9

Of Transcreations and Transpacific Adaptations: Investigating Manga Versions of Spider-Man

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Assessing the global spread of Japanese popular culture, Koichi Iwabuchi distinguishes between "culturally odorless" products that carry only little "cultural imprint of the producing country" and products with a "cultural odor" that retain "cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life." Once the cultural associations of a specific product are valued for their distinctiveness, he suggests, "the cultural odor [. . .] becomes a 'fragrance'—a socially and culturally accepted smell."[1] These observations provide the conceptual framework for my investigation of transnational adaptations and transpacific transcreations of American Spider-Man comics into Japanese manga and their subsequent readaptation into American formats. The term "transcreation" was introduced by the creators of the four-issue miniseries *Spider-Man India*, published simultaneously in India and the United States in 2004, who described their retelling of the American Spider-Man tale as follows: "It is one thing to translate existing American comics into local languages, but this project is truly what we call a transcreation—where we actually reinvent the origin of a character like Spider-Man so that he is an Indian boy growing up in Mumbai and dealing with local problems and challenges." The idea was "to make an international hero also become a local hero."[2]

Focusing on Ryoichi Ikegami's *Spider-Man the Manga* (1970–1/1997–9), Yamanaka Akira's *Spider-Man J* (2004–5/2008–9), and Marvel's *Mangaverse* version of *Spider-Man* (Kaare Andrews, 2002–3), this chapter traces the multidirectional cultural flow between American superhero comics and various Japanese manga transcreations. The first two of these Spider-Man manga

(Ikegami and Akira) were created and first published in Japan before they were translated, reworked, and then published in the United States, while *Spider-Man Mangaverse* was designed to capitalize on the manga boom of the early 2000s by implementing American(ized) manga superheroes. As I will argue in the following, the story of Spider-Man transcreations and transpacific adaptations represents neither a teleological movement from locally resistant adaptations to a globally marketable and transnational hybrid style nor an extended moment of cultural imperialism during which American superhero comics would take over the Japanese market or Japanese superhero manga would come to dominate the production of superhero comics in the United States. Rather, the story illustrates the prevalence of transnational negotiations and transformations that subject popular serial narratives to endless circulation and cause them to bounce continually across national comics styles and storytelling traditions.[3]

Ryoichi Ikegami: *Spider-Man the Manga*

The history of Marvel's "basic commitment to put Marvel Comics in the Orient" is a complicated one, and it was addressed at length in issue #22 of the company's pro-zine *FOOM* (Friends of Ol' Marvel), published in the fall of 1978.[4] The issue features an interview with Gene Pelc, who was working in the licensing department of Cadence Publishing, Marvel's parent company at the time. Inspired by the popularity of American cultural products in Japan, Pelc set out to convince Japanese publishers to translate and sell Marvel comics. Yet, translations of *Spider-Man*, even when adapted to the manga reading order (back to front, right to left), failed to secure a broad readership: "We prepared all the work here and we flopped it. [. . .] So, a Japanese person could read it—with some difficulty, because the styles are different." But "something was wrong. Something was not translating or coming across." Assuming that he was dealing with a "cultural gap" that was difficult to bridge, Pelc suggested indigenously produced transnational adaptations that would "expand on the character from a Japanese viewpoint" as a viable solution.[5]

Ryoichi Ikegami's *Spider-Man the Manga* is such a transnational adaptation. As such, it exemplifies a process through which an international superhero is transformed into a transnational character: not simply an American creation received by audiences around the world, but a character revised and reimagined in a specific national context, narrative tradition, and graphic style. The series appeared in the wake of an earlier, largely unsuccessful, attempt to establish

American superhero comics in the Japanese market: Jiro Kuwata's *Bat-Manga*, which had appeared in *Shonen King* and *Shonen Gako* between April 1966 and May 1967.[6] Ikegami's *Spider-Man the Manga* ran from January 1970 to September 1971 in monthly installments in *Shonen* magazine, and it can be read as a transpacific transcreation avant la lettre. Ikegami took basic elements of Spider-Man's origin story and Peter Parker's social life and placed them into a largely Japanese world. His transcreative revisions begin with the protagonist, who is named Yu Komori, and not Peter Parker, and whose facial features are rendered in the conventional manga style (and are thus at least superficially connoted as ethnically Japanese). Like his American counterpart, Yu attains his superpowers through the bite of a radioactive spider, yet this accident does not take place during a school trip to a science exhibit, but in his school laboratory, where he is experimenting with radioactive power in preparation for an upcoming exam. In that sense, it is not the clumsiness of a geek but the ambition of a master student that causes his transformation into a superhero—a difference that signals diverging attitudes toward public education in the United States and Japan in the early 1970s.

