Girls' Culture across Historical Divides: Negotiating Girlhood in Girls' Magazines and Girls' Comics in Mid-Twentieth Century Japan (1937-1973)

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: Girls' Culture across Historical Divides: Negotiating Girlhood in Girls' Magazines and Girls' Comics in Mid-Twentieth Century Japan (1937-1973)

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (History)

Complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

Girls' Culture across Historical Divides: Negotiating Girlhood in Girls' Magazines and Girls' Comics in Mid-Twentieth Century Japan (1937-1973)

Fangdan Li

In this thesis, I examine the history of girls' culture in Japan between 1937 and 1973. In particular, I address the lack of research in existing studies of women's media on the intervening periods between early twentieth century and the post-1970s period Japan. To this end, I explore how agents of girls' culture, such as illustrations artists, magazines editors, female students and female comic artists negotiated gender expressions of girlhood in relation to state expectations. I specifically focus on discourse of girlhood and womanhood in girls' magazines of the Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945) and girls' comics of the early 1970s. By analysing wartime girls' magazines such as *Girls' Companion* (jp. *Shōjo no tomo,* 1908-1955) and *Girls' Club* (jp. *Shōjo kurabu,* 1923-1962), as well as postwar girls' comics like Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* (jp. *Berusaiyu no bara,* 1972-1973), I argue that these two forms of mass media allowed girls and women to assert agencies over gender roles through imaginations of girlhood that offered alternatives to dominant gender ideologies without directly opposing it. Through my analysis, I propose a new historical approach to studying girls' culture by highlighting its role as a discursive space where marginalized individuals like girls and women were free to create and consume alternative gender expressions from within the framework of dominant ideologies in modern Japan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Like girls' culture itself is constructed through the collective efforts of many, so too is this thesis the culmination of support I have received during my years in graduate schools. I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor and mentor, Matthew Penney, for his unwavering guidance and support over the past four years as I worked through different stages of this project. I could not have completed this thesis without his insightful feedback on numerous drafts, the research materials he kindly brought back for me from his trip to Japan and his constant encouragement that carried me through to the finish line. I am equally grateful to the other members of my examining committee, Elena Razlogova and Alison Rowley, for their thought-provoking questions and comments during my defense. Peter Gossage generously chaired my defense in late summer and offered thoughtful advice on future opportunities to present my work. I also wish to thank Max Begholz, Sarah Ghabrial, Nora Jaffary and Lucie Laumonier, whose seminars equipped me with the knowledge and skills that informed my historical approach in this project. Last but not least, I would like to thank our graduate program assistant, Donna Whittaker, for her dedicated administrative support that allowed me to navigate my program with ease while staying focused on my research.

Beyond the indispensable support from the Department of History at Concordia University, I am also deeply appreciative of the guidance I received in my previous graduate studies. I am particularly indebted to Linda Chance, Ayako Kano and Victor Mair from the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania, who taught me the practical skills of conducting research in English during my time there as a MA student and who have remained generous with their advice and encouragement after my graduation. I must also thank Jolyon Thomas for including me in his seminar "Japanese History and Civilization," which

introduced me to an invaluable list of foundational readings in my field that I still consult while working on this project. During my time in Japan, I greatly benefited from vibrant discussions with instructors and cohorts in courses and workshops at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC), which sparked my early interest in comic history. At Sophia University, the seminars I took with Noriko Murai and David Slater helped me develop the skills essential to my analysis of artworks and interviews in this project. I am also grateful for Patrick Galbraith's "Popular Culture," which provided the theoretical foundation in cultural and media studies that has continued to push me to think critically about popular media throughout my research. While I cannot exhaust the list of professors and instructors I have learned from, I would like to extend my gratitude to all of them for their teaching and support that helped bring this project to fruition.

In addition to my professional trainings, this project also benefited greatly from the invaluable help of colleagues and friends during the course of my writing. I am especially grateful to James Welker and Andrea Horbinski, who generously took the time to speak with me about my research and recommended sources that proved instrumental to this project. I have also been fortunate to work alongside fellow researchers from the Department of History at Concordia like Liam Devitt, Kristin Franseen, Mark Andrew Hamilton, Xuefeng Hu, Gabryelle Iaconetti, Sophia Richter, Lucie Saunier, Althea Thompson, Amanda Whitt and Yasmin Hother Yishey, whose exchanges with me within and outside of classes informed the early stages of my writing. In the months leading up to my defense, conversations with peers about writing tips at the Craft of Historical Nonfiction Workshop helped me push through the final stages of this project, and I would like to extend my gratitude to the workshop's organizers, Ernest Lee and Federico Pirino.

One of the greatest challenges I faced while writing this thesis was perhaps the loss of my fiancé, and I am extremely grateful for all the warmth and emotional support I received from

friends like Emily Beisel-Bolen, Alisa Freedman, Geneva Glows, Tianran Hang, Sawako Honzawa, Rina Nieda, Keiko Nishimura, Paz O'Farrell, Karl Ponthieux, Sophia Richter and Jiahui Zeng during this difficult time. I also wish to extend special thanks to my fellow executive members of the Graduate History Student Association, William Gillies, Nia Langdon, Owen Pharand, Karl Ponthieux and Sophia Richter, for their understanding and solidarity that allowed me to balance student government duties and research while coping with personal loss.

Above all, I would not have been able to undertake this journey without the selfless dedication of my father and mother, Ruijun Li and Dongmei Zheng, for their financial support and devoted love that sustained my graduate studies, and most of all, for nurturing my childhood passion for Japanese popular culture and language when studying foreign languages for pleasure was still unheard of in my hometown. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to my fiancé's parents, Paul Bookman and Wasna Dabbagh, who gave me a second home and family across the Pacific and supported me through my toughest moments with tender care and encouragement of the best in-laws I could ever hope for. The partner of my fiancé's sister, Shane Narayan, was always only a message away as I grieved her passing in the last year of my program. My furry friends, Tito and Stevie, offered the warmest companionship as I worked through writing blocks while drafting the first chapter during my brief visit to the United States last year.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my fiancé and his sister, Mark and Rachel Bookman, for their lives and affection have shaped this project in ways I could not begin to express. Rachel was the sweetest sister to me from the moment we met and later became my fiercest cheerleader after Mark's passing. Despite carrying her own grief and illness, Rachel was always there for me whether I needed a sounding board for research ideas or a gaming partner to catch Pokémon. I would never have been able to move forward, in both my research and my life, without her

nurturing sisterhood, which I will cherish forever. If Rachel gave me the strength to complete this project, it was Mark who set me on this path in the first place. In the months before his sudden passing, Mark indulged my restless search for the “best” topic. He tirelessly offered thoughtful feedback for every idea I had and challenged me to strive for higher standards in my research. He was unstinting in his editorial support as I drafted my research proposal for this project, while equally generous with encouragement and praise whenever I needed a booster of confidence. His whimsical jokes and Pokémon memes never failed to make me smile when I was anxious about work, while his companionship on movie nights and his weird bedtime stories always calmed me on sleepless nights. Mark has been, and forever will be, my greatest source of motivation in my academic journey, my partner in crime in our pursuit of perfection, and my dearest friend and companion in this life and the next. I press ahead with my research knowing that he would be proud of all that I achieve.

DEDICATION

For Mark and Rachel

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Introduction

In this thesis, I examine the history of girls' culture in Japan between 1937 and 1973. In particular, I address a gap in existing scholarship on women's media that often focuses on the early twentieth century and the post-1970s period but leave the intervening decades underexplored. To this end, I explore how agents of girls' culture, such as illustrations artists, magazines editors, female students and other consumers and female comic artists, negotiated gender expressions of girlhood in relation to state ideologies. I specifically focus on the discourses of girlhood and womanhood in girls' magazines (*jp. shōjo zasshi*) of the Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945) and early 1970s girls' comics (*jp. shōjo manga*). By analysing girls' magazines such as *Girls' Companion* (jp. *Shōjo no tomo,* 1908-1955)*, Girls' Club* (jp. *Shōjo kurabu,* 1923-1962) and girls' comics like *The Rose of Versailles* (jp. *Berusaiyu no bara,* 1972-1973), I argue that these popular media allowed girls and women to assert agency over gender roles through imaginations of girlhood that offered gender alternatives to dominant ideologies without directly opposing them. Through my analysis, I propose a new historical approach to girl's culture that conceptualizes it as a discursive space where marginalized individuals like girls and women are free to create and consume alternative gender expressions from within the framework of dominant ideologies in modern Japan.

Japan's history of modernization began with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which ended the country's last feudal regime. In the following decades, Japan rapidly modernized by adopting Western institutions, including modern forms of media such as newspapers and magazines. While women were initially excluded from media production, the expansion of women's education and the rise of female consumers prompted many sectors of the media industry to employ women in creating female-oriented contents such as domestic columns in the early twentieth century. By the late 1930s, it had become common for educated women to work in various media-related creative

professions such as fiction writing, news reporting and comic creation. This growing presence of women in media not only increased their visibility in mass culture but also provided new avenues for feminists such as Hiratsuka Raicho[1] and Ichikawa Fusae to advocate for women's political rights and social equality. Although stringent wartime censorship significantly restricted women's freedom of expression during the World War II, the government's mobilization of women for war support allowed activists and journalists to continue advocating for women's issues in mass media without directly challenging state ideologies. After the war ended in 1945, women's prominence as political partners to the government through their familial roles as housewives and mothers continued to shape their media representations and consumption after Japan's national priorities shifted from military expansion to economic growth in the early postwar decades. During the high economic growth era (1955-1973), housewives and mothers served both as the primary consumers of symbols of life improvement like the 3C (car, cooler and colored TV) in mass media and advertising, and civilian censors of "harmful books" in emerging media like story comics at a time when most of Japan's legal censorship had been abolished by the Allied Occupation (1945-1952).

Meanwhile, Japan's two baby booms in the late 1940s and early 1970s gave rise to new generations of young urban women who became a prominent force in the production and consumption of mass media in late twentieth-century Japan. These young women differed from their parents in their stronger interest in self-actualization and less willingness to sacrifice for companies and families. Some, disillusioned with the male-dominated mass media, have advocated for women's rights as individuals through alternative media known as *mini-komi* (zines, pamphlets and flyers) since the 1960s, while others addressed women's desires as consumers by

[1] For Japanese names appeared in this thesis, I follow the Japanese naming order and present family names first, except when an author's name appears in English-language sources in the reverse order, in which case I follow the source's order.

creating products for girls' culture such as girls' comics and fancy goods – commodities featured cute characters like "Hello Kitty". Despite initially emerged as niche products for teenager, these culture productions soon expanded through related industries such as anime, music and theatrical performances that helped extend girls' culture to broader audience and provided a rich array of leisure options for a rapidly growing female market in the 1980s and 1990s. Against the backdrop of a global fan culture that has long marginalized women in major fandoms like *Star Trek* and superhero comics, the rise of women-oriented consumption in Japan became central to the country's global image as a superpower of youth culture in the twenty-first century. As of 2021, Japan's media contents industry had reached a market size of 9.3 trillion yen (roughly USD 84.88 billion), with exports accounting 4.2% of the global market.[2] Most recently, during the pandemic, a global VTuber market of live streamers using avatars associated with the aesthetics of girls' culture on digital platform such as YouTube and Twitch – had a marker value around USD 6.28 billion in 2023 and is predicted to grow to around USD 117. 16 billion by 2032.[3]

From domestic columns in early twentieth century newspapers to VTuber streaming during the pandemic, women's cultural production has played a central role in the development of Japan's media industry. Studying the history of their representations in and creations of mass media provides valuable opportunity for scholars to examine how women's agency and labor have contributed to the rise of Japan's soft power in contemporary world. In existing scholarship, Japanese studies scholars have studied women's production and consumption of media extensively

[2] Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI, Japan), "Reiwa yon-nendo hosei kaigai juyō kakudai jigyō kokusai kyōsōryoku kyōka ni muketa bunka sōzo sangyō senryaku ni kansuru chōsa kenkyu jigyō 令和 4 年度補正　海外需要拡大事業　国際競争力強化に向けた文化創造産業戦略に関する調査研究事業," PowerPoint Presentation, March 22, 2024, 8-10, https://www.meti.go.jp/meti_lib/report/2022FY/060454.pdf.

[3] "VTuber (Virtual YouTuber) Industry Prospective," ZION Marke. Research, accessed on August 11, 2025, https://www.zionmarketresearch.com/report/vtuber-virtual-youtuber-market#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20revenue%2C%20the,USD%20117.16%20billion%20by%202032..

since the late twentieth century. In the 1980s and the 1990s, scholars such as Inoue Chizuko who were intrigued by the increase of new women's magazines emphasizing female consumers' individuality began examining how mass media shaped women's understanding of gender identities in contemporary Japan.[4] These early studies established the importance of media as the cornerstone for understanding women's culture. By the late 2000s, a rich discussion of the production and consumption of women's media representations had developed in two distinct eras: the age of imperial Japan (1868-1945) and the post-1970s period.[5] While works about both time periods have critically reflected on the opportunities and limitations of mass media in challenging stereotypical gender norms, its involvement in women's culture during the intervening period remains understudied. Recently, scholars such as Jennifer Coates and Jan Bardsley have begun to address this gap by providing more detailed analysis of the gender representations and feminist debates in various forms of media—such as magazines, television programming and films—prior to 1970, with most discussion focusing on the era of economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s.[6] However, these studies have not fully explored the connections between the economic growth era

[4] Inoue Teruko 井上輝子, "Josei jānarizumu-ron (<Tokushū> Jānarizumu-ron wo saguru) 女性ジャーナリズム論(〈特集〉ジャーナリズム論を探る)," Shinbun-gaku hyōron 新聞学評論 34, no. 0 (1985): 51 65, 263, https://doi.org/10.24460/shinbungaku.34.0_51; Brian Moeran and Lise Skov, *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (Routledge, 2013, originally published in 1995), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315026312; Kazue Sakamoto, "Reading Japanese Women's Magazines: The Construction of New Identities in the 1970s and 1980s," *Media, Culture & Society* 21, no. 2 (1999): 173–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/016344399021002003.

[5] For research on women and media in imperial Japan, see Barbara Hamill Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Duke University Press, 2003); Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865320; Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16* (The University of Michigan, 2007). For research on women and media in post 1970s period, see Setsu Shigematsu, "Feminism and Media in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 555-589; Gabriella Lukács, *Scripted Affects, Branded Selves: Television, Subjectivity, and Capitalism in 1990s Japan* (Duke University Press, 2010); Jennifer S. Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shojo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824860578.

[6] Jan Bardsley, *Women and Democracy in Cold War Japan* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Jennifer Coates, *Making Icons: Repetition and the Female Image in Japanese Cinema, 1945-1964* (Hong Kong University Press, 2016.)

and the earlier and later periods. Consequently, there remains a gap in the scholarship on women and media between prewar and postwar Japan.

In this thesis, I address this gap by examining the history of girls' magazines, a longstanding print media for school-aged girls in Japan. These magazines first emerged during the 1900s as a branch of children's magazines that offered educational and entertaining contents for female students from middle-class families at a time when secondary education for girls became available nationally. Following the rise of urban-based consumer culture in 1920s, girls' magazines quickly developed into a vibrant cultural site for consumption and community formation. These magazines featured fictions, illustrations, poems, photographs, fashion designs and merchandise that tailored to readers' tastes. Editors of these magazines included readers' columns and hosted in person reader's events that allowed readers to form friendship with other readers across regions. Through these contents and activities, girls' magazines created spaces where girls could explore their identities as students and consumers that diverged from state-sanctioned gender roles for women as mothers and wives. As I show in the first section of Chapter one, these prewar developments built aesthetic styles and editorial strategies that enabled magazines to sustain a dynamic gender expression of girlhood in following decades.

During the Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945), girls' magazines struggled to survive through publication mergers, page reductions and military demands for increasing war-related contents as a result of increased state control over mass media and severe material shortage during wartime. Nevertheless, two girls' magazines – *Girls' Companion* and *Girls' Club* – continued publishing within the frameworks of state policies throughout the wartime, ensuring the survival of girls' magazines as gender-specific publications into the postwar years. As I show at the end of Chapter one, the wartime publications of these magazines still featured works of artists, editors and readers

that negotiated girls' wartime responsibilities and gender expressions. These publications contributed to a contested discourse of patriotic girlhood during wartime. After Japan entered the era of Occupation (1945-1952), these magazines swiftly replaced wartime contents with stories and artworks that reflected the democratic concept of "gender equality" promoted by the Allied Forces. They also hosted roundtable discussions among readers, parents and educators about educational reforms that American occupiers initiated to transform sex-segregated girls' school into coeducation at the stage of secondary education. Artists and fiction writers also revised popular prewar aesthetics such as floral, dreamlike artist styles and narratives of intimate friendship in their own depictions of girlhood and boyhood in postwar girls' magazines.[7] While these reinvented never regained the same commercial success as they were in prewar girls' magazines, the magazines remained spaces for imaginations of girlhood that diverged from dominant gender ideologies in postwar Japan.

