

SHORT COMMUNICATION / RESEARCH NOTE

Moriarty the Patriot: Sherlockian Manga and the Game of City Living

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ABSTRACT

Manga is a form of Japanese comics that have become a global source of discourse, arguably reaching intellectual heights. It is often considered pure entertainment, although it contains potential for self-education. Barberis and Grüning (2021) observed that sociologists' interest in comics is older than one may suspect, traceable to at least the 1940s. This essay analyses the portrayal of urban living in a popular Japanese manga title, from the sociological perspective of social stratification and diversity. Using thematic analysis of Volumes 1 and 2 of *Moriarty the Patriot*, this essay highlights the *habitus* that a reader can develop from reading these manga, regarding the spoken and unspoken rules of living in cities corresponding to Bourdieu's concepts of *illusio* and *doxa* – formal and informal “rules of the game”, in navigating the dimensions of social stratification. A short public opinion survey was also conducted to gauge the public perception of manga. Manga could act as an unofficial walkthrough, a dramaturgical map of the lived realities of city life, a tool for socialisation. This study corresponds to the following SDGs: 3. Good Health and Well-Being; 4. Quality Education; 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Keywords: comics, manga, sociological imagination, habitus, illusio, doxa

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ABSTRAK

Manga adalah sejenis komik Jepun yang telah menjadi sumber wacana antarabangsa, yang semakin mencapai taraf ilmiah. Manga seringkali dianggap hanya hiburan, walaupun ia mengandungi potensi untuk pembelajaran sendiri. Barberis and Grüning (2021) memerhatikan bahawa minat para sarjana dalam komik lebih terasas dalam sejarah berbanding tanggapan umum, dan boleh dikesan sehingga ke zaman 1940an. Karangan ini menganalisis paparan kehidupan bandar di dalam sebuah judul manga Jepun, dari perspektif sosiologi iaitu stratifikasi sosial dan kepelbagaian. Dengan menggunakan analisis tematik terhadap Judul 1 dan 2 manga *Moriarty the Patriot*, karangan ini mengetengahkan peraturan-peraturan ketara dan tidak ketara mengenai kehidupan di bandar, dan bagaimana ini dijadikan modal budaya yang merangkumi *habitus*, *illusio*, dan *doxa* (konsep oleh Pierre Bourdieu) untuk menangani stratifikasi sosial. Kajian ini berkait dengan SDG berikut: 3. Good Health and Well-Being; 4. Quality Education; 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.



Kata kunci: komik, manga, imaginasi sosiologikal, habitus, illusio, doxa

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INTRODUCTION: COMICS AND MANGA

This essay delves into a brief history of comics as an educational medium, by first tracing its origins, then the beginnings of sociological interest in it, a survey regarding the public perception of manga, followed by examples of comics that focus on highlighting the workings of a city. It connects to the theme of shared urban spaces, especially the lived realities of cities, which contain an intersection of various sociological dimensions such as age, gender, social class, religion, politics, and different ability. Today, city living has been enhanced by the rapid growth of technology, possibly creating a further digital divide that is possible to relate to socioeconomic stratification, as well as age cohorts. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been created to address a multitude of quality-of-life concerns, with a substantial number of these revolving around urbanisation concerns. For a city-dweller, how does one navigate the written and unwritten rules, or *illusio* and *doxa*, of surviving in the urban jungle? This essay asserts that certain comic books, or manga, possess educational potential that can assist in the socialisation of a youth towards the norms and mores of city living.

Sociologists' interest in comics have existed since at least 1944, when the American Journal of Education published a special issue devoted to comics (Barberis & Grüning, 2021). Given its immediate influence among youth, the authors saw comics as a social force, since its language and characters might be harnessed for purposes beyond entertainment (cf. Gruenberg, 1944; in Barberis & Grüning, 2021). In terms of comics' sociological influence, Mickwitz (2020) had even considered how comics had asserted their presence as a vehicle for advocacy and representation in the context of a refugee crisis, related to the "forced migration" and ongoing global crisis of the displacement of people (a humanitarian crisis).

