



Advertise on NYTimes.com

Japanese Universities Draw Foreign Students With Manga

By MIKI TANIKAWA
Published: December 26, 2010

TOKYO — When Zack Wood produces his illustrated stories online, his Japanese classmates say they look like American comics while his American friends say they look decidedly like manga, the popular form of comics that originated in Japan.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Ko Sasaki for the International Herald Tribune
Zack Wood, a Stanford graduate, enrolled at Kyoto Seika University in Japan to study manga, the popular comic form.

That is precisely the blend Mr. Wood, who grew up in the United States and is now studying at Kyoto Seika University's manga program, is angling for.

Mr. Wood, a 25-year-old graduate of [Stanford University](#) in California, and students like him have gravitated toward the modern Japanese arts, feeling they may help them advance their careers in animation, design, computer graphics and the business of promoting them.

And as Japanese universities work harder to attract students to fill their classrooms while the country's birth rate declines, more are offering degrees in manga and animation.

"I like it here because you get totally immersed in the skill training" of manga and animation, Mr. Wood said. "It has turned out to be a lot of fun."

Once they are armed with unique technical and industry knowledge, many international students are eager to gain work experience here upon graduation before heading back home.

Li Lin Lin, 28, a student from northeastern China who attends Digital Hollywood University, a school in Tokyo that specializes in animation and video games, said that upon finishing her degree, it would probably be "easy" to find a job in the animation field in China. The real trophy, she said, was getting job experience in the country of manga. Ms. Li is especially interested in working for a Japanese animation studio.

"I think you can do almost anything back home once you get a degree and animation

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE

I KEPT MY EYES OPEN FOR 127 HOURS

Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nytimes.com.
[Privacy Policy](#) | [What's This?](#)

Log In With Facebook

What's Popular Now

Navy Captain Loses Command Because of Videos



In Beebe, Ark., 5,000 Dead Blackbirds Drop From the Sky



More than 76 online degree programs, including Emergency Management. START NOW > American Military University

Advertise on NYTimes.com

Politics E-Mail



Keep up with the latest news from Washington with the daily Politics e-mail newsletter.

Sign Up input field

Sign Up

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

MOST POPULAR - BUSINESS DAY

E-MAILED BLOGGED VIEWED

1. Strained States Turning to Laws to Curb Labor Unions
2. Mocked as Uncool, the Minivan Rises Again
3. Struggling Borders to Meet With Publishers
4. DealBook: Facebook Deal Offers Freedom From Scrutiny
5. Metrics: In Investing, It's When You Start and When You Finish
6. The New Speed of Money, Reshaping Markets

"I think you can do almost anything back home once you get a degree and animation working experiences in Japan," said Ms. Li, emerging from her class on digital animation coloring one Saturday afternoon.

Hidenori Ohyama, senior director of corporate strategy at Toei Animation, said it was possible that international students could end up at Japanese companies like his. "If they apply, take our tests and pass, they will become employees just like anyone else," he said.

His company, a leading animation company that has produced "Dragonball" and "Slam Dunk" films, has Romanian and Korean producers, among other foreign citizens, Mr. Ohyama said.

None of the animation-themed Japanese university programs seem to be on the international radar yet, said Kison Chang, a training manager at Imagi Studios, an international animation production studio based in Hong Kong.

But he said students studying in Japan who ended up with solid work experiences at Japanese studios could be prime candidates for international recruitment.

"They would certainly be a great benefit to our professional line," he said. "They might bring in some kind of spirit which we may not know, or something we didn't realize that would be a benefit to us," he said.

Such individuals are not yet on his teams, nor at any of his rivals, he said.

Another possible reason that the programs have not received international attention is that the language of instruction is Japanese.

Tomoyuki Sugiyama, president of Digital Hollywood University, conceded that language might be a serious barrier, especially for Western students.

"If we had an English-based program at the graduate level, for example, we would be inundated with Western students almost instantly," he said.

Nevertheless, at Kyoto Seika University, which established the country's first manga program, the number of foreign students in it has risen to 57 currently out of a total of 800 students in the program from just 19 in 2000.

Since it was founded in 2005, Digital Hollywood University has seen its international students grow to 84 this year, roughly 20 percent of its student body, from just one when the school began.

"I want to see it grow to 50 percent of the entire students in the very near future," Mr. Sugiyama said.

In the past 10 years, more than a dozen university departments and programs have been created to offer a degree or a cluster of courses meant as a concentration in manga, animation and video games, and a similar number of vocational schools offer training in the art.

At Digital Hollywood, with campus buildings spread across the Akihabara area in Tokyo, the nation's capital for otaku, or nerds, students from Korea, China, Malaysia, Taiwan and other Asian countries, who constitute the bulk of the international student body, mingle with Japanese students.

The curriculum at the schools usually includes courses on drawing, coloring, and motion

7. Siemens Invests in Expanding Wind Power
8. DealBook: Goldman Offering Clients a Chance to Invest in Facebook
9. Public Workers Face Outrage as Budget Crises Grow
10. In Japan, Pfizer Is Short of Drug to Help Smokers

[Go to Complete List »](#)



Movies worth another look

ALSO IN MOVIES »

Excerpt: 'The Social Network'

Complete coverage of Awards Season

nytimes.com

MOVIES

ADVERTISEMENTS

Find your dream home with
The New York Times Real Estate



Follow The New York Times on Twitter

Watch today's top videos

See the news in the making. Watch
TimesCast, a daily news video.



Ads by Google

what's this?

[Paralegal Universites](#)

picture production, as well as film directing, writing plays and the study of copyright laws.

In recent years, universities in China and Korea have also begun offering manga and animation programs, drawing many students locally. But Keiko Takemiya, dean of the manga program at Kyoto Seika University and a famed manga artist, said there were differences.

“What they teach in Korea is mostly cartoons like you see in the U.S.,” she said. “They don’t quite teach the ‘story manga.’”

Story manga is known for its feature lengths and distinct story lines, as compared with the one-liner cartoons with gags and jokes.

Ms. Takemiya said that manga’s secret was in its limitless boundaries in form and content, and that the sheer number and the kind of manga available in Japan far exceed those in other countries.

And that includes adult-themed manga/animation that may or may not include sexually explicit content that many other countries are staying away from.

“What they teach in China is animation meant for children,” said Mr. Sugiyama of Digital Hollywood. “But what we teach is geared towards both children and adults.”

A professor at Kyoto Seika University, Jacqueline Berndt, one of the few non-Japanese faculty members in the field, said language and culture were an obstacle to wider acceptance of the programs.

In addition, she said, the manga and animation programs might not have yet been fully organized into a coherent body of knowledge and theories that scholars from other countries can understand and appreciate.

One reason the art has never been compiled into a structured body of knowledge: In a country where public education has been strictly administered, manga and animation have thrived in a creative way precisely because they operated outside the purview of the system, free from any supervision from the authorities.

“Manga flourished as a counterculture to the establishment academia,” Ms. Takemiya said. “There was actually a resistance to the idea of organizing the art into an academic program” in the industry.

Most Japanese scholars and teachers acknowledge that the body of knowledge they teach is still in the process of being organized into a system.

“We put together and offer classes that we believe will be of use to people who are going into the trade, but if we wait till manga and animation studies are fully structured and organized academically, that’s too late,” Mr. Sugiyama said. “In a world where creative content is digitalizing and globalizing, we need to train young people in these arts now.”

A version of this article appeared in print on December 27, 2010, on page B6 of the New York edition.

Find a Paralegal University that
Fits Your Schedule. Start Training!
MyEduSeek.com/ParalegalTraining

SIGN IN TO E-
MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS