

# War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu: The humanism of his epic manga 手塚治虫の作品における戦争と平和—その長編漫画のヒューマニズム

Yuki Tanaka

## War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu: The humanism of his epic manga

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### Introduction

From late November 1944, the U.S. Air Force began aerial bombing of Japan's main islands. By the time the war ended on 15 August 1945, the United States had dropped a total of 160,800 tons of conventional and incendiary bombs, as well as two atomic bombs. More than ninety percent of these bombs were dropped by B-29 bombers during the last five months of the Asia-Pacific War. In the end, almost 100 cities and more than 300 towns and villages throughout Japan were targeted, causing more than 1 million casualties including 560,000 deaths. It is said that seventy percent of those killed were women and children. The great destruction and carnage from this intense indiscriminate bombing campaign imposed severe physical as well as psychological damage on Japan's society and people.

Ironically, the U.S. bombing campaign provided the vital life experience for remarkably creative expressions by some young survivors, who later became writers, artists, musicians or anti-war and peace activists. The US destruction thus contributed to creating some of the most important expressions of post-war Japanese culture. One of the most outstanding examples of this is Tezuka Osamu, a manga writer, who is now known worldwide as the creator of Astro

Boy.

Tezuka Osamu was born in November 1928 in Osaka and died at the age of 60, in February 1989. In his relatively short life he produced more than 700 manga, both long and short, which in total amount to some 150,000 pages. I suggest that four major features underlie this large body of work: respect for the natural environment, respect for the life of every living creature, a deep scepticism towards science and civilization, and a strong commitment to anti-war and peace causes.

Here I focus on some of his early work from the 1950s, while briefly introducing his later work. I also compare heroes in Tezuka's epic manga with superheroes in American comics.

### Personal Background

Tezuka's family history had a strong influence on his ideology, which formed the basis for much of his work. Both his great-great-grandfather, Tezuka Ryosen, and great-grandfather Tezuka Ryoan were "*rangakui*" (medical doctors who studied Dutch medical science) in the late Edo period, and belonged to a small group of progressive doctors who set up the anti-smallpox vaccination clinic in Kanda, Edo in 1858. They and their colleagues strove to introduce modern Western medical technologies into Japanese feudal society, overcoming the widespread and deep mistrust of "alien operations" among the general population as well as traditional doctors. (Between 1981 and 1986, Tezuka produced an 11 volume long epic entitled *Hidamari no Ki*,

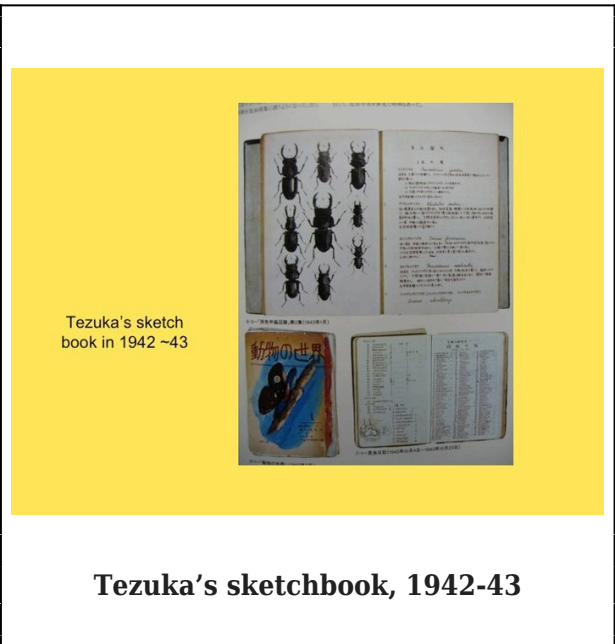
*The Tree Under Sunlight*, a semi biographical manga on Tezuka Ryoan and Ryosen.) Tezuka’s grandfather, Tezuka Taro, was a lawyer who served as chief public prosecutor of the Osaka District Court and as the director of the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Nagoya and Nagasaki. He was also one of the founders of the Kansai Law School (the present Law School of Kansai University). Tezuka’s father, Tezuka Yutaka, an office worker for Sumitomo Metalwork Industry, was deeply interested in photography and film. In the 1930s, at a time when going to the cinema was still a rare recreational activity for many Japanese, he had a film projector called “Patty Baby,” which he used to screen Charlie Chaplin films and Disney animations at home. Tezuka’s mother, Fumiko, was the daughter of a senior officer of the Japanese Imperial Army, Lieutenant General Hattori Hideo, who had remarkably liberated ways of thinking for someone of her background (she bought many manga as well as other literature including Japanese translations of foreign novels and adventure stories for her children). It is obvious that Osamu inherited many characteristic elements from his parents and forebears. These elements are reflected in his work and contributed to the unique style of his manga.

In 1933, when Tezuka was five years old, his family moved from Osaka to Takarazuka.



### Tezuka with his parents and sister

Even though it was a newly established small town in a rural district, surrounded by rice fields and mountains, it was a cultural centre: the Takarazuka Grand Theatre, where the extremely popular all-female Takarazuka Revue constantly performed and still runs spectacular shows, was built in 1924, and other amusement facilities such as Takarazuka Luna Park soon followed. In his boyhood, Tezuka developed an acute interest in insects and astronomy, finding these aspects of rural life fascinating after having moved from an urban area of Osaka city. From his early years at elementary school, he spent hours collecting insects and meticulously recording them with detailed drawings.



Tezuka’s sketchbook, 1942-43

Through such activities, he came to embrace a profound respect for the natural environment and for the life of every living creature. At the same time, he became fascinated by musical and theatrical performances, as his mother often took him to the Takarazuka Revue. His fascination for Takarazuka musicals must also have stimulated his fondness for creating

stories, and while at school he often produced manga with interesting plot lines, which circulated not only amongst his classmates but also his teachers.



