

How emotions work: The politics of vision in Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen*

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Introduction

Nakazawa Keiji's autobiographical manga *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*) is known for its traumatic depictions of the devastations caused by the atomic bomb in Hiroshima (Itō 2006: 161-163, Yoshimura 2006, Itō and Omote 2006: 34-37). This article investigates the ways in which this manga utilizes visual representations to arouse emotions among readers and, by doing so, to pass down the memory of the war to the younger generation in postwar Japan. It will pay attention to the role of the painters who had a crucial role in the growth of *Gen* to show how the manga's imagery functions in a performative way. In this graphic novel, visual images are often conceived not so much as representations of reality but rather as moments that trigger various emotions and actions. Characterized also by its frequent use of point-of-view shots, this manga establishes complex relationships among images, emotions, and memories.¹ By examining the functions of performative images and point-of-view shots, this article argues that *Barefoot Gen* urges younger generations in postwar Japan to share in the event of the atomic bomb as an alternative to the officially produced memories of the event.

1. Four Painters

Four painters appear in *Barefoot Gen*: Nakaoka Daikichi, the father of the protagonist Nakaoka Gen; Yoshida Seiji, whom Gen is employed to take care of; Amano Seiga,

¹ In this article, I use the word "point-of-view shot" in a broader sense to refer to a variety of shots expressing subjectivity according to Izumi (2008: 39-42).

who teaches Gen how to paint; and Gen himself.

The first painter, Nakaoka Daikichi, is a Japanese-style painter. He studied Japanese-style painting and lacquer decoration techniques in Kyoto, and during the war he earns a living for his family by decorating *geta*, Japanese wooden clogs (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Nakaoka Gen often remembers his father making a painting. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 9, 117.



Fig. 2. Yoshida Seiji tries to depict the victims of the atomic bombing by holding a brush with his mouth. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 3, 119.

Killed by the atomic bomb, Daikichi frequently appears in Gen's later recollections and makes Gen vow to live "as strong as a weed".

Yoshida Seiji is an oil painter from a relatively wealthy family. Seiji has to give up his career as a painter after his entire body is burned in the atomic bombing; his arms are completely disabled and he is confined to his bed. At first bitter towards Gen, who takes the job of caring for him, Seiji gradually comes to trust him. One day, Seiji, Gen and Ryūta go to the fields outside the city to draw the landscape and come across many burned corpses from the atomic bombing. This scene makes Seiji determined to paint his "last piece". He desperately tries to draw the scene by holding a brush in his mouth instead of in his disabled hands, but, in the end, he falls down, vomiting blood (fig. 2).

Amano Seiga is also an oil painter. He meets Gen by chance and begins working with him at a signboard shop. While painting signboards together, Seiga teaches Gen the fundamentals of painting, including composition, perspective, and preparatory drawing (fig. 3). Seiga tells Gen about a dream he once had (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 134), which later inspires Gen to become a painter. It is also Seiga who tells Gen to go to Tokyo to improve his skills in painting and drawing.

To be precise, at this point in the story, the fourth painter, Nakaoka Gen, is not yet a painter. He decides to pursue painting towards the end of the story. Through his

encounters and experiences with Daikichi, Seiji, and Seiga, Gen matures and decides on a path to take. Whenever he encounters painters, Gen experiences a special feeling towards them as they remind him of his father, who was also a painter. When Gen



sees Seiji trying to draw the victims of the atomic bomb, he realizes that painting can serve as a kind of mourning for the

Fig. 3. Amano Seiga teaches Gen the fundamentals of painting at a signboard shop where they work together. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, vol. 9, 195.

deceased. Gen's encounter with Seiga pushes him not only to learn painting techniques but also to cherish artistic ideals. Gen repeats Seiga's words in a soliloquy: "Art has no borders... I like those words! I feel like I've found my path... [...] I wanna make art that travels around the world! I wanna break down the narrow-minded barriers that people call national borders!" (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 136). Gen is now determined to become a painter, an artist active beyond national borders. In another scene, Gen says, "I will make a painting that will bring peace to the world" (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 138-139). This is how Gen seeks to be a painter who, through the act of painting, aims to bring about peace.

