Manga powerr

*Shojo Manga Power!* exhibit centerpiece of Japanese pop culture events at Chico State

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The term *shojo* in Japanese simply translates as “girl,” and *manga* means “humorous picture,” or “comic.” According to Dr. Masami Toku, associate professor of art at Chico State University, the term *manga* was originally coined by influential 19th century Japanese printmaker Hokkusai, known for his signature depictions of Mt. Fuji. Hokkusai also came up with the idea of using humorous pictures—known as *Hokkusai manga*—as illustrations in his textbook to facilitate teaching his students.

“When we say *manga* right now, however, we are talking about a totally different thing (than *Hokkusai manga*),” Toku points out.

The *ukiyo-e*, or “floating world” art, of Hokkusai and his contemporaries, with the added influence after World War II of American comics and Disney films, evolved into modern Japanese *manga*, the weekly or monthly graphic novels that Japanese (and, increasingly, American) society devours, and which Toku describes as “more literature than entertainment.”

MANAGING MANGA
Chico State art professor Masami Toku put together the *Shojo Manga Power!* show, which will soon tour nationally.

PHOTO BY TOM ANGEL

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Japanese pop culture takes over Chico State.
Toku is the dynamic woman responsible for putting together the current (soon-to-be-touring-nationally) Shōjo Manga Power! art exhibition and related events at Chico State. Two years in the making, the event features the eye-catching art of 23 male and female Japanese manga artists, or mangaka. Toku collected the pictures for the show this past summer when she was visiting her native Japan.

Toku spoke recently in a very lively, lengthy conversation about the history, evolution and significance of the manga art form.

**CN&R: So, modern manga began in Japan after World War II?**

**Toku**: After the war, there were no toys, nothing. No entertainment for kids. After World War II, we were so decimated. No reading, no movies. Modern manga was developed to entertain the kids.

Most pages [in manga books] were black-and-white, on cheap paper. Maybe only the cover and the first two pages were in color. Artists had to develop a style with limitations. The "black-out" of hair signified Asian people; the "white-out" hair meant Western people. The "huge eye" of modern manga came about because they had no color [to use] and the artists had to enlarge the eye to depict beauty. Kids learned to read these visual images. This is the modern period of manga.

And there was boys' manga and girls' manga?

Modern manga is based on gender differences. Of course, you know Japanese society is a very male-dominated society. [After WWII], women were part of "women's world," the world of housewives. Boys would go to boys' manga. Their goal is to grow up to be a man, to rescue the world! [laughs] The girls' manga that developed, the theme used to be "perfect love" after World War II. But that has changed. Girls' manga used to be directed at women to find eternal love, [and] was created for girls.

**Only men drew girls' manga at first?**

The art world after World War II, including comics, was dominated by males. Some men began drawing girls' manga: For instance, Osamu Tezuka, the "god of Japanese modern manga." He was also crazy about Disney animation. When Japanese society became stable, women artists started to look at girls' manga created by males and thought it was different [than it should be] and wanted to do girls' manga themselves.

Japanese women have become career women, educated. A girl's dream, girl's desire, used to be to become a good wife. Not any longer. Shōjo manga stories can be science fiction, adventure, even philosophical or historical stories. We call them graphic novels because of the quality of the story, not because of the pictures.

**Manga is very popular in Japan for adults, isn’t it, unlike here in America where adults often see comics as being for kids?**
The Japanese accept manga as a high form of art. Japanese adults don't stop reading comics, unlike in America. We have higher expectations of manga as an adult. There is a questionnaire post card in each manga for the reader to fill out. Our desire, our aesthetic, affects the content of future manga.

[Japanese publishers] are always finding the young and talented artists to create new manga. To be a mangaka is to be a rich person (in Japan). They are the equivalent of sports stars in America--millionaires.

Viz, "the first monthly manga company in the United States," according to Toku, "donated 50,000 issues of girls' manga" to Toku's show to be used as opening and closing reception gifts for those in attendance.

Chico is the first stop for the Shojo Manga Power! exhibit before it begins its national tour of four additional stops, including Teacher's College at Columbia University, N.Y., and Philadelphia's all-female Moore College and School of Design. Toku is invited as guest speaker in each location. The exhibit is supported by a major cultural grant from the Japan Foundation, and an extended tour including Beijing, Hong Kong and Taiwan is in the works.