**The Takarazuka Revue, 1930**

The Sino-Japanese War started in 1931 when Tezuka was 3 years old and the Pacific War started in 1941 when he entered junior high school at the age of 13. In summer 1944, he was sent to a special training school set up for physically weak junior high school boys, to do intensive military drills. However he became seriously ill, having contracted a severe skin disease. From September that year, junior high school classes were cancelled, and he was mobilized with his fellow students to work at an army arsenal in Osaka.

From the end of 1944, U.S. forces began bombing Japanese cities, and from the following March fire-bombing intensified, targeting every major city and town throughout Japan. Osaka city was attacked several times. The first bombing raid continued for three hours from midnight on 13 March 1945, when 70,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on the city, and 3,000 civilians were killed. From 1 June, Osaka, the largest city in the Kansai area, was repeatedly attacked - on 7, 15 and 26 June,

10 and 24 July and 14 August. In the last bombing raid, on 14 August (the day before Japan's official surrender), 700 one-ton bombs were dropped from 150 B-29 bombers. The main target was the army arsenal near Osaka Castle, but some bombs fell on Kyobashi railway station, where two rows of passenger trains had just arrived, approaching from opposite directions. Many civilians were killed by direct hits from these bombs. Overall, in total, more than 10,000 civilians of Osaka city were believed to have been killed in this series of U.S. bombing raids.

Tezuka experienced the fire-bombings of Osaka while working at the arsenal. He was often reprimanded for drawing comics rather than concentrating on his work and as punishment he was ordered to climb the watchtower in the factory yard to look out for B-29 bombers and give the warning if he saw them. He later described one air raid:

'As the air raid warning siren began, I saw that as usual, a formation of U.S. bombers was heading towards us along the Yodogawa River. As soon as I thought "here they come," incendiary bombs showered down on us, making a loud noise like a heavy rain. Bombs streamed down one after another onto the factory. Just when I thought that this would be the end of my life, exposed on the top of the watchtower, a bomb hit the roof just two meters directly below me. Later I heard that this bomb killed all the people who had rushed into the air raid shelter underneath this building. I tumbled down the watchtower, screaming as if I had gone mad. All around me, the ground was a sea of fire ... and houses in every direction were burning with



leaping flames making a rumbling sound. Then rain with black soot came down. I walked to the top of the riverbank of the Yodogawa. From there, I saw many big craters hollowed by bombs, where numerous objects which resembled human bodies were lying on top of one another (The bodies were so fractured that they did not look like human beings.)'

In 1974, Tezuka produced the autobiographical manga entitled *The Paper Fortress (Kami no Toride)*, describing this unforgettable experience. His miraculous survival during this fire-bombing episode had a profound impact on his ideas of war and peace, and also imbuing him with a deep mistrust of military leaders and politicians. He also feared the abuse of scientific knowledge which could create destructive weapons such as firebombs and atomic bombs.



**Victims of the bombing**

In July 1945, shortly before the end of the Pacific War, Tezuka entered the special medical college of the Osaka Imperial University. Due to the shortage of medical doctors at the time, the special medical college system was established, by which some students entered the college straight from junior high school. Tezuka completed this medical course in 1951, but chose to work as a professional manga writer rather than as a doctor. However, his study of medical science reinforced his respect for the life of every living creature that he had been nurturing from his early boyhood. Indeed, he maintained his interest in medical science throughout his lifetime, and in 1961, despite his extremely busy work schedule, he submitted his dissertation on "heteromorphic spermatid," and gained a doctoral degree in medicine.

The observation of death in war and the revival of life from the devastation of war infused Tezuka with a life-long motivation to create manga. In a discussion of his work with the well-known modern Japanese artist, Yokoo Tadanori, Tezuka explained that he always felt a strong vitality in the movement of the shapes in manga and animation, and he felt that to some extent this was due to the fact that his own life during the war had been completely



**Osaka bombing viewed from the watchtower**

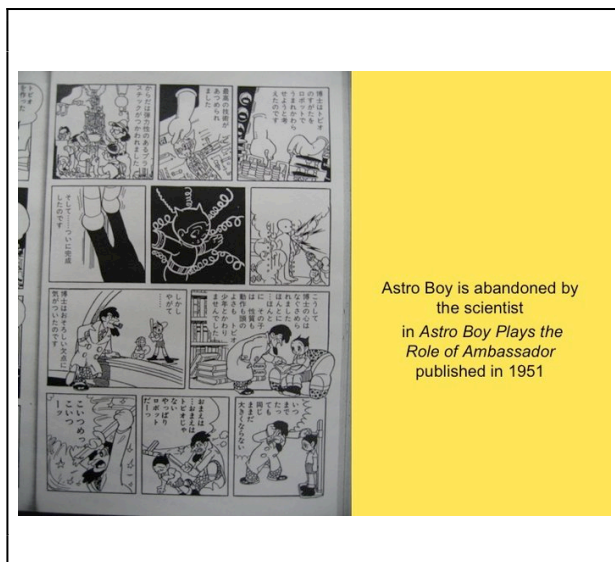
lacking in vitality - he felt almost as if he were dead. When the war ended, he said, the feeling of revival in his own life was indescribable. Since then, he always found tremendous energy in drawing manga.

An avid reader of novels, adventure stories, and theater scripts, Tezuka was influenced by many world-renowned writers, in particular works by Karel Čapek such as *R.U.R*, *War with Newts* and *Power and Glory*, H.G. Wells' *First Men in the Moon*, *Goethe's Faust*, and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Tezuka drew on the profound humanity of these writers' works to create his own stories.