After the Occupation ended in 1952, prewar girls' magazines gradually disappeared, with *Girls' Companion* and *Girls' Club* ceased publication respectively in 1955 and 1962. What took their places in the market of girls' culture were new girls' magazines such as *Girl* (jp. *Shōjo,* 1949-63) and *Girls' Book* (jp. *Shōjo bukku,* 1951-63) that centered on girls' comics, a type of narrative-based comic books for girls. As television became widely affordable in Japanese households, major publishers like Kodansha and Shū'eisha gradually replaced these magazines, which had been published on a monthly cycle, with weeklies such as *Weekly Margaret* (*jp. Shūkan māgaretto,* 1963-) and *Weekly Girls' Friend* (jp. *Shūkan shōjo furendo,* 1963-1996) to compete children's attention with weekly tv programing in the 1960s. As visual contents like girls' comics conflated the market of children' readings in the 1950s and the 1960s, readers' engagement with girls'

[7] Catherine Bae, "Girl Meets Boy Meets Girl: Heterosocial Relations, Wholesome Youth, and Democracy in Postwar Japan," *Asian Studies Association of Australia* 32, no. 3 (2008), 341-60, 10.1080/10357820802298132.

magazines has also changed. Whereas prewar girls' magazines encouraged active correspondence between readers and editors, as well as among readers themselves, via letters published in readers' columns, the postwar girls' magazines that primarily featured comics devoted fewer pages to such letters. Instead, by the 1970s, comic contest, surveys and fan mails to comic artists had become common ways for reader engagement in weeklies of girls' comics. As a result, the negotiations over girlhood that once took place in readers' columns in literary form also shifted to the artists' production of girls' comics. As I show in Chapter Two, works such as Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* continued to present alternative gender expressions of girls that resulted from negotiations between desires of comic artists, editors, readers through Ikeda's creation process.[8]

The long history of girls' culture in forms of prewar girls' magazines and postwar girls' comics provides a valuable opportunity for scholars to address the historiographical gap between imperial Japan and the post-1970s periods in existing scholarship of women's media in Japan. My analysis of girls' culture specifically builds upon the works of scholars such as Mizuki Takahashi, Deborah Shamoon and Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, who have each bridged the gap between prewar girls' magazines and postwar girls' comics in their works. In her groundbreaking book chapter "Opening the Closed World of *Shōjo Manga*" in 2008, Takahashi traced the historical origin of postwar girls' comics back to prewar girls' magazines by analyzing illustrations in girls' magazines from the 1920 and 1930s and aesthetic features of girls' comics from the 1970s. She argued that the female artists of girls' comics in the 1970s inherited literary and visual conventions from prewar girls' magazines that were particularly designed to evoke emotional responses from young female readers. To address this concealed communication between artists and readers that requires predisposed knowledge of girls' culture to understand, she vividly described girls' comics

[8] Deborah Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girl's Culture in Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 102-03.

as a "closed world" that was only accessible to readers and artists who are familiar with the the aesthetic idioms of girls' culture.[9] Through her research, Takahashi effectively connected the prewar girls' magazines and postwar girls' comics that had been often studied in isolation.[10]

While Takahashi's work successfully bridged historical divide between prewar girls' magazines and postwar girls' comics, her analytical focus largely remained on the artistic aspects of girls' culture. In *Passionate Friendship* (2012), Shamoon expanded this genealogy by examining the shared feature of reader interactivity in both prewar girls' magazines and postwar girls' comic magazines. Like Takahashi's "closed world," Shamoon saw girls' culture as a "protected space" in which girls' could create and consume their own culture. However, in addition to artworks such as illustrations and comics, she also studied fictions and readers' letters in prewar girls' magazines and fan letters in postwar girls' comics magazines. In her analysis of the prewar girls' magazines, she emphasized on the central role of prewar girls' magazines in fostering a national girls' community that allowed readers to form intimate, homogender bonds with each other while consuming literary and artistic creations that reflected such relationship. Through her close reading of selected girls' comics in 1970s, she further demonstrated how depictions of homogender relationships between girls in prewar girls' magazines influenced portrayals of such similar relationships between cross-dressing and male characters in postwar girls' comics. As a result, Shamoon expanded the history of girls' culture from a lineage of artistic imaginations to a tangible nationwide community young female reader.[11]

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[9] Mizuki Takahashi, "Opening the Closed World of *Shōjo Manga*," in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime,* ed. Mark W. MacWilliams (M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008), 114-136.

[10] For example, in 2007, Imada Erika and Oshiyama Michiko respectively published books on the histories of prewar girls' magazines and postwar girls' comics. See Imada Erika 今田絵里香, "*Shōjo" no shakaishi* 「少女」の社会史 (Keisoshobo 勁草書房, 2007); Oshiyama Michiko 押山美知子, *Shōjo manga jendā hyōshōron: "dansō no shōjo" no zōkei to aidentiti* 少女マンガジェンダー表象論：〈男装の少女〉の造形とアイデンティティ (Sairyūsha 彩流社, 2007).

[11] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship*.

As such, Shamoon's *Passionate Friendship* has provided critical insights into understanding how printed media contributed to the formation of national community from the perspectives of marginalized individuals like girls in Japan. Her attention to the hegemonic cultural position of homogender relationship in girls' culture further showcased how gender-based and aged-based identities historically contributed to constructing national communities that were alternatives to those that were state-centered and male-dominated. However, her reliance on readers' activities as a key factor in shaping such community was not without limitations. In particular, she divided little attention to the years between the late 1930s and early 1950s when readers interaction was limited by state interventions and material shortage. Furthermore, her heavy focus on girls' comics' ability to reflect readers' desires in the 1970s also risked overlooking contended understandings over girlhood between readers and comic artists. While she rightly observed that young women who penned girls' comics in the 1970s were close in age and gender to their readers and attentive to reader feedback, she failed to address how girls' comic editors' power in prioritize readers' needs when they were at odds with that of artists affected the women's creation of girls' comics during this time. Thus, by emphasizing readers' power in shaping girls' culture, Shamoon failed to capture the complex gender dynamics in production of girls' magazines and girls' comics in Japanese history from 1930s onward.

Addressing the limitations of reader-centered approaches to the study of girls' culture, Dollase shifted her focus from readers to authors who penned fiction for girls in Japan in her monograph *Age of Shōjo* (2019). In her book, Dollase traced the history of girls' fictions that were often published in girl's magazines. Paying equal attention of both readership and authorship, she provided a nuanced interpretation of the genre by demonstrating the diversity of its themes, goals, and audiences. For example, when analyzing girls' magazines published during wartime and

Occupation that Shamoon had failed to address, Dollase' provided a more nuanced account of the contested girlhood during this time by analyzing how girls' fiction writers negotiated with state censorship and commercial demands. However, her reliance on the works of authors who were keen to women's gender issues prompted her to highlight the agency of cultural identity *shōjo* (girl) as a powerful force that represented girls and women who were discontent with the social norms from the margin. Consequently, she aligned with other scholars in framing wartime as a period when the agencies of girls' fiction writers were weakened and underplayed the fact that girls' magazines had never directly challenged dominant gender ideologies in prewar Japan. As a result, her analysis ultimately reinforced the historical divide between prewar and postwar in the history of girls' culture.[12]

Building upon the works of Takahashi, Shamoon and Dollase, I approach girls' culture as a discursive space in which marginalized agents like fiction writers and readers enjoyed some level of freedom to deviate from dominant ideologies while remaining subjects of control under state authorities and market forces. This approach allows me to situate girls' culture in dialogue with broader social ideologies while also acknowledging its historical contingency in transformative eras. I exemplify this approach by contextualize girls' culture in the history of two time periods that have fragmented the history of Japanese women' media in existing scholarship: the Asia-Pacific war (1937-1945) and the early 1970s. In Chapter One, I examine how artists, editors and readers of girls' magazines negotiated girls' wartime responsibilities during the Asia-Pacific War. I begin by outlining the emergence and development of girls' magazines in the early twentieth century Japan. I then analyze how artists adapted prewar aesthetic to mobilize readers for their war support. Next, I zoom in on the contested interpretations of girlhood in 1940, when the military

[12] Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, *Age of Shōjo: The Emergence, Evolution, and Power of Japanese Girls' Magazine Fiction* (State University of New York Press, 2019).

increasingly sought to promote a unified national identity among girls. While the rural-oriented expectations for girls to become future mothers purged the urban consumer-oriented images of non-productive girls, artists and editors continued to imagine girlhood that was partially at odds with state expectations. I conclude by showing that, in contrast to state's more passive stance on women's labor mobilization, readers of girls' magazines imagined patriotic work as liberation from domestic duties in the early 1940s. In my analysis, I challenge the view of wartime girls' magazines as propaganda tools in existing scholarship by showing how reimagined patriotic girlhood allowed readers to assert agencies over gender roles. Through this chapter, I further demonstrate that these magazines remained cultural spaces of gender expressions that offered alternatives to dominant ideologies across prewar and wartime Japan.

In Chapter Two, I shift focus to girls' comics through a case study of Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* (1972-1973), a historical drama that followed the life stories of Marie-Antoinette and royal guard Oscar de Jarjayes in eighteenth century France. I examine how Ikeda critically engaged with the gender issues that women faced in postwar Japan while navigating the evolving aesthetics trends of girls' comics in the early 1970s. First, I trace how the postwar legal reforms promoting sexual equality shaped Ikeda's experience as a woman from her birth in 1947 to her debut as a professional comic artist in the late 1960s. I then analyze how her depiction of Marie-Antoinette as political marriage victim mirrored state expectations for housewives to sacrifice personal desires for the sake of nation in 1950s and 1960s Japan. While Ikeda initially intended to truthfully follow Marie-Antoinette's historical narrative, she later replaced the character with Oscar as the central protagonist due to the Oscar's overwhelming popularity among readers. Unlike Marie-Antoinette, Oscar was a fictional cross-dressing woman who visually resembled the trending beautiful boy characters in girls' comics at the time. In the last section, I

interpret Oscar' storyline as Ikeda's critical response to the gender biases against working women in Japan. Contrary to existing scholarship that views Oscar's rise as a subversive departure from stereotypical gender representations in Ikeda's work, I argue that Ikeda designed both Marie-Antoinette and Oscar as respective alternatives to two of women's dominant gender roles: housewives and career woman. By illustrating how Ikeda adapted her gender critique across both characters' storylines without directly challenging industry conventions and readers' desires in, I uncover the subtle negotiations over gender ideologies between agents like artists, editors, readers that remained active even upon women's growing presence in media production in the 1970s.

To Conclude, I briefly discuss how girls' comics evolved in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to engage with broader audiences. The emergence of BL (boys' love) in the 1980s as a subgenre of girls' culture that depicted romantic and sexual relationships between male characters in commercial fictions and comics is one such example. While early BL works featured imagined homosexual romances that were detached from the lived experiences of gay men, the 1990s saw the rise of stories that actively created fantasy worlds where gay characters lived free from discriminations. The BL media has since developed a global fan base with readers of varied gender and sexual orientations. Similarly, the growing popularity of feminized masculine characters in girls' comics after the 1970s has also attracted male readers. The increase of male fans, many of whom self-identified as "*otoko-no-ko* (male daughter/girl)" or "*fudanshi* (rotten boy)," was especially significant after the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1992. Works such as Yoshinaga Fumi's *Ōoku: The Inner Chambers* (2004-2021) further showed how female artists has also engaged seriously with social anxieties about masculinities and the shared gender struggles faced by men and women in the twenty-first century. In comparison to its birth as a commercial product for middle-class girls in the early twentieth century, the recent expansions of

girls' culture into an inclusive space for marginalized individuals across genders and sexualities has further demonstrated its enduring potential as a discursive space for alternative gender ideologies not only of those in the past but also those in the future. In the next chapter, I trace this potential back to the late 1930s when it was most tested with the onset of the Asia-Pacific War.

Chapter 1. Girls' Magazines in Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945)

The Asia-Pacific War that encompassed the late 1930s and early 1940s was a time of drastic sociocultural transformation when war mobilization redefined women's gender roles in Japan. Following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the mass conscription of male workers caused significant labor shortage in Japan and prompted the Japanese government to reevaluate its expectations for women. While the "good wife, wise mother (*ryōsai* kenbo)" ideal had been the dominant gender role for women in early twentieth century, the Japanese government strengthened the association between women's gender roles and wartime state interests by promoting a female-central family-state ideology that framed women's "motherhood in the interest of the state" through pronatalist policies and the enactment of the Mother-Child Protection Law (1937). [13] However, as Benjamin Uchiyama's analysis of the wartime movie star system suggests, Japan's mobilization of women into the state-sanctioned roles as "Military Mothers (*jp. gunkoku no haha*)" did not entirely erase the more liberating gender roles that had emerged in prewar consumer culture. Instead, cultural agents like the film actresses fluidly navigated between prewar identities such as the modern girl (*jp. modan gāru*) and the working woman (*jp. hataraku fujin*) and wartime mother figures in their onscreen and offscreen personas.[14] In other words, the wartime mobilization did not entirely dismantle prewar gender identities but instead reconfigured them to support the government's agenda in promoting women's motherhood during wartime.

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[13] Yoshiko Miyake, "Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women's Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (University of California Press, 1991), 267-295, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnmjh.

[14] Benjamin Uchiyama, *Japan's Carnival War: Mass Culture on the Home Front, 1937-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 162-201.

Just as the state expectations for women shifted from the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal to that of the military mother, young girls' gender identities as *shōjo* also evolved to reflect the wartime state interests. As historian Catherine Bae has demonstrated, the dominant *shōjo* figure in girls' magazines during this time was the "wartime girl (*jp. gunkoku shōjo*)" who embodied a shared national identity and a sense of duty to protect the homeland. Through her analysis of how the state sought to construct an idealized version of girlhood in girls' magazines, she argued that the wartime girl was a "creative chimera" that bridged contradictory categories such as civilians and soldiers, women and men, and children and adults while serving as a unifying symbol of total war.[15] While Bae insightfully captured the paradoxical nature of the wartime girls, she framed the shift in girls' magazines from prewar to wartime as an abrupt transformation imposed through government surveillance. As a result, she overlooked the prolonged negotiations over young girls' gender identities between the state, magazine editors, and readers throughout the wartime era. In this section, I examine how young girls' identity as *shōjo* evolved during wartime in three distinct stages: the reinvention of prewar consumer aesthetic for national mobilization between 1937 and 1939, the nationalization of *shōjo* in 1940 when consumer-oriented non-productive model of girls competed with military's emphasis on women's reproductivity in a rural-oriented gender model for girls, and the emerge of productive girls in labor culture in last five years of World War II. By analyzing magazines, diaries and secondary resources, I argue that girls' transformation from an independent cultural identity into a contradictory wartime figure – simultaneously a mother, a national subject, and a girl – was the result of a complex interplay between state ideology, editorial mediation, and readers' consumption.

[15] Catherine Bae, "War on the Domestic Front: Changing Ideals of Girlhood in Girls' Magazines, 1937-45," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal,* no. 42 (2012): 128.

The Emergence of Girls' Magazines, 1900-1936

The concept of *shōjo*, referring to school-aged girls, emerged in Japan during the Meiji period. Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan underwent political, economic and social modernization reforms, including the redefinition of gender roles. As a latecomer to modernization compared to the empires in Europe and North America at the time, Japan's reforms largely followed the footsteps of its western predecessors by linking individual gender identities to national goals, which had contributed to young women's increased social involvement in the public spheres in roles such as nurses, teachers and consumers in many modern societies. In Japan, one major effort that prompted girls, in particular those from middle-class families, to join the public was the introduction of a modern education system in 1872 that mandated elementary education for girls. However, secondary education was initially limited to male students. The lack of state support in educating women concerned educators like Nakamura Masanao and Mori Arinori, who emphasized the importance of educated mothers in nation-building. After becoming the Minister of Education in 1885, Mori further defined women's education as raising "*ryōsai kenbo* (good wife and wise mother)" to gain local officials' support. Mori, according to Katheleen Uno, was likely the first who coined the term "*ryōsai kenbo",* which later became the dominant gender ideology of Japan's modern womanhood in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, missionary and private-funded women's school served as primary venues for girls' secondary education during the 1870s and 1880s. After the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, the need to mobilize women on the home front prompted more government officials and private educators to support the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology. Five years later, women's education became standardized upon the release of the *Women's Secondary School Order* (*jp. Kōtō jogakkō rei*), which required each prefecture to establish one secondary school for women. These schools aimed to prepare young girls for their

role as good wives and wise mothers focusing on moral education and domestic science. As receiving education became crucial for women to excel at their roles as wives and mothers, the term "*shōjo,*" which referred to unmarried women at the time, came to be associated with school-aged girls in the late nineteenth century. [16]

By the 1900s, well-educated schoolgirls from middle-class families had become the primary audience for girls' magazines (*jp. shōjo zasshi*), a new type of commercial publication featuring educational and entertaining stories for and about girls. Just as early education reforms focused more on boys, leading to a subsequent emphasis on educating girls for supportive roles as wives and mothers, girls' magazines also emerged alongside boys' magazines (*jp. shōnen zasshi*). Some girls' magazine editors shared the educators' interest in shaping young girls into well-educated wives and mothers. However, Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase's analysis of *Shōjo sekai* (Girls' World, 1906-1931), a leading girls' magazines of the time, showed that its chief editor, Numata Ryūhō, also aimed to define girlhood as distinct from womanhood despite supporting the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal. Emphasizing authenticity and the natural qualities of youth, Numata encouraged girls to embrace their identity as *shōjo* rather than imitating adult behaviors. For instance, Numata advised girls to not buy books they could not read to appear more intellectual, believing that such pretense was not in keeping with the genuine spirit of *shōjo.* He fostered this identity by publishing readers' compositions, hosting writing contests, hiring talented readers as professional writers, and organizing events where readers would sing the magazine's anthem, *Shōjo no uta* (Song of Girls), and form friendships. As Dollase argued, girls' magazines like *Girls' World* offered a community where girls could value their time as *shōjo,* a period Numata described as "neither child nor

[16] For discussions on education reform and "good wife, wise mother" in Meiji period, see Kathleen S Uno, "Womanhood, War, and Empire: Transmutations of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' before 1931," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 495-503.

woman." Through their participation in this community, young girls developed a sense of loyalty not to the nation as future wives and mothers but rather to the girls' magazines and their identities as *shōjo.* In other words, although girls' magazine editors supported the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, their valorization of the *shōjo* period also helped young girls develop alternative gender norms distinct from womanhood in Japan during the early twentieth century. [17]

While editors like Numata defined *shōjo* in contrast to womanhood, the rise of consumer culture in the 1920s and 1930s further reshaped this identity. Following the economic boom during the World War I and the reconstruction boom in urban cities after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, Japan saw the rise of an urban-centered consumer culture targeting a new middle class of salary workers, bureaucrats and teachers. As Miriam Silverberg argued in her analysis of Japanese cultural history, consumers in Japan were not only subjects of the emperor but also subjects with agency. Through their consumption of juxtaposed images conveying distinct ideologies presented in various media such as magazines and theatres, consumers could interpret foreign elements in a familiar context.[18] This was precisely how young girls consumed girls' magazines as they became integrated into the interwar consumer culture of the 1920s and 1930s. While literary composition and off-magazine communities remained integral to girls' magazines, new elements such as illustrations, comics and reports on films and girls' theatre (*jp. shōjo kageki*) performers introduced fresh avenues for these magazines to import cultural fragments, including new gender representations and western family ideologies. [19] Despite this transformation, scholars have demonstrated that girls' magazines in prewar Japan remained a "closed world" for young girls to consume in private. As Mitsuki Takahashi's analysis of prewar girls' magazine illustrations shows,

[17] Dollase, *Age of Shōjo*, 17-30.
[18] Miriam Rom Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (University of California Press*,* 2006), 4.
[19] Dollase, *Age of Shōjo,* 66-68.

commercial artists like Takehisa Yumeji and Nakahara Junichi created images that resonated emotionally with young girls through depictions of fragile, dreamy girls with exaggerated eyes.[20] This emotional bond that young girls shared with the illustrations resembled the connections they shared with the sentimental literary compositions that Dollase observed in *Girls' World.*[21]

Indeed, although girls' magazines became a more dynamic and vibrant publication under the influence of consumer culture, they continued to address young girls in the familiar cultural context established in previous decades. One might argue that girls' magazines were subsumed within the broader consumer culture during the interwar years. However, consumer culture also helped girls' magazines build a distinct culture for young girls, encompassing not just styles of writing but also aesthetics, fashion and other aspects of daily life. Furthermore, girls' magazines also contained discourses on sexuality that were independent from those in other contemporary media. In the early twentieth century, intimate relationships between two girls, often referred to as "S relationships" (from the English word "sister"), became common among middle- and upper-class schoolgirls in Japan. The prevalence of S relationship among schoolgirls sparked contended debates about "*dōsei'ai* (same-sex love)" among sexologists, journalists, and feminists on newspapers, journals and magazines.[22] However, as Shamoon argued, the discourse of S relationship in girls' magazines differed significantly. She showed that the sameness in S relationships was expressed through shared clothing and hairstyles, emphasizing the "emotional rather than the physical connection between girls." Describing this bond as "passionate friendship,"

[20] Takahashi, "Opening the Closed World of *Shōjo Manga*," 135-36.
[21] Dollase, 21-24.
[22] Gregory M Pflugfelder, "'S' is for Sister," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 133-190.

