

POST-SHŌJO: WOMEN IN JOSEI MANGA AFTER 2010

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the portrayal of women protagonists in josei manga, a genre for adult women in the 2010s. Unlike traditional otaku's consumption of characters—especially attributes, in josei manga produced by and for women consumers, the focus of creation and consumption is on the "small narratives," that is, the relationships between characters—a dynamic balance with tension.

In analyzing toshishita manga as an example of josei manga, I will discuss the construction of relationships by combining the gender display theory. Toshishita manga reflects the gender dynamic of women overtaking men in the characters' interaction, and to some extent interrupts social gender expectations and stereotypes. "Toshishita," a forbidden relationship that emphasizes the age gap, suggests the presence of the censorious gaze of the society, which offers Japanese women the possibility of subversion of everyday life and patriarchal norms, thus giving legitimacy to establish a new gender order.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yuanxue Jing is an M.A. student in Asian Studies at Cornell University with research interests in Japanese media and subcultures. She graduated from Communication University of China and New York Institute of Technology in 2020 with a dual BFA degree with Summa Cum Laude.

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INTRODUCTION

While we can perhaps summarize male-oriented manga through the categories of shonen manga (manga for young boys), seinen manga (literally "youth manga"), and adult manga, it is difficult for anyone to give a clear classification of women-oriented manga. Unlike the forever young and innocent girls in shōjo manga—manga that depict romantic relationships or emotions with teenage girls as the target audience—their former readers have grown up, and the image of women in manga has also changed subtly during this decade. This is also the title of my thesis, "Post-Shōjo:" I define it as mature women who are no longer "shōjo." The key to distinguishing whether they are "mature" or not is to compare them with other reference points, and this is what I will specifically explore in a genre called "toshishita manga," which targets adult women and focuses on the romantic relationships of professional women in their thirties and teenage boys. Not only is the subject matter itself subversive—directly depicting the gendered power reversal between men and women—but more importantly, unlike other otaku-oriented manga, it emphasizes "relationships" rather than "characters" as the most important part of "josei manga," a manga genre for adult women. When women readers, as adults, stop participating in romantic stories as shōjo, but observe them from the perspective of a spectator, they ultimately contribute to the emergence of manga that emphasize narrative from the consumer-producer perspective as well.

The blurring of categories and audiences in manga is not only related to the large number of themes and subgenres, but also to the expansion of women readers' readership and their age groups. Traditionally, women-oriented manga includes shōjo manga and Boys' Love manga (fictional works featuring gay love), to which "ladies' comics" (redīsukomikkusu) or "lady-comi" (redikomi) and Teen's Love manga

(*tinzurabu*) have been added, and has even come to incorporate seinen manga, as something without a clear gender difference in its target audience demographic. These manga for older teenage girls and adult women can be collectively referred to as "josei manga"—literally, "women's comics"—and are characterized by their depiction of women in real life. In contrast to *shōjo* manga, which depict idealized romantic fantasies, josei manga sometimes do not even contain romantic relationships, and sex is clearly separated from love. In recent years, josei manga magazines such as *Flowers* have also published many autobiographical manga, or essay manga, as well as story manga.

By and large, the main themes of josei manga in the 1990s were love and sex; in the 2000s, work; and in the 2010s, a balance between the two prevailed, with most works beginning to be geared toward women's everyday lives. Set in the atmosphere of the bubble economy, manga such as Okazaki Kyōko's "Pink" and Anno Moyoco's "Happy Mania" depict the complexities of women who are eager to fall in love and consume, as well as the flamboyant and debauched yet empty lifestyles of women in the age of consumerism. This is related to the conventional depictions of the atmosphere of the 1990s: in a highly developed consumer society, people who were materially enriched were unable to satisfy their spiritual desires, and a sudden outbreak of nihilism, indifference, and a sense of isolation pervaded the entire society, or what sociologist Miyadai Shinji called "endless everyday" (*owarinaki nichijō*)—a sense that society could no longer offer people a meaningful existence (1995, 19). In order to maintain the self-stability, apocalyptic, suicide or drugs and psychedelic become the way to confirm the meaning of one's existence. A less radical means is "sex"—the endless everyday dissolves the meaning of love, which forces urban women to choose a survival strategy that uses intensity (sex) instead of meaning (love), with their existence built on the exploitation of their bodies. Miyadai discusses this

phenomenon in more detail in *Dismantling the Subculture Myth*: the sex boom emerged simultaneously with the "shinkō shūkyō" (new religions) boom from the 1980s until the mid-1990s (2007). The more the sex boom flourished, the more people became disappointed that they could not receive full recognition in sex, and it was because religion could serve as an alternative source of such full recognition that the religious boom was able to thrive. Thus, the sex boom and the religious boom are functionally equivalent in terms of meeting the need for full recognition. Their parallel development since around 1980 marks the beginning of the "age of the self," that is, the age when self-stability began to be valued.

In the 2000s, manga depicting women in the workplace gained popularity. Among the most popular of them were Okazaki Mari's "Suppli" (Sapuri), depicting the female protagonist working in advertising agencies based on her own experiences, and Anno Moyoco's "Hataraki Man," featuring a woman who is a weekly magazine reporter. On the one hand, the popular of works like this can be linked to the fact that it had been 15 years since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was established in 1985, and the number of women in functional positions has increased. On the other hand, in Uno Tsunehiro's words, the shift of josei manga from "love and sex" to "work" can actually be seen as a kind of "decisionism" (ketsudanshugi) (2008, 61), that is, a choice must be made (in order to survive) and the corresponding responsibility must be undertaken. "Love and sex" can certainly be used as an illusion to fill the missing "relationship," but they cannot guarantee the status of women as independent subjects within a state of rapidly changing socio-economic relations (Wang, 2019). This is also the reason for the emergence of a series of works with a strong female protagonist and where romance is not the dominant element.

In the 2010s, works dealing with gender inequality and challenging existing gender concepts began to proliferate. This was influenced not only by social events

such as the MeToo movement and discrimination in admissions to Tokyo Medical University, but also by the fact that women were becoming aware of the irrationality of their daily lives on social networks and were sharing this awareness with each other. The monthly women-oriented manga magazine *Feel Young* originally had the slogan "Love and work go hand in hand!" (Koi moshigotomo!) on its cover, but in 2013, they removed that slogan. Editor Kajikawa Megumi explained that this was because the artists were portraying work that could no longer be defined by "love" and "work." For example, Tsurutani Kaori's "BL Metamorphosis" (Metamorufōze no engawa) depicts the communication between a 75-year-old widowed woman who is into Boys' Love manga and a high school girl, while Fumi Fumiko's "Love and Curse" (Ai to noroi) describes how the author herself was sexually abused by her father when she was a child and ignored by her other family members, who were obsessed with religious activities, and her journey to self-redemption after she grew up. A keyword for josei manga of the 2010s would be "freedom"—in other words, it's acceptable not to be a mother or a shōjo, or to not have children or fall in love. Compared to the works of the previous era, josei manga of the 2010s focused more on the marginalized, but the real purpose was not to expose the other side of society, but rather to provide legitimacy for the "freedom" of urban women by portraying these characters (Wang, 2019).