In this way, the three other painters in *Barefoot Gen* play a crucial role in Gen's decision about his future. Their influences instill Gen with a spirit of independence in the midst of postwar turmoil and encourage him to go to Tokyo to become a painter.

2. Performativity of Painting

As we have seen, four painters including the protagonist appear in *Barefoot Gen*. The following question arises: Why do painters have such an important role in this manga? Taking into account that the author Nakazawa Keiji's life was quite similar to that of Gen—Nakazawa suffered from the Hiroshima bombing, worked for a signboard shop, and then came to Tokyo—we can think of *Barefoot Gen* as a manga on manga depicting the first half of a manga artist's life. Because pictures on pictures (meta-pictures) show how the artists and their contemporaries regard imagery (Stoichita 1997), this manga not only reveals the autobiographical story of a manga artist but also his way of thinking about manga expression. When Seiji witnesses the cremation of the Hiroshima victims, he says, "I have to draw every one of these wretched people... blasted by the bomb and thrown away like so much garbage..." "I have to show them..."

to the bastards who started the war, the bastards who dropped the bomb...” (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 118). Here we can see how Seiji feels an obligation as a witness to the atomic bombing and its victims. He is obsessed with depicting them because he regards himself as a witness. Seiji’s idea of making paintings in the role of witness is taken up by Gen. In other scenes in *Barefoot Gen*, visual images often appear as something beyond mere representations: they serve to trigger some sort of action and emotion. Both Seiji and Seiga shred the ordinary still-life paintings they had previously made, because the paintings represent their inability to cope with the reality after the bombing (fig. 4). A mediocre signboard picture is destroyed, and Seiga’s superb painting leads the signboard company’s boss to question his feelings (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 150-151, 190-191). A signboard depicting a rainbow brings hope to another character (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 242-245). Gen and his friend Musubi beat to shreds the portrait of a prefectural assembly politician, who insisted on militarism during the war (fig. 5). Gen’s affection for a girl is crystallized in a painting, and the painting in turn becomes a means to communicate his love (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 10: 104-105). In this way, the paintings frequently depicted in this narrative do not so much represent something but rather they function as triggers that urge characters to take action and feel particular emotions.

It is not merely characters in the story who are impelled to take actions and experience emotions. If we extend our analysis beyond the world of the narrative, we



Fig. 4. Ashamed that he cannot support his family, Seiga shreds his paintings. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, vol. 9, 121.

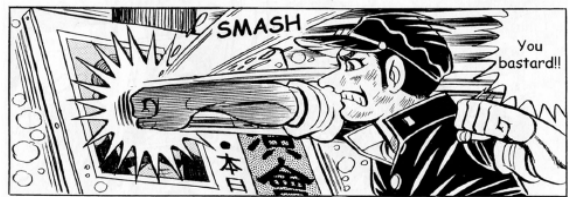


Fig. 5. Gen beats to shreds the portrait of a prefectural assembly politician, an ex-militarist who now talks about “love and peace”. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, vol. 9, 252.

can see how the visual images in *Barefoot Gen* have a performative impact on its readers. As scholars have discussed, the artwork of *Barefoot Gen* includes many shocking images. The author Nakazawa insists that he chose to depict graphic images to reveal the atrocities of the war and the atomic bombing rather than to show

less shocking images modified for children. He says, “It is my aim that the brutal scenes of the atomic bombing would make more and more children in Japan scared and disgusted, and make them say, ‘I don’t want to see it ever again’” (Nakazawa 1994: 211). *Barefoot Gen* does not aim to record the historical facts in a moderate way, but rather to emotionally affect its readers through the performative power of its visual images, and thus deliver the message of world peace. In this way, the visual images in *Barefoot Gen* have a performative effect not simply on the narrative’s characters but also on its readers, arousing their deep emotions.²

3. Visual Grammar of *Barefoot Gen*

In order to consider how these emotions are awakened, let us turn to the visual grammar of *Barefoot Gen*. As critic Kure Tomofusa points out, *Barefoot Gen* has been read in such a strange way: conscientious intellectuals have expressed their great admiration for it and, for the very reason, manga fans have registered their objections by largely ignoring it (Kure 1997: 251). *Barefoot Gen* has been regarded as providing too little reading pleasure for a manga. But taking into account that many people remember this work—made in the 70s and 80s and still in print—we can say that it excels not just as a message of peace but also as a work of manga.