### **Astro Boy: A Humane Robot**

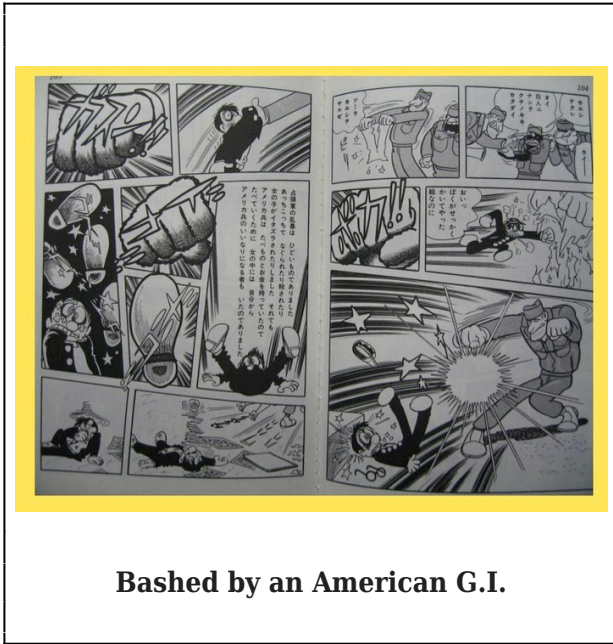
Many of Tezuka's early works strongly reflect his ideas about war, peace, and humanity, drawing on his life and death experience during the fire bombing. For example, *Astro Boy* was not originally a superhero robot, and never became a superhero, but was a lonely and timid boy who was abandoned by the scientist who created him, Professor Tenma. *Astro Boy* was created as a substitute for the scientist's real son who had died in a car accident. Yet, the scientist disposed of *Astro Boy* when he realized that a robot cannot replace a real person.

It seems that the orphan *Astro Boy* evoked the numerous war orphans marginalized by post-war Japanese society. When the manga of *Astro Boy* was published in 1951, six years after the war, there were many war orphans throughout Japan. Like them, *Astro Boy* had to gain his own identity, striving to be accepted by society through his contribution to the community. *Astro Boy* succeeded by acting as a peace mediator. This is why the title of the first episode of *Astro Boy* was *Astro Boy Plays the Role of Ambassador (Atomu Taishi)*.



This manga tells of aliens living on another planet who are forced to migrate to Earth following the explosion of their planet. These space refugees are identical to the human beings on Earth, except that the aliens have bigger ears. The people of Earth initially welcome their alien doubles, but soon, faced with a food crisis, they begin fighting. Here we find Tezuka's criticism of war and conflict through his simple but profound question: how can identical human beings fight and kill each other. Through this manga we see that Tezuka's concept of a "united Earth" is already taking shape, a concept which he elaborated more comprehensively in later works. Tezuka learnt first-hand the absurdity of fighting

between different races not only through the terrifying fire-bombings of World War II but also through his encounter with violence during the Allied occupation immediately after the war. He was bashed by an American soldier when he tried to stop the soldier from tearing up a picture he had drawn to sell to the G.I.s.



**Bashed by an American G.I.**

Astro Boy does not have a double among the aliens as he was artificially created, and therefore can act as a mediator as he does not belong either with the human beings or with the aliens. Eventually he succeeds in making peace between the two races by arranging that half the humans together with half the alien migrants will leave Earth to find another planet to live peacefully. It is interesting to note that, while many post-war monster-invasion stories, most notably represented by the film *Godzilla*, are constructed on the theme of the ultimate survival of the Japanese in confrontation with bizarre and threatening “others,” the main theme of this first episode of *Astro Boy* is “reconciliation” between the two different species. Indeed, in the following seventeen year-long series of *Astro Boy* episodes, reconciliation remained the core theme of these humane robot stories, although the original

theme of confrontation and reconciliation between two different races developed into the conflict between humans and robots.



