

"Hating 'The Korean Wave'" Comic Books: A sign of New Nationalism in Japan?

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Abstract

The internet has become an increasingly influential medium throughout East Asia. In this article we examine the case of *Kenkanryu* ("Hating 'The Korean Wave'"), a manga published in 2005 in hard copy, but available online as a web comic for many months prior to print publication. We argue that the content, while nationalist, xenophobic, and 'toxic' is only one of a number of other, media-related reasons for the sales success of this comic in Japan. Other factors are the influence of online chat groups, the web as a means of communicating and selling ideas and products, and the internet-savvy way in which supporters of the views expressed in the comic communicated with online readers. In the context of increasing fears that Japanese youth are becoming more 'nationalistic' we argue that it is important to examine the medium as much as the message in assessing whether we are witnessing the emergence of a significant and dangerous social movement, or something rather different.

Emerging 'new' nationalism

In postwar Japan, following the pain and suffering of a war that destroyed not only the army but also the nation's cities, nationalism became a dirty word. Led by postwar liberal

intellectuals such as Maruyama Masao, and reinforced by progressives, consensus formed that the Japanese people had been indoctrinated and mobilized by the ultranationalistic state and military. For many, learning from history and moving forward meant democracy and peace, not nationalism. Above all it meant averting the wars that nationalism fostered and that imposed so heavy a price on Asian and Japanese people. This does not mean, of course, that a sense of Japaneseness disappeared altogether from society; rather it meant that postwar discourses of the nation were largely disengaged from the discourses of militarism and war. For example, postwar pacifism that developed around the powerful image of Japan's victimhood of the atomic bombs—a powerful 'national' sentiment—gave rise to widespread anti-war sentiments. Once Japan's war-torn economy recovered, Japanese identity and a sense of national superiority were often expressed in terms of economic and cultural nationalism, which typically sought the source of Japan's 'economic miracle' in its 'unique' national culture and characteristics. Militarist xenophobia and expansionist racism that characterized the war-time ultranationalism seemed to have disappeared or been driven underground, except at the societal fringe.

When the Bubble Economy burst in 1990, coinciding with increasing economic challenges from a resurgent China, and direct criticism from Asian nations over Japan's failure to effectively renounce its past aggression, however, defiant nationalism often in the form of historical revisionism grew in strength. This new strand of nationalism typically defends

Japan's actions in the course of establishing colonial rule and waging the Pacific War, depicts Japan as a victim of postwar US hegemony, warns of the threat from China, North Korea and even South Korea, and glorifies the past to indulge national pride. Though representing voices of a minority, these new-wave nationalists are strident, their messages amplified (often literally by loudspeakers on trucks!) through close ties with dominant conservative groups within the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party, as well as within media and academia. While revisionist nationalism itself is not new (such views had persisted throughout the postwar period within the relatively small extreme conservative sectors in Japan), two factors seem to distinguish post-1980s nationalism from the earlier discourses of nation and nationalism.

The first factor is its construction of explicit enemy figures, in particular, China and South Korea. In the 1990s mounting international pressure was applied to Japan to apologize for and compensate victims of its wartime actions, most notably the 1937 Nanjing massacre of captured Chinese soldiers and civilians and the treatment of the military 'comfort women', which involved the forced induction of Korean, Chinese and other Asian women and girls as sexual slaves for the Japanese Army. In response, conservative media and some online commentators in Japan began representing Japan as a victim of international conspiracies, and attacking China and South Korea. Media reports of incidents such as Korean supporters booing the Japanese team in the 2002 Korea-Japan Soccer World Cup and 2005 anti-Japanese demonstrations in China contributed to the labeling of Korea and China as 'anti-Japanese countries'. The explicit hostility towards these nations distinguishes the post-1980s popular discourse of nationalism from the earlier *nihonjinron*-type superiority based on cultural difference. Moreover, while the production of pre-1990s discourse of nationalism was predicated on a concept of

nation that was largely set in isolation from its neighbors, the newer forms of 'toxic' nationalism are set in the context of East Asia with specific national enemies. If, as Maruyama Masao has suggested, the production of a national enemy or national threat is the precondition for a shift from an apolitical national consciousness to more political, exclusive and aggressive forms of nationalism, then contemporary Japan may be witnessing a turning point in its public national consciousness at a point in history over 60 years since the end of the Pacific War.

Another factor that makes this emerging nationalism new is its pervasiveness and its audience, rather than its content per se. In the 1990s nationalistic language suddenly increased in visibility and credibility among segments of the Japanese population, and among youth in particular. Against the background of mounting social anxiety over the downturn of the economy, unstable employment opportunities and globalization, the vocabularies of crude nationalism are no longer confined to a small number of conservative media but have been firmly re-injected into wider public discourse, and have come to be tolerated, if not accepted, by many Japanese. The increasing prevalence and popularity of such expressions of parochial nationalism, especially amongst the age-group that had usually been considered apathetic and non-political has led to a number of warnings about Japanese youth 'jumping to the right'.

