

by Samuel Mokona Ng

CAR - Comic Artist Reviews : CLAMP



Communication Arts will start a new column and reviews the most up-to-date graphic novel artists from all over the world. Starting from October issue. When people see the word “graphic novel,” most of the people think of Japan instantly. As the world’s largest original place of production for graphic novel, Japan publishes million of new copies every year. Since the 1950s, graphic novels have steadily become a major part of the Japanese publishing industry, representing a 481 billion yen market in Japan in 2006. (approximately 4.4 billion dollars)

Anyone who is into Japanese manga (which means graphic novel in Japanese) and animation culture should be very familiar with the name “CLAMP.” Out of those brilliant manga artists, Clamp is one of the most successful artist groups from Japan. CLAMP is an all-female Japanese mangaka (graphic novelist) group, almost all of their manga series were made into anime series after the manga was published. As of 2006, More than 92 million

Clamp manga copies have been sold all over the world.

Clamp first started in 1985. It was a twelve-members doujinshi circle (which mean Self-published books in Japanese) originally. The former members of Clamp included Tamayo Akiyama, Soushi Hishika, O-Kyon, Sei Nanao, Shinya Ohmi, Kazue Nakamori, Yuzuru Inoue, and Leeza Sei. By 1990, the circle had diminished from twelve to seven. In 1993, three more members left the group, leaving the current four members.

Clamp’s reputation is built on their glamorous character design, also their detailed, yet versatile drawing style. They started their career professionally when they had *RG VEDA* published in *WINGS magazine*. Since then, they kept drawing for more than one manga magazine at the same time, that makes their name pop out in the industry. They expended their demography of their readers in other age group when *Tokyo Babylon* was published,

which was a story that reflects social problems by that time. *Magic Knight Rayearth* was the most luxurious story, the colour and the lines are almost flawless. But Clamp stop using their signature style after *Magic Knight Rayearth*. In 1996, they suddenly changed their style when they start drawing *Card Captor Sakura* and *Wish*, the lines were simpler and the colours are fresher and brighter than their previous works. In 1997, they pushed aestheticism to maximum level when they combined cinematography techniques in *Clover*.

In 2006, CLAMP made their first U.S. Public debut at ANIME EXPO in Anaheim, California. They were well received at the convention, with 6,000 fans in attendance for their panel.



They often represent themselves as manga characters. These examples are from their official website.

Current Members

Okawa Ageha, formerly known as Nanase Ohkawa, and she was born on May 2, 1967 in Ōsaka, Japan. Ohkawa is the leader of the group. She plots and writes the scripts for the story. She sometimes negotiates with their editors and also writes the screenplay of the animated version of their manga.

Mokona, formerly known as Mokona Apapa she was born on June 16, 1968 in Kyōto, Japan. Mokona is the chief artist who in charge of drawing the manga and she also in charge of most of the character design. Her precised art style is the trademark of the studio. She is the namesake of the character Mokona, who first appears in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, and later in *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* and *xxxHolic*.

Neko Tsubaki, she formerly known as Mick Neko. She was born on January 21, 1969 in Kyōto, Japan. Neko is mostly Mokona's first assistant but she is also the main artist for a few series (*Watashi no Suki na Hito*, *Wish*, *Suki Dakara Suki*, *Gōhō Drug*). Neko is in charge of drawing Super Deformed characters (also known as SD, characters are drawn in a highly exaggerated manner. Those characters are typically small and chubby, like their manga characters above) Neko also works with Mokona on character design.

Igarashi Satsuki, she formerly known as Satsuki Igarashi. She was born on February 8, 1969 in Kyōto, Japan. Satsuki's jobs to assist Mokona and Neko in their work, and is also in charge of the design of the manga book. She also has a monthly column in *Kadokawa Newtype Magazine*.

Clamp might be the most productive manga artist in the world. They are now drawing three stories in three different magazines at the same time, two of the magazines are publishing weekly. In the past twenty years, they have wrote twelve stories, and serIALIZED in more than 130 books. Probably no other groups in history can be as productive as Clamp.



As part of Clamp's 15th Anniversary, Clamp's members changed their names. Now they are Okawa Ageha, Mokona, Neko Tsubaki and Igarashi Satsuki.

