

Research on manga in Brazil: a systematic literature review of postgraduate programs

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Abstract:

This study presents a systematic literature review on the status of manga and their inclusion in graduate programs in Brazil. The research broadly investigated: How many theses and dissertations on the topic of manga have been published in Brazil? Which graduate programs and universities have the highest number of defended works on this subject? Specifically, within the scope of Language Studies and the field of Literature, it examined which methodologies these works employed. To address these questions, data were retrieved from the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD). After screening the records (n = 2,244) using the Rayyan platform, a total of 91 works were identified. These comprised 82 dissertations and 9 theses, with the earliest dating back to 2005. The universities with the highest number of defended works were the University of São Paulo and the Fluminense Federal University. The fields of Literature, Communication, and History accounted for the largest number of studies on manga.

Keywords:

Manga; Systematic Literature Review; Postgraduate Programs.

Resumo:

A presente pesquisa propõe uma revisão sistemática de literatura sobre o estatuto dos *mangás* e sua inserção em programas de pós-graduação no Brasil. Para isso, questionou-se, de maneira geral: quantas teses e quantas dissertações foram

publicadas no Brasil sobre o tema *mangás*? Quais são os programas de pós-graduação e quais são as universidades que mais possuem trabalhos defendidos sobre o tema? De maneira específica, para o âmbito dos Estudos de Linguagem e da área de Letras, questionou-se quais metodologias foram utilizadas por esses trabalhos. A fim de responder a essas questões, foi utilizada como base de retirada de dados a plataforma Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD). Após realizar a triagem dos trabalhos (n=2.244), por meio da plataforma *Rayyan*, teve-se como resultado o montante de 91 trabalhos. Observou-se, dessa forma, um total de 82 dissertações e 9 teses, iniciadas a partir de 2005. Dentre as universidades que mais têm trabalhos defendidos estão a Universidade de São Paulo e a Universidade Federal Fluminense. Letras, Comunicação e História são os campos do saber com mais trabalhos defendidos sobre *mangás*.

Palavras-chave:

Mangás; Revisão Sistemática de Literatura; Programas de Pós-Graduação.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, Sonia Maria Bibe Luyten defended the first doctoral thesis on Japanese comics in Brazil, initiating a field of research aimed at better understanding Japanese comics and Japanese society at large. This article takes as its starting point the time frame from 1980 to 2024, just over thirty years, to conduct an exploratory literature review of research produced in Brazil, at master's and doctoral level, on *manga*.

It should be emphasized that, as this is an exploratory, bibliographical study, the aim of this article is to find out what research has been carried out on the subject in Brazil. Thus, the general question was: what contributions have master's and doctoral research made to the establishment of manga studies? Which universities have defended the most research on the subject? Were more theses or dissertations produced in the time frame obtained? Which areas of knowledge have been most interested in Japanese comics? In order to delimit and refine the data, questions were asked in the area in which the authors work. This way, when examining the defenses in these areas, we asked: which postgraduate programs had the most research on *manga*? Furthermore, what were the main methodologies used during this research?

To obtain the data for analysis, we used the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) as it was considered the platform with the most information on published academic works. The descriptors used in the search were two, "*manga*" and "*Japanese comic books*", and as there was no distinction between "*manga*", the comic book, and "*mango*", the fruit, we obtained a total of 2,244 works, and due to lexical correlation, several papers were also retrieved related to mangrove vegetation. We used the *Rayyan* platform to screen the papers that met the objective of this article, theses and dissertations that deal with *manga* as their main object. In the end, 91 academic works were found.

During the theoretical literature review on *manga*, we found research similar to ours. The same process was the subject of Purificação (2024), in her monograph for the Librarianship course at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. The descriptor "*manga*" and the database Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations are the same, as is the aim of both studies – to find the state of the art of postgraduate studies on *manga* in Brazil – but the results differ. While Purificação (2024) found 25 studies, our study found 91. It is not our intention to contrast this article with Purificação's monograph (2024), but to point out that there are previous studies on this subject and to add data and results to them.

