definitions of manga and validated their fan identity as transcultural.

Participation in a fan group is socially and psychologically significant to young readers. The students in this study formed alliances with peers who shared the same interest in manga. Through affiliation, the students sought recognition from each other, and gained a sense of identity. According to Conger (1973), this process is fundamental to the wellbeing of adolescents who are at a stage that is fluid and full of uncertainty.

The use-value of manga has extended beyond the consumption of books to participation in fandom activities, such as drawing, playing manga-based video games, and Cosplay. Through these practices, the students celebrated their agency and power over the text, whilst exploring their potential selves and establishing affiliation with other fans by publicly announcing their passion. Thus, the meaning of manga is no longer in the control of its original producer, but opens up for the user to define according to his/her own creative use. In this way, the students made manga speak for themselves as they spoke for it.



This drawing is Lois' response to *Vampire Knight* volume 4.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I presented the background to this research and reviewed literature about manga, readers, and fandom. I also explained the methodology and the rationale, and analysed the findings of the students' engagement with manga in literary, social, and cultural aspects. In this final chapter, I will first state limitations of this study and make suggestions for future studies. Then, I will summarise key findings in relation to the research questions, and draw out implications. Thereafter, I will suggest potential benefits of introducing manga to schools based on the students' reflections on their participation in this study.

5.1 Research Limitations and Future Studies

This study did not set out to investigate common criticisms of manga's explicit elements of sex and violence, and potential influence of these elements on child readers. As mentioned in the chapter of methodology, I observed from my own conversations with the participants that talking about sensitive issues, such as topics of sex, with teenagers could be difficult. Moreover, the participants tended to give answers in defence of their passion for manga. Future studies that investigate how children perceive these elements in manga and their potential influence on readers will need to take these limitations into account. Whilst face-to-face interviews regarding these issues may not be easy with teenage readers, questionnaires and online-forums may be a less intrusive way to approach their views.

This study did not inquire into the correlation between manga readers and their literacy background. According to the librarians' reports of the students' academic performance, 7 out of the 15 participants were in the first or second highest group of the Year in English. This figure shows that about half of the students had relatively good English literacy. Although there is no strong indication showing that manga attracts more struggling readers than capable readers, the sample size of this study is too small to generalise. However, it would be valuable to look into the correlations, so as to re-examine the stereotype of manga as a text for less literate readers. It is also worth investigating the development of verbal and visual literacy in both groups of readers so as to compare the influence of manga on children of different literacy backgrounds. Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila (2006) claim that manga literacy is transferrable to other media. It would also be worth exploring how certain skills that children develop by reading manga may help them process information in other media better, and vice versa.

This study did not look into children's online access to manga in any depth. However, the issue of online pirate manga (scanlated³⁶ manga) and its impact on child readers is potentially important. Although the students expressed that they preferred reading paper books, I found that the most common way they accessed manga was through scanlation websites in addition to school libraries and self-purchase, because it was quick and freely accessible. Despite the collections of manga in the students' school libraries, the quick access to online manga meant the students could not only explore more titles and read recently released episodes, but also did not need to wait long to get hold of popular titles, especially if they wished to read the volumes in order. Moreover, as popular manga series often go on for hundreds of episodes, generating tens of volumes, collecting a complete series can be prohibitively expensive. The popularity of online manga raises a concern about the lack of censorship and its possible impact on child readers. For example, Elsa mentioned that there was no access restriction to any type of manga online, and she often just browsed through the titles to find one that interested her. During this process, she sometimes came across manga written mainly for adult readers. Therefore, issues of scanlated manga are emergent ones that need to be addressed in the future.

³⁶ Scanlated manga are scanned, translated, and circulated online by fans.

5.2 Findings and Implications

To explore young readers' engagement with manga, I asked three questions in this study:

1. What engages young British readers with manga in terms of literary and aesthetic qualities?
2. How do readers respond to manga, both cognitively and affectively?
3. What are the social and cultural dimensions of young British readers' engagement with manga?

The findings show that pictures in manga have great potential in rendering vicarious experiences and increasing the accessibility of the story. Manga artists exploit both symbolic and cinematic storytelling techniques to engage readers' attention and imagination. Although the verbal narrative tends to be succinct, the visual narrative communicates every nuance of changing emotions, mood, and tension. For example, Becky said that the best thing she could get from reading manga is:

Manga has got more feelings, and it makes you feel like you're inside the book.

(Becky, Individual interview)

As cinematic framing allows artists to direct readers' attention to the most significant detail and show scenes through various characters' points of view, it effectively inscribes readers into the narrative by evoking *situational identification* with characters (readers feel as if they were experiencing what characters go through). In addition, pictures can enhance struggling readers' understanding of words, thus making manga a less intimidating text to them. For example, manga allowed Elsa, Hilary, Alistair, and Harris to enjoy the pleasure of reading, which they struggled to achieve with texts based on long verbal narratives.

The students demonstrated visual literacy in translating visual signs, such as lines, symbols, and shade, to imagined sensory and emotional experiences. They also adopted a strategy of 'reading in a context' that is constituted by words, pictures, and panels to make sense of obscure references in the narrative. In other words, they incorporated

verbal and visual clues in meaningful sequences so as to make sense of what they read, and to keep reading on. This strategy explains Allen and Ingulsrud's (2005) finding that manga readers seem to 'self-teach' how to read manga through repetitive reading. Although the two researchers' finding is based on Japanese manga readers, my study shows that 'reading in a context' is a strategy particularly significant to Western readers, who learn to read a text that contains alien elements, such as format and culture-specific symbols.

The students also showed a tendency to look for familiar elements to make sense of unfamiliar ones. Iser (1980) contends that reading involves an act of recreation of meanings by readers, and the process of recreation is steered by familiar and unfamiliar components within the text. My study shows that participants tried to understand a new character drawing on the repertoire of character archetypes in manga. They also showed expectations of a text based on genre schemata. For example, some of the boys tried to apply their experiences of *shōnen* manga to understand *VK4*, which resulted in confusion and frustration due to the differences between the two schemata. This suggests that readers' reading habits may have significant impact on their comprehension of a text that is in an unfamiliar format. In addition, Stahl (2010) points out that readers encountering 'otherness' in a text have to tolerate the strangeness and the sense of absence in order to enjoy the text. As a social stigma as to what boys should read discouraged the students from reading *shōjo* manga, they seemed to reject *VK4* as a means of announcing their gender identity, rather than tolerating its 'strangeness'. The observed impact of reading habits on the students' comprehension of texts also alludes to the potential problem of some students' limited taste of reading. As several struggling readers in this study told me that they only wanted to read books that contained pictures, it is unlikely that their interest in manga had motivated them to move on to a more advanced level of reading. Instead, the more the students limit their reading options to manga, the more they may resist making an effort to build up the repertoire of competencies required to understand texts in purely verbal form. Although manga has great potential in cultivating children's reading interest and visual literacy, the study has not found any solid evidence to suggest that manga can be used as a springboard for struggling readers to find interest in texts that require a higher level of verbal literacy.

In addition to the highly visual narrative, the study argues that fragmentation is fundamental to the engaging power of manga. It is embodied in the panel structure as well as being a narrative style due to the publication cycle of manga. As each panel captures a small part of the represented world, readers are drawn to complete that which has been cropped out and form a complete picture in their mind. The ability of *closure* (McCloud, 1994) allows readers to connect panels, comprehend the time flow, imagine the unperceivable, and look forward to the next panel. The nature of fragmentation is also presented through the serialised narrative. As manga is published in episodes on a regular basis, artists tell stories in a manner carefully crafted to arouse readers' curiosity so as to entice them into the next episode. Manga artists deliberately leave some questions unanswered so as to create indeterminacy. Thus, the students felt that manga artists told stories in a fragmentary style, which kept them in suspense to a certain extent due to the knowledge gap. This often motivated the students to make predictions of the story's progression when they awaited the next episode. In this way, they collaborated with manga artists in the creation of stories. The study found that participants actively sought to join the creation of stories, and they often felt a sense of ownership over their own versions of stories. Some students even created their own reading strategies to produce a knowledge gap deliberately so as to allow their own imagination to steer the story. By doing so, they tolerated and enjoyed a state of uncertainty that engaged their own creative energies.

The students' engagement with manga is also tied to the personal relevance that they found within the story. Manga provides a set of models that allow readers to reflect on what happens in their own lives, at least to a certain extent. On the one hand, discovering relevance allowed the students to draw on their personal experiences to understand and make judgements of characters' actions and motivations. On the other hand, the students felt that manga taught them things about their own world. For example, forgivable villains challenged the students to evaluate and test their own moral codes in relation to their perception of the characters' responses and actions. Meanwhile, the empathetic portrayal of 'villains' directed some students towards an understanding of the influence of social environments on the development of an individual's personality in a more general way. Perceived personal relevance also allowed the students to find positive models for their own social identities and experiences within this popular culture form. For example, some girls' responses indicated that the way Sakura's (the female leading character in *N6*) power and

weakness was presented became a site of resistance to prevalent stereotypes of girls, both in the book and in their social world. Thus, relevance connects the fictional to the real, which allows manga to speak to its readers at multiple levels.

Whilst realism allows readers to find relevance in manga, fictionality is also fundamental to an immersive experience of manga. In the make-believe world, the students felt that they could temporarily get away from stress and frustration in reality. They could experience dramatic emotions or try out what was unacceptable or forbidden in reality without consequences. Although manga sometimes present ideal or optimistic versions of friendships, love, and personal success, the students felt that they were inspired by characters in spite of the gap between fiction and reality. They suspended their disbelief and actively sought immersion in manga to optimise the pleasure of reading. This shows that immersion is not a state where readers are passively taken away from reality, but a mode of complete involvement in a book that readers consciously and deliberately choose to enter.