The cast of characters surrounding Yu partially recreates Peter Parker's social world: Aunt May is Aunt Mei, the notorious newspaper editor J. Jonah Jameson edits a Japanese newspaper, and the hero's girlfriend Mary Jane Watson is supplanted with the pen pal Rumiko Shiraishi. Only his Uncle Ben is absent. Moreover, Peter Parker's adolescent hubris is replaced by Yu's profound fear of his own superpowers. After a horrific dream about wreaking havoc and killing people in traffic-congested Tokyo, Yu realizes: "In this world, we have to learn to control our anger and lust.. . . There are some things you just can't do."[7] This realization is generally in keeping with Peter's understanding that "with great power there must also come—great responsibility," but it refocuses this understanding from a republican discourse of personal sacrifice for the good of the community to a discourse of (super)humans as inherently monstrous and fearful figures whose violent urges threaten the destruction of society.[8]

Ikegami made efforts to construct a transcultural bridge between American comic book storytelling and the Japanese manga tradition.[9] *Spider-Man the Manga* progressed at a slower narrative pace than most action-packed American superhero comics; it adhered to the cartoonish depiction of faces and the disproportionate body sizes typical of contemporary manga, employed silent panels with greater frequency, repeatedly used slapstick scenes, relied on a greater variety of unusual panel shapes and sizes as well as many establishing shots (splash panels) that depict the setting as distinctly Japanese (mainly Tokyo). Despite the new setting, the transnational nature of this manga adaptation frequently

becomes explicit, such as when Yu remarks about his costume in the first issue: "I'm not Super Man.... But I made myself a costume." This costume is not a perfect fit, and assembling it was a tough task: "I didn't know how difficult . . . sewing was until . . . I made this costume! I could have had my aunt make me a better costume . . . but I don't want anybody to know about this. [. . .] Anyway . . . when I put this costume on, I feel like I become a different person."[10] These reflections are integral to the intradiegetic story; they characterize Yu as a teenager not unlike Peter Parker, whose clandestine assemblage of costume and webshooters reveal him as a new type of superhero: a superhero much more closely aligned with the everyday lives and problems of his audience than Superman or Batman. But we also witness the adaptation of existing superhero material that is twice removed from the first appearance of American superheroes in the late 1930s. If Marvel had reenergized the superhero genre with its introduction of flawed heroes with mundane problems in the early 1960s, then Ikegami's Spider-Man may be said to adapt the formula to a new cultural context. This double remove is suggested in the recap segment in issue #2, which recalls that Yu had "adopted the guise of the amazing Spider-Man" in the previous issue, indicating that Yu became Spider-Man by attaining superpowers and putting on his costume but also insinuating that the Japanese protagonist takes on—and takes over—the identity of his American model.[11] Significantly, such takeovers are not just typical of the superhero genre in general; they are also frequently thematized on the story level. Indeed, superhero imposters appear regularly in American comic books and, as such, acknowledge the superhero figure's tendency to proliferate across stories, series, genres, and media. These imposters therefore represent an intradiegetic way of accounting for—and also potentially defusing—such competing proliferations. *Spider-Man the Manga* also follows this logic; in issue #30, for instance, Yu is faced with a fake Spider-Man who uses his superpowers for a personal vendetta rather than the common good.[12]

While differences between the American Spider-Man and his transcreated manga version are frequently a matter of degree rather than principle—such as when Ikegami abandons the superhero plot for several issues to focus on Yu's social life in school (issues #16–#17) or when he invents mythical figures whose backstories cater to specifically Japanese contexts (issue #24)—other stories are particularly pertinent in the context of transpacific relations. One such story features the American George Midoro (issues #19–#21). Midoro rides his Harley around the streets of Tokyo and eventually goes on a rampage during which he shoots a policeman before taking Yu and his friends hostage. He then hijacks an airplane, shoots several more people, and finally threatens to crash the plane.