One major factor behind the increasing influence of nationalist ideas in Japanese society and among youth in particular is the availability of widely accessed subcultural artifacts such as manga (comics) and internet bulletin boards. Popular culture can be an effective means for transmitting political messages. The genre has affinity with simplistic messages of good versus evil, and is often designed to stimulate excitement, desire, and other emotions via audiovisual and internet

media. The consumers of popular cultural products are likely to be uncritically receptive of its content as they primarily seek pleasure and entertainment in these products. As nationalist ideas and discourse in contemporary Japan are no longer confined to the purely political or intellectual realm, but transmitted and consumed via the entertainment industry, study of popular culture has become an important field for our understanding of contemporary nationalism. This essay looks at *Kenkanryu*, an anti-Korean comic book published in 2005 to address the two factors that contribute to the new toxic nationalism: the construction of the enemy figure and the popularity of this manga. The first section analyses the ideological structure of the manga itself, focusing on its representations of Korea and Koreans as Japan's Other. The second section looks at the process by which *Kenkanryu* became a bestseller.

'Us' and 'Them' in *Kenkanryu*



Kenkanryu cover

Kenkanryu ('Hating 'The Korean Wave'') [1], a comic book by a hitherto unknown author under the pseudonym of Yamano Sharin (the author maintains anonymity) with strong anti-Korean content, became an unlikely bestseller in Japan in 2005. The story revolves around Kaname, a first-year university student, his girlfriend Itsumi, and other members of their university's 'East Asia Investigation Committee', as well as their zainichi (resident Korean) friend, Koichi. Kaname initially believes the story of Japanese oppression of colonized Korea as taught at school and is critical of his grandfather who once worked for the colonial government in Korea. Kaname's belief, however, is subsequently challenged by his grandfather's last words before his death that 'Japan contributed to the development of Korea' (33). Confused, Kaname decides to join the history group on entering the university

and begins his quest for the ‘truth’ about Korea and Japan-Korea relations. Throughout the comic, he and Itsumi accumulate knowledge on Korea and Japan-Korea relations from the internet, books, and senior members of the history group. In each chapter they debate opponents such as their zainichi friend, other history study groups, citizen activists, and South Korean students over issues such as the Japanese colonization of Korea, the status of Korean residents in Japan, and who should accept responsibility for the war. Invariably they win every debate.

Following its success, *Kenkanryu*’s publisher quickly cashed in on its success, and produced a sequel, *Kenkanryu 2*. It also published the ‘*Kenkanryu* official guidebook’ that features reader responses, an interview with Yamano, and a roundtable discussion by self-professed Korea-haters and Korean residents in Japan. The ‘*Kenkanryu Practical Handbook*’, a Q and A style ‘manual for fending off reckless remarks of an anti-Japanese nature by Koreans’ promises to assist readers in effectively responding to Korean demands for ‘apology and compensation.’ *Kenkanryu* (volumes 1 and 2 combined) sold more than 650,000 copies, achieving commercial success.[2]



‘*Kenkanryu Practical Handbook*’

Following the format of the relatively new genre of *manga comics* developed by Kobayashi Yoshinori with its supercharged political commentary, [3] *Kenkanryu* juxtaposes fiction with reality, and manga drawings with photographs and lengthy commentaries, to create a simple and sometimes extreme argument which demonizes what amounts to essentialized stereotypes of ‘South Korea’ and ‘South Koreans’. The provocative tone of the comic is exemplified in the three speech bubbles reproduced on the comic’s cover: ‘There is no more need for apology or compensation for Korea!!’; ‘Korea is misrepresenting many Japanese cultural products such as samurai, Kendo, sushi ... as being of Korean origin!!’; and ‘Why does Korea invade the Japanese territory of Takeshima?’, a reference to the contested Takeshima/Dokdo Island. Other topics include the Korean football

team's supposed foul play in the 2002 World Cup football match, Korean imitations of Japanese consumer products, and a controversial history of zainichi Korean residents in Japan. In addition the comic includes four 'columns' contributed by neonationalist scholars and writers, as well as six 'reports' critically assessing such issues as the 'comfort women' and the Korean government's failure to make the promised relief contribution following the Sumatra earthquake.

Postwar compensation, territorial disputes, and even the discussion of the 'origins' of cultural practices are complex issues with multiple dimensions, but the comic reduces them to a simple matter of black and white, right and wrong, and above all, 'us' versus 'them'. The comic's patterned structure reinforces this binary representation. Kaname's side, holding a 'pro-Japan' stance, invariably has the final word in producing the 'truth'. In all the debates, Kaname and his friends are depicted as extremely knowledgeable, articulate, and rational, whereas their opponents typically stutter with confusion, break out in cold sweats, lose their tempers and fail to find anything convincing to say once the 'truth' is laid out by Kaname's team. In the sense that the 'pro-Japan' argument always wins, Kenkanryu is a nationalistic and jingoistic work.

This does not mean, however, that everything it says is factually wrong or fabricated. Extreme comments like 'there is no civilization ... that Korea can be proud of' (125-26) aside, there are many 'facts' that are widely acknowledged by academics. For example, it rightly notes that during the colonial era not all Koreans were taken to Japan by force and that the Korean government signed a basic treaty with Japan in 1965 in which it relinquished any future demand for compensation in exchange for economic aid. These 'facts', many of them long documented by historians, are often presented

with a dramatic flair as though they are hidden truths uncovered for the first time. While giving Kaname's arguments some credibility, however, they do not assist readers to think any further. Kaname's opponents do not point out that many of the 'voluntary' Korean immigrants to Japan chose to move because of the structural violence and economic exploitation that Japanese colonial rule brought about after seizing Korea. Nor do they point out that many Korean forced laborers were brought to Japan, and that many died. Or that Japan's 'economic aid' never reached the victims of the Japanese military's war-time actions. Unsurprisingly, both the interpretation of specific 'facts' and the end point of each 'debate' are highly controlled.



'There was no such thing as the forceful removal of the Koreans'

The fundamental problem, however, lies in the way the comic organizes knowledge on 'Korea' and 'the Koreans' into an apparently coherent whole. Korea and the Koreans are essentialised, homogenised, and ahistoricised in a string of problematic historical events, actions, and episodes that dismiss important

historical distinctions. Rarely differentiating between Korean administrations, citizens, culture, or business, *Kenkanryu* creates an impression that a large number of disparate issues—Korea’s claim to Takeshima/Dokdo Island, fishing boats entering Japanese waters, a children’s anti-Japanese art exhibition, imitation snack food, *zainichi* ‘privileges’, the conflict between Korean and African-American communities at the time of the Los Angeles riots, the adoption of *hangul*, and the stem cell cloning scandal—all emanate from and exemplify the negative essence of Korea. A given fact presented in the book may or may not be true, but when compiled together and presented as the whole ‘truth’ of ‘Korea’, the result is a work that fundamentally caricatures and distorts the nature of South Korean society. Complex issues are repeatedly reduced to and sensationalized in a few provocative phrases. This is shown in the cover of volume 2: ‘fabrication of history, theft of culture, anti-Japanese policies, discriminatory thinking, invasion of territory, plundering natural resources, suppression of freedom of speech, brain-washing education ... An unbelievably rotten country, that is Korea!!’



Kenkanryu vol. 2 cover

In addition to the selective presentation of information into a compilation that points to an imagined and essentialized object - ‘Korea’ and the ‘Koreans’ - what regulates the *Kenkanryu* text is a dichotomous either/or principle, a simplistic assumption that one belongs either here (‘Japan’) or there (‘Korea’) but not to both or neither, and that the two are utterly and ineluctably in conflict. Debating and crushing the opponent is the goal, and the us/them division is repeatedly reinforced. Furthermore, this us/them distinction is presented not as a simple difference or opposition but as a hierarchical dichotomy: rational ‘us’ versus irrational ‘them’; ‘our’ truth versus ‘their’ ignorance and dogmatism; ‘our’ ethics versus their opportunism; ‘our’ willingness to give versus ‘their’ self-centeredness.[4] In constructing the Korean ‘Other’ by attributing

various negative traits while associating the ‘Self’ with mirroring positive traits, Kenkanryu creates an Orientalist structure in the sense illuminated by Edward Said. But this is an Orientalism constructed to differentiate not Europe from a distant Orient but Japan from its neighbor, Korea.

Kenkanryu’s treatment of zainichi characters is particularly interesting, for such figures—many of them third or fourth generation Japanese residents—could potentially introduce some ambiguity and destabilize the rigid boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Such characters function instead, however, to underscore the tolerance and reasonableness of the Japanese characters, as well as providing an alibi of authenticity by giving an impression of letting the ‘Other’ speak. For example, Kaname’s friend, Koichi, originally appears as a hot-tempered zainichi who is prone to irrational and dogmatic arguments, and gradually comes to doubt his belief that zainichi have been victimized by Japan, eventually asking Kaname to teach him ‘the true history’ (190).

honestly told you my opinion as a Japanese ...’ (195) Again, what is exhibited is an Orientalist power structure—‘they’ don’t know about ‘themselves’, but ‘we’ possess knowledge of ‘them’, and can pass this on in a paternalistic fashion. By the end of volume 2, Koichi, while still not persuaded to naturalize (become a Japanese citizen), has begun to question the validity of his earlier beliefs, saying ‘so far I have been rejecting Japanese arguments without thinking, believing that they had no foundation. But I have now realized that the history I had been taught was prejudiced.’ (238) He then starts his own journey towards the ‘truth’ by joining a history study group organized by other zainichi students who are more ‘open’ to the ‘Japanese’ stance - a project instantly approved and commended by a member of Koichi’s group: ‘As zainichi, it is you yourselves, who will have to challenge certain zainichi’s method of trying to increase their rights by using the fake history.’ (238) The distorting of history, for which Japan has often been accused, is thus thrown back to zainichi as a zainichi problem, not a Japanese one. The Self/Other dichotomy is reinforced.