**Astroboy**

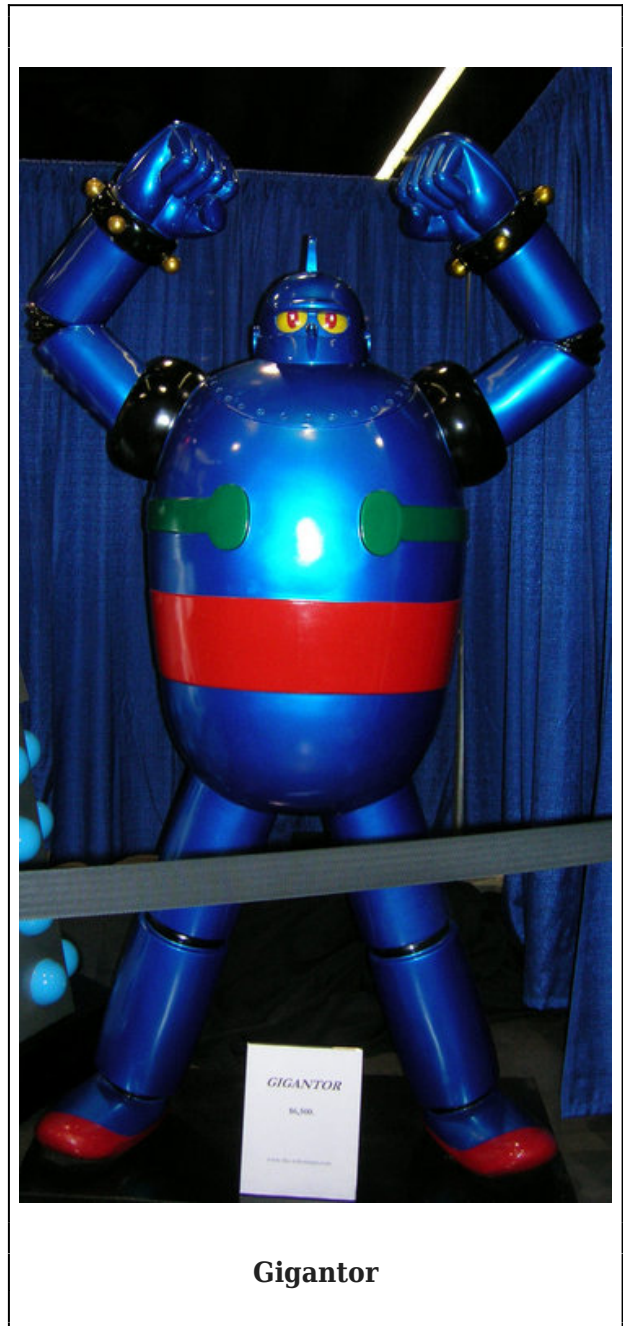
It is also interesting to emphasize that *Astro Boy* has the ability to think for himself and acts to fulfill human happiness. By contrast, other popular robot manga heroes that appeared in the 1950s, for example *Gigantor* (*Tetsujin 28-go*) by Yokoyama Mitsuteru, simply obey their controllers who ultimately decide what is right or wrong for their robots. Therefore, these robots can easily switch from battling for justice to being a villain and vice versa, depending on who controls them. Unlike these robots which are simply mechanical constructions, time and again *Astro Boy* is put



in a quandary when other robots rebel against humans, as he often cannot rationally decide whose side he should take. Yet inevitably, he eventually accomplishes his mission to fulfill human happiness, often by his own self-sacrifice through injury or destruction. Thus, in many episodes, Astro Boy goes through cycles of death and rebirth, being repeatedly repaired or rebuilt. Indeed, the last episode of the Astro Boy series, which concluded in March 1966, ended with Astro Boy's ultimate self-sacrifice. In this story, Astro Boy is completely destroyed and cannot be repaired, after he tries to protect Dr. Rosso who is attacked by the robot Blue Knight (*Ao-kishi*), the leader of the rebellious robots against humans. These robots are products of Dr. Rosso himself. Thus, unlike superheroes in American comics, Astro Boy is neither immortal nor invincible. It is not possible for Astro Boy to become a superhero as he always suffers from the dilemma between self-consciousness as a robot and that as a human being. Although he remains forever young and physically never ages, Astro Boy is just like an ordinary human boy, who is always imperfect and keeps learning from his own experiences and encounters with life's difficulties.

The crucial difference between Astro Boy and Gigantor is the universal nature of Astro Boy. Astro Boy moves around the world, seeking peace and justice. He transcends nationality and ethnicity and freely crosses national borders. He eventually allies with anyone who stands for justice and fights against villainy, although he often finds it difficult to determine what is really just. On the other hand, in the manga stories of Gigantor, the good guys always look Japanese, and they ride in planes or vehicles decorated with the Japanese flag, while the bad guys always look Caucasian. In the world of Astro Boy, conflicts usually do not occur between different nations or different races, but between immoral adults and innocent children. In this sense, this manga for children contains a profound criticism of adult

activities, most of which are closely intertwined with such factors as politics, nationality, ethnicity, religion and racial and cultural differences. This universal aspect to Astro Boy's character is undoubtedly the key reason for his immense, world-wide popularity.



**Gigantor**

It seems that Tezuka was clearly conscious of the famous SF story, *R.U.R.*, written by Karel Čapek in 1920, in which Čapek invented the

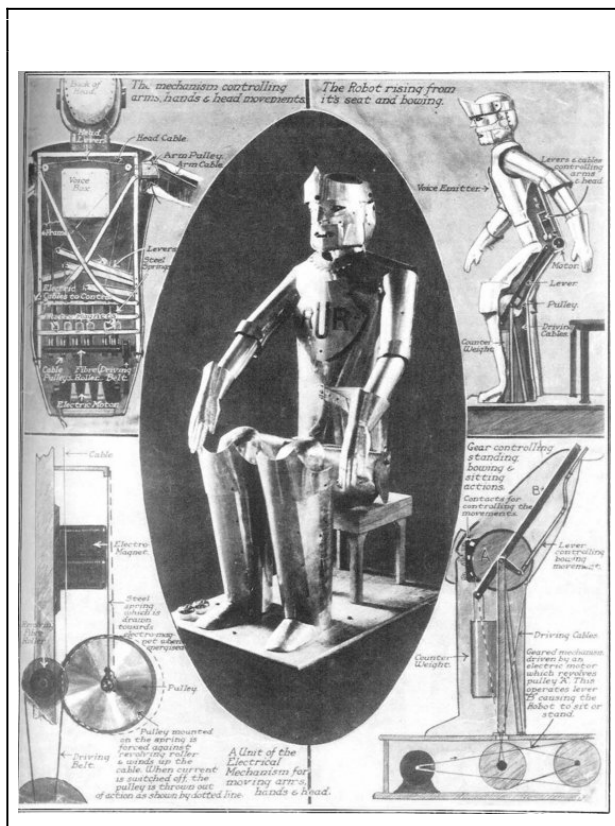
word “robot” from the Czech word “robota” (meaning slave work), a word that quickly spread all over the world through the English translation of this imaginative story. *R.U.R.* ends with the total annihilation of humankind as a result of the increased population of robots produced by humans themselves. One of the important questions that Čapek explored throughout his life was whether the development of science and technology would ultimately bring happiness to human beings. Always sceptical about the benefit that science can provide, he wondered if the abuse of technology would ultimately lead to the extinction of the human race. This question also haunted Tezuka, but unlike Čapek, he never gave up hope that humans are basically wise enough to utilize the knowledge of science and technology for their own happiness. However, through his manga, he constantly warned of the harm that abuse of such knowledge could bring not only to humans, but also to the environment and the many other creatures on this planet.