Thanks to Spider-Man, Midoro is stopped, and the plane can land safely. As such, the story does not diverge too much from American comic book stories, perhaps with the exception of its graphic depiction of violence and bloodshed. The significant difference appears on the final four pages, where the readers learn what had driven Midoro to his rampage:

> The Vietnam War.. . . A battlefield of death and destruction. George Midoro, American. Private first class. He spent four long years in that living hell, and when it ended, he was reassigned to the Iwakuni base here in Japan. He was one of the many U.S. soldiers stationed here. Today, the war returned to Private Midoro. He started reliving it in his mind [. . .]. He didn't want to go back to the uncertainty, not knowing if he was going to kill or be killed in the war. So . . . he looked at us and . . ..

This both personal and national history contextualizes a plea voiced earlier in the story by a doctor, who had asked: "What have we ever done to you? We're simple Japanese people who just want to lead normal, happy lives!"[13] Passages such as these offer a complex transnational subtext to the American superhero narrative, a subtext that includes the graphic depiction of US fighter planes over Vietnam and a large group of Vietnamese inspecting a long line of dead bodies. Years before Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986/1991) introduced similar images of Holocaust victims into the field of Western comic books and before Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen* (1973–85) depicted the devastation of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Ikegami visualizes the horrors of war. And he does so in an expressly transnational vein: America's bombing of the Vietnamese evokes a significant connection among Asian countries—here Vietnam and Japan—whose people look back on a shared experience of American aerial warfare. Yu's thoughts emphasize this connection when he identifies the Asianness of the Japanese as the impulse that had triggered Midori's rampage ("he looked at us"). Thus, the manga suggests an uneasy alliance between the continued presence of American soldiers in Japan (at the actual airbase Iwakuni) and the aggressive attempts of American comics publishers to establish a commercial presence on the Japanese comics market. Interpreting this alliance of military and cultural forms as examples of US imperialism would probably go too far, but the ambivalence toward the arrival of American superhero comics expressed in this storyline of *Spider-Man the Manga* should not be underestimated.

Spider-Man the Manga had its original reception in Japan, followed by a secondary reception when it was republished in adapted form in the United States (1997–9). Its Japanese reception was less than stellar, and it seems that the

reasons were not just cultural, but also political, as its ambivalence concerning the American (military) presence in Japan suggests. The series did not create any lasting interest in American superhero comics. Ikegami recalls:

> I created an original main character named "Yu Komori" and tried to integrate him into the American story, but that didn't go over too well with the Japanese readers. The editors finally decided to ask the Japanese science fiction writer Kazumasa Hirai to write scripts for us, creating a story more tailored to a Japanese audience. The popularity picked up a little after that, but as a series, it never really became a big success.[14]

In the mid-1990s, however, *Spider-Man the Manga* was republished with new covers in Japan and shortly afterwards in the United States, where its appearance came in the wake of the first wave of manga publications and anime films such as Osomo Katsuhiro's cyberpunk *Akira* (1988).[15] What is more, two of Ikegami's later works, *Mai the Psychic Girl* (Eclipse/Viz Communications, 1987) and *Crying Freeman* (Viz Communications, 1989–94), appeared around the same time as *Spider-Man the Manga*. As series that moved away from the superhero genre and possessed a visual style that the editor of Eclipse Comics, Letitia Glozer, described as "[not] too Japanese or too American," they found an American readership interested in this still largely unknown style of comics storytelling.[16]

Spider-Man the Manga was sufficiently different from its American sources that the editor of the translated and flopped American version, Tom Brevoort, raised questions of transcultural transformation in an afterword to the first American issue. Brevoort begins by anticipating reader feedback and then addresses the tension between original creation and the process of transcultural cloning:

> So what's all this about Spider-Man Manga? Where'd this strange thing come from, and why's it so different from the Spidey we know and love? Why didn't Marvel Comics just translate the American Spidey comics into Japanese, rather than creating a whole new strip? And why, why, why isn't this Spider-Man Peter Parker—who's this Yu Komori, another clone?