If shōjo manga, where love is paramount, has the potential to solidify heterosexual hegemony and gender stereotypes under patriarchy, then perhaps josei manga has taken on the task of tending to this "aftermath." Josei manga researcher, Oda Makoto, pointed out that most women-oriented manga focuses on relationships between the characters, so readers will have a sense of empathy. It is important to note that this "empathy" is not with the characters, but with the narrative and the relationship between them. A character who is independent of the text is difficult to empathize with; only with the context of the story can the reader empathize

with the situation one finds oneself in. This is an important point that distinguishes women manga readers from male otaku—they place more emphasis on characters with fluid relationships with each other, rather than characters made up of elements drawn from a database, as was described by Azuma Hiroki (2009, 47). In the next chapter, I will take on the example of toshishita manga, a genre of josei manga that focuses on a romantic relationship with age gaps (women in their 30s and teen boys), to analyze the visual appearance of the characters and discuss how the female protagonists of toshishita manga, or "onē-san" (the older woman) are characterized differently from shōjo so that they are not consumed as fetishes. I will analyze how toshishita manga authors select and use visual elements of multiple media to construct individual characters: the mundane appearance of these characters makes them more likely to be constructed from a narrative perspective than if they were assembled by taking elements from a database. However, this is not to say that Azuma's theory is inapplicable to josei manga: authors of toshishita manga carefully use character attributes to help readers quickly understand character orientation, while using manga techniques such as juxtaposing panels to avoid characters existing independently from the text. In such process, moe elements—visual elements that effectively evoke a sense of "cuteness" of the consumers (Azuma 2009, 42)—still play a role in positioning the character's personality and attributes, only the character's moe no longer takes precedence over the narrative, making the readers place more importance on the storyline than on fetishistic consumption. Moreover, the key difference between onē-san and shōjo is that by actively interiorizing the male gaze, emphasizing femininity, and appealing to male aesthetics, onē-san achieve the goal of gaining more control (Berger 2008, 46). The act of becoming the object of another's desire or satisfying another's desire cannot be equated simply with the loss of one's agency. The advantage of being gazed at is that on the one hand it can be empowering, bringing

initiative—by becoming the focus of attention, they can take control of resources—and on the other hand, it can bring the narcissistic pleasure that comes from internalizing the desires of others.

In the second chapter, I will analyze the construction of relationships between characters from an interactive perspective, in the context of Erving Goffman's interpretation of gender display (1979, 3)—in other words, how some different postures or gestural language expressing gender class identity can create the impression of "femininity" or "masculinity," especially as demonstrated in gendered advertising. I will explain how toshishita manga embodies the gender dynamic of women overtaking men, and to some extent breaks the social expectations and gender stereotypes of individual behavior. "Onē-san" is no longer a character to be desired and gazed at but instead draws the man into the position of being desired. Subsequently, I will compare toshishita manga with shōjo manga and Boys' Love manga to show that female protagonists in josei manga can enjoy sex as women themselves, rather than seeing it as a detriment and sacrifice. Toshishita manga rarely builds on fantasy texts, indicating the presence of the censored gaze of the real society. The forbidden relationship of the toshishita couple offers the possibility of a subversion of everyday life, especially of patriarchal norms, and gives Japanese women the legitimacy to establish a new gender order.

CHAPTER 1
CHARACTER'S RETURN TO THE TEXT

Toshishita Manga vs. Database Consumption

In the postmodern environment, characters are flattened and made into symbols. For otaku, who are passionate consumers of anime and manga, etc., storytelling is irrelevant, as long as the characters have attractive labels from the database to satisfy the consumption needs. Itō Gō names this phenomenon of characters becoming more independent from the original works as "autonomization of character" (*kyara no jiritsu-ka*) (2005, 95), referring to the change in the ways of reading: while readers used to read manga by understanding the storyline in first and then appreciating the characters, from the 1970s onward, a large proportion of readers were able to enjoy the characters independently of the story, or "kyara," the attributes of the character. If we take a traditional adventure story as an example, otaku readers will be more inclined to consume characters such as the hero, the magician, the elf, and various "kyara" such as appearance, personality, and even fetish, rather than the adventure process as a narrative.

In a conversation with Itō Gō and Natsume Fusanosuke, Azuma Hiroki mentioned that characters in anime and manga are divided into "kyara" and "character," and that "kyara" = "drawing" and "character" = "story" (2007, 124). Kyara are also defined as having the possibility of "wandering away from the text" (Itō 2005, 97). More and more characters can be consumed even without a worldview or story to support them. For example, the character "Uzumasa Moe" designed by the Kyoto Municipal Transportation Bureau in an advertisement to encourage people to travel by subway, and the avatar characters "Madobe Yuu" and "Madobe Ai" designed on the packaging of Microsoft Windows 8 when it was released in Japan, demonstrate that

characters are widely available as individual objects of consumption. Such a phenomenon has given rise to the birth of a portion of anime with mediocre storylines but hugely popular characters. It is easy to see that, at least in the production and consumption of otaku products (and "reverse harem" works in which a female protagonist has romantic relationships with several male characters), the characters in the story have gone beyond the story itself. In order to satisfy the readers, the authors' creative approach has also gradually shifted from the pursuit of the story to the pursuit of character.

According to Azuma Hiroki, the way otaku consume is to extract "moe elements" from characters and create a database of labels for consumption (2009, 31). Although Azuma emphasizes the moe elements of the characters while downplaying the importance of the story, in the chapter "The Dissociated Human" in *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, he also points out that otaku's desire for story/small narrative is growing in database consumption (2009, 74). While the grand narrative is withering in the postmodern condition, the small narrative still exists and is gaining importance. The two are not exclusive, but dissociated and coexisting; it is in this coexistence that the postmodern nature of database consumption is reflected. Although I think Azuma overemphasizes the influence of character attributes in consumption, his acknowledgement of the importance of small narratives is insightful: "small narratives" can be seen as "relationships" between characters, a dynamic balance with tension. I believe that in ladies' comics produced by women and for women consumers, it is not the characters that are consumed, but the relationships. In the case of *toshishita* manga, which emphasizes the age gap, it is not possible to fully render "character autonomization" and character attributes as separate from the text. The characterization of the female protagonist as "onē-san" actually exists to satisfy the relationship of "toshishita" (a state of the man being younger), and it is also difficult to

separate this descriptive relationship property from the narrative. Although there are independent moe elements such as "onē" and "shōta" that can be separated from the text, toshishita does not simply integrate them but serves as a kind of unique relationship that to some extent suggests power inversion: due to his lack of life experience, the man who is supposed to be in a dominant position has to depend on the woman in terms of social status and economic conditions, and this woman even has a decisive influence on whether he can become an "adult." Therefore, if it exists apart from the context, toshishita would lose its subversive meaning. I will refer to the "older female protagonist" as "onē-san" and the "younger male protagonist" as "otōto" in order to emphasize the embodiment of this relationship in toshishita manga.

However, this is not to say that character attributes are completely ineffective in toshishita manga: onē-san is indeed labeled as embodying certain tropes at the beginning of the plot. To help readers quickly understand her characterization—especially in her milieu—she has apparent and stereotypical character attributes early in the story. She tends to be not good at housework, judged to be unfeminine (not cute/unpopular with male peers), and as someone who "acts like a man"(rational and efficient). This brings to mind a particular phenomenon in Japanese society, as described by Saitō Tamaki in both *Character seishinbunseki* (Character psychoanalysis) and *Shōnin o meguru yamai* (Disease over recognition): the "alienation" of students from themselves driven by the "class" and the "need to be recognized" in the classroom. Specifically, a "kyara" is a hypothetical personality that is automatically assigned within a group to facilitate communication—when students have the identity of a given "kyara," it helps to predict each other's reactions, and communication is often ultimately a "mutual confirmation of kyara" (Saitō 2013, 71-72). While the assigned kyara does not necessarily match that person's self-perception, failure to play the kyara can lead to rejection by the group - in Saitō's words, any form of change,

including growth and maturation, is avoided because it "undermines the 'kyara' and can interfere with peer relationships" (2013, 72). The same goes for onē-san in their thirties, who play the kyara of the "unpopular old women" and "iron ladies" in the workplace, as opposed to the "normal" and "cute" women who actually cater to hegemonic masculinity. However, it is in the development of the plot that they crack, or rather blur, the labels they carry.

