

Female Subjectivity and *Shoujo* (Girls) Manga (Japanese Comics): *Shoujo* in Ladies' Comics and Young Ladies' Comics

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I. Sexist Reality and Ladies' Comics: Women's Lives and Experiences

Shoujo manga experienced a turning point in the 1970s when more women began to choose different lives from those the traditional gender role system expected them to take. Although the Japanese social system supports women as housewives, the number of women who work outside the house has been increasing. In this article, I am going to survey the situation of women in Japan when ladies' comics was born in the 1980s and consider how ladies' comics could convey those women's voices.

The first publication of the genre ladies' comics is *Be Love* published by Kodansha in 1980. Its target reader is an adult female approximately 25 to 30 years old. Generally, the target readers of ladies comics are adult women or *shoujo* who are almost adult. Ladies comics seem to have performed two roles as a new kind of writing for women: the first is to present women's desires when they are no longer girls; and the second is to offer alternate role models to adult women. In these respects, ladies' comics is a genre which first requires identification with the category "woman," rather than a genre which gives readers an objective point of view defined by the category "woman."

The number of ladies' comics magazines increased as if reflecting women's increased concern with their own lives. There were only two ladies' comics in 1980, but the number went up to 8 in 1984, 19 in 1985, and 48 in 1991 (Shuppan 1996: 201; 1999: 226). The 1980s, when ladies' comics became quite popular, was a time in which working women disrupted sexist myths which presented working women as unattractive and sexually frustrated (Buckley 1989: 107). It is significant that after 1985 the number of ladies' comics increased dramatically, because in

1985 *Kikai kintou hou* [The Equal Employment Opportunity Law] was passed in the Diet, which guarantees equal employment opportunities to both men and women. However, the law was not strict and there was no punishment stipulated if companies did not follow the law. Since the law just encouraged companies to arrange equal opportunities for both men and women, most women had to continue their fight against the discrimination triggered by being women (Shiota 2000; Ueno 1995; Ueno 1990: 303; Sougou 1993: 268; Bornoff 1991: 452). Although the law barred sexual discrimination in the workplace, jobs and career expectations were still gender coded. The law was passed on May 17 in 1985, and by April 1 in 1986 when the law became effective, companies managed to invent two new categories to classify full-time jobs: *sougou shoku* [managerial career track] and *ippan shoku* [regular service]. According to Ueno Chizuko,¹ in 1986, 99 % of male employees of new graduates were employed as *sougou shoku*, which includes business trips and transfers to other sections or branches in the future, and 99% of female employees recruited from among new graduates were employed as *ippan shoku*, which does not include the possibility of such transfer (Ueno 1990: 303). A woman in an *ippan shoku* position is generally called an “O.L.,” or “office lady.” This position never allows the possibility of promotion. It is a position that reflects the traditional feminine role as a housewife in a household. To cite Yuko Ogasawara:

Most office ladies are not entrusted with work that fully exercises their abilities, but are instead assigned simple, routine clerical jobs. They have little prospect of promotion, and their individuality is seldom respected, as evidenced by the fact that they are often referred to as “gifts.” (1998: 155)

Office work that included preparing and serving tea to male workers was mostly reserved for the office ladies (Allison 1994: 93). Ogasawara claims that “[I]ndeed, men in Japanese companies are dependent on women for their loyal and reliable assistance” (1998: 156). According to the data in 1996, women workers occupy 8.2% of all managerial posts in Japan, while in the US, 42.7% of the managerial posts are held by women (Inoue 1999: 115). The position of office ladies only creates a glass ceiling.

The law was not a happy avenue to equality between men and women. It was based on gender segregation. It forced female workers to work as late hours and at as physical and demanding jobs as men, and raised the number of female part-time workers (Sougou 1993: 268; Ueno 1995: 702). According to Shiota Sakiko, in 1987, 48.2% of wives of employees had a job, and more than 40% of the wives with a job were part-time workers (Shiota 2000: 152). In fact, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was not a law that encouraged women to pursue long-term careers. Rather, it was a law that aimed at protecting women who were also engaged in housework. Protecting the position of housewives, the Japanese government has maintained women as a low cost, secondary labor force (Shiota 2000: 175; Ueno 1995: 700). Shiota declares that in the 1990s the easiest lifestyle for a woman is still to choose the traditional female role, where a woman is economically supported by her husband (Shiota 2000: 165). Women who pursue careers have to choose either of two courses: to give up housework or to find a substitute in the home for herself (Shiota 2000: 87). In fact, it seems difficult for most women to give up housework. Therefore, according to Shiota, if she cannot find a substitute in the home for herself, she has to do with both housework and outside employment.

However, the number of women who are pursuing careers has been increasing. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law opened opportunities for some women. The number of women whose work is not secondary is increasing (Konno 2000: 218-19). Moreover, the traditional form of marriage, in which men go out to work and women stay at home, is becoming obsolete. Anne E. Imamura remarks:

[In the 1990s] The cost of living pushed women into the labor force, but the sluggish domestic economy cut into women's gains in the job market. Women's age at first marriage rose to twenty-six, crossing the magic number of twenty-five, when women—like Christmas cakes—were supposed to become stale. Women were in no hurry to marry, and once married had fewer children. (1996: 4)

Despite the reality of the current Japanese society, in which the birth rate (Inoue 1999: 5)² is decreasing, according to Shiota, most women who work outside the house regard child raising as a part of their future happiness (2000: 84). According to Shiota,

in Japanese society, which values housework only in relation to housewives, women need different role models for their current lives from that of the conventional lifestyle for women, because more and more women do not conform to the conventional role models the society endorses. Ladies' comics may provide women with such models and possible ideas for their futures. This genre may help women to generate a space where they can amuse themselves as women and also consider their difficulties in reality in the process of pursuing a more satisfying, fulfilling way of life.

