Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, and Occidentalism in the Visual-Verbal Medium of Japanese Girls' Comics

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Introduction

Among the most interesting aspects of the genre of *shōjo manga*, Japanese girls' comics, are its consistent refusal of straightforward realistic representation in both word and image, and its exoticisation of European culture. The comics are renowned for their fantastical narrative and graphic style, as best exemplified by the use of "large, starry eyes, emotive backgrounds, and rule-breaking panel arrangements,"[1] and by the overwhelming presence of interior monologue in the narration. Furthermore, the stories are often set in imaginary Western, generally European, countries, and they use such settings simultaneously as a source of escape from the constraints of everyday reality and as a tool to produce critical distance and induce reflection on cultural and social norms. In this article, I aim to investigate girls' comics' combination of experimental visual-verbal techniques and exoticisation of Western culture, to shed light onto their use of fantascapes as a platform for a critique of social normativity.

I begin the article with a survey of the development of Japanese *shōjo manga*'s distinctive narrative and graphic style, and analyse the implications of its peculiar combination of visual and verbal means, as well as its oscillation between subversive and escapist features. I then provide a brief outline of the representation of Western culture in girls' comics from the 1970s to the present, with particular focus on their use of Christian imagery. The exoticisation of Christianity is a particularly intriguing dimension of their 'Occidentalism,' as it replicates and subverts one of the most pervasive East/West dichotomies, the idea that Asia is inherently spiritual in contrast with the rational, modern West. I conclude by exemplifying my argument with a comparative analysis of two different versions of the same manga series, one in the genre of *seinen manga* (*manga* aimed at a young adult male audience), the other in the genre of *shōjo manga*, and more specifically in the subgenre of

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[1] Deborah Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), p. 100.

Boys Love, one of the most experimental forms of contemporary *manga*, as I will explain.[2] By contrasting the two series' different textual and graphic strategies to represent the same story, I will show how views of culture and society are both reflected in, and reproduced through, the use of the visual/verbal medium of Japanese comics, and how *shōjo manga*, despite their reputation as a 'light' and escapist genre, lends itself to a politically subversive reading precisely because of its fantastical nature.

Blurring the lines, blurring the boundaries
In his analysis of the medium of comic books, Scott McCloud notes that stylised cartoon characters have a stronger emotional impact on readers than realistic ones because they function as a form of "amplification through simplification." As he goes on to explain,

> When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential "meaning," an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't.[3]

This is particularly true of *manga*, Japanese comics, which in McCloud's opinion are more sophisticated than their North American counterparts in their use of stylised images to create empathy in the reader:

> Whether through the iconic faces and varied visual archetypes that needed to be filled in by the reader to bring them to life, or the silent, wandering encounters with environments capable of placing readers within a scene, or the direct connection to real-life experiences and interests of the average reader, or the graphic devices meant to move readers emotionally, as well as literally moving with the action, all of these techniques amplified the sense of reader participation in *manga*, a feeling of being part of the story, rather than simply observing the story from afar.[4]

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[2] Boys Love manga, also known as *shōnen ai*, BL, and *yaoi*, are comics that focus on romantic and sexual relationships between teenage or young adult men, written by female authors for a predominantly female audience. They first appeared in the early 1970s, and played an important role in the development of female-authored *shōjo* manga as an independent and widely read genre in contemporary Japan. For a survey of the definitions of the genre, see Fujimoto Yukari, 'Shōnen ai/yaoi/BL: 2007nen genzai no shiten kara,' *Yuriika* vol. 39 no. 16 (2007), pp. 36-47. The expression is variously transliterated into English as Boy's Love, Boys' Love, and Boys Love. In this article, I will refer to the genre broadly as Boys Love.

[3] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 30.

[4] Scott McCloud, *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 217.

McCloud also notes that this effect is more typical of *shōjo manga*, comics aimed at a female audience, than of *shōnen* or *seinen manga*, comics geared towards a male public. Unlike North American comics, and by extension Japanese boys' comics, in which "the physical positions of characters in relation to one another tend to be carefully shown, as if they were pieces on a chessboard," in *shōjo manga*, especially in emotionally heightened scenes, "the 'action' may be little more than a montage of floating, expressive faces, cascading down the page."[5] As a result, *shōjo manga* "invites the readers to participate in the emotional lives of its characters, not just observe them."[6]

Indeed, since their inception Japanese girls' comics have shown a marked preference for emotion, as well as for anti-naturalistic visual and narrative strategies. In particular, they featured a creative use of panels and frames that disrupted narrative continuity, and a more complex configuration of visual and verbal signs on the page.

While in Western comics, and to a degree in Japanese comics for boys, the text is often a combination of dialogues in speech balloons and short third-person narratives, in *shōjo manga* the text is spread all over the page, with a prevalence of interior monologue and first-person narration. This often translates into a focus on emotions and interiority at the expense of action and plot development.

