

An Etymological Study of the Terms *Dongman*, *Donghua*, and *Manhua*

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Since 2004, the Chinese government has been gradually implementing various policies to support the development of a domestic *dongman* industry. The year 2016 marked the 90th anniversary of Chinese animation, and numerous commemorative celebrations and exhibitions were launched, using phrases like “the 90th anniversary of *dongman*.” The use of the word *dongman* is intriguing, because it is a term often associated with Japan. Oddly enough, when the year 2017 witnessed the centennial of Japanese animation, the word “animation” rather than *dongman* was used for the celebrations in Japan. The term *dongman* is now widely used in China, but it has often been used in different ways.

What exactly is *dongman*? There is an ongoing online debate among fans of this art form about the meaning of the word. One common definition regards *dongman* as the combination of animation and comics. Other people believe that the word refers to animated comics, Japanese animation in particular, and the major difference between *dongman* and *donghua* is that the target audience of the former tends to be older. They further use age of the audience to differentiate the three words *katong* (cartoon in English), *donghua*, and *dongman*, with *katong* targeting the youngest and *dongman* the oldest audience. In addition, a considerable number of people hold the view that the word *dongman* is originally from Japan and describes an industry chain with anime and manga at its core, but extending to video games, light novels, and other media. In academia in mainland China, there is no consensus regarding the definitions of *dongman*, *donghua*, and *katong*. To bridge this gap, this essay will provide an etymological study of the word *dongman* and clarify other related terms such as *manhua*, *donghua*, and *katong*.

First of all, the word *dongman* did not originate in Japan. In fact, the word *dongman* never existed in Japan. One widely accepted opinion is that it was first officially used in Taiwan instead, marked by the establishment of the Chinese Animation & Comic Publishers Association (Zhonghua *dongman* chuban tongye xiejinhui) in 1998.¹ Preparation for the organization began in 1993, and it was officially established in 1998. During that time, the animation industry in Taiwan was undermined by widespread piracy, and comics were generally regarded as harmful materials. The original motivation of the organization was to develop the animation industry by implementing local government policy, protecting copyright, and improving the image of the animation and comic industry in Taiwan. The word *dongmanhua* was frequently used in the association’s articles and other materials. The members of the association were mainly companies that produced animation and comics, and other

¹ <<http://www.ccpa.org.tw>>, accessed December 17, 2018.

related professionals. The majority of the members came from the comics industry and there were no video game companies involved yet. It is clear that at that time, the words *donghua* and *manhua* were put together to produce the word *dongman*. The term *dongmanhua* started to be used frequently in the 1990s, and then was gradually abbreviated to *dongman*. Given the fact that at that time, video games and anime music had not yet gained footholds in Taiwan, we can speculate that the original meaning of *dongman* is the combination of animation (*donghua*) and comics (*manhua*). As the term became more widely used, its meanings were expanded. It was later introduced to mainland China.

Another important term, “ACG,” also appeared around this time. It made its debut on the BBS (Bulletin Board System) of the National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan in 1995.² ACG is the acronym for Anime, Comics, and Games, three related industries with a close kinship with Japanese popular culture. Since then, the term has been promoted by Taiwan’s famous comic commentary group SHUFFLE ALLIANCE (Shahulu tongmeng) and was later introduced to mainland China. ACG was later expanded to ACGN as a result of the increasing popularity of light novels. However, ACG is still the most popular form. In Taiwan, the terms *dongman(hua)* and ACG have equal popularity, and their meanings are almost exactly the same, except that ACG emphasizes video games as an important part of the industry chain. The term *dongman* is more popular than ACG in mainland China, probably because it is a Chinese word and is therefore more easily accepted by mainlanders.

Why do so many people mistakenly believe that *dongman* is a loan word from Japanese? Their misconception is not completely groundless, given the Japanese connection of related words like *donghua* and *manhua*. Let’s start with the term *manhua*, which originated in China. The word *manhua* has the same written form in Chinese and Japanese (*manga*) but has had different pronunciations throughout history. The word *manhua* first appeared in literature during the Song Dynasty (960–1279).³ It was originally the name of a species of aquatic bird, pronounced as *mankaku* in Japanese at that time. The word *manhua* describes its hunting behavior – waving its beak on the surface of water tirelessly. In the preface of *Pick-up Essays* (*Mankaku zuibitsu roukai ittoku*), written in 1771, Japanese author Suzuki Kankei explains that the reason for naming his book *Mankaku* is because he was drowned in the tireless pursuit of knowledge just like the bird *mankaku*.⁴ This is a milestone for the etymological evolution of the word *mankaku* (now pronounced as *manga*) in Japan. However, there were no paintings at all in that book. The word *mankaku* was

² Ccsx, “Taiwan Otaku Memorabilia,” 30.