The students' engagement with manga is also expressed through their active participation in fandom related activities, such as fan talk, drawing manga, gaming, and Cosplay. Some of these activities allowed the students to establish a social network where members supported each other's interest in manga, and updated, or deepened their knowledge of it. Whilst the students felt that they gained a sense of recognition and acceptance by meeting up with other fans, the study finds that exclusivity existed within the fan communities that the students were involved in. They consciously weighed their own knowledge and experience of manga against other fans', and located themselves and others in status groups. The students used their knowledge of manga as a cultural capital, which gave them freedom and power over the text, particularly in relation to their participation in certain activities in a fan community. Thus, whilst the students gained a sense of positive identity from bonding together within the fan community where members defended manga against external criticisms or exclusion uniformly, they also discriminated between themselves and other fans who possessed knowledge of manga on different levels to them. This finding concurs with Hills' (2002a) argument that fans are like 'players' who compete over their knowledge and access to the object of their fandom and the status that they obtain in the fan community.

This study also finds that the students' practices of drawing, gaming, and Cosplay were not only ways to express their passion for manga, but also to enjoy transferrable power that belongs to the original creator(s). For example, drawing allowed the students to achieve something equivalent to what manga artists do; gaming allowed the students to experience and alter characters' power in the onscreen environment by flicking controls; and Cosplay enables the students to bring their favourite characters to life in their own creativity context. Through these activities, the students obtained a sense of achievement and gained pleasure by utilising power over the characters.

As manga was an exotic text to the students, in terms of its provenance, they came to it with expectations of encountering cultural and textual elements that were alien to them. Despite the fact that manga have received Western influence through history and continual cross-cultural influences in an era of globalised production, the students distinguished manga from its Western counterparts by both its appearance and the content. For example, Fiona said that the best thing she got from reading manga was to "experience something new". The students pointed out that manga contains Japanese elements in its art style, format, phonetic translation of certain Japanese language, and depiction of Japanese culture, place, and life styles. They also put forward the opinion that these elements defined an 'authentic manga'. Although the students' responses show that they treated all elements of 'otherness' in manga as 'Japaneseness', their request for exotic elements in manga validated their fan identity as transcultural.

In conclusion, this study finds that visual techniques, fragmentary narrative style, relevance, fictionality, social roots, and cultural elements particularly play a key role in young British readers' engagement with manga. The participants gained vicarious experiences of what happened in manga, as the visual stimuli enhanced their imagination and increased their comprehension. They demonstrated visual literacy by relating words to pictures in meaningful sequences, especially when encountering unfamiliar elements. They also engaged with the construction of stories actively, and looked for relevance that connected the text to their social environments. Aware of the gap between fiction and reality, they purposefully suspended disbelief to gain pleasure from immersion. The students demonstrated their passion for manga by defending it and becoming involved in related fandom activities, through which they established self-identity as well as gained pleasure of exerting power over the characters. Although manga is alien to the students in many ways, the encounter with 'otherness' and

‘Japaneseness’ essentially contributed to their engagement with manga. Thus, this study suggests that manga has significant literary, aesthetic, social, and cultural value, in addition to its entertainment potential. It is a useful material to help children of various literacy backgrounds develop visual literacy and cultivate aesthetic sensibility of literature in diverse forms. Moreover, manga provides rich cultural experience to readers who do not share a Japanese cultural background. It is also a useful social tool for children to explore self-identities through interacting with other readers and committing to a culture that defines their personal uniqueness.

5.3 Students’ Reflections on the study

To conclude this study, I would like to urge educators to welcome manga as an alternative choice of reading for children. In addition to the value of manga that I have mentioned above, the students’ final reflections on their participation in this study suggest that there are several potential benefits of introducing manga to schools.

Firstly, with the teacher’s guidance, manga can be a good material to train critical reading skills. Several students mentioned that they now spent more time reading manga instead of just glancing through it, because they had learnt new ways to appreciate manga with critical approaches that emerged in an unforced way through our discussions. For example, Abel, Travis, and Fiona said that they started to pay more attention to the artist’s intentions behind specific presentations of words and pictures.

Secondly, talking to children about their reading of manga not only allows adults to learn about children’s perception of their engagement with this text and the wider world, but also opens up an opportunity for children to learn about themselves. One of the students reflected on his/her experience of this study in the feedback questionnaire:

I learned more about manga and myself.

(Anonymity, Feedback questionnaire)

Olaf also said:

I think the idea of talking with someone else about the way we see manga is a good idea, because normally with my friends, we'll be talking about a certain manga or about how this manga is similar. We wouldn't talk about how [sic] the effect of manga, or/and how it's really important, how it changes certain things about us, and how life is. I think it's really important, but I think we normally, we normally wouldn't talk about that, so I think gathering in a group of four or five is actually quite good.

(Olaf, Individual interview)

I found that when the students felt that their interest in manga was respected, they were very willing to open themselves up to share what mattered to them about their devotion to manga and the popular culture within which it was embedded.

Several students also pointed out that hearing other people's views about manga in the discussion group enhanced their knowledge and introduced them to alternative ways to read manga. Moreover, through sharing their own views, they deepened their own understanding of manga. For example, Elsa said:

When it came out from my mouth, I was just thinking, "Really? I actually think about it like that?" [...] I never thought about manga like that [...] And you know, someone else, another manga reader, like, this is what they like, and what they do about manga. And it's good, it's good to see that, like, how they like action, and I like romance, and what they like in action, something like that.

(Elsa, Individual interview)

Thirdly, the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of manga and to express their passion can help children build self-confidence. Fiona said:

It's not usual that I'm able to express my feeling[s], and tell other people about [why] manga is actually important to me, and why people could relate to it, so yeah, I enjoyed it [the project].

(Fiona, Individual interview)

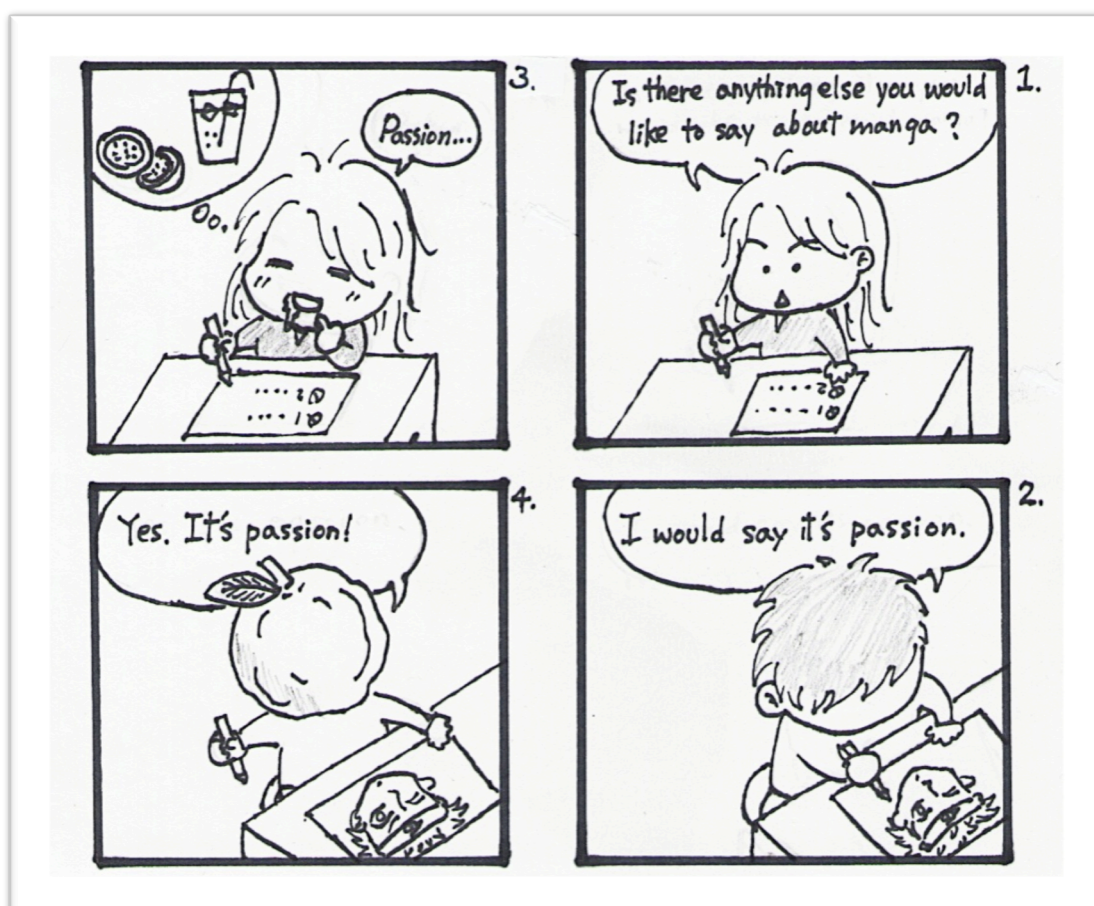
Arthur also expressed a sense of acceptance:

It [the research project] makes me feel that my hobby is not useless. Like, at least I can socialise with people about manga.

(Arthur, Individual interview)

There was a common appreciation of manga in the groups. The students generally felt that they were able to express themselves freely regarding their attachment to manga. They felt accepted by their peers and the adult researcher, in terms of their interests in manga that had not received wide approval from adults. According to the librarian, one of the participants, Travis, showed great enthusiasm and acted more responsibly during his participation in this research project. The librarian pointed out that Travis' positive attitude was not usually seen in other school tasks and activities. This shows that adults' respect of children's diverse interests can enhance their self-esteem.

The students' feedback on this study should direct us towards re-examining the fundamental purposes of reading. Smith (1988) contends that reading is not only for acquiring information. He argues, "Literacy is a matter not of honing skills but of increasing confidence, familiarity, and understanding, all consequences of meaningful use" (p. 103). The students' reading of manga in this study shows us that they appropriated their use of manga for multiple purposes of entertainment, socialisation, and exploration of literature, foreign culture, and the wider world. Their meaningful use of this text qualifies it as potentially valuable material that teachers can adopt to help children develop their literary and cultural sensibilities, build up their self-confidence, and explore or challenge existing worldviews.



This cartoon is based on a conversation between Travis and me on the return visit.