This article consists of three more parts, apart from the final considerations, which are a topic on *manga*, the methodology and the results and discussions. In the first, we provide a brief section on the definition of *manga*, as well as a short history of its emergence; in the second, we present the methodological process that the research took and, finally, in the third, through graphs, there is a discussion to answer the questions raised. Finally, in the concluding remarks, we project pertinent questions about the validity of research on *manga*.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Manga

In Japanese, the term *manga* refers to comic books and is seen as a specific way of considering syncretic productions¹ specific to Japan. Initially, in the Nara period (8th century AD), Japanese comics were conceived in the form of drawings on scrolls, with the written information separated from the image frames, a Chinese technique (Petersen, 2011). Over the years, production techniques evolved: from scrolls to books; from short stories to grand narratives; from single themes to mixed themes. It was from the 19th century onwards, with the British cartoonist Charles Wrigman, that the use of dialogue balloons in *manga* frames became common (Petersen, 2011; Eiji, 2013). This configuration combined Western techniques with drawing and also influenced later artists².

In 1910, through cinema, the Japanese were introduced to cartoons (Sato, 2005), but it was only in 1913 that the country launched its first original production³. The link between anime and *manga* began in the 1950s with Osamu Tezuka, whose contribution was to integrate fluid framing techniques from cinema and animation into *manga*.

Among the studies on *manga* in Brazil, which are the focus of this article, attention is drawn to the academic work of Sonia Bibe Luyten who, in the 1990s, released the first edition of her book *Mangá: o poder dos quadrinhos japoneses*⁴. In it, the author reflects on the genre from a historical-cultural perspective, indicating its influences and value as a Japanese product.

As for the arrival of *manga* in Brazil, initially these works served as a link between Japanese immigrants and the content of their country, around the beginning of the 20th century. Over time, this process resulted in the creation of artists and niches in comics, using *manga* features in their art. Thus, with the development of television in the country during the 1990s, the widespread dissemination of these works was made possible: during this period, the now-defunct TV network *Rede Manchete* bought the rights to the anime *Knights of the Zodiac*, making this language even better known in the country (Vasconcelos, 2006; Luyten, 2012; Rocha, 2021).

By the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, the publishing houses JBC and Conrad were created, translating Japanese works into Portuguese. It was also a result of this process that the need to analyze *manga* as cultural objects emerged and their effects of meaning within Japanese culture. In Japan, the major *manga* publishers began to think of them as products based on a more demographic logic, allocating and selecting what would be published based on gender and age (Vigorito, 2015; Do Carmo Alvarenga, 2023). Thus, emerged the categories *kodomo*, whose works were shorter and without much development, aimed at children; *shounen*, whose stories were more developed, based on conflicts to be resolved, aimed at young men; *shoujo*, whose characteristics brought greater romantic appeal to the characters, for the young female target audience; *seinen*, which addresses social issues and with greater and more complex dilemmas, aimed at the adult male audience; and, finally, the *josei* works which, when aimed at the adult female audience, addressed more sensitive cultural themes, such as sex. Alvarenga (2023) also draws attention to the other categorizations, now thought of in a more thematic way: *ecchi*, in which the female body is eroticized and with little explicit sexual appeal; *hentai*, whose content focuses on nudity and explicit sex, classified as +18 years; *yuri*, in which homoaffective relationships between women are addressed and *yaoi*, addressing homoaffective relationships between men.

In the next section, we will explain the methodology of this research.

¹ Language productions formed by the relation between verbal and non-verbal languages.

² From 1930s onwards, a large amount of American animation arrived in Japan. As Otsuka (2013) points out, the *manga* that were produced from that time in had a large number of characters inspired by Mickey Mouse. Another important impact was the substantial increase in *manga* produced for children.

³ Although it was a short film, Seitaro Kitayama produced *Saru Kani Kassen* (The fight between the Crab and the Monkey) (Faria, 2008).

⁴ The result of her doctoral theses entitled “Poder e difusão ds quadrinhos japoneses como reflexo da sociedade nipônica” (Power and diffusion of Japanese comics as a reflection of Japanese society), defended in 1988, the book presents a historical overview of *manga*, from their emergence in Japan to their arrival in Brazil, also pointing out their main characteristics and target audience.

METHODOLOGY

This research constitutes a systematic literature review of an exploratory nature considering what has been produced in Brazil in the subject of *manga* in the academic field at master's and doctoral level. The aim was to answer the following questions: at master's and doctoral level, what does the research have to say in order to contribute to the establishment of investigations on the subject of *manga*? Which were the years in which most academic work on the subject was produced? Which universities defended these studies? Were more theses or dissertations produced? As this is a research whose authors are from the language field and to relate it to the scope of this journal, we focused on works in the areas of Letters, Translation and the Language Studies and asked: which postgraduate programs have carried out the most research on the subject in these fields? In addition, what were the main methodologies used by their authors?

In order to achieve the results, the research involved three phases: the first was the search for theses and dissertations on the subject; the second, the sorting of the collected academic works, and the third, the analysis process, seeking to answer the proposed questions.

Searching for academic works and selecting the *corpus*

The search for academic works was carried out using the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) platform. We disregarded the use of the Sucupira Platform due to the lack of information in some papers and the difficulty of accessing them. As we wanted to find out the state of the art at postgraduate level on Japanese comic books in Brazil, we used the descriptors “*manga*” and “Japanese comic books”. The major complication in this search was the lack of differentiation between *manga*, the comic book, and mango, the fruit. Thus, as we did not set a time limit, given that the research aims to find out how many academic works have been published in Brazil so far on the subject, we obtained the result of 2,244 works involving the descriptors, from 1973 to 2024. Next, in order to screen the data, we used the *Rayyan* platform – as it works via mobile application or web platform, we will use the terms “platform” and “application” to refer to *Rayyan*.

With the aim of aiding systematic literature review research, especially that involving large amounts of data, the Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) has produced the free-to-use application *Rayyan*⁵ - the basis for our data refinement. The application works by importing and cataloging data from scientific research platforms – whether articles, such as *SciELO*, or theses and dissertations, such as BDTD. Once imported, the data is listed and appears in the application indicating its title, author(s), abstract and, if necessary, referential information. As it is a review platform, *Rayyan* allows several researchers to access the same set of data – as long as the creator allows access. Thus, collaboratively, the authors consider whether the academic works listed will be included in the review or will be discarded, according to previous selection criteria.

Thus, for this research, we established inclusion and exclusion criteria for the papers available in the application for subsequent analysis: for inclusion, we selected those focusing on Japanese comic books as the main objects of appreciation and/or analysis; for exclusion, we did not select academic works that did not have *manga* as the target of analysis – which made it possible to exclude a significant amount that dealt with the mango fruit and mangrove vegetation – nor did we consider academic works that focused on some aspect of Japanese pop culture, taking *manga* as a secondary or exemplary element.

Once the inclusion and exclusion criteria had been established, an exhaustive screening of all 2,244 papers was carried out, arriving at the result of 91 defenses, from 2005 to 2024.

⁵ For more information, there is a booklet produced by UNESP which explains the features and step-by-step instructions for using the platform, available at: <https://www.btu.unesf.br/Home/sobre/biblioteca/manual-rayyan-systematic-review-1.pdf>.

Corpus analysis

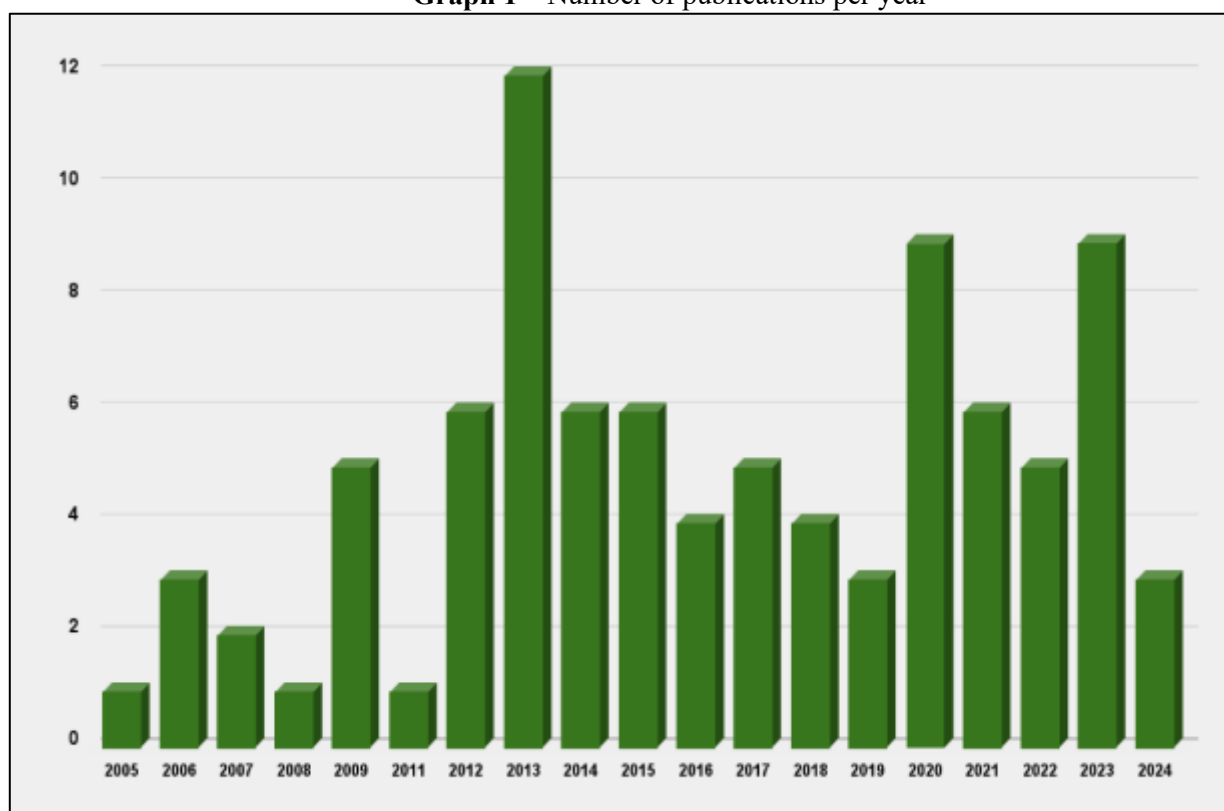
In order to analyze the publications and due to the volume of papers, the analysis process considered only those related to the Letters, Language Studies and Translation areas, motivated by the area of activity of the authors of this article. The years in which the academic works were defended, the universities where there is research in the area and the main methodologies used were all taken into account.

Aiming to make the data accessible and verifiable, a table was produced with the 91 academic works, catalogued according to: year; title, author(s), abstract, postgraduate program, university, link to the paper, subject area and type of research. For the list of academic works in the Letters, Language Studies and Translation areas, the “methodology”⁶ column was added.

ANALYSIS

The results of the research indicate a growing production of academic works from 2005 to 2024, totaling 91 studies; of these, 90.1% (n=82) are dissertations, while 9.9% (n=9) are theses. Among the years with the fewest publications were 2005, 2008 and 2011, with 1.07% (n=1) each. The year in which the most papers were published was 2013, with 13.2% (n=12). Graph 1 shows that in the initial years, between 2005 and 2011, the average number of publications was below 5 per year. From 2012 to 2025, however, there was great variation in the number of defenses, alternating in years such 2019, with 3.3% (n=3), 2020, with 9.9% (n=9), and 2023 with 9.9%(n=9). As can be seen from the data, no academic work was defended in 2010.

Graph 1 – Number of publications per year



Source: prepared by the authors (2025)

There is therefore a gap between the defense of the first thesis by Sonia Maria Luyten (1988)

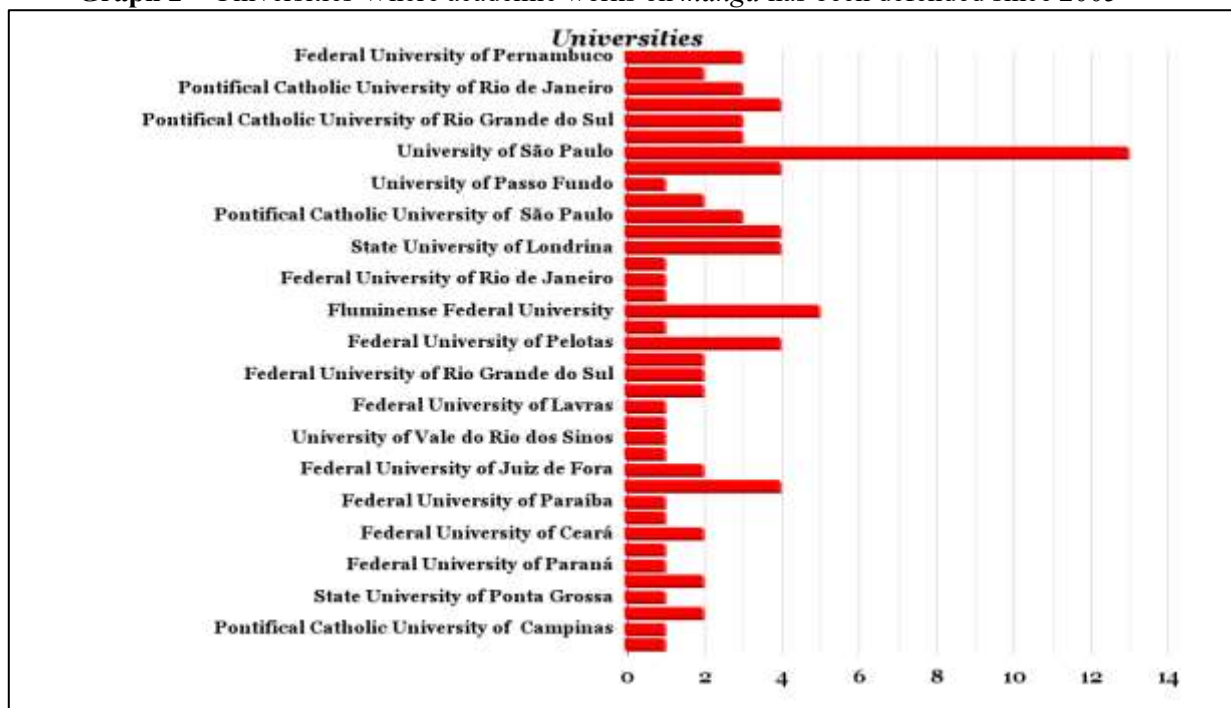
⁶ To access the tabulated data, see the link:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/15zhkHD5rzcCMAbmltX8k9Stfl0aCYOmRz64gbZfxBRE/edit?usp=sharing>

and the first defended academic work found on the platform, Braga Junior (2005). It should be noted that even Luyten's paper has no data on the platform, which leads us to reflect that the BDTD, although it records a broad period of research, does not have all the academic works that have been defended in the country in relation to *manga*. Although there is inconsistency regarding the definition of *manga* (fruit) and *manga* (comic book) on the platform, the most distant result dates back to 1973⁷, related to fruit.

The number of universities with academic works defended between 2005 and 2024 on the subject of *manga* is 39⁸. Of these 39, the University of São Paulo has the most papers defended, with 14.3% (n=13). The Fluminense Federal University also stands out with 5.5% (n=5). The Federal Universities of Bahia, São Carlos, Mato Grosso and Pelotas, as well as the State University of Londrina and the University of Brasília have 4.4% (n=4) of the papers defended, as can be seen in Graph 2.

Graph 2 – Universities Where academic works on *manga* has been defended since 2005



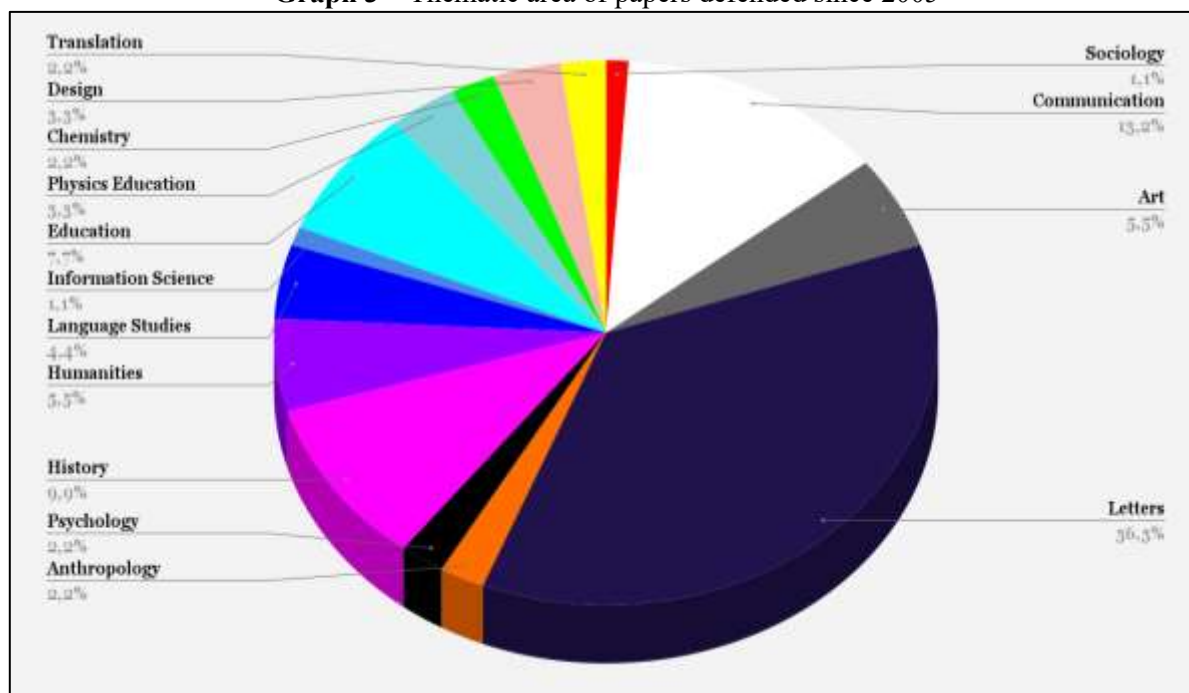
Source: prepared by the authors (2025)

There was a great diversity of areas in the research on *manga*. The Humanities and Applied Social Sciences had the highest percentage of papers defended. It should be noted that 36.3% (n=33) of the academic works were in the Letters area, while 13.2% (n=12) were in the Communication area and 9.9% (n=9) were in the History area. The areas of Education, Human Sciences (Humanities) and Art account for 7.7% (n=7), 5.5% (n=5) and 5.5% (n=5) of the published papers, respectively. These theses and dissertations from areas such as Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies are therefore allocated to the Human Sciences area. Papers in the Language Studies area account for 4.4% (n=4) of the research defended. The areas of Design (n=3) and Physics Teaching (n=3) account for 3.3% each. The areas of Translation (n=2), Chemistry (n=2), Anthropology (n=2) and Psychology (n=2) each had 2.2% of the papers defended. Finally, with only 1.1% of the papers, there were Information Science (n=1) and Sociology (n=1).

⁷ It is important to reflect on the inclusion of academic works on the platform since, although it was only created in 1999, it has been collecting papers from years before that – as can be seen with the date 1973.

⁸ Although the graph Only shows 20 universities, this is just one way of visualizing it. In the link to the table, you can see the full chart with all the universities and the number of papers defended at them.

Graph 3 – Thematic area of papers defended since 2005

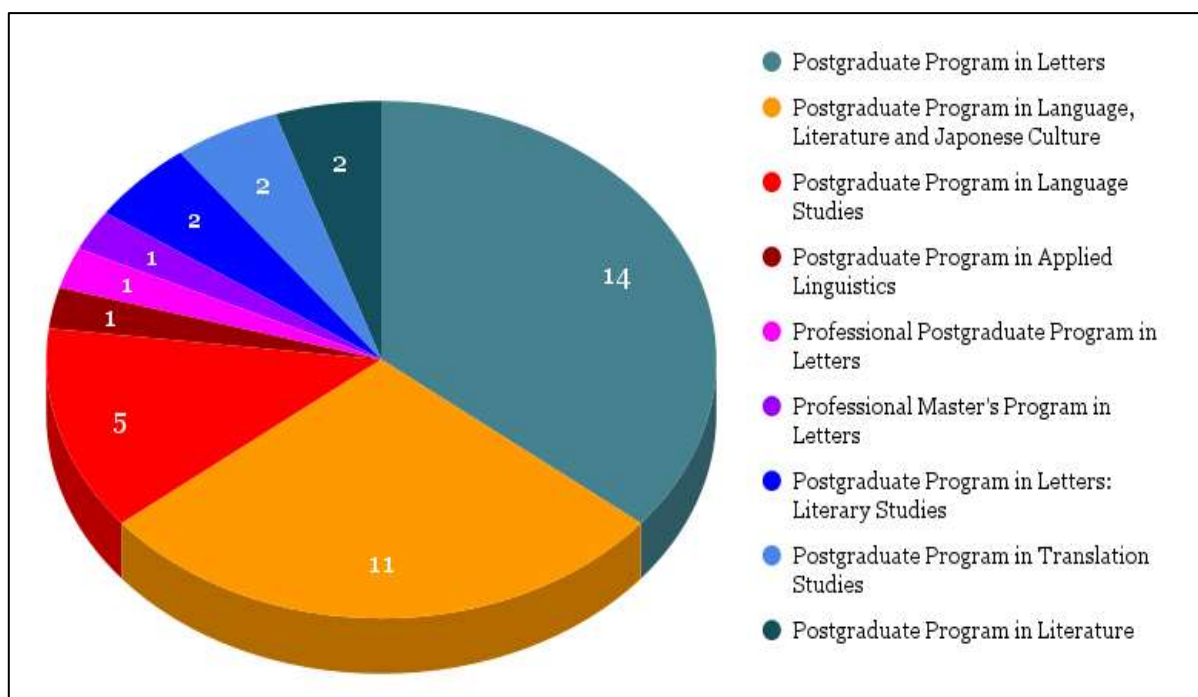


Source: prepared by the authors (2025)

Due to the high number of papers, we limited the analysis to theses and dissertations defended in the areas of Letters (n=33), Language Studies (n=4) and Translation (n=2). The following section will consider the approaches used by the academic works to analyze the *manga* phenomenon, which postgraduate programs have published the most on the subject and a discussion of what these academic works have to say about the concept of Japanese comics in Brazil.

By specifying the analysis only for the Languages area – Literature, Translation and Language Studies – we can see that, among the postgraduate programs, *Letters* is the one that stands out the most. Considering 39 papers under analysis, although 35.9% (n=14) are from postgraduate programs in Letters, the universities differ. Unicentro (Nascimento, 2014; Theodorovicz, 2014), UERJ (Tanaka, 2007; Fonseca, 2013), UNIFESP (Rocha, 2022; Bezerra, 2023), the Catholic University of Pelotas (Cé, 2009; 2014) and PUC-RS (Monteiro, 2020; Aguiar, 2023) each have 5.4% (n=2) of the papers defended, while the University of Passo Fundo (Bastistella, 2009), UEM (Bisconcim, 2012), UFPB (Curvelo, 2013) and UFRGS (Batistella, 2014) each have 2.7% (n=1) of the papers defended.

Graph 4 – Postgraduate programs with the most defended papers since 2005 in the areas of “*Letras*” (Literature) and Languages Studies



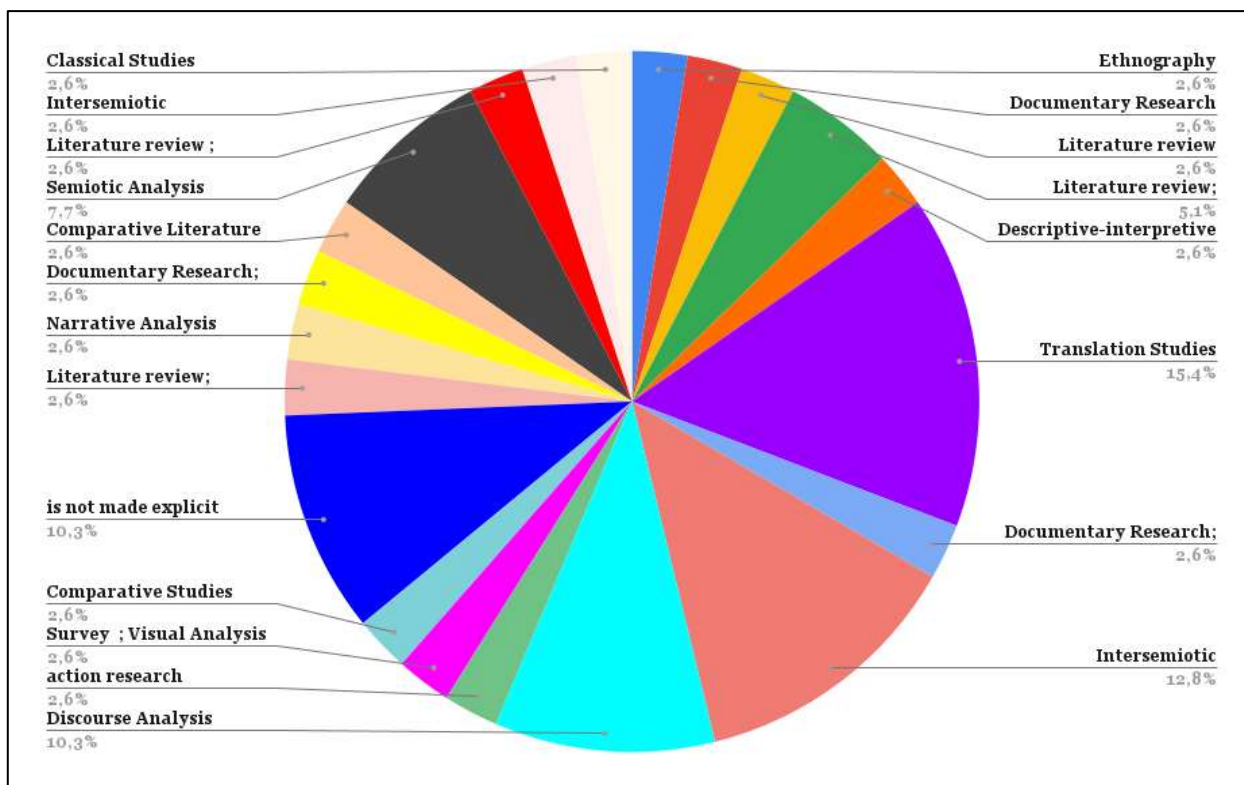
Source: prepared by the authors (2025)

