

Final Project Critique

Qi En's work, "In the place where the winds rest", was an enjoyable and light-hearted read that nicely captured some humorous moments from her time abroad in the USA. Besides sharing personal anecdotes, she also shared her experiences engaging with cultural differences, making this an interesting read for any college student who has been or is thinking of studying abroad. While her work explored general social experiences any student might have coming to America, she manages to inject her manga with a unique sense of comedy that amply reflects her personality in the quirky stories she tells.

Her manga appears to be of the 'slice of life' variety, with more of a josei pace and feeling. Generally, nothing crazily exciting happens in terms of action; the drive of the plot comes across from her day-to-day experiences. The comedy is more of the observational kind, with no explicit punchline set-ups that would be too over-the-top.

While it is not really worth commenting on the quality of the art – given Qi En's status as an amateur, even as she aspires to be a mangaka – her art style is quite efficient and economical in conveying the humour of her narrative. The clean lines ensure that the panels are not too cluttered, and that the action in each panel is easy to follow. However, the art style does not immediately look like a conventional manga style, besides some of the facial expressions or symbols that she employs to help convey the characters' emotions. Besides that, the characters do not have conventional design traits, such as manga-styled eyes. This is not necessarily a negative feature, as it appears to be the style and preference of the author to prefer cleaner lines and backgrounds. Even so, the characters largely appear to all be wearing the same kind of clothes, and there is minimal background drawing that would have otherwise helped to contextualise each chapter and

give a better sense of setting. More details could have made for a richer reading experience, as opposed to having things happen in a relatively ‘empty’ space.

Furthermore, the manga comprises little narratives that have little to do with each other, besides the fact that they all centre around the same protagonist. If there were room for more chapters, it might be beneficial to build up characters’ personalities more, and perhaps use a recurring cast. This could help strengthen the narrative, as readers would have a set of expectations as to how each character thinks and acts. Readers would then be able to trace the character development as they read each story, building a richer world of characters. This could make for more interesting devices, such as inside jokes and recurring gags. Perhaps recurring characters would eventually surface, but with only seven chapters it is hard to tell where Qi En would plan to take her manga in subsequent volumes.

Additionally, the formatting for some of the earlier chapters appear to be inconsistent with the later chapters. For instance, Chapters 1 to 3 have individual title pages, with a little drawing that symbolises what the subsequent chapter is about. This is not done for Chapters 4 to 7. To make for a more consistent reading experience, it might be good to consider doing the same for later chapters. However, given how the later chapters are much shorter, and appear to approximate a ‘yonkoma’ format, it is understandable if the author decides that it is not necessary to set up the chapter with an introductory title page. It might even be refreshing for the manga chapters to vary in length, as shorter comedic bits can come in between longer and more introspective ones.

Overall, Qi En’s work was enjoyable, and it was interesting to get a peek into the experiences of an exchange student from Singapore. The comedic nature of her strips give a nice balance to her explorations of American culture and society. I would be interested to read more,

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with the hope that she would be able to build a stronger cast of characters, and paint a more vivid picture of the worlds she is trying to evoke.