Through small narratives, otōto contrast and conflict with onē-san—the contradictory relationship of "toshishita" becoming a good basis for conflict—and help them to discover that these seemingly inherent attributes of themselves are not immutable. However, it is onē-san herself who decides whether to change. Readers will find a fluid quality about onē-san, a multidimensional image that makes it difficult to generalize with just a few attributes. Rather than catering to others (whether it is the censored eyes of the society within the manga or consumers outside the manga) by changing character attributes or using them as a selling point, onē-san allow readers to identify with them through their stories. In other words, this is the reverse of the usual character consumption process, in which characters with specific attributes are created to appeal to consumer preferences, and narrative no longer matters; in the case of ladies' comics exemplified by onē-san, narrative even takes precedence over character attributes. Furthermore, onē-san do not need to completely change the logic of how they act to gain recognition; they prove that even as flawed people, "even if not being recognized," they can still have everyday lives.

Onē-san vs. Shōjo: Different Species of Women

Although the above mentioned onē-san is to some extent male-like, this does not mean that she is visually masculine. Unlike the "tomboys" in shōjo manga, onē-san in the toshishita manga do not deliberately eliminate femininity and imitate masculinity

in order to gain recognition from a hegemonic male perspective of "acting like a man." On the contrary, onē-san express their femininity to the fullest, not by creating the illusion of equality to balance gender dynamics, but by challenging male hegemony from the front. In order to help the audience quickly understand that the image of onē-san is completely different from that of shōjo, manga authors use typical features such as costumes and props to reinforce the image of her as a mature woman: her secondary sexual characteristics will be deliberately emphasized, such as a mature body that signifies fertility and desire and a dangerous seductive power that breaks social taboos (as opposed to the virginal innocence of the shōjo). Shōjo represent a projection of fantasy and are often associated with innocence and dreaminess. Ōtsuka Eiji points out that the bodies of teenage girls are given special added value because they are "forbidden bodies" (1989, 169). In contrast, white lace, petals, bubbles, feathers, and other elements that mark the fragility and fantasy of shōjo never appear on onē-san's body, and "pure and sweet" is hardly a synonym for her. In terms of clothing, onē-san's mostly wears dark colors, unlike the elaborate white lace, bows, fluffy skirts or school uniforms that represent shōjo (or more accurately, virgins), onē-san's closet is more in line with reality, such as turtleneck sweaters that reflect maturity, suits and sheath dress that are common in the workplace, and black lace-trimmed underwear with sexual connotations. Unlike shōjo, a phantom that exists only in the imagination, onē-san's clothes are closer to the image of real-life office ladies: there are few decorations and their hairstyles are mostly side-parted curls or short hair, rather than long hair with bangs.

If a major sexualized trope in shōjo manga is "accidentally" exposing underwear, then the authors of toshishita manga tend to emphasize high heels, cigarettes, and other symbols of "becoming an adult" rather than such adolescent, if unspoken, seduction, playing into the idea of high heels, as fashion statements, fetishes, and tools

of power, helping women to increase their femininity and become more attractive to men through their gait and the swaying of their hips (Smith, E. O., & Helms 1999, 56). In addition, Dietz and Evans reported that in more than 50% of the cover photos of pornographic magazines, women models wore high heels (1982, 1494). It can be seen that for men, high heels are synonymous with being sexy and having a mature allure. However, the fact that onē-san cater to the male aesthetic does not mean that they lose their subjectivity. In order for women to have control over the process of "being seen by men," they must contain and interiorize this process (Berger 2008, 46). In other words, they change the process of men looking at women, which is external to women, into an internal process of women looking at themselves. This is a strategy of gaining subjectivity by conceding one's own subjectivity: when women themselves cannot be the subject of desire, they play the object according to the subject's desires in order to satisfy the subject's projection of desire and thus gain a capacity to manipulate the subject. By actively internalizing the male gaze, becoming the focus of attention and the object of desire, and thus mastering capital resources such as money, networking and social status, women achieve the goal of gaining more control.

If high heels still lure boys into sexual maturity, then cigarettes, an image not usually found in shōjo manga, have a more negative meaning—in fact, even adult characters in shōjo manga are restricted from smoking. The strict regulation of cigarettes in manga may be related to an amendment to Japan's Civil Law: although the age of adults was lowered from 20 to 18, the age of prohibition of alcohol and smoking remained at less than 20 years old. Cigarettes do not represent onē-san imitating men in order to achieve a balance against otōto; on the contrary, they represent an identity that demarcates them from the underage, the absolute negation of shōjo, and the destruction of the men's desire for purity. As Richard Klein invokes Kant's concept of the sublime, cigarettes "are not beautiful, but they are sublime

because they produce a negative pleasure that is accompanied by pain and fear" (1995, 62). It can be said that onē-san is the very one who lures otōto to the ladder of "adulthood," providing both sublime and "the negative pleasure of pain and fear."

Menstruation and Castration Anxiety

The absolute difference between onē-san and shōjo is more in physicality, specifically, the representation of the mature secondary sexual characteristic, menstruation. Although menstruation is also (though rarely) mentioned in shōjo manga, it is never portrayed directly, but in a vague and ambiguous way: for example, when the heroine looks distressed, the hero asks considerately and offers hot water (yes, shōjo hardly ever say directly that they are menstruating). We can see such approach in shōjo manga as fear of seepage between the inner psychic states and the outer body, which can also be seen as abjection (Lunning 2011, 8). For the body of shōjo, the menstrual blood of the mature woman body represents this seepage, a "great threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside," representing in the heterosexual matrix the cultural onset of the heavy responsibility of women's sexual maturity and fertility (Kristeva 1982, 1). From this, we can see that menstruation is not an attribute of shōjo's body—she is even consciously rejecting it—but a prop that serves the plot without having meaning in itself, just like the trope of the summer festival or the school trip that could happen anywhere distant from the character. Above the realities of blood and maternity, it is a performance of shōjo's dependence on men for support.

In contrast, in ladies' comics, the author not only does not avoid menstruation but even has direct depictions of blood. This time, however, it is the otōto who feels repulsion and fear. In "Asako," when 11-year-old boy Masashi sees blood running down Asako's thigh, the "adult" he most admires, he panics and asks Asako to go to

the hospital. Menstrual blood was unfamiliar to Masashi, who was among his peers in the future of menarche, and he therefore understood blood as "injury." Asako calmly replied, "Oh, it's already time, no wonder it hurts," and let the blood flow down her thighs. Unlike shōjo who are avoiding growing up—and it's worth noting that there are many shōjo have a wistfulness of "wanting to become adults," but never in the sense of sexual maturity—shōjo deny being women themselves, and only after sex is guaranteed to lead to a happy ending will they be open to their maturity, and generally this is when shōjo manga come to an end. For shōjo, she does not need to exist as a woman at all, but rather maintains a neutral existence or pre-feminine existence. In contrast, onē-san is an extremely carnal existence, and her mature body is the basis of her status as "toshiue," senior to otōto. On the other hand, Masashi's anxiety about menstruation can be seen as a denial of women's sexuality and an escape from it, a denial of Asako's existence as a woman. This is reminiscent of Freud's theory: the young boy experiences castration anxiety when he discovers that his mother has no phallus. If the older woman, onē-san, is substituted for the mother, and otōto for the young boy, and the father is seen as the law and taboo that restricts the young child's love and pleasure, then when otōto sees the menstruation, under the influence of the intrusion of castration anxiety, he will agree to obey the law of the incest taboo and choose to preserve his phallus. That is, the renunciation of the mother (onē-san) will be transformed into an identification with the father (social rule), that is, with the male. I will elaborate on the triangular power relationship of onē-san, otōto, and society in Chapter 2.