‘Koichi asking Kaname to teach him the ‘true history’

Kaname explains zainichi history and their ‘privileged’ status to the obviously shocked Koichi, saying ‘since you are my friend, I have

There are other examples of using non-Japanese characters to provide the alibi of authenticity: when Koichi visits South Korea, far from being warmly welcomed, he is abused by a South Korean student who accuses him of not being a genuine Korean but ‘half Japanese’ who avoids the conscription obligation of South Korea, and cannot even speak Korean. Another character, a naturalized former zainichi youth, claims that he has ‘chosen to live as a Japanese’ because he ‘had been bothered by the victim complex of zainichi Koreans’. (64) Yet another character, a Taiwanese exchange student, severely criticizes Korean diplomacy over Taiwan and professes to hate Korea. To Koichi who suggests that Taiwanese and Koreans are ‘friends’ as the victims of Japan’s colonization, she retorts ‘what nonsense!’ and insists that she does not share Koichi’s ‘anti-Japanese education’ and ‘distorted victim consciousness.

(Vol. 2, 43)



'A Taiwanese student declares that she does not share the Koreans' 'distorted victim consciousness'

All these have the same function of letting non-Japanese criticise Korea/ns. Recent zainichi writers such as Sagisawa Megumu and Kaneshiro Kazuki have addressed the similar issue of South Korean prejudice towards the term 'zainichi' and the desire of current zainichi to distance themselves from the 'victim consciousness' of earlier generations. What is crucially different between *Kenkanryu* and these zainichi writers' works though, is that in the former this kind of representation serves the dominant narrative voice that is unmistakably 'Japanese,' emphasizing the conflict within the zainichi community over the 'truth' of their history in Japan, i.e., that they are mistaken in their understanding, and that their views need correcting. The presence and the words of these non-Japanese characters function to reinforce the position of 'us' by speaking from the position of the 'Other'. These characters do not challenge or complicate the basic Self/Other structure or convey any sense of the diversity of views among Koreans.[5]

Kenkanryu 'Boom' as an Internet Phenomenon

There is no doubt that *Kenkanryu* is a parochial, 'toxic' nationalistic and anti-Korean work, as has been reported in a number of English-language media.[6] Shall we then conclude that *Kenkanryu* is nothing but a product of the growing nationalistic sentiments that fan antagonism between Korea and Japan? In particular, can we say that *Kenkanryu* demonstrates growing resentment of Korea among Japanese youth? These are perhaps over-simplistic representations of what is a complex phenomenon because there are factors other than nationalism per se that have contributed to the success of this comic book. Besides, to say that *Kenkanryu* is nothing but an expression of pre-existing nationalism does not help us understand issues specific to this particular work. It does not, for example, explain why hating Korea, South Korea in particular, has become part of contemporary Japan's nationalism. Unlike the case of China, whose rapidly growing economy and military capacity are perceived to be a threat, or North Korea which is associated with kidnapping of Japanese citizens, missiles, and nuclear weapons development in Japanese media, the construction of South Korea as Japan's threat/enemy is not easy to grasp. *Kenkanryu* provides us with some clues about how to understand this phenomenon. To this end, the following section examines some related but not identical contexts in which *Kenkanryu* appeared and became a bestseller in Japan. Not all of them immediately point to the existence of 'dangerous' nationalism or anti-Korean sentiments.

The first and most significant context is that of post-1990 Japan, where the discursive dominance of moderate conservatism is gradually giving way to, or at least being augmented with discourses of resurgent nationalism and historical revisionism, epitomized by the new right, and most often

associated with the so-called ‘liberal history’ and ‘new history’ textbook groups.[7] *Kenkanryu* appeared as a part of this discursive shift and within the larger constellation of historically oriented nationalism that was in part a response to institutionalized Japanese fears of a rising China that pointed an accusatory finger at Japan’s past experience on the Chinese mainland during the early twentieth century. The link between *Kenkanryu* and revisionism is clear in Yamano’s reference to Kobayashi Yoshinori,[8] as well as in pieces contributed by scholars and writers associated with the aforementioned groups (Nishio Kanji and Otsuki Takahiro). *Kenkanryu*’s views on issues such as the ‘comfort women’ and apology/compensation for Japan’s colonial rule are identical with those of the ‘liberal history’ group. Also common in other conservative and revisionist media is the critique of internal ‘enemies’—‘anti-Japanese’ Japanese media and citizens—as well as the sense of weariness and disdain over the perceived ‘anti-Japanese’ sentiments of Korea. *Kenkanryu* is essentially a simplified representation of revisionist history combined with fragments of negative information on Korea available on the internet such as the ‘Hangul Thread’ of the popular Japanese BBS, 2-channeru. The ‘liberal history’ group and others have inserted a clear voice of dissent into the postwar discursive consensus over Japan’s ‘regrettable’ history, and *Kenkanryu* is located in the general context of 1990s Japan. In other words, it is one strand of an ongoing debate about Japan’s location in the post-Cold War world, and while it appears extreme, parochial, toxic and reactionary, it is still part of a necessary debate over the significance of Japan’s history, its present, and its orientation to the future in a democratic society.

