

The World Touring Exhibition: Shojo Manga! Girl Power!
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Postcard with an image of “Hello Doctor (1964)” by Hideko Mizuno
As the 3rd place in the US, Columbia College Chicago staged the show (3/13 – 4/26/06) including the period of NAEA convention Chicago (3/22 – 3/26)

Japanese manga (comics) are no longer just a phenomenon of visual pop-culture in Japan. At the beginning of the 21st century the popularity of Japanese manga has spread all over the world through comic books, animation, and merchandise. But not many people really understand the significance of manga and how its characteristics are different from those of American comics, for example.

For this reason, I undertook the creation of a touring exhibition in the US to introduce the significant value and contribution to visual culture and society with a special emphasis on *shojo manga*—comic books for girls. More than 200 artworks created by renowned 23 shojo mangaka (comics artists) who have perhaps contributed the most to the development of modern shojo manga in Japan are introduced chronologically in three major generations over the last 60 years after W.W. II to present: (1) Dawn of modern shojo manga (WW II – 1960s), (2) Development of modern shojo manga (1960s- 1980s), and (3) New generation of modern shojo manga (1980s – present). The medium reflects the evolution of the social roles of Japanese girls and women during this period. The exhibition also documents how the visual composition of manga mirrors the developments in Japanese aesthetics. The exhibition is the first to focus solely on shojo manga (girls’ comics). Details at: <http://www.csuchico.edu/~mtoku/vc>

Shojo (girls) vs. Shonen (boys) Manga

One of the major characteristics of manga is that it has split into boys’ (shonen) and girls’ (shojo) manga, each developing in its own way. Almost all boys’ manga have a common theme, as do girls’ manga. Regardless of the subject depicted in the story, the main theme of boys’ manga is competitive fighting, how the hero(es) become men by protecting

important things such as women, family, country, or the earth from enemies. The theme of girls' manga is simply love. In brief, the most important thing in girls' manga is how love triumphs by overcoming obstacles. These generalizations are true to a certain extent; however, the theme of girls' manga has been changing in response to changing roles of women in the still male dominated Japanese society.

The Future of Shoyo Manga in the US

Shoyo manga has been hugely popular in Asian and European countries since the 1990s. The same phenomenon is just beginning in the United States. In June, 2005 the monthly shoyo manga anthology *NANA* began publication in the United States, two years after a monthly shonen (boys') manga anthology, *JUMP*, began publication. The New York Times has said that shoyo manga has become one of the hottest markets in the book business. Two publishers – Viz Media and Tokyopop - have been the leaders in the American manga market, which has more than doubled since 2002, helped along by a \$5 billion business in related animated films, TV series and licensed products like dolls and action figures (September 18, 2005).

Shoyo manga is said to be a mirror of Japanese girls' desires and expectations. In its subjects and expressions, manga reflects girls' aesthetics and fulfills their dreams. But manga not only reflects social aesthetics and values throughout Japan, it influences them. It will be interesting to see how this taste of shoyo manga will affect visual cultural society in the United States, and whether it will lead to a renaissance of girls' comics in the United States that will reflect and influence US audiences' desires and expectations as well.

Extra visual example 2 about here if space is available:
NANA © 1999 by Yazawa Manga Seisakusho/SHUEISUA Inc.



Addition from Mechamedia:

One significant phenomenon of comic markets is the genre of homosexual boys' love parodies in manga and novels called "Yaoi" or "Boy's love" which are depicted by female manga fans¹³. While in the Comic Market (known also as *Comiket* or *Comike*) groups of university students created dojinshi (fanzine) with original characters and plots, at the same time manga and anime fan clubs produced parodies of characters from commercial manga and animated cartoons. The term "Yaoi" is an acronym of three terms: Yamanashi, Ochinashi, and Iminashi (no climax, no point, no meaning)¹⁴. In the eighties yaoi became synonymous with M/M--parodies of popular manga and animation characters in what appear to be gay relationships in which explicit and sometimes violent sex is shown. "Boys' love" termed Shonen ai in Japanese, refers to dojinshi featuring highly romantic, gentle, loving, and cuddly male/male relationships in which explicit sex is seldom suggested. Both yaoi and boys' love are, according to their creators and consumers, forms of love "superior" to heterosexual varieties. There are many interpretations of why female amateur mangaka (dojinshi creators) are interested in "boys' love" as their favorite theme. Yoko Nagakubo says, "Why are the couples described in Yaoi males? One of the reasons is to eliminate power structures between couples of different genders. In heterosexual love relationships, it is extremely difficult to exclude the normal power structures in which men are strong and women are weak. Using male couples makes it possible to describe a more equal relationship between two individuals¹⁵."