The increase in ladies' comics magazines seems to reflect women's consciousness-raising vis à vis their position both within and outside the house. As we have seen, the Japanese social system has been more supportive of the position of housewife, which resulted in the increase in the number of housewives who also worked outside the home as part-time workers. The position as a part-time worker imposed a double bind on a woman: housework has continued being regarded as a woman's duty and the woman's labor force outside the house has been kept as secondary. However, the number of housewives who are engaged only in housework is decreasing and more women are participating in work outside the home. The Employment Equal Opportunity Law did not bring many benefits to working women, but as Ueno points out, the law permitted companies to require women to work outside the home as hard as men (Ueno 1995: 702). This meant that women had to be like men to work outside, but it also gave both men and women an opportunity to reconsider existing gender roles. That is to say, the law ironically exposed the fact that women were not the only ones that had suffered from traditional gender roles.

Shoujo in Ladies' Comics

Ladies' comics has become a genre which reflects the contemporary difficulties of women's lives and their pleasures. In order to present "women," the women writers each pursue the image in their own manner. As I pointed out before, the following two roles are crucial to examining ladies' comics as writing for women: the first is to present women's desires when they are no longer girls; and the second is to offer role models to adult women. In this section, I would like to explore

these two points in turn, considering how ladies' comics, as intended explicitly for a woman who is no longer a *shoujo*, is independent of *shoujo manga*, if they still share some aspects, I would like to examine how they rework the concept of gender and how the social background has been reflected in those aspects.

1. A Woman as Sexual Subject

The most crucial reason for the popularity of ladies' comics in the 1980s, according to critics (Matsuzawa 1999: 29; Ishida 1992: 76), is the introduction of the theme of sexuality. Because *shoujo* is a common word in Japanese meaning a teen-aged female before marriage, it was very difficult to deal with the theme of sexuality in *shoujo manga*, in spite of its being a genre for women, by women, and about women. As a result, in the 1970s *shoujo manga* created a special way to use the male body in order to introduce the theme of sexuality.

Ladies' comics visualizes the theme of sexuality using adult women's bodies. Ladies' comics offered the theme of sexuality to both women writers and readers in a more suitable way for their age (Yonezawa 1988: 168) and the issues positively represent sexuality, showing women who frankly enjoy their sexual affairs (Fujimoto 1999b: 84). Employing women's own bodies, ladies' comics provided women, who were not allowed to be in a subject position for their sexuality and pleasure, with a space in which they can acknowledge and accept their sexuality. However at this point, we have a problem with ladies' comics in that the texts represent women's roles only from women's points of view. For example, explicit sexual encounters from a female protagonist's point of view are often depicted in ladies' comics, which seem to challenge the pornographic discourse of male-oriented publishers. This may heighten woman's consciousness, suggesting that women can also gain a subject position from which they can "look" at and objectify males. But we cannot say that the texts do not reinscribe the man/woman power relationship because they are written for female readers alone and thus do not affect male readers in any way.

As long as these texts explore "women" only from the point of view of heterosexual women, the use of women by women is not much different from men's use of women for purposes of sexual titillation (Pollock 1977: 142), which

retains the hierarchical power relationship; they remain mere image-promoters rather than image-makers. This limitation of ladies' comics is reflected in the fact that ladies' comics present marriage as a natural goal for a woman. As Arimitsu Mamiko remarks, ladies' comics mainly functioned as a reinscription of patriarchal values and a female version of pornography (Arimitsu 1991: 154). As long as the characters in ladies' comics question whether they can get married or continue their marriage safely, they never question the system itself. To envision a woman's future position as a "happy" housewife and mother might even enhance the myth of motherhood as a natural result of marriage. Here women objectify themselves according to patriarchal codes, reinforcing heterosexual gender roles and preserving a fixed ideology. Considering that the genre ladies' comics does not abandon the traditional view of "women" but perpetuates it, we cannot help but see the genre reinscribing the existing value of gender. However, considering the turning point in *shoujo manga* in terms of sexuality in the 1970s, it is crucial to note that ladies' comics provided women with a space in which they could confront and acknowledge their own bodies. Although most ladies' comics might only represent the traditional power relationship between men and women, the space of women in *manga* for women has been changing, generating different forms.

The history of *shoujo manga* as women's space has existed for only a few decades and has offered various ways to challenge the existing gender roles. After the turning point in the 1970s, in which *shoujo manga* introduced the subversive theme of sexuality, *shoujo* as a female body has been secured by employing a boy's body to explore the theme of sexuality. In terms of the theme of sexuality, ladies' comics is one of the "failures" of *shoujo manga*. ladies' comics is a genre which can deal with explicit sexuality that *shoujo manga* could not handle. As a gendered category for women, ladies' comics is a younger sister of *shoujo manga*. But ladies' comics is not a genre which takes over the characteristics of *shoujo manga* regarding sexuality. Instead, dealing with a taboo subject for *shoujo*'s sexuality, ladies' comics is a genre for a woman who fails to be a *shoujo*. *Shoujo manga* has interpellated readers and writers in terms of gender, while portraying taboo subjects in the form of the absence of the *shoujo*. The category ladies' comics as a women's genre would also tell women how to perform as

“women” and signal writers and readers that they are reading what has been written for adult “women,” while portraying what *shoujo* cannot be or do.

Here, the existence of ladies’ comics, which promises women’s sexual pleasure, seemingly performs what adult women want, and reinscribes the existing power relationship between man and woman merely by replacing male gazes with female gazes. However, as a “failure” of the category *shoujo manga*, it also disturbs a woman when she sees her sexuality in a traditional way. As a supposedly sexual “subject” in pornographic representations for women in ladies’ comics, a female reader may enjoy her sexual desire, but may also see her sexual desire of an adult woman as a “failure” of a *shoujo* or what is not *shoujo*. The female sexual subject of ladies’ comics destabilizes the idea of *shoujo*, which does not contain female sexuality of women and does not present women’s bodies. Ladies’ comics, as a category for women, reinscribes the traditional values of women, but at the same time, as a “failure” of *shoujo manga*, promising to introduce what *shoujo* or a future woman should not have, stimulates the world of comics for “women.” This characteristic of ladies’ comics, which presents what *shoujo manga* cannot contain, might emphasize and develop ladies’ comics as pornographic representations of women’s bodies, which could not directly be represented in *shoujo manga* and needed to be transformed into other bodies. In this sense, pornographic representations of ladies’ comics are part of the concept of *shoujo* and its absence, rather than a result of a mere reversal of a male and female power relationship which merely looks at a woman’s body as a sexual object.

2. *Role Models to Women*

Another function of ladies’ comics has been to present various images of women’s lifestyles as role models for other women. Mainly dealing with themes which closely report women’s daily lives such as love, marriage, and work (Yonezawa 2000: 1009), the purpose of the genre has been to describe “real” women’s lives (cf. Fujimoto 1990: 193-94). A *shoujo manga* writer, Shouji Masako, who is currently writing ladies’ comics, comments that writing *shoujo manga* is easier than writing ladies’ comics, because in *shoujo manga* you can

pursue dreams and readers would not recognize them as lies (Shouji Masako 1983: 110).

A realist perspective on women's lives is one difference between *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics. Since the 1970s, one of the crucial reasons for *shoujo manga* to be treated as serious fiction has been its use of fantastic illusions in addition to realistic concepts. As Fujimoto Yukari remarks, in the world of *shoujo manga*, most of the working women's occupations are special ones such as designers, pianists, actresses, or models, where talent and originality matter; ladies' comics, however, even in the late 1980s, depict common women's daily lives (Fujimoto 1994). Offering various familiar lifestyles and their problems, ladies' comics becomes a sphere in which women can see their own lives as women. However, ladies' comics, as well as *shoujo manga*, does not always encourage women to be independent (Matsuzawa 1999: 29) and to fight traditional, patriarchal values, which compel women to stay within a subsidiary position.

For example, *Waru* [A Bad Girl], a long-run ladies' comic from 1988 to 1997 in *Be Love*, presents the success story of a woman who continuously overcomes the difficulties of her lower status as an office lady and at the same time never gives up her love. Some readers regard *Waru* as an example of ladies' comics with a feminist point of view which encourages women readers to be independent (Sakamoto 1999: 27). At the same time, this work has been criticized in that the heroine is totally passive and merely lucky (Erino 1991: 177). Erino Miya claims that the heroine does not do anything to further her career. The protagonist only accepts other people's advice, and never doubts it, and she is asked to do things which seem to have no relation to her career, such as to remember a sweeper's name. This work only regards a woman as a person who cannot do anything without help and never discovers her life by herself, but always thinks about love. Although some ladies' comics depict the severe and unequal reality which women may face at the office, most stories end with a happy marriage to a nice husband.

Yet according to Murakami Tomohiko, since the 1990s, ladies' comics began to be regarded as a genre which also deals with social issues. Until then, ladies' comics had drawn attention only to its pornographic and radically sexual scenes (Murakami 2000: 1006). As a genre which deals with women's

reality, ladies' comics began to focus on more social and political issues, such as domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and so on, presenting how the woman character tackles the problems, suffers, and sometimes makes mistakes, rather than clearly suggesting which solution she should take. Ladies' comics draws both women's reality and their fantasies in a more serious way than *shoujo manga*, in that *shoujo* are at an age when they can still enjoy illusions of gender, while the reality faced by readers of ladies' comics requires them to consider marriage as if it were a social obligation.

The theme of marriage in ladies' comics begins to appear as one social and political issue, while *shoujo manga* deals only with a process to marriage. Moreover, differently from *shoujo manga*, ladies' comics can present issues after marriage, including divorce as a principal theme. For example, Amane Kazumi, one of the most productive ladies' comics writers, deals with current women's issues in a serious way. *Shelter*, one of her ladies' comics, depicts a woman who is beaten by her husband (see Figure 1). They had two daughters. The younger daughter was very smart and her father's favorite. After she died in an accident on her way home with her mother, the father's violence toward his family erupts. His violence unveils his male-centered values and contempt toward his wife. The wife and their elder daughter escape from the husband and go to a shelter for battered women. *Shelter* depicts how the female protagonist overcomes her problem, recovers her confidence, and regains an independent life, which she once had as a lawyer. Presenting other women who share the same problem, this work considers different cases of domestic violence.

As we see in this *manga*, ladies' comics as a genre about women living in reality as adults, seems to show more concern about the process of how the heroine and other women change their lives, rather than about a solution leading to a happy ending. This work not only reveals male dominance within society, but also portrays each woman's flaws and how she easily spoils her partner and their relationship without knowing it, for example, by only being concerned about her financial status and being supported by her husband although she does not love her husband any more. In this work, each story ends when a woman decides to change her life in a positive way, which leaves an impression of a happy ending. Yet in fact, it is not simply a happy ending. It is a new beginning for her life,

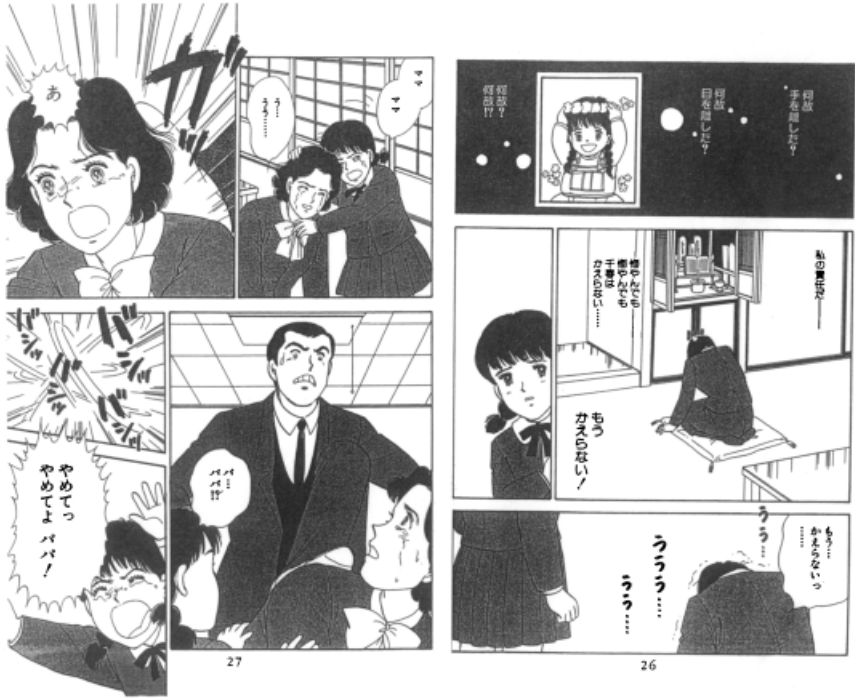


Figure 1. Amane Kazumi. *Shelter*. Tokyo: Hakusensha, 2001. 26-27. © 2000 Kazumi Amane/Hakusensha.

