A different kind of cultural frame: An analysis of panels in American comics and Japanese manga

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Abstract

The growing interest and influence of Japanese manga ("comics") in America has inspired comparisons between the properties of the two cultures' graphic systems. Various theories have hinted to the existence of structural variation between these cultures' books, yet little quantitative data has served to support these claims. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence for these cross-cultural theories by examining 300 panels in each of twelve American and twelve Japanese comic books. It examines 1) how they highlight amounts of information, 2) their depiction of subjective viewpoints, and 3) the angle of view taken by their representations.
Thus, analysis of panels in Asian and American comics provides a place to look for cultural differences in cognition through creative expression. Cross-cultural differences in attention have been consistent across numerous behavioral paradigms. Japanese manga come from a different cultural context than that of American comics. While comics in the USA have historically appealed to a particular subculture, manga in Japan are treated much the same as movies, television, or textual books. Manga are widely read by all ages, have many genres, and, in fact, are so popular that they constitute nearly one-third of all printed material (Schodt, 1983, 1996; Gravett, 2004).