³ Shimizu, *History of Manga*, 17.

⁴ This information on the history of Japanese manga is mainly based on the following books: Shimizu, *History of Manga*; Natsume and Takeuchi, *Introduction to Manga Studies*.

just associated with the concept of “tireless hunting” at that time, and later it gradually became a term for the graphic arts. An alternative view in Japan holds that the word *manga* in the Japanese writing system is the simplification of *manpitsuga*, an art form similar to illustrated essays in the Edo era. The word *manpitsuga* was borrowed from the Chinese word *manbi*, which was pronounced as *manpitsu* in Japanese and which means casually written essays.

Both of these two possible etymologies in Japan agree that the first documented usage of the word *manga* to refer to the art form of writings combined with paintings can be traced back to the preface of *The Pageant of Seasons* (*Shi ji no yuki kai*), published in 1798. The painting author, Kitao Shigemasa (pen name Kōsuisai Kitao), was a famous Ukiyoe artist and the founder of the Kitao school. Its literature author Santō Kyōden uses the written word *manga*, pronounced as *mangha* (closer to the Chinese pronunciation of *manhua*) at that time, to express the idea of “painting casually.”⁵ This book is a graphic narrative delineating daily life in a year of the Edo era. In 1814, another famous Ukiyoe artist, Katsushika Hokusai, used *manga* for the title of his collection *Hokusai Manga* (*Hokusai manga*), an anthology of funny and satirical sketches similar to caricature (*giga*). Katsushika’s painting style was influenced by Kitao Shigemasa, and because of Katsushika’s reputation and the success of *Hokusai manga*, the naming method of “XX manga” became common. This art form, which developed and matured through the wood engraving technology in the middle Edo period (18th century), became a popular form of mass entertainment. Usage of the term *manga* was not uncommon at that time, but it was very different from the modern use of *manga*. In both the water bird theory and the *manpitsu* theory of the term’s etymology, the definitions of *manga* have evolved from a form of written article to a combination of writings and paintings, and finally to a form of painting alone.

What is the modern definition of the word *manga*? To answer this question, we have to first discuss several related terms such as “caricature,” “cartoon,” and “comics,” which went through a complicated process of translation from English into Japanese, Japanese into Chinese, and English into Chinese.⁶ The westernization and modernization of Japan started in the late Tokugawa period (1800-1868) and blossomed in the Meiji period (1868-1912). English words like “caricature” (sketches that exaggerate one specific feature of a character), “cartoon” (satirical single paintings of current affairs), and “comics” (derived from the adjective comic, which expressed funny things) were introduced to Japan. In 1891, Imaizumi Ippyō became the first person to use the term *manga* as the Japanese translation for the English words “caricature” and “cartoon.” Imaizumi was in charge of satirical comics in the

⁵ Kitao Shigemasa, *The Pageant of Seasons*, 3.

⁶ My analysis of the term *manhua* in Chinese is inspired by Long, “Feng Zikai and the Concept of Manhua.”

