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**Speech at *Manga now: three generations*, the British Museum  
by Ambassador Keiichi Hayashi  
on Wednesday 2 September 2015**

Japan is a major manga power. Its market for manga/comics amounts to about 20 billion pounds, with sales of about a billion copies a year; actually, manga/comics account for as much as one third of all the publications sold in Japan. A weekly manga magazine once boasted of selling six million copies in three months.

One ongoing series of the most popular comic has already sold 320 million copies in total. – 320 million! It is entitled “One Piece”, but what a piece! Indeed, in Japan manga comprise a major part of the culture and a serious business.

In Britain the market for manga is relatively small, and that is an understatement. The total number of copies of all types of publications sold in the UK comes to 700 million, out of which the share for comics is just two million, occupying barely a quarter of a percent. Actually that is not bad news, because I believe that the potential for growth is huge. In fact, Japanese manga have already secured a share of about one third of the comics market in the UK.

I have said manga are serious business. How serious? Well, I have a confession: my primary source of education was manga, particularly weekly and monthly manga magazines. Actually I was a regular and avid reader of manga magazines, both monthly and weekly, throughout my school years and up to the university days. The themes were so diverse: from serious history dramas to love comedies, sports, science fiction and horror stories.

But many contents were quite instructive, even educational. I still own a 54-volume series of *Manga History of Japan*, which was written with the help of academic experts and makes the learning of history exciting. Another series called “*The Drops of God*,” which has recorded modest global sales of 10 million copies, has become a bible for wine lovers all over the world.

Osamu Tezuka, arguably the greatest manga artist of all time, was famous for *Astro Boy*, but should also be recognized as having created the character of the *Jungle Emperor Leo*, the White Lion, 50 years before *The Lion King* was produced by Walt Disney.

Thanks to these weekly and monthly magazines, new manga artists have been introduced month by month, if not weekly. The three artists introduced today were once among such shining new stars in those manga magazines. I learned a lot about the history of Japan, politics and the geography of the world through manga. Now I am proud that manga and its variant anime are being globally recognized.

150 years ago Ukiyo-e, having been discarded by the Japanese, were discovered by the Europeans. The woodblock prints by Hiroshige, Sharaku and Kuniyoshi struck

impressionist artists with their bold lines, striking colours and daring themes

One reason why *ukiyo-e* and other compelling manifestations of Japanese art are now accessible to people the world over lies in the pioneering role played by institutions such as the British Museum. The special exhibition featuring manga in the Asahi Gallery which we are celebrating today follows in this tradition.

I hope that *Manga now: three generations*, along with the series of upcoming manga-related events, will inspire people about the genre by showing the beauty of the original drawings upon which manga are based as well as showcasing the potential of manga to engage people's emotions and aspirations, even having an educational impact, in a delightful way. Let us hope that manga will soon become a major representative of Japanese culture like Ukiyo-e.

Lastly, I note that this year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Asahi Shimbun Gallery. May I thank Asahi Shimbun for its valuable contribution to Japan-UK cultural exchange symbolised by the Gallery and, of course, for making this particular exhibition possible. Thank you.