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Appendix A: A Summary of the Pilot Studies

In order to test my theoretical hypotheses about manga and readers, and the feasibility of the methodology, I conducted three pilot studies before the stage of data collection. This appendix includes a brief report of the three pilot studies and a table of amendments that were made to the main study as a result.

Pilot study 1

The first pilot study took place in January 2012 when the ideas of this study were in infancy. I had a semi-structured interview with a 12-year-old keen manga reader from Canada. The interview lasted about 50 minutes and it was audio recorded. The questions I asked focused on the reader's reading preferences and habits, and why he loved reading manga. I also showed him some pages that I chose from an episode of *Naruto* and asked him to explain his understanding of the words and the pictures. The main purpose of this pilot study was to test my hypotheses, generate ideas and draw clearer directions for the main study. The participant's responses show his interest in the artwork of manga, the mixture of realism and fantasy in the story, and the development of the hero's character. He showed well developed understanding of the artistic techniques in the pictures that I showed him, such as the use of lines, symbolic signs and cinematic effects. He also told me that the network of manga developed at his school in a similar way that the social network, Facebook, attracts users – both rely partly on 'recommendation' between friends. What especially drew my attention was his interest in the depiction of emotions in manga. He pointed out that manga artists usually take time to describe a character's emotional changes in several panels, which was distinctively different from what he read in Western comic books. He also mentioned that this artistic style effectively engaged him and it was one of the reasons why he liked manga. The aspects of social networking among fans and the artistic depiction of emotions in manga were the main themes that emerged in this study. They led me to focus on these issues particularly in the main study.

Pilot study 2

The second pilot study was conducted in February 2013 in a more formal setting to test the chosen methodology of the main study. The school is an academy located in South London. Manga is one of the alternative readings options introduced to the school by the librarian. Four keen manga readers were selected for the study – two boys aged 12 and 13, and two girls aged 14 and 15 respectively. My original plan was to restrict the participants' age to 13, but it turned out to be unfeasible because I failed to consider two factors that made this criterion hard to meet. The first was that many of the readers in this age group were not necessarily the most keen and mature manga readers. Another factor was that the unequal population of boys and girls (7:3) in the school made it difficult to select female participants who were of an equivalent level to the male participants in terms of their experience and interest in manga. The results of the pilot study showed that the readers' age and gender do not necessarily correlate with the maturity of their experience and comprehension of manga. In fact, the 12-year-old boy and the 15-year-old girl were the most critical readers of manga in this study.

The participants were chosen based on their experience and interest in manga. A screening questionnaire was used to select suitable participants. The participants received the two chosen manga before the interviews. They were asked to complete a reading journal (in a form of reading reflection) for each book. I met them all together twice to discuss their views of the two books. The interview questions were generated to investigate what especially engaged the participants with manga and how they responded to the selected texts cognitively and emotionally. After the first interview, I saw the need to compare the participants' views of the two chosen manga, so I made some revisions to the questions for the second group interview. After the two group interviews, I met the participants in pairs, boys and girls respectively. The questions of the pair interviews were focused on the participants' views of the manga books that they themselves chose to discuss. There were several purposes for the pair interviews. First of all, I tried to observe their genuine engagement with a manga that they liked. Second, I wanted to investigate what other activities the participants were engaged with in relation to manga apart from reading it. Third, I intended to test gender influence on the participants' openness to share their opinions or feelings about manga by comparing their responses in the group interviews and the pair interviews. All the interviews lasted 40 to 50 minutes. They were audio and video recorded. The participants' right to

withdraw their participation and the protection of their identity were explained both in the parental consent letter and in the initial meeting with the participants.

The four participants' responses to manga generally agree with my findings in the first pilot study, but the depth of this study provided richer data and findings. Apart from confirming the previous findings, I noticed that the participants were particularly interested in the *Chibi* style humour in manga. They also pointed out that the narrative of manga tends to be fragmentary. Instead of giving the reader clear details at once, the artist usually gives just enough hints to allow the story to progress, whilst keeping the reader's appetite for more. All the participants agreed that the distinct art style of manga attracted them to this particular form of text in the first place. However, what sustained their interest in manga was more than that. They were interested in the fantasy world in manga that was highly imaginative, but also related to real life in some ways. They also liked the cinematic techniques employed by the artist to focus on characters' emotions and movements. In addition to these, the participants were drawn to the elements of Japanese culture that are shown in both verbal and visual narratives.

Their engagement with manga extends from reading to other fan activities. One of the girls created fan-manga. She sometimes drew alternative endings to the manga that she had read. All the participants played video games that were adapted from manga. One of the boys mentioned that he enjoyed playing video games because he could experience the power of the characters simply by flicking the controls. This same participant mentioned several times during the interviews that he wished he were as funny and powerful as manga characters. These participants not only projected their thoughts and feelings onto the characters, but they also enjoyed the ability to manipulate the characters through a game control or a pen/ pencil. These manga-related activities allowed the participants to access the fictional characters in real life.

The participants showed more enthusiasm when discussing the manga that they chose for themselves. There could be several reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, the participants had more to say about books that they liked. In fact, two participants expressed that they were not so interested in either of the books I chose. Secondly, the pair interview gave each of the participants more opportunities to express his or her ideas. Thirdly, the participants felt more comfortable about sharing their opinions and feelings with peers of the same gender since manga is marketed at readers of different

genders. Although my interview questions did not involve any sensitive issues, all the participants mentioned sexual elements in manga during the pair interviews. The boys used the term, ‘weird porn’, to refer to the voluptuous figure of a female character in a manga that they read before. The girls mentioned that kissing scenes in some manga are depicted in several panels to show the different angles, which is sometimes ‘too much’ for them. As none of the participants mentioned these issues in the group interviews, I suspected that there might be a gender influence on the participants’ discussions.

The participants’ reading journals contributed valuable data to triangulate their responses in the interviews. They also provided retrospective information of what happened in the participants’ minds as they read these books – how they felt, what confused them and what strategies they adopted to comprehend the stories. In addition, what readers chose to write (and draw) in the journals shows the aspects of the stories that particularly engaged them.

As it was difficult to keep field notes when I moderated the interviews, the use of videos allowed me to trace the participants’ physical responses, such as their facial expressions and gestures. Such visual information allowed me to better understand participants’ attitudes and feelings of every aspect of the manga that we discussed during the interviews. The videos allowed me to identify different speakers more easily, and also allowed me to see the pages and pictures of the book that participants tried to show me during the interviews.

Pilot study 3

The third pilot study took place in March 2013. I interviewed a 15-year-old British girl who was keen on reading manga. She was doing manga art for her GCSE project at the time of the interview. I gave her both *Naruto* vol. 6 and *Vampire Knight* vol. 4 to read before we met. I extracted questions from those I used in the second pilot study to explore the following aspects: (i) her reflections on the two manga that I provided, (ii) her general experience of manga, (iii) the aspects of manga that attracted her in general, (iv) the comparison between *shōnen* manga and *shōjo* manga, (v) the comparison between manga and other types of texts, and (vi) her views on a manga she likes. The interview lasted about 50 minutes. It was audio recorded. The purpose of this pilot study

was to follow up on ideas that emerged in the second pilot study and to triangulate some findings from the previous pilot studies. I also modified the ways of asking some questions that I used in the second pilot study so as to elicit answers that might give richer information to the study.

In contrast to the two girls in the second pilot study, this participant's reading of manga is more limited to *shōjo* manga. She told me that she was especially attracted by the subtleness of the artwork and the tangled relationships between characters. According to her, she reread each manga at least five times so that she would not miss out any detail.

One thing that seems to be very important to this participant about manga is that she felt she was able to relate to the stories. She told me about her emotional connection with her favourite manga, *Sand Chronicles*:

For me, there's a trigger word. If anyone says that trigger phrase that is within Sand Chronicle [...], I'd burst into tears, and it happened twice before. They said that certain phrase by accident and I just burst into tears. Everyone just looked at me thinking, "What's happening?" Because that bit was just so sad, it reminds me of, a bit of...really...

She told me that this manga helped her to know how she could react to her family situation, and how she could try to become a better person like the heroine. Her engagement with this manga shows the impact of this manga on her real life. She admitted that reading manga had occupied much of her time, but she also pointed out that manga helped her perceive her life in a better way. She mentioned that some of her friends thought that manga were 'improper books', and her feeling upon hearing that was being 'insulted'. This participant's strong attachment to manga drew my attention to fans' loyalty to manga, and to the relevance that readers' find in manga to their own lives.

Amendments made on the main study

The three pilot studies enlightened me about the important elements that drew the participants to manga. Some of the findings added new understanding to my previous knowledge of manga and its readers, whilst others brought me to re-examine the

methodology of the main study. According to the findings, I modified the design of the main study as shown below:

Aspects	Discovery	Confirmation or modification to the main study	Purpose
Emerging topics (Pilot 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The depiction of emotions in manga particularly attracts the participant. Ways manga tell stories with images make the participant feel as if he were in the story. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotion became one of the major focuses in this study, especially how it is depicted in manga and how readers respond to it. Cinematic techniques in manga were explored in this study. 	To understand what authorial/artistic techniques are used to engage readers and how readers respond to them.
Emerging topics (Pilot 2&3)	The element of humour is important to the participants, especially the visual humour of <i>Chibi</i> and the caricatured forms of characters.	Humour was moved from prompts to form one of the main questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the role humour plays in manga. To explore whether or not readers find any cultural difference in manga humour.
Emerging topics (Pilot 2&3)	The participants mentioned that manga artists tend to leave gaps and puzzles for readers to solve.	I added the question, 'What specifically did you do to help yourself understand the confusing bits?'	Knowing the strategies that readers use to help their understanding of a story can help me understand what skills manga may require from its readers.
Methods (Pilot 2)	Participants showed greater enthusiasm during the discussion of the manga chosen by them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A third group interview was added to the main study. Participants were asked to keep a reading journal of this manga. 	To understand what elements of manga attract the participants.
Methods (Pilot 2)	The participants mentioned sexual elements in manga.	The participants were grouped by gender, as originally planned.	To avoid the participants' embarrassment of talking about sensitive issues with peers of the opposite sex.