which is not guaranteed to be a better life than before. However, some reference to the actual law related to women's status and reliable comments by the heroine as a lawyer may suggest to readers that this *manga* could help and encourage women who are in reality suffering from a problem.

Thus, ladies' comics develops as a genre for female readers and their issues, which *shoujo manga* could not take up. Nevertheless, ladies' comics seems still to contain a conventional sense of femininity, which *shoujo manga* also displays as a genre. The following two points especially emphasize the traditional concept of femininity in ladies' comics. First, as I suggested before, ladies' comics presents many women who depend upon their husbands or partners and are waiting for someone who would lead them and love them. Second, ladies' comics rarely present elderly or middle-aged female protagonists, although the genre was generated from women's need to "grow up."

The first point supports a passive femininity like that of Cinderella which can be seen in *shoujo manga*. As we have examined, it also reflects the current status of Japanese women, in which, as Shiota and other critics remark, the traditional woman's life as a housewife totally supported by her husband has been the easiest, most traditional, and socially acceptable life for women to choose. This may explain why ladies' comics are more concerned with marriage, than with women living independently of marriage. However, as we have seen in *Shelter*, the treatment of marriage has been changing and ladies' comics is becoming a genre which shows the problems of current social issues about women who can be part of an unhappy marriage.

The second point also reflects traditional femininity. That is to say, in the world of ladies' comics, the concept of youth seems still effective as a key concept of ideal femininity, just like in the world of *shoujo*. In comparison with men's comics which presents many middle-aged male main characters, ladies' comics, which rarely show older females as main characters, seem a part of *shoujo manga*, rather than an independent genre. One of the characteristics of the genre for adults might lie in its treatment of various types of characters in part defined by age. In this respect, ladies' comics as a genre for women could have focused on widely aged female characters and have even expanded a sense of femininity regarding age. However, middle-aged women, as Susan Napier points out, have been excluded from the world of *manga*: "It is also interesting to note that there seem to be relatively few *manga* concerning middle-aged women or mothers in contemporary Japan" (Napier 1998: 105). Nevertheless, in comparison to other genres, we find more middle-aged and older women characters in ladies' comics as subcharacters. Their problems are depicted from the younger heroines' point of view, and in that sense, ladies' comics at least do not ignore elder women, but include them.

Thus, ladies' comics still maintains the traditional sense of femininity, which *shoujo manga* also holds as part of its conventional sense of *shoujo*. In this respect, ladies' comics has not made a genre of *manga* for women in a general sense yet. Rather, ladies' comics is a genre which presents what *shoujo manga* cannot do. In other words, dealing with both tradition and subversion to the existing notion of *shoujo* and making a dissonance between them to destabilize the existing system must be a way which ladies' comics takes over from *shoujo manga*.

Promising to show women who are not *shoujo* any more, ladies' comics stimulates readers' existing notion about women who still recognize imaginary *shoujo* in themselves.

However these days, we see the term *josei manga*, which means *manga* for women, and which tries to replace the term ladies' comics. Although it has not emerged yet, in a strict sense that there are no *manga* for women of different ages, this genre is gradually moving away from *shoujo manga* to a women's genre. Performing what cannot be *shoujo* and promising the emergence of a genre of *manga* for women, the genre ladies' comics may also continuously urge women not to depend on the division anymore between *shoujo manga* for *shoujo* and ladies' comics for women who are not *shoujo*, which divides women into only two types that supposedly never merge.

Writing Women and Shoujo Manga

The number of ladies comics magazines increased from two in 1980 to 48 in 1991, and to 57 in 1993, as I noted earlier. By 1998 the number had shrunk somewhat to 54. They still have a large readership, although their publication was reduced in the late 1990s. The total publication including special issues of ladies' comics in 1998 was 103,820,000, which comprises 7% of all *manga* publication; the highest total publication of ladies' comics was 133,520,000 in 1991 (Shuppan 1999: 226).

However, the concept of ladies' comics has gradually changed. As we have seen, the contents of ladies' comics have experienced some change in that ladies' comics also became a genre of political and social issues. Further, another genre of *manga* for women emerged from ladies' comics and *shoujo manga*. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a different type of commercial magazine of *manga* for women came out: *Young You* in 1987, *Young Rose* in 1990, and *Feel Young* in 1991. While some data count these magazines as ladies' comics, they have been regarded by critics and readers as another genre (Ishida 1992: 76; Fujimoto 1999a: 28). Since these early magazines share the word "young" in their titles, the new genre has been called "Young ladies' comics."³ Their target readers range from girls in their late teens to women under thirty. Yet the genre seems to cover a wider range of readers, since there are characters over thirty and readers' pages often show letters from middle-aged

women. Although we manage to distinguish these three genres, the actual boundaries regarding contents, readers, and writers among *shoujo manga*, young ladies' comics, and ladies' comics are somewhat vague, perhaps except for *shoujo manga* for lower teens and the special interest of ladies' comics in pornography, horror comics, mothering, and so on (Yonezawa 2000: 1009).⁴ Besides, some young ladies' comics magazines call themselves *shoujo manga*. For example, a phrase of the copy for *Chorus*, one of the popular young ladies' comics magazines, signifies the status of young ladies' comics: *shoujo manga mo otona ni naru* [*shoujo manga* also grows up].

