

Macau in the final chapter. Additional material in each chapter deals with place-specific issues such as a discussion of Taiwan's political relationship with China and the dramatic growth of the gaming industry in Macau since the 1999 handover.

While this text is most appropriate for a college-level course on the geography of China or Asia, it provides an excellent source of information for high school or middle school teachers whose curricula includes Asia. Teachers should greatly benefit from purchasing the text, as it will become an often-referenced and easily accessible source of information on China. Of particular note are the references at the end of each chapter, which include a robust list of academic journal articles, recent news stories, and classic sources. For example, the chapter on environmental issues lists forty-four references, with many of them dated within the last five years. The text has a companion website with digital versions of the visuals used in the text and additional materials not in the text. This text fills a significant gap in English-written geography books about China and should be on the shelf of anyone interested in a comprehensive geographic survey of the lands of China. ■

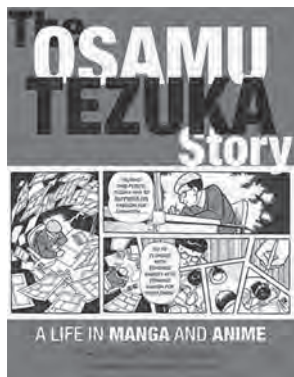
CRAIG R. LAING is an Associate Professor of Geography in the Department of Social, Cultural, and Justice Studies at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He has spent a month and a half in China on two separate visits. One of these trips was a field seminar to Yunnan Province to study the province's ethnic minorities, sponsored by the Asian Studies Development Program of the University of Hawai'i East-West Center. He regularly teaches a course on the geography of East Asia.

The Osamu Tezuka Story

A Life in Manga and Anime

BY TOSHIO BAN AND TEZUKA PRODUCTIONS
TRANSLATED BY FREDERIK L. SCHODT
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA: STONE BRIDGE PRESS, 2016
928 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1611720259, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by William Tsutsui



Tezuka Osamu is hardly a household name in the United States, even in the fan communities that so eagerly consume the products of the Japanese pop culture industry that Tezuka was instrumental in building after World War II. In Japan, however, Tezuka is revered as a “god of *manga*,” a pioneer in the development of comics and animation, and, as one recent biographer described him, an almost-superhuman figure, “like Walt Disney, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Tim Burton, Arthur C. Clarke, and Carl Sagan

all rolled into one.”¹ A remarkably prolific artist, author, and entrepreneur, Tezuka created a staggering 150,000 manga pages, sixty animated films and series, and a host of iconic characters—from the Jungle Emperor, known to American audiences as Kimba the White Lion, to Tetsuwan Atom, the

endearing robot beloved internationally as Astro Boy. Ranging widely across styles and genres—he was just as comfortable penning sci-fi epics and lighthearted animal tales as hard-edge suspense stories and softcore pornography—Tezuka’s imagination, popular appeal, and sheer productivity drove the postwar boom in manga and anime that swept Japan and eventually spread around the world.

The Osamu Tezuka Story is a biography in manga form drawn by Ban Toshio, one of Tezuka’s closest associates, and the team of illustrators at Tezuka Productions, the comics and animation studio that Tezuka founded. It was originally serialized in Japan from 1989 to 1992, in the years immediately following Tezuka’s death. The English translation of what is a truly monumental volume (914 pages, including a short introduction and a comprehensive listing of Tezuka’s manga and anime works) was done by Frederik Schodt, a well-known authority on Japanese comics and a long-time friend and interpreter for Tezuka.

This book traces Tezuka’s life and career in deep chronological detail, setting his personal story against the dramatic historical backdrop of Japan during the Shōwa Period (1926–1989). Tezuka’s lifespan, in fact, overlapped almost exactly with the reign of the Shōwa Emperor. He was born two years after Hirohito ascended to the throne and died just one month after Hirohito’s passing. The eldest child of a privileged, progressive-minded family in the suburbs of Osaka, Tezuka was a bright and precocious youth with many interests, including reading, nature (especially insects), astronomy, movies, and music. Tezuka followed in the footsteps of his many ancestors who were distinguished physicians, training to be a medical doctor. But his true passion was always manga, and he compulsively drew cartoons and honed his skills as an artist and storyteller from the time he was in primary school. Ban’s graphic biography meticulously charts Tezuka’s rise from a young up-and-comer on the Osaka manga scene to Japan’s most popular comic artist to a pioneer in cinematic and television anime to a leading force in the internationalization of Japanese popular culture.

Readers already familiar with Tezuka’s work will find much in this volume of interest. The origins of many of the characteristic themes in Tezuka’s creations can, for example, be traced to formative personal experiences. His concern for the environment and fascination with metamorphosis grew from his childhood obsession with collecting beetles and moths, and his pacifist leanings and apocalyptic imagination grew from the trauma of surviving the wartime firebombing of Osaka. The influence of American comic books and Hollywood movies on Tezuka was also profound, and his fixation on Disney cartoons is well-documented here. He watched *Snow White* more than fifty times and *Bambi* more than eighty. Ban also explores Tezuka’s stylistic genius and the numerous innovations he brought to manga, from a bold cinematic style rich in visual effects (such as close-ups and cutbacks) to the groundbreaking development of long-format “story manga.” For readers without previous exposure to Tezuka’s work, however, this book may be more overwhelming than enlightening. Even a dedicated fan of Japanese pop culture could easily feel lost in the whirl of manga series and anime productions touched upon only fleetingly here and, even by the end of this long biography, be uncertain of what set Tezuka apart as an artist and pioneer beyond his incredibly prolific output over the postwar decades.