### Karel Čapek’s R.U.R. robot

One question that remains is why Tezuka used the Japanese word “*Atomu*” (i.e. “Atom”) for the name of this robot. The English name “Astro Boy” was adopted in 1963 when the first few episodes of the Japanese animation version of “*Tetsuwan Atomu*” (Atomu with Iron Arms) were televised in the United States. The first episode of Astro Boy, *Astro Boy Plays the Role of Ambassador (Atomu Taishi)* never suggests that the energy source of the robot is nuclear power, despite the name “Atom.” In later episodes, there are often references suggesting that the energy source of the robot is nuclear power, but it is never clearly explained how nuclear power is used to generate energy for the robot. Some people suggest that Astro Boy carries a small nuclear reactor inside the body, but Tezuka himself never adopted this story. In one of his autobiographies, he explains that he stumbled on the idea of using the word “Atom” for the name of the robot as the deadline for the manuscript was coming closer and the publisher was pressing him to urgently decide on the title for this manga. The early 1950s was a time when “peaceful uses of nuclear energy” began to be promoted in various nations. It seems that, even unconsciously, Tezuka was influenced by this over-optimistic idea for the use of nuclear energy, despite his deep fear of the abuse of scientific knowledge. In 1960, he used the word “*Uran*” (Uranium) for the newly created sister robot of Astro Boy, which implies that in the early 1960s, Tezuka was still influenced by the idea of “peaceful uses of nuclear energy”.

### *The Future World: A Warning about the Abuse of Science and Technology*

In 1951, Tezuka published an epic manga entitled *The Future World (Kitarubeki Sekai)*, which sharply criticizes the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this manga, two hostile nations, the





Star Nation and the Uranium Union have been conducting nuclear tests over many years. As a result many animals and plants have been affected by radiation causing mutations. One such mutation produces a breed of creatures with superior intellect called the “Mufun,” who sense that the Earth will soon be covered in poisonous gases and hence that all living creatures will be annihilated. Therefore the Mufuns decide to leave the Earth in a large satellite, taking a pair of every creature on Earth, as Noah did in his Ark. Meanwhile, the people of the Star Nation and the Uranium Union are still busy developing nuclear weapons and eventually go to war. When both nations are almost completely destroyed, their leaders agree to restore peace. However, by then the Earth is clouded with dark, poisonous gases. The leaders of the two nations embrace and joyfully proclaim “Peace, Peace has come, No more war on Earth,” “Long Live Human beings! Long Live World Culture!” as gases begin to shower down on them. The message of this manga is still relevant today as we fight wars all over the world, and globally spend more than US\$1.4 trillion annually on the military, at a time when our planet suffers a serious climate crisis due to global warming.

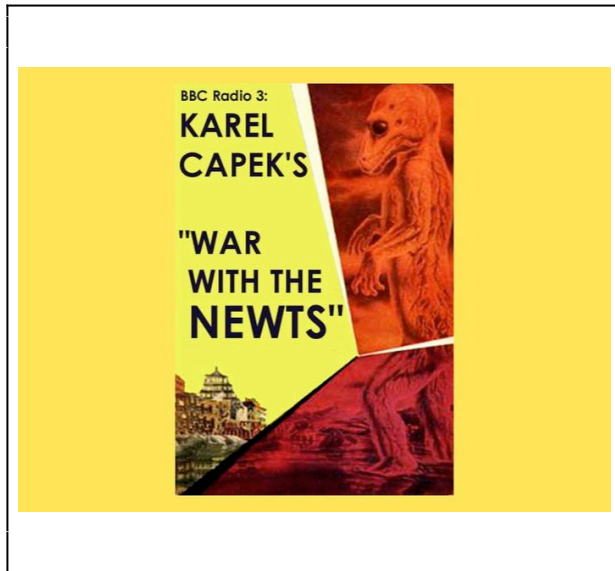
*The Future World* presents many other elements of the problems it raises. In this manga, the main characters are three children, a Mufun, a private detective called Hige Oyaji (meaning mustached old man), a biologist by the name of Dr. Yamadano Kakashi, and the respective state leaders of the Star Nation and the Uranium Union. The story of the conflict of the two nations unfolds as the relationships between these characters evolve. These characters watch as a vicious cycle is created, wherein critical events occur one after another, each commencing before the previous case is solved. As Japanese manga writer and critic Natsume Fusanosuke points out, this tale of international conflict between two powerful nations is complexly comprised of many stories of personal relationships among the main

characters. Furthermore, international conflict is constructed as an important element of the story of cultural and intellectual differences between humans and Mufuns. Eventually, readers find that all these stories are presented only as small parts of the grand tale of the cosmos. We find that the conflict between the two nations is meaningless in the context of the conflict between humans and Mufuns, and similarly that the antagonism between the humans and Mufuns is futile at a time when Earth and everything on it is under threat.

