

REPORT OF THE GNCRT METADATA AND CATALOGING COMMITTEE ON THE INCLUSION OF MANGA IN THE LCGFT VOCABULARY

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Introduction

At the PCC Operations Committee meeting on May 6, 2022, librarians from multiple institutions questioned the lack of “Manga” as an accepted term in the LCGFT vocabulary, and expressed a desire to have manga added to the LCGFT. The GNCRT Metadata and Cataloging Committee contacted the Policy, Training and Cooperative Programs Division at the Library of Congress, and offered to research and report on “Manga” from the perspective of comics librarians and the comics community more broadly.

Background

The term “Manga” has been proposed multiple times for inclusion in the LCSH and LCGFT vocabularies. The Library of Congress rejected “Manga” from the original list of LCGFT literature terms developed by the ALA Subject Analysis Committee’s Subcommittee on Genre/Form Implementation Literature Working Group in 2012; in their 2014 rejection, the Library of Congress argued that manga “is a style of drawing in comic books, and in addition it means different things to different people.” The most recent rejections by the Library of Congress were in [December 2019](#) (for manga proposed as a subject) and [January 2020](#) (for manga proposed as a genre). The reasons for these rejections were threefold: 1) manga “is an artistic style that exists outside comic books, and not all comic books that are called ‘manga’ conform to all aspects of manga style;” 2) “LC subject headings do not indicate text direction;” and 3) “manga is merely the Japanese-language word for comic book, and is therefore a synonym for Comic books, strips, etc., not a separate concept.”¹

¹ *Summary of Decisions, Editorial Meeting Number 12 (2019) - SACO - Program for Cooperative Cataloging (Library of Congress)*. <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsaed/psd-191216.html>. Accessed 16 May 2022.

Many subject and genre headings exist in the LCSH and LCGFT vocabularies that are defined by their stylistic and artistic conventions. Examples include the subjects "[Impressionism \(Art\)](#)" and "[Neo-impressionism \(Art\)](#)," and the genres "[Mail art](#)" (defined by the artistic process of adding postal components to works in progress), "[Photomontages](#)" (defined as stylistic arrangements of photographic images in a "somewhat unified composition") and "[Fotonovelas](#)" (graphic novels where the style of illustrative content is photographs instead of drawn images). If subjects and genres like these defined by their artistic styles can be included in the LCSH and LCGFT, manga should also be allowable following this pattern. And if "Neo-impressionism (Art)" can exist within the realm of art while having distinct stylistic conventions, and "[Noir fiction](#)" can still be considered literature despite being determined entirely by stylistic elements, then manga (like "Fotonovelas") can exist within the continuum of comics while having its own unique artistic style (rather than "outside comic books," as posited in the rejection of the term). As will be seen below, manga is widely considered by comics audiences, librarians, publishers and scholars (as well as several authority vocabularies) to be a form of comics, and not merely an art style used in comics.

Further, there is no guidance in the LCGFT Manual that states genres and forms can only be established if all members conform in all aspects to a set of generally accepted characteristics. If there were, many artistic forms and genres would not be established, due to the experimental or nonconforming content of a few examples. One of the sources cited in the genre heading for "[Noir poetry](#)," for example, admits that "there is no one definition about what noir poetry is as a type of poem for the most part."²

It is true that LCSH and LCGFT do not indicate text direction (although they do sometimes indicate textual size, as with "[Large type books](#)"). However, as will be shown below, manga contain a number of stylistic conventions beyond reading direction that are widely understood and recognizable. Thus, even leaving aside the right-to-left alignment of manga, there are other sufficient components present to adequately define manga as a form for inclusion in the LCGFT.

Finally, the definition of manga in Japan is immaterial to establishing it in the LCGFT vocabulary. As stated in LCGFT Manual Instruction [J 120](#): "Genre/form terms are usually established to reflect current American usage."³ It is this American understanding of manga that should be centered when considering whether to include manga in the LCGFT. As will be shown below, American audiences share a common understanding of manga that meets the qualifications in J 120 for establishing new genre/form terms.

² Quote from *The Malpais review*, Spring 2013: 192.

³ "When to Establish a New Genre/Form Term (J 120)." *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms Manual* (May 2021): 1. <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCGFT/J120.pdf>.

Considerations

LCGFT Manual Instruction J 120 directs catalogers to establish new genres and forms “for definable and identifiable genres and forms for resources being cataloged”; these should share “known conventions” which describe “the purpose, structure, content, and/or themes” of the genres/forms.⁴ As noted above, current American usage and understandings of the conventions underpin the construction of genre and form headings.

