Introduction

In Japan in the early 1970s, a transformation took place in the popular culture consumed by teenage girls. Young women artists, inspired by the atmosphere of youthful rebellion and creative experimentation at the time, took over the genre of shōjo manga, or comic books for girls, and changed it to address the concerns of teenage girls. The popularity of the comics they created granted legitimacy and gave voice to a coherent girls’ culture. By the end of the twentieth century, shōjo manga had become one of the primary sites of cultural production in Japan. This is a book about the development of shōjo manga as a genre and the meaning of girls’ culture in Japan.

Despite the massive popularity of shōjo manga in Japan, the genre is not well known or understood in the English-speaking world. Relatively few titles have been translated and released in the United States, and none of the major classics of the 1970s is available in translation. The discovery that there is a special category of manga by and for young women is often baffling to many Americans, who are accustomed to thinking of comics as a boys-only medium. While some find the promise of a “girl-power” genre of comics exciting, many shōjo manga stories resist the kind of ideology American feminists would like to see: instead of demonstrating openly radical politics that subvert gender hierarchies, the characters seem stereotypically feminine, and the drawing style emphasizes their childish traits. And perhaps most surprising to Western readers, many shōjo manga stories feature romance not between a boy and a girl, but between two boys. What, then, is the appeal of shōjo manga for girls in Japan?

The answer to this question does not lie in analysis of any single shōjo manga story, but rather in understanding its cultural history: how it developed as a genre, who the creators are, and how readers interact with the texts. Shōjo manga is not just a genre of comics aimed at a specific demographic; it is a part of girls’ culture (shōjo bunka), a discrete discourse on the social construction of girlhood. Since the 1970s, shōjo manga has been one of the most influential media for the creation and dissemination of girls’ culture, but, as I will demonstrate, the roots of shōjo manga and shōjo bunka reach back to the early twentieth century, specifically in the pages of girls’ literary magazines. This book will explore the connection between prewar girls’ magazines and postwar shōjo manga and in doing so shed light on the discourse of girlhood created and consumed by girls themselves.
Definition of the Shōjo

The first step toward understanding shōjo manga—and shōjo bunka—is to consider the meaning of the term shōjo, in its various definitions and media representations. The word shōjo is most efficiently translated into English as “girl,” although the Japanese word carries a much more specific connotation. This term tends to refer to teenage girls, that is, girls in the liminal adolescent space between childhood and adulthood, the end of which time was traditionally signaled by marriage and motherhood. In cultural (as opposed to biological) terms, adolescence is marked not so much by physical age as by social convention. The concept of adolescence, and particularly female adolescence, is one of the hallmarks of modern industrialized nations, which encourage girls to delay marriage, childbearing, or entering the work force, usually to receive higher education (Savage xvi–xviii; Driscoll 35–37; Mitchell 7). While Japan in the Edo period (1600–1868) did have relatively late marriages and some educational opportunities for girls, it was not until the Meiji period (1868–1912) that it became economically advantageous for upper- and middle-class girls to delay marriage in favor of advanced education (Uno 17–41; Inoue 41–42). Thus, a new space opened for girls to develop socially and intellectually in ways that are quite different from the roles of childhood and motherhood, although the exact beginning and end of adolescence was and still is fluid.

The shōjo, then, is strongly associated with modernity and, more specifically, the educated urban middle and upper classes. In the prewar period, a girl became a shōjo by attending an all-girls secondary school and by reading girls’ magazines (Imada 5), in other words, through a process of enculturation in shōjo bunka, which was created among girls in higher schools, mainly attended by daughters of the new urban middle and upper classes. In particular, it was the girls’ magazines that gave the shōjo a sense of gender identity and provided models of speech, dress, behavior, and style (Imada 9–10). In the prewar period, the term shōjo also implied a certain refinement, marked by chastity, sentimentality, and the use of polite language. Even after World War II, the word shōjo still has a lingering connotation of the elegance of the all-girls school and the private space of girls’ culture.