*The Future World* is based on *the logic of relativity* and shows that there is no such thing as “absolute justice” in this world, in particular from a universal viewpoint. In fact, through his entertaining and imaginative manga, Tezuka tried to convey that everything is conditioned by its relationship with other things, so there is no simple and straightforward answer to anything. In other words, every existence, including that of human beings, is conditioned by its relationship with other existences, and nothing exists without this relationship of relativity. Hence, unlike many other children’s manga stories, no superhero fighting for justice and peace appears. The story never ends with the absolute victory of a superhero. However, Tezuka did not want to end this manga with a tragedy of mankind. Thus, he let the poisonous gases undergo a drastic chemical reaction and turn into harmless oxygen, just as they were showering down on the Earth, allowing humanity to survive. Even so, he warns readers through Dr. Yamadano’s last statement – ‘Someday, superior creatures may conquer humans in a similar way to which, once upon a time, we humans conquered the apes. This is the law of nature. If we wish to live under the law of nature and survive, we must stop fighting each other.’ Tezuka inserted similar warnings at the end of other such epic manga that he produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s such as *Metropolis* and *Zero-Man*: for example, ‘Some day, human beings may destroy themselves because of the science that

they over-develop.'

In comparing Karel Čapek's novel *War with Newts* and *The Future World*, we find a strikingly similar logic of relativity. In both stories, a species superior to humans - salamanders in *War with Newts* and Mufuns in *The Future World* - appear and eventually everything on Earth is faced with the danger of total destruction. In both stories, humans are treated as one of many living species on Earth, and fighting among humans themselves seriously endangers the planet. Then again, the ending of Tezuka's story still gives hope for ultimate human survival, while Čapek's story ends with a prediction of fatal tragedy for human beings. Despite this difference, there is no doubt that Tezuka's early work was heavily influenced by Čapek's scepticism towards science and human behavior.



### Epic Manga on Nuclear Issues

In 1953, Tezuka published an epic manga entitled *Point X in the Pacific (Taiheiyo X Pointo)*, another critique of the nuclear arms race. Two hostile nuclear powers, Cosmopolitan and Eurasia, are frantically developing more and more powerful weapons. Eventually Cosmopolitan produces a new bomb called the

“Oxygen Bomb,” which is far more powerful than a nuclear bomb. Despite world-wide protest against the test of this new weapon, the government of Cosmopolitan decides to carry out the test at “Point X” in the Pacific, removing all local inhabitants of islands near the test site to more remote locations. When an old man called Hige Oyaji (meaning mustached old man), an ex-thief who now lives as an ordinary citizen, hears this news, he decides to destroy the weapon before it is tested. With his son's assistance he succeeds. In this manga, too, it is not a superhero but an old man with a criminal record and his son, who fight against the madness of politicians and militarists.

Remarkably, Tezuka wrote this manga a year before the United States tested the Hydrogen Bomb on Bikini Atoll in the Southwest Pacific. Although the U.S. government started nuclear tests on Bikini in July 1946, less than a year after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear test issue did not become a major political issue in Japan or internationally until a Japanese fishing boat called *Lucky Dragon # 5* was covered by radioactive fallout and its crew irradiated as a result of the first U.S. Hydrogen Bomb test, Operation Bravo, near Bikini in March 1954. Aside from Tezuka, hardly any writers in the manga world took up the nuclear issue as the main theme of their work at this time.



Irradiated fishermen are having their contaminated hair shaved

**Irradiated Japanese fisherman from the 1954 Hydrogen Bomb test at Bikini having contaminated hair shaved**

One of the first to do so was Shirato Sanpei, whose *A Disappearing Girl* (*Kieyuku Shoyo*) was published in 1959, five years after the *Lucky Dragon* incident, when the Japanese anti-nuclear movement was already strong and widespread. This is a story about a young girl in Hiroshima who loses her entire family due to radiation caused by the atomic bombing. She herself becomes sick from exposure to radiation, and as a result of deep-rooted social discrimination against *hibakusha* (A-bomb survivors) she becomes homeless. In the forest where she wanders about, she meets a Korean man who was brought to Japan during the war and forced to work at a Japanese coal mine. They live happily together for a while until the Korean man is arrested by the police and put on a ship back to Korea. Escaping from the ship, he returns to the forest only to find that the girl is already dead. The main theme of this moving manga is social and racial discrimination rather than nuclear issues. It focuses on the problems of Japanese society, and, unlike Tezuka's manga, does not offer a global perspective on nuclear issues.



**Shirato Sanpei's Disappearing Girl**

It is well known that the film *Godzilla*, produced at the end of 1954, was inspired by the *Lucky Dragon* incident. The following year, Kurosawa Akira, who was also influenced by the H-bomb test, produced the film *I Live in Fear* (*Ikimono no Kiroku*). Both films present the Japanese as victims of nuclear weapons.



**Godzilla**

In fact, many films featuring atomic bombings or nuclear tests were produced following the end of the US occupation in 1952, such as



*Children of the Atomic Bomb (Genbaku no Ko)* directed by Shindo Kaneto. Without exception, these films depict Japan and the Japanese as victims. In the 1970s, Nakazawa Keiji published *Barefoot Gen (Hadashi no Gen)*, an epic manga about the difficult life of a boy and his family, some of whom survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The translation of this manga has been widely circulated in the English-speaking world and remains popular both within and outside of Japan. However, as Tezuka once commented, the main weight of Nakazawa's manga is the deep love and strong bonds of a family who experienced an unimaginable calamity, rather than the issue of nuclear weapons as such. In this manga, too, the Japanese are presented as victims of the war, although rather than being portrayed as passive victims, they strenuously act to overcome the difficulties of life in post-war Japan.