Secondly and more immediately, *Kenkanryu* appeared partly as a backlash against the hype of the ‘Korean Wave’ (*hanryu*) that Japan was, and in fact still is, going through. The ‘Korean Wave’ started around 2003 with the enormous

popularity of a Korean TV drama, *Winter Sonata*, among Japanese, notably among, but not limited to, middle-aged women. As Japan’s mainstream media regularly reported, interest in popular cultural products from Korea quickly spread, leading to growing overall interest in Korea. Fans traveled to Korea, signed up for Korean language courses, and learned about this ‘near but far’ neighboring country which Japan had once colonized. Optimism was expressed that this new Japanese fascination with things Korean might help ease the political tensions between the two countries with a troubled past. *Kenkanryu*, in the most immediate sense, is a critique of the popularity of the ‘Korean Wave’. Yamano maintains that the Korea boom was a creation of the mass media and that the anti-Korean sentiments which had been rife amongst Japanese internet users, he claims simply to have made available in manga form. Yamano’s position seems to be that those who find Korean popular culture attractive, fashionable, cool and hip, do not know the ‘true’ Korea, and his comics shows the ‘other side’ of Korea. Japanese bloggers and BBS posters who support *Kenkanryu*, too, often regard the comic as the antithesis of the *Hanryu* boom ‘media-creation’, and look down on those consumers who simply went along with the trend (themselves following the opposite trend).



Pop Idols of the Korean Wave

It was, however, the internet that popularized

the comic. Net users initially made *Kenkanryu* a bestseller on Amazon Japan and other online bookshops prior to its hardcopy publication, despite the lack of advertising in mainstream media. The comic's earliest version had been posted on the author's website as a web-comic and was known to net users who were interested in such issues. Once the author announced its publication in book form, along with a story of how a number of publishers turned it down due to its controversial nature, the news quickly circulated via the internet. Some 2-channeru users and bloggers suggested that net users should pre-order *Kenkanryu* and make it a bestseller. When it did become a big seller, this news also quickly spread with self-congratulatory remarks about the power of netizens. Following the hardcopy publication, net users exchanged stories of their difficulties in getting hold of the comic, tips on where one might successfully find a copy, observations on the lack of knowledge of the comics outside the cyberworld, as well as opinions on the content of the comics and recommendations that others should read it.

Behind this internet 'movement' lay not only nationalistic motivation but also the culture of Japanese net users, in particular, who revealed their strong distrust of mainstream media and the belief that the internet, as an alternative medium, can reveal the 'truth' that the mass media ignore, distort, or suppress. The rumor that mainstream newspapers had refused to carry advertisements for *Kenkanryu*, as well as analysis of how newspapers and large bookshops manipulated their rankings of best-selling books in order to exclude *Kenkanryu* from various lists of top-selling books, quickly spread via the internet and became shared online 'knowledge'. Conspiracy theories of this kind, with just sufficient links with reality and some informal detective work to reveal the 'media lie', are often popular in online forums and attract many postings. With *Kenkanryu*, too, the understanding that the mainstream media were ignoring, or worse, intentionally

preventing people from learning about this web-originated comic encouraged net commentators to pay attention to it and promote sales. In a perverse response to the perception that media sources were working to prevent any publicity of this publication, some netizens ordered *Kenkanryu* to make a statement about the media conspiracy, apparently with little concern for the content of the comic.

This distrust of and desire to challenge mainstream media is also related to the desire to challenge mainstream ideas within society, associated not just with the mass media but also with older generations, the education system, and the elites of society. Throughout the text of *Kenkanryu*, as Kaname and his history group study Japan-Korea relations, a subtext is that if one (a young, non-professional, non-elite seeker of the 'truth') did some independent research on the web and in libraries, the 'truth' hidden from them could be found and that this is an exciting, liberating and 'cool' thing to do.[9] Kaname initially appears as an average university student who has little interest in politics or history beyond some uncritically internalized postwar guilt over Japan's colonization of Korea. With the help of the internet and his senior group members, however, he begins to challenge the 'school knowledge', winning all debates against those who hold 'pro-Korean' views along the way. Interestingly, while the text places a strong emphasis on 'truth', 'studying' and 'finding out'—something that any university teacher would promote—Kaname's research and learning take place entirely outside the classroom, as an extra curricular activity of a 'circle' (commonly associated with 'fun' activities such as sports, music and other hobbies). Not a single reference is made to Kaname's professor or the content of the courses he is (presumably) taking at the university.

This is understandable if we see that the 'truth'

in *Kenkanryu* is represented as the antithesis of ‘school knowledge’. Thus, *Kenkanryu*’s dichotomies between good and evil, ‘us’ and ‘them’, are complemented with dichotomies of professional knowledge workers versus amateur seekers of truth. The emphasis on ordinary people (rather than elite and professional) challenging mainstream ideas presented in the mass media via independent research is important for some net users who consider the internet as a participatory medium suitable for such an activity.[10] It is also worth noting that the position taken by *Kenkanryu*’s supporters is, somewhat ironically, a position that converges with current reactionary, nationalist sentiment in Japan, epitomized by the ‘New History Textbook Movement,’ itself an organization of mostly older, ‘patriotic’, revisionist thinkers.