Writing in 1997, Brevoort further proclaims the global appeal of Marvel comics and notes that their worldwide translation and circulation was now a firmly established business practice. Yet, as he also acknowledged, "when we attempted to expand into the lucrative Japanese comics market in the mid 1970s, we met with difficulty." Brevoort then suggests that what had failed in the 1970s could now work as part of the increasing transcultural flow of comics styles and

stories: "Today [. . .] there are a number of American Marvel comics which are routinely translated into Japanese for that audience—the cultural barriers between storytelling techniques gradually eroding away—just as today there are dozens of Japanese manga imported to America."[17]

Published in the United States before manga became the mainstream phenomenon it is today, the Americanized version of *Spider-Man the Manga* uses various indigenization strategies. One such strategy was keeping the Japanese covers while announcing the series' transpacific origins prominently. These covers both exoticize and familiarize the manga for an American readership acquainted but in many cases not yet intimately familiar with manga storytelling. They acknowledge the comic's status as a transnational hybrid by printing Ikegami's name both in kanji and in Roman letters and also casting the iconic Spider-Man logo in kanji-looking Roman font. They further carry a "Marvel Imports" label and present the series as "the daringly different origin of the Japanese wall-crawler" and as "[t]ranslated from the Manga series by the internationally acclaimed artist Ryoichi Ikegami."[18] Within the manga, signs and sayings are occasionally left in the original kanji and are translated in footnotes. Most obviously, however, the reading order of these stories is reversed (all pages are flopped) so as to comply with Western reading habits.

Spider-Man the Manga was not too successful in the United States. After 31 issues, publication was suspended in mid-series (issue #31 ends with "to be continued"), and the run was never completed. As I have suggested, its belated translation and American reception followed the popularity of a small number of anime productions and manga series that preceded the mainstream reception of manga in the United States. Its failure to see complete publication despite its various indigenization strategies should, however, not distract us from an increasing interest in manga versions of Spider-Man and other superheroes that manifested itself, within a little over a decade, in a number of manga adaptations of American superheroes. These adaptations included both Japanese productions translated and readapted for the American market, such as Kia Asamiya's *Batman: Child of Dreams* (2000–1/2003) and Yamanaka Akira's *Spider-Man J* (2004–5/2008–9), as well as comic books that were produced in the United States but made use of the manga style, such as Marvel's *Mangaverse* line (2000–3). Furthermore, they included transnational cooperations like Yoshinori Nastume's graphic novel *Batman: Death Mask* (2008), which was written and drawn by a Japanese mangaka but was commissioned for a Western audience and overseen by American editors.[19]

Yamanaka Akira: *Spider-Man J*

Yamanaka Akira's *Spider-Man J* ran from November 2004 to May 2005 in the Japanese *Comic Bom Bom* magazine and was issued as an American adaptation first as part of Marvel's *Spider-Man Family* series (#1–12, 2008–9) and then in two anthologies, *Japanese Knights* (2008) and *Japanese Daze* (2009).[20] Both anthologies carry credit information that acknowledges the adaptation process (named are the original writer and artist, the translator, and the English adaptor, among others), and they are introduced by a brief announcement that foregrounds their global appeal: "Each corner of the globe has its own unique take on the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN! Direct from Japan, Marvel is proud to present. . . ." In fact, the titles of the anthologies, *Japanese Knights* and *Japanese Daze*, as well as the rebranding of Spider-Man into Spider-Man J already announce the texts' status as a cultural import. The covers depict manga-style scenes from the stories (black-and-white drawings, massive motion lines, snippets of kanji) and feature Spider-Man J and his close friend Detective Flynn (a character original to this series) as quintessential manga figures with smallish physical frames, youthful facial features, and the typical oversized eyes. What is more, the back covers pitch these products as trendy imports ("Fresh from Japan") that were "[o]riginally only published in Japan" but are now "collected for the first time in America and translated for your reading pleasure." Apart from this suggestion of exclusivity, which clearly seeks to appeal to those appreciative of the manga aesthetic and repeats Marvel's tried-and-true rhetoric of selflessly serving the desires of its readers, the back cover blurb gestures toward the existence of a potentially transnational fandom: "overseas, Spider-Man J enjoyed a large following of loyal readers. Now, fans here can enjoy Spidey's manga-styled adventures, as well." If editor Brevoort had still acknowledged the cultural barriers between American comic book storytelling and Ikegami's *Spider-Man the Manga* adaptation in the 1990s and had pitched its US publication as the retroactive documentation of an ongoing process toward the popularity of Marvel superheroes in Japan, *Spider-Man J* openly promotes a global agenda of comic book production and consumption.