The status of the shōjo in postwar Japan is harder to pin down. Kawamura Kunimitsu argues that the era of the shōjo began around 1900, flourishing from about 1910 to 1930, that is, the years when all-girls schools were the primary educational opportunity for girls (Otome no inori 12). Kawamura further claims that the shōjo no longer exists in Japan and that only traces of girls’ culture remain today in holdovers from prewar culture such as the all-girl Takarazuka Revue (ibid. 13). Kawamura’s argument indicates just how closely the idea of
the shōjo is tied to concepts of purity and chastity. Some recent trends in girls’ culture, such as the subculture of gyaru (“gals”), have moved emphatically in the opposite direction, embracing vulgarity and sexual promiscuity. Anthropological and sociological work is needed to sort out the shifting landscape of girls’ culture in twenty-first-century Japan. However, I would argue that girls’ culture is nonetheless a coherent entity in contemporary Japan. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, postwar shōjo manga still draws on themes of purity and innocence derived from prewar girls’ culture. While contemporary Japan offers a far larger variety of choices for self-identification and group allegiance for girls, the idea of the shōjo and the ideals of shōjo bunka are still in circulation, whether girls embrace those ideals or not.

As this is a literary and visual study of girls’ print media, I am primarily interested in fictional representations of shōjo, with the understanding that these fictional representations may vary significantly from lived experiences, sometimes intentionally. This is not an anthropological or sociological study of the lives of real girls, but rather an examination of how normative concepts of girlhood were created and disseminated through print media. Media representation of the shōjo vary significantly depending on audience; this book will consider two competing discourses on the shōjo, one arising in literature predominantly (although not exclusively) written by and for adult men, in which the teenage girl appears as sexualized and threatening, and the other emerging in the texts consumed by girls themselves, which emphasize purity and avoidance of heterosexual activity. One of my goals in this book is to distinguish between these two discourses on the girl, that is, the way adults (particularly adult men) portray girls and the way girls’ culture created a different image of girlhood.

**Theoretical Approaches to Shōjo Studies**

Although the concept of the shōjo is central to both gender identity and Japan’s modernization, it has received relatively little scholarly attention. Shōjo studies (shōjo-ron) is still a nascent field in Japanese-language scholarship and even more so in English. Although the shōjo is a central feature of modernity in Japan, and although girls’ culture has had a discrete and coherent discourse throughout the twentieth century, scholarly discussion of girls in Japan has tended to be piecemeal. In spite of the significant social changes that occurred after World War II and the American Occupation, girls’ culture seems to have retained some of its key features, as I will show in terms of the connection between prewar girls’ magazines and postwar shōjo manga. Most studies of the girl in Japanese tend to focus on either the prewar or the postwar period. My goal in this book is to bridge that gap and to put shōjo manga into historical context by considering
the continuities between pre- and postwar girls’ culture. Japanese-language scholarship on girls’ culture and shōjo manga, however, has been moving toward increasing historical specificity. As this scholarship has not been translated and is not well known outside Japan, it is worth first reviewing how girls’ culture has been discussed in Japan.

The study perhaps best known outside Japan is Ōtsuka Eiji’s *Shōjo minzoku-kugaku* (Ethnography of Girls, 1985), which propelled the study of Japanese girls’ culture, in all of its seemingly trivial and inconsequential cuteness and disposability, to the ranks of serious academic inquiry. While Ōtsuka’s study was groundbreaking in considering such topics as girls’ school uniforms, idiosyncratic girl handwriting, dolls, and girls’ comics as evidence of a coherent discourse, his primary aim was to critique Japanese culture as he saw it in the mid-1980s. He ends his book with an expression of male anxiety: “Where is the shōjo leading us?” (243). The pronoun he uses for “us,” *wareware*, is reserved almost exclusively for reference to the (patriarchal) national body: “we Japanese.” However, rather than validating the narratives produced by and important to girls, he worries about the impact of the shōjoization of adult culture. His final question is “Can we change from ‘shōjo’ to ‘adults’? If we can’t, then it will mean our destruction” (249). Again, Ōtsuka uses a male pronoun for “we,” this time *bokutachi*, which might be translated as “we guys.” While Ōtsuka celebrates girls’ culture, his fear that girls will destroy Japan obscures any attempt to understand the ways in which girls receive their own culture. Ōtsuka’s anxious suggestion that girl culture has the power to destroy the Japanese nation is common to what I term the patriarchal discourse on the shōjo, as I will discuss in Chapter 1. While Ōtsuka’s was an important study of shōjo culture in his attention to everyday artifacts of culture, he perpetuates the fear that the shōjo is a danger to the Japanese nation.

In contrast to Ōtsuka’s approach, Honda Masuko, also writing in the 1980s, set her definition of the shōjo in the context of prewar girls’ culture. Although Honda has received less international attention than Ōtsuka, her approach is grounded in much greater historical specificity and a feminist perspective. In an early essay, Honda writes that “‘Girlhood’ is a topic that has long been neglected and even dismissed as an object of derision. The world of the girl has, therefore, been marginalized as a ‘field unworthy of discussion.’ This position conceals the logic of non-girls who seek to justify themselves by neglecting the girl. However, we must acknowledge the logic of the girl herself, who protects her own time by, to some extent at least, welcoming this neglect” (*Genealogy of Hiraibira* 20). As Honda writes, the critical neglect of girls’ culture is attributable not only to sexist attitudes, but also to the fact that the world of girls, particularly in prewar Japan, was private, closed off to adults, particularly men. The signs of girls’ culture that
Honda sees in the literature and art of prewar girls' magazines carry emotional weight for girls but are unreadable by adult men, who dismiss them as frivolous. Honda points to the importance of reading girls' culture from the inside; although she is no longer a girl herself, her analysis, unlike Ōtsuka's, considers how girls themselves read those signs.

Honda’s work on prewar girls’ culture opened the field to further historically grounded scholarship, particularly Kawamura Kunimitsu’s three-volume study documenting the rise and fall of prewar girls' culture and, more recently, Shōjo no shakaishi (A Social History of the Shōjo) by Imada Erika and Shōjo-zō no tanjō (The Birth of the Shōjo Image) by Watanabe Shūko, both published in 2007. Watanabe’s study looks at the Meiji and Taishō periods (1880s to early 1920s), and Imada focuses on early Shōwa (mid-1920s to mid-1930s). Both studies aim to describe girls’ culture from the inside, that is, to look at how girls themselves defined the shōjo image, rather than using the shōjo as a symbol of national identity. Both Imada and Watanabe demonstrate that the primary site of prewar girls’ culture was located in girls’ magazines even more than in girls’ schools. Watanabe writes, “Perhaps because girls’ culture [shōjo bunka] was at odds with the model of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ [ryōi kenbo] advocated in public education, the site in which girls’ culture developed apart from state interests was in girls’ magazines” (130). In other words, to understand girls’ culture requires a study of girls’ magazines.

The strength of Imada’s and Watanabe’s studies lies in their methodology, specifically, their surveys of original materials. In analyzing the discourse on the shōjo in girls’ magazines, Imada and Watanabe look not only at articles or fiction serialized in those magazines, but also at other parts of the magazines, such as advertisements and readers’ letters, as well as analyzing patterns of readership and comparing girls’ magazines to other popular press discsourses. In surveying a vast number of prewar magazines as well as reading those magazines as part of larger discourses, Imada and Watanabe make ephemera accessible, substantiating the size and reality of girls’ culture. I take this approach as well, namely, the close study of the magazine as artifact, analyzing magazines as a whole: not only reprints of the novels serialized in them but the surrounding articles, letters, advertisements, and illustrations to see how they created a coherent look and feel of girls’ culture and juxtaposed that discourse with the dominant discourse on the shōjo in highbrow literature.

While Honda, Kawamura, Imada, and Watanabe all provide detailed readings of prewar girls’ culture and girls’ magazines, they do not make connections with postwar shōjo manga. At the other end of the historical spectrum, most studies of postwar shōjo manga begin with the development of the genre in the early 1970s and tend not to consider any earlier antecedents. Moreover, writing
on shōjo manga even in Japan has lagged behind academic study of manga for boys. Although Yonezawa Yoshihiro published a history of postwar shōjo manga in 1980, for over a decade it was the only book-length study of the genre. In the late 1990s, women who had grown up reading these texts, such as Fujimoto Yukari and Yokomori Rika, began writing about shōjo manga from a feminist perspective. In these early studies, Fujimoto and Yokomori bolstered their feminist approach with a highly personal angle, recounting how shōjo manga had affected them in their formative years. As with studies of prewar girls’ culture, however, once the study of shōjo manga was established as a topic of serious academic inquiry, there has been a trend toward more historical specificity.

One of the more interesting studies to appear recently is Oshiyama Michiko’s 2007 book Shōjo manga hyōbōron (The Semiotics of Gender in Shōjo Manga). Oshiyama traces the historical development of a single theme, cross-dressing and gender bending in shōjo manga, and uses this topic to look at the historical development of shōjo manga from the 1950s through the 1990s. This approach, charting the genealogy of a genre by exploring various iterations of an oft-repeated motif, allows for analysis of specific texts in historical and cultural context. In other words, the generic structures and rules, and the repetition of certain motifs or narratives contribute to the meaning of any particular story for its audience. I have found this to be a productive methodology that helps bring into focus the meaning and significance of classic shōjo manga texts. While Oshiyama is primarily interested in the thematic deployment of female cross-dressing, however, I focus on homosocial relationships and include visual as well as thematic analysis.

Academic writing on the shōjo in English, like Ōtsuka’s Shōjo minzokugaku, in retrospect appears to have begun with a reponse to that moment during the height of the bubble economy in Japan when teenage girls rose to new prominence as consumers. Among the first to examine the shōjo as a cultural topos was John Treat in a 1993 essay on novelist Yoshimoto Banana, whose style is indebted to girls’ novels and shōjo manga. Like Ōtsuka Eiji, whom he cites in an epigraph (“Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home,” 1993, 353) as well as throughout the article (pp. 375, 379, 381), Treat considers girls’ culture as an outsider and limits the scope of his analysis to the 1980s. Treat later published two more essays on Yoshimoto Banana in 1995 and 1996. Appearing in the same anthology as Treat’s 1993 essay was another on shōjo culture by Sharon Kinsella titled “Cuties in Japan,” which catalogs cuteness in girls’ culture in the 1980s, primarily with relation to consumer goods. However, Kinsella does not discuss shōjo manga, nor does her analysis reach back further than the 1970s. While girls’ culture has increased in visibility and importance in Japan in the years since those studies first appeared, academic study of girls’ culture in English has not kept up.
In-depth, historically grounded analysis did not follow the seminal essays on girls’ culture in English. Instead, aspects of girls’ culture have been selected for analysis, particularly author Yoshiya Nobuko (Frederick, Suzuki, Dollase), the boys’ love subgenre of shōjo manga (Levi et al.), and the Tākara-zuka Revue (Stickland, Robertson). But while these authors all mention girls’ culture in passing, only anthropologist Jennifer Robertson undertakes a detailed study of shōjo identity, which she translates literally as “a ‘not-quite-female’ female” and one who has “heterosexual inexperience and homosexual experience” (Tākara-zuka 65). And while there have been two book-length studies of magazines for adult women (Frederick, Sato), there have been none on teenage girls’ magazines. Moreover, there is a tendency in English-language scholarship to consider all representations of teenage girls and young women as shōjo/girls culture indiscriminately. For instance, in the introduction to the anthology Bad Girls of Japan, editors Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley are most concerned with defining “badness” (that is, resistance to sexism or subversion of patriarchal structures); their project is not to theorize the concept of the girl, and the anthology does not make a distinction between teenage girls and adult women.

My own study is indebted to the work of both Japanese- and English-language scholars on prewar girls’ magazines and postwar shōjo manga; however, I have also been motivated by a frustration with the limitations of those studies in connecting prewar and postwar girls’ culture. Just as the studies of prewar girls’ magazines discussed above do not consider the impact those magazines had on later generations of artists and writers, studies of shōjo manga thus far for the most part have not touched on prewar girls’ culture. Even in Japanese-language scholarship, prewar girls’ magazines have at most been mentioned in passing; for instance, Yonezawa spends just two pages on prewar artists Tōkatake Kashō and Nakahara Jun’ichi before skipping ahead to the 1950s (14–15). Most historical studies of shōjo manga, like Oshiyama’s, begin with the 1950s and do not reference that earlier culture at all.

This gap between pre- and postwar girls’ culture also exists in some studies of girls’ literature. For instance, L-hungaku zentai yomibon (Complete Reader of L Literature), edited by Saitō Minako, purports to define girls’ literature but focuses exclusively on the postwar period, ignoring the importance of prewar girls’ culture. Essays in Saitō’s anthology by Tanaka Hiko and Yonemitsu Kazunari that trace the history of girls’ literature in Japan do not reach any farther back than 1960. While L-hungaku is a guide aimed at a nonacademic audience, this gap suggests a lack of appreciation of the legacy of prewar girls’ culture to girls’ literature today.

How are we to account for this gap? One reason may be the misconception that Tēzuka Osamu (nicknamed the God of Comics) single-handedly invented
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shōjo manga in the 1950s. Tezuka’s manga *Ribban no kisbi* (Princess Knight) is often called the first shōjo manga (Schodt 253). However, to single out Tezuka alone is to ignore the work of many other artists in the 1950s and 1960s who created manga for girls, such as Takahashi Makoto, whose visual style is much closer to subsequent trends in shōjo manga than Tezuka’s. Furthermore, Tezuka himself was deeply connected to prewar girls’ culture, and many of his contributions to shōjo manga derive from that connection, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. Another reason for the gap in scholarship between prewar girls’ magazines and postwar shōjo manga is the popular narrative that shōjo manga as a genre appeared suddenly in the early 1970s, when young women artists began to publish psychologically complex stories aimed at a teenage audience and featuring a tendency toward androgynous figures and a preference among readers for static but ornate poses. And what of the most striking feature of shōjo manga, the tendency toward androgynous figures and a preference among readers for stories featuring male homosexuality? If “shōjo” is a more specific signifier than “girl,” what exactly is shōjo about shōjo manga?

This book attempts to answer these questions by making the connection between prewar girls’ magazines and postwar shōjo manga. While a major impetus of this study is to provide a historically grounded exploration of the shōjo in Japan, I do not mean to suggest that girls’ culture is monolithic and unchanging over time. Individual readers may interact with texts as they please. Furthermore, this is not an anthropological study of girls or magazine readership. Rather, I am interested in how girls’ magazines and shōjo manga create a discourse on female adolescence: how they address their audience and create fictional images of girlhood, and what features of that image persist over time in spite of larger cultural shifts. By necessity, this is not a comprehensive, exhaustive history. Although the material is arranged in chronological order, I have chosen a few representative texts in each period for in-depth study; there are of course themes and narratives that await future study.

**Girl Studies in English—a Different Approach**

My approach to analysis of the shōjo has also been influenced by Girl Studies, a field generally associated with writing on girls in the United States and Britain. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber are credited with bringing a feminist point of view to the study of teenage girls and popular culture in Britain with their 1976 essay “Girls and Subcultures” (Kearney 4). Like shōjo studies in Japanese, Girl Studies is still a small subfield of gender studies. Even in the more than
thirty years since McRobbie and Garber’s essay, Girl Studies is perpetually characterized as an emerging field; as Gateward and Pomerance write, “Very little has been written about the inscription of girlhood” (14). However, I have found in the work of the small (but steadily increasing) group of scholars who position their work in Girl Studies many continuities with my analysis of *shōjo bunka*. Although I do not use the work of any particular scholar of Girl Studies as the praxis for this volume, I have been inspired by the idea that systematic study of the texts and media aimed at teenage girls is key to understanding the formation of both female and, more broadly, cultural identity.

Scholarly studies of girls in Western cultures have uncovered some similarities in the various representations of female adolescence. In *The New Girl*, for instance, Sally Mitchell looks to the books and magazines that girls in England from 1880 to 1915 consumed as a means of examining how the new concept of adolescence was understood by the girls themselves. She writes of girls in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century England: “The new girl—no longer a child, not yet a (sexual) adult—occupied a provisional free space. Girls’ culture suggested new ways of being, new modes of behavior, and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women” (3). Just as adolescence is a time in an individual’s life for experimenting with new identities, in a larger cultural context, it becomes a space for a society to imagine changing social roles for women, regardless of whether those new roles are ever fully realized.

Catherine Driscoll, in her book simply titled *Girls*, also lays out a methodological approach for the study of teenage girls and popular culture that I have found useful. In spite of historical and cultural differences, Driscoll’s basic assertions about the concept of Western girlhood hold true for Japanese girlhood as well. She argues that adolescence is not so much the physical process of puberty but a transitory social, psychological, and cultural role on the way to adulthood, what she calls “a space in which processes of identity-formation and social placement are monitored” (53). In other words, Driscoll does not fix her definition of girlhood to any specific age or set of social behaviors. Similarly, I define the *shōjo* not by physical age but as a transitional state between the social roles of child and wife or mother. Driscoll argues that the constant surveillances of feminine adolescence produced and continues to produce a discourse on girls that represents them as problematic but at the same time central to our understanding of modern culture. She considers how the discourses of psychoanalysis, feminism, anthropology, Marxism, and cultural studies as well as youth subcultures have created the concept of feminine adolescence. She writes, “Girls figure in both the pleasures and threats of technologized cultural progress and the promise and failure of the modern” (303). Similarly in Japan, teenage girl characters are frequently a locus of both hope and anxiety in discourses of modernization and Westernization.
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While Girl Studies in general and Driscoll’s work in particular do not provide a prescriptive approach to the study of girlhood in Japan, they do suggest larger questions beyond the necessary but somewhat limiting discourse of shōjo studies. In looking at the cultural space of female adolescence, the primary motivation in my analysis, is, as Driscoll suggests, the question of who is monitoring the development of the teenage girl: is it the family, societal institutions, potential male partners, or the girls themselves? And how does the representation of girls shift according to who is doing the monitoring? My focus on some representative texts reveals similar images that occur repeatedly. The patriarchal image of the shōjo, that is, one defined and mediated by a male observer, is very different from the discourse of girls’ magazines, and it is in that discrepancy that competing cultural and national interests come into focus.

Toward a Genealogy of the Shōjo Image

Representations of shōjo tend to fall into two distinct categories, one that can be seen in late-nineteenth-century jūbungaku (“pure literature,” or belles lettres) and eventually throughout mainstream twentieth-century public discourse, which I have loosely termed the patriarchal image of the shōjo, and the other arising in girls’ magazines. The shōjo that emerges in the patriarchal discourse is the girl as seen from the point of view of the older man who seeks to marry her; she is characterized through the lens of his attraction-repulsion to her. To quote Jennifer Robertson on the shōjo, “controlling her was desirable because she was fascinating, attractive and weak, and it was necessary because she was powerful, threatening and different” (Takarazuka 158). This discourse creates an image of feminine adolescence as problematic and dangerous. Moreover, in this construction, the shōjo, as John Treat writes, “lacks any libidinal agency of her own” (“Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home,” 1996, 281), or, perhaps more specifically, her sexuality is constructed in response to male desires and channeled into acceptable outlets. She is imagined as innocent but also dangerously seductive, threatening to disrupt the patriarchal control of the family.

