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\*e-mail: [evarpahovskis@hse.ru](mailto:evarpahovskis@hse.ru)**GRAPHIC ARTS (MANGA) AS A COMPONENT  
OF JAPANESE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY DETERMINING RUSSIAN  
AND KAZAKHSTANI CONSUMERS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS  
AND PERCEIVED COUNTRY IMAGE OF JAPAN**

Japanese graphic arts, particularly manga novels, have developed into a global cultural phenomenon, functioning both as a source of entertainment and as a means of influencing perceptions. The majority of research conducted in this field addresses the topic of manga through the lens of soft power and in the context of globalization discourse. This study, however, is focused on determining whether the consumption of Japanese cultural products contributes to the perceived image of Japan, as well as the intentions of people from Russia and Kazakhstan to either travel to Japan or to engage in learning the Japanese language. To estimate the results, the paper employs a computer-based survey to collect descriptive statistics from a sample of 535 individuals. To analyze the data, the authors employed descriptive statistics and a logistic regression model to ascertain the correlation between the respondents' perceptions of Japan, their consumption of manga, and their likelihood of intending to travel to Japan or to learn the Japanese language. The logistic model evaluation demonstrated that the intention to learn Japanese, the intention to visit Japan, and positive attitudes towards Japan are at least partly shaped by primary Japanese cultural awareness, the amount of money spent on manga-related attributes, and the volume of comics read. Furthermore, the intention to visit Japan is influenced by occupational level, while positive attitudes towards Japan are influenced by the reader's gender. The positive attitude was primarily based on the emotional dimension, as people on average rated the beauty of Japan higher than its political or economic competitiveness and its social values and norms.

**Key words:** consumption of Japanese graphic arts, manga, youth, Russia, Kazakhstan, country image, Japanese culture.

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\*e-mail: [evarpahovskis@hse.ru](mailto:evarpahovskis@hse.ru)**Графикалық өнер (манга) ресейлік және қазақстандық тұтынушылардың  
мінез-құлық әрекеттерін және Жапония бейнесін қабылдауды анықтайтын  
жапон мәдени дипломатиясының құрамдас бөлігі ретінде**

Жапондық графикалық өнер – манга, негізінен, ойын-сауық көзі ретінде де, имиджді қабылдау құралы ретінде де әрекет ететін жаһандық мәдени құбылысқа айналды. Осы саладағы зерттеулердің басым көпшілігі манганы жұмсақ күш пен жаһандану дискурсы контекстінде қарастырады. Бұл зерттеу жапон мәдени өнімдерін тұтыну тұтынушыға Жапонияның имиджін қалыптастыруға, соның ішінде Қазақстан мен Ресей азаматтарының жапон мәдениетіне қызығушылық танытуына, жапон тілін үйренуіне, Жапонияға баруға ықпал ететіндігін/етпейтіндігін анықтауға бағытталады. Зерттеу жұмысын жүзеге асыру үшін 535 адамға онлайн түрде сауалнама жүргізілді. Деректерді сараптау үшін зерттеу авторлары респонденттердің Жапония имиджін қабылдауы, манганы қолдану/тұтынуы Жапонияға бару немесе жапон тілін үйрену ниеті арасындағы өзара байланысты орнату үшін сипаттамалық статистикалық және логистикалық регрессия талдауын қолданды.

Логистикалық модельді талдаудың қорытындысы бойынша жапон тілін үйрену ниеті, Жапонияға бару ниеті және Жапонияның позитивті имиджі туралы көзқарасы ең алдымен жапон мәдениеті туралы бұған дейінгі білетін ақпараттарына, мангаға қатысты өнімдерге жұмсалған қаржыға, оқылған манганың көлемін және оқудың жиілігінен алатын әсеріне байланысты қалыптасады. Сонымен қатар, Жапонияға бару ниеті жұмыспен қамту деңгейіне байланысты, ал, Жапонияға деген позитивті көзқарас оқырманның жынысына байланысты анықталады. Позитивті көзқарас негізінен эмоционалды аспектке негізделген, өйткені адамдар орташа есеппен

нияның сұлулығы мен эстетикалық сипаттамаларын оның саяси немесе экономикалық бәсекеге қабілеттілігі мен әлеуметтік нормалары мен құндылықтарынан жоғары бағалады.

**Түйін сөздер:** жапон өнерін тұтыну, Манга, жастар, Ресей, Қазақстан, Жапония бейнесі, Жапония мәдениеті.

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**Графическое искусство (манга) как компонент японской культурной дипломатии, определяющий поведенческие намерения российских и казахстанских потребителей и восприятие образа Японии**

Японское графическое искусство, в частности манга, стало глобальным культурным феноменом, выступая как источником развлечения, так и средством влияния на восприятие. Большинство исследований в этой области рассматривает мангу через призму мягкой силы и в контексте дискурса глобализации. Однако данное исследование сосредоточено на определении того, способствует ли потребление японских культурных продуктов формированию образа Японии, а также намерениям людей из России и Казахстана либо посетить Японию, либо изучать японский язык. Оценка результатов в работе основана на онлайн опросе для сбора описательной статистики с выборкой из 535 человек. Для анализа данных авторы применили описательную статистику и логистическую регрессию, чтобы установить взаимосвязь между восприятием Японии респондентами, их потреблением манги и вероятностью намерений посетить Японию или изучать японский язык. Оценка логистической модели показала, что намерение изучать японский язык, намерение посетить Японию и положительное отношение к Японии в первую очередь формируются под воздействием первичной осведомленности о японской культуре, финансов, потраченных на связанные с мангой атрибуты, объема прочитанной манги и регулярности чтения. Кроме того, намерение посетить Японию зависит от уровня занятости, в то время как положительное отношение к Японии связано с полом читателя. Положительное отношение в основном основывалось на эмоциональном аспекте, поскольку в среднем люди оценивали красоту и эстетические характеристики Японии выше, чем ее политическую или экономическую конкурентоспособность и социальные нормы, и ценности.

