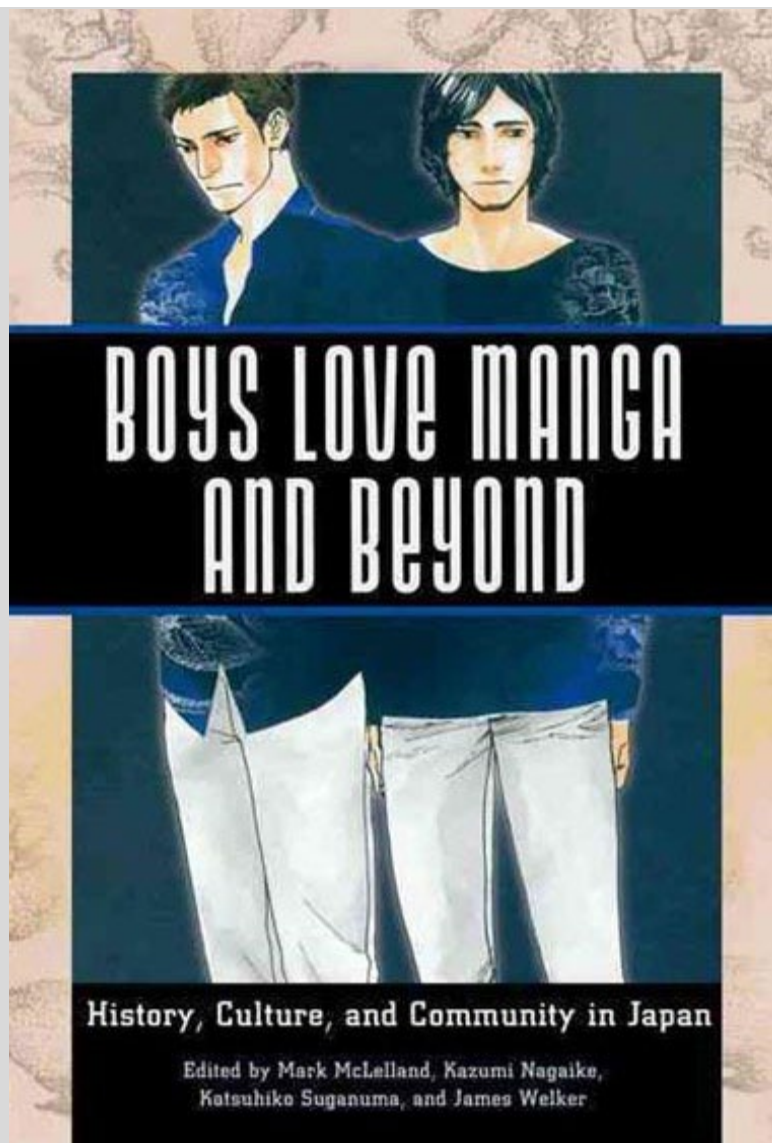


## The Future of Queer Manga Studies: Censorship and Communicative Rationality

Kazumi Nagaike

When Mark McLelland spent a month in Oita as a research fellow, I confessed to him that, as a Japanese woman who loves and is doing research on pornographic manga (including BL and *shota*), I felt a bit embarrassed. Mark hilariously responded, 'What's wrong with being *hentai* [perverse]? Shall we just keep on being gay and queer?' I'll never forget that chat with him. So, here I would like to talk about Mark's contributions to queer manga studies. Japan has notoriously been branded as a *hentai* nation which keeps producing *rori* and *shota* manga that, respectively, feature seemingly under-age female and male characters as sexual objects. That said, fans of pornographic manga criticise Western attempts to disparage these works by applying Orientalist standards that assume them to reflect a sexually perverse Japanese culture. Mark's analytical strategies help us read pornographic manga specifically in terms of queerness and thus demonstrate that censorship does matter. I find the analytical framework of Mark's censorship studies quite provocative. He intentionally brings 'censorship' on stage as symbolising the essence of an established authority that remains irrelevant to the actual queerness of pornographic manga. By confronting *hentai* with censorship and power, Mark reveals how authoritarian initiatives construct the basis for censorship for the benefit of power-oriented authorities, and how this renders the voices of actual fans unheard.

A number of Mark's studies are especially memorable to me, such as his analysis of an Australian court case dealing with a fan's animated parody of *The Simpsons*, his discussion of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's 'Non-Existent Youth Bill' dispute, and his explanation of the controversies surrounding some Japanese municipal libraries' removal of all BL works from their shelves. Australia's 'zero tolerance' toward what are interpreted as 'child-abuse' materials is revealed by the judicial decision to legitimately register *The Simpsons'* cartoon characters as 'persons.'<sup>[1]</sup> The Tokyo Metropolitan Government's 'Non-Existent Youth Bill' dispute was initiated when the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Office for Youth Affairs and Public Safety proposed a series of amendments to the Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youth. This dispute reveals a common tendency for Western-oriented processes of power and control, in that the bill's advocates fail to specify how animation, comics and games (ACG) are supposedly harmful to the 'healthy development of youth,' and to justify why only ACG are targeted for censorship, while real-life photography and literature remain exempt.<sup>[2]</sup> The removal of BL works from public libraries' shelves and their subsequent return as a direct result of criticisms officially registered by women, including the well-known Japanese feminist Ueno Chizuko, illustrates the degree to which 'silent' bureaucratic aggressiveness in Japan lacks any form of public openness.<sup>[3]</sup>



**Figure 1.** Cover of Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaïke, Katsuhiko Sugañuma and James Welker (eds), *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture and Community in Japan*, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 2015.