Multiple authority vocabularies used in the United States include manga among their genre and form terms. The Art and Architecture Thesaurus contains “[Manga \(comic books\)](#)” in its “Comics by form.” Homosaurus includes “[LGBTQ+ manga](#)” among its comics terms. The [BISAC subject headings list for comics and graphic novels](#) includes 23 manga headings. And the Sears List of Subject Headings added “Manga” to the 19th edition of their vocabulary in 2007, on the advice of “Katherine L. Kan, a noted expert in the field, who is preparing a Core Collection of Graphic Novels for the Wilson company.”⁵ Other authority vocabularies also distinguish between comics and manga.⁶

These vocabularies, as well as reference sources, library guides to manga for patrons, publishers’ websites, and comics communities in the United States all share a common understanding of the structural and stylistic conventions of manga. The Art and Architecture Thesaurus, for example, notes that manga are “often produced in black and white, with the cover or the first few pages in color, with emphasis on exaggerated facial expressions and large eyes.” Oxford English Dictionary in its manga definition points to a “meticulously detailed style, usually featuring characters with distinctive large, staring eyes.”⁷ The New York Public Library’s “A beginner’s guide to manga” and Nova Southeastern University’s “Graphic novels, manga & anime” LibGuide also describe manga’s black-and-white interiors, right-to-left reading alignment, distinctive style of artwork, and multiple-volume series publication in volumes “that are approximately the size of a typical paperback novel.”⁸ Martin Webb’s article in *The Japan times*, “Manga by any other name is...,” describes manga as “a fusion of ukiyo-e (traditional woodblock prints) and Western forms of sequential art” resulting in “a set of stylistic conventions that evolved in the postwar period. These include exaggerated physical features such as large eyes,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Sears Report to the ALCTS Subject Analysis Committee.” *ALCTS CCS Subject Analysis Committee, ALA Annual Meeting 2007, Washington D.C. (2007)*: 14. <https://www.coursehero.com/file/100657284/ccs-SAC-AC07mindoc>

⁶ See, for example, the Gemeinsame Normdatei authority entries for [Comic](#) and [Manga](#). [Manga](#) also exists as a term in the Svenska ämnesord för barn vocabulary, as distinct from [Graphic novels](#). The RAMEAU vocabulary considers [Manga](#) a valid narrower term under comics, as does the [Australian Schools Online Thesaurus](#).

⁷ “manga, n.2.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/244747. Accessed 16 May 2022.

⁸ Quote from Segno, Jamie. *Library Guides: Graphic Novels, Manga, & Anime: Introduction*. <https://nsufl.libguides.com/c.php?g=111997&p=725444>. Accessed 16 May 2022. See also Pagan, Amanda. *A Beginner’s Guide to Manga* | *The New York Public Library*. <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/12/27/beginners-guide-manga>. Accessed 16 May 2022.

big hair and elongated limbs; right-to-left panel sequencing; and dramatically shaped speech bubbles, speed lines and onomatopoeic, exclamatory typography.”⁹

Zoltan Kacsuk, in discussing the distinct style of manga, points out “elements of character design, morphemes, or symbols and paneling” that are “specific to manga” including “people drawn with big eyes, big hair, small mouths, and pointed chins” and a “unique distribution of panel transitions.”¹⁰ In *Manga: an anthology of global and cultural perspectives*, the differences between manga and Western style comics are noted to include manga’s heavy reliance on visual cues and adoption of cinematic techniques “such as close-ups and freeze frames” along with “sound effects” to add “texture to the story.”¹¹ This similarity to motion pictures is also noted by Rommens, who states, “To ‘read’ manga is to read images.”¹² Wikipedia devotes an entire page to distinctive manga iconography, including “impressionistic backgrounds,” “sequences in which the panel shows details of the setting rather than the characters,” “expressive dialogue bubbles,” and visual conventions like the “throbbing ‘cross popping’ veins, usually depicted as a hollow cruciform in the upper head region” to indicate anger.¹³