To think about *Barefoot Gen* as a manga, let us compare it with “The Tragedy of a Planet” [Aru wakusei no higeki], Asaoka Kōji’s 1969 manga depicting the atomic bomb in Hiroshima.³



Fig. 6. The scenes just after the bombing are depicted in relation to the protagonist’s movements. (Asaoka and Kusaka 1969: 36).

² On the performativity of visual images, see Bolt (2004).

³ “The Tragedy of a Planet” was drawn by Asaoka Kōji based on Kusaka Tatsuo’s memoir. It created a sensation after it was published in *Shūkan Shōnen Magazine* in the three issues of



Fig. 7. The panels depict A-bomb victims through Gen's point-of-view shots. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 1, 253.



Fig. 8. Three women are put in the frontal setting of the pictorial composition: they stand between a wooden box and a water tank in the foreground, and houses in the background. The frontality of the composition is emphasized by the plane of the tank with the words “Beware of fires.” (Asaoka and Kusaka 1969: 68).

For the scene of the situation just after the bombing, “The Tragedy of a Planet” reveals how the protagonist escapes his collapsed house and shows the disasters of the scene as background for the protagonist (fig. 6); whereas *Barefoot Gen* depicts not only Gen's acts but also what he sees in point-of-view shots (fig. 7).

We can also regard the scene where a mother finds her dead child and makes him/her eat a peach, which we can find in both pieces. “The Tragedy of a Planet” puts three women in the frontal setting of the pictorial composition (fig. 8). It may be a point-of-view shot taken from the protagonist's vantage but because the composition is so well organized it is close to an objective shot. The three women thus remind us of the Three Graces in art history. On the other hand, *Barefoot Gen* depicts this scene by looking down on the mother and her child on the ground, which is a point-of-view shot from the eyes of Gen (fig. 9).

“The Tragedy of a Planet” unfolds according to the protagonist's acts and depicts

August 3, 10 and 17, 1969.



Fig. 9. A dead child and his mother, surrounded by flies, are depicted through Gen's point-of-view shot. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, trans. Project Gen, vol. 2, 63.

the scenes after the bombing in an objective way, whereas *Barefoot Gen* focuses more on Gen's emotions than on his acts and shows what he witnessed mostly by point-of-view shots.

Used frequently throughout *Barefoot Gen*, the point-of-view shot is one of its most salient characteristics.⁴

Another feature of *Barefoot Gen* is its frequent rendering of characters who turn away from the people they are talking to. For example, take the scene (fig. 10) where Gen speaks with his mother Kimie after seeing a dream in which his dead father is still alive. Talking with his mother, Gen does not keep her in his line of vision, and just looks to the right of the panel. It seems unnatural that he does not look at her during their conversation; but this shows Gen's turning his attention to the world of his dream outside the panel. His face turning to the right implies the possibility of the future development of the story.⁵ To Gen, who thinks that his father might be alive somewhere,



Fig. 10. Gen and his mother often have a conversation without looking at each other. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, vol. 2, 13.

4 Due to insufficient space we cannot discuss it further, but there are other visual devices for inviting the readers to the depicted spaces than point-of-view shots. For example, see Fried (1988).

5 Izumi Nobuyuki argues that Japanese manga include many ingenious expressions utilizing the flow of reading from right to left. See Izumi (2001: 6-17). These can also be found in Japanese art works. See Etō (1980:163-222). Recent translations of Japanese manga tend to keep the reading direction the same as the original (from right to left) but there are other translations, including *Barefoot Gen*, which flip the pages horizontally so that you can read manga in the western way. One of the problems in the flipped translation here is that not all the images are flipped; some of the images maintain their original orientation. For example, among the *Barefoot Gen* images in this article, figures 1, 4, and 5 are not flipped whereas all others are. These three images are intact probably because they depict actions by a right-handed person against a background that includes



Fig. 11. Neighbors cannot see the inner consciousness of Gen's mother. Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*, vol 1, p. 49.