The Postgraduate Program in Japanese Language, Literature and Culture at the University of São Paulo recorded the highest number of defended research papers with 29.7% (n=11) (Furuyama, 2008; Leitão, 2012; Wanderley, 2013; Torquato, 2014; Nakagawa, 2016; Ramos, 2017; Perides, 2018; Gava, 2018; Melo-Nascimento, 2020; Yanaguiya, 2022; Gassert, 2024). Although the first academic work retrieved from the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations is dated 2005, when we look at the *Letters* area, the first was only defended in 2007 (Tanaka, 2007). In 2010, 2011 and 2019, no papers were defended in this area, according to BDTD data.

When we analyzed the 39 abstracts of each of the papers, we tried to identify which methodology was used to carry out the research. The following graph shows this relationship. Among the studies, 15.6% (n=6) used Translation Studies as their methodology (Leitão, 2012; Marques, 2013; Perides, 2018; Freire, 2020; Pinheiro, 2021; Lopes, 2023), which focused on *manga* and their respective translations into Portuguese, describing and observing their effects of meaning in the transition from one language to another. In addition, with significant weight and quantity, Intersemiotic Translation (Curvelo, 2013; Nascimento, 2014; Torquato, 2014; Batistella, 2014; Rocha, 2022), appears in 12.8% (n=5) of the academic works defended, using *manga* and their adaptations for anime as a basis. Discourse Analysis appears in around 10.3% (n=4) of the papers each. In these studies (Fonseca, 2013; Cé, 2014; Theodorovicz, 2014; Maia, 2023), the meanings of specific *manga* were analyzed using different theoretical approaches. In the latter, it was possible to observe allusions to the studies of theorists such as Michael Foucault and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

The Semiotic Analysis papers accounted for 7.7% (n=3) of the results. While two of the papers (Costa, 2021; Antunes, 2021) favored the theoretical perspective of comic book analysis provided by Thierry Groensteen, one (Batista, 2023) adopted the semiotic perspective of Jacques Fontanille – whose contribution updates the theoretical vision of French semiotics formulated by Algirdas Julien Greimas and collaborators.

Graph 5 – Main methodologies used in academic works on *manga* defended since 2005 in the areas of Literature and Language Studies



Source: prepared by the authors (2025)

There are also papers whose abstracts do not specify the methodology. Although their abstracts often contain passages indicating the analysis of works, the forms and methodologies of analysis are not presented. The number of papers presenting themselves in this way is 10.3% (n=4) (Ramos, 2017; Melo-Nascimento, 2020; Castello, 2023; Gassert, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to carry out a systematic review of master's and doctoral level productions on *manga* in Brazil. The results show that, across a diverse range of fields, most of the academic works were defended in the Literature, Communication and History areas. The University of São Paulo stood out in terms of research output since 2005, when the first dissertation was defended, according to the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations platform.

This study provides a foundation for future research on *manga*. The number of 91 production showed that, over the past 20 years of research, comics have been approached in different ways, with the relation between *manga* and anime being one of the most recurrent focuses. It is hoped that this research, as well as the spreadsheet created during the course of it, can serve as a resource for other researchers who are interested in this area and this theme.

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