Shamoon highlighted that S relationships were not necessarily challenging the heteronormativity but rather a distinct experience that was normative within girls' culture. [23]

In summary, as scholars like Dollase, Shamoon and Takahashi have shown, girls' magazines were established as a unique cultural space for and about young girls in the early twentieth century, and they succeeded in maintaining this focus until national censorship over children-oriented publications tightened in the late 1930s. However, this was not to say that there were no overlaps between girlhood and womanhood in prewar Japan. Notably, both young female writers who contributed to girls' magazines and feminists in Japan were concerned with gender equality in the early twentieth century. As I discussed previously, the state-constructed ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* initially positioned women in inferior social roles, supporting male citizens as wives and mothers. However, as Uno has shown in her book chapter, this ideology was not static. By the early twentieth century, even supporters of *ryōsai kenbo* began emphasizing the equality between women's domestic roles and their husbands' roles outside the home.[24] Meanwhile, new expressions of modern womanhood, such as "*atarashii fujin* (new woman)," "*modan gāru* (modern girl)," and "*shufu* (housewife)," began to challenge *ryōsai kenbo* by presenting alternative paths to gender equality. In the literary works of young girls who were cultivated into professional writers through girls' magazines, concerns over gender equality were also reflected through depictions of young girls' struggles. Despite support for the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology among girls' magazine editors, some readers (who later became professional writers for these magazines) sympathized with the feminist discourses. For example, in her analysis of semi-autobiographical works by Yoshiya Nobuko and Morita Tama, Dollase argued that these writers emphasized the importance

[23] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship,* 37-38.
[24] Uno, 500-509.

of selfhood for young girls.[25] Similarly, as Richard Reitan argued in his analysis of the New Woman movements in Japan, a woman's personality (*jp.kosei*) was one of the key elements in the New Womanhood that posed threat to *ryōsai kenbo,* which emphasized women's responsibilities as national subjects over their individual desires.[26] In other words, although women who wrote for girls' magazines dealt with a different set of normativity within girls' culture, their works still echoed contemporary discourses over womanhood in modern Japan.

In addition, concerns about gender equality in the girls' magazines were not limited to male-female relations but also extended to the relationship between girl and woman. As scholars like Dollase, Shamoon and Takahashi have shown, the identity of *shōjo* was constructed as distinct from that of woman, despite both being biologically female. The girls' magazine editors' valorization of the *shōjo* period in a girl's life and their treatments of young readers as equals to adults can be seen as a push for equality between girlhood and womanhood. Such concerns also permeated "*shōjo shōsetsu* (girls' fiction)," a genre of popular literature that was often serialized in the girls' magazines in the 1900s and 1910s. For example, one popular narrative pattern in girls' fictions was stories about young girls who lost or being separated from their birth mothers struggled under the cruelty of another woman, such as a stepmother or an aunt. In her analysis of such stories written by Ojima Kikuko, Kume Yoriko interpreted the young girls' inability to form alliance with other female characters in her family as expressions of the ultimate trump of patriarchy.[27] However, these stories also reveal the tensions between young girls and adult women

[25] Dollase, 63.
[26] Richard Reitan, "Claiming Personality: Reassessing the Dangers of the 'New Woman' in Early Taisho Japan," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 19, no. 1 (2011): 84. In his article, Reitan uses the word "personality" as a translation of the Japanese term "*jinkaku*," which Reitan defines as "a self-conscious awareness of oneself as an individual and, according to new women and others, a defining feature of humanity." (Reitan, 84)
[27] Kume Yoriko, David Boyd, and Wakako Suzuki, "Shōjo Constructed: The Genre Formation of the Meiji-Era Shōjo Shōsetsu = 構成される「少女」～明治期「少女小説」のジャンル形成," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 62 (2022): 15-18.

in daily life. Through depictions of antagonistic adult women, girls' fiction writers highlighted the threats posed by womanhood to *shōjo'*s social status. Thus, even though girls' magazine editors and girls' fictions did not directly address gender equality between men and women, they did engage with the concept in the relationship between *shōjo* and woman. Such shared concerns over gender equality between *shōjo'*s and women's culture built the foundation the emergence of alternative patriotic girlhood during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

National Mobilization of Girl's Magazines, 1937-1939

In the late 1930s, the Japanese state intensified its control over mass media in preparation for a prolonged war with China. Initially, the state control was implemented through large-scale national mobilization efforts, including the launch of the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement (*jp. Kokumin seishin sōdō'in*) in October 1937 and the enactment of the National Mobilization Law (*jp. Kokka sōdōin hō*) in April 1938. Both initiatives aimed to expand the state authority over a broad range of industries and to ensure its access to readily available labor and resources for long-term war. Following the broad framework offered in these early measures, the Home Ministry quickly moved to enforce detailed regulations targeting specific categories of magazines. One policy that had the most significant impact over girls' magazines was perhaps the "Children's Reading Materials Improvement Instructions (*jp. Jidō yomimono kaizen ni kansuru shiji yōkō*)" that the Home Ministry issued in October 1938. Through this document, the Home Ministry condemned elements deemed harmful in existing children's literature such as exaggerated commercial advertisements, small fonts that could strain children's eyesight, excessively sentimental and morbid stories, as well as vulgar languages in certain comics. At the same time, the policy encouraged publishers to incorporate more educational contents that aligned with the

state's goal in its colonial expansion in Asia, such as those promoting the Japanese spiritual values, scientific knowledge and positive portrayals of Chinese children. To ensure the implementation of these guidelines, the Home Ministry also held regular consultation meetings with magazine editors to provide detailed guidance in adapting the contents of their publications.[28]

Overall, the "Children's Reading Materials Improvement Instructions" reflected several key objectives that the Home Ministry sought to achieve in children's education, such as promoting children's mental and physical well-being, fostering a sense of national unity, and shaping their understanding of the Sino-Japan relationship amid the ongoing war. However, notably absent from the document was any clear instructions on the state's expectations for young girls during wartime. While the document applied to children's literature in general, most of the contents flagged for revision or expansion, such as scientific knowledge and adventure stories, had been central to boy's magazines rather than those for girls. At the same time, although the document discouraged the publication of sentimental love stories that had previously dominated girls' magazines in the early twentieth century, it failed to propose alternative themes that might be more relevant and engaging for girls. This oversight likely stemmed from the state's broader wartime perception of women's primary responsibility as reproduction and child-rearing – roles that girls could not fulfill before marriage. As a result, the absence of a clear state for young girl's education allowed girls' magazines some degree of freedom in shaping the wartime identity for their readers.

During the late 1930s, girl's magazines showed varying degrees of support for Japan's war effort. However, even the conservative publications such as *Girls' Club* did not entirely abandon their prewar consumerist strategies. On the one hand, many girls' magazines increased their

[28] Naimusho Keihōkyoku Toshoka 内務省警保局図書課, "Jidō yomimono kaizen ni kansuru shiji yōkō 児童読物改善ニ関スル指示要綱," in *Nihon Jidō Bungaku Taikei* 日本児童文学大系, Vol. 4, eds. Suga Tadamichi 菅忠道 (San'ichi Shobō 三一書房, 1955), 305-307. https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/1662320.

patriotic contents. As social historian Imada Erika observed, the percentage of national symbols appearing on the cover pages of girls' magazines rose from 6.5% in issues published between 1931 and 1935 to 20.1% in those published between 1936 and 1940.[29] Furthermore, major girls' magazines such as *Girls' Companion* and *Girls' Club* also released special issues with themes like "wartime (*jp. senji*)," "gratitude from the homefront (*jp. jyūgo no kansha*)," and "consolations for the imperial army (*jp. kōgun imon*)." These issues provided moral lessons and practical guidance on how young girls could contribute to war effort, such as by purchasing "patriotic government bond (*jp. aikoku kōsai*)" with pocket money and sending letters to soldiers to express their gratitude. On the other hand, despite these thematic shifts, the visual representation of girls remained consistent with prewar girls' magazines. Well known illustration artists such as Takabatake Kashō, Fukiya Kōji and Nakahara Junichi continued to depict girls in the same art style that they had established in the late 1920s and early 1930s. While the girls in their illustrations often engaged in activities aligned with wartime mobilization, the overall aesthetic style of wartime girls' magazines retained many of the characteristics of prewar girls' culture.

An example of how illustration artists integrated wartime propaganda with prewar girls' cultural aesthetics could be seen in one of Fukiya's illustrations in the December 1938 issue of *Girls' Club*. This image depicts two girls shopping at a department store. In the middle of the image is a large circular counter that displays a variety of goods, including but not limited to gloves, envelopes and comfort bags (*jp. imon bukuro*), a type of knitted pouches that were used to contain gifts to Japanese soldiers. At the center of the counter are two large signs that read "Imperial Army Comfort Goods Sales Floor (*jp. Kōgun imonhin uriba*)," with Japanese national flags hanging above. The two girls were standing in front of the counter and appear to be selecting comfort goods.

[29] Imada 今田, *"Shōjo" no shakaishi*「少女」の社会史, 60.

The girl on the left wears a Western-style yellow trench coat over a dark blue sailor suit. She is reading a pocket-sized book titled *Quick Guide to Chinese* (*jp. Shinago hayawakari*). On her right side was another girl of the same age dressed in a yellow kimono and a black *haori*. She holds a basket filled with various items, including what appeared to be a small doll on top of other goods. Beneath the illustration, there is a short passage titled "At the Comfort Goods Sales Floor," which seemed to be written from the two girls' perspective. In their message, they explained why certain products -- such as the doll and the pocket-sized Chinese language book – would make meaningful gifts for soldiers stationed in China. They also share that, since the previous year, they had bought nothing but comfort goods at department stores, as they could not justify spending money on anything else while the soldiers were enduring hardships abroad.[30]

By combining the visual representation of girls with detailed textual instructions designed to evoke readers' sympathy for soldiers, the illustrated essay provided readers with two tangible role models and clear guidance on how to support soldiers through comfort goods shopping. At the same time, its connection to the prewar consumer culture is also evident. Through its depiction of young girls shopping for Japanese soldiers in a department store, the essay framed war mobilization within familiar social practices such as New Year shopping. This coexistence of wartime propaganda and commercial activities in *Girls' Club* is termed as "amphibious (*jp. ryōseisei*)" by Honda Masuko in her book chapter on wartime girls' magazines. As Honda noted in her work, girls' magazines had been "amphibious" since their emergence in the 1900s, when essays by prestigious educators promoting "good wives and wise mothers" often appeared alongside entertaining content that cultivated a sense of impractical leisure.[31] As this illustrated

[30] Fukiya Kōji 蕗谷虹児, "Imonohin uriba nite 慰問品売り場で[At the Comfort Goods Sales Floor]," *Girls' Club* 少女クラブ, December 1938.
[31] Honda Masuko, "Senjika no shōjo zasshi" 戦時下の少女雑誌, in *Shōjo zasshiron* 少女雑誌論, edited by Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚英志 (Tokyo Shoseki 東京書籍, 1991), 15,28.

essay shows, the wartime practice of sending soldiers comfort goods had replaced "good wives and wise mothers" as the state-sanctioned ideal for girls in the 1930s. However, by integrating this patriotic obligation with shopping, the authors cleverly infused the leisure activity a sense of practicality, while simultaneously rendering state's wartime expectations more leisurely and enjoyable for girls.

The paring of the two girls at the center of Fukiya's illustration further exemplified the lingering influence of prewar aesthetics in girls' magazines. As Shamoon argued in her book, artists such as Fukiya, Takabatake and Nakahara frequently depicted girls' with similar facial expressions but contrasting fashion styles — kimono versus western clothing — to reflect the homosocial intimacy that schoolgirls shared with each other, particularly with the S relationships that I discussed in the previous section.[32] As Fukiya's illustration demonstrated, girls continued to appear in pairs with contrasting fashion styles even in depictions of their engagement in patriotic activities. Their intimacy is further emphasized through the subtle interaction between them, with the girl in kimono holding the basket as if she was waiting for the other girl to decide whether she wanted to add the Chinese language handbook to their selection. Through such design, Fukiya presented the act of purchasing comfort goods as both a fulfillment of national obligations and an intimate moment shared between two girls in a familiar shopping experience.

With that said, the introduction of war mobilization contents in girls' magazines did transform the gender dynamic in girls' culture. Notably, the increase of patriotic contents challenged the autonomy of girls' magazines as an enclosed world for girls by reinforcing their ties to family. For example, the depiction of comfort bags and other comfort goods played an important role in symbolizing the family ties in Fukiya's illustration. At the time when Fukiya's

[32] Shamoon, 66-70.

illustration came out in *Girls' Club* in 1938, instruction on how to make comfort bags and comfort dolls (*jp. imon ningyō*), a type of western-style doll that women from the home front often sent to Japanese soldiers in comfort bags, frequently appeared in women's and girls' magazines. As cultural anthropologist Ellen Schattschneider demonstrated in her study of comfort dolls, these gifts helped soldiers on the war front maintain their connections to "the 'home' world of women" back in Japan.[33] Building on Schattschneider's discussion of comfort dolls' ritualistic role in maintaining the kinship ties, I suggest that these dolls also reflected a wartime expansion of the social conception of family. While women had been expected to manage households since before the war started, their wartime familial obligations now extended to various support activities such as making dolls and packing comfort bags within the broader home front rather than strictly at home. As a result, the act of shopping for comfort goods, as Fukiya depicted in his work, also relegated young girls to familial roles during wartime, despite their prewar identity as consumers often associated with a degree of financial independence. Thus, while Fukiya's illustration remained within the frame of consumer culture, the girls' practice of purchasing comfort goods ultimately positioned them as symbols of the family ideology during wartime.

As I have shown in this sub-section, girls' magazines saw an increase in war-related content that operated within the framework of consumer culture in the late 1930s. While these changes responded to the state's national mobilization efforts and its growing control over mass media, they also gave girls' magazines some flexibility to address readers in a way that remained consistent with prewar girls' culture. In the meantime, even as girls' magazines preserved certain prewar aesthetics, the increased focus on war support activities such as preparing comfort bags inevitably strengthened the connection between girls and family. This shift consequently

[33] Ellen Schattschneider, "The Bloodstained Doll: Violence and the Gift in Wartime Japan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 329-356, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2005.0058.

challenged the boundaries between girls' culture and the state-sanctioned family ideologies by integrating young girls into the national war effort. In the next sub-section, I examine how this boundary further dissolved in the early 1940s as government officials and girls' magazine editors negotiated the military expectation for girls' take upon reproductive roles during wartime.

Contested Girlhood in Girls' Companion, 1940

The year 1940 held particular historical significance in wartime Japan, as it marked the 2,600th anniversary of the imperial calendar. This number was derived from a mythology that the Meiji government constructed in the late nineteenth century, which claimed that Japan's mythical first emperor, Jimmu, ascended the throne in 660 BCE and that his imperial descendants had since then ruled the nation in an unbroken line. While these claims were not historically founded, the anniversary nevertheless provided a unique opportunity for both the state and its citizens to reflect on Japan's national history through varied forms of memories such as museum exhibitions and children's books. As historian Kenneth J. Ruoff noted in his analysis of the celebration, mass consumption played a central role in facilitating people's participation. Newspapers and magazines -- including girls' magazines -- launched contests that encouraged readers to commemorate the anniversary by writing and purchasing stories and songs related to national history, while also boosting their own profits. *Girls' Club*, for example, held an essay contest that invited readers to submit short creative writings on the theme of celebrating the 2,600th anniversary of the imperial line in 1940. The winner was a young girl who expressed her profound sense of gratitude for experiencing the "eternal national history" when she prayed atop the sacred Mt. Takachiho on New Year's Day.[34] As this contest showed, girls' magazines were playing a more active role in national

[34] Kenneth J Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 71.

mobilization by encouraging young girls to internalize national identity through their own everyday experiences. Rather than adding patriotic symbols to illustrations in prewar style as they did back in 1938, these contests transformed young girls into active agents in nation-building.

Despite young girls' active participation in shaping a shared community that was increasingly intertwined with national legacies, gender expressions in girls' magazines were more fractured than ever in 1940. In celebration of the 2,600th anniversary of the imperial line, girls' magazines not only encouraged readers to articulate their understanding of national history but also featured contributions from government officials who shared their expectations for ideal girlhood. One such example was "Regarding the Spirit of Asian Development (*jp. Kō'a no seishin ni tsuite*)," an essay penned by Suzuki Kurazō of the Japanese Army (*jp. rikugun-shō,* also translated as Ministry of War). The essay appeared in the February 1940 issue of *Girls' Companion* to mark the National Foundation Day. As Mizutani Maki summarized in her article, Suzuki outlined three principles for a young girl's self-cultivation: first, "to carefully follow the teachings of one's parents and teachers while practicing self-cultivation"; second, "to thoroughly train one's body"; and third, "to study hard and carry on the great Japanese culture." Suzuki further linked the latter two to women's reproductive roles – emphasizing their need for physical strength to withstand material shortages, protect the home front, work on the continent and give birth. Citing this essay along with Suzuki's 1942 contribution to *Girls' Companion*, which associated the beauty of Japanese girls with loyalty, filial piety and simplicity, Mizutani righteously critiqued Suzuki for contributing to the birth of a new wartime girls' aesthetic of that touted the beauty of health.[35]

[35] Mizutani Maki 水谷真紀, "Jikyokuka no shōjobi — 'shōjo no tomo' ni okeru shuhitsu, sakka, genrontōsei 時局下の少女美–『少女の友』における主筆・作家・言論統制," *Showa Literary Studies = 昭和文学研究* 53 (2006), 18-19.