YOUNG BRITISH READERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH MANGA

Methods (Pilot 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants' experience of manga does not correlate with their age. The age difference between the participants did not have obvious impact on the dynamics of the group discussions. 	The age range of participants was extended to cover 12 to 15. Therefore, I recruited participants from Years 7 to 10.	By extending the age range of sampling, I intended to find more experienced readers of manga to contribute their views regarding how they read manga and why they chose to read it.
Methods (Pilot 2)	Camera provided valuable visual information.	Camera was used to collect data, as originally planned.	To capture the participants' facial expressions and gestures so as to observe their attitudes and feelings.
Methods (Pilot 1, 2 & 3)	Some questions only allowed me to learn about what manga-related activities the participants were involved in, but not the reason of their participation.	Instead of only asking the participants what manga-related activities they did, I asked what they enjoyed about doing these activities.	To explore the reasons that drive the participants to participate in manga-related activities.
Methods (Pilot 1, 2 & 3)	The original planned questions did not explore the participants' self-reflections on their passion for manga enough.	The question, 'To you, what is good or bad about reading manga?' was added in the second group interview of the second pilot study and the question, 'Do you consider yourself as a fan of manga?' was asked in the third pilot study. Both of the questions were added to the interview questions of the major study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand how the participants evaluate the impact of manga on themselves. To explore their definitions of 'manga fans' and how they identify themselves.

Appendix B: A Screening Questionnaire

MY READING PREFERENCES AND HABITS



I am a ☐ male ☐ female. I am _____ years old. My name is _____

1. What kinds of books do you read in your free time? (Multiple choice)

☐ novel ☐ picturebook ☐ comics ☐ graphic novel ☐ manga (Japanese comic books) ☐ others: _____

2. What is the average time you spend every week on your leisure reading?

☐ less than 1 hour ☐ 1~3 hours ☐ 3~5 hours ☐ more than 5 hours

3. Can you name a few books that you like? _____

4. Have you ever read manga?

☐ Yes (Please continue from question 6.) ☐ No (Go to question 5.)

5. Would you be interested in reading manga? ☐ Yes. ☐ No. (If no, you may stop here.)

6. Do you like reading manga? ☐ Yes. ☐ Moderate. ☐ No.

7. When did you start reading manga? _____

8. What is the average time you spend every week on reading manga?

☐ less than 1 hour ☐ 1~3 hours ☐ 3~5 hours ☐ more than 5 hours

9. How many volumes of manga have you ever read?

☐ 1~10 ☐ 11~20 ☐ 21~30 ☐ more than 30

10. Can you name one or more manga you like? _____

11. Are you currently reading any manga? ☐ Yes. ☐ No.

What are you currently reading? _____

12. What interests you about this manga? _____

13. How do you get hold of manga? (Multiple choice)

☐ Buy from bookstores. ☐ Borrow from friends. ☐ Borrow from the school library. ☐ Borrow from the public library. ☐ Read online. ☐ Others: _____

14. Do you watch manga-adapted anime (animation) on TV or in cinemas?

☐ Yes. My favourite one is _____.
☐ No.

15. Do you play manga-adapted games?

☐ Yes. My favourite one is _____.
☐ No

16. Are you involved in any other activities related to manga (e.g. draw manga, do Cosplay, visit manga conventions, visit online manga forums, collect manga-related commodities)?

☐ Yes. What are they? _____.
☐ No

17. Would you be interested in participating in a research project to share your views of manga?

☐ Yes. ☐ No.



Appendix C: Reading Journal

(This appendix only comprises two reflective feedback forms.)

Reflective feedback of Manga



Book title: *Naruto* volume 6

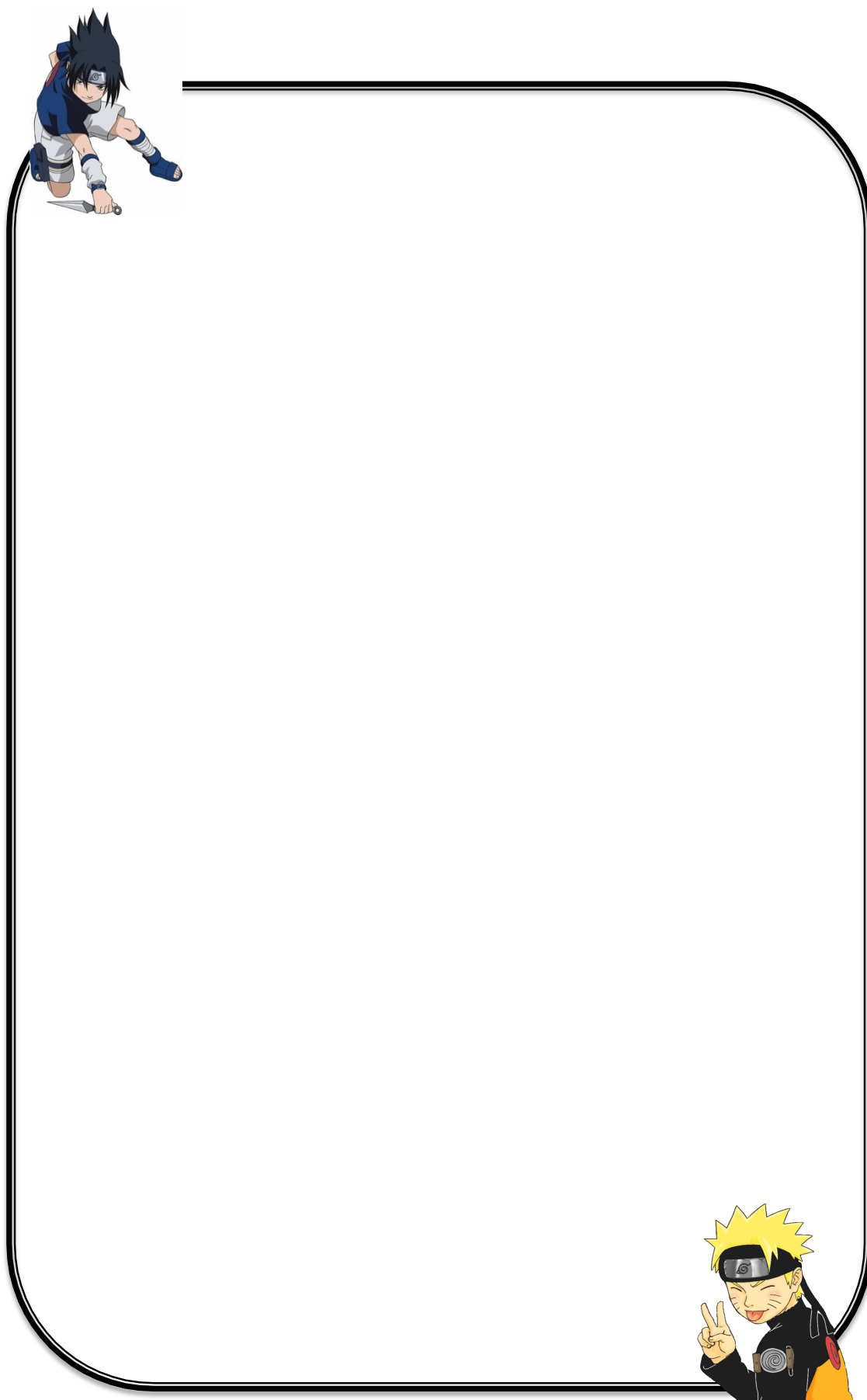
This story makes me feel _____ because _____

I will ☐ recommend this book to _____

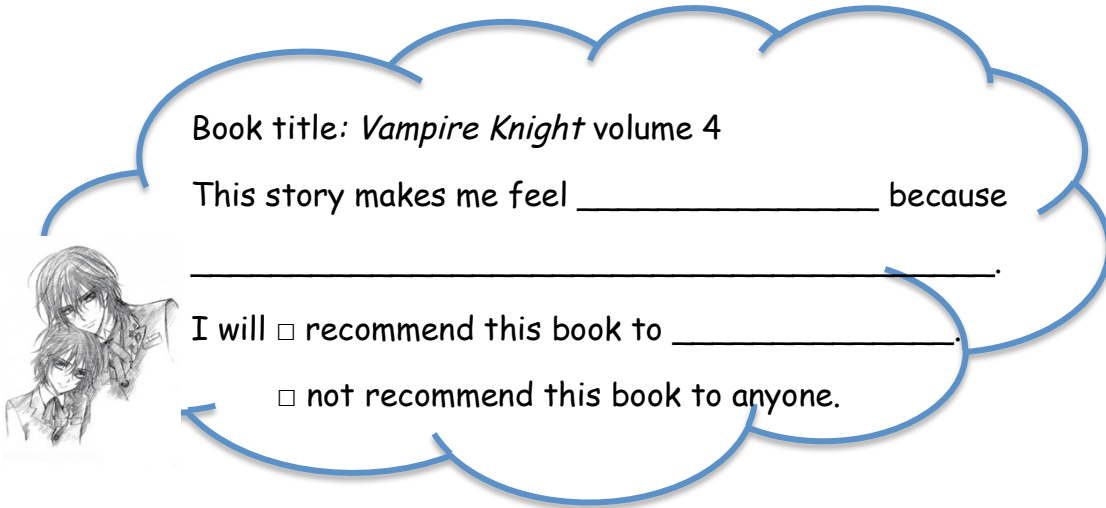
☐ not recommend this book to anyone.

❖ What interested you while you were reading this book? Did anything impress you in particular? Please share it here. You can choose to write or draw about it, or both.