The definition of comics is neither static nor absolute; many are still in debate over the actual all-encompassing criterion. However, for the purpose of our analysis, comics are defined as 'stories told through a sequence of juxtaposed images', a shortform provided after much lexical distillation by independent comic shop Page 45 (Aggleton, 2018). Cohn (2015)'s definition is also cited, in which comics are "un-defined", by tying the usual characteristics of "images, text, and sequentiality", to the "industry that produces comics, the community that embraces them, the content which they represent, and the avenues in which they appear", providing a cultural context for the demarcation of comics from other art forms. Visual language is the crucial element, which is communicative across cultures.

Manga has historically been a Japanese art form, evolving from *ukiyo-e*, eventually gaining place as a contemporary form of entertainment. Manga is a form of Japanese comics that originated from Japan in a form known as *ukiyo-e*, woodblock prints, or "pictures of the floating world" (Brenner, 2007; in Chan, 2018). Its outstanding characteristics include a unique

drawing style, in which characters are depicted with large expressive eyes, up-close perspectives of characters' facial expressions, framed in panels laced with textual vocalization of sounds, as well as explanatory notes or comments by the mangaka (manga artist). Manga genres are categorised based on the age and gender of its target readers, for example, shonen manga (for teenage boys), shojo manga (for teenage girls), josei manga (for women), and seinen manga (for men) (Wong, 2006; in Chan, 2018). Compared to other forms of multimedia, manga encourages its readers to use their own imagination, and hence engages the reader in an interactive social learning process. The reader is able to utilise their sociological imagination to mentally locate the individual, which is symbolised by the manga character or characters, within the reader's own social reality. In reading manga, one undergoes a different experience compared to viewing a film, as in the latter one does not need to use one's imagination so intently and completely to understand what is happening. Manga's ability to be evocative could surpass that of reading novels, as there are visual cues in addition to text. Furthermore, manga is often a multi-volume affair, with a continuous storyline, compiled from monthly serials published in specialised manga magazines. Thus, this structure requires readers to possess an understanding of the social, cultural, and historical context of the manga's theme, especially if it is a historical manga (Chan, 2023).

MANGA AS EDUCATIONAL PLATFORM

Chan (2023) previously observed through a thematic analysis of selected Malaysian manga, that manga is a dramaturgical and communication tool that could be used not only in entertainment but also in education. To gauge the perception of comics, and manga in particular, as a medium of informal learning, a survey was conducted at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) with 95 complete responses, including undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as staff. The following are the results obtained from the survey.

QUESTION 3 Have you ever read comics?

95 responses

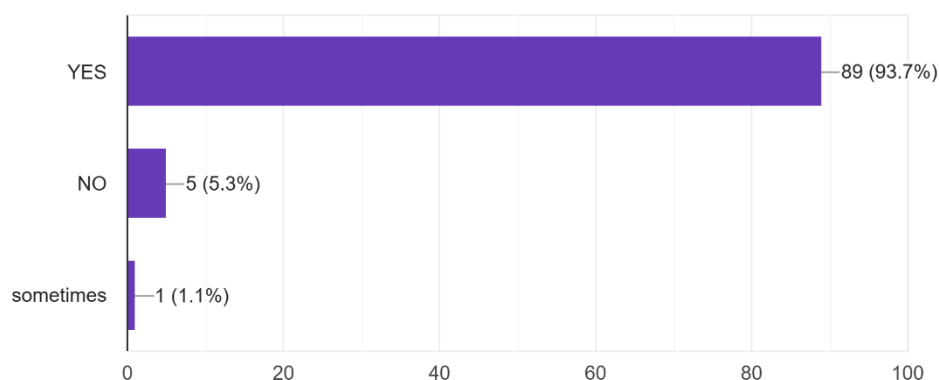


Figure 1 - Experience with reading comics

The majority of respondents, at almost 94%, reported having read comics, thus this shows that they are familiar with the platform.

QUESTION 4 Have comics ever helped you learn a new subject, skills, or idea?