Onē-san as Femme Fatales

The forbidden attraction of onē-san to otōto is easily reminiscent of Femme Fatale. As Susan Napier suggests, in aesthetic imaginary, women increasingly become

othered, untouchable, and even evil, because they can both support and undermine the coherence of male logic and symbolic order (1996, 53). According to Žižek, the classic femme fatale is support for patriarchal domination: she is on the one hand "the sex-starved and sexually exploited woman of the male masochistic-paranoid fantasy, while at the same time she dominates us, enjoys her pain, and provokes us to violently possess her and abuse her" (2000, 10). The classic femme fatale represents the externalization of the fantasy object, making the impossible real an obstacle. "She is punished, and then the male-dominated order is re-established (Ibid.)." In some adult manga depicting romantic/sexual relationships, groups that are censored in the real world, such as the queer community, and groups that are considered immoral, such as pedophiles and those in incestuous relationships, are often normalized without receiving the scrutinizing gaze of the society portrayed in the manga. In *toshishita* manga, however, the morality and censorship of society is almost the same as the real society in which the reader lives. The more emphasis is placed on the censorship of such incestuous relationships from the society, the more *onē-san's* femme fatale attributes are reflected: in "A Sinful Sister" (*Warui Ane*) by Miwa Makoto, where *onē-san* and *otōto* are blood-related, the heroine Ōmori Hinako sees the rape of herself by her workplace colleagues as punishment for seducing her own younger brother and developing incestuous feelings for him. At this stage, it can be said that Ōmori fits the classic femme fatale: when facing *otōto*, she is sexually aggressive; we can tolerate her desires for an incestuous relationship that undermines the patriarchy because we know that she will eventually pay the price. When subjected to sexual violence by a male colleague, Ōmori lies on the floor with her limbs spread wide, not resisting, but saying, "Please feel free to use my body." She loses all bodily movement, and the control over her is revealed through visual expression. Through the abuse from her male colleague, she is exploited and punished, and the man-dominated order is re-

established. In the postmodern version of the femme fatale, it is the sinful woman who ultimately triumphs. By being "brutally aware of male fantasies and executing them in real life" (Ibid.), she ultimately subverts male domination to the greatest extent possible. In other words, giving illusions directly to men is the most effective way to undermine male domination. In the second half of "A Sinful Sister," through a conversation with her mother, Ōmori realizes that "we are able to recognize each other" and "this is what our family looks like," frees herself from the shackles and fulfills her own desires: she escapes with her younger brother to a seaport city, living an undisturbed life, and the male colleague who violated her is arrested. The new version of femme fatale fully embraces the manipulative rules of men, defeating them in their own rules, and threatens the patriarchal laws more effectively than the ghosted classic femme fatale.

Similarly, onē-san has a kind of control over otōto: in a large number of toshishita manga, onē-san's evaluation of otōto is that he is "cute." This is actually contradictory to the onē-san's own position: subjectively, onē-san does not actively choose "cute" things, such as accessories or dolls, and objectively, she is often judged as "not cute" by others—especially by her peers. The rejection of cute by onē-san on the contrary reflects the importance of "cute" to the traditional stereotype of women. Take the example of shōjo who is usually tied to the description of "cute," when she describes something as "cute," she is not only saying that the thing she sees is "cute," but she is also demonstrating that she herself, recognizing the cuteness, is also cute. In this process, shōjo completes her self-identification. The definition of cute can be condensed into "an aesthetic that yearns for immaturity" (Koga 2009, 12). Cuteness keeps Japanese women of all ages in a state of shōjo at an unconscious level, and is a political force that can control women's consumption and daily behavior (Kinsella 1995, 244), thus reinforcing gender norms. In other words, when women use shōjo-

like words to describe themselves, they also unconsciously accept the definition of shōjo as an immature attribute. This is also in line with Yomota Inuhiko's description of "cute": a charming attitude that is dependent on the strategy of the other (2006, 92). Now we can understand why otōto is displeased when the "unlovely" onē-san uses the word "cute" to describe him: it creates a power relationship between the speaker and the listener, by placing the speaker in a position of superiority over the person described as "cute." When onē-san uses the word "cute" to describe a man who is supposed to be in a dominant position, she naturally places herself in a position of power over otōto who is evaluated as cute.

Character Design

Now let's go back to the use of the manga medium. In terms of facial expressions, the biggest difference between onē-san and shōjo is the representation of their eyes. The only pictorial representation of human organs that takes a non-simplified orientation in the characterization of anime and manga is the eyes. Although the characters are fictional, it is the creators who condense the desires of the characters into visual details and form a kind of eye-to-eye with the audience, acting as a wordless exchange of feelings between the object and the subject.



Figure 1.1 (From top left to bottom right): Kamisama Hajimemashita; Warui Ane; Bungaku Shōjo; Asako.

One can notice that even when looking directly at the viewer, shōjo's eyes are hazy and blurred, almost animal-like, at the same time occupying an exaggerated size on the face. Shōjo's eyes are usually downcast, and the pupils are not prominently represented: for example, only the general shape of the pupil is outlined with dark colors or shadows, rather than clearly drawing the pupil with a solid line, thus creating an unfocused gaze that shows the viewer the innocence and non-threatening of shōjo as an object of desire. This out-of-focus gaze reflects the loss of the woman self: inattention sacrifices the sense of subjectivity, while also indulging the attention and control of the body. Onē-san's eyes, on the other hand, are upturned with a definite highlight and pupils. It can be said that their affirmative gaze masters the agency over the body.

With the exception of a few unique styles, most manga depicting romantic relationships are narrated from a single third-person internal point of view. Specifically, it means that the narrator adopts the eyes of the characters within the story, who tend to be more subjective, biased and emotional. Although a large number of these third-person perspectives seem objective, guiding the audience into the text and receiving manipulation through frames and panels is essentially the most subjective form of narrative. This powerful subconscious manipulative nature tends to make readers identify with the text, mistakenly believing that they are not watching but participating in the construction of the story and that the trajectory of the story is moving forward according to their desires and ideals, thus involuntarily creating empathy for the narrator in the story. Since the protagonist is the source of all the information and the reader is able to share in the protagonist's mental activity, it is very easy for the reader to substitute for and empathize with the protagonist's perspective in this situation. Manga authors usually prefer to choose the psychologically active and relatively weak side of the relationship as the main

character to elaborate upon, so in shōjo manga and Boys' Love manga, the main character is usually a teenage girl or "uke"—in queer manga, uke refers to the dominated, entered side, usually with a submissive but sensitive personality as well. However, in toshishita manga, the probability of having onē-san or otōto as the main character is almost the same. What's more, unlike shōjo manga and Boys' Love manga where the narrative subject is single, there is hardly any toshishita manga that does not have a narrator switch. Toshishita manga authors not only develop the narrative through the two perspectives of onē-san and otōto at the same time, but also describes a lot of inner thoughts of the otōto. This is rare in heterosexual manga in general, as internal monologues and psychological activities—visualizing emotional anguish—are usually reserved for female characters (Shamoon 2007, 12). Whether onē-san or otōto is the main narrator, after both sides have become familiar with each other to some extent, the author usually shifts to the other side and completes the characterization or plot with a relatively unfamiliar perspective. In other words, when the toshishita couple establishes a romantic relationship, the external focus of the narrative cuts in and is juxtaposed with the internal focus. On the one hand, readers remain the main narrator on the weaker side, while on the other hand, the original protagonist is viewed from the outside (the dominant side, whether it is onē-san or otōto), providing an objective perspective. Such perspective allows the viewer to literally transcend the dimension in which the characters are located and to have a completely clear grasp of the time, place and characters from the outside where the story takes place. The purpose of the shift in perspective is not to put the viewer into this fictional world, but to observe it objectively. The resulting omniscient narrative, which is a combination of subjective and objective perspectives, can better help readers establish the relationship between the two characters by visually representing the inner thoughts of both sides in

turn, or even by directly adopting a dual perspective for the narrative, in which the author actually invites the reader to identify with the relationship between them.

In contrast, in conventional love manga that depict romantic relationships, there is a large number of first-person subjective shots, where a single female character or male character speaks to the subjective camera, giving the audience a postulated sense of being in the space of that scene together with the character and communicating with them directly, rather than the character-to-character communication in manga. It directly manifests itself in the weakness of the narrative protagonist's presence, so that when the audience enters the textual world of the story from a third perspective, it often creates a hypothetical narrative space of the first perspective of a certain character. This is very common in "harem" works: in "Heaven's Lost Property" (Sora no Otoshimono), for example, the manga contains a large number of subjective first-person shots toward female characters, which leads readers to unconsciously believe that they are interacting with themselves rather than the main character. The audience in such shots will subconsciously unite themselves from the external viewing behavior with the space of the scene in which the story takes place, and the emotions of the audience and the characters can then be agreed upon. At the same time, the male protagonist Tomoki Sakurai often appears in a chibi way—a small and chubby image that resemble a child, even though all other characters have normal body proportions. This elimination of the male protagonist's presence also leads readers to discuss female characters Ikaros, Nymph, and Astraea more than Sakurai. Comparatively, the reader cares more about who Sakurai actually chooses in the end—or rather who the reader chooses—than about the growth of Sakurai. Such kind of consumption out of narrative is the typical consumption of database mode. Unlike these character-centered manga, however, toshishita manga gives equal importance to both sides of the characters that produce the romantic relationship. Not only are first-person subjective

shots rare, but even when a panel appears, it is immediately followed by a reverse shot in an almost side-by-side position, that is, a picture of the viewer's (character's) reaction in the manga text. In addition, the abundance of narration and psychological activity enhances the presence of the narrative protagonists, making them interdependent with the worldview depicted in the manga, and thus making it difficult for them to stray from the text.

Conclusion

In the post-war period, shōjo embraced a new patriarchal aesthetic after breaking away from the culture of "motherhood". The power of women's autonomy was constructed as "moe" elements that could be consumed, creating a huge database of consumer iconography in the minds of otaku culture consumers. Compared to shōjo manga, ladies' comics have a higher level of freedom, where romance is no longer a necessity for the heroines, and they have no reason to need to be saved. Therefore, rather than the ultimate goal of falling in love, it is the growth of the toshishita couple in the relationship that is the focus of ladies' comics, even if sometimes that growth may not point to a good ending in the usual sense.

The "onē-san" image, born under this new trend of escaping from traditional constraints, is not completely free from the male gaze, but by analyzing the imagery and culture behind them in contemporary josei manga, we can understand how some women manga artists express patriarchal culture and whether this expression implies a contradiction. The concept of onē-san provides an interesting and powerful perspective on the analysis of women figures and allows us to reflect on the problems concealed by a feminist view of assimilation with men: women can hold power by the same means as men, but they cannot be separated from male discourse. The tensions that exist in the cultural vein of the Japanese shōjo regarding the female body and the

relationship of the gaze make an in-depth examination of the image of onē-san of great theoretical value. With the emergence of "Girlscape"—a link that combines feminine bodies, affects, objects, and media environments, onē-san, dressed in professional suits, with her dominant social status and discretionary wealth, is not a mere subversion of patriarchy and femininity, but rather a possibility: a new distribution and flow of the female body in visual space and the media milieu (Yoda 2017, 176). The characterization of onē-san is different from that of shōjo in many ways, and although some of these attributes are not uncommon nowadays, it is still necessary to emphasize them—for each "difference" is a rebellion against the existing gender order and the social expectations imposed on women, and offers the possibility of being something other than shōjo. This is also the key part of manga as a product of fantasy: the possibility of assuming beyond the norm, or finding a different future for the norm itself (Butler 2004, 28). This possibility outside the norm is a freedom—the freedom of women to not be shōjo—and the nascent josei manga provide legitimacy to this freedom for urban women.

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CHAPTER 2

A RELATIONSHIP THAT INVADES REALITY

In the previous chapter, I followed Azuma's approach and broke down the two types of characters in toshishita manga—onē-san and otōto—into labeled kyara that can find their counterparts in the database. In this process, I also analyzed how the onē-san differs from the shōjo in many ways in terms of characterization. Next, I will start with the perspective of onē-san and otōto's interaction, first invoking Erving Goffman's methodology of decoding the visual language of commercials. According to my observation, the power dynamics of toshishita couples in manga cover art show powerful women and weak male characters in a way that is rarely seen in heterosexual manga. Then, I will compare and contrast toshishita manga with shōjo manga and Boys' Love manga to examine how toshishita manga represents a more egalitarian romantic relationship in its treatment of gender. Finally, I will look at what might at first seem to be an irrelevant background element: "society" itself, in its role as interveing in the toshishita relationship. In my opinion, "toshishita" depicts more than just onē-san and otōto's relationships; the most fascinating aspect of this subject matter, which emphasizes the age difference, is the violation of moral norms, which explains why the background of this type of manga is always based on the real world: the tension of morality caused by the inequality of age and power. Therefore, in this context, I will consider the society depicted in toshishita manga—an invisible but omnipresent disciplining force that is identical to the norms of the real world—as a "third party" alongside onē-san and otōto. The couple may appear to be a group of only two people, but it is and must be, a "triad" (Simmel 1902) that includes society; otherwise, the emphasis on the key element of "toshishita" is meaningless. At the same time, the indispensability of society in toshishita is also a critique of Itō's statement

that characters can wander outside the narrative (2005, 97). It is worth noting that although "society"—or "the world"—appears as a third party, this does not mean that toshishita manga is a "sekai-kei" work, another popular subgenre of Japanese pop cultural works where the relationship between the hero and heroine is directly linked to the survival of the world. On the contrary, the characters in toshishita manga use falling in love as a strategy of resistance to everyday life, challenging the patriarchy with the inversion of gender power and making the non-everyday everyday.

Gender Display

In discussing how the toshishita relationship is represented, the most straightforward way to begin is with a visual analysis of the images, and one of the most visual representations is the cover of the manga. Visual images act as a powerful socialization agent, subliminally entrenching gender differences and patterns of control in social interaction. For Erving Goffman, gender is any cultural setting associated with biological sex, and gender display refers to the non-verbal, conventionalized depiction of these associations (1979, 69): they are different poses or gestures that express gender class identity, thus creating the impression of "femininity" or "masculinity" for people who are present. Goffman attempts to decode symbolic gender behavior patterns through a content analysis of advertising images: a visual interpretation of commercials that is similar to a textual analysis of language. For Goffman, advertisements do not necessarily depict the behavior of men and women in real life, but rather how people imagine men and women to behave—in other words, these commercials contain constructive social intentions. Thus, advertising is a textualized form of imagery that expresses social regulations of individual behavior, and it constantly maintains and reproduces the social order, thus

shaping not only the individual themselves but also the relationship between the individual and others.

Goffman's research on advertising images reflects current socially differentiated approaches to and expectations of different genders. However, when we look at gender displays in advertisements, we are not merely focusing on the stereotypes of gender differences in advertisements or examining the social norms reflected in the gender patterns implied by these stereotypes. Rather, we should be concerned with how the creators of these images are able to weave accessible material within social contexts to achieve their purposes, that is, "how these meanings can be interpreted in the moment" (Goffman 1979, 27). Although the cover of a comic book does not have the impact and persuasive power of an advertisement that indicates "buying this product is becoming the person in the advertisement," it is worthwhile to consider how manga artists, who are also creators of images and externalizers of internal states, transform the body into a visual symbol and allow readers to instantly understand the gendered expressions constituted by the present body. In heteronormative and patriarchal societies where gender roles become the centralized expression of social will, individuals need to constantly and rigorously self-adjust to conform their behavior to the normative expectations of gender roles. If advertising as a public media provides a social practice of standardized gender in everyday life to maintain gendered domination, manga that assemble various fantasies provide another subversive possibility for women's everyday.

Manga covers serve the same propaganda function as advertisements, both of which can pictorialize and focus on experiences that have not been systematically articulated and have yet to take shape. I attempt to adopt Goffman's six-aspect decoding of commercial gender advertisements in gender advertisements (1979) to visually analyze several representative toshishita manga of how the cover images

break down, to some extent, society's gender expectations and stereotypes of individual behavior, and to explain why toshishita can have a subversive effect on male dominance to a certain extent.



Figure 2.1(From top left to bottom right): Hiru to Yoru no Oishii Jikan; Aida ni Hatachi; Kawaisugiru Danshi ga Ouchi de Matteimasu; Asako; Warui Ane.

First, *relative size*. In commercial images, a person's social importance (power, authority, class, prestige, etc.) is expressed by the relative size he/she occupies in the image, especially the height, which is believed to be the result of biological and social selection so that tall and stout men will gain more advantages and dominance than women and children in advertisements. However, in the cover of toshishita manga, onē-san and otōto occupy almost the same size. Due to their age difference, onē-san is usually taller, while otōto is closer to a shōjo in terms of body type—a relatively childlike appearance. Although most otōto in the figure are high school or even college students, they by no means have the body type expected of young adults, let alone being stocky or muscular. The petite imagery cuts down on the size of otōto in the image, giving them an average social weight with onē-san.

Second, *feminine touch*. Women use their fingers to trace and caress the outlines of objects or touch their own bodies more often than men do, a ritualistic touch that

distinguishes them from the utilitarian grasping, gripping, and manipulation often used by men. Interestingly, in toshishita manga, the "object" that onē-san trace is otōto's body. This touch is not only a body-focused movement, but more importantly, when onē-san touches otōto's naked body, especially the sexually suggestive parts such as the chest in conjunction with the pulling away of clothes, their touching hands are more like a seduction to take the initiative, guidance toward sexual maturity, and objectification of otōto's body.

Third, *functional ranking*. When men and women work together face-to-face to perform an activity, men tend to play the role of execution, management, or instruction, and this functional sequence directly indicates the submissive status of the mentee and compliance with the mentor. In areas where women excel or are traditionally dominant, such as the kitchen and the nursing room, men usually perform insignificant activities to circumvent the submissive status or are presented in a comical and childish manner, thus keeping masculinity unaffected in reality. This situation is almost reversed in the toshishita manga: in "The Cutest Boy Is Waiting for Me at Home (Kawaisugiru Danshi ga Ouchi de Matteimasu)," for example, otōto with a spatula in his hand, is in a traditionally female-dominated domain (kitchen and housework), while onē-san's suit shows her social identity—non-domestic, outward, professional. Otōto wears an apron and a pink hoodie, creating a clear contrast with the onē-san's dark blue suit. Rather than avoiding the realm of the feminine, otōto accepts and is comfortable in this "submissive position."

Fourth, *the gendered presentation in the family field*. According to Goffman, the visual presentation of family members can symbolize elements of the social structure of the family—such as social unity, love, social bonding, etc. For example, mothers usually appear closer to daughters and engage in behaviors related to family activities, while fathers stand at a distance from other family members to demonstrate their

symbolic protective role. Although toshishita couples do not yet constitute a complete family with offspring, we can derive the concept of "family" to indicate that women are presented with family identities as wives, mothers, and daughters, and engage in behaviors related to domestic activities, while men are presented as husbands, fathers, and sons, adopting a detached attitude. As seen in the picture, the role of onē-san in "Delicious Time of Day and Night (Hiru to Yoru no Oishii Jikan)" more closely resembles that of the husband—smoking, looking away, and taking a detached distance from the family, while otōto looks out at the audience in her place and receives the audience's gaze. Otōto in "The cutest boy is waiting for me at home" mentioned in the previous point is not only active in the traditional field of women with spatulas and aprons, but the name of the manga also reflects how otōto participates in the household as the "cutest boy": he takes on the role of a wife who cooks dinner at home and waits for onē-san, who presents herself as a husband to come back from work. In "A Sinful Sister (Warui Ane)," onē-san, despite encircling her otōto with a motherly gesture, presents him not as a father figure as opposed to her, but more akin to a protected son. The actions of these couples present women as more detached from the family and men as more intimate, a transgression of the usual division of family roles and gender presentation.

Fifth, *the ritualization of subordination*. In many commercials, men usually occupy a higher spatial position than women, while women usually submit to other people, the environment, or external forces, or show submissive postures such as lying down, bending over, bowing their heads, or even kneeling, to lower their bodies in some form. In contrast, in the positional relationship shown in toshishita manga, onē-san occupy a more upward position and, based on their already superior height, incline their weight toward otōto, creating a sense of oppression for them. A closer look at their physical interaction reveals that when otōto sits on the bed, lies down, or curls up,

onē-san supports her body above him, pushes him from behind, or leans his head against her chest in order to fix otōto within her control. This interaction not only degrades otōto's body and places them in a subordinate position, but also interprets how onē-san takes over otōto's agency with a more feminine—or femme fatale—temperament rather than a sense of masculine power.

Sixth, *licensed withdrawal*. It refers to a mental state in which the woman, although in the scene, is psychologically expelled from the social situation and thus licensed to somehow stay away from the scene, for example, showing expressions of disorientation, eye avoidance, etc. This distraction is also reflected in intimate encounters with men, showing a lost expression and mentally drifting, thus giving the impression of being at a loss and dependent on the protection of others present. Instead, the cover of toshishita manga rarely shows a disoriented onē-san, but rather a dazed otōto. Observing the direction of their gaze reveals that when otōto's eyes are not looking at the audience, they almost always look at onē-san from below and upwards in an attempt to communicate, even though onē-san does not necessarily interact with them, or even looks at the audience outside the frame instead. Otōto's gaze is restricted—he either accepts the audience's gaze, confirming that he is in the position to be gazed at or looks in the direction of onē-san, although not always in response. Onē-san here becomes the object of otōto's viewing, i.e., the object of otōto's projection of desire. However, given that toshishita manga belongs to the broad category of josei manga, and that the audience is predominantly female, whether the gaze of onē-san towards the viewer still belongs to the paradigm of the male gaze needs to be further investigated.

It is thus evident that covers of toshishita manga violate the above six rules for the presentation of men/women interactions in commercials, and that gender dynamics are subverted. We can see how toshishita manga presents gender in compliance with

heteronormative norms, and how the environment and interpersonal interactions are negotiated. The gentle touch, the kitchen, and the dreamy eyes that originally belonged to femininity are now transferred to otōto. If we analyze only the images without considering the narrative content, then it can be said that visually, otōto's masculinity is almost completely replaced by femininity. It is the inversion of otōto's gender temperament and physical sex that allows the viewer to understand the genre of the manga at a glance: a woman-powered romance text. However, the onē-san's femininity is not relatively replaced with masculinity. Her long hair and slender, soft body curves are still in fact displays of femininity. The gendered temperament of onē-san over otōto embodied in toshishita manga is not the same as the traditional masculinity over femininity but is much more complex. This mixed-gender interaction may offer new possibilities for heterosexual hegemonic love patterns.

Comparison with Shōjo Manga and Boys' Love Manga

Next, I will analyze how toshishita manga deals with the event of sex by comparing it to the two typical genres of women-oriented manga—shōjo manga and Boys' Love manga—in terms of how onē-san schemes to seize some of the power under the heterosexual hegemony. In most shōjo manga, love is seen as something irreplaceable that transcends day-to-day life, so girls have to fall in love with male protagonists to define the very meaning of their existence. Fujimoto calls this the "love trap" (1998, 46) : the girl needs to surrender her desires completely to the boy who loves her, and sacrifice herself for him in order to be happy—a definition of "happiness," in my opinion, which refers to shōjo's confirmation of her own existence. The situation of "sacrificing oneself for the love of others to confirm one's existence" in shōjo manga is even more dangerous in the 90s. In a highly developed consumer society, the never-ending daily routine dissolves the meaning of love and replaces it

with "sex" as a means to further confirm the meaning of one's existence. Since shōjo manga are mainly for underage girls, there is hardly any content related to "bed scenes"; when there is, it is in the form of overcoming, or "the ultimate form of self-sacrifice" for the heroine: she has to use the fear and pain associated with sexuality to prove that her love is real (2011, 173). For shōjo, sex is an unknown and dangerous thing to be taken seriously, and it is what Tsunehiro Uno calls a "decision": if she does not sacrifice herself, then she cannot confirm her romantic relationship with the boy, and furthermore, she cannot determine her own existence. In contrast, onē-san in toshishita manga gains control of her body through sex. In "A Sinful Sister," Ōmori had sex with her biological brother Natsuki in high school and abducted him from home, and years later they recognized their incestuous feelings and eventually flee to a distant seaport city together. Although when Natsuki became an adult, he did actively seek out and express his love for Ōmori, and all sexual behaviors that occurred between them were initiated by Ōmori. At the end of the manga, they look at the sea together and Ōmori monologues in her mind, "I have hurt and destroyed many things to survive, and Natsuki must be among them. I traded these experiences for this view, but even so..." Even so, Ōmori, who is already 30 years old, fulfills what she has always wanted since high school: to live with Natsuki even if it breaks ethical taboos. The whole process of subverting social morality ends with the triumph of onē-san, which is based on her sexual and decisive dominance over her otōto. Other toshishita manga have more sexually aggressive onē-san, such as Misa in "20 years apart" (Aida ni Hatachi), who asks Reona, a high school boy twenty years younger than her, on their second meeting if he is interested in a sexual partner. Asako in "Asako" teaches Masashi, who is still in elementary school, "the way to become an adult." Sex is not just a detriment or sacrifice for onē-san, but a dominant power over the immature otōto. When the age difference is too great, these acts of assault are not even

necessarily about the onē-san enjoying sex, but about simply satisfying their desire to toy with men.

As mentioned earlier, shōjo manga are mainly for underage readers, so sex scenes are avoided as much as possible. As a way to satisfy women's fantasy of sexual equality, the Boys' Love/yaoi genre then emerged. Some scholars argue that this shift allowed women to adopt various sexual roles and power dynamics to escape oppressive gender roles (Senda 2012, Stanzani 2012); however, the female body is inevitably erased in BL manga, so some scholars also point out that BL/yaoi comes at the cost of misogyny, and female sexuality is essentially passive (Ueno 1989, Fujimoto 1998, Suzuki 1998, Saito 2011, Hori 2012). For these scholars who see BL genre as women's fantasies of sexual equality, the consensus that can at least be reached is that BL manga are self-projections of independent women's fantasies of repressed sexuality. Specifically, projective identification is an unconscious self-defense mechanism that projects the psychological confusion and anxiety caused by the divided and repressed self onto the other in order to restore their psychological equilibrium (Rosenfeld 1971). It is by transferring the inherent danger of heterosexuality to women onto two men that BL manga artists enable women readers to endorse desire and enjoy sexuality without the female body. In this regard, toshishita manga has made important strides as a heterosexual manga genre; this is corroborated by Watanabe's observation that popular manga for adult women are increasingly adapting what BL fans consider to be "yaoi-like relationships" in heterosexual romance (Watanabe 2007, 72). Although in toshishita manga, this is done by authors deliberately setting up an age gap to make a difference in economic/social status, etc. As stated in the previous paragraph, onē-san gains sexual dominance through her age and experience, and this must be based on the female body. For otōto, sex is related to the mature female bodies of onē-san, which is dangerous and

mysterious. At this point, onē-san's female body is unconditionally confirmed and can actively build her desires on otōto.

Real Society as a Context

After having previously analyzed how the onē-san in toshishita manga visually achieves agency and even places the otōto in a subordinate position, we now need to pay attention to how this takes place in the context of heterosexual norms. While again appearing to be a deconstruction of traditional masculinity and a subversion of patriarchy, few BL works realistically reflect the real-world regulation and oppression of homosexuality, such as rumors, gossip, and stigmatization. Gayness in most BL works possesses a legitimacy that is difficult to obtain in reality, and sometimes is even normative by default, and this is particularly common in yaoi works. Not surprisingly, many BL stories feature foreign, historical, or fantasy settings, which girl readers use as a means of escaping reality (Shamoon 2007, 7); Hori also points out that BL has a distinctly fantastical nature (Hori 2013). This actually proves, on the contrary, that gayness is unfeasible and difficult to accept in reality. In contrast, toshishita manga consciously emphasizes the taboo nature of incest or the subversion of traditional gender politics: the author points out that onē-san and otōto are at all times bound by the same social morality as we are. Before fleeing with Natsuki, Ōmori states to herself, "The feelings of disgust (from people with the right notions) must haunt me for the rest of my life, no matter where I flee." Thus, onē-san's guilt over transgressions is also a frequent psychological activity depicted in toshishita manga. And ironically, almost every toshishita manga that takes the perspective of female desire achieves a good ending from onē-san's point of view—the best outcome is the approval of both families and a wedding. And even without the approval of universal values, toshishita couples can circumvent the censoring gaze or moral

condemnation in a variety of ways, such as escaping to distant lands or continuing their lives together in a legally ambiguous way (e.g., as a family rather than a couple).