This global agenda warrants a closer look at *Spider-Man J*'s visual aesthetics and storytelling techniques. In terms of its visual aesthetics, we find the manga-typical black-and-white line drawings and gray shading techniques; we also find the equally typical flexible use of panel shapes and page layouts as well as a characteristic mixture of different degrees of abstraction and caricature in single panels, where focal characters may be drawn in the already reduced manga

style that concentrates on a small selection of specific facial features, whereas side characters and bystanders are rendered with an even greater degree of cartoonish abstraction, often consisting of only a few lines. Moreover, extended fight scenes (complete with excessive motion lines and stylized sound words) intersect with occasional goofy slapstick comedy, such as when Spider-Man J explains the law of inertia to Flynn and his explanation is accompanied by a hypercartoony instructional diagram of him falling off a skateboard and bumping his head against a wall. Finally, Akira uses a whole range of emotional icons familiar to readers of manga, such as huge sweat drops to indicate either fear or exertion, gaping mouths to express shock or surprise, and faces that morph into monsters to illustrate a character's emotional state.

In terms of storytelling techniques, *Spider-Man J* follows the common trajectory of serial narration with individual story arcs extending over several episodes. Notably, the series largely aligns with the American Spider-Man's backstory and characterization—without, however, inserting itself into the established Marvel continuity. The roster of villains includes versions of classic supercriminals like Dr Doom as well as science-fiction-inspired new creatures such as Lord Beastius, B-Warrior Tough Goraias, and Dragonfly. Among these new villains, it is especially the towering B-Warrior Tough Goraias who seems geared toward a Japanese audience. He looks like a manga version of the popular Transformer toys, and his Noh mask places him within the tradition of Japanese popular theater. Apart from science-fiction scenarios and references to popular theater, *Spider-Man J* employs themes that may be directed at a Japanese readership but would just as well have appealed to American audiences familiar with movie, television, and comic book representations of Japanese fighter figures. The Ninja theme of the "Enter . . . Elektra" episode, for instance, in which the mythical ninja hero Ka Mai U Soku Sai has left a scroll that is supposed to afford those who read it with the power to destroy all their enemies, would have resonated with popular culture-savvy American readers, some of whom might also have been familiar with the transnational backstory of Marvel's Elektra (who is of Greek origin and acquired her Asian martial arts skills from a Japanese sensei).

On the side of the superheroes, Spider-Man J is supported by the new sidekick Detective Flynn (a paternal figure less given to emotional outbursts and childish fantasies than Peter) and sometimes assisted by characters from the Marvel universe, Elektra and the Fantastic Four among them. Such team-up adventures have historically functioned as a means of uniting different series and their characters and storylines within an overarching fictional universe. They continue to serve as a means of inducing readers to purchase comic books they might not

normally buy (i.e. when a favorite superhero migrates to another series for a team-up), and their narrative exploration of plotlines that may remain outside a character's official serial continuity illustrates the transformative potential of the superhero figure across comic book series as well as comics traditions. In the case of *Spider-Man J*, team-ups foreground the transnational status of this manga adaptation and allow for a comparative reading that builds on the intertextual pleasures of seeing established American characters transported into a Japanese diegesis and storytelling mode.

As the roster of villains and supporting superheroes illustrates, the character constellation of *Spider-Man J* neither simply reproduces the American cast nor completely reimagines it. We are dealing with an adaptation that only partially transcreates its source texts. To boot, at this point in the history of the superhero reception in Japan, no reintroduction of Spider-Man through a recap or revision of his origin story was necessary—at least, *Spider-Man J* does without one. While Uncle Ben, the moral center of Peter's origin story, is never even mentioned, Spider-Man J has internalized the superhero's eternal creed: "When you have powers like ours," he reprimands Dragonfly, "you need to use them responsibly."[21] Other characters, above all Aunt May and Mary-Jane (here: Jane-Marie), also make appearances. Aunt May is a somewhat overbearing mother figure who frequently cuddles little Peter, while Jane-Marie is a friend but not yet a potential love interest. In fact, Peter is a small, preadolescent kid who still sleeps with stuffed animals and does not want to team up with the older and substantially more mature Elektra.[22] He also misses his parents, who are alive (in contrast to the American continuity) and are doing research in America on a science project (the setting of *Spider-Man J* is present-day Japan, mostly Tokyo). It may not be too far-fetched to interpret Spider-Man J's American parents as a diegetic acknowledgment of an American ancestry that also characterizes the manga's intertextual and transnational indebtedness to the American *Spider-Man* comics. This is further underscored in a scene in which the Japanese Peter receives a present from his parents: an extremely tacky "I ♡ New York" jacket, which may be read as a self-reflexive joke about the Japanese fascination with American pop culture, a fascination on which *Spider-Man J* builds and which it simultaneously questions by endorsing a visual aesthetic that differs substantially from the American comics.