Some of this volume’s most fascinating insights are into the inner workings of Japan’s publishing industry and the emergence of anime as a major cultural force. Tezuka rose to prominence in a time of tremendous, seemingly insatiable demand for manga, as Japanese children, and increasingly adults as well, eagerly sought distractions after wartime deprivation and through the struggles of postwar recovery.

In this environment, competition—both among publishers and individual manga artists—was often cutthroat, and much of this book recounts

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the constant rivalries among editors desperate to get their monthly cartoon pages from the chronically overcommitted Tezuka. Ban’s narrative also sheds valuable light on the process of producing manga and anime, revealing how important teamwork and craft were to modern cartooning as they had been to *ukiyo-e* production in the Tokugawa Period, and documenting how technological change in printing and animation shaped the evolution of Japanese pop forms. Significantly, Tezuka’s story also demonstrates how minimal the financial rewards were in Japan’s postwar mass entertainment industries, how common failure was for publishers and entrepreneurs (including Tezuka himself), and how passion rather than profit fueled the golden age of Japanese comics and cartoons.

Tezuka’s personal story as presented here appears as a virtual microcosm of Japan’s collective experience of national reconstruction, unprecedented growth, and international reintegration after World War II. Tezuka, like our image of the Japanese people as a whole during the intense decades of the “miracle economy,” was hardworking, even workaholic; focused, even single-minded; highly competitive and fired by a “burning ambition and energy” (514). Tezuka’s career mirrored not just Japan’s economic resurgence from wartime devastation, but also the incremental return of Japan to the peaceful, cultured community of nations. Tezuka was an eager international traveler and an enthusiastic advocate for Japanese manga and anime overseas. Indeed, even long before “soft power” became an expressed goal of the Japanese state, Tezuka was regularly dispatched abroad to promote Japanese popular culture by the Japan Foundation and was even named a “Manga Ambassador” in 1980, lecturing on his work at the United Nations. Perhaps not coincidentally, Tezuka’s trademark manga character—one that he worked on from the early 1950s up until his

death—was the phoenix, an apt symbol of a reborn Japan rising from the ashes of war and the isolation of defeat.

Like most triumphalist narratives of Japan’s postwar “miracle economy,” however, *The Osamu Tezuka Story* tends to stress the accomplishments rather than the costs of the nation’s (and Tezuka’s) success. Women, for instance, only appear occasionally in the narrative here. Tezuka’s family only play bit parts as well: his wife is only mentioned for the first time on page 486, and his children rate far less attention than the legions of impatient editors pressuring him for their monthly manga pages. Ban’s account also glosses over the fact that for many years Tezuka lived alone in a small apartment so that he could better concentrate on his work, returning home to his family for at most a couple of days a week. Moreover, even though Tezuka was deeply interested in nature and wrote largely for an audience of Japanese schoolchildren, some of the most pressing environmental and social issues of Japan’s high-economic-growth decades—industrial pollution, educational stress, bullying—receive little or no attention in this biography.

Dedicated fans of Tezuka Osamu’s imaginative and varied work, as well as those deeply steeped in the history of Japanese pop culture, will undoubtedly relish this book. Although it clearly also has potential as a classroom text, with its valuable perspectives on the evolution of manga and anime in postwar Japan, instructors and students alike could well find it a challenging source. Not only is the volume long, but it is also surprisingly dense for a graphic work, with a biographical narrative that is notably lacking in drama. For all the colorful characters that flowed from Tezuka’s pen, he himself was more salaryman than adventure hero, leading an almost ascetic life of dedication to his work. The seemingly endless stories of Tezuka’s struggles with his editors and the recitation of the many honors bestowed upon him grow tiresome quickly. Moreover, even though Ban tries to provide a balanced view of Tezuka the man and the artist, the biography does become gratefully hagiographic at times. Schodt’s translation is excellent and the book is presented, only appropriately, in the traditional Japanese format, reading from right to left. Curiously, however, given this attention to authenticity, Japanese personal names are not presented in the customary order with family name first, but here are cavalierly inverted in Western fashion.

For all its merits, *The Osamu Tezuka Story* pales in comparison to the compelling, inspiring, enchanting, and electrifying tales woven by Tezuka himself. If nothing else, this meticulous biography reminds us of the tremendous originality, energy, and range of one of the great talents of twentieth-century Japanese popular culture and encourages us to revisit, or to experience for the first time, the genius of *Astro Boy*, *Black Jack*, *Phoenix*, and Tezuka’s other enduring creations. ■

NOTES

1. Helen McCarthy, *The Art of Osamu Tezuka: God of Manga* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2009), 8.

WILLIAM TSUTSUI is President and Professor of History at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. He previously served as Dean of Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences at Southern Methodist University from 2010 to 2014. An award-winning classroom teacher, Tsutsui is the Author or Editor of eight books, including *Manufacturing Ideology: Scientific Management in Twentieth-Century Japan*, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, and *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization*, as well as numerous articles on modern Japanese history.

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