For some, the internet ‘movement’ to popularize *Kenkanryu* was also about the excitement net users derived from making things happen in the ‘real’ world. There have been a number of internet ‘movements’ in Japan where people organized an activity not because of the commitment to the content of the specific activity but for the entertainment value of some nonsensical and even absurd activities. One well-known example is ‘shonan gomi hiroi ofu kai,’ where several hundred 2-channeru (largest BBS in Japan) users got together and picked up all the rubbish on Shonan beach just before Fuji TV was to televise a huge beach cleaning event by volunteers.[11] The primary motivation for those who participated in this net-originated action was having fun by embarrassing the mainstream media rather than cleaning the beach. Similarly, for some, the movement to make *Kenkanryu* a bestseller may have been less about a serious commitment to nationalistic or anti-Korean sentiment and more about having fun by stirring up the ‘real’ world via net activity. This is evident in that many individuals put up online the details of their real-life actions such as complaining to

bookshops for not stocking *Kenkanryu* or manipulating their ‘bestseller’ lists to exclude it. Some of them wrote about exchanges with the bookshop workers regarding the availability of the book, or their conversations over the request to stock *Kenkanryu* in a manga café. There is even an account of one person who donated *Kenkanryu* to a library and paid a follow-up visit, asking where the donated book was (apparently not on display). These and other similar stories were diligently uploaded and consumed as a form of entertainment. The mischievous pleasure of these actions, writing it up for the net audience, and consuming such episodes is not identical with that of advocating and consuming nationalism, for their interest seems not purely connected with the content of *Kenkanryu* but often largely about their own subjectivity as ‘protesters’ against conformity.

The transfer of information between the internet and the mass media, *as well as among different mass media, has also contributed to Kenkanryu*’s commercial success. *Kenkanryu* as an entertainment and commercial product was sold not purely for its ideological and nationalistic content but also because of its added value – newsworthiness. Added value was created by, for example, the information that the comic was turned down by many publishers for over two years, and that various print media refused to advertise it because of its controversial and radical content. The author and editor were keen to share such information on the author’s website in the first instance. The ‘web effect’ it created was such that the print media decided the story was newsworthy, and interviews with the author were arranged and published.

The image of *Kenkanryu* as hugely controversial—and therefore worth a look—circulated via websites, weekly general interest magazines, newspapers and other media, often with one media source citing another. The internet may have been the starting point of the *Kenkanryu* boom, but once

the first volume became a bestseller, *Kenkanryu 2*, as well as other publications such as *Kenkanryu no shinjitsu* (The truth about Kenkanryu) and its sequel *Kenkanryu no shinjitsu jogai ranto hen* focused on how the media's silence on the success of the comic book was not effective in stopping taboo-breaking Kenkanryu selling hundreds of thousands of copies.

The mass media itself quickly caught onto this, printing the story about how the anti-Korean wave had been ignored by the media. In this rather ironic way, something that the mainstream media had been ignoring became news within the media that was 'ignoring' it. Meanwhile those who were shocked by the *Kenkanryu* boom attacked it, raising its profile in the media. Any publicity is good publicity, and the participation of the mass media with a much larger audience consolidated the comic's status as a bestseller. As in the case of *Densha Otoko* (Train Man),^[12] an internet-originated 'boom' may be made into a national phenomenon with the intervention of mass media. With *Kenkanryu*, too, media did much more than simply report an event that had already taken place. Media actually contributed to creating 'reality' by bouncing around information of added value, and simply by increasing the number of appearances of *Kenkanryu* in the public arena. Ironically both the love and hate of Korea (Korean Wave and Hate 'The Korean Wave') took place in the same context of commercialism, marketing strategies, and media effects.



Densha Otoko (Train Man)

The widespread image of *Kenkanryu* as a taboo-breaking and controversial work was partly a result of planned marketing strategies and partly an unintended consequence of media reports and inter-media circulation of information. With the internet, information that an anti-Korean comic book had become a bestseller in Japan traveled quickly even beyond the national and linguistic borders, thus involving people who do not read Japanese or people who would not have encountered *Kenkanryu* if it were not for the internet. Korean media naturally carried critical reviews, and Korean 'outrage' was quickly reported back on Japanese internet sites. Emotional responses and comments appeared, often solely based on other online reports on *Kenkanryu* and Korean reactions to it. Some English-language media also printed articles critical of *Kenkanryu* and popular nationalism in Japan. In particular, The New York Times' article of 21 November 2005 drew much attention, becoming a key reference point for English-language commentaries on *Kenkanryu*. The irony here is that overseas media interest in *Kenkanryu* ended up providing not only new content for volume two of *Kenkanryu* but was also used in advertisements selling the second volume ('[*Kenkanryu* was] reported in the US's New York Times, Britain's Times, as well as in the main media in Korea ... the whole world is paying attention [to this comic book]!').



References to overseas media reports in the New York Times and the South Korean press is used in advertising Volume 2

While it would be an exaggeration to say that the ‘whole world’ was paying attention, via the Internet stories about *Kenkanryu* circulated beyond Japanese language media, attracting the attention of some English-language bloggers in South Korea, producing quibbles about the ‘vandalism’ of the English Wikipedia entry of [Kenkanryu](#).^[13] Avid followers of the issue even uploaded part of the comic with English (and of course Korean) translations so non-Japanese readers could read them, inserted links to Japanese sites, and summarized what Japanese sources say about *Kenkanryu*. Generally, the English language mainstream media reported *Kenkanryu* as an example of rising youth nationalism in Japan. Internet commentaries on *Kenkanryu* in English language, though, are more nuanced, including voices that support the content of the comic book or those that focus on the media/government conspiracy issues.