[illegible]



Reflective Feedback of Manga



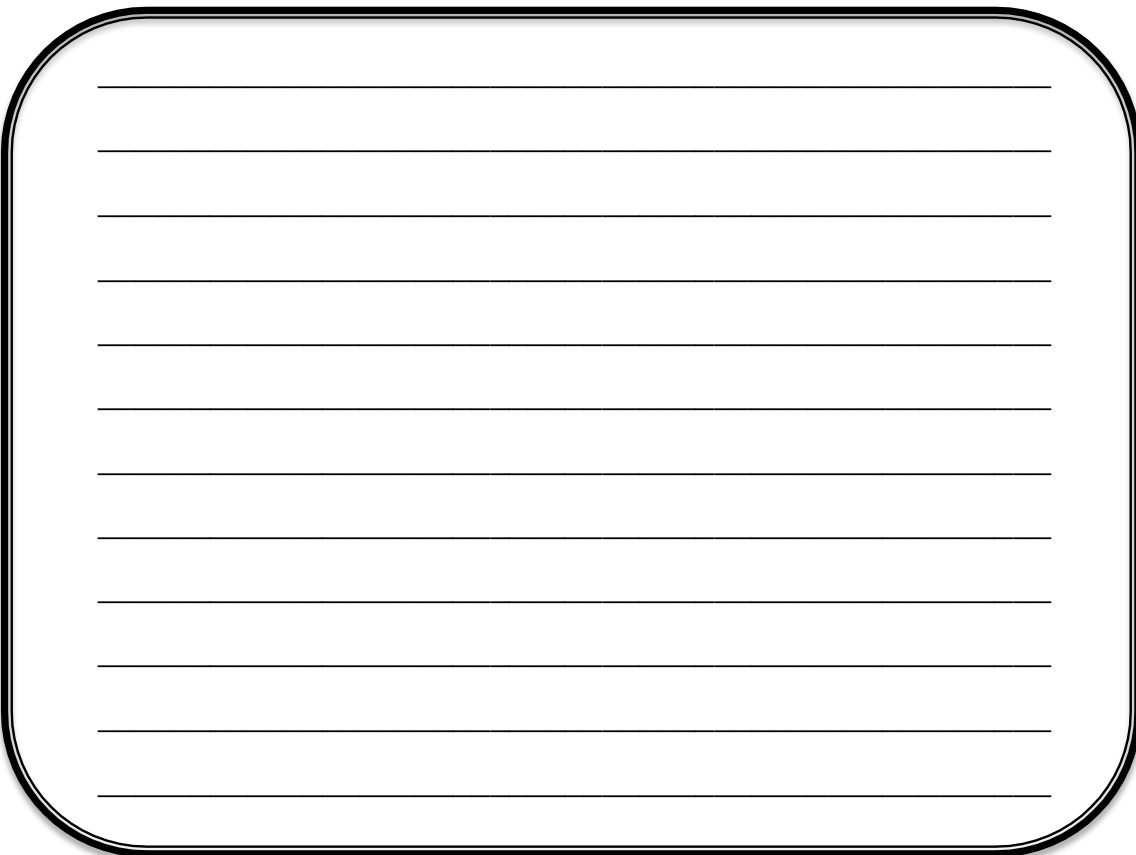
Book title: *Vampire Knight* volume 4

This story makes me feel _____ because _____.

I will ☐ recommend this book to _____.

☐ not recommend this book to anyone.

✿ What interested you while you were reading this book? Did anything impress you in particular? Please share it here. You can choose to write or draw about it, or both.





Appendix D: Feedback Questionnaire

Dear little manga expert,

I would like to first thank you for participating in this project and contributing your ideas about manga. It has been fun and enjoyable working with you. Please evaluate this project and your experience in this questionnaire anonymously.

Please tick the box and leave your comments with as many details as possible.

1 – Strongly agree; 2 – Agree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Disagree; 5 – Strongly disagree

1. I enjoyed the first group discussion on *Naruto* vol. 6.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Reasons:

2. I enjoyed the second group discussion on *Vampire Knight* vol. 4.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Reasons:

3. I enjoyed the third group discussion on the book chosen by myself.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Reasons:

4. I enjoyed the final individual interview.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Reasons:

5. I enjoyed keeping the reading journals.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Reasons:

6. I agree that I was given enough space without pressure to share my opinions.

1	2	3	4	5
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Reasons:

7. I think this project has influenced the way I think about manga.

1	2	3	4	5
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Reasons:

8. I think this project has influenced the way I think about myself.

1	2	3	4	5
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Reasons:

9. I think this project has influenced the way I read manga.

1	2	3	4	5
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Reasons:

10. I wish that the researcher could have done more on....

11. Overall, I am glad that I have participated in this project.

1	2	3	4	5
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Reasons:

12. Please give your final comments on manga or this project here:

Appendix E: Interviews Questions

E-1: Group Interview 1 – *Naruto* vol. 6

Questions	Prompts	Purpose
1. Is this your first time reading this book? 2. Did you enjoy reading this book? 3. Is everyone clear about how to keep the reading journals? Would anyone like to share with us what you have written or drawn?		Warm-up
4. What did you find the most interesting about this book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The drawing? - The storyline? - The fighting? - The romance? - The fantasy elements? 	To find out what especially engages the participants with this book.
5. Is there any character that particularly impresses you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What impresses you about this character? - Is there anything you like or dislike about this character? 	To find out how the development of characterisation engages the participants.
6. How does the author tackle with personal relationships in this book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does this story tell you about friendship? Do you agree or disagree? - What does this story tell you about love? Do you agree or disagree? - Does this story tell you about any other personal relationship? Do you agree or disagree? 	To see if the participants would agree or disagree with the ways the artist represents personal relationships.
7. Do you find any part of this book funny?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which bits are funny? - Do you think the element of humour is important in manga? - Do you sometimes feel that the funny parts disengage you from the story or the character temporarily? 	To find out in what ways comic humour may engage or disengage the participants.
8. Did you reread or slow down in any part of the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The confusing parts (What specifically did you do to help yourself understand the confusing bits?) 	To understand what is particularly significant to the participants about this book.

YOUNG BRITISH READERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH MANGA

Questions	Prompts	Purpose
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interesting parts - The drawing 	
9. Did you skip any part of the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sound effects in the background - The artist's notes - The backstories or bonus stories - The advertisement 	To understand the participants' reading strategy of this book.
10. Do words and pictures in this book help you understand the story better?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do they sometimes make you ask questions? What do you do to sort out your confusion? - Do you notice anything special about the way words and pictures are presented in this book? - Do the speech bubbles give you any information other than the verbal narrative? - What do you think about the use of lines/ symbols/ tone in the background? 	To understand how the dynamics of words and pictures in manga help the participants to understand stories better.
11. Imagine the artist as a movie director who alternates the camera to present the audience with pictures from different angles (up, down and parallel), distance (close and far) and perspectives (point of view) for different purposes. Let's spend two minutes flipping over the book and focus on the ways the artist arranges and presents the panels to readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is special about the shots and the arrangement of panels here? - What does it try to say? - What will be different if these panels are not arranged this way? <i>Naruto</i> p. 174-175; p. 32-33 - From whose perspectives are we seeing these pictures? What's the artist's purpose? - From what angles are we seeing this panel (the right bottom)? What's the artist's purpose? - How does the artist alternate the distance of the camera? What's the artist's purpose? - Why does the artist put the panels together this way? - Please pick one page to share why you think the artist has arranged the panels/shots this way. 	To understand what messages readers receive from images that are portrayed with particular cinematic techniques.
12. Is there anything more you would like to share about this book?		Closing up

E-2: Group Interview 2 – *Vampire Knight* vol. 4

Questions	Prompts	Purpose
1. Is this your first time reading this book? 2. Did you enjoy reading this book? 3. Would anyone like to share with us what you have written or drawn?		Warm-up
4. What did you find the most interesting about this book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The drawing? - The storyline? - The fighting? - The romance? - The fantasy elements? 	To find out what engages the participants with this book.
5. Is there any character that particularly impresses you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What impresses you about this character? - Do you like the way this character is portrayed and developed in the book? - What do you think about the bad character, Shizuka? Is she evil? 	To find out how the development of characterisation engages the participants.
6. How does the author tackle personal relationships in this book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendship? - Love? - Other personal relationship? - Do you like the ways the artist deals with the personal relationships here? 	To see whether the participants would agree or disagree with the ways the artist represents personal relationships.
7. Do you find any part of this book funny?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the laughing point? - Are they funny in ways different from the humour in <i>Naruto</i>? 	To compare the different humour in <i>Vampire Knight</i> vol. 4 and <i>Naruto</i> vol. 6.
8. Did you reread or slow down in any part of the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The confusing parts (What specifically did you do to help yourself understand the confusing bits?) - The interesting parts - The drawing 	To understand what is particularly significant to the participants about this book.
9. Did you skip any part of the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sound effects in the background - The artist's notes - The backstories or bonus stories - The advertisement 	To understand the reader's reading strategy of this book.
10. Do words and pictures in this book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please pick one page to tell me how words and pictures together 	To understand how the dynamics of

YOUNG BRITISH READERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH MANGA

Questions	Prompts	Purpose
help you understand the story better?	<p>helped you understand the page better.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there any page that confused you? - Compared to <i>Naruto</i>, do you notice anything different about the way words and pictures are presented in this book? - What do you think about the use of lines/ symbols/ tone in the background? 	words and pictures in manga help the participants understand the story better.
11. Imagine the artist as a movie director who alternates the camera to present the audience with pictures from different angles (up, down and parallel), distance (close and far) and perspectives (point of view) for different purposes. Let's spend three minutes flipping over the book and focus on the ways the artist arranges and presents the panels to readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is special about the shots and the arrangement of panels here? - What does it try to say? - What will be different if these panels are not arranged this way? <i>Vampire Knight</i> p. 34-35; p. 40-41; p. 116-7 - From whose perspectives are we seeing these pictures? What's the artist's purpose? - From what angles are we seeing this panel (the right bottom)? What's the artist's purpose? - How does the artist alternate the distance of the camera? What's the artist's purpose? - Why does the artist put the panels together this way? - Please pick one page to share why you think the artist has arranged the panels/shots this way. 	To understand what messages readers receive from images that are portrayed with particular cinematic techniques.
12. Compare <i>Vampire Knight</i> and <i>Naruto</i> , what is the most distinct difference between them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artwork (panels, background, drawing styles) - Which book do you like better? - How are boys and girls like in the two books? (characterisation, personal struggles) - Are they typical <i>shōnen</i> and <i>shōjo</i> characters? - Can you describe the most obvious differences between <i>shōnen</i> manga and <i>shōjo</i> manga? 	To compare students' understanding of the two books that are marketed at readers of different genders.
13. Is there anything more you would like to share about this book?		Closing up
14. Reflect on the previous interviews and prepare for the next interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We have had two interviews so far. Have you enjoyed our discussions so far? - Is there anything you feel like to change? - Is there anything you would like me to do more? 	