In 1955, Tezuka produced one other epic manga dealing with nuclear issues, *The Age of the Deluge (Daikozui Jidai)*, in which he presented Japan as a nuclear power. This manga tells of a disaster in which Japan's secret nuclear arsenal built near the North Pole

suddenly explodes, causing a deluge of seawater to descend on Japan. As a result, one third of Japan sinks under water. We see through this manga that while most Japanese people were concerned only with their own victimization through the use of nuclear weapons, Tezuka did not hesitate to imply that Japan too could become a nuclear nation and consequently bring disaster on the natural environment as well as on human beings, even without engaging in warfare. Tezuka obviously produced this manga to voice his concern that with the U.S. military using Japanese bases to fight the Korean War, Japan too might become aggressors. In this manga, again, it is a boy who tries to fight against the madness of adults who plan to produce weapons of mass destruction.

### Gekiga Manga and Heroes

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the height of the Vietnam War, Tezuka produced several excellent *gekiga manga* (manga for adults) featuring the Asia Pacific War, such as *The Paper Fortress (Kami no Toride)*, *Zephyrus*, *Canon*, *A Crashed Fighter Plane (Tsuirakuki)*, and *The Grand General Goes to the Forest (Dai Shogun Mori e Iku)*. There is no doubt that Tezuka wrote these manga imagining what the Vietnamese were suffering under heavy U.S. aerial bombing. In 1987, many years after the Vietnam War and two years before his death, Tezuka continued to use Astro Boy to make readers of his manga think about the effects of bombing civilians in Vietnam. In *Astro Boy, Past and Present Stories (Atomu Konjyaku Monogatari)* published in 1987, Astro Boy travels back almost 50 years from 2017 to Vietnam in 1969, and stops the bombing by B-52 bombers, saving the lives of a newly born baby and his mother in the jungle.

In the 1970s, he also produced other *gekiga manga*, in particular the series *Black Jack*, featuring the psychological trauma and serious physical injuries experienced by American

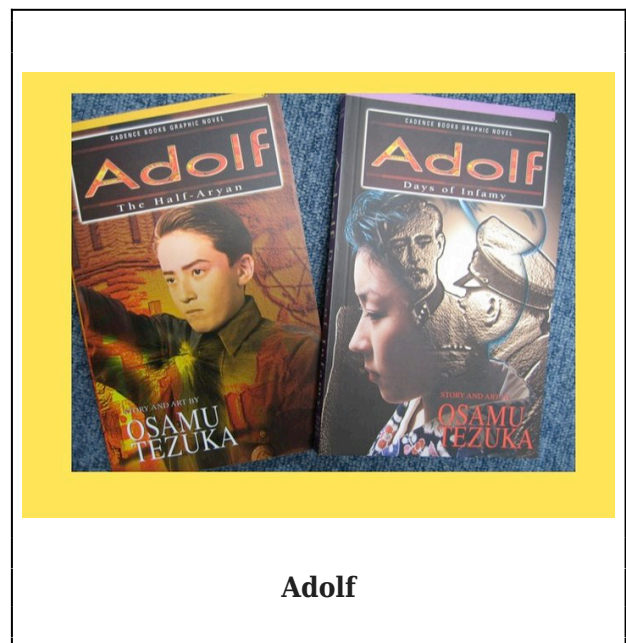
soldiers in Vietnam. *Black Jack* is a series of medical dramas that Tezuka started in November 1973 and ended in October 1983, producing a total of 230 short manga stories which fully utilize his wide medical knowledge. The main character Black Jack is an unlicensed but superbly gifted surgeon. Again and again Black Jack miraculously saves seriously ill patients and those on the verge of death, utilizing his surgical technique - but he always demands an outrageous price for his operation to rich clients.

In the *Black Jack* series, Tezuka included several stories focusing on the Vietnam War. For example in *Anaphylaxis*, published in December 1973, Black Jack is asked to save the life of George, son of a U.S. officer, Colonel Mason. George has been struck in the heart by shrapnel on a battlefield in Vietnam and brought to the hospital at Yokota Base. He is anaphylactic, and develops a severe cramp in reaction to the anesthesia. Therefore Black Jack tries electric anesthesia, and the operation succeeds. Nevertheless, George commits suicide when his father forces him to go back to Vietnam and show his bravery as a U.S. soldier.

Another *Black Jack* story entitled *Captain Devil*, published in October 1975, is a kind of analogy of the March 1968 My Lai Massacre committed in Vietnam by a unit of US Army, Charlie Company. In this story, Lieutenant Kenneth is a captain of the Army unit who burned innocent civilian villagers to death in Vietnam. He shows not the slightest acknowledgement or repentance for what he had done. even boasting that killing civilians is simply unavoidable during wartime. He visits Black Jack and asks him to remove the bullets lodged in his brain. Black Jack accepts the request, on condition that Vietnamese child refugees from the village where Lieutenant Kenneth's unit committed the massacre are present at the operation. While he is on the operation table, he is struck with terror. The operation is successful, but he becomes insane and kills

himself accidentally.