Kimie says, "How wonderful it would be if your dream were true...", turning her back on Gen. Taking into account their positions in the first panel, it is unnatural that she would turn her back to Gen, but



her posture of withdrawing into herself is necessary to show the depth of her grief and to portray the inner consciousness reflected in her gloomy facial expression. By adopting this posture, Nakazawa conveys Gen's innocence and the mother's sorrow simultaneously in just one panel and emphasizes the difference in emotion between the two, which makes the unfolding story easier to understand. In other scenes, this posture is also used to portray Kimie's un conveyed emotions when neighbors talk behind her back (fig. 11), and Gen's conflicting emotions (outward courage and inward sorrow) in the second panel in figure 12. The fifth panel of figure 12 depicts the gap between emotion and

Fig. 12. The page depicts Gen's inner sorrow and his outward courage (second panel), Ryūta's change of mind (fourth panel), and Gen's regret (fifth panel). Nakazawa: *Barefoot Gen*, vol. 3, 70.

thought (regret and determined will) when Gen watches the children whom he gave his money to walk away, and answers Ryūta's question decisively. Nakazawa thus renders communication with subtle emotions by depicting characters who turn their eyes away from the people they talk to.

The characters not only turn their eyes away from people they talk with but also direct their attention to them by turning round. For example (fourth panel in figure 12),

Japanese letters (although figure 4 does not include letters), but this excessive care sometimes diminishes the visual power derived from reading direction as discussed by Izumi. Gen's leftward punch in figure 5 would look more powerful if you could read this panel from right to left, which is the opposite way of reading on the otherwise flipped page in the translated version.

when Gen rescues Ryūta from a group of wicked boys, Ryūta turns to Gen and asks, “What’d you help me for...?” (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 3: 70). Up to this point, Ryūta has ambivalent feelings toward Gen because Gen treats him as if he were his dead little brother, Shinji, but Ryūta feels closer to Gen after this episode. It seems unnatural that Ryūta looks around to his right in this panel because Ryūta is sitting to the right of Gen in the previous panel. Nonetheless, Ryūta’s act of looking back effectively indicates his new feelings toward Gen. Here, Ryūta is “looking back”—literally to his right and figuratively to his previous attitude toward Gen.

In this way, *Barefoot Gen* twists the gazes and postures of the characters, depicting the gaps between gazes and their objects, images and emotions. At first the gaps seem awkward as a representation of the conversations, but they attain what could be called manga’s reality,⁶ which creates the character’s inner consciousness and makes the reader’s emotions more complex via performative images and point-of-view shots. That is how the dynamics of visual images and consciousness take the reader into the deep seas of the characters’ emotions, leaving an unforgettable impact on the reader’s mind.⁷

4. Prehistory of *Barefoot Gen*

What makes possible visual expressions such as performative images, point-of-view shots, and the twist of gazes and postures? Although it may be a digression, let us trace them back to Nakazawa’s earlier works. It is necessary to note that *Barefoot Gen* is not exactly an autobiography of Nakazawa, though it is mostly based on his experience. Gen decides to become a painter in order to deliver the message of world peace (Nakazawa 2009, vol. 9: 139), but this was not the case with Nakazawa. He did not become a manga artist because he wanted to advocate for world peace. After working as an assistant for popular manga artists such as Kazumine Daiji and Tsuji Naoki, Nakazawa was working on various types of boys’ manga (Nakazawa 1994). According to his autobiography, he found that atomic bomb survivors were the subject of prejudice in Tokyo, and he made sure people did not know he was one of them. It was his mother’s death in October 1966 that made him decide to depict the theme of the atomic bombing and publish “Struck by Black Rain” (Kuroi ame ni utarete) in May 1968. So,

⁶ On the limit of manga’s modern realism based on the cinematic expression, see Itō (2005).

⁷ There is no space to discuss it here, but parodic songs, sung by the characters, especially by children, play an important role in arousing emotions among the readers. Now we are losing the tradition of parodic songs; they cease to function in an emotional way for today’s readers.

unlike the hero of *Barefoot Gen*, Nakazawa’s decision was not caused by his encounters with painters.