Young ladies' comics is a contradictory genre which at once contains sexuality, *shoujo*, and adult women. How might we explain the contradictory impulses at work in the new genre, which has both characteristics of *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics, and at the same time, is different from the existing two genres in terms of women's lives? I will explore what enables this alternative perspective, which can share and separate the two genres at the same time, considering how the genre young ladies' comics can open a different perspective in the world of *manga* for women, and how the term *shoujo*, which these three genres share, functions upon this genre to create a new writing.

Since the genre contains *shoujo*, young ladies' comics can be regarded as a part of *shoujo manga*, but it also contains adult women and their issues and has characteristics of ladies' comics. In this sense, young ladies' comics is a genre between *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics. As Fujimoto remarks, the concept of marriage seems to play an important role to distinguish these three genres. *shoujo manga* represents women before marriage and ladies' comics deals with women after marriage, while young ladies' comics represents both women's lives before and after marriage. Fujimoto's idea of the division between *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics, i.e., marriage, suggests that both *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics are patriarchal products. Ishida Saeko also sees young ladies' comics as a product between *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics. Yet Ishida regards young ladies' comics as *manga* closer to *shoujo manga*. According to Ishida, although it contains sexuality, the genre takes over the world of *shoujo manga*, which is more concerned with *shoujo*'s inner mind and cannot escape the narrow and personal world of "herself." In this respect, young ladies' comics is not a totally new genre. That is because *shoujo manga* as the first genre of

manga for women has heavily affected other genres of *manga* in terms of women, especially this genre which employs *shoujo* as main characters. Yet simultaneously, we may also find some significant characteristics in young ladies' comics, in its treatment of the same term *shoujo*. These three genres share the concept of *shoujo*, but their modes of representation are different. *Shoujo manga* has *shoujo*, ladies' comics has a taboo concept for *shoujo* in the form of sexuality, and young ladies' comics has *shoujo*, although it deals with sexuality. They are all *manga*, for women, by women, of women, but make use of the concept of women in terms of *shoujo* differently.

The characteristic of young ladies' comics appears in its treatment of *shoujo* and reality, which distinguishes this new genre from *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics. On the one hand, *shoujo manga* visualizes the concept of *shoujo* and, as I suggested, even if it introduces taboo concepts like displacement into male bodies to *shoujo*, readers would notice their existence in the form of the absence of *shoujo*. On the other hand, ladies' comics deals with what is taboo to *shoujo* as a counter category to *shoujo manga* and tries to depict adult women's real lives and issues which *shoujo manga* cannot imagine. Young ladies' comics maintains a *shoujo*'s point of view, but it also inherits a characteristic from ladies' comics, which surveys reality rather than fantasy and tries to present *shoujo*'s life and issues as part of the reality surrounding them, just like ladies' comics tries to deal with women's issues and lives from their own perspective as women. Reading works published as young ladies' comics, we would never think at least at the first glance that they are presenting "reality." Many elements remind readers of *shoujo manga*: their cute characters with big eyes, their concern for love and inner feelings, and special situations or happenings which would rarely occur to "actual girls." Yet their concern for reality makes young ladies' comics unique and different from *shoujo manga*.

For example, let us examine *Onna tachi no miyako* [Women's Utopia] (1992-1994) by Matsunae Akemi, one of the most productive and popular *shoujo manga* writers who also writes for young ladies' comics. In the late 1980s, an early series of this *manga* was published as *shoujo manga*. From 1988 to 1990, *Katorea na onna tachi* [Women Like Cattleya], which employs the same characters, was published in *LaLa*, and from 1992 to 1994, *Onna tachi no miyako* was published in *Bouquet*.

LaLa and *Bouquet* are both *shoujo manga* magazines. In 1993, the series was also published in a new magazine *Chorus*, which has been one of the popular young ladies' magazines. This work experienced a transition from *shoujo manga* to young ladies' comics. It is about three women characters running a nursing home for elderly people. At first glance, this work may seem to present typical cute *shoujo* characters. Then immediately, we notice that this *manga* uses the term *shoujo* in a double sense. One is *shoujo* in their teens and the other is *shoujo* in an ideological sense, which signifies women who have either *shoujo*'s mind and feelings or appearance despite their age, even if they are in their seventies. In Figure 2, an interviewer mistakenly asks them a question for girls. The interviewer immediately runs away after she notices that she made a mistake, but the "aged" girls complain why the interviewer does not define a girl's age up to 74, instead of 24. Using aged protagonists, this *manga* unveils how the term *shoujo* is fixated on the notion of youth. Simultaneously, this *manga* portrays issues of old age and sometimes depicts aged characters' pasts,

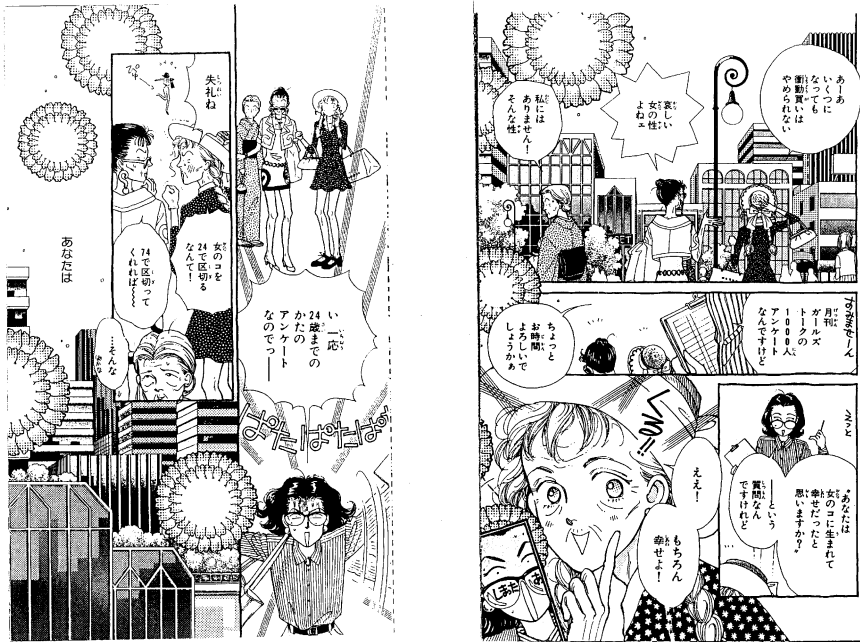


Figure 2. Matsunae Akemi. *Onna tachi no miyako*. Vol. 1. Tokyo: Shueisha, 1994. 7-8. © 1994 Matsunae Akemi/SHUEISHA, Inc.