These stylistic elements of manga do not exist outside of comic books (as posited in the December 2019 rejection of the term). Rather, the distinctive manga style developed as a result of manga being a variety of comics, and was also shaped by the physicality of the medium. Kaczuk mentions “the importance of the influence of political cartoons and comic strips from Europe and the US”¹⁴ on the development of manga; Jean-Marie Bouissou also states that “Japanese mangaka largely drew their inspiration from American comics and cartoons,” and that “prewar Japan appropriated the imported art of comics and melded it with its own culture’s diversified tradition of graphic narration” to form manga.¹⁵ Robert Petersen goes even further, asserting that manga style developed not just under the influence of American comics, but in opposition to it: “mangaka were well aware of what was happening in American comics and developed a contrasting style that had a tighter integration of words and pictures ... This sympathetic integration of words and pictures in manga was largely a result of the simple fact that, for the most part, mangaka both wrote and drew their works themselves. These pieces were invariably edited by a publisher, but mangaka were able to conceive of connections between words and pictures in ways that were much harder for American comic artists, who

⁹ Webb, Martin. “Manga by Any Other Name Is...” *The Japan Times*, 28 May 2006, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2006/05/28/to-be-sorted/manga-by-any-other-name-is/>.

¹⁰ Kacsuk, Zoltan. “Re-Examining the ‘What Is Manga’ Problematic: The Tension and Interrelationship between the ‘Style’ Versus ‘Made in Japan’ Positions.” *Arts*, vol. 7, no. 3, Sept. 2018. www.mdpi.com, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts7030026>.

¹¹ Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Manga : an Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*. Continuum, 2010.

¹² Rommens, Aarnoud. “Manga Story-Telling/Showing.” *Image & Narrative*, vol. 1, 2000.

¹³ “Manga Iconography.” *Wikipedia*, 15 Apr. 2022.

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Manga_iconography&oldid=1082785432.

¹⁴ Kaczuk op. cit.

¹⁵ Bouissou, Jean-Marie. “Manga : a historical overview.” *Manga in America : transnational book publishing and the domestication of Japanese comics*. Bloomsbury, 2016: 23, 25.

were given a script to work with and then had their work passed on to inkers and letterers.”¹⁶ In other words, manga’s artistic style developed in part because of its existence within a continuum of global comics and comics art.

Manga’s stylistic elements were not just influenced by other comic art styles, however. At times, the physicality of the medium itself and decisions made by manga publishers created stylistic elements now considered part of manga style. Both Toni Johnson-Woods and Petersen describe, for example, how publishers switching to recycled paper to print manga as a method of economizing due to increased serial publication schedules created manga’s distinctive black and white interior art: “As one editor recalls, ‘Manga used to be printed with some colors in them, but it was too expensive, so we started to print only with black ink on some colored paper.’”¹⁷ These changes in manga publishing, resulting from a “shift of magazines from monthly to weekly”¹⁸ serialization based on consumer demand, reinforced the need for black and white content, which has in turn become one of the hallmarks of manga style. The increased demand for stories with weekly serialization (manga magazines often having “as many as 40 stories in a single issue”) also led to innovations in manga genres and styles, facilitating slower moving plots and the cinematic art style discussed above; Petersen notes that “this publication model allowed manga to cast a wide net across all levels of society and produce a staggering array of story genres and styles that could appeal to many different audiences.”¹⁹ So rather than manga’s artistic style developing outside of the comics medium and somehow being imposed upon it, the artistic style of manga and its physical nature as a form of comic are intertwined.

The introduction to *Global manga* highlights that the definitions above (that manga is a particular form of comics with a distinctive artistic style) are understood specifically by English-language audiences: “When used by English language speakers, the word ‘manga’ typically refers to ‘story manga,’ a format telling a continuous story over a large number of pages and often serialized. It also connotes certain stereotypes about specific types of narrative and artistic content such as character designs with big eyes.”²⁰ Neil Cohn in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* points to an understanding of manga outside of Japan as including both manga as “sociocultural objects” with industries that produce them (i.e., as physical comics), and the visual language style used within those comics.²¹ Casey Brienza in *Manga in America* also points to a shared American understanding of manga: “the word ‘manga’ is

¹⁶ Petersen, Robert. *Comics, manga, and graphic novels : a history of graphic narratives*. Praeger, 2010: 173-174.

¹⁷ Quote from *Manga : An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*. Continuum, 2010: 3. See also Petersen op. cit.: 179-180.

¹⁸ Noriko, Inomata. “BD in Young Girl-Oriented Magazines in France.” *Comics Worlds and the World of Comics: Towards Scholarship on a Global Scale*, 1. ed, International Manga Research Center, Kyoto Seika University, 2010: 184.

¹⁹ Both quotes from Petersen op. cit.: 180.