**Ключевые слова:** потребление японского искусства, манга, молодежь, Россия, Казахстан, образ Японии, культура Японии.

## Introduction

The contemporary tourist is more knowledgeable, mobile, and adventurous than their predecessors (Wang et al., 2014). This shift has implications for their future development and destination choices. The decision-making process is influenced by a number of factors, including a preference for international products (Kyriakaki et al., 2020). For example, Budi et al. (2022) emphasized the significant correlation between literature and travel, noting that locations featured in popular media, such as Marvel comics, gain prominence (Budi, 2022). Moreover, Phillips et al. (2013) discovered that perceptions of Korea's image and familiarity with its cuisine can stimulate interest in visiting South Korea. Consequently, even positive perceptions of foreign cuisines can impact travelers' destination preferences.

In the case of a paper related to Japanese graphic arts, it can be hypothesized that after reading a piece of Japanese graphic arts, specifically manga comic books, a consumer will be excited to explore famil-

iar venues and experience the essence of the country of origin.

Japanese manga novels, which are specifically Japanese-style comic books, have evolved into a global phenomenon over the last twenty years. They have touched not only the hearts of people from a variety of cultures and audiences in terms of age and ethnicity throughout the world, but also continued to grow and influence foreigners' interest in Japanese goods. The evolution of manga has been shaped by Japan's lengthy history, which has reflected the social, political, and economic conditions of the day.

The manga industry has experienced significant growth, evolving from local magazines to global comic books (Allison, 2000) that are being consumed both offline and online. In the present era, a flourishing global community of manga enthusiasts exists, unified by a common set of interests, including the consumption of the same titles<sup>1</sup>, the accu-

<sup>1</sup> **Title** in regards to Japanese graphic arts refers to the unique name of anime or manga. For example, "Hunter x Hunter", "Naruto", "One Piece".

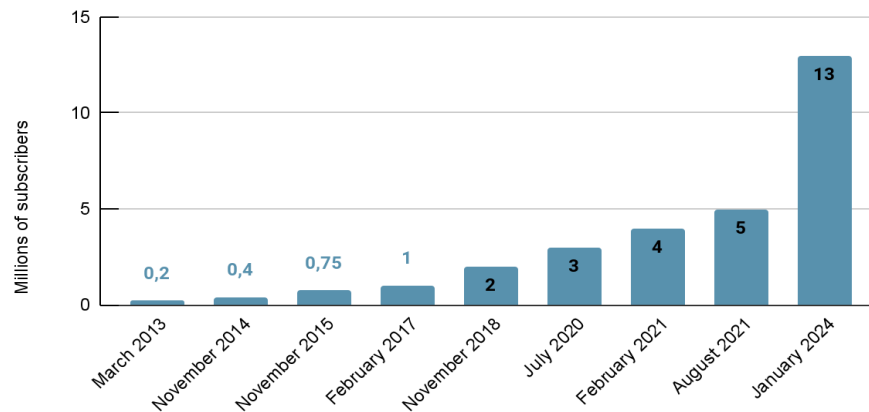
mulation of character trading cards, and even the practice of cosplay, wherein individuals assume the attire and persona of their favorite characters.

In 2022, the global manga market reached a value of USD 11.45 billion (Spherical Insights, 2023).

Crunchyroll, the leading international platform for manga subscriptions, has seen a significant growth in its reader base, with 13 million (Media Play News, 2024) paying subscribers in January 2024 compared to just 200 thousand in 2013 (Figure 1).

### Number of Crunchyroll paying subscribers worldwide

(2012-2024, in millions)



Source: composed by authors based on data from Crunchyroll Media Play News (2023) | Statista

**Figure 1** – Number of Crunchroll paying subscribers worldwide, 2012-2024

Some scholars argue that its specific visual style and technical quality attract readers worldwide (Kowner, 2008). Others blame the variety of topics (Mikhailova, 2008) including stories written to be the subject of attraction: basically optimistic views on life and human nature, heroic adventures, eternal struggles, romantic dreams of teenagers. Alternatively, the “qualities of empathy and deep diving psychology” can be considered as a factor (Melnikova, 2008) that has made it an especially popular form of entertainment worldwide.

In the observed countries, namely Russia and Kazakhstan, the Japanese manga industry has recently demonstrated a gradual increase in mass approval, particularly among teenagers and pre-adults. This is despite the pervasive belief that comics, regardless of whether they are American or Japanese, are perceived as “children’s literature” (Alaniz, 2010). During the early 1990s, as Russia began to embrace global culture, there was a notable fascination with Japanese anime and manga, as evidenced by Mikhailova and Torchinov (2008). A considerable number of young people, who had recently acquired a newfound sense of autonomy, became

fervent adherents of Japanese popular culture. Subsequently, the popularity of Japanese exports to Russia has increased steadily, resulting in the emergence of a dynamic youth subculture that draws inspiration from Japan. According to the statistics of SimilarWeb<sup>1</sup>, in both Russia and Kazakhstan, the most readable manga-focused website is mangalib.me, sharing half (SimilarWeb Identity, 2024) of the market of online platforms for reading manga with more than 10 million visits per month in Russia, while in Kazakhstan, it shares 62% with almost 3 million readers per month. Acknowledging the trend of manga getting popular in Russia and Kazakhstan the authors suggest exploring the phenomenon in detail.

This paper has three principal objectives. The initial objective is to examine the principal factors that have contributed to the pervasive consumption of Japanese manga series in two post-Soviet states, namely Russia and Kazakhstan, during the 21st century. Secondly, through the use of descriptive statistics, the authors seek to identify the key char-

<sup>1</sup> SimilarWeb Identity provides web analytics, data mining, and business intelligence services to international corporations.

acteristics of manga consumption among Russian and Kazakhstani manga readers. Finally, the paper aims to quantify the extent to which these factors influence the intention to engage with Japan, either through learning the Japanese language or traveling to Japan, as well as to examine the relationship between manga consumption patterns and the perceived image of Japan.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, the research questions posed in this paper are as follows:

RQ 1. What factors contribute to the popularity of Japanese comic books (manga series) in Russia and in Kazakhstan in the 21st century?

RQ 2. What is the relationship between the consumption of Japanese graphic art, specifically manga, by enthusiasts based in Russia and Kazakhstan and their subsequent intention to engage further with Japan through language learning and travel?