The shōjo first appeared as a fictional character in the first novels of the Meiji period, which were modeled on the European novel. Before this period, the proper love interest for a middle- or upper-class man was the geisha or the prostitute. Erotic interest was only located in the “floating world” of the pleasure quarters, not in the home. Among the many ideas imported from the West during Meiji was the concept of romantic or spiritual love, especially as a motivating concept in literature. As a result, this eroticism entered the domestic sphere, and the middle- or upper-class girl emerged for the first time as a love interest in fiction. The shōjo, as Treat points out, is a modern character that often
symbolizes the problems or failure of modernity ("Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home," 1996).

This early shōjo character was the girl student (joshi gakusei), who appeared frequently as a love interest in Meiji fiction. In this book, I examine the girl student characters in three foundational novels of the modern literary canon, Futa-batei Shimei’s Ukigumo (Drifting Clouds, 1887), Miyake Kaho’s Yabu no ugnisu (A Warbler in the Grove, 1888), and Tayama Katai’s Futon (The Quilt, 1907), all of which portray the dual appeal and threat of the newly emergent shōjo character. The fact that the shōjo is the main love interest in these canonical, genre-defining novels shows the extent to which the shōjo is one of the key sites in which issues of both gender identity and national identity have been contested in twentieth-century Japan. This patriarchal image of the girl as disruptive to the family and the nation is still reproduced today. However, it is important to distinguish between these mainstream, male authored texts aimed at a male audience and the image of the girl that arose within girls’ culture, which Miyako Inoue calls a “counterpublic” sphere (110).

In the early twentieth century, a normative girls’ culture developed primarily in literary magazines marketed to students at all-girls secondary schools. Although the editors and many of the contributors were men, girl readers embraced these magazines as an authentic representation of girlhood, in part because the magazines encouraged interactivity through reader contributions to the magazines and social clubs. In particular, the magazine Shōjo no tomo (The Girl’s Friend) was the most interactive of the girls’ magazines and from the mid-1920s to mid-1930s helped to foster a reading community of girls.

The shōjo image that emerges in girls’ culture does not appear as a threat or source of anxiety, but rather as a point of identification. Prewar girls’ culture created a private space of girlhood, a community of friends insulated from the pressures of a restrictive patriarchy. The girl character who appeared in the fiction and illustrations in girls’ magazines was pure and virginal, and channeled her romantic desires into homosocial relationships with other girls.

One of the most salient and misunderstood features of prewar girls’ culture is the prevalence of homosociality and particularly S kankei (S relationships), a close but temporary bond between two girls. Although S relationships have a homoerotic element, they should not be read as lesbian in the twenty-first-century sense of a fixed sexual identity. S relationships were tolerated, even encouraged by educators and other authority figures, as a way to channel girls’ desires away from heterosexual activity. Representations of S relationships in fiction were always coded as pure, innocent, and asexual. As a result, the love between two girls, because it was understood as chaste, becomes the ideal expression of spiritual love. In this respect, I examine the novel Otome no minato...
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(The Girls' Harbor), serialized in *Shōjo tomo* in 1938, as an example of spiritual love between girls. Girls' magazines and, by extension, girls' culture provided a temporary escape from the pressures of heterosexual courtship and marriage, which awaited girls upon graduation. This homosocial world of girls was premised on an affinity for sameness and an idealized concept of spiritual love.

Girls' magazines or, more specifically, the girls' novels (*shōjo shōsetsu*) and accompanying illustrations serialized in those magazines developed a recognizable aesthetic and literary style that came to be associated with the "authentic" representation of girls' culture. The artists Takehisa Yumeji, Takabatake Kashō, and Nakahara Jun’ichi in particular created an aesthetic of sameness by featuring pairs of girls with similar or identical features appropriate for the stories of romantic relationships between girls that they illustrated. Likewise, Yoshiya Nobuko’s lyrical, wistful stories of female friendship defined the narrative aesthetic of girls’ novels. I look at two of Yoshiya's most typical novels depicting female friendship, *Wasurenagusa* (Forget-me-not, 1932) and *Ban Sensei* (Our Teacher, Miss Ban, 1938), both serialized in *Shōjo tomo*. At least as important as the stories themselves, however, were her flowery, ornate language and overdetermined use of polite speech. Yoshiya’s narrative aesthetic, like the illustrations that accompany her work, was part of the creation of girls’ culture.

The private discourse on girlhood that developed in girls’ magazines enabled the postwar development of girls’ comics, or *shōjo* manga. A recognizable *shōjo* manga aesthetic was formed in large part by artist Takahashi Makoto, who adapted the style of illustration from prewar girls’ magazines, particularly the work of Nakahara Jun’ichi, to a manga format. I examine in detail two of his early manga stories, *Paris–Tokyo* (1956) and *Sakura namiki* (Cherry Row, 1957), as transitional works. Both stories show a hybrid style between illustration and manga, and also a tendency to favor familial love over romance.

A dramatic change in the content of *shōjo* manga occurred in the early 1970s, when artists, mainly young women, began creating psychologically complex stories that addressed teenage girls’ sexual desires. However, since *shōjo* manga evolved from prewar girls’ magazines, they also inherited the generic tendency to rely on homogender romance and sameness in romantic pairs. Two of the genre-defining works of the 1970s that struggle to create satisfying romance narratives are *Tōma no shinzō* (The Heart of Thomas, 1974) by Hagio Moto and *Bersaiya no bara* (The Rose of Versailles, 1973) by Ikeda Riyoko. These works reflect some of the major changes that took place from the 1950s through the 1970s as *shōjo* manga took shape as a coherent genre. The reliance in *shōjo* manga on homosexual romance between boys, gender switching, and androgyny is linked to the legacy of prewar girls’ culture. Although girls’ culture is no longer closed and private, many of its features derive from prewar girls’ magazines.
In the postwar period, in shōjo manga from the 1970s and beyond, depictions of homosocial relationships shifted from friendship between two girls to the love between two boys. Regardless of gender, however, even in postwar shōjo manga adolescent development remains a central theme. The important contribution of girls’ culture has been its discourse on the process of identity formation, that is, a narrative that mirrors the changes the adolescent reader is also experiencing. These narratives legitimize the emotions of girl readers through an aesthetic that girls accept as authentically addressed to them, reflected in the popularity of girls’ magazines. This aesthetic that has developed through the twentieth century is a primary agent of what Ōtsuka calls the “shōjoization” of Japan, but, rather than creating a nation of children, I see this process as giving that girl-driven image of the shōjo cultural legitimacy, contesting the older patriarchal version of girlhood.

In examining the competing discourses on the shōjo, I find that girls’ culture offers less a direct rebuke to the patriarchal discourse than an alternate vision of girlhood. For that reason, this study is not concerned with representations of good girls versus bad girls or with locating subversive or radical ideology in girls’ culture texts. Rather, this is a study of representations of the ordinary girl, the normative image of girlhood that arises in response to the competing demands of conservative social mores and girls’ adolescent desires. While girls’ magazines and shōjo manga may not contain an overt feminist ideology, nonetheless, they have provided girls with a protected space to participate in their own culture, to express and read about the emotional experience of adolescence. The intense attachment to those texts, recorded by readers in the pages of the magazines and in fan letters, speaks to the importance of the shared experience of girls’ culture.