E-3: Group Interview 3 – A Manga Chosen by the Participants

Questions	Probes	Purpose
1. Follow-up questions from the previous interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you like <i>Naruto</i> or <i>Vampire Knight</i> better? - What do you think about the villains in both books? - Would you spend time reading the cover of manga? - Can you tell me what you read from the cover of <i>Naruto</i>? And the cover of <i>Vampire Knight</i>? Does it tell you things about the story or the characters? - Some of you particularly mentioned about characters' hair in manga last time. Do you find it important in other comics as well or is it specific to manga only? 	<p>To investigate students' preferences of <i>shōnen</i> and <i>shōjo</i> manga.</p> <p>To explore students' view of villains.</p> <p>To know whether students read any metaphorical meanings from the cover.</p> <p>What is significant about the depiction of characters' hair?</p>
2. What made you start reading this manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did someone introduce it to you? - What first interested you about this manga? 	Warm-up/ To understand what makes the participants start a new manga.
3. What do you like about this manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The drawing? - The storyline? - The characters? - The humour? - The fighting? - The romance? 	To find out what particularly interests the participants with this book.
4. Do you own this manga? How do you usually get hold of manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buy it? How do you decide what volumes to buy? Do you try to collect the whole series? - Borrow it? - Read it online? - Where do you usually read manga? 	Find out how the participants access manga and how they collect it.
5. You have chosen to bring this particular volume with you today. Is there anything special to you about this volume?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there anything special about the cover? - Can you choose your favourite page to share with us? - What do you think about the ways the artist presents this page? - Choose one page to talk about the relationship between words and pictures in the narrative. - Choose one page to talk about the artist's use of angle, perspective or distance in telling the story. 	To understand what affects the reader's choice of volume, and what interests them about the chosen book.
6. What kinds of manga interest you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you decide which manga to pick up and read? 	To understand what elements of manga

YOUNG BRITISH READERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH MANGA

Questions	Probes	Purpose
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What key elements does a manga need to have in order to interest you? Drawing? Fighting? Humour? Genres? - Do you read more <i>shōnen</i> manga or <i>shōjo</i> manga? - How do you decide which manga to continue following? - Do you tend to read words first or pictures first? Or depends? 	interest the participants.
7. How aware are you that manga stories come from Japan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there any Japanese particular element in manga? - Did some manga stories make you feel more Japanese than the others? - Are there things in manga that you don't get in the other types of books you read? 	To understand the participants' experience of 'Japaneseness' in manga.
8. Do you think boys/ girls will like this manga equally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which bits may they like? - Which bits may they not like? 	To understand how aware the participants are about the distinction of the targeted readership of manga.
9. Did you talk about this manga with people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whom did you talk with? - What did you talk about? - What do you like about sharing manga with friends? - Did you ever recommend this manga to anyone? - Is this person also a keen manga reader or a beginner reader? - Have you ever brought someone to read manga? 	To find out the possible influence manga readers have on each other.
10. Have you reread this manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How many times have you reread it? - Did you always reread the whole book? - What is the average time you spend each time on rereading a manga? - What is the average time you spend each time on reading a new manga? 	To find out whether and how the participants revisit the manga they like. Also to find out their general reading speed of manga.
11. Do you do anything else with this manga other than read it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch anime? Play the video game? Collect the related commodities? Do Cosplay? Draw it? Do things with other manga readers? Visit manga forums? - What do you enjoy about doing these things? - Some of you mentioned before that anime helped you understand manga stories better. Why is it? 	To find out in what ways the participants are engaged with particular manga in their life, apart from reading them.
12. Is there anything more you would like to share about this book?		Closing up

E-4: Individual Interview

(This set of questions does not include follow-up questions for individual participants.)

Questions	Probes	Purpose
Greetings.		Warm-up
1. What made you start reading manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did someone introduce it to you? - Did you start with anime? What turned you from anime to manga? 	To understand what makes the participants start reading manga and what keeps their interest in manga.
2. What sort of books do you read as well as manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is manga different to you, compared to the other kinds of books? - Do you talk about other books with friends or family? - Do you read any types of books more than the others? - In what ways do manga tell stories differently than other types of books? 	To find out the participants' general reading preference and the significance of manga to them.
3. What do you like the most about reading manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which parts of manga attract you? - What is the best thing you can get from reading manga? - To you, is there anything bad about reading manga? - How did you deal with this problem? 	To explore the participants' own views of the influence of manga on them.
4. Has any manga ever changed or influenced your ways of seeing things in your life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you relate yourself to this manga? - Is there any kind of manga that you don't like reading? 	To explore how manga may speak to the participants.
5. What do people around you think about manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your parents, teachers, friends, siblings, etc.? - Does anyone of them ever affect your choice of reading? - What would be different if you could not read manga anymore? 	To understand if other people's view on manga have any influence on the participants.
6. Do you consider yourself as a fan of manga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does that make you feel you are different from the others? - Do you think people see you differently too? - Can you describe what a fan of manga is like? 	To understand how the participants identify themselves with their interest in manga.
7. Follow-up questions from the group interviews and reading journals.	<p>Group interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you mean when you said...? <p>Reading journals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you mean when you wrote...? - Why did you choose to draw...? - Have you deliberately changed or added anything? Why? 	To follow up on any new discoveries from the previous experiences with the participants.

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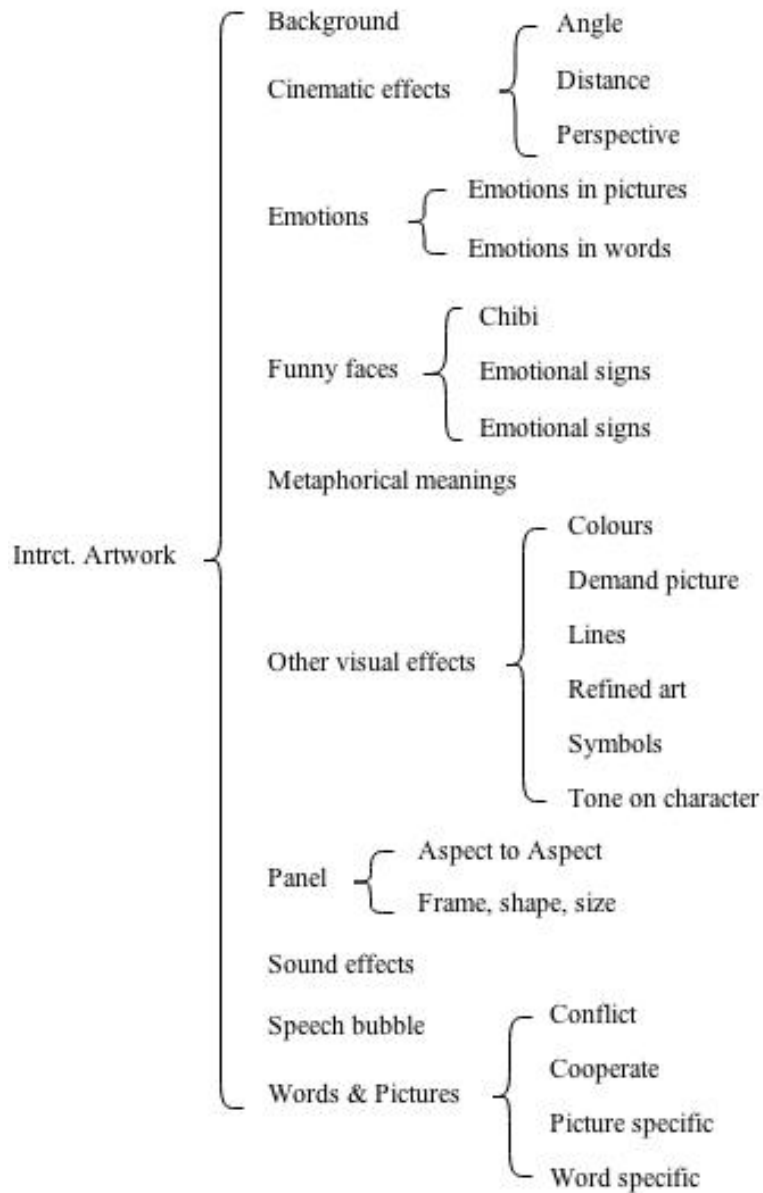
Questions	Probes	Purpose
8. Reflective questions on this study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think this manga project, including the group discussions and reading journals, has changed the way you think about manga? - Has this project changed the way you think about yourself as a manga lover? - Has this project influenced how you read manga? 	To seek for the participants' feedback on their participation of the study.
9. Do you speak any other language apart from English?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you grow up in the UK? - Is English your first language? - Does anyone in your family speak other languages? - What is your ethnic background? 	To understand the ethnic background of the participants.
10. Is there anything more you would like to share with me?	Please complete the feedback questionnaire and hand it in to the librarian.	Closing up