95 responses

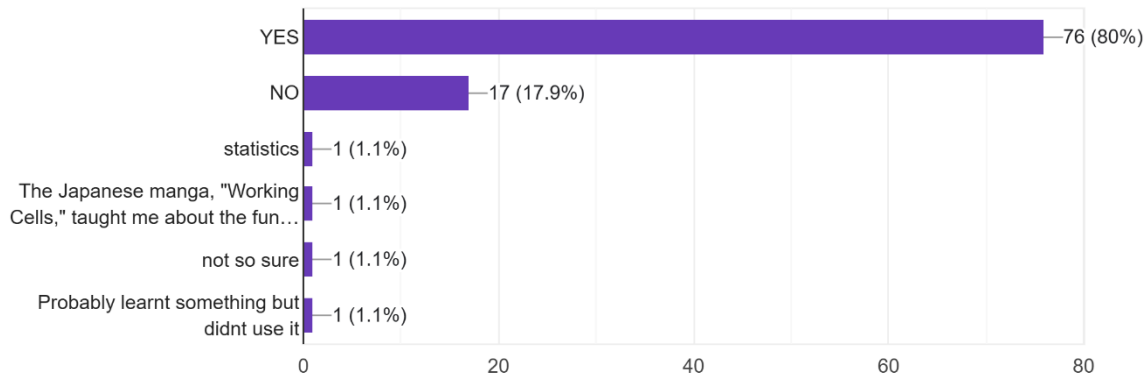


Figure 2 - Learning experience with comics

80% of respondents reported having learnt a new subject, skills, or idea from reading comics. This shows that for the respondents, comics contain the possibility of broadening one's general knowledge.

QUESTION 7 Have you read Japanese manga?

95 responses

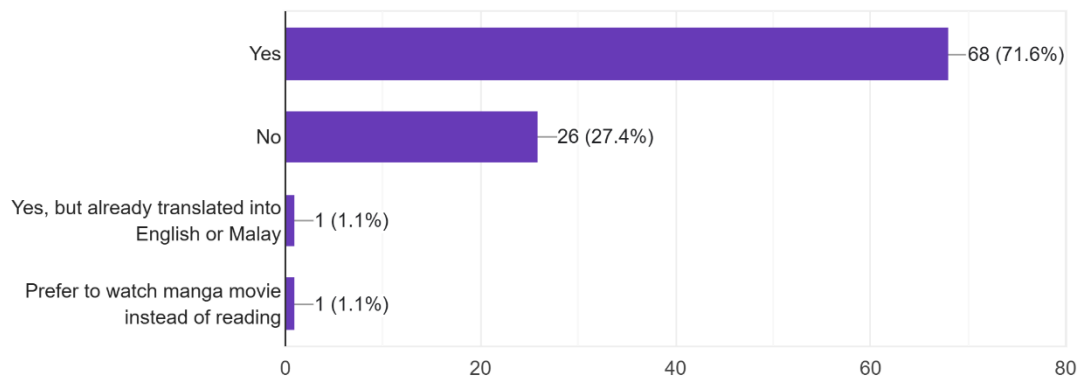


Figure 3 - Experience with reading Japanese manga

Almost 72% of respondents claimed to have read Japanese manga, showing that a majority of the respondents are familiar with the genre.

QUESTION 8 Have you learned anything specific about Japanese culture from Japanese manga?
 95 responses