4. 1. Early works

In fact, the process whereby Nakazawa began to depict the atomic bombing in manga is more complicated. Nakazawa, who made his debut at “Spark One” [Supāku wan] in *Shōnen Gahō*, has often depicted episodes that remind us of the atomic bombing.⁸ “Universe Giraffe” [Uchū Jirafu], which was published in *Shūkan Shōnen King* in 1964, has an episode of mutated plants.⁹ They exhaust oxygen and kill many men and animals, which evokes the massacre of the atomic bomb. “The Eleventh Spy” [11 nin me no supai], a piece published in *Bokura* in 1966, is the story of an attempt to rescue Dr. Murata, a nuclear physicist working on “a new-type bomb” who was captured by the American Army during the war.¹⁰ “Godzilla’s Son: Battle on the Monster Island” [Gojira no

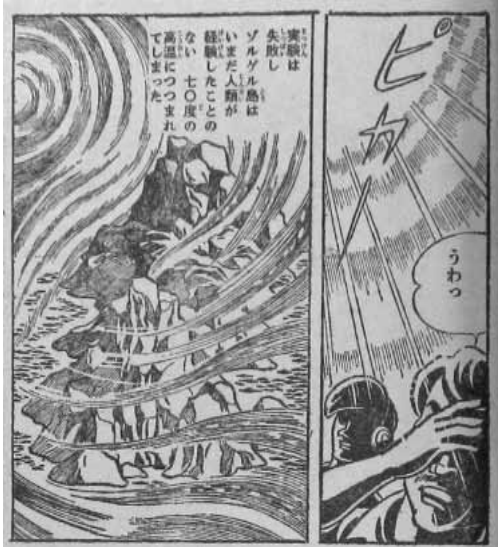


Fig. 13. Scientists are bathed in a dazzling light.

musuko: Kaijū tō no kessen], made in Sekizawa, Shiba, and Nakazawa, 1968: 7. 1968, is about Godzilla’s son, who was born on an island blanketed by 70°C heat due to a scientific experiment gone awry.¹¹ It is probably in this work that the onomatopoeic

8 “Spark One” was published in *Shōnen Gahō* in a nine-part series between December 1962 and August 1963. The February and the June issues were published as a supplement to the magazine.

9 “Universe Giraffe” was written by Kitamura Akira and drawn by Nakazawa. It appeared in a thirteen-part series in *Shūkan Shōnen King* from 17 May to 9 August 9, 1964. For a science fiction manga, he also published “Time Tunnel” [Taimu Tonneru] in the special summer issue of *Bōken ō* (September 15, 1967).

10 “The Eleventh Spy” was published in the January 15 issue of *Bokura* in 1966. For a spy manga, he also published “Bide Knows It” [Bide wa shitteiru] in the September 15 issue of *Bokura* in 1965.

11 “Godzilla’s Son: Battle on the Monster Island”, written by Sekizawa Shin’ichi and drawn by Nakazawa, was published as the supplement to the new year issue of *Shōnen* (January 1, 1968). For a monster manga, Nakazaka also published “Big Monster Gappa” [Dai kyojū Gappa] in *Bessatsu Bōken ō* (April 15, 1967). These manga were both made in conjunction with the screening of the movies with the same titles.

world “pika” first appeared in Nakazawa’s manga (fig. 13).

4.2. “The Super Battleship Fujimi” (1968)

It has been said that “Struck by Black Rain” is Nakazawa’s first manga dealing with the atomic bombing, but this is not true. In February 1968, three months before “Struck by Black Rain” appeared, Nakazawa published, in the monthly manga magazine *Shōnen*, a manga that refers to the atomic bomb and Hiroshima entitled “The Super Battleship Fujimi” [Chōkan Fujimi].¹² It is set at a naval arsenal in Kure, where the super battleship Fujimi, larger than the Battleship Yamato, is secretly being readied. The workers who built the Fujimi are drowned by the battleship’s captain because its construction has to be cloaked in absolute secrecy. The Fujimi is launched and heads



