

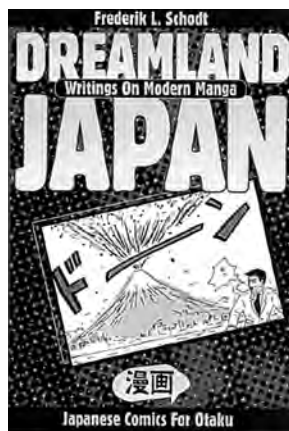
BOOK REVIEWS

Dreamland Japan

Writings on Modern Manga

BY FREDERIK L. SCHODT
BERKELEY: STONE BRIDGE PRESS, 1997
360 PAGES

Manga is one of the most often mentioned topics of the Japanese popular culture, and it tends to inspire two types of reactions: some refuse and look down on manga, while others are fascinated. *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, is written by Frederik Schodt, an American who has been fascinated by *manga* and has been “observing and writing about the *manga* industry in Japan over the last sixteen years” (p.12). *Dreamland Japan* is a new addition to Schodt’s previous book, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1983), and skillfully presents artistic, social, and economic aspects of the Japanese ‘story *manga*’ industry. *Dreamland Japan* also provides a rich information source of Japanese animation (pp. 275–304) and *manga*-related activities in the English-speaking world (pp. 305–47).



What are *manga*, and where did they come from? The author defines *manga* as follows: “In a nutshell, the modern Japanese *manga* is a synthesis: a long Japanese tradition of art that entertains has taken on a physical form imported from the West” (p. 21). Throughout the book, Schodt claims that *manga* is the amalgamation of a Japanese traditional art (monochrome line drawings such as *chōjūgiga*, *kibyōshi*) and the physical form of American newspaper comic strips.

However, several significant differences should be identified between Japanese *manga* and American comics. One of the crucial differences is that much, but not all, Japanese *manga* are “the comics of normal people doing normal things” (the celebration of the ordinary), whereas American comics must “have incredible people doing incredible things” (p. 28). The difference leads the author to an important reason why foreigners should read *manga*. Because *manga* portrays the ordinary life of ordinary people, *manga* offers a discourse between *tatema*e (surface images and intentions) and *hon*ne (true feelings and intentions) which otherwise confuse most foreigners. Reading *manga* helps foreigners make the inscrutable Japanese society and people into something scrutable. Again, according to Schodt, “Reading *manga* is like peering into the unvarnished, untouched reality of the Japanese mind” (p. 31). His claim was exemplified by some selected story *manga* artists (e.g., Fujiko F. Fujio, Shigeru Mizuki, Osamu Tezuka) and their works in three chapters (pp. 81–274).

While *Dreamland Japan* is designed for the general public, it should prove especially useful in advanced undergraduate courses dealing with the crossroads between Japanese art history and Japanese

popular culture, for the book succeeds in correcting a stereotyped negative image about *manga* and informing readers of the traditional artistic aspect of Japanese *manga*. In a sense, Schodt accentuates another category of Japanese art comparable to Kabuki, *Bunraku*, *Sado*, and so on. This study almost appears flawless in terms of the discovery of a Japanese art. However, the discovery made by the author, an outsider of Japanese culture, appears nothing new for the natives of Japanese culture. The natives of Japanese culture have known the tradition and the presence of *manga*, whether or not *manga* was discovered by outsiders. In this respect, the discovery may be valuable only for outsiders of Japanese culture, and the discovery appears to be ‘the discovery of America by Columbus,’ as is often the case with the discoveries of Asian arts made by American Asianists. ■

Dai Tanno

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Foreign Devil

BY WANG PING
MINNEAPOLIS: COFFEE HOUSE PRESS, 1996

What to do if you are an intelligent woman motivated to escape your insular upbringing, your adulterous mother, your violent father? What to do if you score well on your exams but find the male hierarchy threatened by your performance? What to do if a series of men view and use you for sexual satisfaction or in order to satisfy their need to possess you, never mind your other talents and potential? What to do, too, if women regard you as a means to further their own interests?

Such is the world of one Ni Bing, heroine of the novel *Foreign Devil*, by Wang Ping. This accessible novel is appropriate for all undergraduates since it addresses concerns experienced by all young men and women. Western readers can identify with Ni Bing, even as the novel is set in China, since she confronts authorities and hierarchies and adult duplicities that youths in any culture have encountered. It is a painful process for a youth to encounter and understand gradually the power and chicanery of the adult world, especially when the adults exploit youths for their youth. Yet the transition from innocence to experience obliges youths to recognize adults for who they are, and youths—most youths—learn how to articulate and defend and further their own best interests.

Ni Bing, however, is a tentative learner, and her case is special since these youthful experiences are complicated by the traditional forms of

authority in Chinese society (the novel's men are physical and lustful), by the multicultural attractions and revelations of the twentieth century (Ni Bing is well read), by commerce (through an odd but self-serving set of circumstances, she succumbs to the advances of Bruno, an Italian capitalist), and by politics (Chinese men and women are as ready as ever to suppress each other for personal gain). She finds herself the object of the attentions of a variety of men, all of whom are reaching beyond the confines culture places on them. She is raped, strung along, she is set aside and praised, only to be dragged down and mounted. Were this suffering not enough, it occurs against the backdrop of ancient and modern tensions in conflict. Ni Bing is thus expected to be filial, but she is also wise enough to see that education is her escape. But students and educational authorities have their agendas, too, which makes us wonder whether anyone has genuine, sincere motives in a China whose ancient values are rapidly confronting the modern and Westernized world.

If it sounds as though this novel has an agenda, perhaps it does, but its originality helps counter its own motives, and the beauty of Ni Bing's aspirations likewise augurs well for a generation exploited by an adult, authoritative world. Wang Ping can write well. She has learned how to write about sex, contemporary Chinese sex at that, which is undergoing transformations and experiencing confusions similar to those in the culture itself. Ni Bing finds herself satisfying men, sometimes by accident, sometimes by the ways of a world she is only beginning to understand, but she also works hard to satisfy herself. The two have trouble mixing.

This trouble may be traced to the voice of the novel itself, which has one foot in the Eastern world, one in the West. Thus, the novel freely pauses to explain various details of the East to the Western reader—the identity of a *gula* (someone who has no descendants), a definition of a *kang* (a bed made of mud and bricks), etc. Yet the novelist is also appealing to the Asian audience that knows what Ni Bing is confronting, but has gotten beyond her conflicts, possibly by emigrating. Still further, to the contemporary Chinese reader of English, the novel makes an appeal to recognize what contemporary China is and has become, certainly in its treatment of a promising young woman. If awkwardness and implausibility are part of Wang Ping's overtures to these various audiences, we can attribute them to the newness of such a dialogue. Given the intensifying multicultural pressures on China and Asia, not to mention America, we can expect many works of literature not only will, but must, address the redefinition of gender and self in both hemispheres. *Foreign Devil* helps initiate the dialogue on these issues. ▢

Thomas Hamel

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TRANSLATED BY ANN WEHMEYER

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