

Panel Title: “Breaking the Mold: Manga & the Politics of Identity”

Speakers:

1. Ben Whaley, Assistant Professor of Japanese, School of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures and Cultures, University of Calgary; benjamin.whaley@ucalgary.ca

“Will the Real *Nihonjin* Please Stand Up? Ethno-Racial Politics in Tezuka’s *Gringo*”

This paper examines racial and national identity politics in *Gringo* (1987–89, *Big Comic*), one of the last, unfinished manga series Tezuka Osamu was serializing at the time of his death. In a tape-recorded interview conducted in 1987 from his Tokyo hospital bed, Tezuka characterized *Gringo* as a message to a Japanese citizenry he viewed as increasingly insular and unwilling to associate with foreigners abroad or accept them domestically into Japanese households. While *Gringo* debuted during the height of Japan’s bubble economy, it remains oddly prescient in how it anticipates populist political discourses in both Japan and the United States today.

I read *Gringo* as Tezuka’s own rebuttal against notions of Japanese cultural uniqueness. My analysis centers on the destabilization of Japanese identity as it moves through different national and cultural spaces, typified by the story arc of transplanting a sumo wrestler turned *salaryman* (company worker), his French-Canadian wife, and their biracial daughter, to South America. Tezuka’s series highlights a new, internationalized vision for the Japanese nuclear family that is quickly called into question when the characters sojourn in Tokyo Village (*Tōkyō-mura*), an anachronistic diaspora community in Brazil that values Japanese ethno-racial purity. Japanese culture, cuisine, and national sport are recast to expose ongoing tensions between contemporary Japanese society and the imperialist and nationalist values that defined the country four decades earlier. It is by parodying these stereotypical images of “Japaneseness” that Tezuka’s *Gringo* becomes as useful a critique of Japan’s bubble economy as it is of today’s political climate.

2. Mimi Okabe, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta; tokabe@ualberta.ca

“Ain’t Worth a Shilling No More: Class, Detection & the Boy Sleuths of Japan”

This paper explores the role of class in the construction of boy sleuths in manga. Since the first appearance of the Baker Street Irregulars in Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*, the unofficial force, as they are famously known, have been revised and reinvented in creative ways across cultures. In his examination of class in contemporary comic book adaptations of Doyle’s Baker Street Irregulars, Dominic Cheetham posits that the modern-day irregulars are marked by an upward shift in class as indicated by their upper or middle-class status, which stands in striking contrast to the representation of the Irregulars in Doyle’s original works as “dirty little scoundrels” (*A Study in Scarlet*) and as “dirty and ragged little street-Arabs,” (*Sign of Four*). Such a dramatic shift in class is also evidenced in *tanei* or *misuteri* manga that have been published within the past two decades in Japan. Following Cheetham’s analysis, and with reference to commercially successful manga within the past two decades such as *Death Note*, *Meitantei Konan* and *Tantei Gakuen Q*, I explore the relationship between class and detection within a Japanese socio-political context, looking particularly at the socio-economic climate of the 1990s and early 2000s and its impact on the construction of youth identities in popular fiction.

3. Jonathan Chau, PhD Candidate, Carleton University; jonathan.chau@carleton.ca

“Intersecting Indigeneity: Transcultural Graphical Orality in *Red: A Haida Manga*”

As its title suggests, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’s *Red: A Haida Manga* fuses together two disparate visual forms—traditional Haida art and Japanese manga—in order to create a new aesthetic form that remediates a culturally specific story. Despite the influence of manga, however, Yahgulanaas’s comic remains resolutely *Indigenous*, weaving Haida traditions and epistemologies throughout the panels and pages. This paper examines the convergences and divergences of both art forms, arguing that the form and style of manga presents Indigenous comics creators with a style distinct from the Western comics tradition. In doing so, artists such as Yahgulanaas enter a space that evades the visual rhetorics of settler-colonialism. Reading *Red: A Haida Manga* against the framework of graphical orality, this paper ultimately demonstrates the ways in which Yahgulanaas’s adaptation of the manga form—which is infused with Haida art, mythology, and symbolism—functions as a vehicle to transmit the effects of oral storytelling in a visual, textual medium.

Speaker Bios:

Ben Whaley is Assistant Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Calgary. His research examines discourses of race, ethnicity, and national identity in postwar manga and issues of trauma and recovery in Japanese videogames. Dr. Whaley holds his Ph.D. (2016) in modern Japanese literature and popular culture from The University of British Columbia. His articles appear in the *International Journal of Comic Art* and *Games and Culture*.

Mimi Okabe a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta undertaking her SSHRC funded research on manga adaptations of literary classics, but with a focus on Japanese detective manga. Mimi has published articles in journals such as the *International Journal of Comic Art* and the *Jane Austen Society of North America*. For more information, please visit her website: mimiokabe.com

Jonathan Chau is a PhD candidate at Carleton University. His research focuses on the visual rhetorics of Canadian comics, and the ways in which these books create an alternative model of nationhood.