RQ 3. To what extent does the consumption of Japanese graphic art, specifically manga, influence the formation of the image of Japan in the eyes of Russian and Kazakhstani readers?

The findings of this study have the potential to inform further research in both sociological and economic domains. A comprehensive analysis of the factors that significantly influenced the popularity and dissemination of Japanese graphic arts, at least in part, demonstrates how the products of Japan contribute to the distinctiveness of Japanese culture. In conclusion, this research offers at least partly novel perspectives on the economic, educational, and cultural value of manga. The analysis of the contributing factors can also be applied to the fields of marketing and cultural policy.

The research paper covers etymological meaning, historical development, current trends in the industry, and cultural discourse related to manga firstly. Secondly, it discusses previous scholarly contributions, outlines the concepts and theories shaping the study, and explains the research methodology and limitations. The paper delves into the observed cultural product development trends, followed by presenting the research findings in the respective sections with tables and graphs for analysis of potential patterns. Final part of the paper discusses results and new research avenues that the paper suggests.

### Literature review

The subjects addressed in this paper have previously been the subject of investigation from a variety of perspectives. A substantial proportion of

the literature on the cultural exports of Japan views these exports as a means of exerting soft power. In general, previous studies on related matters can be classified into several interdisciplinary fields.

For example, Norris (2010) and Lam (2007) contend that the soft power of Japan is not contingent on popular culture, including anime and manga, video and computer games, fashion trends, and cuisine. The authors sought to determine whether Japan truly employs its popular culture as a tool of soft power. While Norris (2010) endeavors to quantify the evidence of Japan's appeal by examining factors such as the extent of cultural exports, the emergence of the otaku subculture, and the growth in the number of foreign Japanese language students, Lam (2007) primarily assesses whether the popularity of Japanese cultural products genuinely impacts the dynamics between Japan and other Asian and Western countries, taking into account the constraints and opportunities inherent in state's diplomacy.

Norris (2010) examined attitudes in South Korea and China in conjunction with Japan's historical militaristic tendencies, ultimately concluding that Japanese popular culture serves to reinforce Japan's image as a "Cool Japan" (McGray, 2002) rather than as a conduit for soft power. Lam (2007) offers a similar perspective, emphasizing the distinction between admiration for Japan's cultural image and the country's political entity. A review of the literature revealed a paucity of studies devoted to the role of manga in fostering interest in Japan.

The thesis by Dalil (2016) explores the phenomenon of Japanese animation and manga as a source of interest in Japanese culture. The author posits that manga and anime serve as a gateway to Japanese culture, rather than merely a source of entertainment (Dalil, 2016). The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating video diaries, observation, interviews, and thematic content analysis, to examine the popularity of manga and anime in Morocco. The research drew on the theoretical frameworks of cultural transnationalism (Iwabuchi, 2002) and cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 2014) to examine the global circulation of cultural products and the tendency of audiences to prefer media from their own or neighboring cultures.

Dalil's (2016) thesis examined the portrayal of Japanese culture in animation. In order to situate the subsequent examination of manga in a broader cultural context, it is first necessary to consider its origins in the Edo period, which lasted from 1603 to 1868. The author posits that over time, the content of scrolls evolved from mere humor to encompass a range of subjects, including demons, ghosts, and



highly imaginative forms of pornography (Dalil, 2016).

A mounting corpus of studies seeks to ascertain the influence of country image variables, particularly past travel experience, attitude toward revisiting, subjective norms, tourist motivation, and travel constraints, on the intention to visit Japan (for example, a study on intention to revisit Japan among Indonesian nationals by Josephine et al., 2023). The principal objective of the analysis by Josephine and colleagues was to ascertain the interrelationships between the aforementioned variables. The authors employed a questionnaire for the collection of data and utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Bollen, 1989) for its analysis.

Josephine et al. (2023) illustrate the correlation between specific factors that exert a considerable influence on individuals' attitudes toward revisiting Japan. Such factors include travel constraints, past travel experience, and tourist motivation. In contrast, the intention to revisit is found to be significantly influenced by past travel experience and subjective norms. This indicates that the decision of Indonesians to revisit Japan is significantly shaped by their prior experiences in the country and the opinions or recommendations of their immediate social circle, who play a pivotal role in influencing their intention to visit Japan again (Josephine et al., 2023).

Another significant block of literature is attempts to concentrate on manga. To illustrate, Robin E. Brenner's (2007) publication presents a conceptual framework for understanding manga and anime as significant global phenomena. She examines the appeal of these art forms while addressing stereotypes surrounding them, such as perceptions of adult content and harmful values, which are often held by older generations. While adults may find the unfamiliar stories and customs confusing (Brenner, 2007), younger readers are drawn to manga for its freshness and sophistication, appreciating its complexity beyond their parents' comprehension (Brenner, 2007).

In terms of target audience, Brenner (2007) notes that Japanese comic books are enjoyed by people of all ages, from children to adults. This can be attributed to the narrative style of manga, which is more complex than the typical Western comic book. The myth that comics are too juvenile for adults is not applicable to Japanese manga, as there are works within the genre that exhibit complexity beyond the grasp of children. She highlights the intricate plots, multi-level characters, and expertly drawn visuals in manga that transcend traditional narratives.

“Berserk”<sup>1</sup> (*jap.* ベルセルク) by Miura Kentaro perfectly fits in Brenner's statements.

Mangakas<sup>2</sup> provide international audiences with a diverse array of genres, including drama, horror, fantasy, and adult themes, thereby appealing to a broad spectrum of demographic preferences. A noteworthy illustration of this phenomenon is “Vinland Saga” by Makoto Yukimura. While the narrative is centered on Vikings, it delves into more profound themes such as friendship, betrayal, and the pursuit of peace after conflict. This work challenges conventional stereotypes associated with Norse warriors (Danesin, 2017).

The popularity of manga abroad can at least partly be associated with the increase of professional and fan translations into English by enthusiasts. The rise of interest in manga in Russia and Kazakhstan can also be partly linked to the contribution of volunteer translators in Russian (Magera, 2018) and to a lesser extent in Kazakh, as the translation of manga into Kazakh is a relatively new trend, and initially manga readers were exposed to translations of manga to Russian (Ninomiya, 2020).