in which they were physically “*shoujo*.” Not seriously, but comically, this work depicts how they had to suffer as *shoujo* in a traditional world under the patriarchal society before the war, suggesting a contrast with the current meaning of *shoujo*, which appears totally liberal in the story. This disruption of the notion of age in the world of *shoujo manga*, which later moved into the category young ladies’ comics, might tell us how the term *shoujo* began to become a sign which can float free from the body of *shoujo*. The characters insist that they are still *shoujo*. Yet their existence as *shoujo* might subvert our notion of the existing *shoujo* and the traditional *shoujo* image. In this work, *shoujo* is not a body anymore, but is an ideological concept that suggests that everyone can be *shoujo* if they want.

Young ladies’ comics is a genre which visually uses *shoujo manga*’s technique and presents cute girls. Like ladies’ comics, the genre centers on female characters and their issues, but its representation offers flexible images of *shoujo*, which does not always show the properly aged *shoujo*. The notion of *shoujo* can be applied to any body beyond its physical sense of being a teenaged female before marriage. A conflict between the notion of *shoujo* and what is actually presented as *shoujo* subjects gives a twist to the world of *shoujo*. Young ladies’ comics is about *shoujo*, and does not always show a taboo concept to the category *shoujo*, as ladies’ comics tries to show. This aspect of young ladies’ comics, once again, refers to the fact that *shoujo* can be a signifier which freely moves from the existing bodies of *shoujo*, emphasizing itself as an ideological notion, from which readers may take and get out whatever they want.

Furthermore, such different treatments of reality among these three genres will appear in their different endings. A typical *shoujo manga* has been regarded as the story, of a prince and a princess with a happy ending to a love story such as Cinderella, in which a lower-status girl gains a higher-status husband through magic. Ladies’ comics present their works as part of real lives and expect the ending to provide readers with an actual solution which they would also have in their lives. Young ladies’ comics also concerns reality and many women writers for this genre claim that they want to write *manga* which does not end but continues in the same way as the real life that they are having now continues. In general, they regard *shoujo manga* as a limited genre which does not allow them to write what they are writing currently. The concept of the “real”

appears as if it were a common key word among them regarding their comments on the limit of *shoujo manga*.

However, the concept of the “real,” which young ladies’ comics deals with, also seems to have a unique message, because young ladies comics does not abandon *shoujo*’s point of view, which also allows readers to see dreams. Despite its concern about real lives of women, the concept of *shoujo* still remains in young ladies’ comics. Yet, the difference between *shoujo manga* and young ladies comics can be found in their treatment of this *shoujo*. Basically, *shoujo manga* shows the world of a girl before the age of social duty. Young ladies’ comics seemingly present a similar world in which a character can appear as *shoujo* without any social obligations. However, young ladies’ comics also emphasize some aspects of the protagonist, which stress that she has also been living in a “real” life. In reality, “she” gets hurt, gets old, or gets changed in some way. She also witnesses somebody experiencing a change. A *shoujo* protagonist in young ladies’ comics appears not as a momentary existence which will finish once the story ends, but as an actual existence, just like the readers who are living and continue their lives after the story ends.

This perspective, which sees *shoujo*’s life as one that will continue after the story ends, is common among popular authors in the field of young ladies’ comics. For example, a well-received young ladies’ comics, *Happy-Mania*, by Anno Moyo-ko, which started in 1995 and ended in July 2001, presents a unique *shoujo* character, who easily makes love but cannot find a boy whom she can trust. Unlike the existing type of *shoujo*, this heroine uses her body as her first step to love. Anno says that she now writes a “real” love story with sexual scenes which Anno herself could have experienced but *shoujo manga* discourages (Anno 1999: 160). For example, in Figure 3, the protagonist is excited about her new love, while her friend, who is drawn as a smaller figure, asks her if they used a condom or not. Tracing this protagonist, who is easily blinded by her love, this story continues to show various cases of love affairs which young women might experience. Figure 4 shows a moment when she finds out that her boyfriend has another girlfriend. That does not end her love, and the story continues showing her pursuing her boyfriend until she becomes something like a stalker and finally notices what she is doing for a worthless male; she decides to find another lover. And then, another story