Fig. 14. Suicide plane attacks to an A-bomb factory cause the explosion of the atomic bomb. Nakazawa, 1968: 49.

to Waiki Island in America. A crew member, protagonist Dan Kazuo, learns that a new type of bomb, one of which could easily wipe out all of Japan, is now being mass-produced on this island. Dan and his colleague Kurokawa carry out suicide plane attacks on the underground factory (fig. 14). After the flash of light is depicted with the onomatopoeic word “pika”, the narration says, “The bombs that Dan and Kurokawa guided themselves led to the explosions of the atomic bombs, which blew up the island”. “This incident delayed America’s production of atomic bombs for two years. Then, on August 6 of 1945, one of the newly made bombs was dropped on Hiroshima.”

The fictional name of Waiki Island reminds us of Waikiki in Hawaii and therefore the attack on Pearl Harbor. Also, the onomatopoeic word “pika” suggests the flash of the atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima. Thus, several historical events of the Pacific War, namely the attack on Pearl Harbor, the battle of Okinawa, and the atomic

¹² “Super Battleship Fujimi” was published as the supplement to the February issue of *Shōnen* in 1968. For a war manga, he also published “Wings of Friendship” [Yūjō no tsubasa] in the special new year issue of *Shōnen* (1966/03/15) and “Phantom # 36” [Maboroshi no 36 gō] in the April 15 issue of *Bessatsu Manga* 5, 1968.

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are incorporated into one episode in this manga. It is important to note that although “Super Battleship Fujimi” might contribute to the glorification of war, it is not a manga precisely aimed at glorifying war, but rather one aimed at being true to the genre of war comics; it is a narrative that a little too emphatically depicts the mechanical details of air planes and battleships, the rivalries and friendships among fighters, and the spirit of self-sacrifice, which shows how important it is to follow the convention of the genre in this manga.¹³

4. 3. “Struck by Black Rain” (1968)

“Struck by Black Rain”, which followed “Super Battleship Fujimi”, also falls within the conventions of the manga genre.¹⁴ The protagonist is a xenophobic hit man in a trench coat who assassinates only Americans. His suffering from the atomic bombing is his justification for murder. Rather than being a vehicle for an anti-A-bomb message, the narrative of this manga is that of a hard-boiled story. The title thus refers to the blackness of film noir as well as to Ibuse Masuji’s novel *Black Rain*.¹⁵

And yet, “Struck by Black Rain” offers an independent message about the atomic bombing, which was subordinate to the convention of the genre of war comics in “Super Battleship Fujimi”. Towards the end of “Struck by Black Rain”, the dying protagonist promises to give his eyes to a blind girl named Heiwa, meaning peace, and appeals to her to be a witness to a peaceful world. In addition, the last panel conveys a direct message from the author: “If you become more aware of the atomic bombings through this manga, I, as one of the atomic bomb survivors, will be very grateful.”¹⁶ This line

13 See Takemiya (2003: 17-48) about the significance of imitating senior manga artists’ works in the development of the manga genres.

14 “Struck by Black Rain” was published in the May 29 issue of *Manga Panchi* in 1968. Before *Barefoot Gen* started from the June 11 issue of *Shūkan Shōnen Jump* in 1973, the following manga dealing with the Hiroshima bombing appeared in *Manga Panchi*, *Shūkan Shōnen Jump*, and *Bessatsu Shōnen Jump*: “Kuroi kawa no nagare ni”, “Kuroi chinmoku no hate ni”, “Kuroi hato no mure ni”, “Aru hi totsuzen ni”, “Kuroi hae no sakebi ni”, “Nanika ga okoru”, “Aka tonbo no uta”, “Warera eien ni”, “Kuroi tsuchi no sakebi ni”, “Ore wa mita!”, and “Kuroi ito”. They are included in Nakazawa (1971) and its different version “Kuroi ame ni utarete” (2005).

15 In this regard, Miyamoto Hirohito kindly told me that that “Struck by Black Rain” is probably inspired more directly by action *gekiga*, or drama pictures, which, from its beginning, have depicted protagonists’ strong emotions towards social injustice, such as “Man with a Black Scar” [Kuroi kizuato no otoko] (1960-61) by Satō Masaaki. This is one of the topics I would like to investigate in the future.