While Mizutani attributed the novelty of Suzuki's aesthetic to wartime discourse, Suzuki's reference to Asian development (jp. *kō'a*) and his call for young girls to work on the Asian continent also reflect the influence of the Japanese Army's longstanding interest in farm relief, which had existed before the Second Sino-Japanese War. In the 1930s, many military officers, including Suzuki himself, came from rural backgrounds and supported policies aimed at revitalizing the countryside. The army's colonial expansion in Asia also intersected with visions of agrarianists like Katō Kanji who advocated the emigration of farming population to Manchuria as a solution to domestic agricultural tensions, which had been exacerbated by the Great Depression of 1929. Following Katō's successful petition to the Diet in 1937, the Ministry of Colonial Affairs sent the Manchuria-Mongolia Pioneer Youth Group (jp. *Manmō giyūgun*), which composed of farm boys under the age of twenty, to northern Manchuria and inner Mongolia in 1938. In 1939, it launched regional experiments in forming the Asian Development Girls' Corps (jp. *Kō'a shōjo-tai*) by recruiting primary school graduates from rural areas for intensive training. Suzuki's emphasis on girls' physical strength closely aligned with the Ministry's efforts to prepare these girls for future roles as wives of Manchuria-Mongolia Pioneer Youth Group members, including instructions in colonial affairs and military trainings. His focus likely reflected practical concerns about their ability to endure agricultural labor under harsh climates and to contribute to racial settlement efforts of the Manchuria and Mongolia regions. However, when Suzuki's article appeared in *Girls' Companion* in 1940, the magazine's readership still largely consisted of urban, middle-class girls. Thus, his emphasis on girls' physicality and fertility was new not only for its pronatalist alignment with Japan's colonial ambitions during wartime, but also for how it inserted rural-oriented expectations into a cultural space originally constructed for urban consumers.[36]

[36] For the relationship between agrarianism and military, see Thomas R. H. Havens, *Farm and Nation in Modern Japan: Agrarian Nationalism, 1870-1940* (Princeton University Press, 1974), 308-313.

The contrast between Suzuki's girlhood and the consumer-oriented gender representations of girls featured in girls' magazines was particularly evident in the February 1940 issue of *Girls' Companion.* The cover illustration was penned by Nakahara Junichi, a popular illustration artist who had been drawing cover illustrations and running fashion columns in the magazine since 1935. The image depicted a young girl wearing a purple dress and white gloves, with a red clutch hanging from the crook of her right arm and a white coat with a red hat draped over her left one. In stark contrast to the ideals of self-cultivation that Suzuki emphasized in his article, Nakahara's portrayals of girls conveyed affluence rather than austerity. Her hands were occupied with fashionable accessories instead of farming tools. And although she was unmistakably representative of the Japanese girls' culture of the 1930s, few readers would have associated her with the "great Japanese culture" that Suzuki encouraged young girls to inherit. Perhaps the most striking contrast lay in her body features, which were in line with Nakahara's iconic depiction of young girls with large eyes, pale skin and a slim waist, which stood in direct opposition to the ideals of physical strength and fertility. These features were less realistic depictions of actual young girls, but more imaginative creations shaped by Nakahara's earlier experience as a doll artist in the early 1930s.[37] As Jordan Sand noted in his book on cosmopolitan life in modern Japan, dolls were a popular commodity that allowed girls and young women in cosmopolitan centers to domesticate Western culture by making and dressing them at home. [38] While Sand focused on an earlier period, Nakahara's incorporation of doll-like features into his illustrations of girls added another layer of hybridization that blended urban-based middle-class aesthetics with girls' culture.

[37] Nakahara Junichi 中原淳一, cover illustration, *Girls' Companion,* February 1940.
[38] Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Reforming Everyday Life 1880-1930* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 218-219.

In doing so, he helped reverse the gender roles of young girls from the future mothers caring for children to the recipients of care.

Given the contrast between Nakahara's and Suzuki's interpretations of girlhood, it was perhaps unsurprising when five months later, the Japanese Army banned *Girls' Companion* from publishing Nakahara's work. However, Nakahara's departure did not immediately result in the replacement of his illustrations of girls with a gendered body that reflected the army's expectations. This was especially evident in how the magazine's July 1940 issue responded to his absence. In that issue, artist Miyamoto Saburō took over the cover illustration and portrayed a girl wearing a floral-patterned yellow kimono. While Miyamoto's portrayal of girls offered a more realistic depiction of a young girl's features compared to Nakahara's doll-like aesthetic, the figure still appeared fashionable and embodied no visible references to physical strength or motherhood. Furthermore, Miyamoto framed this stylistic shift as part of a new aesthetic of girls' culture in his essay "The New Beauty of Young Girls (*jp. Atarashii shōjo no utsukushisa*)," which was published in the same issue. In his essay, Miyamoto described the "new beauty" as "healthy and lively, with an intelligent facial expression that did not come at the expense of (girls') tender beauty." In other words, while Miyamoto acknowledged the importance of health in defining young girls' beauty, his emphasis on intelligence and tenderness suggested that he was not fully aligned with Suzuki's ideal that emphasized physical strength and reproductivity.[39]

A similar discrepancy in how *Girls' Companion* addressed health in relation to young girls was also evident in the words of the magazine's chief editor Uchiyama Motoi in July 1940. M. Uchiyama had discovered Nakahara's talent at the latter's doll exhibition in 1932 and invited him to draw for the magazine in 1935. As the letter he wrote to readers in the July issue's readers'

[39] Cited in Mizutani 水谷, 21.

column showed, he sympathized with many readers who were saddened by Nakahara's departure. In his explanation of the reason behind Nakahara's absence, M. Uchiyama wrote that the beauty of Nakahara's illustrations was rooted in something fragile, and that the girls he depicted lacked health and strength. M. Uchiyama further explained that while such portrayals might have been acceptable during the peaceful years five or six years earlier, the ongoing "holy war" now demanded national citizens to be strong and healthy. Like Miyamoto, M. Uchiyama acknowledged the need to shift toward a wartime image of girls that was distinct from Nakahara's aesthetic. However, his explanation of "health" also deviated from Suzuki's article on young girls' self-cultivation in the February issue. Whereas Suzuki emphasized physical strength in relation to girls' reproductive roles, Uchiyama's notion of being "healthy and strong" remained vague. It was unclear whether he referred to young girl's physical endurance or mental resilience. This ambiguity opened space for alternative interpretations of girls' wartime roles that did not fully align with the army's expectations. As Dollase noted in her book, Uchiyama's statement in 1943 would later interpret the role of "*gunkoku shōjo* (military girl)" as spiritual fighter who inspired soldiers through her "youth, bravery, and beauty."[40]

As I have shown in this section, the efforts of girls' magazines to unite readers through shared narratives of national history did not result in an overarching consensus on the girls' gender identities within the magazines in 1940. While the rise of Suzuki's pronatalist vision presented a prescriptive model of girlhood for magazines to follow, prewar consumer culture and the ambiguous interpretations of "health" continued to shape the interpretations of girlhood that agents like Nakahara, Miyamoto and Uchiyama made in *Girls' Companion*. Notably, the censorship of Nakahara's portrayal of girls– and by extension their connection to the urban consumer life -- did

[40] Dollase, 69, 78-79.

not immediately lead to the full adoption of Suzuki's aesthetic. Rather, contestation over girlhood persisted even as Miyamoto and M. Uchiyama made efforts to align with the army's demand for a healthy girl. In the next section, I examine how the fractured understanding of girlhood in girls' magazines prompted girls to actively participate in imagining alternative gender expressions of girls in labor culture in the final years of World War II.

The Laboring Girls in Girls Magazines, 1941-1945

As Japan officially joined the Axis powers in World War II in late 1941, the country's extended warfront across East and Southeast Asia consequently increased the need for both soldiers and munitions on the frontline. This further strained the resources on the home front and prompted the state to release a series of labor policies that mobilized non-combatant civilians like women and students to participate in industrial production between 1941 and 1945. While Japan's wartime labor mobilization had begun shortly after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the polices of the early 1940s did more than increasing the number of workers in munitions factories. Rather, as B. Uchiyama suggested, they also glorified labor culture and paved the way for munitions workers to receive public acclaim on par with soldiers fighting on the front lines. This positive shift in the image of munitions workers and labor culture in mass media extended to girls' magazines as well.[41] As Imada demonstrated in her chart, "Frequency of Appearances in the Cover Illustrations of Girls' Magazines," the presence of cover illustrations featuring subjects performing labor increased by nearly ten times -- from 3.1% between 1936 and 1940 to 30.2% between 1941 and 1945. Notably, in contrast to girls' magazines, depictions of labor activities on the covers of boys' magazines dropped from 7% between 1936 and 1940 to 2.2% between 1941

[41] B. Uchiyama, 93.

and 1945.[42] Through such contrast, girls' magazines transformed the state's labor mobilization into a defining characteristic of girls' culture in early 1940s Japan.

While the shift of girls' patriotic roles in girls' magazines from consumers to workers aligned with state policies, the celebration of labor nevertheless created new opportunities for readers to explore their agency within girls' culture. After Nakahara left *Girls' Companion* in 1940, many readers expressed sadness and confusion over the loss of the consumer-oriented aesthetic that had once been familiar and dear. However, by 1941, some readers had begun to self-identify as "Japanese Girl (*jp. nihon no shōjo*)" – a national identity that emphasized labor as girls' new wartime responsibilities. In her analysis of how readers used this new identity in *Girls' Companion,* Imada insightfully pointed out that girls often used their national loyalty as a tool to rebel against adults such as their mothers, who represented the "old" gender identity for girls in prewar Japan.[43] Indeed, eager to carve out a gender identity distinct from that of the older generation, readers embraced the state's labor mobilization to add their own color to girls' culture – not only as consumers but also as workers under patriotic titles like "industrial warriors (*jp. sangyō senshi*)". With consumer culture no longer providing a safe space for them to explore gender roles under military censorship in girls' magazines, labor culture became the new site for girls to validate their experiences in adolescent years in the final years of wartime.

Despite girls' enthusiastic support for labor, their vision of work as a new gender role for girls nevertheless differed from the state's expectations for women at the time. Historians of women's labor participation in wartime Japan have shown that expectations for women to become "good wives, wise mothers" continued to dominate state mobilization policies. As Miyake argued, Japan's wartime government associated the family system with nationalist ideology by releasing

[42] Imada 今田, 61.
[43] Ibid., 177-80.

pronatalist policies that defined women's roles as either mothers in patriotic associations or draft laborers who worked in munitions factories.[44] Yet, as Elyssa Faison suggested, wartime labor policy in fact discouraged women from working to protect their obligations as mothers. Her analysis of the Patriotic Industrial Service Federations (*jp. Sanpō chūō honbu*)'s 1943 guideline for women's labor management further revealed that government officials even considered establishing educational programs that offer trainings in skills like sewing, cooking and arranging flowers to preserve women's "fundamental character" at work.[45] Meanwhile, reader's letters in *Girls' Companions* from the same year showed that girls embraced labor precisely because they rejected domestic responsibilities. Some even criticized adults for lacking awareness of wartime realities by restricting their daughters to domestic activities like flower arrangements and needlework instead of respecting their wishes to work. Whereas Imada interpreted these letters as evidence of readers' support for the patriotic shift of *Girls' Companion*, I argue that these voices rather reflected how readers had diverged from the state-sanctioned domestic roles for women.[46]

This misalignment between girls' and the states' expectations for labor only deepened by late 1944 when severe material shortages had set in. With consumption no longer viable and new labor policies mandating that female students work in aircraft and munitions factories for four months each year, participation in industrial labor was no longer voluntary. Yet such state-sanctioned "freedom" for girls to pursue industrial work during the school year only widened the gap between their lived experiences in factories and their imaginations of labor, which explored alternative options in literary world. This contrast was particularly evident in the case of *Girls' Companion* reader Tanabe Seiko, who documented her daily life and practiced writing fictions in

[44] Miyake, 268-269.
[45] Elyssa Faison, *Managing Women: Disciplining Labor in Modern Japan* (University of California Press, 2007), 142-44.
[46] Imada 今田, 177-80.

her diary from 1945. Like many female students in the first half of that year, the seventeen-year-old Tanabe had been working full-time in a factory making aircraft parts alongside her classmates from *Shō'in* Women's Vocational School (*jp. Shō'in joshi senmon gakkō*) under student mobilization (*jp. gakuto dō'in*). Yet in her novella "Girl on the Mongolian Plain" from April 1945, she depicted her heroine – initially appeared under the disguise of male cross-dressing – as a spy who gathered intelligence from bandits on the Mongolian wilderness. Although her espionage was technically a form of patriotic labor, fulfilling such duty on a male-dominated battlefield – both in fiction and in reality – rendered the cross-dressing spy much more transgressive than female students working in factories as the war drew close to an end.[47]

Furthermore, Tanabe's cross-dressing protagonist reflected the lingering influences of prewar girls' culture, in which many readers of girls' magazines were also fans of musical theatre troupes like the Takarazuka Girls' Revue (jp. *Takarazuka shōjo kagekidan*) and the Shouchiku Girl's Revue (*Shōchiku shōjo kagekidan*), where female actors performed male roles in male costumes. As Tanabe recalled in her 1997 autobiography – *Make Way for Miss Sunny* (jp. *Rakuten shōjo tōri masu*), she had frequented Takarazuka's theatre from a young age with her mother and aunt in the late 1930s.[48] However, by 1944, Japanese army had deemed Takarazuka as unnecessary and forced the troupe to cease performances following the heightening of the war. Suffering cultural deprivation as she wrote in 1945, Tanabe's description of the protagonist's masculinized appearance evoked a sense of nostalgia for the loss of Takarazuka. In particular, the spy's androgynous appearance -- as characterized by her "strikingly white teeth" and "dark stunning

[47] Tanabe Seiko 田辺聖子, *Tanabe seiko jūhassai no hi no kiroku* 田辺聖子十八歳の日の記録 (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū 文藝春秋, 2021), 278-284. This novella was originally included in the Tanabe's diary entry on April 26th, 1945.

[48] Tanabe Seiko 田辺聖子, *Rakuten shōjo tōri masu: watashi no rirekisho* 楽天少女通ります−私の履歴書 (Kadokawa Haruki Jimusho 角川春樹事務所, 2001), 11, 67-68.

eyes" -- showed that her masculinity was in line with the sexually ambiguous performances of the male roles that Takarazuka actors embodied. Thus, by framing the mystery of her patriotic heroine's sexual identity through cross-dressing, Tanabe widened the gap between her fictional world and her lived reality in which the state rejected the Takarazuka culture that shaped its form.

Conclusion

As exemplified by wartime issues of *Girls' Companion* and *Girls' Club,* as well as Tanabe's novella in her diary, girls' magazines and their readers re-imagined patriotic responsibilities as a form of liberation that allowed girls to assert agency over their own gender roles in wartime Japan. Following the state's intensified intervention in children's publications in the late 1930s, girls' magazines increased patriotic content that aligned with state policies by combining prewar aesthetic style with war themes, removing artworks that the Japanese army deemed as inappropriate, and eventually mobilizing girls into war production in the early 1940s. Historians of wartime girls' culture have often interpreted these changes as evidence of the magazines compliance with state ideology. However, through analysis of materials such as Fukiya's illustration of comfort goods sales, M. Uchiyama's editorial letter, readers' columns in *Girls' Companion* and Tanabe's diary, this chapter shows that artists, editors and readers alike sought alternative interpretations of patriotic girlhood that deviated from state expectations without directly challenging Japan's military expansion. This is not to suggest that girls' magazines adopted an anti-war stance. On the contrary, much of their published contents displayed genuine support for the national cause. Yet it was precisely through their patriotic sentiments that girls' magazines devised gender expressions for girls that differed from the state-sanctioned domestic roles. Through depictions of alternative girlhood in war mobilization, these magazines showed that girls' gendered agencies persevered throughout the Asia-Pacific War.

By uncovering wartime girls' magazines as a site of agency for girls, this chapter also challenges historical narratives that framed the wartime period as a radical break from the golden age of girls' culture in prewar Japan. While historians like Dollase have acknowledged voices of resistance to government policies in magazines like *Girls' Companion*, they tend to frame these dissents as reactive responses to the magazines' forced transformation under state control.[49] In contrast, this chapter has shown that prewar aesthetics and editorial strategies continued to shape the production of wartime girls' magazines, including patriotic materials that mobilized girls for war support. Although these magazines adapted visual styles and themes under state pressure, they continued to devise popular alternatives to state expectations of girlhood, following the same logic they did in prewar years when they provided consumer goods tailored to girls' tastes without directly challenging the dominant consumerism. In this sense, the magazines' transformation to patriotic forms during wartime was rather affirmation of the same strategy of negotiating girlhood from within the dominant frameworks continued in girls' magazines from prewar to wartime. As I discuss in the next chapter, the same logic continued to shape girls' culture when girls' comic magazines replaced girls' magazines as the new entertainment readings for girls in postwar Japan.

[49] Dollase,72-80.

Chapter 2 Girls' Comics in Postwar Japan: A Case Study on *The Rose of Versailles*

Following the end of World War II in August 1945, Japan was occupied by the Allied Forces until 1952. During this time, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) replaced the country's wartime censorship with a new system aimed at purging militarism. Although the implementation of Occupation censorship brought new set of restrictions such as banning negative criticism of the Allied Forces, the two girls' magazines that had survived the war – *Girl's Companion* and *Girls' Club* – regained the freedom to bring back prewar aesthetics. Nakahara Jun'ichi, who had been banned from publishing in *Girls' Companion* in 1940, also returned to the industry as an illustration artist and fashion designer, even launching his own girls' magazines – *Sunflower* (*jp. Himawari,* 1947-1952). Nevertheless, this brief revival of prewar girls' culture did not achieve the same commercial success it once did. By the mid 1950s, a new generation of postwar girls' magazines like *Ribbon* (jp. *Ribon,* 1955-) and *Good Friends* (jp. *Nakayoshi,* 1954-) emerged as dominant forms of entertainment for girls, primarily featured story comics that had become popular among children since the end of the war. While most comics were still created by male artists during this time, the shift of publishing cycle from monthly to weekly in boys' and girls' magazines in the 1960s led to a labor shortage in the comic industry. As a result, this opened new opportunities for female artists to join as girls' comic artists. By the 1970s, young women had taken over much of the creation of girls' comics and introduced new narrative tropes and character types to the genre, including homosexual romance and beautiful boy characters (*jp, bishōnen*). These changes helped expand the readership of girls' comics from school-aged girls to a broad audience with diverse ages and gender in the following decades.

In their analysis of this transformation, historians of girls' culture in Japan have often treated the early 1970s as a revolutionary time that defined girls' comics in its contemporary form. One of the most influential accounts of this history is Deborah Shamoon's *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan* (2012). In her book, Shamoon interpreted this revolution as a return to the narrative and aesthetic traditions of prewar girls' magazines by analyzing two iconic works from this time: Hagio Moto's *The Heart of Thomas* (*jp. Tōma no shinzō,* 1974) and Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* (*jp. Berusaiyu no bara,* 1972-73). By tracing portrayals of homogender romance in these comics back to narratives of S relationships and illustrations of pairings of girls in 1920s and 1930s girls' magazines, she convincingly bridged the two eras in the genealogy of girls' culture in Japan. While Shamoon's analysis rightly underscored the influence of prewar aesthetics on girls' comics in the 1970s, what received less attention in her book was the historical context of comic production in postwar Japan that enabled the revival of prewar girls' aesthetics. Like many cultural industries in Japan, comic creation had been a male-dominated profession since the rise of comics in popular media in the late 1940s. Even though the majority of girls' comic artists had become women by the 1970s, how did their experiences of working against industrial gender biases shaped their comic reinvention of prewar girls' aesthetics in the 1970s? Without considering the influence of uneven gender dynamics that was persistent in postwar girls' comic productions, Shamoon risked of deepening the historical divided between girls' comics of 1970s and that of the earlier postwar decades in the history of girls' culture.[50]

In this chapter, I reconsider the transformation of girls' comics from the 1960s to the 1970s by conducting a case study of Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles* (1972-1973)*,* a popular historical drama that followed the lives of two women: Marie-Antoinette and her fictional royal guard Oscar

[50] Shamoon, 101-136.

de Jarjayes. Despite being published in the 1970s, *The Rose of Versailles* is valuable for my inquiry for two reasons. First, Ikeda's life experience from her birth in 1947 to her debut as a professional comic artist in late 1960s was representative of the generation of young women who reintroduced prewar girls' aesthetics to girls' comics in the 1970s. Her life allows me to examine how these women's experiences shaped their creative output. For many of these women, the democratic ideal of "gender equality" that American occupiers promoted had lasting influence in their lives. In particular, the legal implementation of this ideal in Japan's 1947 Constitution included sections of sexual equality that "was not even explicitly guaranteed in the U.S. Constitutions at the time."[51] Alongside other reformed legal codes such as the Civil Code and the Labour Standard Law, the 1947 legal forms expanded women's basic rights in areas such as suffrage, divorce, equal pay and access to higher education. While these reforms allowed women like Ikeda to pursue education and careers, persistent discrimination at home, school and work soon led to their disillusionment and drove many to activism. Scholars like Nobuko Anan have noted how Ikeda's participation in the New Left student activism shaped her political imagination in *The Rose of Versailles*, but few have traced the roots of her perspectives back to the Occupation era. [52] As I show in the first section of this chapter, it was the discrepancy between ideals of gender equality and the realities of postwar social unevenness that shaped Ikeda's critical approach to gender issues in her works.

Second, Ikeda's attentiveness to readers reception during the serialization of *The Rose of Versailles* allowed me to examine how the revival of consumer culture in the 1950s and 1960s shaped women's creative labor in postwar media industries. Although consumer culture temporarily waned in Japan due to severe material shortage during wartime and the immediate

[51] John W Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 369,
[52] Nobuko Anan, "The Rose of Versailles: Women and Revolution in Girls' Manga and the Socialist Movement in Japan," *Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 1 (2014): 41–63, https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12107.

postwar years, the rapid economic recovery of the 1950s encouraged many to readopt the consumer lifestyles. Girls' comic magazines, which expanded alongside consumer culture's resurgence, ensured their contents would always reflect consumers' desires to boost profit. To meet the needs of their readers, publishers in the 1960s actively recruited young women to write girls' comics for readers of the approximate of age and gender. Through hosting comic contests in girls' magazines and offering opportunities for winning artists to debut as professionals, girls' comic magazines successfully cultivated a generation of young girls into future comic artists. While scholars like Shamoon have celebrated this change as an empowerment for readers to gain greater control over their own culture, I use Ikeda's creation of *The Rose of Versailles* to exemplify how the magazines' increased attention to consumer needs also introduced new restrictions for artists that forced them to negotiate between the desires of readers and that of their own.

One of the most significant compromises Ikeda made under such pressure was to shift her narrative focus Marie-Antoinette to Oscar, whose androgynous gender performance reflected the rising popularity of beautiful boys in 1970s girls' comics. In this chapter, I examine how this shift shaped Ikeda's engagement with gender issues in *The Rose of Versailles.* While existing scholarship on comics in Japa often focused on visual styles and narratives, I contextualize the narrative shift in *The Rose of Versailles* within the broader production of girls' comics in postwar Japan. By analyzing materials such as Ikeda's girls' comics, non-fictions and printed interviews, as well as secondary scholarship on women's labor and feminist debates in postwar Japan, I show how Ikeda used the life stories of Marie-Antoinette and Oscar to respectively address women's social struggles as housewives and working woman. I argue that while Oscar's cross-dressing and military career offered Ikeda new opportunities to critique gender discrimination at work, they did not necessarily provide her greater creative freedom to challenge the publishers' expectations for

girls' comics as a woman-centered culture. Ultimately, through my analysis of *The Rose of Versailles*, I contend that even after female artists took over the production of girls' comics in the 1970s, gender representations in the genre remained a contested field that was negotiated among artists, editors and readers within the constraints of consumer market.

Growing in Postwar Japan: Ikeda Riyoko's Early Life Experience (1947-1972)

Ikeda was born in Osaka as the eldest child among two girls and two boys to a salaryman father and a housewife mother in 1947, just two years after the end of the Second World War. Like many of her age cohorts in Japan, she grew up under the influence of the gender equality ideals promoted by the Allied Forces during the Occupation (1945-1952). During this time, the implication of coeducation at all educational levels and the enactment of the Labor Standard Act, which guaranteed women equal pay for equal work, granted young girls like Ikeda the prospect of receiving higher education and achieving financial independence in adulthood. These positive signs of change in women's social status prompted Ikeda's mother to hope that her daughters would not become dependent on their husbands like herself when they grew up. In one interview discussing her childhood, Ikeda recalled her mother urging her to become a person who could "earn her own living without relying one a man and have a skill of her own" repeatedly when she was young. As a result, Ikeda's gender did not disadvantage her at home. Due to her mother's enthusiasm for education, Ikeda developed diverse interests in art, history and literature as a child.[53]

[53] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, "Ikeda Riyoko-san "berubara" Osukaru wa naze josei ni 池田理代子さん「ベルばら」オスカルはなぜ女性に," interview by Kobayashi Akira 小林明, *Nihon keizai shinbun* 日本経済新聞, September 13, 2019, https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO49580760Z00C19A9000000/.

When comic became popular among children in the 1950s, Ikeda fell in love with the medium and began submitting manga strips to girls' magazines when she was still in middle school. However, her mother strongly opposed to her dream of becoming a professional comic artist. Despite of the commercial success of comics at the time, most artists led precarious lives with unstable income. Before the expansion of weekly comic magazines increased demand for comic production, many artists sold manuscripts to small publishers that often struggled to pay proper manuscript fees and had high bankruptcy rates. Moreover, many parents condemned comics as harmful readings for children due to their explicit depictions of violence and sex. From the mid-1950s to the 1960s, social organizations such as Parent-Teacher Association and the Federation of Mother's Associations led the "movement against harmful publications" which heavily targeted rental comics and comic magazines. Even the "God of manga," Tezuka Osamu, was labeled as "enemy of children" for producing what critics called "vulgar" comics.[54] Under the pressure of her mother, Ikeda did not further pursue the path of becoming a manga artist at the time and instead explored other career options such as fiction writing and music performance later in high school.[55]

As Ikeda entered her late teens, however, she increasingly struggled with gender bias against women in her life. Upon graduating from high school, she enrolled in Tokyo University of Education with aspirations of becoming a scholar in philosophy, but her father was against the idea of women receiving higher education and only agreed to pay for her tuition for the first year. The contrasting attitudes towards Ikeda's education as a woman between her parents was especially reflective of the ongoing contestations between the emerging ideal of gender equality and persistent patriarchy forces in early postwar Japan, which continued to shape her life upon entering

[54] Kaoru Nagayama, *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*, trans. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 96n5, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048550722.
[55] Ikeda 池田, "Ikeda Riyoko-san "berubara" Osukaru wa naze josei ni 池田理代子さん「ベルばら」オスカルはなぜ女性に."

college. Like many other countries experiencing the upheaval of New Left political movements throughout the 1960s, the daily lives of college students in Japan were also filled with political gatherings, on-campus strikes and street protests at the time when Ikeda entered university. However, as Chelsea Schieder has shown in her book, these student movements often emphasized on masculinist ideas of politics and marginalized female student's desires.[56] As a result, Ikeda's struggles with receiving financial support from family due of her gender identity did not resolve upon her arrival at college but rather put her at odds with her cohorts. Although she initially joined the Democratic Youth League of Japan and participated in student protests in her freshmen year, she could not sympathize with student activists who were questioning their parents' establishment view on one hand while taking their financial support for granted on the other. Unconvinced by the student activism, Ikeda carried out her personal liberation by moving away from her family to achieve financial independence in the fall of 1965.[57]

Ikeda's decision to cut ties with her family in college put her through extreme financial hardship, a situation closely tied to her identity as a young woman. While Japan initially suffered severe material shortages in the immediate postwar years, its economy recovered significantly after the Korean war (1950-1953) and entered the nearly two decades of high economic growth in 1955. By the 1960s, the nominal wages in Japan had begun increasing by twelve percent per year, which was around double the rate of the consumer prices increase. This brough substantial earning powering to workers in Japan.[58] However, the main beneficiaries of this growth remained male employees in full-time tenured positions who received salaries that was designed to cover support

[56] Chelsea Szendi Schieder, *Co-Ed Revolution: The Female Student in the Japanese New Left* (Duke University Press, 2021), 3.
[57] Ikeda 池田, "Ikeda Riyoko-san "berubara" Osukaru wa naze josei ni 池田理代子さん「ベルばら」オスカルはなぜ女性に."
[58] Andrew Gordon, *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 148.

his non-working wife and children as well. In contrast, Ikeda struggled to find stable employment after leaving home and ended up working several part-time jobs such as tutoring, working on assembly lines and serving at beauty café (jp. *bijin kissa*), a type of café that attracted customers with beautiful waitresses. However, her income was so low that she could not afford enough food. In her reflections on this period, Ikeda recalled: "When I read my diary from that time, it was written, 'I'm hungry, I'm hungry, I want to eat whatever I can to my heart's content.' I was surprised later to find that at a time when I was coming of age, I experienced such severe hunger in my life." As Ikeda's words reflect, struggling to fulfill material needs was her major if not only concern.[59] To improve her financial situation, Ikeda began exploring the possibility of becoming a girls' comic artist, a creative profession that especially valued young women's ability to affectively connect with their young female readers and offered a moderate amount of manuscript fee for their works. After honing her skills by creating rental comics for a couple of years, Ikeda achieved her debut in commercial girls' comic magazines in 1967. By the time *The Rose of Versailles* was published in 1972, Ikeda had released several popular works in mainstream girls' comic magazines such as *Girls' Friend* and *Margarete* as a professional manga artist.

While the commercial success that Ikeda achieved as a girls' comic artist gradually relieved her from the economic stress she experienced in college, she continued to face gender inequality in her professional life. In the 1960s, female comic artists and girls' comic remained in supplementary positions to male manga artists and boys' comic (jp. *shōnen manga*). As Ikeda later revealed in her interviews, it was common for female comic artists to receive half of the manuscript

[59] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, "Jibun ga ima kokoni iru imi wo mitsukeru 自分が今ここにいる意味を見つけよう," in *Zoku: bokutachi ga nanimono demonakatta koro no hanashi wo shiyō* 続・僕たちが何者でもなかった頃の話をしよう (Bungeishunjū 文藝春秋, 2018), 13.

fees that their male colleagues made during that time.[60] In addition, she had to negotiate with gender biases from the male editors she worked with. For example, her proposal to write *The Rose of Versailles* as a historical drama initially faced strong backlash from her editor, who believed that women did not enjoy reading about history. It was not until she promised vehemently that her work would sell that her editor granted her permission to begin serializing the story.[61] After the popularity of *The Rose of Versailles* solidified Ikeda's position as a professional comic artist, she became vocal of gender issues in mass media in the following decades. She not only spoke explicitly about her struggles as a woman working in the manga industry in comic-related interviews but also contributed several short pieces on issues regarding women's independence and their working experiences to magazines targeting audience with general interests. Moreover, several works she published, from manga like *The Rose of Versailles, The Window of Orpheus* (jp. *Orufe'usu no mado,* 1975-76, 1977-81) and *I-manga* (jp. *Shi manga, 1987*) to literary works like *The Women Who Wrote Masterpieces: The Lives of Thirteen Who Lived True to Themselves* (jp. *Meisaku wo kaita onna-tachi: jibun wo ikita jyūsan-nin no jinsei*, 1995) showed her efforts in emphasizing women's diversity to combat stereotypical images of woman.

As Ikeda's interviews and her works suggest, her early life experiences of gender bias as a woman played an important role in shaping her approach to gender issues in her creations. As one of the girls' comics that achieved most commercial success for its depiction of French history during this time, *The Rose of Versailles* is often praised for Ikeda's attentiveness to historicity by social critics in Japan and scholars writing in English. However, there have been few analyses of

[60] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, "Supesharu intabyū Ikeda Riyoko-shi ni ohanashi wo ukagaimashita スペシャルインタビュー池田理代子氏にお話しを伺いました," interview by Hayashi Tomoko 林伴子, *Kyōdō-sankaku* 共同参画, no.152 (2022): 2.
[61] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, *Berusaiyu no bara daijiten* ベルサイユのばら大事典 (Shū'eisha 集英社, 2002), 122-129.

how the social transformation of women's gender roles in postwar Japan shaped Ikeda's story. In next section, I show how Ikeda critically engaged with the dominant gender role for women as housewife in postwar Japan through her depiction of Marie-Antoinette in *The Rose of Versailles.*

Marie-Antoinette and Housewife in Postwar Japan

The Rose of Versailles began in 1755 with the birth of Marie-Antoinette, the ninth child of Austrian Empress, Maria-Theresa, and fast-forwarded to Marie-Antoinette's childhood within the first episode. While the narrator indicated the Empress' intention to raise her daughter into a "beautiful, elegant, graceful and generous woman," young Marie-Antoinette turned out to be a tomboy who was energetic, mischievous, and adept at tricking her tutors to skip classes for outdoor activities."[62] Nevertheless, in contrast to her behaviors that were portrayed as non-feminine in Ikeda's fictional world, her visual appearance was highly femininized through markers associated with femininities in girls' comics such as starry eyes, long permed hair and dresses decorated with ribbons and flowers. These feminine traits were positively acknowledged by side characters in the stories. For example, her maids praised her heartwarming smiles, and the child music prodigy Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was attracted by her and asked her to marry him when she was at the tender age of six. Her beauty, as Ikeda narrates in the story, "would continue to shine without fading until her death" as the queen of France.[63]

In her depiction of Marie-Antoinette's deviance from gender expectations, Ikeda's choice of designing the young princess as a tomboy character worth particular attention. Tomboy (*jp. otenba musume*) is a type of character consisting of vital and adventurous young girls in their pre-adolescence in girls' comic. It first appeared in children's comics in Japan in the 1920s, around

[62] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1* (Shū'eisha 集英社, 1994), 12.
[63] Ibid., 17.

the same time when the circulation of girls' magazines "contributed to the construction of girls' culture as a closed, homosocial world."[64] While the tomboy characters shared the same sentimental aesthetic style with the homosocial girls' culture in some comics, they did not always reject heterosexual desires. As Ryan Holmberg showed in his analysis of manga artist Matsumoto Katsuji's iconic tomboy characters Clover and Kurumi, the tomboy characters were able to transform and merge with the state-sanctioned "good wife, wise mother" (*jp. ryōsai kenbo*) ideologies to ensure their continued existence during the World War II. As I showed in the last chapter, this was a time when military censorship demanded media emphasis on women's reproductive duties. Although both tomboy characters sported athleticism and assertiveness that allowed them to perform duties that were socially deemed as male in the 1930s, they also preserved feminine traits such as eroticism and motherhood.[65] After the end of the World War II, tomboys proliferated in daily life stories and romance comedies in girls' comics like *Chako-chan's Diary* (jp. *Chako-chan no nikki,* 1959-70) and *The Magnificent Cora* (jp. *Suteki na kōra,* 1963) in the 1950s and 1960s. These postwar tomboys exemplified how gender equality shaped children's lives in democratic society from young girls' perspective at a time when women of Ikeda's generation were coming of age. Their close association with the subjectivities of women and willingness to embrace women's materiality thus sets Ikeda's depiction of Marie-Antoinette apart from other girls' comics that rejected women's material bodies through their depiction of beautiful boy characters in the 1970s. While young Marie-Antoinette as a tomboy challenges the gender norms for girls like the beautiful boys, she encourages readers to embrace their female identities rather than escape from them.

[64] Shamoon, 29.
[65] Ryan Holmberg, "Manga Shōnen: Katō Ken'ichi and the Manga Boys," *Mechademia* 8, no. 1 (2013): 173–93, https://doi.org/10.1353/mec.2013.0010.

