

The Cross-dressing Girls in the 1970s Japanese *Shōjo* Manga

日本の少女マンガにおける「男装少女」
-1970年代をめぐって-

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Introduction

Shōjo manga was seen as little girls' fantasies replete with old love clichés and lacking depth. This dissertation examined the cross-dressing girls portrayed in 1970s *shōjo* manga to prove that *shōjo* manga was not as vulgar or insignificant as it claimed. From the two aspects of gender and race, it was argued that *shōjo* manga actually represented women's discourse through which Japanese women suffering from the double oppression of gender and race under Japan's modernization could finally articulate their own voices. The image of the cross-dressing girl, which is considered an important representation of *shōjo* culture, revealed a contrast to the fixed notions of gender and race and introduced the neutral, fluid gender.

During Japan's modernization, Japanese women were doubly oppressed by both Japanese and Western men. In modern Japanese history, some images of women symbolizing a modern Japan emerged. The women in these images were students, workers, nurses, and teachers, among others, and were depicted as being participants in Japan's modernization out of free will and having their own voice. However, in reality,

these new images were contrived by the patriarchal Japanese government to better serve the men since, in reality, the women were still attached to men's positions—for example, *ryōsaikenbo*¹ (“the good wife and wise mother”). Was this the role those women actually wanted to play in society? The true voice of women during modernization was behind the iron curtain of patriarchal discourse. In other words, women were still absent in the primarily male-influenced modernization process. It was not until the late 1960s and the early 1970s, which witnessed the development of the publishing industry and increasing economic prosperity in Japan, that the popularity of *shōjo*² manga soared across the nation, attracting a huge readership. As most artists and readers of *shōjo* manga were female, a women's discourse in Japanese postwar society was established, whereby women made their voice heard and articulated their desire in the form of becoming cross-dressing girls.

¹ 良妻賢母

² 少女, girl(s). Refer to 1.1 Prewar *Shōjo* Culture, page 17.

In the 1970s, many themes and different characters appeared in *shōjo* manga. However, the cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys³ that featured were considered the most influential as these characters were seen to represent the highest level of *shōjo* manga and to have the highest literary merit. The previous studies focused on this subject can be categorized under either gender or race.

Gender

While many studies, both eastern and western, involved in-depth research and analysis into the cross-dressing and transgender issues apparent in *shōjo* manga, they all failed to grasp the essence of fluidity in the 1970s *shōjo* manga as women's discourse for pre-sex girls. The “cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys” were neither an escape or a disguise for oppressed women nor demonstrated hatred toward women; rather, *shōjo* manga presented women's original look in the pre-Oedipal period that had not been corrupted by the patriarchal power—the way they wanted to be depicted.

³ This dissertation takes cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys as one gender category in the *shōjo* manga discourse because of their similar qualities of hybridity and fluidity; therefore, when cross-dressing girls are discussed in this dissertation, androgynous boys are also included.

Race

There have been significantly fewer discussions on race than those on gender despite the myriad Western images of stateless faces in *shōjo* manga, as most scholars believed that these images were no more than a representation of the over-worshipping of the West by Japanese women. It has been argued that Japanese women's magazines idealized the problem and simplified the fashion trend after the 1970s because Western images are still used widely in women's magazines and mixed-blood models are still favored the most. Even if the models are Japanese, their faces are far from what would be considered traditional Japanese beauty; they are a hybrid of Oriental and Western beauty.

In summary, while the above studies were both gender and race faceted, most of them failed to advance feminist perspectives on women's discourse because they neglected to mention the essence of *shōjo* manga as women's discourse. In fact, all these studies on cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys were conducted within a modernist theoretical framework, with most conclusions being based on prevalent binary gender

perspectives that failed to identify the postmodern qualities of fluidity and diversity in *shōjo* manga. As a discourse for pre-sex girls, gender and race are unfixed, ambiguous, and ambivalent. Focusing on these cognitive omissions, this dissertation adopts another postmodern dimension to examine the following questions: What is the women's discourse in *shōjo* manga? Why is this discourse unique and significant to women? Why and how are cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys formed in *shōjo* manga? How do we understand and interpret them? What influence do they have as imaginary images in the present world? To answer these questions, this dissertation divides the research into four chapters:

Chapter One: “Prewar *Shōjo* Culture and Postwar *Shōjo* Manga”

Chapter one first traces the roots of prewar *shōjo* culture by examining *shōjo* magazines, the S-relationship prevailing in all-girls high schools, and the all-female cast of the Takarazuka Revue.⁴ Then, it maps the history of postwar *shōjo* manga and examines the response of the mainstream culture to *shōjo* manga.