Fumi Yoshinaga, one of the major boys' love mangaka who are originally from the Comic Market, mentioned the reason she creates the story as encouragement for the values and life styles of minorities. "I want to depict people who try very hard but don't make it. In boys' magazines people who try hard always win. That is not what I want. I want to show the people who didn't win, whose dreams didn't come true. It is not possible for everybody to get first prize. I want my readers to understand the happiness that people can get from trying hard, going through the process, and being frustrated. The job I got was with a boys' love magazine, so I decided to show my philosophy through boys' love. Boy's love stories deal with minorities. I show the pains of gays who can't fit in. Minorities have to deal with society before they can achieve happiness¹⁶."

... Please place Figure 7: Western Antique Pastry Shop, 1999–2000, by Fumi Yoshinaga about here ...

When this phenomenon appeared in the 1980s, major publications totally ignored its popularity. The genre of boys' love has become a major part of the world of shojo and ladies' manga. Boys' love has begun to appear in mainstream Japanese visual culture (such as TV series) at the beginning of the 21st century.

The Future of Shojo Manga in the US

The influence of the manga movement continues to spread with translated comics, animation, and other merchandise. Shojo manga also continues to diversify in response to readers' demands. Shojo manga has been hugely popular in Asian and European

countries since the 1990s. The same phenomenon is just beginning in the United States. In June 2005, the monthly shojo manga anthology NANA began publication in the United States, two years after a monthly shonen (boys') manga anthology, JUMP, began publication. The New York Times has said that shojo manga has become one of the hottest markets in the book business. Two publishers, Viz Media and Tokyopop, have been the leaders in the American manga market, which has more than doubled since 2002, helped along by a \$5 billion business in related animated films, TV series, and licensed products like dolls and action figures (September 18, 2005). Boys' love is a big phenomenon not only in Japan but also in the US. The New York Times also mentions that the topic of boys' love has become significantly popular even in commercial publications in the US. In Japan, the topic of shojo manga seems to have no limitations. The love between Women/Women (lesbians) has started to appear¹⁷. As the original theme of shojo manga is "love," the eternal theme of shojo manga is still "love," regardless of the subjects or themes in diverse styles such as drama, sci-fi, suspense, etc.

Shojo manga is said to be a mirror of Japanese girls' and women's desires and expectations. In its subjects and expressions, manga reflects female aesthetics and fulfills their dreams. But manga not only reflects social aesthetics and values throughout Japan, it influences them. It will be interesting to see how this taste of shojo manga will affect visual cultural society in the United States, and whether it will lead to a renaissance of girls' comics in the United States that will reflect and influence US audiences' desires and expectations as well.

¹³ Brent Wilson & Masami Toku, "Boys' Love," Yaoi, and Art Education: Issues of Power and Pedagogy," in Semiotics and Art/Visual Culture, ed. Smith-Shank (Reston, VA: National Art Education Association Press, 2003), 94-103.

¹⁴ The term yaoi was coined in the late seventies by Kanazawa region dojinshi artists, including Yasuko Sakata and Rinko Hatsu. Yaoi is an ironic subversion of a traditional Japanese narrative structure consisting of an introduction, development, transition, and conclusion (Natsume, personal communication, June 6, 2002).

¹⁵ Yoko Nagakubo, "Yaoi Novels and Shojo Manga" (Girls' Comics)," in Shojo Manga! Girl Power!, ed. Masami Toku (Chico, CA: Flume Press, California State University, Chico, 2005), 17, 2005.

¹⁶ (Yoshinaga, personal conversation, July, 2005)

¹⁷ Yukari Fujimoto mentions that "Although boys' love was popular in the 1990s, the issue of lesbianism was practically taboo. Still, even in the 1990s, positive depictions of lesbians started to appear. Originally, the theme of shojo manga was women falling in

love with men, but the trend has been to include a wider range of women's experiences, showing women how to live. Love is not seen as everything, but is rather one part of life. Things like friendship between women can be more important than love, as in Bishojo Senshi Sailor Moon (1992–1997) and Shojo Kakumei Utena (1996–1998). (“The most popular shojo.” A life-Size Mirror: women's Self representation in Girls' Comics” Shojo Manga! Girl Power!, ed. Masami Toku (Chico, CA: Flumer Press, California State University, Chico, 2005), 16, 2005).