The final factor contributing to the widespread acceptance of manga is the existence of global, strongly connected fan communities (Brenner, 2007). Such communities are full of passionate enthusiasts of both manga and anime, and are commonly referred to as “fandoms” (Alt, 2008). The genesis of this phenomenon can be traced back to the 1970s, when the science fiction anime series “Space Battleship Yamato” (Japanese title: 宇宙戦艦ヤマト, also known as CosmoShip Yamato and Star Blazers) was banned from Japanese television. This prompted fans to unite and advocate for its reinstatement (Starblazers, 2008). Currently, the anime and manga fandom operates on a global scale through conventions held worldwide (Guo & Zeng, 2020). These events provide a platform for otaku members to engage in cosplay, discussions, compe-

<sup>1</sup> “Berserk” (*jap.* ベルセルク) by Miura Kentaro narrates the story focuses on the protagonist Guts, a lone swordsman driven by a revenge on the antagonist of Griffith, the commander of a mercenary band known as the “Band of the Hawk”. Griffith's betrayal of Guts and his sacrifice of comrades to attain limitless demonic power form the core conflict of the story. As this manga is set in a dark fantasy realm inspired by medieval Europe, it delves into intense physical and psychological violence, eroticism, moral and religious beliefs, and brutality of warfare between the kingdoms.

<sup>2</sup> **Mangaka** (*jap.* 漫画家): the Japanese word for a comic artist or cartoonist. This term may be used to describe any number of artists who work to create a comic book, from those who oversee every element of the production to those who merely contribute a portion.

titions, and interactions with fellow enthusiasts from around the world.

From geographical perspective it appears that extensive amounts of studies devoted to the Japanese graphic arts tend to be discussed within a context of “soft power” of Japan and focused on mostly the North America and Europe (e.g., Ma, 2023; Bouissou, 2013; Iwabuchi, 2018), leaving other countries like Russia and other post-Soviet states relatively aside (e.g., Mikhailova, & Torchinov, 2008; Pashchenko, & Kyrlyova, 2020).

To address the above mentioned gap the authors aim at exploring Russian and Kazakhstani manga readership trends and inquire whether existing features contribute to manga readers’ perception of Japan and their intentions to learn Japanese language and visit Japan.

One of the major factors that may explain a will to transform reading experience to learning language and traveling is the unique Japanese culture deeply rooted in manga (Norris, 2009). Fans often have a strong interest in experiencing the country that inspired their favorite stories or authors. By traveling to Japan, they can immerse themselves in the distinctive cultural elements depicted in manga, such as traditional festivals, historical landmarks, and local customs. Hence the authors interpret the independent variable as the amount of manga consumed.

Secondly, numbers of manga enthusiasts partake in a phenomenon referred to as an “otaku pilgrimage” (Okamoto, 2014) where they engage in visiting actual locations depicted in their preferred stories. These locations could be distinct neighborhoods, notable landmarks, or even entire urban areas. By walking in the footsteps of beloved characters, fans are able to relive memorable scenes and feel a closer connection to the narratives that resonate with them. Thus the hypotheses suggest that greater consumption of Japanese culture, illustrated in this study in the amount of consumed manga by readers from Russia and Kazakhstan would impact their motivations, hence manga consumers will be more likely to express intention get closer to the cultural origins of favorite stories via traveling to Japan (H1) or learning the Japanese language (H2). The assumption about the impact on the language learning motivations is inspired by the work of Armour and Iida (2013), who explored the relationship between manga and anime consumption by Australians and the intention to join formal Japanese language education. Unlike Armour and Iida, in the given study the authors do not distinguish between formal and informal Japanese language education.

The third hypothesis was inspired by statements made by Otmazgin (2012) suggesting that despite Japanese governments’ efforts to spread the positive and updated image of Japan the outcomes are debatable. Hence, in the hypothesis (H3) the authors would like to inquire whether the amount of consumption of Japanese cultural products has any relationship with how Japan is perceived by Russia- and Kazakhstan-based manga readers.

Among above mentioned factors other factors and demographic features are tested as well. Nevertheless, the primary set of hypotheses is the following:

H1. Higher levels of Japanese manga consumption correlate with a greater intention to study Japanese language by Russians and Kazakhstanis.

H2. Higher levels of Japanese manga consumption correlate with a greater intention to visit Japan by Russians and Kazakhstanis.

H3. Higher levels of Japanese manga consumption correlate with a more positive perception of Japan by Russians and Kazakhstanis.

### Theoretical and conceptual framework

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, the authors apply the following concepts: the push and pull factors theory (Ravenstein, 1885) to determine which drivers motivate people to visit Japan; the nation branding concept (Anholt, 2008; Kaneva, 2011) and the ‘Cool Japan’ concept (McGray, 2002) to explain the reasons for the perceived image of Japan.

In addition, authors operate with a term “cultural awareness level” that is defined as the sensitivity to unfamiliar differences or similarities between one’s native and foreign cultures (Raines, 2023). It entails “enhancing people’s comprehension of the impact of our culture (or a foreign one)” (Raines, 2023) has on our conduct in the corporate setting, dietary habits, and communication with others.

With regard to cultural products originating from Japan, the term “awareness level of Japanese culture” denotes the extent of an individual’s knowledge, comprehension, and familiarity with diverse aspects of Japanese culture. This encompasses a comprehensive understanding of traditional practices, customs, history, art, cuisine, language, popular culture, and social norms in Japan (Lugina et al., 2019). A higher level of awareness is indicative of a more profound tolerance and appreciation for Japanese culture, whereas a lower level may be indicative of limited exposure.

In this paper, the term “Japanese graphic arts” or “graphic novels” refers to manga novels, which

are painted digitally or by hand by artists known as mangakas (Cohn, 2010). As it has become a universal phenomenon, it is currently a nascent form of art that has been evolving over decades and distinguished from Western-styled comic books (Steen, 2016). This storytelling form, through its imaginary dialogues and pictures, allows readers and viewers to imbue the scenes with meaning based on their own passions and life experiences.