⁴ 宝塚歌劇, refer to 1.1.2 *Shōjo* Theater: Takarazuka Revue, P22.

Chapter Two: “The Gender of Cross-dressing Girls: A Piercing Voice from the Silence of Japanese Women”

Chapter two presents a gender analysis of the cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys. Through an analysis of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories and the consequent feminist theoretical developments such as Hélène Cixous’s theory of bisexuality and feminine writing and Julia Kristeva’s feminist psychoanalytic theory, this chapter examines feminists’ advocacy of a return to the pre-Oedipal period—a chaotic period of bisexuality. Discourse on this period, which asserts that a baby can choose to identify as male or female because its gender is still fluid, is similar to the discourse in *shōjo* manga, in which both the manga artists and the readers are adolescent pre-sex women. This is a maternal world; as the mother possesses the phallus or the power in the Imaginary order of the pre-Oedipal period, the women in this pre-Oedipal discourse of *shōjo* manga have a voice and are no longer the oppressed, the distorted, or the silenced. They can articulate their voice and want to show their original neutral, fluid form, as reflected in the cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys in *shōjo* manga.

Texts such as *The Rose of Versailles*,⁵ *Princess Knight*,⁶ *Heart of Thomas*,⁷ and *The Poem of Wind and Trees*⁸ are closely analyzed to substantiate this dissertation's arguments.

Chapter Three: “A Race of Cross-dressing Girls: A Mimicry Reflected in a Western Mirror”

Chapter three takes Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory of mimicry and Lacanian mirror theory to examine the emergence of many modern Japanese images of women under Japanese modernization such as *ryōsaikenbo*, *jogakusei*,⁹ and the “new woman,” all of which were “fragmented bodies” in the Lacanian mirror. Women, through the *shōjo* manga discourse and by identifying with the many Western images, finally built their own space that while mimicking the West also incorporating ambivalence that it was “almost the same, but not quite.”¹⁰ In this sense, regardless of whether the cross-dressing girls and androgynous boys in *shōjo* manga are somewhat Western

⁵ 『ベルサイユのばら』

⁶ 『リボンの騎士』

⁷ 『トーマの心臓』

⁸ 『風と木の詩』

⁹ 女学生

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 122.

representations, it is the differences between these Westernized images and real Western images that expose the mockery of Japanese women and therefore deconstruct the Western colonial power.

Chapter Four: “Limitations and Impacts of *Shōjo* Manga”

Chapter four analyzes the limitations of the *shōjo* manga boom in the 1970s in terms of dissemination paths, themes, and reader gender. It also analyzes how *shōjo* manga has maintained its core—*shōjo* culture—when faced with the social and cultural changes brought about by the scientific and technological revolution. By breaking down the walls of women’s discourse in *shōjo* manga, *shōjo* culture has flowed into a much broader realm and has had a greater impact on our present world.

Conclusion

From the above four chapters, it is then concluded that 1970s *shōjo* manga was primarily women’s discourse for pre-sex young women, through which women were able to articulate their voice for the first time as cross-dressing girls. The gender and

race of this postmodern female image were fluid and unfixed which seamlessly connected with today's Internet, so the core of *shōjo* manga survives as the print magazines have been gradually replaced by electronic texts. Further, *shōjo* manga has transcended gender barriers and now flows from the women's discourse in *shōjo* manga to much broader dimensions that collude with mainstream culture and deconstruct the patriarchal discourse through the rewriting and re-narrating of texts, changing it into a hybrid female discourse. In addition, in line with postmodern feminist movements, it is no longer necessary to position women opposite men to fight patriarchal power in the current phallic framework as the two sexes are no longer in binary opposition; instead, they have a fluid, plural coexistence. It is wise to use the feminine power of women's discourse to rewrite men and remodel them as fluid and diverse to make them, as Homi Bhabha describes, "almost the same, but not quite,"¹¹ thereby mocking the patriarchal society and deconstructing the phallic discourse.

¹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

Bibliography

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004.