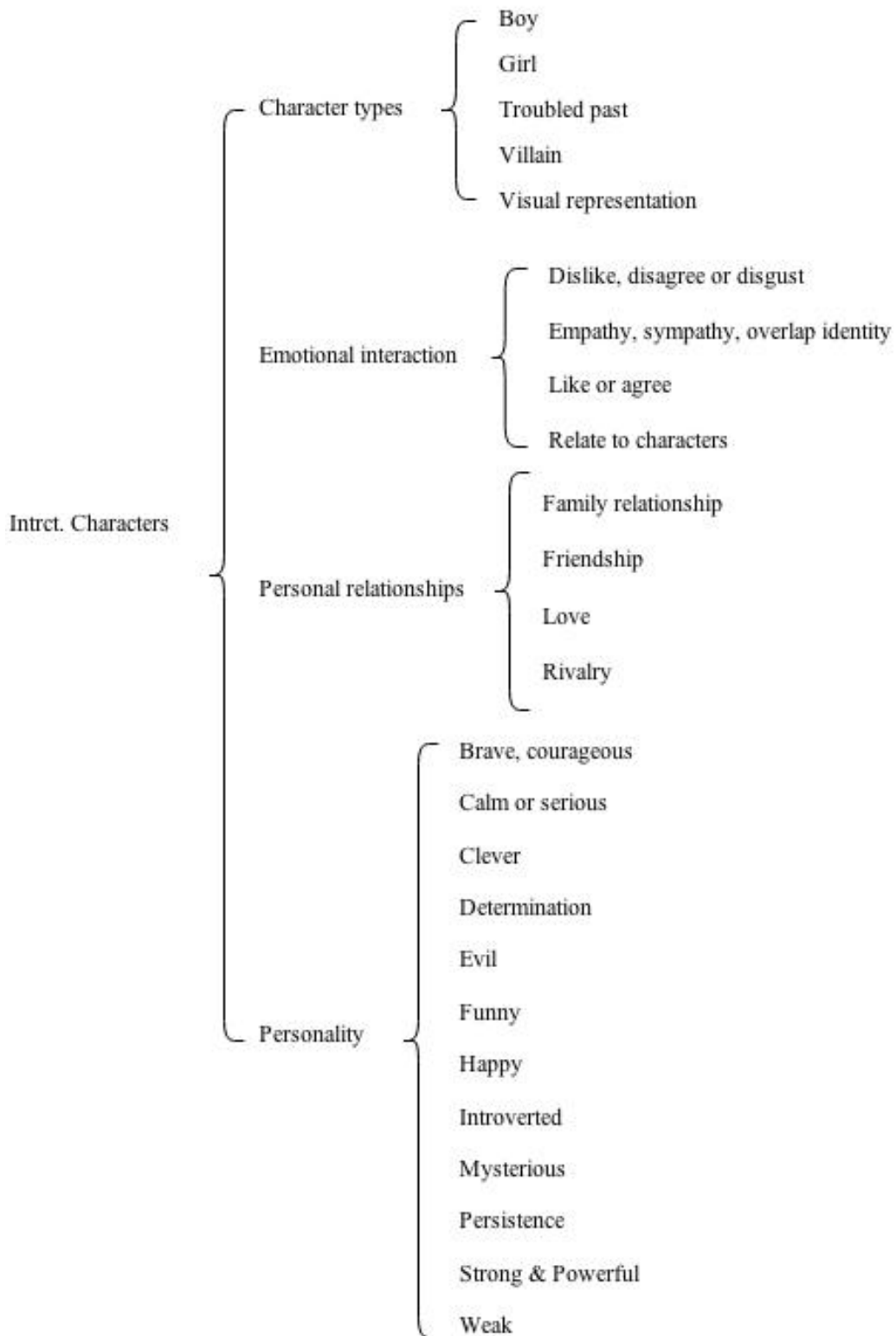
E-5: Return Visit – Group Questions

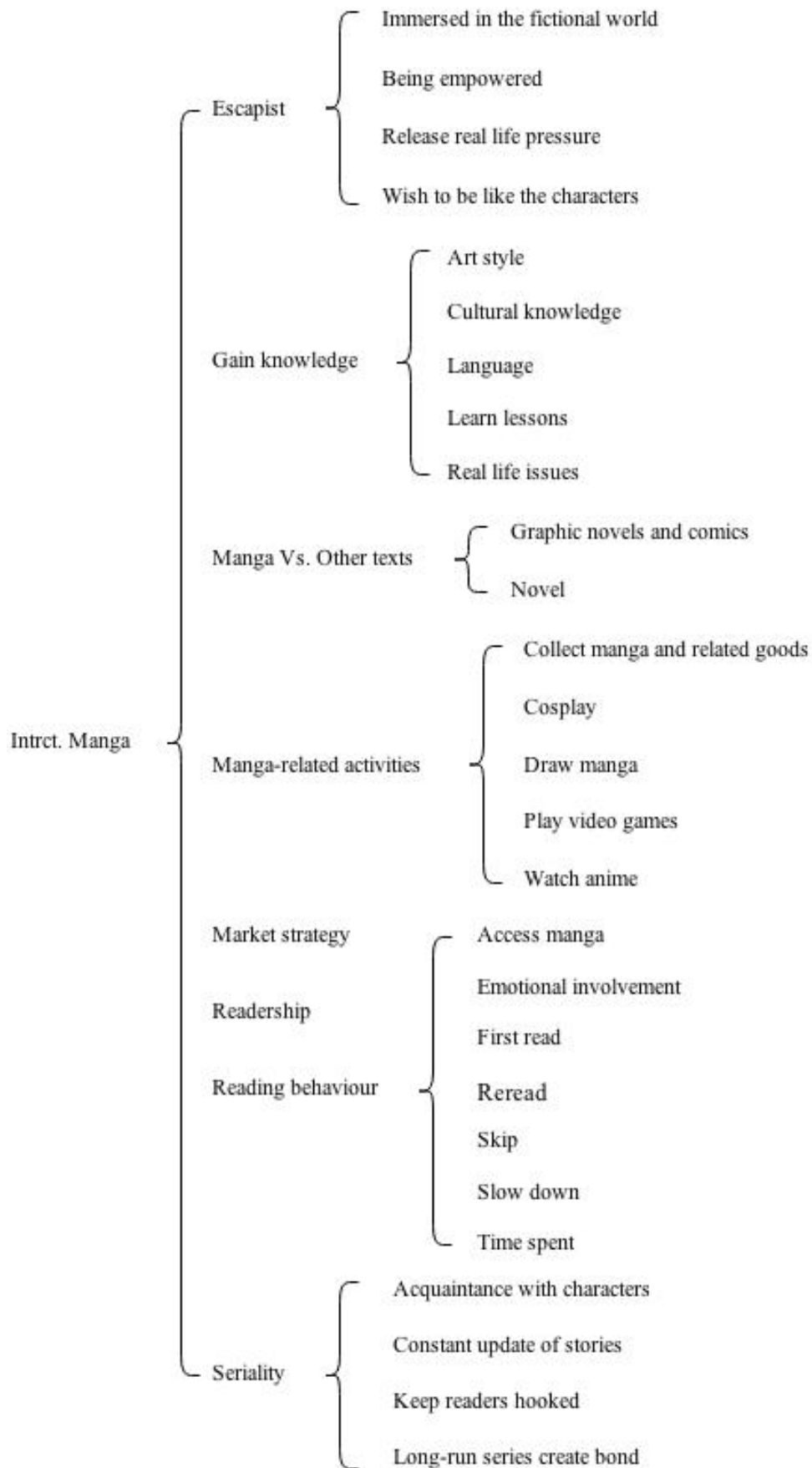
1. When you first started reading manga, were you ever confused by symbols like sweat drops, open cross, nose bleeding, lines or any other symbols on characters' faces (show students examples)? How did you learn to read the meanings of these symbols?
2. Some of you mentioned that petals were associated with romance when you saw them in the background of a picture or cover such as *VK4*? What made you think so?
3. When we discussed *N6* and *VK4*, some of you pointed out that the tone used in the background implies the characters' feelings (show examples), the mood of that story moment, flashback, and so on. Do you find background in manga is presented in any way different from any other comics or graphic books that you have read? Do you think the depiction of background is important in terms of your reading experience of manga?
4. We read in *VK4* that the villainous character Shizuka became evil because of some reasons. In another volume of *Naruto* (if you've read it), it also shows readers that Orochimaru becomes evil because of the bad things that happened in his life. Do you think it's particular to manga that bad characters seem to be justified in their backstories or do you notice this in other books that you have read as well?
5. Some of you mentioned that there were some types of characters in manga stories, such as happy character, funny character, brave character and so on. Do you like reading stories that have stereotypical characters that you can recognise or do you think that artists should develop more complicated characterisation?
6. I noticed that many of you found it difficult to remember the characters' names, especially characters in *VK4*. Would you rather that they have English names than translated names from Japanese? Many of you have been following up *Naruto*. Did you have problems remembering the characters' names too in the beginning? Did it make the reading less fun?
7. Do you sometimes feel that your reading experience of manga affects the way you read books in other formats, e.g., novels, Western comics, graphic novels, etc.?
8. Have you ever visited any manga forums (fan-based message board) online? Did you participate in the discussion? What do you like about visiting the forums?
9. In some manga, the author would insert a few pages to tell readers how they created the manga, where they got their inspirations from, or life about the characters or the artists themselves. Do you like to read them in a manga or would you sometimes feel that they interrupted the flow of reading?
10. Is there anything you want to say as manga experts?