While the first episode highlighted the freedom that Marie-Antoinette enjoyed as the beloved tomboy princess in Austria, it also foreshadowed her tragic future in France. As early as her depiction of Marie-Antoinette's childhood, Ikeda highlights the political nature of her impending marriage at its planning stage. She devotes several pages to the meetings between Marie-Antoinette's mother and her vassals, in which they intensively discussed the potential benefits that Marie-Antoinette's marriage would bring to the alliance between Austria and France. Notably, considerations regarding Marie-Antoinette's personal will and happiness were absent from these meetings. As the Empress stated in the manga, she arranged this marriage "only for the prosperity and safety of" Austria, even though she was aware that Marie-Antoinette's personality might not be suitable for her future positions in France.[66] In her parting words to her daughter on the day of her wedding, the Empress, worried about Marie-Antoinette's capability in fulfilling her duties as the future queen of France, reminded her of the importance to "study hard, improve yourself and overcome your weaknesses!"[67] From the Empress' perspective, Ikeda underscores the weights of political and diplomatic responsibilities that were to come with Marie-Antoinette's future titles as the Dauphine and later the Queen of France.

Such understanding of the domestic roles that Marie-Antoinette were about to assume in her marriage reflects the juxtaposed social expectation for women to contribute to national prosperity through their domestic gender role as housewives in postwar Japan. Housewife, or *shufu* in its Japanese term, initially emerged as a new role for upper and upper-middle class women amid the modernization of Japanese society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It implied the responsibilities of these women as head managers of domestic affairs in their households.[68] By

[66] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1,* 36.
[67] Ibid., 42.
[68] Ishii Kazumi, and Nerida Jarkey, "The Housewife Is Born: The Establishment of the Notion and Identity of the Shufu in Modern Japan," *Japanese Studies* 22, no. 1 (2002): 39, https://doi.org/10.1080/103713902201436732.

the late 1940s, factors such as women's increased involvement in social management during the interwar and wartime years, their efforts in securing food for families amid the food shortages in the immediate postwar years, and the attempts of postwar political groups such as Women's Democratic Club (jp. *Fujin minshu kurabu*) and New Japan Women's League (jp. *Shin Nihon Fujin no Kai*) to mobilize housewives into political participation upon women gaining suffrage rights in Japan in 1947 had contributed to the broader social acceptance of housewives as a dominant gender role for women. [69] Commercial media that marketed women as family representative for purchases of household appliances further encouraged women's public participation as consumers.[70] This dual dynamic in political and commercial world that offered housewives new opportunities of social participation, however, was pushed back by efforts of conservatives initiatives from government officials, corporate managers and women's organizations that increasingly pressuring women to return to home. Such efforts were most evident in their attempt to professionalize the role of housewife through a series of social initiatives known as the New Life Movement between 1948 and 1985. Through activities such as group meetings, workshops and classes on homemaking skills that were aimed at women in both rural and urban areas, this movement not only naturalized women's gender roles as housewives nationwide but also linked the value of housewives' domestic contributions to the shared economic development goals of both companies and the government in postwar Japan. [71] As I have shown in the previous section, it was precisely this "gap" between the expanding opportunities for women's social participation and the conservative constrains that trapped educated young women

[69] Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 179-182; Vera C Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment, and Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 123. Ochiai Emiko, *The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan* (LTCB International Library Foundation, 1997), 21.
[70] Moeran and Skov, 28.
[71] Andrew Gordon, "Managing the Japanese Household: The New Life Movement in Postwar Japan," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 274-76.

like Ikeda from attaining financial independence in the 1960s. Her depiction of Marie-Antoinette's struggles to achieve equality within the confines of her political marriage mirrored the dilemmas that Ikeda and many other women faced in postwar Japan.

In *The Rose of Versailles*, Ikeda pays particular attention to the connection between women's gender roles and state interests in her depiction of Marie-Antoinette transforming into her new role as the Dauphine of France. In Ikeda's portrayal of Marie-Antoinette's grand wedding to the future Louise XVI, the young Austrian princess gave up her Austrian attires upon the request of French court ladies at the border and changed into French outfits. Instead of illustrating the Marie-Antoinette's change of clothes directly, Ikeda dedicates a full-page panel to depict the young bride from two different stages of her life. Following the reading order of Japanese publications from right to left, readers first encounter the young tomboy Marie-Antoinette standing naked on the right upper half of the page with her eyes shut. The lower half of her body is concealed by roses surrounding the current older Marie-Antoinette who stands in front of her younger self on the left lower side of the page with her long hair tied up under her tiara and her body wrapped in French regalia. The present Marie-Antoinette is just as beautiful as her younger self, but her lively nature as a tomboy princess has given way to the elegance of French fashions that acts as a constraint on her body and defines her as a woman. While it was common for *shōjo manga* artists to use full body images when they (re)introduce main characters and highlight key moments, Ikeda's juxtaposition of Marie-Antoinette's images from two different life stages on one page emphasizes how her new national identity as the Dauphine of France shaped her gender performances in marriage. With the completion of the wedding, Marie-Antoinette transforms from a tomboy into a royal housewife.[72]

[72] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1,* 46.

The rise of the "housewife" as the dominant role for women typically implies a deepening of gender-based labor division in modern society. However, this social transformation also generated tensions among women in postwar Japan. While the role of housewife was initially confined to upper and upper-middle class families in prewar Japan, the majority of women from farming households and small business-owning families continued to work after marriage, managing family lands and businesses at home.[73] Yet, as employment outside of home became the norm for both men and women in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s in Japan, the housework and child-rearing that housewives conducted increasingly differentiated their labor from that of women who worked alongside male employees in companies and factories. While many women celebrated their new domestic role as a step forward, "leading post-war women's organization," as Sheldon Garon noted, "self-consciously cast the nations' women as housewives in charge of the family while doing little to represent the interests of working women." Despite resistance from women's organizations such as the Housewives Association (*jp. Shufuren*) and the National Federation of Regional Women's Organizations (*jp. Zen Chifuren*) against attempts to restore patriarchal household from prewar Japan, their strategies remained focused on women's domestic performances and gender equality within the family.[74]

The segregated interests between housewives and working women in the 1950s sparked a series of feminist debates in print media known as the "housewife debate (*jp. shufu ronsō*)". The first wave of this debate initiated in *Women's Review* (jp. *Fujin kōron,* 1916-), a women's magazine that had carried various feminist debates in Japan since prewar. It focused on whether a woman's primary role should be as a wife and mother at home or as a worker outside the home.

[73] Ochiai, 23-36.
[74] Sheldon Garon, "State and Family in Modern Japan: A Historical Perspective," *Economy and Society* 39, no. 3 (2010): 331-32, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2010.486214.

By the 1960s, a second wave of the debate expanded across various publications, including the weekly *Asahi Journal* (jp. *Asahi jānaru,* 1959-1992) and left leaning newspapers like *Women's Democracy* (jp. *Fujin Minshu shinbun,* 1946) as well as highbrow journals like *Thought* (jp. *Shisō,* 1921-) and *The Science of Thought* (jp. *Shisō no kagaku,* 1946-96). During this period, liberal feminism and Marxist feminism clashed over whether women should receive payments for housework or enter the workforce and join labor unions to challenge capitalism system. In the 1970s, the third and final wave of the debate shifted focus to whether housewives could be considered liberated human beings without financial independence. Under the influence of the women's liberation movement, feminists such as Takeda Kyōko rejected the logic of capitalist society by supporting housewives' choices to not achieve economic independence through employment. As Ayako Kano argued, despite the concepts that emerged in these three waves of housewife debates, such as women's domestic labor as unpaid work, were prescient at the time, Takeda's valorization of full-time housewife as liberated subjects in the last wave remained in alignment with the family model supported by postwar social policy.[75]

Writing concurrently with the emergence of the third-wave housewife debate, Ikeda was also influenced by the women's liberation movement when *the Rose of Versailles* came out in 1972. While Ikeda did not directly participate in the women's liberation movement in its form as an organized social movement, her life experiences mirrored those of many women's liberation activists who grew up in the reformed coeducation system and became involved in student movements in the 1960s. However, unlike Takeda, Ikeda heavily criticized the valorization of the

[75] Ayako Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates: A Century of Contention on Sex, Love, and Labor* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 121-22, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824855833. As Kano explained, Takeda valorized housewives as "liberate subjects" who stood outside of the logic of capitalist society. Rather than seeing economic independence through employment as a path to liberation, Takeda argued that housewives actively chose to forgo paid labor and position themselves in social weaker roles so that they could care for those even less financially independent such as children, the elderly and the disabled. Her radical inversion of value was influenced by "countercultural atmosphere and the women's lib movements of the 1960s and 1970s." (Kano, 121)

housewife by showing how marriage restrained women's freedom regardless of the empowerment it had brought them. In the first climax of *The Rose of Versailles,* Ikeda depicted the young Dauphine's standoff with Madam du Barry, one of Louise XV's mistresses at the time of Marie-Antoinette's arrival in France. Marie-Antoinette initially struggled to comply with French court etiquettes that were stricter than those in Austria, but she soon found out that her new title as the Dauphine also brought her certain privileges. Namely, as the woman with the highest-ranking in court, no other court ladies could speak to Marie-Antoinette unless she addressed them first. Upon discovering Madam du Barry's illicit relationship with the king, Marie-Antoinette refused to address her in public for nearly two years after her wedding in 1770. However, upon learning of the conflict between his mistress and granddaughter-in-law, Louise XV was enraged by Marie-Antoinette's defiance and threatened to wage war against Austria. As a result, Marie-Antoinette eventually compromised and spoke to Madam du Barry at the New Year's Greeting in 1772.[76] Through Marie-Antoinette's defeat in her rivalry with Madam du Barry, Ikeda showed that despite wifehood empowering women in certain ways, such power was nevertheless contingent on state interests and failed to truly liberate women in their marriages.

Furthermore, Ikeda questioned the housewife's role as a democratic subject by critically depicting how Marie-Antoinette's political marriage restrained her freedom to pursue romance. As the conflict between Marie-Antoinette and Madam du Barry came to an end, *The Rose of Versailles* saw the arrival of its male protagonist in Paris in 1773, Hans Axel Fersen. Historians have long speculated about his affair with Marie-Antoinette based on the passionate letters the two exchanged.[77] Although it was never confirmed in historical accounts, Ikeda adapted the speculated

[76] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1*, 128.
[77] John Hardman, *Marie-Antoinette: The Making of a French Queen* (Yale University Press, 2019), 79,

affair into the main storyline of *The Rose of Versailles,* as romance has always been the most popular theme in girls' comics. Initially, Ikeda truthfully followed the historical record of Marie-Antoinette' s first encounter with Fersen at a masquerade dance in Paris in January 1774 but added her own fantasy of the two became attracted to each other after sharing a few dances. After this brief meeting at the ball, Ikeda continued to depict the development of friendship between Marie-Antoinette and Fersen at the Palace of Versailles following the historical trajectory but added depictions of their intimacy that foreshadowed their future romance. In Ikeda's version of the story, Marie-Antoinette's special treatment of Fersen quickly raised concerns among some of the side characters who were close to her, even though she herself was not yet fully aware of her feelings.

After Marie-Antoinette and her husband ascended to the throne of Queen and King of France in June 1775, her friend Oscar de Jarjayes, a fictional cross-dressing female soldier who oversaw Marie-Antoinette's safety at the time, paid Fersen a visit and urged him to leave France before rumors about his relationship with Marie-Antoinette began to spread. As Oscar explained to Fersen during their meeting, his intimacy with Marie-Antoinette was initially tolerated because the Marie-Antoinette was still considered a child when she was the Dauphine of France. Although it was now clear how Fersen viewed Marie-Antoinette at this time historically, Ikeda's version depicted him as deeply in love with Marie-Antoinette and was aware of his own feelings. Nevertheless, he chose to leave France for the sake of the Queen's reputation. While in history Fersen did return to Sweden after Marie-Antoinette's coronation in 1775, Ikeda's rewrote that history that depicted his departure as a direct response to Marie-Antoinette's transition from the crown prince' wife to the mother of the nation. This change reframed their separation as not only a historical fact but also a sacrifice that Marie-Antoinette was forced to make. Consequently, it

reinforced Ikeda's critique against Marie-Antoinette's political marriage that gave the young queen no freedom in experiencing romance in her married life.[78]

While Marie-Antoinette's potential affair with Fersen as a married woman might seem morally contested, their romance should be understood as a symbol of sex equality within the cultural context of postwar Japan. As Jennifer Coates argued in her work, the censorship that the Allied Forces issued during the Occupation encouraged media producers to depict "modern nuclear families centered on egalitarian romance" to promote democratic marital relationships as desirable for people in Japan.[79] While the Occupation ended in 1952, girls' comic continued to deliver stories featuring egalitarian romance under the influence of American culture in the following decades. This was most evident in Mizuno's adaptation of Audrey Hepburn's romance comedies such as *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *Sabrina* (1954) in the 1960s. While Ikeda never openly admitted the Mizuno's influence on her creation, there are many similarities between *the Rose of Versailles* and Mizuno's historical manga *White Troika* (jp. *Shiro'i toroika,* 1964-65). Notably, the side character Rosalie from *the Rose of Versailles* and the protagonist Rosalita from *White Troika* not only shared similar names but also similar life experiences. Both young girls were born as aristocrats but adopted by parents from lower class when they were infants. Before reclaiming their noble identities, both young girls underwent a series of high-class etiquette trainings under the guidance of a young aristocratic man, or a cross-dressing aristocratic woman in the case of *the Rose of Versailles.* Such a process of presenting young girls with lower social upbringing to high class society reminds readers of the narrative of another one of Audre Hepburn's films, *My Fair Lady,* which was released in the United States the same year when

[78] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1,* 254.
[79] Jennifer Coates, "How to Be a Domestic Goddess: Female Film Stars and the Housewife Role in Postwar Japan," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 50 (2016): 33, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26401819.

Mizuno began serializing *White Troika* in 1964. Given the possible influence that Mizuno's works had over *The Rose of Versailles,* Marie-Antoinette's lack of freedom to pursue romance thus denotes the absence of sex equality in her marriage. Through Marie-Antoinette's forced separation from Fersen, Ikeda questions the social assumptions that equalized women's role as housewife with their identity as democratic subjects in postwar Japan.

Moreover, Ikeda challenged the alignment between state interest and women's desires to gain happiness through marriage by highlighting the conflict between Marie-Antoinette's romance with Fersen and her duties as the Queen of France. In the episodes depicting Fersen's return to France in 1778, Marie-Antoinette finally embraced her feelings for Fersen and began to see him discreetly. While Ikeda added her own imaginative depictions of their secrete meetings, the timing of when their relationship became more publicly acknowledged was largely consistent to historical records. However, once rumors about Marie-Antoinette's affair began to spread in the French court, Ikeda had the fictional character Oscar request a private audience with the Marie-Antoinette and reminded her of her duties as the queen. In response to Oscar's concerns, Marie-Antoinette said:

> "……For the alliance between Austria and France, I took on the roles of Dauphine, Queen, the National Mother…I was made to forget that I am also a woman named Marie-Antoinette. Still…!! Oscar François, as a woman yourself, you understand, don't you?! I am a queen, but first of all, I am a human being! A woman with a living heart!! Just like any other women, my body trembles with the desire to love and be loved……" [80]

In Marie-Antoinette's heartfelt confession, Ikeda addressed the internal conflict between a woman's personal desire and her responsibilities to her countries from a first-person perspective. Just like the gender role of housewife in postwar Japan was multifaceted, so too were Marie-

[80] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *2* (Shū'eisha 集英社, 1994), 95.

Antoinette's various domestic roles as "Dauphine," "Queen" and "the National Mother." They implied not only the expectation for her to remain faithful to her marriage as a wife and a mother, but also her political responsibilities in maintaining peace between Austria and France. Nevertheless, Ikeda reminded her readers through Marie-Antoinette's words that none of these duties aligned with Marie-Antoinette's own desires for love as a woman. By articulating Marie-Antoinette's struggle to live as "a human being," a phrase once used by government officials to explain the importance of democratization to women during the New Life Movement, Ikeda demonstrated that state interests compromise, rather than represent, women's desires in marriage.

Overall, Ikeda portrayed Marie-Antoinette as a victim of her political marriage in *The Rose of Versailles*. While Ikeda based her plots largely on historical facts, her emphasis on Marie-Antoinette's lack of freedom in her married life still reflected the influence of women's social status in postwar Japan. In particular, the emergence of housewife as a contested conceptual space for debates over women's works and freedom in Japan between the 1950s and 1970s shaped Ikeda's interpretation of Marie-Antoinette's marriage in French history. Consequently, while Ikeda's choice to depict the history of eighteenth-century France followed the emerging trend of using historical Europe as narrative background in girls' comics from the 1970s, her depiction of Marie-Antoinette did not necessarily offer her readers an escape from reality. Instead, her use of the tomboy character, her critique against marriage for political purpose and her advocates for women's freedom addressed her readers through the gender issues they were familiar with growing up in postwar Japan. Unfortunately, this strategy proved unsuccessful, as her fictionalized cross-dressing side character, Oscar, soon gained more support from readers than Marie-Antoinette. To ensure the circulation of her work, Ikeda responded to her readers' feedback by shifting her

narrative focus to Oscar. In next section, I examine how her efforts to follow the cultural trends in girls' comics influenced her approach to gender issues in the latter half of *The Rose of Versailles.*

Oscar and Working Women in the Early 1970s

Despite Ikeda's initial intention to write *The Rose of Versailles* as a biography of Marie-Antoinette, she later shifted her narrative focus to Oscar Francois de Jarjayes, a side character who gained overwhelming popularity among readers. Oscar was a cross-dressing woman who served Marie-Antoinette and her royal family as the head of the Royal Guard at the Palace of Versailles. Unlike Marie-Antoinette, who was based on a historical figure, Oscar was a fictional character of Ikeda's own creation. Born as the youngest daughter in the household of General de Jarjayes in France, Oscar's femininity was denied by her father from the moment of her birth. Disappointed by not receiving the male heir he had expected, Oscar's father said: "The household of a general who is in charge of protecting the royal family and leading the army has no need for a woman!"[81] As a result, he raised Oscar as if she were a boy, giving her a name intended for a son, dressing her in men's clothing, and training her in sword fighting to prepare her for a military career. At the age fifteen, Oscar successfully joined the French army and became the captain of the Royal Guard at the Palace of Versailles. Although her biological sex was an open secret in the French court, Oscar almost always appeared in male military uniforms. By the time her life crossed path with Marie-Antoinette in France in 1770, Oscar had embodied a set of gender expressions that were distinctively different in comparison to Marie-Antoinette's despite being the same age.

Oscar's overwhelming popularity among readers reflected the evolving trends in girls' comics characters that took place in postwar Japan. In contrast to the character depiction of Marie-

[81] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1,* 8.

Antoinette as a tomboy, a type of female character that had been present in manga for more than a decade by the 1970s, Oscar's visual appearance aligned with the emerging "beautiful boy" (jp. *bishōnen*) characters that just began to appear in girls' comics a few years before the serialization of *The Rose of Versailles* in 1972. The beautiful boys were typically school-aged boys, occasionally featuring cross-dressing girls, who appeared in girls' comics narratives set in historical European contexts. Commonly known as "boy's love (jp. *shōnen ai*) manga," many of these stories featured romantic relationships between the beautiful boys, while others emphasized their intimate Each and friendships.[82] The androgynous beauty and complex mentalities of the beautiful boys created the potential for girls to identify them in diverse ways, not only including as representations of homosexual men but also as surrogate subjects and objects of sexual desires, among other possible interpretations. As Oshiyama Michiko wrote in her book, Oscar was just as androgynous as the beautiful boys. Her visual features, such as the length of her hair, her height and the thickness of her eyebrows, positioned her physically in between male and female characters, thus making her appear more masculine than female characters but more feminine than male characters.[83] Consequently, the novelty of Oscar's character type and the potential in her androgynous appearance made her a more engaging protagonist for readers than Marie-Antoinette.

Oscar's unexpected popularity among readers inevitably disrupted Ikeda's original plan to explore housewives' familial freedom through the life of Marie-Antoinette. However, her identity as a cross-dressing soldier opened new possibilities for addressing gender discrimination against working women in contemporary Japan. Oscar's experiences of adopting masculine gender performances to access a professional career mirrored the social reality that many women faced at

[82] James Welker, "A Brief History of Shōnen'ai, Yaoi and Boys' love," in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), eds. Nagaike Kazumi, Katsuhiko Suganuma, James Welker, and Mark J. McLelland, 44-47.
[83] Oshiyama 押山, *Shōjo manga jendā hyōshōron* 少女マンガジェンダー表象論, 165-67.

work in early 1970s Japan. At that time, Japanese companies and factories were transitioning from the seniority-merit (*jp. nenkō*) system to the merit system, where personal abilities replaced age and gender as the primary criteria for career advancement. As economist Kumazawa Makoto argued, the merit system 'relies primarily on what one may call "modern" forms of gender discrimination, and only secondarily on "traditional" forms.' In other words, instead of overtly discriminating based on sex, such as forcing women to retire upon marriage and maintaining separate pay scale between men and women, employers assigned female employees to low-level jobs with limited opportunities for skill development, making it difficult for them to meet the criteria for promotions and raises. Consequently, women often remained at the bottom of pay scales throughout their careers.[84] As companies systematically rewarded male behaviors, professional performance standards became increasingly gendered as masculine. Some women resisted these male-dominated standards through protests or by quitting their jobs, while others, like Oscar in *The Rose of Versailles,* adopted the male standards in pursuit of professional careers.

As a girls' comic artist since the late 1960s, Ikeda faced similar gender discrimination while penning *The Rose of Versailles*. Arguably, the employment arrangement between manga artists and publishers differed from the relationships blue-collar and white-collar workers had with their employers. Most manga artists were contract workers who delivered comics to magazines weekly or monthly based on the publications' production cycles. Unlike employees in large businesses, they did not have to navigate the seniority-merit or the merit system. However, female manga artists still experienced comparable gender discrimination. When story comic popularized among children in the late 1940s, the industry of comic production quickly became dominated by male

[84] For gender discrimination against working women in postwar Japan, see Kumazawa Makoto, *Portraits of the Japanese Workplace,* eds. Andrew Gordon, trans. Andrew Gordon and Mikiso Hane, (Westview Press, 1996), 159-205.

artists. Many publishers outright refused to publish comics that were penned by women in the 1950s. When major publishers replaced their monthly children's magazines with weeklies during the late 1950s, the speeded cycle of production caused severe labor shortages. While this opened opportunities for female artists to join, it also reinforced the industry's gendered divisions of labor, in which publishers actively recruited young women to write girls' comics for their approximate of age and gender with the readers during the 1960s. Unlike skilled male artists of girls*'* comics who could secure contracts in other genres such as boys' comics (jp. *shōnen manga*), which was considered as a career advancement given the supplementary positions of girls' comics to that of boys, skilled female artists either retired after marriage or childbirth or transitioned to magazines targeting post-adolescent girls and adult women, despite that many of them expressed interests in writing manga for boys. Additionally, several female artists, including Ikeda, recalled receiving lower manuscript fees than male artists despite the commercial success that women had achieved in producing girls' comics by the early 1970s.[85] At that time, many female girls' comic artists had become aware of their inferior industrial status and attempted to fight for their rights by organizing workshops on copyrights issues, negotiating the genre and gender expressions of girls' comics with editorial departments, and demanding higher manuscript fees.[86]

In other words, female comic artists like Ikeda struggled with gender discrimination at work like women in other industries. However, unlike other industries, the comic industry viewed

[85] Ikeda 池田, "*Supesharu intabyū Ikeda Riyoko-shi ni ohanashi wo ukagaimashita スペシャルインタビュー池田理代子にお話しを伺いました,*" 2.

[86] For workshop on copyright issues, see Mizuno Hideko's interview with the editorial department of *Josei jishin* in Josei Jishin Henshūbu 女性自身編集部, "Shin-mama de josei mangaka no Mizuno Hideko 'watashi ni shika kakenai monogatari ga aru' シンママで女性漫画家の水野英子「私にしか書けない物語がある」," *Josei jishin* 女性自身, Last modified October 31st, 2021, https://jisin.jp/domestic/2031670/. For female manga artists' negotiations with editorial departments, see Ishida Minori 石田美紀, *Hisoyaka na kyōiku: 'yaoi, bōizu rabu' zenshi* 密やかな教育：〈やおい・ボーイズラブ〉前史 (Rakuhoku Shuppan 洛北出版, 2008), 302-307.

women's gender performances positively in relation to productivity. While companies in other sectors hid gender differential treatments within male-dominated performance standards to avoid legal penalties, girls' magazines actively recruited female artists to create girls 'comics. In the late 1950s, manga editor Maruyama Akira at *Kōdansha* worked with female artists like Hosokawa Chieko, Mizuno Hideko and Ueda Toshiko to produce girls' comics when female artists were still scarce. In a 1999 colloquium titled "How Girls' Comics have been Edited," Maruyama humorously explained that he had no choice but to "leave everything in the hands of female manga artists" because male editors like himself "unfortunately did not live as girls (*shōjo*)."[87] Although such willingness to publish the works of female artists was initially driven by individual efforts of open-minded editors like Maruyama, this practice later became common among publishers of girls' comics, leading to a demographic shift from male to female artists by the late 1960s. At the time, only a few publishers like *Shōgakukan* still included girls' comics by male artists in their girls' magazines. However, as *Shōgakukan*'s girls' comic editor, Yamamoto Junya, bitterly lamented, he had no other choices because all the female artists had been "allocated by other publishers" by the time his company took girls' comics seriously.[88] As these manga editors' statements suggest, female artists' identities as women provided them career advantages in creating girls' comics -- a privilege that working women lacked in other industries. Despite the gender biases in the male-dominated girls' comic production of the 1970s, female artists' professional success was tied to their gender performances as women, unlike in other industries where success required adopting masculine performances.

[87] Tomoko, Yamada, Masuda Nozomi, Konishi Yuri and Sōda Yon, eds. *Shōjo manga wa doko kara kitano?* 少女マンガはどこからきたの? = *Where did shojo manga come from? — 'Shōjo manga o kataru kai' zenkiroku*「少女マンガを語る会」全記錄 (Seidosha 青土社, 2023),132.

[88] Ibid., 125.

In *The Rose of Versailles,* Oscar's story development reflected how the positive view of womanhood in girls' comic production shaped Ikeda's engagement with gender issues. While Oscar's cross-gender performance represented the difficult choices that many working women made to progress in their careers, she initially appeared as a passive character who blindly followed her father's decision to raise her as a boy, refusing to accept female gender norms. For example, at one ball, Oscar appeared in her male military uniform and did not dance with other guests. Her unconventional behavior soon caught the attention of Marie-Antoinette, who invited Oscar to her afternoon salon. However, Oscar politely declined and said: "My pardon, Madame Dauphine, I am a woman, but also a soldier. My duties are not chatting and dancing, but solely in protecting France and the royal family."[89] Oscar's emphasis on her identity as a soldier over her female sex indicated that she rejected not only Marie-Antoinette's invitation but also the conventional lifestyle for women that Marie-Antoinette adopted at the French court. Her choice to prioritize duty over womanhood caused her great struggles later in the story, Like Marie-Antoinette, Oscar developed romantic feelings for Fersen after the three met in Paris. However, not only was Fersen unaware of Oscar's feelings that was deeply buried under her masculine performances, but Oscar herself also pushed Fersen away by advising him to leave France to protect Marie-Antoinette from potential rumors about their intimate relationship. As Oscar's story illustrates, Ikeda's critique was not only of the patriarchal suppression forcing working women like Oscar to adopt male gender performances but also of working women's decisions to prioritize their careers over womanhood, which was viewed as essential to girls' comic production during the 1970s.

Upon promoting Oscar to the protagonist of her story due to her overwhelming popularity among readers, Ikeda reimagined Oscar into a character who embraced a more positive attitude

[89] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *1,* 89.

toward womanhood. To this end, she increased depictions of Oscar's awareness of her nonconformities as a woman in the middle-to-late stages of the story. For example, after Fersen returned to France in 1783, Oscar attended a ball in the disguise of a women's dress to gain his attention. There, she experienced for the first time of what it was like to be a woman in the conventional sense by sharing a dance with Fersen without him recognizing her. The joy she felt when Fersen embraced her as a "woman" signified a softening of her initial rejection of femininity.[90] Although Oscar later returned to cross-dressing and let go of her unfruitful desire for Fersen, this experience marked a shift in Oscar's attitude from resistance to acceptance of her identity as a woman when she overtook the story's leading role from Marie-Antoinette.

This transformation in Oscar's character design shows how her storyline inherited Marie-Antoinette's belief in the significance of womanhood, despite the notable differences among their gender performances and social standings. This shared belief is evident not only in Oscar's evolving acceptance of her identity as a woman but also in her growing class consciousness. Following her dance with Fersen, Oscar became increasingly critical of her father's decisions, including his loyalty to the French royal family. She eventually resigned from her original position as the captain of the Royal Guard against her father's wishes and requested for a demotion to the French Guard (fr. *Régiment des Gardes Françaises*), where she worked with soldiers from lower classes.[91] As the new commanding officer, Oscar struggled to gain her soldiers' trusts due to their hostility toward her dual identities as a woman and an aristocrat. During a troop inspection, the soldiers openly disobeyed Oscar in front of her superior, attempting to force her to resign. Instead of punishing them, Oscar won their trust by appealing to their desire for freedom, saying:

[90] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *2*, 316-29.
[91] Ikeda 池田, *Berusaiyu no bara* ベルサイユのばら *3,* 118-22.

> "Every one of you… no matter who you are…… as long as you are human……you're no one's slave……you are no one's possession, and your heart is free. Therefore, that is precisely why… I will never oppress you with power…… I will never punish you…… why won't you understand that!!"[92]

As Oscar's words show, her speech followed the same logic of Marie-Antoinette's earlier statement. Just like Marie-Antoinette reminded Oscar of her freedom as a woman and a human being, Oscar reminded her soldiers that their hearts were free because they were human. The similarity between the two female characters' words hinted that it was Oscar's insights as a woman that allowed her to emotionally connect with her soldiers across class. Through Oscar's speech, Ikeda stressed the significance of womanhood not only in achieving women's freedom but also in advancing the liberation of the lower classes.

Admittedly, this does not suggest that Oscar's gender performances, distinct from Marie-Antoinette's, did not bring changes to Ikeda's interpretation of womanhood. One notable difference was Ikeda's interpretation of women's freedom. After Oscar transferred to the French Guard, her father urged her to resign and marry a fellow military officer. Although he sought to protect her from the French citizens' rising anger towards aristocrats when carrying out duties in her new position, his decision to "save" Oscar through marriage nevertheless denied the efforts that she had invested in her military career. Consequently, Oscar rejected her father's proposal and said:

> "Father……I am grateful……Thank you for giving me a life like this……For allowing me to experience such a vast world as a woman… for letting me live as a human being…… even though it meant to struggle amidst the sliminess and foolishness of

[92] Ibid., 248.

humanity……I have no regrets anymore. I… I…I will live as the child of the war god Mars. I will dedicate myself to the sword, to the cannons, and live my life as a military officer……as the child of the war god Mars!" [93]

Here, Oscar's perception of herself as both a woman (jp. *onna*) and a human being (jp. *ningen*) once again echoed Marie-Antoinette's statement regarding her freedom as a "human being" and a "woman with a living heart" in earlier chapters. However, due to their difference life experiences, Oscar's gratitude towards her father for allowing her to live beyond domestic confines shifted Ikeda's critique from restrictions over women's freedom in marriage to their freedom to live and work in society. Unlike Marie-Antoinette, who interpreted women's freedom as to love and be loved beyond their family obligations, Oscar concluded that her freedom was to fight as a soldier.

Despite this difference in Ikeda's interpretation of women's freedom, however, the significance of a woman's identity in Oscar's story remains. In an interview with history teacher Ōe Kazumichi in 1980, Ikeda explained that understanding Oscar's thoughts and behaviors during the creation of *The Rose of Versailles* helped her see the connection between Oscar and women in contemporary Japan. According to Ikeda, "[For women,] having to think like a man, and wanting to act like a man, these alone were not enough to be liberated." Instead, her ideal image of a woman was someone who "thinks like a man, acts like a man, but also conceals 'woman' inside of her." To Ikeda, Oscar was "a woman who chose [cross-dressing] out of her own will."[94] Indeed, although Oscar rejected the feminine lifestyle that Marie-Antoinette embraced in the French court, she still maintained her identity as a "woman" as I showed in the last paragraph. In other words, it was not Oscar's decision to dress and fight like a man that liberated her, but her choice to live this

[93] Ibid., 360-62.
[94] Ikeda Riyoko 池田理代子, "Manga-ka no atori'e kara—Ikeda Riyoko-san ni kiku—マンガ家のアトリエから—池田理代子さんに聞く—," interviewed by Ōe Kazumichi 大江一道, *Rekishi chiri kyōiku* 歴史地理教育 9, no. 310 (1980): 10-11.

way as a "woman." Even as *The Rose of Versailles* shifted from a feminine to masculine-coded protagonist, its central message remained consistent with the guiding principle of girls' comics since the 1950s: to create stories about the dreams and hopes of female readers.

In this sense, the narrative shift from Marie-Antoinette to Oscar was more than a transition of aesthetic style from a conventionally feminine protagonist to an androgynous one. Instead, it also reflected a broader transformation in postwar consumer culture in which girls and young women emerged as powerful market agents. Their desires for protagonists with masculine traits prompted Ikeda to prioritize Oscar's storyline to ensure the survival of her comic. Meanwhile, editors who understood girls' comics as a genre about women's desires also shaped how Ikeda responded to readers' desires. Together, these factors shaped some of the major narrative decisions that Ikeda made when serializing *The Rose of Versailles*, such as elevating Oscar to protagonist and emphasizing on her gender identity as woman. This is not to say that Ikeda had no agency over her creations. Her critiques of gender inequality through Marie-Antoinette's tragic political marriage that restricted her to domestic roles for national interest and Oscar's struggle as a woman working in a profession only accessible to men closely reflected her own experience as woman in postwar Japan. Thus, *The Rose of Versailles* was essentially a product of the negotiation between comic artists like Ikeda, the consumers' desires and the editorial conventions within the constraints of consumer culture that prioritized market gains. Yet, Ikeda's portrayal of heroines like Marie-Antoinette and Oscar who resisted the dominant gender roles of housewives and working women provided new models of gender performances for women in imaginative world. In doing so, Ikeda exemplified potential of girls' comics in redefining gender identities and practices in the new era of consumer culture.

Conclusion

From Marie-Antoinette's tragic political marriage to Oscar's heroic performance in the French Revolution, *The Rose of Versailles* exemplified not only the shifting aesthetic style in girls' comics during the 1970s but also the persistent tensions over womanhood that predated the birth of their young creators in the late 1940s and lasted beyond the turmoil social activism in the late 1960s. Born in the same year when Japan's 1947 Constitution promised gender equality under law, Ikeda came of age navigating the contestations between the liberal ideals that allowed her access to higher education and professional career, and the conservative patriarchy that confined her to underpaid and gendered labor. Even after her debut a professional girls' comic artists, Ikeda had to negotiate with male-dominated editorial authorities to gain creative freedom as a woman.

Contrary to common belief that Ikeda's narrative shift from Marie-Antoinette to Oscar in *The Rose of Versailles* reflected women' increasing control over girls' comic creations in the 1970s, I have shown in this chapter that the shift was more of a strategic compromise Ikeda made to ensure publications of her works. Throughout the comic, Ikeda embedded sharp gender critiques within character types that already aligned with the evolving cultural trends of girls' comics. Just as she evoked the familiar tomboy figures in her character design of Marie-Antoinette to critique women's lack of equality in marriage as housewives, her critique of gender biases in the workplaces equally took advantage of Oscar's androgynous appearance that aligned with the growing popularity of beautiful boys. While Oscar's masculine performance made her visually more subversive than Marie-Antoinette, her androgynous appearance did not offer Ikeda more creative freedom in addressing gender issues. Rather, it provided new opportunities for Ikeda to engage with the gender issues faced by working woman instead of housewives. Meanwhile, Ikeda's consistent emphasis on both characters' gender identities as women showed that girls'

comics remained a woman-centered culture in the 1970s as defined by editors' interpretations of the desires of consumers rather than that of the female artists. Like wartime girls' magazines, girls' comics continued to host creations of new gender expressions from within the structures that were now dominated by consumer culture in postwar Japan.