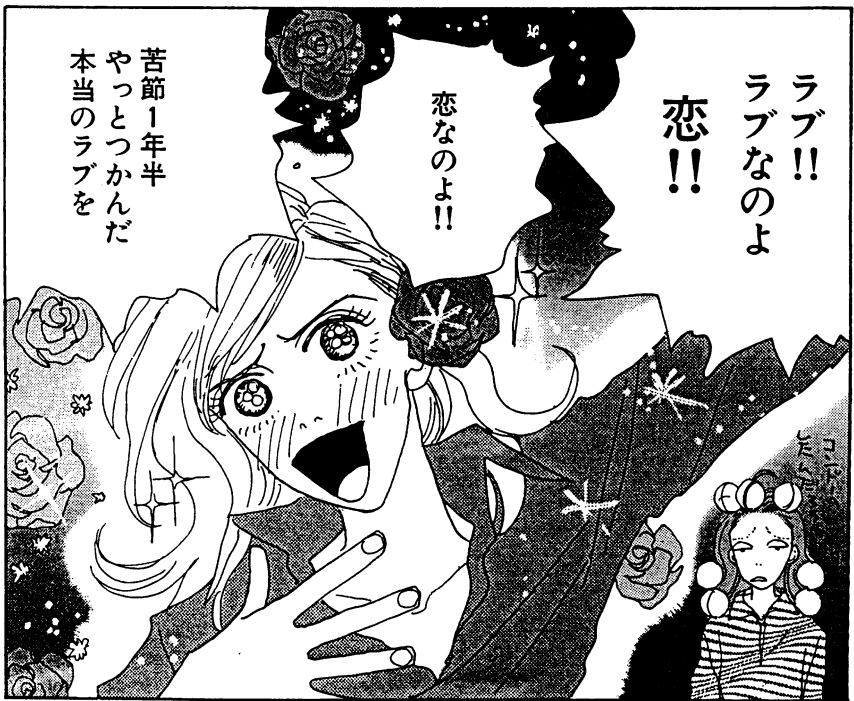
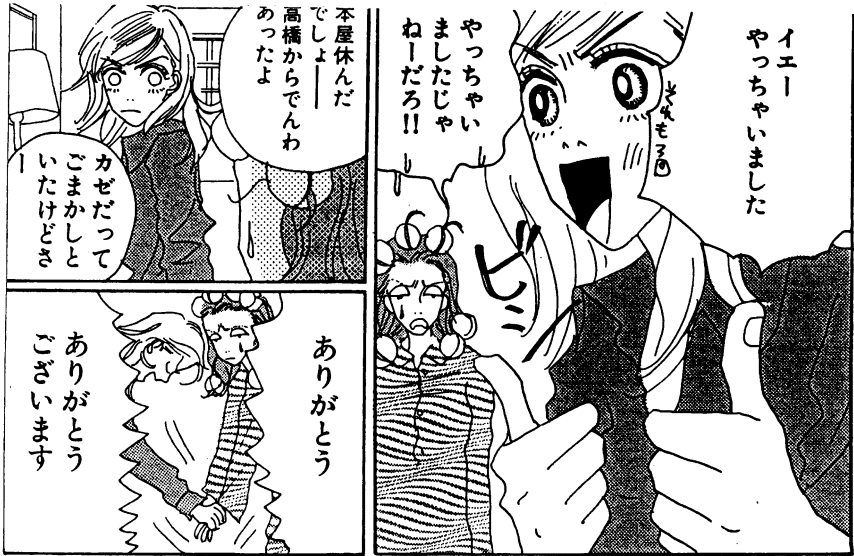


Figure 3. Anno Moyoko. *Happy-Mania*. Vol. 1. Tokyo: Shodensha, 1996. 97.
© 1996 Anno Moyoko/Shodensha.

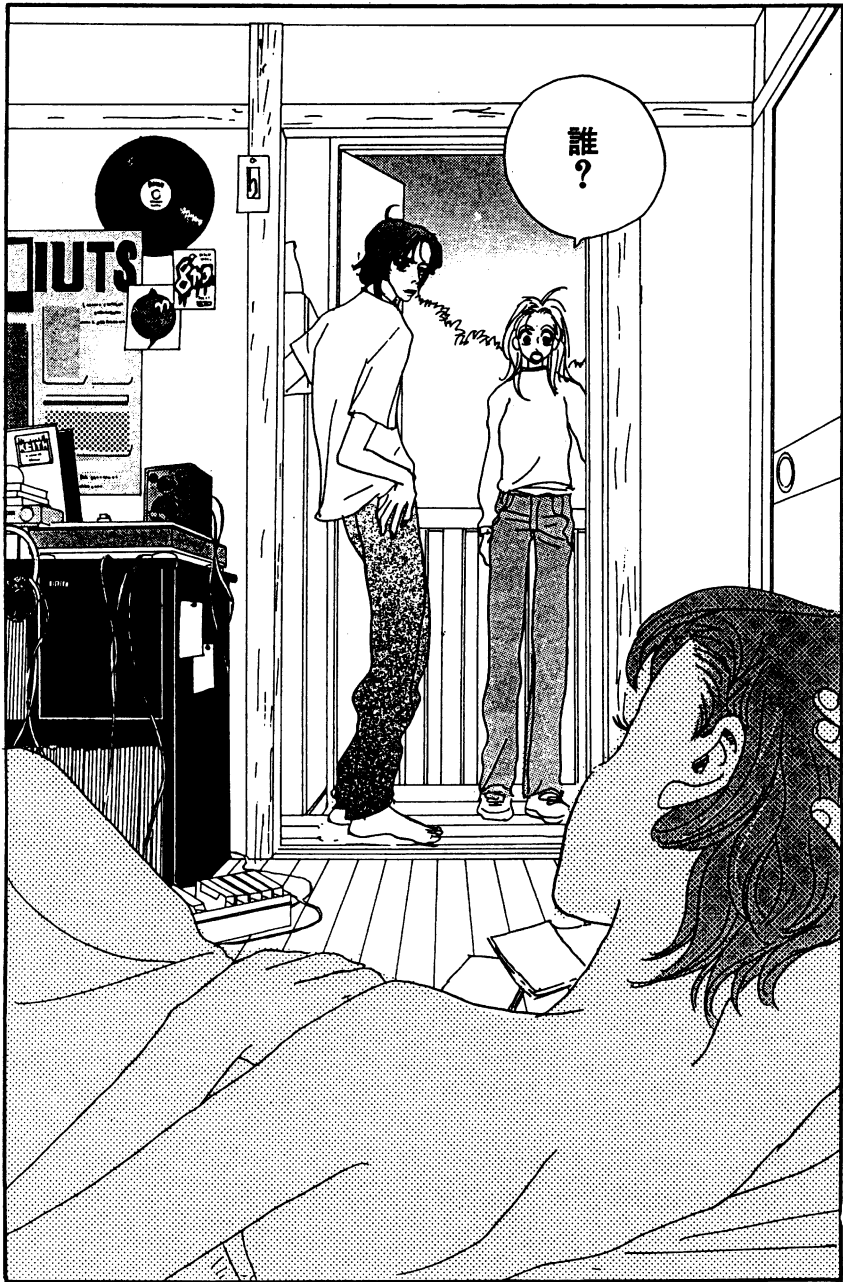


Figure 4. Anno Moyoko. *Happy-Mania*. Vol 1. Tokyo: Shodensha, 1996. 112.
© 1996 Anno Moyoko/Shodensha.

about this protagonist begins. Although readers of *shoujo manga* may expect a happy ending, the readers here do not necessarily expect one (Anno 1999: 164). Moreover, Minami Qta, one of the popular young ladies' comics writers, denies the concept of ending itself. Her work is quite different from typical *shounen* (boys) and *shoujo manga* which offer a clear ending. According to her (Minami 1997: 196), typical *shounen* and *shoujo manga* are stories about gaining something. *Shounen manga* deal with the pursuit of power, money, or a position, while *shoujo manga* aims at attracting a handsome boy. Yet, to her, "reality" does not cease the moment something has been attained.