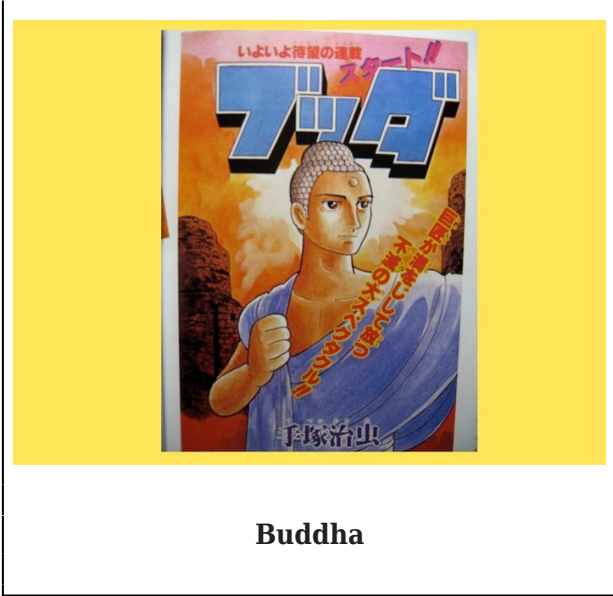
From the latter half of the 1970s until the end of his life, many of Tezuka's stories addressed the question of the duality of human nature - the co-existence of good and evil - and how to solve various problems arising from this innate contradiction, the most serious of which is war. Two of the finest of these works are *MW*, published in 1976, and *Adolf*, published in 1983. While *MW* depicts the madness of people who deal with weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons, *Adolf* is a long and comprehensive war story about three men, each named "Adolf": Adolf Hitler, a Jewish boy living in Kobe, and a boy born to a German father and Japanese mother. This story addresses many important issues such as racial purity, ethnicity, personal identity, nationalism, state ideology, military violence, dehumanization, and political corruption. The father of the Jewish boy is killed by the Japanese-German boy, who becomes a Nazi officer during World War II. Yet after the war, the Jewish boy migrates to Israel and becomes a brutal oppressor of Palestinians.



In the early 1980s, at a time when few Japanese

were paying attention to the Palestinian problem, Tezuka was already introducing this issue to manga readers, clearly pointing out that war can make the same person a victim as well as an assailant. The story is cleverly woven into actual historical events, so that readers learn much about World War II while being enthralled by a fascinating plot. The final message that readers learn from this captivating epic manga is that every nation claims to be acting justly in order to justify its conduct, yet the result often turns out to be gross “injustice” for many people, including citizens of that nation-state itself - an irony of politics.

As already mentioned, hardly any superheroes appear in Tezuka’s manga. Even the saint-like Buddha is described as a person who struggles to painfully overcome various human weaknesses and defects in order to achieve his goal. In the 14 volume long epic manga entitled *Buddha*, Buddha has personal flaws, unlike an innately perfect figure such as Jesus Christ. Tezuka’s manga contain no superheroes like Superman, Spiderman and Batman, the most popular characters in American comics. These American superheroes never make mistakes of judgment concerning justice, morality and ethics. They always fight for the noble causes of justice and peace, and invariably accomplish their grand missions to defeat villains and evil, eliminating one danger after another with their incredible powers.



**Buddha**

Yet, these superheroes suddenly become utterly powerless when a real catastrophic event occurs, like the September 11 terrorist attack. This is because the world of the imagination in which these superheroes live is completely detached from the real world, whilst the imaginative world of Tezuka’s manga is closely and firmly connected with the vital and complex problems of the real world. Thus, Superman is at a loss for words and simply holds his head in his hands, looking down at the ground in front of the debris of the Twin Towers. A cartoon published in late 2001 shows a tiny figure of Superman standing and saying ‘wow’ in front of the oversized figures of the September 11 rescue volunteers - a fire fighter, policeman, nurse and doctor - clearly indicating that the real heroes are these workers and volunteers, not Superman. Similarly, after the September 11 attack, the only thing that Spiderman could do immediately was to hopelessly stand at “ground zero” site and mutter that we can never comprehend the world of terrorists. In fact, the first Hollywood movie of Spiderman was being filmed shortly before the September 11 attack, in which Spiderman makes a huge web between the Twin Towers. Before the movie was released, all images of the World Trade Centre buildings were erased using computer



technology. How could Spiderman jump around the Twin Towers, despite the fact that he could not save even a single person trapped under the debris after these buildings collapsed?

I wonder, were he still alive at the time, how Tezuka would have reacted through his manga to this astonishing terrorist attack, in which almost three thousand civilians were killed indiscriminately. In Tezuka's manga there is no space for superheroes, simply because his manga world is a complex one, in which there is no absolute justice or absolute righteousness. In his imaginative manga world, if any of his characters yearn for justice and peace, they have to face the complexities of human society, in particular the various forms of "confrontation."



**Tezuka's characters surround Astro Boy**

## Conclusion

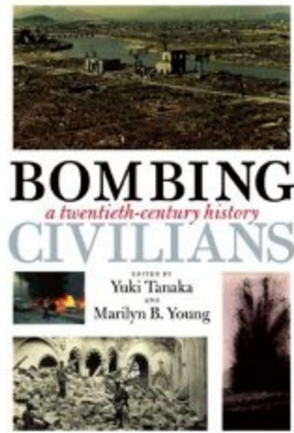
Tezuka's epic manga are dynamic as the storylines always revolve around confrontation: powerful nations versus powerful nations, humans versus machines, the primitive versus the modern, organizations versus individuals,

idealism versus realism, science versus ethics, and so on. These confrontations take the form of universal problems such as imperialism, dictatorship, colonization, war, genocide, and bureaucracy. Yet, these adult themes are always clearly presented and simplified so as to be readily understood by children. Indeed, the vast volume of his manga work can be called "a ceremony of innocence," an expression that the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, used to describe children in 1920.

In this way, from the very beginning of his career as a manga writer immediately after the war, until the end of his life, Tezuka's fascinating vision and powerful imagination allowed him to maintain a profound humanism with a global perspective, which was largely unaffected by the narrow-minded Japanese view of war victimhood. It is apparent that his work stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from recent works of nationalistic Japanese war manga like those of Kobayashi Yoshinori. How did Tezuka gain such humanism? How can we acquire humanism and disseminate it as a moral foundation for society? These questions should be taken up by anyone, regardless of race or nationality, who reads Tezuka's vivid manga.

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