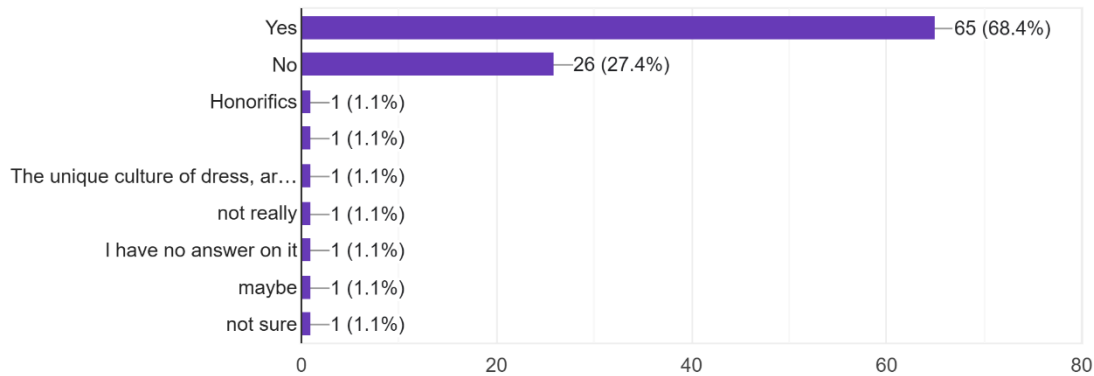


Figure 4 - Learning outcomes from Japanese manga

Almost 68% of respondents reported having learnt useful knowledge from reading manga. Among the items learnt include those such as clothing and costume like “Kimono”; “the details about ramen”; “food (dorayaki) history (kyoto as old capital of Japan)”; and “History, the spirit of the Yamato people, food culture, clothing culture, architectural culture, etc.” These fall under the knowledge categories of “language, culture, food, fashion, history”, as one respondent spelt out.

ILLUSIO AND DOXA ENCODED: THE UNOFFICIAL WALKTHROUGH TO THE GAME OF CITY LIVING

Bourdieu (1984) introduced the term cultural capital to describe the worldview, life experiences, and lifestyle preferences of select groups of people demarcated by their relations to the means of production. Cultural capital incorporates three forms: objectified, institutionalised, and embodied. The embodied form is the habitus, or lived dispositions; the objectified form is the consumption of commodities; and the institutionalised form includes the legitimacy accorded to forms of cultural capital by social institutions such as education (Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Chan, 2016a; Chan, 2016b; Chan, 2016c). Within the “fields” to which they belong, an individual’s power, or “capital”, is both a weapon to use to their advantage in the game and a stake to be won (Harrington et al, 2015). The amount and type of “capital” an individual possesses determines their relative position in the “field” (Harrington et al, 2015). The “rules of the game” determine this value, and hence the “field”’s symbolic capital is the ultimate basis of power (Bourdieu, 1977; Harrington et al, 2015). The “rules of the game” is also known as “illusio”, a concept developed by Bourdieu, defined as “the belief that the ‘game’ we collectively agree to play is worth playing, that the fiction we collectively elect to accredit constitutes reality” (Cuille, 1997; Chan, 2017a). An individual’s “habitus”, or internal dispositions, enable them to use “doxa” for playing the game effectively (Harrington et al, 2015). “Doxa” comprises the taken-for-granted shared knowledge of the values, practices, and associated language of the field[*ibid*]. Failure to know or abide by the “illusio” as well as the

“doxa” may result in social exclusion through the lack of “capital”, or as Chan (2017b) terms it, “anti-capital” (Chan, 2017b).

We shall take as the starting point, a youth who is fresh out of school, just at the cusp of adulthood and past the threshold of adolescence, who is at the psychosocial stage of identity vs. identity confusion (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022), and who is newly introduced to the city. At this point in their life, the individual “weighs out their previous experiences, societal expectations, and their aspirations in establishing values and ‘finding themselves’ (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). They are not only in need of a roadmap to the city, but also to discovering their “true selves”. For socialisation agents, the youth has their education, their peers, their family, and the mass media. Comics fall into the latter. It is not always the case that one is situated comfortably in a functional relationship with one’s peers or family, and one can be unreceptive to formal education at times. Hence the power of mass media, a less coercive medium, which many consider to be unassuming and approachable, may reveal a wealth of knowledge without appearing to play an authoritative role. Such mediums are conducive to self-learning and autodidacticism, where the reader can learn through exploration, or pick up facts indirectly. This tends to increase the youth’s interest in their surroundings. This essay thus takes the role of highlighting just how comics, in particular manga, can do just this, that is, provide guidance in a non-authoritarian way, about the unspoken rules of city life. Indeed, the sociologist Georg Simmel had linked the metropolis to one’s mental life, chronicling the individual’s struggle to maintain independence of mind in the bustle of the city, as early as 1903. One such example would be from the illustrious God of Manga, Osamu Tezuka (Power, 2009), who also produced, among many others, the manga Metropolis. Metropolis is a legendary 1949 graphic novel about a beautiful, artificially created girl of the future, who is essentially a robot, but unaware of it, wandering in search of her parents amidst a desolate world populated by humans and their enslaved robots. The main theme of this oeuvre was the nature of humanity in a technological society, thematically similar to his other landmark work, Astro Boy. Tezuka was commended for his many works commenting on society’s fixation with technology. However, for the purpose of this essay, a recent manga which focuses strongly on the theme of social stratification in an urban context will be analysed.