While *Kenkanryu* expressed nationalistic sentiments based on a clear us/them structure, it did not achieve its commercial success and ‘boom’ status purely because of its nationalistic and anti-Korean content. *Kenkanryu* also became a socially visible bestseller as a creation of the contemporary media environment—in particular, the internet. Net culture, commercialism, and inter-media movements interacted to facilitate and amplify a market for anti-Korean nationalism. In the sense that these elements stimulated the consumption of discourses and *images of Korea as a problem country for Japan, we may conclude that the phenomenon of the Kenkanryu boom was as much about the internet, and commercialized and media nationalism in Japan, as it was about the ethnocentric content of the product.*

Marshall McLuhan’s famous statement that ‘the medium is the message’ is entirely apposite in this context. While Japanese netizens pushed to have the story of *Kenkanryu* taken up by the print and other mainstream media, the absence of a significant contrary position on the internet, in sources such as those used by the supporters of *Kenkanryu*, is noteworthy. This fundamental gap between users of internet sources and users of print and other electronic media has been instrumental in both the marketing of the comic, and the acceptance of readers of its content. While there are few alternative positions available in the internet media on this topic, and while those who have alternative perspectives refuse to engage with the issues, rumors continue to inform individuals and spread on the net, in turn influencing new generations of netizens about the ‘true’ nature of Japanese history; i.e., the medium of the net delivers net-based ‘truths’ to netizens about history.

The medium, then, is the message. In Japan, as in many other nations, the internet is increasingly influential and its users are typically younger people. Perhaps most significantly, net users typically do not simply consume media; they interact with it. This is quite different to the more ‘traditional’ print and other electronic media which is passively consumed (with the ‘enlightened’ exception of talkback radio). Their interaction means that opinions are shared freely among online communities. While much print, and indeed other electronic media are often edited, moderated, and at least self-referential, often bound by legal and other constraints, the internet is almost completely without constraints. Just as the web-organized student protests against Japan in China and Korea in 2005 over Japan’s historical memory of conflict against these people were fuelled by internet invective, so too *Kenkanryu* supporters use the web to mobilize support for a project that is a fairly xenophobic reaction to the Chinese and Korean protests about precisely the type of

‘toxic nationalism’ they produce, and in part a reaction to the *Hanryu* boom.

It is worth noting too that consuming should not necessarily be equated with accepting the content of a product.[14] There have been diverse responses in Japan to *Kenkanryu*, including many critical ones. A quick overview of Japanese website postings confirms that even among readers who welcome *Kenkanryu* and its stance towards Korea, partial questioning and challenging are common. Indeed, many longer commentaries available on the internet provide relatively calm analysis of the comic book rather than conveying xenophobic nationalism. Attempts to use *Kenkanryu* as a means of reexamining Korea-Japan relations coexist with numerous brief, emotional, and provocative comments that support stereotyped, essentialized images of Korea and Koreans. *Hanryu* and *Kenkanryu* continue to coexist. They may well be two sides of the same coin—a television and print media bonanza with *Hanryu* versus the internet phenomenon of a web comic turned print best-seller based on exactly the opposite ideological position. Perhaps the two synchronous booms illustrate the ‘love-hate’ relationship between Japan and Korea which pre-dates the modern era. Or perhaps they are simply transitional, extreme, and ‘popular’ responses with opposite vectors which have emerged in response to the increasing linkages between Japan and Korea in the contemporary commercial and media environment.

Does the existence of this comic mean that Japanese youth are becoming more ‘nationalistic’? More extreme? Our discussion above has cast doubt on this.[15] But there are disturbing new statistics about the increasing political conservatism of Japanese youth, described by Sasada[16] (2006:119), who points to the commercial success of manga on such topics as *Kenkanryu*, suggesting that audiences who read them are in fact digesting and accommodating narrow and sometimes

bigoted views on nationalism in a format they can comprehend and relate to, and that they provide ‘a bridge between young readers and conservative scholars’. While it is hard to estimate the influence of such publications, there is no doubt that many people have now consumed the comic. In terms of consumption though, it can be stated that as many hundreds of thousands of people have read the comic, vastly more people will have read these views than have read (or will read) the ‘new history textbook’ over which a major international incident arose between China and Japan, because it was thought to influence many Japanese. Yet, the question of influence is moot if we return to the question raised above: do all who read these publications believe all of the opinions expressed within? It’s unlikely. Indeed, many who read these works, which in effect reproduce a series of longstanding arguments about Japan’s historical memory held by a small but vocal minority of right wing historians, do so for other reasons as we’ve outlined above. Even those who are sympathetic to the views expressed within these publications may be reacting to the phenomenon of the ‘Korean Wave’ itself rather than forming anything intrinsically neo-nationalist: a reaction to the pop cultural ‘invasion’ by their neighbors. And while it is tempting to cite this example as another instance of increasing nationalism among Japanese youth, such a statement has little or no empirical foundation.