The ubiquity of society emphasizes and testifies to the ethical norm that toshishita manga cannot be separated from the real world, challenging what Itō calls "autonomization of character" from one side (2005, 95). Character, or "kyara" is defined as having "the possibility of wandering away from the text" (Itō 2005, 97), and this is perhaps a relatively less important component of toshishita manga. In addition to describing the age difference between the couples, the term "toshishita" also implies an external gaze on the relationship, which is likely to consider it as unorthodox or taboo. This external gaze reflects a worldview, and this worldview judges the toshishita couple in a way that is almost identical to the world in which the reader lives. This suggests that textual context and character labels are at least equally important in toshishita manga. Because of the high presence of social discipline, I argue that this external gaze should not only be seen as the narrative context in which toshishita manga is built, but should be elevated to the same level as the characters. Therefore, here I will introduce Georg Simmel's concept of "triad," a three-member group (Simmel 1902). The "member" here can be an individual, a family, an organization, or even a nation. Applied to the analysis of toshishita manga, I see onē-san, otōto, and the tie that connects them as a two-person group (dyad), while the social intervention makes it a three-person group (triad). Simmel argues that members of dyads are directly affected by interactions, and thus their relationships are close, interdependent, and strongly exclusive yet unstable. This is especially the case for romantic or marital relationships: once the emotional bond disappears, the dyad is always at risk of dissolution. Compared with the dyad, although the triad has only one additional member, its nature and structure will change substantially: at this moment, each person is dealing with a collective rather than a separate individual. Some

scholars have verified the following assertion emphasized by Simmel (Caplow 1956): the triad relationship tends to be "two against one," so the main tendency of a triad is to separate into a pair and a third party. In toshishita manga, the "third party" is the censorious gaze of society, which is sometimes concretized as the "person with the right notion" that Ōmori needs to escape from, and is seen as an intruder on the relations of the dyad. In a dyad, members can only constrain each other as individuals; in a dyad, there can be a situation where the minority follows the majority. That is, when there is opposition, the minority exists only as an individual, while the majority can still maintain the qualifications of the group, and the majority then constrains the individual with the status and authority of the group. But the case of toshishita manga is more paradoxical: the society as a minority cannot be subordinated to the toshishita couple as a majority. Nor can the dyad of onē-san and otōto be dismantled into society & onē-san or society & otōto, for if the tie of being a couple is lost, then the triad, which is built on top of the dyad, is fundamentally untenable. Therefore, the essence of toshishita manga is to maintain a dynamic balance of three individuals, while onē-san and otōto form a dyad to counter society as a third party.

However, this does not mean that toshishita manga falls into the sekai-kei genre. The so-called "sekai-kei" refers to a common type of story in which the relationship between the protagonist and his love is directly linked to an existential narrative such as "the crisis of the world" (Azuma 2007, 96-97). The characters' actions are directly synchronized with the world's crisis, while some intermediate institutions, such as the government, the state, and society, are barely depicted (Maeda 2010). The protagonist couple is usually an ordinary hero and a shōjo who loves him unconditionally (usually carrying the fate of the world), and she implements her love for the hero at the cost of the world's existence, and then the ordinary hero is recognized and affirmed. Despite the seeming emptiness, sekai-kei gives the characters and readers a meaning that goes

beyond the "never-ending everyday life": they are fulfilled by the full affirmation of themselves through the unconditional love of a shōjo. This is why the two protagonists are strictly opposed to the world: the authenticity of love can only be guaranteed when they are forced to face the extreme situation of death/the end of the world. However, the reality is an endless everyday life that will not bring about the end of the world, which makes such extreme feelings exist only in fantasy texts and hardly recognized in real life, and therefore also further difficult to confirm the meaning of existence.

While sekai-kei works seek meaning by escaping from the everyday, toshishita manga offers the possibility of coexistence between the personal and the everyday life—it even, instead, emphasizes the everydayness. Onē-san and otōto need to constantly confront the social gaze. Specifically, the embodied individuals include both parents and peers, and the intermediate institutions include the family, the neighborhood, onē-san's workplace, otōto's school, and so on. In fact, the logic of the toshishita couple's behavior is to be in the midst of the everyday and to resist it through a non-everyday relationship, which is, a romantic relationship that defies common sense. As a consequence, the happy ending of the toshishita couple challenges gendered hegemony by reversing gender dynamics, thus making the non-everyday everyday and offering the possibility of Japanese women's lives outside the patriarchal routine. From this perspective, the two-people-world relationship dealt with by toshishita manga is more like a challenge and reconciliation with the world (society) rather than a complete opposition in a critical state. Therefore, toshishita manga's narrative must be closely integrated with reality so that it has the potential to provide justification for the non-everyday in day-to-day life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focus on analyzing how toshishita manga visually subverts hegemonic gender politics, and how this dynamic is reflected in the text. In my view, toshishita manga embodies the progression of women-oriented subcultures in the 2010s—the previous shōjo manga and BL/yaoi manga were simply a way for women to fill their void through cultural imagination and consumption, in which sexuality was either offered as a sacrifice or the female body could not be present. These works hardly have the heterogeneous power to destabilize the established gender order, much less breed a resistant gender revolution. Toshishita manga offers a feminist-style practice of gender politics in which onē-san not only does not escape her identity but even establishes dominance over otōto based on the agency of her female body. Admittedly, this dominance comes at a cost - on top of the advantages of experience, economy, and social status given by the manga authors, onē-san need to actively objectify or sexualize their own bodies in exchange for this power to dominate men. In other words, this is an attempt by adult women to rebel within the existing patriarchal system of heterosexuality. As I mentioned in the section on visual analysis, although otōto's appearance and gestures express femininity, onē-san's gender vibe is not relatively replaced with masculinity. Thus, this mixed gender temperament interaction embodied in the toshishita genre offers new possibilities for a model of love under patriarchy.

As josei manga artists turn their attention from fantasy texts to reality, the triadic relationship between toshishita couple and society embodies a dynamic balance of mutual constraints. Unlike the sekai-kei characters who also confront the world, the toshishita couple demonstrates a more feasible practice. Sekai-kei, as a simulated society artificially created by the author, offers self-fulfillment that is difficult to sustain in reality because a simulated society can never replace a highly fluid real one.

The self-affirmation in sekai-kei is no more than a self-directed play within a small group. Both sekai-kei and moe characters, as products of database consumption, are used to achieve self-stabilization by resetting reality. Moreover, the whole database itself can function on self-stabilization: as long as materials are used to maintain self-stabilization, then both reality and fantasy can exist simultaneously in the database. The cost of otaku-oriented characters constantly resetting reality and taking fixed elements from the database to maintain self-stability is that their character and personality may remain the same until the end of the story—only then is the proof of being fully recognized. Unlike the otaku-oriented characters who seek recognition in stagnant fantasies, the toshishita couple confronts the censorious gaze and moral codes of the real world and offers their own solution— to grow up in order to negotiate with the society. "Becoming an adult" is precisely the process of adjusting to the real world, pursuing freedom within the current limited space, and even achieving the reinvention of gender norms. As a result, onē-san, or Japanese urban women, acquire non-everyday romantic relationships that offer new possibilities for current patriarchal daily routine. And as time goes on, there is reason to believe that this feminist practice is likely to become the new everyday.

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