The most successful and popular manga of Clamp is certainly *Card Captor Sakura* (also abbreviated as CCS). CCS originally serialized in Nakayoshi monthly magazine from 1996-2000. It won the Seiun Award, a major manga award in Japan, for best manga in 2001. CCS is a magical girl genre which is one of the most typical girl's manga genre, the story was about ten-year-old Sakura Kinomoto opened a mysterious book in her father's study room. Sakura accidentally let loose the magical Clow Cards, but by her ability to open the seal, she is revealed to have magical powers, and it became her responsibility to retrieve the missing cards.

The first six volumes of the manga and the first and second seasons of the anime focus on Sakura's attempts to capture the released Clow Cards. The latter six volumes of the manga and third season of the anime introduce several new characters. Since Sakura has now become the new Master of the Clow Cards, she must transform them under her own magic into Sakura Cards.

Angelic Layer

2001 is the changing point of Clamp's career. All of the manga of Clamp by that point was mostly targeted at teenage girls. After they finished the CCS story, Clamp decided to expand their target market as well to teenage boys, therefore they drew *Angelic Layer*. The drawing style of *Angelic Layer* is completely different from their previous work. The lines became thicker and more pointy. (Usually the lines of Japanese girl's manga are thinner and more smooth and curvy)

Angelic Layer was about Misaki Suzuhara, a seventh grader who just moved in to Tokyo to live with her aunt, Shouko Asami. After arriving in the city, she saw the battle doll Athena on a big screen television outside of Tokyo Station. She was immediately fascinated by the amazingly popular toy called *Angelic Layer*, a game in which players (called Deus) buy and custom-design dolls known as Angels. Angels can be controlled mentally when they are within the field called the "layer". Layers are very expensive, and most people just pay to use them by the hour in establishments resembling cybercafes. Even though Misaki was clueless about

the game, she soon began to compete in tournament, and was assisted and watched carefully by Icchan, later Icchan's identity was revealed as Ichiro Mihara, the creator of *Angelic Layer*. With the help of Icchan, Misaki got into the final 2 and faced off her mother in *Angelic Layer Final*.

Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle

Clamp surprised their fans once again when they announced their two new released manga series, *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* and *xxxHolic* in 2003. Although the stories are serialized in two different magazines, the time line of the two story is synchronized which means the characters from *Reservoir Chronicle* also appear in *xxxHolic* from time to time and the two manga occasionally intertwine with each other. That was a very smart and strategic move on Clamp in marketing, since they not only brought new spice in their story, also they recruited new fans, since readers of either story, need to read the other story as well.

Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle, also known as *Chronicle of the Wings*, the story was about Sakura, the princess of Clow kingdom, which was ruled by her older brother, King Tōya. Her childhood friend Syaoran was a young archaeologist. Sakura was revealed to have strange powers when she had a vision of a mysterious symbol and places she has never seen. Meanwhile, Syaoran discovered the same symbol at the ruins he was excavating. He sees Sakura standing on the symbol on the ground. Ghostly wings appeared on her back and a mysterious force began to pull her into the walls of the ruins. Syaoran rescued her in time, but her wings are scattered across dimensions. The High Priest of Clow Kingdom, Yukito, immediately realized that Sakura's "wings" were the manifestation of her soul and memories; she will die without them. In order to save Sakura, Syaoran must journey to retrieve her wing's feathers, the fragments of her memories.

Yukito sent Syaoran and the unconscious Sakura to the Dimensional Witch, Yūko, who is one of the main characters in *xxxHolic*. There he meets Kurogane, a rough-mannered ninja banished from his

world by Princess Tomoyo, and Fay D. Flourite, a magician who fled his world to avoid King Ashura. Each of them must pay with what he values most in order to gain the power to cross dimensions. Syaoran, must pay with his relationship with Sakura: even if he is able to retrieve all of her memories, she will never remember anything about him or their relationship. After the three agreed to her terms, Yūko presented them with the power to cross dimensions; a white creature named Mokona Modoki.

While traversing through worlds to find Sakura's feathers, the four travellers and Mokona were forced to overcome many dangers and opponents, some of whom were figures from Syaoran's past who wish to collect Sakura's feathers for their own reasons as they are seen to be objects that hold great power.

Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle is almost a sequel to every previous story, because Clamp bought back the characters from most of their previous book, including *Card Captor Sakura*, *Magic Knight Rayearth*, *Clover*, *Chobits* and *Angelic Layer*. That guarantees that the old fans are going to read their new book, or the other way around. After 20 years in the industry, Clamp indeed becomes real commercial artists with smart marketing strategies. **CA**