The readaptation of *Spider-Man J* for the American market further illustrates its status as a transnational product. The pages are flipped so as to ensure the standard Western reading order (in some panels, this is still visible, for instance, when Roman letters are backwards). Yet, almost all of the signs in the diegetic

world are kept in kanji lettering, as are all of the sound words. This is highly important because it renders the diegetic world a Japanese space that remains partially impenetrable for American readers. Especially the sound words tend to be all over the place; they play an integral part in specific panels and thus have verbal as well as visual functions. The same applies to the speech balloons, which were kept in their original shape (probably because reworking them would have entailed redrawing almost all panels) and thus are regularly too tall to accommodate Western left-to-right writing (as opposed to the Japanese top-to-bottom writing; the result is large patches of white space in these balloons). The American version of *Spider-Man J* thus retains much of its manga-specific "odor," appeals to readers interested in the culture-specific fragrances that Koichi Iwabuchi associates with products that have distinct cultural origins, and does not fully succumb to the "deodorization process" that Henry Jenkins finds at work in the mainstream promotion and marketing of globally palatable products of popular culture.[23]

Kaare Andrews: *Spider-Man Mangaverse*

The *Spider-Man Mangaverse* five-volume miniseries, which appeared a few years before *Spider-Man J* (Mar. 2002–Apr. 2003), differs substantially from Akira's manga. The miniseries was written by Kaare Andrews and was part of Marvel's much publicized but short-lived Mangaverse line, which ran from 2000 to 2003 and was revived as the *New Mangaverse* between 2005 and 2006.[24] In keeping with Marvel's policy of incorporating the storyworlds of all of their superhero comics within an interconnected fictional multiverse (a policy from which transcreations such as *Spider-Man the Manga* and *Spider-Man J* were exempt), the Mangaverse stories take place in an alternate universe called Earth-2301. On the story level, *Spider-Man Mangaverse* offers little serious engagement with transnational and transcultural themes and, as such, does not do much in the way of transcreation. In fact, it largely recycles bits and pieces that readers would have known from some of the most popular Hollywood film franchises: Peter's Uncle Ben is also his sensei and comes across as a curious mixture of Daniel LaRusso's karate master Mr Miyagi in *Karate Kid* and Luke Skywalker's Jedi teacher Yoda in the *Star Wars* movies. The final splash page in issue #5 depicts young Peter in Daniel's iconographic karate kid pose; in addition, one of Spider-Man main opponents, the evil Venom, is actually Ben's son; he was drawn to the dark side and thus "gave up the right to call him father," as Peter insists

in the first issue of the miniseries (the parallels to Darth Vader's sinister career are obvious). Combined with the pseudo-hip high school setting and an overall anime look, these familiar pop culture references imply a preteen and teenage readership that is supposedly more open to this kind of superhero-manga mix than readers knowledgeable of the transnational history of American superhero comics and their Japanese adaptations into transcreated manga.

Moreover, the story shows only superficial interest in Japanese culture. The plot pits good ninjas (the Spider-Clan) against bad ninjas (Baal's Shadow of the Clan), but by the time *Spider-Man Mangaverse* appeared, ninjas in superhero comics had long ceased to be innovative—Frank Miller had already transplanted ninja figures into the superhero canon in *Ronin* (1983–4) and his work on *Daredevil* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* had been a mainstream phenomenon in the 1990s.[25] Furthermore, the ninja presence is not made in any way plausible; readers are offered an adjusted origin story in which Peter attains his special powers from years of martial arts training, but his ninja heritage is never traced back to any transnational context. This origin story lacks any real justification for Ben's obligatory final words, "remember . . . with that great power must come great responsibility."[26] Certainly, the preteenage Peter was a few minutes late to practice and was thus unable to prevent his sensei's murder by Venom, but this comes across as a substantially weaker retelling of the initial origin story and does not reveal any deep character flaw that would render Peter a convincingly tragic—and convincingly transnational—character.