²⁰ Brienza, Casey. *Global Manga : “Japanese” Comics without Japan?* Ashgate, 2015: 7.

²¹ Cohn, Neil. “Japanese Visual Language: The Structure of Manga.” *Manga : An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*. Continuum, 2010: 187.

typically used by English speakers to refer to exclusively Japanese story manga. Moreover, it connotes certain stereotypes about specific types of narrative and artistic content.”²²

Because of these commonly-held conceptions of manga in America, manga is not considered to be merely a synonym for comics writ large (as posited in the rejection of manga as a subject and genre). If manga were considered completely interchangeable with other types of comics, Barnes and Noble’s [Manga Shop](#) would contain all varieties of comics and graphic novels, and not just manga; nor would Dark Horse, one of the key comics publishers in America (aside from the Big Two) separate their manga titles into a [Manga Zone](#). Similarly, Goodreads’ genre selection for [Manga](#) contains only manga titles, and Free Comic Book Day also separates [manga](#) from other comics. The Library of Congress’ Newspaper & Current Periodical Reading Room’s documentation about its [Comic Book Collection](#) also mentions manga specifically in its collection highlights, acknowledging the form as separate from other types of comics.

Concerns

Although manga is primarily Japanese in origin, current American understanding of the form also includes non-Japanese texts that follow the same stylistic conventions. OED states that, although manga usually comes from Japan, “in extended use” manga “denot[es] cartoons in this style from other countries.”²³ BISAC also instructs coders to “Use subjects beginning ‘COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS / Manga’ for works initially published in Asian territories, or for works published in the style of such Asian works.”²⁴ Martin Webb notes that “more and more manga is now being created outside of Japan--and by non-Japanese artists,” and that “publishers like Tokyopop are bringing out titles in manga style by non-Japanese artists.”²⁵ Odagiri Hiroshi in the chapter “Manga truisms” explains that “in America the word ‘manga’ has changed semantically; it no longer refers just to Japanese manga, and even Japanese comics will not always be called manga.”²⁶ Goodreads includes both “Japanese or Japanese-influenced” titles in their manga section.²⁷ In other words, style is as important as country of origin in determining whether a text is manga.

This means that without a single dedicated LCGFT term for patrons to search, locating all manga in a library’s collection is extremely difficult. Catalogers can’t simply denote manga by

²² Brienza, Casey. *Manga in America : Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics*. Bloomsbury, 2016: 11.

²³ *OED Online* op. cit.

²⁴ *BISAC Subject Headings List, Comics and Graphic Novels*. Book Industry Study Group (2021). Accessed 16 May 2022. <https://bisg.org/page/ComicsGraphicNovels>

²⁵ Webb op. cit.

²⁶ Hiroshi, Odagiri. “Manga truisms : on the insularity of Japanese manga discourse.” *Comics Worlds and the World of Comics: Towards Scholarship on a Global Scale*. 1. ed, International Manga Research Center, Kyoto Seika University, 2010: 54.

²⁷ “Manga.” Goodreads. Accessed 16 May 2022. <https://www.goodreads.com/genres/manga>

including “Comic books, strips, etc. \$z Japan” in their bibliographic records, for example. Such coding would miss manga like Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’ *Red: a Haida manga* (which blends Haida imagery with manga stylistic conventions), or Fred Gallagher’s webcomic *Megatokyo*. It would also exclude Queenie Chan’s *The dreaming*, one of the first manga titles published by Tokyopop not made in Japan, and *Moonchosen*, 2021 Silver International Manga Award winner by artist Nataliia Rerekina and writer Gilbert Brissen (both from Ukraine).

The lack of an official LCGFT term for manga has also led to a patchwork of workarounds to fill in the gap, which leads to inconsistencies and split results sets for patrons searching within catalogs, and to problems sharing metadata between libraries. A search in OCLC for “manga” in the genre field returns 301,324 results; manga in the subject field returns 351,467 results. Even when limiting the search criteria to English-language cataloging of monographs within the last 10 years, there are 7,441 bibliographic records with “manga” in the genre. These appear in multiple iterations, including:

- 655 _0 \$a Manga. [Which is incorrect, since there is no LCSH term to borrow]
- 655 _0 \$a Manga \$v Juvenile fiction. [Incorrect both in vocabulary and in formatting for genre/form terms]
- 655 _4 \$a Manga. [These often get stripped out of library metadata ingests, since they are uncontrolled]
- 655 _4 \$a Manga (Comic books, strips, etc.). [A variation on the above, which shows the problems of inconsistency in uncontrolled terms]
- 655 _4 \$a Graphic novels [Manga]. [Same issue as the above]
- 655 _7 \$a Manga. \$2 local [Also often stripped out because it’s not an authorized vocabulary]
- 655 _7 \$a Manga (Comics) \$2 local [A variation on the above, and illustrative of the variance between locally-determined vocabularies that can result in the same inconsistency as uncontrolled terms when commingled in a union catalog]
- 655 _7 \$a Manga. \$2 lcgft [This is incorrect, as there is no LCGFT term for manga]
- 655 _7 \$a Manga (comic books). \$2 aat [This is authorized, but may not display in all catalogs unless normalization rules or accepted vocabularies within a library system and discovery layer include AAT. This would need to be specifically checked for or configured, and cannot be done by all libraries.]
- 655 _7 \$a Manga. \$2 sears [Also authorized, but this vocabulary is often removed by libraries without large juvenile collections. Academic libraries, for instance, are unlikely to have browsable index searching for Sears headings.]

This problem of patchwork headings is particularly acute for libraries that are unable to customize their metadata for local consumption. This is particularly true for smaller public libraries relying on volunteer catalogers, or libraries with part-time catalogers or minimally-trained “copy cataloging” units that accept bibliographic records as is; all of these may lack the bibliographic knowledge necessary to create potential workarounds, or the staffing capacity to systematically alter bibliographic records to usefully implement a workaround. This also applies to disadvantaged libraries whose only public catalog is a state-run union catalog, who lack any

ability to customize their metadata for local patrons. Libraries in consortia may also have strict metadata requirements precluding workarounds (such as limitations on acceptable vocabularies). And some libraries simply lack the technical expertise or institutional desire to configure their systems to accept non-LC vocabularies into their catalogs. For all of these libraries, the options are either to accept the patchwork of metadata, even when incorrect or varied, to provide some access to manga; or to strip out all of the above, and be left with no headings for patrons interested in manga to search to be able to retrieve their desired resources. This creates unequal access to manga within the continuum of comics in library collections, and drastically limits the ability of patrons to discover new manga, or make connections between manga of potential interest.

The Library of Congress' own catalog illustrates the confusion caused by the lack of a single, standardized heading for manga, and the difficulties this causes for patrons trying to locate manga in its collection. Patrons performing a [browse search for subjects beginning with manga](#) find: 141 entries for “Manga” unattached to a vocabulary; 9 entries for “Manga” as a locally assigned term; 5 entries for “Manga” as a Library of Congress Subject Heading; 3 entries for “Manga” from the Schlagwortnormdatei; 3 entries for “Manga” from the Sears List of Subject Headings; 3 entries for “Manga” from the Gemeinsame Normdatei; 1 entry for “Manga” from the Svenska ämnesord; 1 entry for “manga (comic books)” from the Art & Architecture Thesaurus; 2 entries for “Manga (Comic books, strips, etc.)” unattached to a vocabulary; 4 entries for “Manga (Comics)” unattached to a vocabulary; 1 entry for “Manga graphic novel” as a Library of Congress Subject Heading; and 1 entry for “Manga (Japanese comic books)” as a Library of Congress Subject Heading. Patrons performing a [browse search for subjects containing the word manga](#) find additional results where manga does not begin the heading string, including three slightly different terms that appear to be pointing to the same type of manga, splitting results: 25 locally assigned “Adult manga--Shōwa 1945-1989;” 1 unattached “Adult manga--Shōwa period, 1926-1989” and 2 locally assigned “Adults' manga--Shōwa 1945-1989.”

Recommendation

The GNCRT Metadata and Cataloging Committee recommends that the Library of Congress adopt “Manga” as a term into the LCGFT vocabulary (and preferably also into the LCSH vocabulary, for scholarly works about the form). Manga as a form meets the criteria for inclusion into the LCGFT delineated in LCGFT Manual Instruction J 120—it is definable and identifiable, with a common, shared American understanding, as seen above. An LCGFT heading for manga would bring the vocabulary into line with other authority vocabularies that already include the term. And it would alleviate the problems for patrons and libraries that the lack of LCGFT term, and patchwork of stopgap terms, creates when attempting to access manga in library catalogs. The Committee would be happy to further facilitate the process by creating SACO proposals for “Manga” as a genre and subject, should the Library of Congress agree that manga would now be eligible for inclusion into the LCGFT and LCSH.

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