Makimura Satoru, a popular and renowned *shoujo manga* writer who has written for *shoujo manga* since the 1970s, refers to how she felt when she began writing for young ladies' comics (Makimura 1999). She thought that she could not write any more dream-like works for *manga*. She wished to write "reality," in which as long as she lived, she would face more uncomfortable facts. At the same time, she did not totally abandon *shoujo manga*. Yet she composed her works in a different way, using some aspects of *shoujo manga*. She began research outside the world of *shoujo manga*. Researching readers by herself, she found how deceitful and fictitious what she had written as *shoujo manga* was. Here, what she notes as the importance in the category genre of young ladies' comics is to present "reality."

These young ladies' comics writers find *shoujo manga* full of deceptions which tell only comforting myths to entertain *shoujo* with dreamlike ideas; young ladies' comics allow them to write something other than fantasy. In fact, many popular young ladies' comics writers share this wish for the "real." Onozuka Kahori, another popular young ladies' comics writer, also makes similar comments that she is writing a life, not a story, with upheavals, which might even hurt you. They wish to show how *shoujo* will be if she continues her life. Even after the story ends, their characters' lives would continue. Onozuka suggests that she would like to send a message to readers, which suggests that even if they can be hurt, they will be fine, and such experience will give them power to continue their lives (Onozuka 1999: 30).

However, in speaking about the "real" that *shoujo manga* cannot present, we should note that these young ladies' comics

writers point out facts. On the one hand, they have *shoujo*, and on the other hand, they want the *shoujo* to grow up, move, and change. Can *shoujo* grow up? The term *shoujo* is a category for girls during a special period in which they are neither children nor adults. Yet some heroines in young ladies' comics seem to already have grown up because they deal with the theme of sexuality. Considering the ideological function of the category *shoujo*, which has used even her absence as her substance, we note a similar function of the category *shoujo* in young ladies' comics, which uses *shoujo*'s absence, rather than showing a heroine who is *shoujo*. By offering a heroine who grows up enough to deal with sexuality, but has not found a way to settle down herself in accordance with the social codes which her gender requires, such as marriage, young ladies' comics make use of the concept of *shoujo*. This heroine, who already has a sexual body of a woman, offers *shoujo*'s absence, rather than her existence. The absence of *shoujo* functions here again as a key to perceiving the connection of the *manga* with a "real" life, which *shoujo* does not have; young ladies' comics resists idealization which portrays only one piece of her life as if it were the best moment.

The genre of ladies' comics, which employs the theme of sexuality and women's bodies and their issues, has been a practice of how to develop what *shoujo manga* has treated in the form of the absence of *shoujo* to describe women's sexuality and their adult lives. Ladies' comics enabled what *shoujo manga* could not contain. Then young ladies' comics was born and dealt with what ladies' comics could not contain. Showing both what ladies' comics cannot contain and what *shoujo manga* cannot contain, the new genre, temporarily called young ladies' comics, seems to occupy a place in between *shoujo manga* and ladies' comics, but it is more than that, rooted in the term *shoujo*. Showing the body of *shoujo*, it alters the meaning of *shoujo* into that of a future adult woman, who is still in the process of changing and considering her life in reality.

In 1999, the *Kikai kintou hou* [The Equal Employment Opportunity Law] of 1985 was amended. A clause concerning sexual harassment was added and the law became stricter. The older version of the law only encouraged companies not to discriminate against women, but the revised law bans discrimination in promotion, education, and so on. It becomes a company's duty not to discriminate against employees in terms

of gender. However, there are still many points which need to be amended. For example, the new clause concerning sexual harassment does not ban sexual harassment. According to the new version of the law, it is a company's duty to take sexual harassment into consideration. Under such circumstances, women's struggle at work will continue.

The category *shoujo* functions as an ideological apparatus for women to be free from social obligations such as marriage. Women's world of *manga* began with the term of *shoujo*. Even a new genre for adult women has been formed out of *shoujo manga* and seems to be still part of *shoujo*, which could escape from the reality and social obligation. *shoujo* still functions as an important aspect of comics for women. When will women in Japan escape the world of *shoujo*? The Japanese society imposes many problems on women although women are trying to get out of the category *shoujo*, which they claim ignores "reality." However, women continue to question the disconnection between the category *shoujo* and themselves as adult women, allowing them both to think of their actual lives from the point of view of a *shoujo* who has not been involved in social obligations yet, and to imagine themselves as *shoujo*. In that sense, the category *shoujo* still gives female readers a performative power by promising to show another perspective which is the reality in which they live, in a process of their search for their own way of living.

Notes

¹Japanese names appear in the same order as they appear in their articles or books.

²Number of children to whom one woman shall give birth when she is between the ages of 15 and 49 years old. In 1997, the birth rate in Japan was 1.39.

³Mediaworks. <<http://www.mediaworks.co.jp/alt/000/text/ya.html>>.

⁴Yonezawa remarks that ladies' comics magazines have three kinds of target readers: "young Mrs." for housewives, "ladies" for working women, and "young adult" for younger women around twenty. Ladies' comics by major publishers employ many *manga* writers who were once engaged as *shoujo manga* writers. According to Yonezawa, the main stream of current ladies' comics has been closer to *shoujo manga*.

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