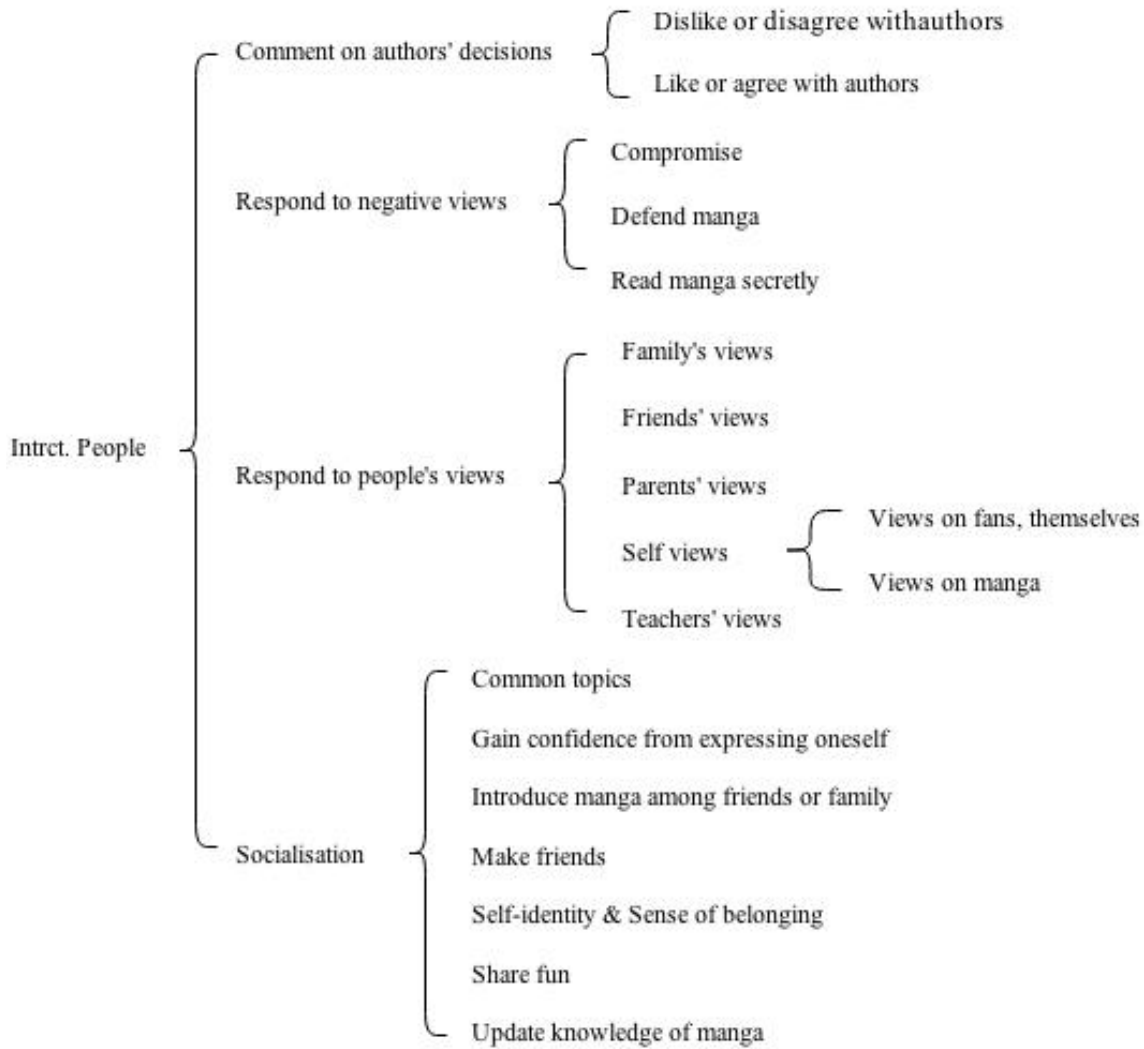
Appendix F: Codes for Data Analysis

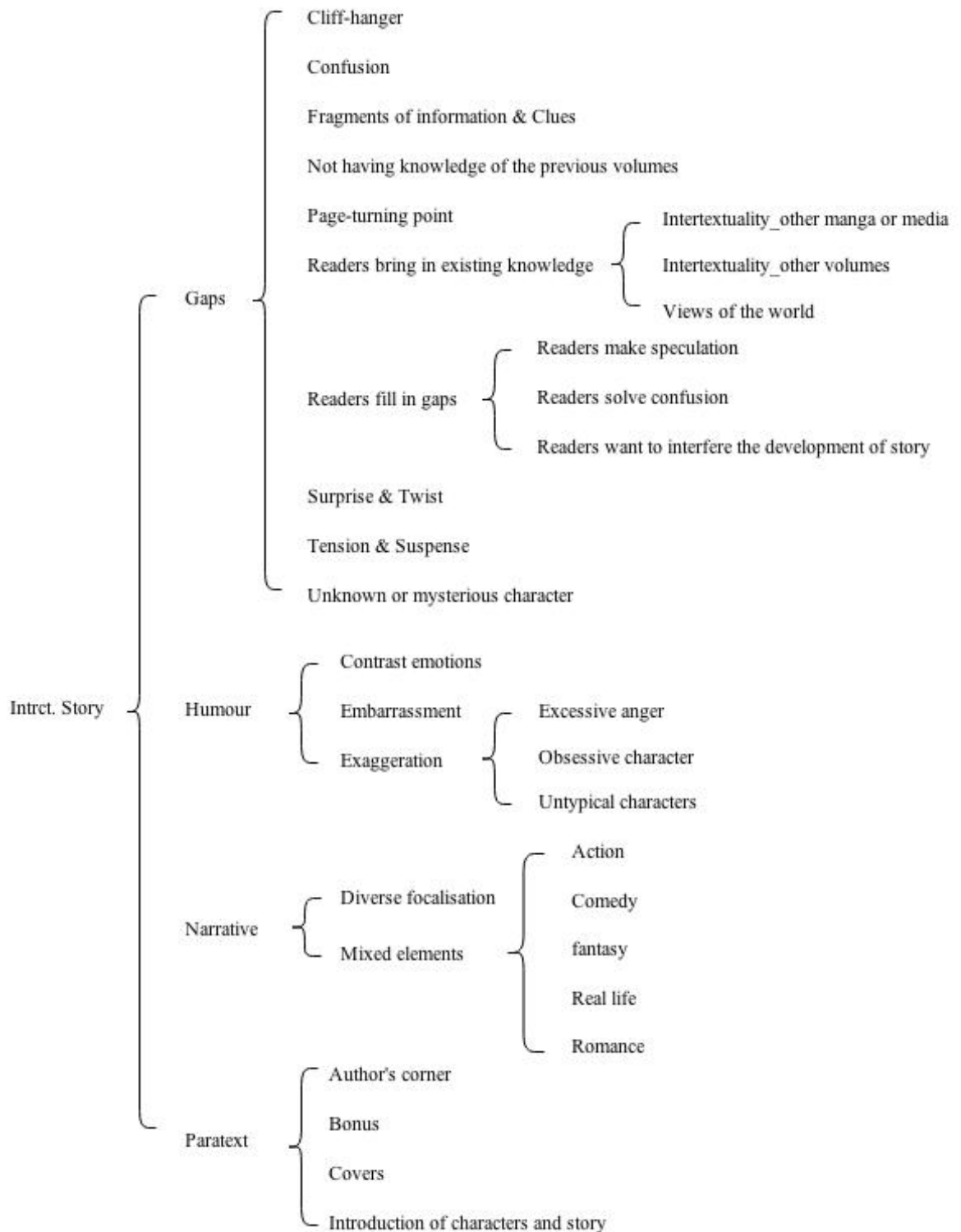
F-1: Codes Applied to Interview Transcriptions



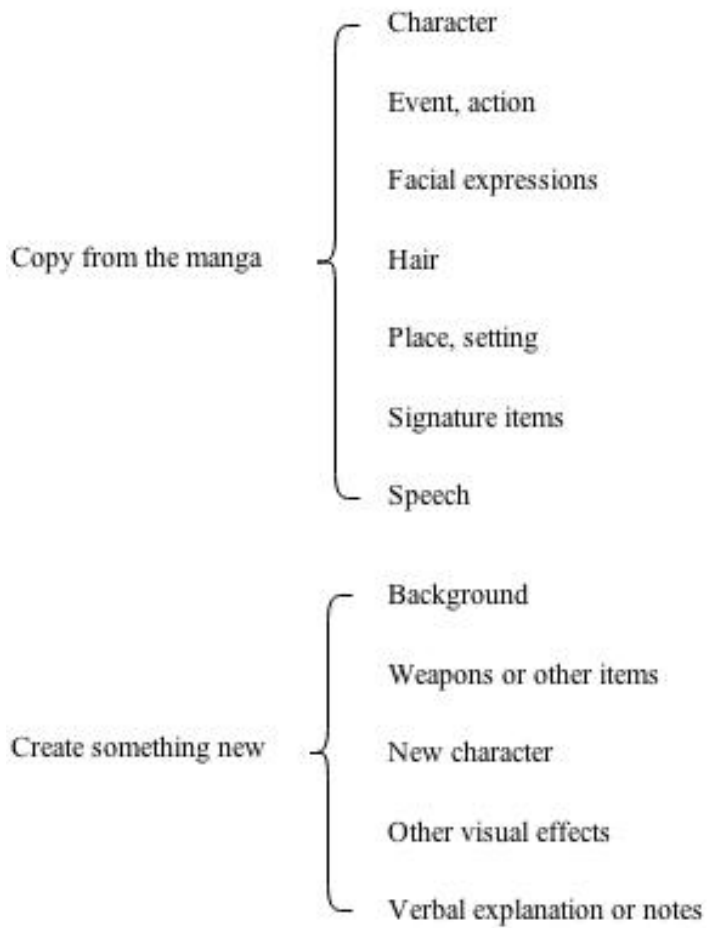








F-2: Codes Applied to Reading Journals



Appendix G: Parental Consent Slip

Dear parents/ guardians,

My name is Yi-Shan Tsai. I am a PhD student at the University of Cambridge. I am currently conducting research on young readers' experience of manga (Japanese comic books). I am looking for some volunteer students who are interested in reading manga and feel comfortable about sharing their reflections in a small group, and with myself.

My research comprises three main tasks. The first task requires the participant to read two provided manga and one manga of their choice and keep reading journals of their reflections on the books. The second task requires the participants to join three group interviews and share their reading experience of the assigned manga. The third task is an individual interview, which will be conducted after the group interviews. The group interviews will last about 45 minutes and the individual interview will last for approximately 25 minutes.

Both group interviews and individual interview will be audio- and video-recorded. All the data collected from the participants will be used for academic use only, with their identity protected. The participants are free to withdraw their participation at any point during the research process without providing any reasons, and their input will not be used. The analysis and findings of the research will be available on request.

I hope this research will provide participants with an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. If you agree to let your child participate in this research, please kindly fill in the return slip below and return it to the classroom teacher or the librarian. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to working with your child in what promises to be an exciting experience.

Yi-Shan Tsai
yst22@cam.ac.uk

✂ -----

This is to confirm that I agree to let my child, _____, participate in the manga research with Yi-Shan Tsai from the University of Cambridge. I understand that my child will be asked to write reading journals and participate in three group interviews and one individual interview. I understand that my child's participation will be audio- and video-recorded and the data will be used and shared, with the identity protected, in an academic field. I understand that my child is free to discontinue at any point during the research.

Parent's signature: _____