Conclusion

In commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of *The Rose of Versailles'* serialization in 1972, the January 2022 issue of *Gender Equality* (jp. *Kyōdō sankaku*) – the organ of the Gender Equality Bureau at Japan Cabinet Office (jp. *Naikakufu Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Kyoku*) [95] – featured a special interview that the Bureau's director, Hayashi Tomoko, conducted with Ikeda. In the interview, Hayashi and Ikeda reflected upon Ikeda's career as a female comic artist in the 1970s. As they walked through Ikeda's creative journey from *The Rose of Versailles* to two of her later works – *The Window of Orpheus*, a historical drama set during the first Russian Revolution (1905) and the World War I (1914-1918), and *Claudine…!* (jp. *Kurōdīnu…!,* 1978), which depicted the tragic life of its transgender eponymous protagonist – Ikeda gradually wove in accounts of her struggles she as a working woman. According to Ikeda, not only did she receive half as much in manuscript fees as her male peers but also faced discriminations in house construction and mortgage applications, as it was unusual for women to pursue such financial independence at the time. Toward the end of interview, Hayashi and Ikeda discussed some of the persistent gender inequalities in contemporary Japan, including underrepresentation of women in the National Diet and the legal requirement for married couples to adopt a single surname, which often put burdens

[95] In regarding the Bureau's title, while Japanese' government's official English is "gender equality," the Japanese term "Danjo Kōdō Sankaku," bears a more literal meaning of "male-female joint participation/planning." In Japan's *Basic Act for Gender Equal Society* (1999), a "gender equal society" or "danjo kōdō sankaku society" is defined as "a society of which, men and women, acting as social members in equivalent to each other, have guaranteed opportunities to participate and join the planning of activities in all social aspects of social based on their own will. With this, men and women are thus able to enjoy the equal amount of political, economic, social and cultural benefits, and assume the responsibilities together (in this society)." As Kano noted, the choice of Japanese term "kōdō sankaku (joint participation/planning)" over "byōdō" – which would be a more straightforward choice for the English meaning of "equality"– is to avoid the latter's historical contentions that promised equal outcomes for women yet rendered them to discrimination for sexual differences in practice. (Kano, 142-43). As I have shown in this thesis, Ikeda's struggles were precisely entangled with the contested understandings of "byōdō (equal)" in late twentieth century Japan. Her interview with the Bureau Director Hayashi shows how Ikeda's past struggles to achieve "byōdō" in the 1970s is now reframed under the "kōdō sankaku" model of social equality for women.

on women to change their last names in cases of marriage and divorce. Reflecting this issue's special interview, the cover illustration featured Oscar raising the French flag in one hand and a musket in another as she led the soldiers to storm the Bastilles, with a speech bubble said: "After the French Revolution comes the gender revolution in Japan!" [96]

As this interview showed, even fifty years after its initial publication, *The Rose of Versailles* continued to serve as a shared cultural space where agents of girls' culture from different social positions like comic artists and government officials could discuss gender issues that were pertinent to women. In this interview, Ikeda was given the freedom to speak candidly on some of the most sensitive political topics of the time such as the legal requirement for married couples to same surnames and the ban on same-sex marriage. Yet, the overall conversation remained focused on achieving gender equality through a binary model of collaborative efforts between men and women. While existing scholarship has celebrated Ikeda's work for its critical engagement with gender, it does not explain how a subversive, French origin character like Oscar could gain recognition from a government institution in Japan. In this thesis, I address this question by tracing the evolution of gender discourses in girls' culture from its emergence in the 1900s to the publication of *The Rose of Versailles* in the early 1970s. Whereas scholars of Japanese girls' culture have viewed this history as a shift from prewar consumer products to wartime propaganda and eventually to a powerful feminist media in postwar Japan, I have instead emphasized on the persistent tensions surrounding girlhood across these historical stages. Building upon analysis of popular media that were created by or for girls, such as *Girls' Companion, Girls' Club* and *The Rose Versailles,* I have argued that these publications frequently served as cultural sites where artists, editors and readers negotiated alternative gender expressions from within dominate

[96] Ikeda 池田, "Supesharu intabyū Ikeda Riyoko-shi ni ohanashi wo ukagaimashita スペシャルインタビュー池田理代子氏にお話しを伺いました."

ideologies. By following how these negotiations unfolded between the late 1930s and the early 1970s, I have demonstrated that girls' culture has been a discursive space where state-sanctioned ideologies and grassroots efforts collectively contributed to the imagination of gender alternatives.

The ability of girls' culture to sustain gender alternatives without openly defying state agendas was most evident at times of intense ideological transformation such as the Asia-Pacific War and the early 1970s. As I showed in Chapter One, wartime artists, editors and readers of girls' magazines reimagined patriotic girlhood by emphasizing girls' productivity in roles like consumers, students and laborers without rejecting Japan's total war mobilization. Even after Nakahara's departure from *Girls' Companion* led to the decline of prewar aesthetics, girls' culture continued to validate readers' gendered agencies through depictions of girls carrying out patriotic duties in male-dominated spaces such as factories and battlefields. Similarly, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, the rise of female comic artists in in the 1970s did not fully liberate girls' culture from prevailing gender norms in the consumer culture in postwar Japan. In *The Rose of Versailles,* the storylines of both Marie-Antoinette and Oscar allowed Ikeda to express her desire for women' social liberation. While the unexpected popularity of Oscar offered Ikeda new opportunities to engage with the gender discriminations that women faced at work instead of in marriage, her creations remained constrained by the demands of consumer desires that had replaced state censorship as the guiding force for girls' magazine editors by the 1970s

My thesis also contributes to the broader field of women's media studies in Japan. Existing scholarship has primarily focused the history of imperial Japan (1868-1945) and the post-1970s years due women's prominent presence as media consumers in these periods. Consequently, the lack of research over women's media in intervening periods left a gap in understanding how the historical development of women' engagement in media productions in wartime and early Cold

War informed their resurgence as a powerful force of consumption in late twentieth century Japan. My thesis bridges this gap by analyzing gender discourse in girls' media like magazines and comics during two transformative historical moments: the wartime years in the late 1930s and early 1940s and the early 1970s when women had seemingly taken control of girls' comic productions. While scholars have frequently treated these two time periods separately as the end of the imperial regime and the dawn of women's activism in Japanese history, my analysis of wartime girls' magazines and postwar girls' comics has shown how girls and women's persistent exercise of creative agencies and negotiations with gender were critical to respective constructions of new gender expressions such as patriotic girlhood and androgynous comic characters in both time periods. By identifying key medium of girls' culture as sites of persistent negotiations over gender norms, I suggest that popular media such as magazines and comics serves as an effective lens for historians to trace continuities of cultural discourse across historical divides of shifting state ideologies and reframe Japan's modernization as a continuum of popular discourses from below rather than a progression of democracy in the top.

In doing so, my thesis also indicates the potential of girls' comics from the 1950s and 1960s, which has been largely overlooked in existing scholarship due to their lack of subversive character types in comparison to the genre's later works in the 1970s. In addition, because most girls' comics from these two decades were published as cheap rental comics by small publishers, many of which have since gone bankrupt, there has been limited institutional efforts to preserve these comics. This has consequently created extra challenges for scholars to access these materials. Recently, however, there has been new publications and initiatives that began to preserve the memories of artists who penned girls' comics during this time. In late 2000s, female comic artists who debuted in the 1950s, such as Hanamura Eiko, Mizuno Hideko and Watanabe Masako, each published

autobiographies that recounted their experiences as girls' comic artists back in the 1950s and 1960s. In 2020, the Yonezawa Yoshihiro Memorial Library at Meiji University hosted a web exhibition titled "Where did girls' comics come from?" under the supervision of Mizuno. This exhibition displayed many rare images of rental girls' comics and girls' magazines from these two decades and remains accessible to date. In 2023, a book under the same title was also published, which documented a series of five colloquiums that Mizuno hosted in 1999 and 2000. In these colloquiums, Mizuno gathered girls' comic artists, comic magazine editors and rental comic publishers who were active in the production of girls' comics between 1945 and 1970 to share their experiences. Together, these new materials have offered new possibilities for scholars to critically engage with this formative period of girls' comics in future research.[97]

Furthermore, my case study of *The Rose of Versailles* in Chapter Two also suggested that contextualizing girls' comics within their production process is an effective approach to gain new insights into the girls' culture of the 1970s. Although my analysis focused on Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles*, this approach could also benefit analysis of other comics given recent autobiographical publications by female comics artists of the same era. For example, Takemiya Keiko, whose works built the foundation for depictions of beautiful boy characters, has recently published two autobiographies, namely *The Boy's Name is Gilbert* (jp. *Shōnen no na wa Jirubēru,* 2016) and *Opening the Door, Time after Time: A Witness of an Era* (jp. *Tobira wa hiraku ikutabimo: jidai*

[97] Watanabe Masako 渡辺まさこ, *Manga to ikite* まんがと生きて (Futabasha 双葉社, 2008); Mizuno Hideko 水野英子, *Tokiwa-sō nikki* トキワ荘日記 (Self-Published, 2009); Hanamura Eiko 花村えいこ, *Watashi, mangaka ni nacchatta!? Mangaka Hanamura Eiko no gagyō 50-nen* 私、まんが家になっちゃった！？漫画家・花村えい子の画業 50 年 (Magazine House マガジンハウス, 2009); Tomoko, et al. eds. *Shōjo manga wa doko kara kitano?* 少女マンガはどこからきたの? = *Where did shojo manga come from?* Also, see web exhibition: *Shōjo manga wa doko kara kitano? Web-ten ~ Janru no seiritsuki ni kansuru shōgen yori* ~少女マンガはどこからきたの？web 展～ジャンルの成立期に関する証言より～, hosted online by Yoshihiro Yonezawa Memorial Library of Manga and Subculture, accessed on August 11, 2025, https://www.meiji.ac.jp/manga/yonezawa_lib/exh-syoudoko.html.

no shōgen-sha, 2021). In these two books, she reflected on her struggles as a young women attempting to reinvent girls' comics in male-dominated industry. In the same year Takemiya's second autobiography was published, her long-time friend and rival Hagio Moto – another key figure to the development of beautiful boys – also published her memoire about creating girls' comics in the 1970s. Having witnessed rising consumer interest in these autobiographies, the editorial department of the weekly magazine – *Shūkan bunshun* – released a collection of auto-biographical essays titled *Girl's Comic Artists' "Family" Resume* in 2022. This essay collection compiled the life stories of twelve girls' comic artists who debuted between 1950s and 1970s. While these journal essays were originally serialized in newspapers, this reprint has made the essays more accessible to scholars outside of Japan. While girls' comics of the 1970s have been widely studied in existing scholarship, most scholars focused on the visual symbols and narratives rather than the social context of production, partly due to the difficulty of obtaining direct interviews with professional artists. These autobiographies thus present new opportunities for scholars to gain new insights in this transformative period from a historical perspective.[98]

The commercial success that female artists achieved through girls' comics in the 1970s has since extended their creative influence beyond representations of girlhood. Notably, the stories centered on beautiful boys' intimate relationships that Takemiya and Hagio developed in the 1970s contributed to the rise of a new subgenre known as "BL (boys' love)," which depicted romantic and sexual relationships between male characters in commercial fictions and comics. BL initially emerged as a fantasy genre catered to female readers' desires rather than reflecting the lived

[98] [98] Takemiya Keiko 竹宮恵子, *Shōnen no na wa Jirubēru* 少年の名はジルベール（Shōgakukan 小学館, 2016); *Tobira wa hiraku ikutabimo: jidai no shōgen-sha* 扉はひらくいくたびも：時代の証言者 (Chūōkōron Shinsha 中央公論新社, 2021); Hagio Moto 萩尾望都, *Ichido kiri no Ō'izumi no hanashi* 一度きりの大泉の話 (Kawade Shobō-Shinsha 河出書房新社, 2021); Shūkan Bunshun 週刊文春, ed. *Shōjo mangaka 'ie' no rirekisho* 少女マンガ家「家」の履歴書 (Bungei Shunjyū 文藝春秋, 2022), Kindle.

experiences of gay men. However, later works such as Akisato Wakuni's *Tomoi* (1985-86) and Ragawa Marimo's *New York New York* (1995-1998) began depicting characters who self identified as gay and incorporating real world contexts such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic. By the 1990s, as gender studies scholar Mizoguchi Akiko observed in her monograph *Theorizing BL as a Transformative Genre: Boys' Love Move the World Forward* (2017), there was a surge of "evolved BL narratives (*jp. BL shinkakei sakuhin*)" that created gay-friendly worlds where gay characters could live free from social discriminations that they would face in reality. [99] Since then, BL media has grown into a domestic market worth 16.7 billion yen (roughly 119 million USD) as of Japan's fiscal year 2023 (April 1st 2023 to March 31st 2024) .[100] It has also gained a broad fan base across the globe, with a particular well reception in East and Southeast Asia where BL media was created, consumed and communicated across borders.[101] Just as girls' magazines and comics once offered the new models of femininities, recent BL media has also provided readers with alternative models of sexual relationships beyond heteronormativity.

In addition to portrayals of alternative sexual relationships, the proliferation of feminized masculinities through androgynous characters in the 1970s also led to new representations of masculinities in girls' culture. During Japan's postwar economic boom (1955-1973), the tenured male company employees – "salaryman" – became the archetype of dominant ideal of manhood. However, the burst of the economic bubble in 1992 rendered many men to precarious labor conditions and compromised younger generations' belief in achieving masculinity through a

[99] Mizoguchi Akiko 溝口彰子, *BL shinkaron: bō'izu rabu ga shakai wo ugokasu* BL 進化論：ボーイズラブが社会を動かす [*Theorizing BL as a Transformative Genre: Boys' Love Move the World Forward*] (Ōta Shuppan 太田出版, 2017).
[100] "Otaku Market in Japan: Key Research Findings 2024," Yano Research Institute Ltd., released on February 18, 2025 (originally released in Japanese on February 05, 2025), https://www.yano.co.jp/press-release/show/press_id/3725.
[101] James Welker, ed., *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022).

lifetime of corporate services. As a result, the feminized male characters in girls' comics and BL media have attracted a growing male audience since the 2000s. These male readers often self-identified as "*otoko no ko* (male daughter)" and *"fudanshi* (rotten boy)" and turned to girls' culture for escape from rigid masculine norms. Some male fans have even practiced feminized masculinities by cross-dressing as cute girls in music bands, cosplay events and theme cafes.[102] Meanwhile, female comic artists have also addressed gender issues with an awareness of how these issues affected not only girls and women but men as well. Yoshinaga Fumi's *Ōoku: The Inner Chambers* (2004-2021) is one such example. In her depiction of a dystopian historical Japan in the Edo period (1603-1868), a mysterious epidemic that only affected boys and young men significantly reduced Japan's male population. As a result, women rose to the central political power as female Shoguns (general) while male consorts populated the Shogun's inner chambers for reproductive purpose. By tracing this gender reversed history across the generations of female Shoguns, Yoshinaga skillfully constructed a society in which both men and women were forced to adopt the reversed gender roles to fulfill their respective reproductive duties. At a time when Japanese men faced growing economic instability and increased social pressures to reverse the population decline, Yoshinaga's *Ōoku* addressed the gender struggles of women and men alike.

[102] For "*otoko no ko*," see Sharon Kinsella, "Cuteness, Josō, and the Need to Appeal: Otoko No Ko in Male Subculture in 2010s Japan," *Japan Forum (Oxford, England)* 32, no. 3 (2020): 432–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2019.1676289. For "*fudanshi"* in Japan, see Kazumi Nagaike's "Do Heterosexual Men Dream of Homosexual Men?: BL *Fundashi* and Discourse on Male Feminization" in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, eds. Nagaike Kazumi, Katsuhiko Suganuma, James Welker, and Mark J. McLelland (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 189-209. For "*fudanshi*" in other Asian countries, see Nagaike's "*Fudanshi* ("Rotten Boys") in Asia: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Male Readings of BL and Concepts of Masculinity," in *Women's Manga in Asia and Beyond: Uniting Different Cultures and Identities*, eds. Fusami Ogi, Rebecca Suter, Kazumi Nagaike and John A. Lent (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 69-84, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97229-9; In addition to these studies focusing on male fans in contemporary Japan, Galbraith's research shows that male *shōjo* fans have existed since at least the 1970s and early 1980. See Patrick W. Galbraith, "Seeking an Alternative: 'Male' Shōjo Fans Since the 1970s" in *Shōjo Across Media: Exploring "Girl" Practices in Contemporary Japan,* eds. Jaqueline Berndt, Kazumi Nagaika and Fusami Ogi (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)*,* 355-390*, https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1007/978-3-030-01485-8*.

Indeed, with the recent developments in BL and feminized masculinities, girls' culture has become a sanctuary not only for girls and women, but also for individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Its social and cultural significance is further exemplified through its financial success. According to recent data from the website of the Japan Magazine Publishers' Association (JMPA), commercial girls' comic magazines had a total circulation of 1,805,010 copies in 2024.[103] At grassroots events like Comic Market (Comiket) – one of Japan's largest semi-annual conventions for self-published works, which attracted 750,000 participants in 2019, women have consistently comprised more than half of all participants.[104] Most of all, girls' culture has been a intellectually stimulating space for me, as a graduate student, to study the history of Japan through familiar topics. Using girls' comics and magazines as my starting points, I have learned and relearned not only the cultural history of girls and women but also broader worlds they lived in and the people they have engaged with. As I wrote my thesis with their history at the center, I have also been able to engage with academic debates on a topic as wide-ranging as consumer culture, war nationalism and feminism from a fresh perspective. Researching and writing this thesis has helped me build meaningful connections across historical periods, thoughts and fields

[103] This figure is my own calculation based on the date published on the official website of JMPA. The JMPA is the only national umbrella organization of magazine publishers in Japan. It was founded in 1956 and ninety member companies as of July 2025. These members account for more than 80% of the total circulation of magazines in Japan. The database on JMPA's official website publishes magazines' circulation figures reported by its member companies on a quarterly basis. I compiled the 2024 circulation numbers for all magazines classified as "girl-oriented comic magazines" in this database and yielded a total of 1,805,010 copies. For the JMPA database, see "Insatsu shōmeitsuki busū 印刷証明付部数," Ippan Shadan Hōjin Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai (JMPA)一般社団法人日本雑誌協会, accessed August 10, 2025, https://www.j-magazine.or.jp/user/printed2/index.

[104] The data on Comiket's attendance is released on the event's official website. After 2019, attendance dropped significantly because the events held since the outbreak of the pandemic were shortened from four days to two days. See "Komikku māketto nenpyō コミックマーケット年表," accessed on August 10, 2025, https://www.comiket.co.jp/archives/Chronology.html. While there was no official data on the gender ratio of general participants, a PowerPoint presentation made by the Comic Market Committee in 2008 claimed that women comprised the majority of participants at the time, although male attendance had been increasing as well. See the Comic Market Committee, "What is Comic Market?" PowerPoint presentation, accessible from the webpage "Comic Market 106: Information for International Participants," January 2008 (updated January 2014), https://www.comiket.co.jp/info-a/WhatIsEng201401.pdf.

of study in my own growth as a historian. I hope that my thesis will in turn become part of new discoveries and encounters in the intellectual journeys of others.

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