SHERLOCK’S NEMESIS AS THE GUIDE TO CITY LIFE TENSIONS

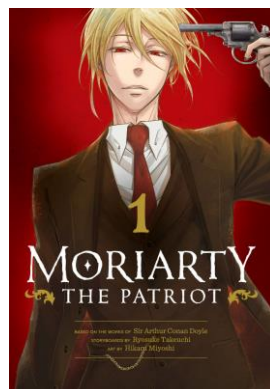


Figure 5 - The front cover of Moriarty the Patriot Vol. 1. Note: Don't try this pose at home.

The choice of manga for this case study is *Yuukoku no Moriarty*, or *Moriarty the Patriot*, by Ryosuke Takeuchi and Hikaru Miyoshi (2016 to present) published in English by Viz Media. It was chosen based on the individual manga's suitability as critical discourse, from criteria such as accuracy of social and historical reality (no magical realms), and its popularity which suggests a wide readership. The manga's main theme revolves around social class discrimination in 19th century Britain. The author has used this manga as a case study in their sociology class, hosted also on their YouTube online teaching channel:

[Malaysian manga as dramaturgy of everyday defined realities by Dr. Rachel Chan Suet Kay \(Part 1\) \(youtube.com\);](#)

[Malaysian manga as dramaturgy of everyday defined realities by Dr Rachel Chan Suet Kay \(Part 2\) \(youtube.com\);](#)

[Peeref Webinar 5 Minute Research Ideation Challenge Entry: Malaysian Manga as Educational Platform \(youtube.com\)](#)

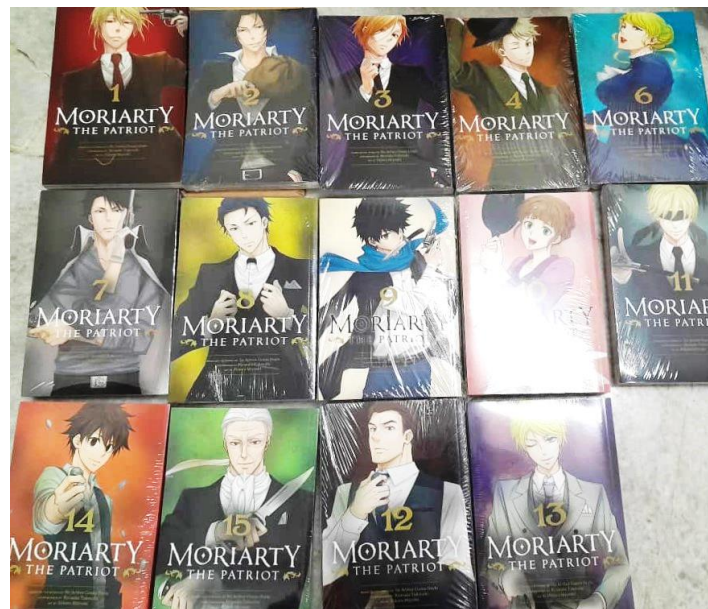


Figure 6 - The author's collection of *Moriarty the Patriot* translated to English by Viz Media, funded by Sumitomo Foundation 23804004.

Moriarty the Patriot's narrative derives from the Sherlock Holmes series by Arthur Conan Doyle, and is a retelling of the origin story of Holmes' antagonist, Professor Moriarty. It is written by Ryōsuke Takeuchi and illustrated by Hikaru Miyoshi, and was serialised in *Jump Square* magazine beginning Aug 2016 and was adapted into anime starting Oct 2020. This manga is a creative medium of broadcasting social critique, as it uses a sociological analysis of inequality, focusing on social class from a Marxian perspective.