Current Affairs Newspaper (*Jiji shinpō*) and had studied in the United States. He later published *Ippyō's Manga, First Chapter* (*Ippyō manga shu ·shopen*) in 1895. His work had no division of frames and the narrative text was listed on the side, so it can be said that his *manga* were not quite comics, which takes the form of juxtaposed sequences of panels of images and text. Following him, Kitazawa Rakuten, often referred to as “the earliest Japanese professional manga artist,” joined the *Current Affairs Newspaper*. Kitazawa had once worked with Australian cartoonist Frank Arthur Nankivell for the English newspaper *Box of Curios* in Yokohama, and had studied the techniques of European and American comics under Nankivell. Kitazawa was greatly influenced by comic strips (multiple-panel funny comics) and comics (similar to the comic strip for displaying brief humor or forming a narrative), which were popular in Europe and the United States at the time. During his stay at *Current Affairs Newspaper* in 1902 (after Imaizumi Ippyō left *Current Affairs*), Kitazawa established a column called “Manga of Current Affairs (*Jiji manga*)” in the newspaper, and started publishing multiple-frame satirical comics with a style close to that of Europe and the United States. At this point, the meaning of *manga* overlapped with the concept of comics, which had the closest definition to today’s *manga*. Due to his contributions, Kitazawa Rakuten is recognized as “the originator of modern Japanese manga.” After him, Misei Kosugi and other manga artists used the word *manga*, which gradually became popular in modern Japan. During the Meiji period (1868-1912), the English words “comics” and “cartoon” were translated into *manga* in Japanese.

Now let us examine the term *manhua* in China.⁷ It is widely accepted that Feng Zikai, the author of *Zikai Manhua* published in the 1920s, was the first to use the Chinese word *manhua* in China. However, this assertion has always been under debate. In the newspaper *Alarming Bell Daily* (*Jing zhong ri bao*), published in 1904, there was already a column named “Shishi manhua,” as discovered by Huang Dade.⁸ So far, no researchers have connected this Chinese “Shishi manhua” with the Japanese “Jiji manga” column of Kitazawa Rakuten. The four written characters are the same in Chinese and Japanese, and they were used in both countries during the same period with the same meaning. The connection to Japan is clear.

During the Taisho period in Japan (1912-1926), manga artist Okamoto Ippei was introduced to the Asahi Newspaper Company by Natsume Sōseki and became the newspaper’s cartoonist. Okamoto created the form of “Manga and Essay” (*Manga manbun*), a unique art form combining writing and painting, and started publishing it in famous newspapers and magazines such as *Asahi Newspaper* (*Asahi shimbun*). Okamoto’s works, influenced by Natsume Sōseki and other authors of the time, were

⁷ Information about *manhua* between the 1920s and 1950s is mainly based on Huang, *Shanghai Art Notes*.

⁸ Huang, “Study on the Origin of Chinese ‘Manhua.’”

high in literary value, and won the favor of a large number of readers. Later he created *The Whole Life of One Person* (*Hito no issyō*) and other works, and became a pioneer of employing the narrative techniques of motion pictures in the storytelling of manga. The father of modern Japanese manga— Tezuka Osamu also claimed that he was influenced by *The Complete Works of Ippei* (*Ippei zan syū*). Okamoto's work has influenced many other artists of the same period, including Feng Zikai, who studied in Japan in 1921 and later became the father of Chinese *manhua*. Feng Zikai was also influenced by another Japanese artist named Takehisa Yumeji, as pointed out by many researchers, such as Geremie R. Barmé.⁹

After the start of the Taisho democracy movement (1910s-1920s), the Japanese manga industry gained new vitality under the stimulus of political events. Comics for proletariats and specifically for children emerged, and comic publishing developed by leaps and bounds. In the Showa era (1926-1989), the term *manga* took hold in Japan. At the same time, under the widespread influence of *Zi Kai Manhua*, the word *manhua* expanded its meaning to include art forms that were previously called caricature and comic strip in China. The Chinese term *manhua* finally emerged to cover art forms that had been in existence for years in China.

Now let us discuss the words *dōga* in Japanese and *donghua* in Chinese, which also have the same characters.¹⁰ In the late Meiji period (1905-1912), foreign animated shorts were shown in Japan under the name of *dekobō shingachō*, which was the earliest name for the art form of animation in Japan. As Japan developed its animation technology, the name *senga* appeared in the 1930s and was used to collectively describe all animation effects in films realized through moving drawings, including maps, charts, and subtitles etc. At the same time, Masaoka Kenzō, “Father of Japanese animation,” started advocating for the use of *dōga* as the Japanese translation for “animated cartoon.” In the 1940s, *senga* and *dōga* were both used to refer to animated shorts. When *Princess Iron Fan* (*Tieshan gongzhu*, Wan Brothers, Shanghai, 1941), the first animated feature film in Asia, was released in Japan in 1942, it was called *chōhen manga* and *chōhen manga eiga*, which literally means long animated film. *Princess Iron Fan* was the first animated feature film to be released in Japan, because at that time Disney features were banned in wartime Japan. It could be inferred that the word *manga eiga* was coined with the debut of *Princess Iron Fan* in Japan. After the end of World War II, it became the norm for animated shorts to be called *dōga*, and animated feature films *manga eiga*.

⁹ Geremie R. Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*.

¹⁰ Information on the history of *dōga* in Japan mainly draws on Nakano, *Theory of Manga Industry*; Tsuji, *Our Anime History*; Yamaguchi, *The History of Japanese Animation*, 2004. Information on the term *donghua* in China is mainly based on my research of *Shenbao*.

In the 1950s, the term “cel animation,” which was used in the US to classify animation made with celluloid film, became popular, and the katakana term *animēshon* started to be used in Japan. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, *manga* and TV *manga* (*terebi manga*) were still the main terms used by mainstream television stations and producers to refer to animations. From the usage of the term we can see that as the Japanese animation and manga industry chains were forming, there was no clear-cut separation between animation and manga. There was a one-way relationship between manga and animation, with manga at the core and animations were often based on manga. In 1967, the comic critic Ishiko Junzō published the book *On the Art of Cartoon (Manga geijyutsu ron)*. Since then, the katakana term *manga* was widely used to refer to the broader industry related to manga, including animation.

Now let us turn to China. Through browsing the *Shenbao* newspaper published from the 1870s to the 1940s, I found that animated shorts and commercials started to appear in Shanghai in the 1920s. They were called a variety of names, such as *huodong yingxi*, *huo dong hua ji ying pian*, *hua ji hua pian*, *huo dong mo shui hua*, and *huo dong gang bi hua ying pian*. All of these names focus on the visual effects of moving pictures (*dong*), the general comical themes (*hua ji*), and the medium of film (*pian*). In the second half of the 1920s, the terms *katong* and *katong pian* appeared, both of which were the transliteration of the phrase “animated cartoon” in English. The word *katong* took hold with the success of *Princess Iron Fan*, which at the time was referred to as China’s first feature length sound *katong*. In English, “cartoon” refers to both animated cartoons and printed cartoons (printed comics). Printed cartoons were referred to as *manhua* in Chinese, and the word *katong* was used exclusively to refer to animated films.

However, later in the 1930s, drawings of cartoon characters and drawings of that similar style also began to be called *katong hua* (cartoon drawings), and so the confusion emerged. I speculate that the Japanese word *dōga*, pronounced *donghua* in Chinese, was introduced to wartime China in the 1940s, most likely by the Japanese occupation force. Prior to the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Chinese animation experts were called upon to discuss new names for animation that could fit in well with the spirit of the new socialist China. According to the memoir of Fang Ming (Mochinaga Tadahito), the head of the Cartoon Group of the Northeast Film Studio, he and Te Wei, who worked at the Northeast Film Studio at that time and who later became the president of the Shanghai Animation Film Studio between the 1950s and 1980s, shared the opinion that animation should be considered as a fine art (*meishu*). They proposed using the term fine arts film (*meishu dianying*) to replace the English loan word *katong*.¹¹ At the Northeast Film Studio, the name of the division in charge of animated filmmaking was changed from Cartoon Group of the Art Division (*meigong ke katong gu*) to Fine Arts Filmmaking Group (*meishupian zu*). In contrast,

¹¹ Mochinaga, “Animation is My Lifetime Career,” 136.

according to Fang Ming and Jin Xi's memoir, in order to further classify the different kinds of animated films, they decided to use *donghua*, the equivalent of the term already in use in Japan, to refer to cel animation in order to differentiate it from stop-motion puppetoon made with action figures or dolls.¹² This proposal was adopted by Chinese animators.

Today, the official name of animation in Japan is still *dōga*, the formal translation of the word "animation." However, the meaning of the word is now expanded to cover various types of dynamic images, as opposed to still images. The English word "anime" was in fact transmitted from Japan back to English-speaking countries. In 1965, the magazine *Small Gauge Film (Kogata ēiga)* first proposed to shorten the katakana form of *animēshon* into *anime*, which then became popular in Japan. When Japanese animation gradually became popular in North America in the 1970s, the word *anime* was first known among the fans and then quickly spread among English speakers in the 1990s through "Anime Expo," an American anime convention held in Los Angeles, California, organized by the non-profit Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation (SPJA).