Apart from a few general plot points, the majority of references to Japanese culture are visual, ranging from the manga influence on the iconography of the characters and the graphic design of individual panels to more or less superficial signifiers of a vaguely Japanese setting. These signifiers include the dojo in which Ben is murdered (it is also displayed prominently on the cover of the first issue, next to a group of skyscrapers), female servants to the sumo-wrestler look-alike Kingpin clad in kimonos and geta, Spider-Man's weapons, a samurai sword in Peter's home, as well as the ethnic Japanese facial features of Ben and Aunt May.[27] The Spider-Man of this manga version is a much punier version than the Spider-Man of most ongoing regular series, and his visual rendition complies with many central elements of the manga style. This Spider-Man has a disproportionate physique, with a tiny body but oversized head, hands, and feet; his eyes, already prominent parts of the established mask, are oversized, as well; and his movements, especially during fight scenes, are highly stylized in a cartoonish manner that emphasizes the discrepancy between the size of his body, his strength of will and training, and the massive size of his opponents.

Spider-Man Mangaverse employs additional features commonly associated with the manga style, for instance, frequent splash panels, extended fight scenes, and massive sounds words. However, a compelling case could be made that these features had already been absorbed into the visual arsenal of American comics creators at least since Jack Kirby and Frank Miller and then Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* (since 1992) and that they might not necessarily have to be associated with manga specifically. In other words, the comic draws on various manga elements but subsumes them into an overall style that is frequently called "Amerimanga" and that uses manga simply as one more option on the palette of visual choices.[28] Obviously, nothing had to be flopped in this American-produced comic book because it was written in the Western reading order from the outset. The conventional black-and-white reduction of Japanese manga is notably absent, as well, as the story is told in full color.

Therefore, I would argue that *Spider-Man Mangaverse* exemplifies the absorption of selected stylistic elements from Japanese manga into the American comics mainstream, an absorption, however, that signifies a repatriation of cultural difference and allows American comics publishers to draw freely on comics styles from foreign national traditions in order to produce a popular product that actually transports very little distinct cultural flavor into this still largely American genre—and that deodorizes Japanese cultural odors to an extent that they remain traceable but faint.[29] A single panel in the final issue of *Spider-Man Mangaverse* reinforces this point. It shows an exhausted Peter Parker wrapped in a Hello Kitty blanket. This image may be interpreted variously as a self-conscious reference to the comic's indebtedness to Japanese visual culture—the trademarked Hello Kitty character is one of Japan's most successful cultural exports and shares manga's reduced cartoonish style—or as an allusion to the global marketability and spreadability of cultural artifacts that carry only the faintest traces of their countries of origin and are essentially received as global products.[30]

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of the Spider-Man transcreations and transpacific adaptations I have sketched in this chapter is, of course, only a brief chapter in a much larger story about the globalization of popular culture. In fact, as many critics and commentators have pointed out, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between "American comics" and "Japanese manga"—so much so that

Paul Gravett even endorses a particular notion of "world comics" when he writes: "As artists combine the genres from manga, Euro-comics, American comics and other sources, rather than forging a 'universal' style, they seem to be ushering in a post-imperialist, transnational culture of 'World Comics.'"[31] In fact, most major publishers of graphic narratives now operate as transnational corporations whose business practices are no longer defined by any close allegiance with their national origins or the country in which their headquarters is located. Indeed, manga are no longer just a Japanese export but are increasingly produced around the world by non-Japanese writers and artists, and their impact on the increasingly transnational fragrances of comic book superheroes is hard to deny.[32] That this impact is substantial rather than marginal is nicely captured by the existence of drawing manuals such as Andy Smith's *Drawing American Manga Superheroes* (2007), which teaches comics artists and those who want to break into the industry how to create transnationally hybrid manga superheroes.

Notes

1 Iwabuchi 27.

2 Devarajan, n.p. On *Spider-Man India*, see Shilpa Davé's contribution (Chapter 8) to this volume.

3 This chapter is part of a book project that deals with the genre evolution of American superhero comics on a national and transnational scale. It is related to a joint research project (with Frank Kelleter) in the Research Unit "Popular Seriality—Aesthetics and Practice" (University of Göttingen; funded by the German Research Foundation). The aims and purposes of this project are outlined in Kelleter and Stein, "Autorisierungspraktiken." For a companion piece to this chapter that examines Bat-manga adaptations, see Stein, "Popular Seriality."

4 Pelc 13.

5 Pelc 14, 17.

6 For reprints of the strips, see Kidd et al.

7 *Spider-Man the Manga* #19, n.p. I cite from the American version of the series.