In conclusion, it seems that as political and economic frictions between Japan and Korea, and Japan and China continue to cycle through positive-negative matrices, nationalism among youth will become a key issue to watch. The current tensions between these three nations, generated in part by pop cultural references, and fueled by internet publishing, PR, and online discussion are at a point where the rise of reactionary nationalism among some youth has appeared. The internet will not simply go away in the near future, and it seems inevitable

that its reach will spread ever wider, influencing increasing numbers of young people who are first and foremost web-connected. How governments and their agents respond to the internet publishing phenomenon will in turn influence the kinds of responses which are currently generated on the net. Although web censorship has been attempted in China, and web monitoring is increasingly common in Japan and South Korea, it is perhaps a little surprising that state agencies haven't been more active in engaging with web publishers and chat room groups to promote their own political agendas. [17] As new online expressions of nationalism emerge, apparently spontaneously, from within national boundaries to challenge the inherent internationalism of the internet, the *Kenkanryu* case occupies a significant historical location. It will be fascinating to see whether other social histories and critiques, following in its footsteps, emerge on the web.

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Notes

[1] The title means "Hating "The Korean Wave"" rather than 'The Hating Korea Wave', as indicated by the different color and font used for the letter 'ken', or 'hate'.

[2] While such figures are not huge in the context of Japanese manga sales records, they signify a relatively large audience.

[3] This genre started with Kobayashi

Yoshinori's *Gomanizumu sengen* (Proclamation of Arrogance, 1998). Other examples include Akiyama Joji's *Chugoku nyumon* (Introduction to China, 2004) and Hatake Natsuko's pithily titled *Hyakunin-giri hodo o kiru - teki wa shina chu-kyo seifu to waga kuni no henko masukomi da* (Slashing the report on the 'one-hundred men head-cutting competition - our enemy is the communist Chinese government and the prejudiced mass media in our country, 2004).

[4] We need to note, however, that 'them' or the 'Other' is not always geopolitical 'Korea' or ethnic 'Koreans' but more like 'pro-Korea' position and ideas. In other words, 'Korea' in this comic has become an abstract sign for the anti-Japanese Other.

[5] Kaneshiro Kazuki (2000), *GO*, Tokyo: Kodansha; Sagisawa Megumu, *Kimi wa kono kuni o suki ka* (Do you like this country) (1997) Tokyo: Shincho bunko, Use of a *zainichi* character to critique *zainichi* victim consciousness and to introduce an argument for 'naturalisation', in itself, is not problematic. Critique of North Korea and Korean discrimination of *zainichi*, too, are found in Kaneshiro's *GO*, a bestseller in 2000 which was also made into a film. The fundamental difference, however, is that *GO* deconstructs and relativises both 'Korean' and 'Japanese' whereas in *Kenkanryu*, the self-evident category of 'Japanese' itself is never challenged.

[6] Kenta Tanimichi, 'The youthful face of Japanese nationalism,' *Far East Economic Review*, November 2005; Norimitsu Onishi, 'Ugly images of Asian rivals become best sellers in Japan,' *New York Times* 21st November, 2005; Associated Press 'Nationalist comics become popular in Japan' 1st December 2005; Matthew Rusling, 'Comics stoke Japan-Korea tension', *Asia Times Online* 21 April, 2006.

[7] The 'liberal history' group is a misnomer,

generated to incorporate sympathy from those who believe that Japan has moved on from its Pacific War phase, which really incorporates a perspective that is anything but liberal. 'New history' is simply an oxymoron.

[8] Kobayashi himself has differentiated his position from that of Kenkanryu, criticizing in particular the anonymity of Yamano, as well as the lack of evidences of research beyond the Internet.

[9] The presumption that the validity and believability of an idea comes from the strength of the argument and effective presentation of evidence rather than the status or identity of the source is something that Kenkanryu shares with internet forums with anonymous participants.

[10] See, for example, the proliferation of entries in the user-based Wikipedia website (both in English and Japanese), that are largely unmoderated.

[11] In this case, too, the critique of and challenge to the mainstream media was one of the factors.

[12] A 'novel' that started as postings on a BBS and then was published as a book. It was also made into a film.

[13] Anyone can edit Wikipedia, and the changes made to the English Wikipedia entry on Kenkanryu that prompted an accusation of it

being 'vandalism' does not fit the definition of vandalism in the official policy of Wikipedia (deliberate attempt to compromise the integrity of Wikipedia - often includes such action as addition of obscenities, page blanking or insertion of jokes and nonsense). However, our point here is that Kenkanryu has established a presence in English-language media and web.

[14] We bought copies after all!

[15] Moreover, consider the Japan Student Movement of the 1960s - an extreme, nationalist (if Marxist) movement that became violent in an effort to protect peace. Current views are, by comparison, comparatively mild, and action is virtually non-existent.

[16] Sasada, Horinori 'Youth and Nationalism in Japan'. SAIS Review vol. XXCI no.2 (Summer-Fall 2006) pp. 109-122)

[17] It has to be said, though, that often official agencies 'get it wrong' in their approach to using the internet to influence youth. For example, in Australia it is the year of a federal election. Recently the Prime Minister has begun to use YouTube to counter views of his opponents about his policies. This in turn has made Mr Howard a target of media manipulating by web-savvy users who have dubbed and re-dubbed his speeches, and re-posted the often very funny new pastiches. While he may be able to say that he's using YouTube to communicate with youth, in practice he has become an object of fun to users who have countered his positions, and lampooned the technology.