"In the late 19th century, Great Britain rules over a quarter of the world. Nobles sit in their fancy homes in comfort and luxury, while the working-class slaves away at their jobs. When young Albert James Moriarty's upper-class family adopts two lower-class orphans, the cruelty the boys experience at his family's hands cements Albert's hatred of the nobility he was born into." (Volume 1, *Moriarty the Patriot*, Viz.com)

The manga is set in 19th century Britain and thus features an ethnically homogeneous cast of European characters, with appearances that match. This manga focuses almost exclusively on the nobility in Britain during the first Industrial Revolution and their treatment of commoners which is depicted as often being negative, discriminatory, and abusive. However, not all commoners are depicted as blanket good guys and neither are all aristocrats made to be cruel – that is to say there are a reasonable number of exceptions.

The main family in question is an aristocratic one, the House of Moriarty, with three brothers consisting of an Earl (or Count) who has two adopted orphan brothers, and their extended “crime network”. Alternately, the nemesis of the protagonist Moriarty is also portrayed, that is Sherlock Holmes, his housemate Dr. John Watson, and their landlady Ms. Hudson (as well as Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock’s elder brother). The families in question are not biological nor nuclear families but have a non-kinship-based structure.

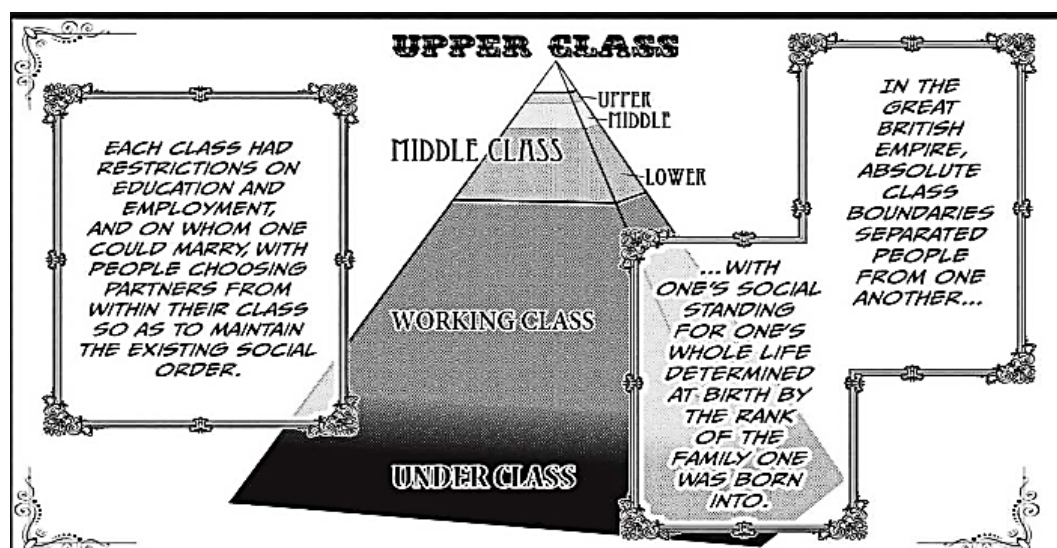


Figure 7 - A literal panel explaining social class in Marxian terms in the manga Moriarty the Patriot

Stratification is a core area in sociology (Kenworthy 2007), where one of the main goals of classical sociology was to measure and explain the reason for the existence and persistence of stratification” (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). The social conflict theorist, Karl Marx, used the concept of social class to describe social inequality in terms of relations to the means of production (Giddens & Sutton 2013). The end result of stratification, which is the segmentation of individuals into categories, is inequality.