The Japanese word “manga” (*kanji*: 漫画; *hiragana*<sup>1</sup> まんが) refers to comics and cartoonings. Outside Japan, this term refers to the comics originally published in Japan by the Japanese mangakas. Usually, manga stories are issued within several chapters in by-number-ordered books for readers to collect all of the episodes of a story. It is published as a black-and-white comic book, read from top to bottom and from right to left, but, commonly, readers can find chapters’ introductions and, sometimes, several pages to be in color at the end of a book. Its current form emerged shortly after World War II, making it a particularly young kind of graphic art. Developed from ancient genre of woodblock paintings called Ukiyo-e (*kanji*: 浮世絵) – originated in Edo period (between 1603 and 1868) – and then mixed with the western drawing styles during globalization.

### Methodological framework

In the present study, the authors employed two principal methods to achieve the above-mentioned research aims: descriptive statistics analysis and logistic regression. The latter is a model for binary classification tasks, wherein the outcome variable is categorical and comprises two classes (Lerche, 2012). The authors utilized logistic regression as a quantitative method for assessing the correlation between graphic arts consumption and the independent variables of intentions to travel and to learn the Japanese language, as well as country image perception. The results of this model were instrumental in elucidating the influence of predictors on the probability of the outcome (Greene, 2003).

The results of the independent variables’ impact on the dependent variables were interpreted and average marginal effects (AME) were subsequently

estimated. The average marginal effect (AME) represents the average change in the probability of the outcome variable for a one-unit change in the independent variable, with all other variables held constant (Norton et al., 2019).

To ascertain the extent to which respondents were drawn to Japan as a country, the authors partly employed a 4D model of the country image (Buhmann, 2016; Ayhan & Gouda, 2021). The original model illustrates the influence of four primary dimensions (functional, aesthetic, normative, and emotional) on decision-making behavior. The model has been demonstrated to be reliable and efficient in studies of South Korea country image (e.g., Varpahovskis & Ayhan, 2020) and of German and Swiss country images (Ingenhoff et al., 2018). In order to evaluate the factors that contribute to the attitudes of manga consumers towards Japan, the adjusted version of the questionnaire was employed in the course of this study.

### Data Collection

This study collected data through a self-administrated computer-based questionnaire with 38 close-ended questions in Russian and Kazakh languages for representatives reading manga on the regular basis. An online survey was conducted using GoogleForms. A pilot survey was conducted on April 2, 2024. Responses from the primary group helped to improve the validity of the survey. On April 5, 2024, a revised questionnaire was distributed to the administration of targeted communities on social media (mainly in VK.com and telegram). On April 10, 2024, the survey started and was open until May 3. All the participants took part in the survey voluntarily.

The questionnaire was distributed mostly via group chats, communities, and channels posting anime- and/or manga-related content, like language learning techniques, fanarts, manga explanations, merchandise selling, and those focused on oriental studies. Most of them (6) were found in the Russian segment, while only one was found in the Kazakh one. A summary of groups through which the survey was distributed is presented in Table 1.

The survey questions regarding the factors of attraction to Japanese graphic arts are based on the results of interviews conducted by Dalil (2016). She points out seven major aspects of Japanese culture mentioned by the enthusiasts who read manga on a regular basis, including history, traditions, attire, eating habits, Japanese behavior, martial arts, and traditional festivals. The current study took these major categories with the additional details.

<sup>1</sup> **Hiragana** is one out of three phonetic lettering systems in Japanese language used for originally Japanese words. Hiragana, as well as Katakana, can be seen as a set of Japanese syllabic symbols. These are phonetic letters representing one of the 46 unique syllables without representing specific connotes as kanji do.

**Table 1** – Survey distributors' profiles

Community name	Social media	Number of subscribers
Nihongooyopta	Telegram	10,3 thousand
Rabashi	Telegram	9 thousand
Манга на японском языке   日本語の漫画	VK	4 thousand
Японский клуб ИСАА МГУ	VK	2,9 thousand
Каз клуб НИУ ВШЭ	Telegram	416
Экономика и политика в Азии '20	VK	104
Экономика и политика в Азии '21	VK	61

Source: composed by authors

### Sample

As this research aimed to examine only manga audiences from Russia and Kazakhstan, the re-

sponses of participants of other foreign states were excluded from the analysis. Overall, 682 responses were received of which 535 were complete and useful for further analysis.

**Table 2** – Summary of respondents' profile

Country	Number of cases for analysis	Gender
Russia	478	Males: 222
		Females: 256
Kazakhstan	57	Males: 32
		Females: 25

Source: composed by authors

### Limitations

Firstly, this study focused primarily on the two post-Soviet states, Russia and Kazakhstan. Future studies into the field should focus on different post-Soviet countries, for example, Belarus, Ukraine to broaden insights on Japanese cultural impact in the post-Soviet region.

Second, it was found that although there are plenty of works discussing the current issue in terms of Russia, however, the research regarding the influence of Japanese manga on the Kazakhstani youth is not covered. Lack of the communities related to Japanese graphic arts in Kazakhstan have limited the opportunities for the research analysis. Limited data also hinders correlation analysis, urging more specific research in Kazakhstan in future.

Lastly, this research has collected the responses regarding manga series, while Japanese graphic arts also includes animation (anime) as it is also a crucial part of Japanese cultural export. Therefore, ad-

ditional analysis of the Russian and the Kazakhstani audiences who consume anime on a regular basis is needed.

Initial goal of this study aimed to deliver a full-scale comparison of Russia-based and Kazakhstan-based Japanese graphical arts consumers but the amount of verified respondents turned out to be less than expected and some statistical operations appeared to be impossible because of too few cases. For further studies the authors suggest using some advanced techniques to collect responses from Kazakh-speaking manga consumers.