16 In the book version, this line accompanies the signature and the date, “Nakazawa Keiji, April Shōwa 43 (1968),” although it lacks the month when it first appeared in *Manga Panchi* (May 29, 1968). This indicates that the date of publication was not yet decided when it was sent to the printer.

clearly declares Nakazawa's strong intention to tell many people about the fact of the atomic bombings. This is how the anti-A bomb message is delivered independent of the hard-boiled story in "Struck by Black Rain".

5. Barefoot Gen as manga expression

It is in this context that *Barefoot Gen* appeared. "I Saw It!" [Ore wa mita!],¹⁷ published as one part of an autobiographical series on manga artists, recounts the first half of Nakazawa's life with restraint, whereas *Barefoot Gen* depicts the same subject with strong emotions.

Barefoot Gen was also made within the conventions of existing manga genres. After the autobiographical work "I Saw It", the anti-A-bomb message was, for the first time, fully incorporated into the world of the narrative in *Barefoot Gen*. Of course, *Barefoot Gen* also appropriated existing manga works to some extent. Two years prior to the appearance of *Barefoot Gen* in *Shūkan Shōnen Jump*, Nagashima Shinji ran a serial manga piece called "Barefoot Bun" [Hadashi no Bun] in *Shūkan Shōnen Sunday* (fig. 15).¹⁸ "Barefoot Bun" is a story about growing up in the countryside and concerns the high-spirited Bun and his friends.¹⁹ *Barefoot Gen* shares this coming-of-age plot with "Barefoot Bun". Barefootedness implies the revival of Japan's society as well as the liveliness of the boys, but because this theme is not developed in the story of *Barefoot Gen*, it seems to be inspired by Nagashima's boys' manga. As many scholars argue, *Barefoot Gen* is a manga that tackles the issue of the atomic bomb in the format of boys' manga such as "Barefoot Bun" (Omote 2006: 59-86).



Fig. 15. Cover of Barefoot Bun, which portrays the growth of boys and girls in a countryside branch school. Nagashima, *Hadashi no Bun*, vol. 2.

17 "I Saw It!" [Ore wa mita!] was published in the October issue of *Bessatsu Shōnen Jump* in 1972.

18 "Barefoot Bun" appeared in a nineteen-part series in *Shūkan Shōnen Sunday* from July 25 to November 28, 1971

19 The protagonist Bun in "Barefoot Bun" is a fast runner and aims to become a marathon runner towards the end of the story. The character seems to be derived from the Ethiopian marathon runner Abebe Bikila, who was popular in Japan as "Barefoot Abebe [Hadashi no Abebe]" after the 1960 Rome Olympics. The character of *Barefoot Gen* can thus be traced to barefoot Abebe via "Barefoot Bun".

In his early works, Nakazawa was dealing with a wide range of genres such as spy stories, science fiction, and war tales;²⁰ the atomic bombing was thus just an episode within the larger story and its inclusion lacked a political agenda. “Struck by Black Rain” distinguished itself from his previous works for its clear anti-war, pacifist message, but such a message did not quite fit in the hard-boiled setting of the story. It was not until *Barefoot Gen* that Nakazawa incorporated the anti-war message seamlessly within the narrative world. In this masterpiece, Nakazawa successfully immerses young readers in the narrative world by making them experience what he actually went through in his childhood. In addition, this boys’ manga depicts characters similar in age to its target audience, thus allowing its young readers to better identify with atomic-bomb survivors. Gen’s strength and resilience symbolize that of the atomic-bomb survivors, and this makes it possible to deliver the anti-war message via the world of boys’ manga. As I discussed above, manga’s visual devices also help readers become effectively absorbed into the story.

Barefoot Gen uses visual devices such as performative images, point-of-view shots, and twists in gaze and posture, but they are probably not Nakazawa’s inventions. We can find similar expressions in manga works by his contemporaries, such as Motomiya Hiroshi’s “King of the Castle” [Otoko ippiki gaki daishō]. And yet it was Nakazawa who made the best use of them and incorporated them into his own style. Nakazawa’s arrangement of the panels is orthodox; no character goes beyond his or her frame, which are almost all rectangles.²¹ Nakazawa was interested in depicting strong emotions within a seemingly monotonous arrangement of panels. He provides characters with an inner consciousness by depicting the gaps between images, emotions, and thoughts. Of course, his style is scarcely comparable to the various psychological depictions developed in the field of girls’ manga in the 70s, especially through their multi-layered arrangement of the panels, but as far as I know Nakazawa’s visual grammar in *Barefoot Gen* was unparalleled in boys’ manga at the time. As Ōtsuka Eiji argues, Kajiya Ikki bestowed an inner consciousness upon heroes like Hoshi Hyūma and Yabuki Jō so that they could reflect on themselves.²² But the inner consciousness

20 Nakazawa also made a cowboy manga. “Ninja Sheriff” [Ninja hoankan] appeared in the special summer issue of *Bōken ō* (September 15, 1966).

21 In the sketches for the unfinished part two of *Barefoot Gen*, Nakazawa first divides a page into four rows with a pencil and further divides each row into two or three panels. He sometimes uses a big panel two rows high but because the erased pencil lines can be discerned in the middle of the panels, it is safe to say that he first divides a page into four.

22 About the discovery of inner consciousness in manga, see Ōtsuka (1994: 56-90). Ōtsuka

of characters in *Barefoot Gen* is less a reflection than a site of emotions not acted upon, thereby transferring powerfully emotional burdens onto the reader. It is in this context that we should view the intense emotions *Barefoot Gen* activates in its readers.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the ways in which Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen* arouses strong emotions in its readers. First, I have highlighted four painters appearing in this manga in order to clarify the critical role of the act of painting in this work. The visual images depicted in *Barefoot Gen* possess a performative effect not simply on the narrative's characters but also on its readers, arousing their deep emotions. Utilizing point-of-view shots that show what the author actually witnessed as well as twisting the characters' gazes and postures to indicate their emotions and their inner consciousness, *Barefoot Gen* urges the readers to share the unforgettable memories and emotions Nakazawa had in Hiroshima in 1945. Multi-layered relationships among images, emotions, and memories, combined with the shocking depictions of the disaster, encourage an emotional ambivalence, in addition to complex and intense states of mind that could even be traumatic for young readers.²³

To Nakazawa, the atomic bombing he experienced at the age of six was a traumatic event, one he has sought to confront through *Barefoot Gen* and other works in his career as a manga artist. By the time this manga was made, however, a new generation of readers had little knowledge, let alone experience, of the atomic bombing. Through *Barefoot Gen* and Nakazawa's other works, they have seen a different side of the atrocity of the atomic bomb from the one they learn in history class at school, which in many cases is nothing more than dry historical data absent the emotions felt by wartime witnesses. By reactivating these emotions among younger readers, *Barefoot Gen* successfully passes down the memories of the bomb and the war to the younger generation of postwar Japan.

In the world of boys' manga, *Barefoot Gen* is a tale that ingeniously depicts the interior lives of its characters. The portrayal of characters' state of mind was actively

writes that the depiction of inner consciousness, which was popular in girls' manga, was not conventionalized in the field of boys' manga. According to him, Hoshi Hyūma and Yabuki Jō come to reflect on themselves just before the story ends.

23 Although we cannot discuss it here for want of space, we can think of traumatic emotions in *Barefoot Gen* in terms of the shock effect discussed in the field of early cinema studies. See Gunning (1990: 56-62). I would like to investigate this issue in my forthcoming article on Nakazawa.

developed in girls' manga around the time *Barefoot Gen* appeared. In contrast to the multi-layered arrangement of panels in girls' manga, Nakazawa unveils a variety of emotions in a relatively monotonous arrangement of frames. In spite of *Barefoot Gen's* impressive depiction of the atomic bombing, it is sadly underappreciated. But when we read *Barefoot Gen*, we feel the emotions of its characters as keenly as we do physical sensations. What arouses these feelings is less the political fact of the atomic bombing than the politics of vision made possible by Nakazawa Keiji's art.

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