The central dimension of power examined in this manga is that of social class and estate. The Moriarty brothers believe in aspiring towards equality, though they aim to achieve it by illegal means, in a fashion akin to Robin Hood by vigilantist social justice. As this manga acknowledges from the very beginning itself, it is a tale of a well-known fictional antagonist of the Sherlock Holmes series by Arthur Conan Doyle, who is Professor William James Moriarty (name slightly adapted by the manga). He is a known “Napoleon of Crime” and in this incarnation is known as the “Lord of Crime”. Thus, moral values are not the main or direct concern here, though by elimination and critical reading, the manga appeals to one’s sense of social justice, as social class stratification is persistent even in contemporary society. William

is often shown to interweave mathematical puzzles into his master plans, and creates mysteries for Sherlock to solve, using this as his grand design. However, William is shown to not be just any crook, but one that has social reform (albeit somewhat revolutionary) in his mind. The front stage which they aim to portray is that of the perfect crime, while the backstage is the dramaturgical medium of revealing the exploitations that are initially hidden but that are exposed when a staged crime beckons an investigation. These fictional crimes that the protagonists seek to expose in the plot include child abuse, slavery, substance abuse, sexual harassment, and more violent crimes such as murder, all depicted in a way that visually explains its underlying mechanisms to aid the uninitiated reader, while explaining why it is wrong and must be stopped. The task of William and Sherlock is to eliminate these various forms of social injustice, by playing the role of "ethical criminals". In here, famous fictional characters like a certain suave British spy and Jack the Ripper are also inserted, though with a twist.

The city is depicted in contrast between the Whitechapel area, which is primarily inhabited by the working class¹, and the nobles' locales. Durham is also shown to contain a contradiction between "town" and "gown", much like the history of Oxford (Collison, 2012). Oppositions between the posh aristocratic students and the working-class townsfolk form a crucial part of the setting. The urban-rural divide is made clear. Even when the Moriarty brothers use both London and Durham as their base, they choose it for different reasons. The iconoclasm of the original Doylean Sherlock Holmes universe with regards to the city has been observed. Weise (2017) for example, had noted that the Sherlock Holmes canon contained "a very iconic and somewhat stereotypical image of the city", in which it is described as "A foggy, smoke ridden city, congested with traffic, populated by exotic figures, which in the nineteenth century has become the heart of a global Empire" (Weise, 2017). But nowhere is this more pronounced than in a graphic novel version of the many Holmesian pastiches that exist out there. The beginnings of diversity, as observed by Vertovec (2007), had already been germinating in this famous narrative, where superdiversity is expressed as "a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced", and "distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of immigrants who have arrived over the last decade, who are: new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified" (Vertovec, 2007). This era that was depicted in Moriarty the Patriot was described in Vertovec (2007)'s paper as having the characteristics of "significant immigrant influxes in the 1800s – 1900s", "a heterogeneity of people described by poet Wordsworth (Holmes, 2007)²", and "people divided between cosmopolitan vs xenophobic attitudes (Statt 1995)". The migratory trends that Vertovec (2007) observed had featured in some way in the selected manga, Moriarty the Patriot, which remained true to the iconoclasm of the Doylean vision of Sherlock Holmes, a man who was upper middle class in cultural capital but clear in his intentions to help the downtrodden. The trick was in the

¹ For more history on the class divide in Whitechapel, there are other sources, such as Oakley (2023): <https://www.eastlondonhistory.co.uk/visit-whitechapel-east-london/#:~:text=The%20East%20End's%20Whitechapel%20may,attractive%2C%20eclectic%20and%20varied%20history.>

² Not Sherlock.

transposition of these characteristics into another protagonist as the main character, a character directly meant to be an educator and reformer³.

In conclusion, this visual narrative of city life and its tensions, which derives from the original ideas of Arthur Conan Doyle, but excellently flipped and portrayed in graphics by Ryosuke Takeuchi and Hikaru Miyoshi, provides the young reader with a vicarious and cathartic glimpse into the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of living in the city. Having performed a thematic analysis of the Moriarty the Patriot manga and anime, having used it as in-class supplementary teaching material, as well as having conducted the opinion survey above, the observations stand testament to the power of manga as a supplementary learning tool for both formal and informal self-learning.

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³ Real-life scholars have studied the fictional Professor Moriarty's scholarly works. See for example: Jenkins, A. (2013). *On the Title of Moriarty's 'Dynamics of an Asteroid'*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1302.5855>



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