Engaging with Jürgen Habermas's theoretical contrast between 'communicative rationality' and 'instrumental rationality,'<sup>[4]</sup> Mark's work demonstrates that members of the so-called erotic manga community do possess communicative rationality, while the intrusion of bureaucratic, instrumental rationality into the erotic manga community is dysfunctional precisely because it only appears rational to the power-oriented authorities themselves. Indeed, through his examination of the ways in which the affective orientations of online fan communities surrounding BL or slash (male homoerotic works of anglophone origin) create their own legitimate modes of discipline and regulation, Mark demonstrates that bureaucratic control of manga fan communities can never be a practical and productive means to locate what may be termed 'real' paedophilia. As Mark has written, 'The internet, too, is increasingly subject to processes of juridification. The internet is of course not one thing but a series of interactive environments characterised by a wide range of "lifeworld" communities.'<sup>[5]</sup> Mark's analysis of erotic manga-power-censorship as interwoven processes is also distinguished by the fact that the 'agency' of manga fan communities always matters to him. As he has argued, 'There is a serious disconnect between the construction of "child abuse materials" on the part of the legislators and the "lifeworld" understanding of the day-

to-day interactions among the largely youth-driven fandoms (which in the case of slash and BL are overwhelmingly female).<sup>[6]</sup> Here, he maintains that the highly non-hegemonic and communicatively rationalised agency of youth or women in these communities should not be dismissed superficially, in the name of protecting the socially weak. I find in this discussion the very basis for Mark's research on the visibility of 'queer' agency, which cannot and should not be suppressed by the countervailing agency of authoritarian power. (Here, 'queer' means any form of non-hegemonic agency, such as that manifested by youth and women).

Only the other day, I had a conversation with Nagayama Kaoru, author of *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*, and his English translators, Patrick Galbraith and Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto. With them, I reaffirmed Mark's analytical position regarding *hentai* manga, remarking that we should talk more about *hentai* in order to enhance our queer agency and thus become whistle-blowers in relation to prevailing attitudes based on instrumental rationality.

Although Mark was definitely a hero to me, I would prefer not to conclude this essay by portraying him as a hero figure. It seems to me that he has bequeathed me an assignment to deal with the issues involved in bridging Japan and the West. I have not been vocal in the Japanese language (almost all of my research is written in English), as Mark was also not. Precisely because we write in English, Mark and I definitely have an advantage in communicating aspects of queer Japan to non-Japanese people, and this has definitely furthered our contributions to our common research field. However, the issue here is how researchers such as ourselves can engage with local research (written in the Japanese language, in this case) without suppressing our own agency. Honestly speaking, while I am wary of presenting my research findings in Japanese, due to the fact that several of my research topics have already been developed by Japanese scholars writing in Japanese, I must also admit that papers written in English appeal to a wider range of readers and are more likely to receive academic acknowledgment within my chosen discipline. However, I am sure that I need to face the reality of my 'queer' agency as a female Japanese scholar who is fluent in English, as well as enhancing my different variety of 'queer' agency by addressing Japanese readers in the Japanese language. As Mark encouraged me to be *hentai* and to be queer, I will keep my multi-faceted agency as *hentai* manga fan, scholar and Japanese woman. (I would like you to view this as my own form of strategic essentialism, as Gayatri Spivak proposes.<sup>[7]</sup>) In this way, by fully acknowledging my own agency, I believe that I can help to preserve Mark's legacy.

## Notes

[1] Mark McLelland, 'Australia's "child abuse material" legislation, internet regulation and the juridification of the imagination,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15(5) (2011): 467–83, doi: [10.1177/1367877911421082](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877911421082).

[2] Mark J. McLelland, 'Thought policing or the protection of youth? Debate in Japan over the "Non-Existent Youth Bill",' *International Journal of Comic Art* 13(1) (2011): 348–67.

[3] Mark J. McLelland, 'Regulation of manga content in Japan: Is there a future for BL comics?,' *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture and Community in Japan*, edited by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Suganuma and James Welker, 253–73, Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2015, doi: [10.14325/mississippi/9781628461190.003.0013](https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781628461190.003.0013).

[4] McLelland, 'Australia's "child abuse material" legislation,' pp. 474–76.

[5] McLelland, 'Australia's "child abuse material" legislation,' p. 10.

[6] McLelland, 'Australia's "child abuse material" legislation,' p. 9.

[7] Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?,' *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and

Lawrence Grossberg, 271–313, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988.

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