### Research results

The results examination starts with descriptive statistics analysis, based on the survey composed by authors. The analysis was estimated on responses of individuals who participated in the survey (N=535). The study delivers research results for a joint sample of Russia-based and Kazakhstan-based manga con-



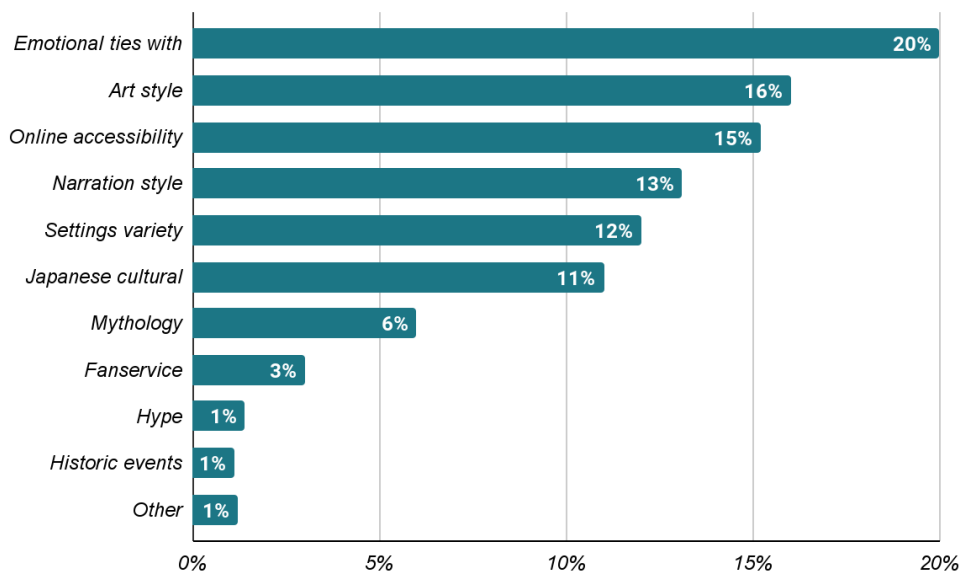
sumers. Preliminary studies demonstrated minimal differences between groups. The respondents were offered to take a survey in Russian and Kazakh languages, and only one person completed the survey in Kazakh. The remaining 534 responses were submitted in Russian. This fact hints that both studied groups tend to consume manga either in Russian language or from Russian-language based online communities. Moreover this fact suggests that the majority of Kazakhstani manga readers under investigation in this project felt comfortable with the Russian language as a means of communication in the text context of filling out the questionnaire. Besides a limited amount of responses from Kazakhstan-based audiences, the factor that urged authors to treat respondents from Russia and Kazakhstan as a joint group is that Kazakhstan and Russia have in-

tensive migration flow. It became especially active in 2022 and 2023 especially (IOM, 2024), while our surveying technique did not allow pure identification of Kazakhstani and Russian manga-consumers.

Further the section is divided into two major blocks: descriptive statistics-based results and results obtained as an assessment of logistic regressions.

### Descriptive statistics-based results

Absolute majority of respondents (from the whole sample 535) highlighted that they started reading manga at the age of 14-16 – 80,7%. The manga followers also highlighted Telegram and VK as the two most popular social media for studying the patterns of Japanese language and culture.



Source: composed by authors

Note: 535 responses

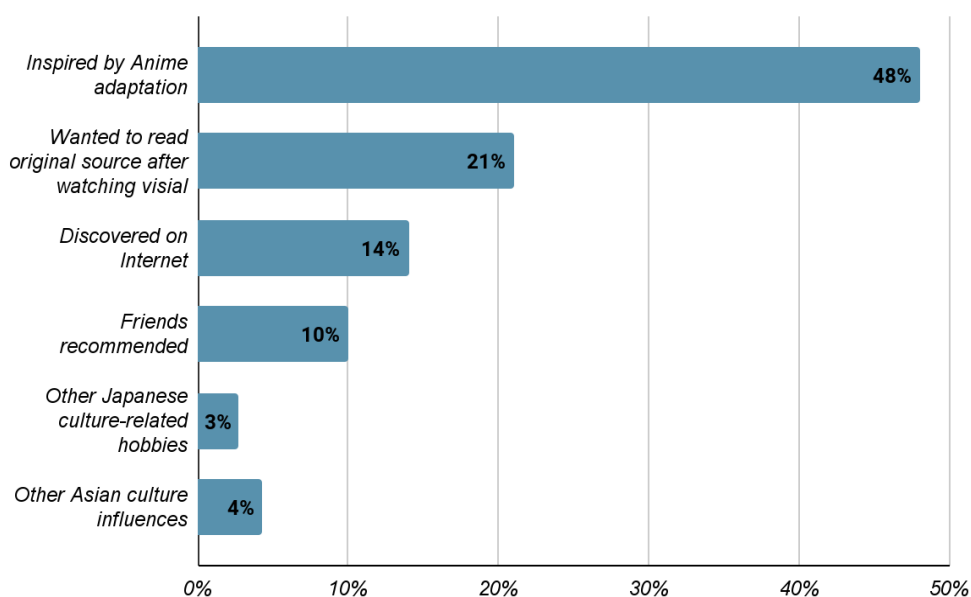
**Figure 2** – Factors driving Japanese graphic arts consumption

Descriptive statistics suggest that factors driving Japanese manga consumption as reported by respondents themselves include emotional ties with characters (20%), artstyle (16%), accessibility via online platforms (15,2%), narration style (13,1%), and variety of settings (12%). Moderate factors include cultural elements incorporated in artworks (cuisine, landscapes, attire) (11%) and mythology (6%). The least influential factors include interest in

historic events (1,1%), hype (1,4%), and fanservice<sup>1</sup> (3%). (Figure 2).

Availability of manga on online platforms is seen by 84,5% of respondents as a crucial factor in sustaining their interest in manga consumption.

<sup>1</sup> Fanservice in Japanese artworks is mostly represented by erotic content, usually demonstrated by female characters, and is not contributing to the story development but for attracting the audience.



Source: composed by authors  
 Note: 535 respondents

**Figure 3** – The primary motives contributed to manga reading

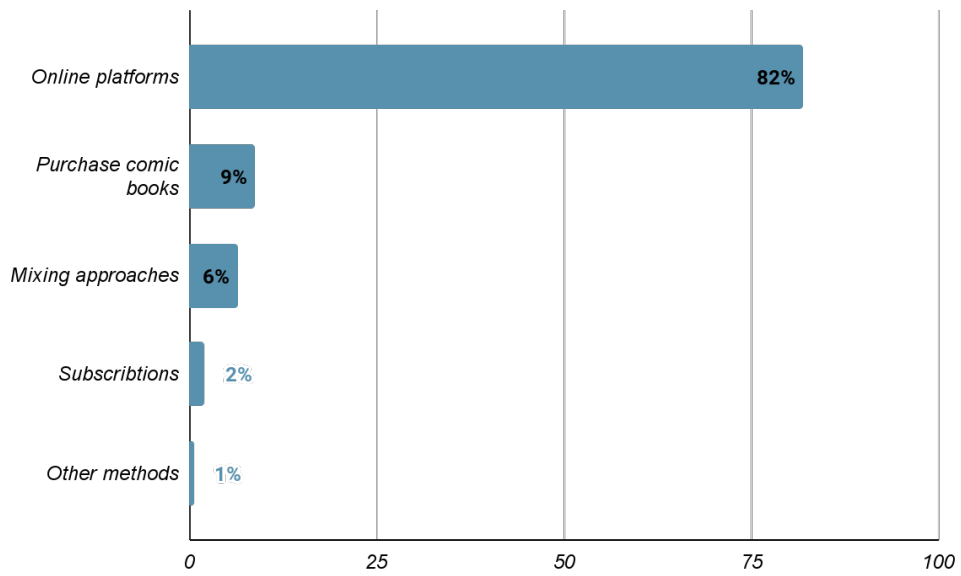
The respondents indicated major driving motivations to read manga were the following: 48% were inspired by anime adaptations, 25% chose to delve into the original source material after watching the anime, and 14% were driven by content discovered on the Internet. Only 10% cited friends as their primary source, and merely 3% expressed interest in cultural elements from other countries, like Chinese manhua. (Figure 3).

Additionally, 48% of manga followers have read less than 90 titles, on the average reading at least five volumes per month. Almost 34% already consumed 100-200 titles, reading on the average 10-30 volumes per month. A bit less than 15% have read 300-400 titles, on the average reading 40-60 volumes per month. The least proportion of 3% goes to readers who have read 400 and more original manga titles.

Among the respondents, 82% prefer to read manga online, while almost 9% buy it in bookstores. The rest of 6% mix these consumption methods. Just 2% have subscriptions to platforms such as Crunchyroll and merely 1% prefer other ways of manga consumption. (Figure 4).

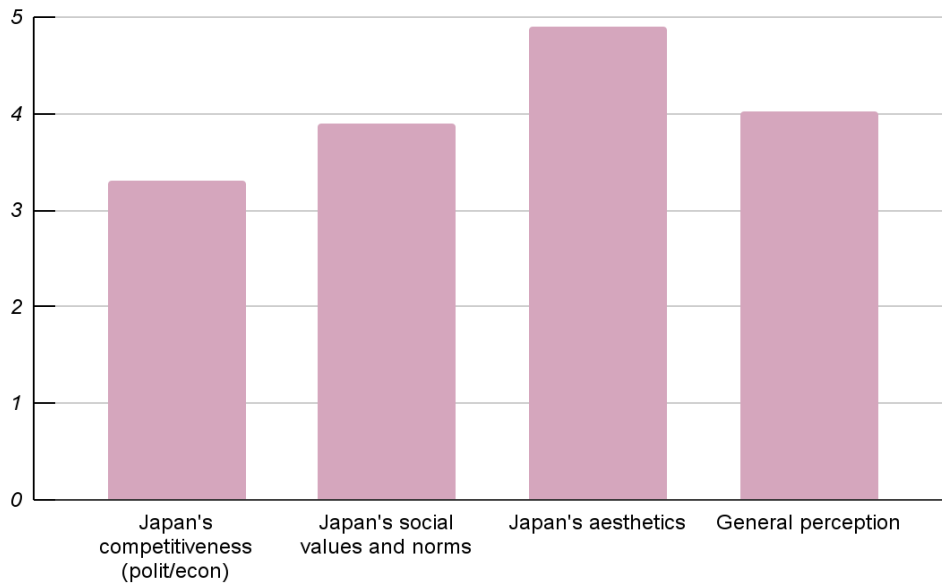
Analysis of perceptions towards Japan, based on the adjusted 4D model of country image<sup>1</sup>, demonstrated that Japan is mostly viewed as a state with an attractive cultural uniqueness and beauty, reaching the highest average of 4,9 (out of 5). Japan's integrity accounted for 3,9 on average. Less agreement is demonstrated by the respondents about Japan's political and economic competitiveness. (Figure 5).

<sup>1</sup> Buhmann, Alexander. "Measuring Country Image. Theory, Method, and Effects." ResearchGate, January 1, 2016. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306280000\\_Measuring\\_Country\\_Image\\_Theory\\_Method\\_and\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306280000_Measuring_Country_Image_Theory_Method_and_Effects)



Source: composed by authors

Figure 4 – Preferences in graphic arts consumption ways



Source: composed by authors

Note: 535 respondents

Figure 5 – Perception of Japan's country image based on 4D model

### Logistic regression results

The authors used logistic regression to analyze how manga consumption-related behavioral patterns and demographic indicators impact individuals' likelihood of visiting Japan, learning Japanese, and having a positive image of Japan. Six factors appeared statistically significant (fan\_cost\_perc\_cat – percentage of income respondents spend per month on purchasing manga-related products (merchandise included); lang – initial level of self-reported Japanese language proficiency; culture\_inf – how respondents rate their knowledge of Japanese culture on a scale 1 to 5 Likert scale; exp\_before\_manga – experience in learning the Japanese language or culture before reading manga; age\_regular\_m\_cat – age when a respondent began manga reading on a regular basis; vol\_month – amount of volumes of manga consumed per month) for determining the likelihood of learning Japanese intentions among respondents reading manga at a significance level of 10%.

The calculations demonstrated that the intention to visit Japan is driven by four factors: occupation level (whether the respondent holds a status of a full-time employed professional, a student, combining work and studying duties or is currently unemployed and not enrolled in education programs at the moment of taking research); expenditures on manga-related products; self-perceived awareness and knowledge level about Japanese culture; the amount of consumption of manga volumes per month). Hence increase in occupation level towards full-time employment, amount of expenditures on manga, self-perceived level of knowledge about Japanese culture and amount of monthly consumed manga corresponds with increase in reported intention to visit Japan (Table 4).

The attitude towards Japan is also determined by four statistically significant factors (gender with females tend to perceive Japan more positively; amount of expenditures on manga, self-perceived level of knowledge about Japanese culture and amount of monthly consumed manga) among tested ones (Table 4).

**Table 4** – Logistic Regression Assessment Results 1

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	int_to_lang_m	int_to_visit_m	image_pos_m
age	-0.0307 (0.0355)	0.00473 (0.0345)	-0.00314 (0.0323)
1.gender	-0.282 (0.226)	0.205 (0.225)	<b>0.499**</b> (0.216)
educ	0.199 (0.153)	0.0804 (0.150)	0.0777 (0.142)
occupation	0.0826 (0.138)	<b>0.274**</b> (0.135)	0.165 (0.128)
income_cat_rub	-0.0225 (0.0898)	-0.124 (0.0884)	-0.0815 (0.0839)
income_cat_tg	-10.47 (453.4)	-12.08 (378.7)	-13.18 (823.4)
fan_cost_perc_cat	<b>0.138*</b> (0.0808)	<b>0.217**</b> (0.0905)	<b>0.122*</b> (0.0783)
lang	<b>0.332**</b> (0.135)	-0.160 (0.135)	-0.0836 (0.128)
culture_inf	<b>0.357**</b> (0.167)	<b>0.485***</b> (0.168)	<b>0.389**</b> (0.158)
prefer_manga	0.0875 (0.155)	-0.00596 (0.148)	0.0114 (0.143)



*Continuation of the table*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
exp_before_manga	<b>0.449*</b>	0.118	-0.233
	(0.249)	(0.255)	(0.242)
fst_manga_age	0.00574	0.000393	0.00415
	(0.0106)	(0.00867)	(0.0102)
age_regular_m_cat	<b>0.345*</b>	0.234	0.0562
	(0.183)	(0.197)	(0.175)
hours_day_cat	0.225	-0.0808	-0.107
	(0.141)	(0.141)	(0.137)
vol_month	<b>0.139*</b>	<b>0.150*</b>	<b>0.200***</b>
	(0.0748)	(0.0802)	(0.0755)
all_manga_cnt_cat	-0.0217	-0.0761	-0.0466
	(0.0609)	(0.0580)	(0.0557)
Constant	-3.262***	-1.988**	-1.807**
	(0.908)	(0.911)	(0.835)
<b>Observations</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>535</b>

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## Discussion & Conclusion

The study attempted to deliver a description about manga consuming patterns and demographic features of manga consumers from Russian and Kazakhstan, and attempted to figure out determining factors for intentions to study Japanese language and to visit Japan, as well as tried to inquire about factors determining country image perception by manga readers.

The examined data indicated that the most significant factors positively contributing to all the three dependent variables (here the authors treated as dependent variables intention to visit Japan, intention to study Japanese and self-reported perceived country image of Japan) are general cultural awareness level, amount of finances spent on manga novels, and amount of volumes read per month. Even if a person has superficial knowledge of Japanese culture, this still has a positive impact on both the desire to travel to Japan and learn the language, and also associates with a positive attitude towards the image of Japan, at least on an emotional level.

According to a study's descriptive statistics, online platforms are by far the most popular way to explore Japanese comics. However, the authors did not look into the platforms' accessibility and rise in

numbers of manga read by followers, hence further studies can address this issue.

The intentions to study Japanese are influenced by existing language and cultural awareness, finances spent, age of initial exposure, manga volumes per month consumed, and frequency of manga reading. It is noticed that not only the number of artworks consumed positively contributes to the desire of learning Japanese, but also its estimated consistency. If a person does not read manga regularly, interest in Japanese language education is going to fade away. Therefore, hypothesis 1 (H.1) is confirmed as there is a correlation between consumption of Japanese manga and intentions to learn Japanese. However, the influence of regularity has to be investigated further.

The intentions to travel to Japan are mostly influenced by a person's occupation, cultural awareness, money spent, and volumes read per month. As the logit showed, the higher levels of manga comics consumed by a person from both states, the more a person wants to visit Japan, confirming hypothesis 2 (H.2).

The results of the logistics model also clarified the impact of manga consumption on positive perception of Japan. Respondents who share higher Japanese culture awareness and manga pieces read have an increasing likelihood of a positive percep-

tion of Japan. Additionally, spending money on graphic arts fans may serve as proxies for those who are tolerant of Japan and its products as readers are already consuming its exports.

Although the studied community of manga enthusiasts do not express strong positive attitudes towards Japan's integrity and competitiveness, they do express a clear positive attitude towards Japan as a culturally rich and aesthetic place. This leads to the conclusion that the attraction to Japan and its cultural exports is based mainly on the emotional component. This emotional linking to Japan as a motivator to read manga should be explored in further studies. The calculations demonstrated the correlation between increase in manga consumption amounts and positive perception of Japan confirming the hypothesis 3 (H.3).

The design of the study did not allow authors to trace statistically differences between manga consumers from Russia and Kazakhstan mainly due to the limited amount of responses among Kazakhstan-base manga consumers, hence further studies may attempt revealing manga consumption patterns as well as determinants of manga consumption of intentions to visit Japan, study Japanese language, and attitude towards Japan.

Breadth of the study and exploratory nature of some parts of it, with the limited amount to write, left authors with some assumptions that could not be tested, however, they deserve to be explored. Our study suggested the model where the country image appeared as a dependent variable, however, as it was highlighted by multiple studies before, the country image itself may appear as determining factor of consumers' intentions (e.g., Cho, Lee & Rha, 2017; Varpahovskis & Ayhan, 2020; Buhmann, 2016), hence for further studies the authors suggest to have at least two tests that would explore the role of perceived country image as an independent variable and as intervening variable in relation to such intentional like visiting Japan and studying Japanese language.

Future research into the field of Japanese graphic arts consumption should delve deeper into this subculture in Kazakhstan and Russia separately as current study lacks extensive literature on Japanese cultural exports in Central Asia. Additionally, investigating the motivations for travel to Japan and the impact of public diplomacy on cultural awareness is essential. Lastly, examining cultural awareness of Japan in other post-Soviet states can provide insights into regional perceptions of Japanese culture.

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