8 Lee and Ditko 19.

9 Any clear distinction between American comics and Japanese manga is bound to ignore the historical complexities that mark graphic narrative traditions as always already transnational. Manga were influenced by European and American sources from the late nineteenth century onwards. Bainbridge and Norris argue they "are already somewhat hybridized and therefore familiar to a globally dispersed audience" (241). Johnson-Woods speaks of a transnational flow that "goes both ways—in and out of Japan" (10).

10 *Spider-Man the Manga* #1, n.p.
11 *Spider-Man the Manga* #2, n.p.
12 On the proliferation of serial figures across media, see Denson; Denson and Mayer. *Spider-Man the Manga* features culturally adapted supervillains whose American sources are more or less obvious. Examples are Electro in *Spider-Man the Manga* #2, whom readers may have known from his first appearance in *Amazing Spider-Man #9* (Feb. 1964); the Lizard in *Spider-Man the Manga* #5–6, who had originated in *Amazing Spider-Man* #6 (Nov. 1963); and Mysterio in *Spider-Man the Manga* #13–15, who made his debut in *Amazing Spider-Man* #13 (June 1964).
13 *Spider-Man the Manga* #21, n.p.
14 Qtd in Fujii 48.
15 The film was based on Katsuhiro's manga version, which had run from 1982 to 1990 in the Japanese *Young Magazine* and was presented to American audiences in 1988, when Epic Comics published it in six volumes.
16 Qtd in Gravett 155. Frank Miller's promotion of Koike and Goseki Kojima's samurai epic *Lone Wolfe and Cub* (1970–6/1987–91) further popularized manga in the United States.
17 Brevoort n.p.
18 Ikegami's name is misspelled as "Ikegamil."
19 On *Batman: Child of Dreams* and *Batman: Death Mask*, see Stein, "Popular Seriality."
20 Other superhero transcreations include *Shadow of the Spawn*, a licensed manga adaptation of Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* series, which was written and illustrated by Juzu Tokoro, originally ran in the *Dengeki Comic Gao*! magazine between 1998 and 1999, and was republished in the United States in 2006; and *X-Men the Manga*, which was created by Hiroshi Higuchi, Miyako Kojima, Koji Yasue, and others and ran in 12 volumes from 1998–9 (it was also republished in the United States).
21 *Japanese Knights*, n.p.
22 In one scene, Dragonfly mocks Spider-Man and Elektra as a laughable team-up, to which Spider-Man responds: "Elektra and I are **not** a team!" In response, Elektra cups his face in her hands and coos lasciviously, "Thank you. You truly are a hero," which leaves Spider-Man visibly embarrassed (*Japanese Knights*, n.p.).
23 Jenkins 159.
24 In 2003, Marvel launched the imprint Tsunami, which published a variety of manga-styled comic books but was discontinued by the end of the year.
25 *Spider-Man Mangaverse* draws on Daredevil's backstory. Like *Spider-Man Mangaverse*, Miller's *Daredevil* run (issues #168–91) had depicted the rivalry between two ninja clans; like Peter, Matt Murdock is trained by a sensei and, like the Daredevil of *Spider-Man Mangaverse*, loses his girlfriend Elektra to the rival clan, where she becomes an assassin.
26 *Spider-Man Mangaverse* #1, n.p.

27 Like the covers of the American readaptation of *Spider-Man the Manga*, the covers of *Spider-Man Mangaverse* use kanji lettering to announce their transnationality (Andrews's name is printed in Roman and kanji letters) and use a font for the Spider-Man logo that, by simulating brush strokes, suggests Japanese calligraphy. The insignia on Spider-Man's chest is slightly altered so as to further indicate to readers that they are dealing with an alternative version of this superhero character.

28 On "Amerimanga," see also Petersen 184–5.

29 I take the notion of a "repatriation of difference" from Appadurai (307).

30 Hello Kitty was designed by Yuko Shimizu for the Japanese Sanrio company in 1974; it made its first appearance in the United States in 1976.

31 Gravett 157.

32 On the manga-inflected work of the Canadian Bryan Lee O'Malley, see Chapter 15 in this volume. On manga as a global phenomenon, see the essays in Johnson-Woods. As Katharina Bieloch and Sharif Bitar (Chapter 7), Shilpa Davé (Chapter 8), and Stefan Meier (Chapter 11) argue in their respective contributions to this volume, it makes little sense to think of comic book superheroes in an exclusively American context.

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