In the 1970s, because of the ambiguity of the word *manga* and a higher acceptance of loan words in Japan, printed comics were more commonly called *komi kku* (transliteration of the English word comic). In the 1990s, the katakana form *manga* became popular in Japan, and it was also introduced to English-speaking countries just like the word anime, and became a term specifically for Japanese comics.

Now let us look at the question raised at the beginning of this article. Although the two words *donghua* and *manhua* both originated from Japan, the word *dongman* was first used in Taiwan. In the 1990s, when the words *dongman* and ACG were proposed, *dong* (anime) was placed before *man* (comic) and assumed more importance than *man* (comic). Obviously, these words did not originate in Japan where comics are the core of the industry and assume more importance. In the same period (the 1990s), Japan referred to the comic and animation industry as the manga industry (*manga sangyō*). There was also a less popular word MAG (acronym of Manga, Anime, Game), similar to ACG, which was regarded as the core of the industry. The belief in Japan was that, no matter how the industrial chain developed, the original manga still came first, and from it animations, games, light novels and other art forms could be developed.

However, since 2000, with the rise of original TV animations, animations based on

¹² Mochinaga, "Animation is My Lifetime Career," 136; Jin, "Puppet Animation and I," Ono, *The History of Chinese Animation Film*, 82-83. These three references all made it clear that Chinese animators at that time knew well that the word *donghua* was from Japan, but only Ono pointed out that it was Mochinaga who brought the term to China.

light novels, and manga based on video games, as well as the downturn of manga publishing, manga's position as the core of the industry has fallen in Japan. The phrase media mix (*mediamikkusu*) started to become popular. This phrase originated in the advertising industry and referred to cross-media communication.

In the 21st century, media mix is a conglomerate of media covering comics, animation, video games, light novels, radio dramas, live-action performances, picture books, models, toys, character designs and other content. Any of these forms of media can serve as the source or starting point that leads to the development of a series of cultural products, which in turn drives peripheral areas such as cosplay, original music, idols, theme parks, or even tours to real life locations depicted in these works.

If we try to find a Japanese phrase that is close to China's "*dongman* industry," it would be "otaku industry." Otaku industry is defined as a multi-media industry that generates content in the areas we discussed above and targets "otakus" (people with obsessive interests, particularly in ACG) as its main consumers. In contrast, live action movies and live TV dramas are also popular in Japan, but the audience is not limited to "the otakus."

In 2009, China's annual animation output surpassed that of Japan to become first in the world. China has become a large animation producer, but still cannot be called an animation power. In China, an industry chain similar to that of Japan has not yet fully formed. The basic model in China is that the "animation," especially cinema animation, drives everything. The make-up and definition of the "otaku" group in China is different from its original form in Japan due to the influence of multiple cultural forces. The most important influence is that the kanji "taku" in "otaku" is the same character as the Chinese word "dwelling" (*zhai*). As a result, the word in Chinese has become strongly associated with not wanting to leave one's home. For example, some among the Chinese otaku community are not fans of anime, comics, or video games. They call themselves otakus because they prefer to stay in their own homes and dislike social activities. Therefore, in China's communication context, *dongman* and *dongman industry* are the most well-defined concepts for the Chinese comics and animation industry. With the development of the industry, the word "*dongman industry*" is likely to be redefined or replaced by new words in the future.

Right now, in addition to *dongman*, many other new words exist. In cross-cultural communication, the underlying cultural clashes and fusions behind these words can only be fully understood after clarifying the connotations behind these words and concepts. When the concept of *fine arts film* (*meishu dianying*) was proposed in early socialist China, there were only cel and stop-motion puppet animations at that time. The definition of *fine arts film* (*meishu dianying*) inspired Chinese animators to incorporate other forms of art into the family of animation, such as papercutting,

paperfolding, and ink-painting animation. In this way, emphasizing the issues of names and naming in the animation industry is not pure semantics. With a serious etymological study of the terms, this article aims to provide a perspective for animators and industry practitioners from which to start new ways of thinking about the comic and animation industry in China and Japan.

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