As Deborah Shamoon has pointed out, a significant influence on this development was the author Takahashi Makoto, who introduced a series of elements that would remain typical of the genre. In particular, he represented characters in an anti-realistic way, with disproportionate eyes full of highlights and thin, ethereal bodies, often disappearing under over-detailed clothes.[7]

He also introduced a creative use of frames on the page, particularly the use of oddly shaped, open, or shattered panels, and of non-diegetic flowery backgrounds to express metaphorically the characters' emotions. Takahashi's most significant contribution to the development of a specific *shōjo* style was the so-called *sandan buchinuki sutairu-ga*, or three-row overlay style pictures, full-figure images of the characters overlaid on the page, unrelated to the narrative, which has remained a central feature of the genre to this day.[8]

In the early 1970s, Japanese girls' comics underwent a series of radical changes thanks to the work of the so-called *24nengumi*, a group of female authors all born in or around 1949, or the twenty-fourth year of the Shōwa era. On one hand, they questioned the rigid division of themes between the genres

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[5] McCloud, *Making Comics*, p. 220.
[6] McCloud, *Making Comics*, p. 220.
[7] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship*, pp. 90-100.
[8] Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship*, p. 95.

of boys' and girls' *manga*, claiming the right for *shōjo* to tackle different themes than romance, which at the time was perceived and portrayed as the only apt topic for girls' comics.

They thus produced works in a variety of genres, such as science fiction or historical drama, with the aim of overturning the generic conventions of their time. At the same time, they expanded on the specific style of *shōjo manga* that had developed in the 1960s, particularly its focus on interiority and its use of visual and narrative complexity. They often presented dialogues and internal monologues spread over the page rather than contained in speech bubbles, while sound effects merged with the drawings to become an integral part of the artwork. Interestingly, these non-realistic graphic strategies played an important role in the comics' representation of social norms, particularly in the realm of gender and sexuality. As Frederick Schodt has shown, Japanese girls' comics contain more explicit sexual representations than their Western counterparts aimed at the same demographics:

> Nudity and scenes of lovers in bed are commonplace, even in magazines where the target reader age is between eleven and thirteen. Artists must adjust to the readership of the magazines they are working for, but sex today is almost always included.[9]

At the same time, the scenes are framed by the indirect and suggestive aesthetics of the genre, so that the graphic depictions of sexual acts are simultaneously showcased and hidden, forcing the readers to fill in the gaps with their imagination. "Unfolding orchids and crashing surf are superimposed on scenes of lovers embracing. Close-ups of clenched hands, tousled hair, and sweating faces allow the reader to imagine the rest."[10] This was particularly true of what is arguably the most experimental, and most controversial, subgenre of post-1970s *shōjo manga*, so-called Boys Love, stories about homosexual relationships between beautiful young men aimed at an audience of teenage and young adult female readers. Although representations of sexual acts are ubiquitous in Boys Love *manga*, the protagonists' bodies are simultaneously eroticised as the object of the readers,' and other characters,' gaze, and de-sexualised in their graphic representation. Furthermore, the comics combine visual and verbal means in a symbolic rather than realistic way, representing sexual acts metaphorically through natural images such as flowers, trees, or waves [Figure 3].

In this respect, *manga* critic Ishida Minori argues that Boys' Love comics generally feature the most sophisticated graphic and narrative

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[9] Fredrick Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983), p. 101.

[10] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 101.

techniques within the production of *shōjo manga* artists. To exemplify her point, Ishida compares the beginning of Takemiya Keiko's first Boys' Love comic, *Sanrūmu ni te* (*In The Sunroom*, 1970) with that of a previous, more conventional *shōjo manga* by the same author, *Runa no taiyō* (*Luna's Sun*, 1969).

Runa no taiyō opens on a long shot of a paved street, with the protagonist walking towards the reader in the distance, accompanied by a first-person narrative passage on the left-hand side of the page that reads: "*Boku wa Pinokio. Ima wa mō yaku ni tatanai ponkotsu robotto sa.*" [My name is Pinocchio. I am a discarded unemployed robot].[11] This is followed by a medium shot of the character in full figure, accompanied by a continuation of the self-introductory narrative giving more details about the character; the page concludes with a close-up shot of the protagonist's face looking at the entrance of a restaurant, with a thought balloon to its left: "*Koko nara tsukatte kuresō da*" [I might find work here!].[12] While the protagonist is represented with the same kind of stylised cartoonish physiognomy described by McCloud as provoking a degree of empathy in the reader, the structure of the first three panels is a rather conventional narrative one, guiding the readers into the world of the story in a straightforward manner and offering them up front all the information they need about the protagonist and his world.

By contrast, *Sanrūmu ni te* begins with an empty landscape, an outside shot of the sunroom from the title, with an ambiguous, poetic monologue in free-floating text on the page that reads as follows:

> A snowy day
> in his sunroom,
> *he* said goodbye
> to his unrequited love
> and slipped away
> from my hands…
> And yet
> he left his burning heart
> with me….
> Etoile
> Etoile!
> To think that
> only now
> I understand
> how much I loved you![13]

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[11] Takemiya Keiko, *Runa no taiyō* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1977 [1969]), p. 3.

[12] Takemiya, *Runa*, p. 3.

[13] *Yuki no furu hi. Kare no sanrūmu de kare wa ippō tsūkō no koi ni sayonara shite, boku no*

Compared to the incipit of the previous comic, this one demands a much greater interpretive effort of its readers. While the text begins with a first-person narrative, we don't know the name of the narrator or anything else about him. The first-person pronoun used, *boku*, tells us that it is probably a male, as does the third-person pronoun used for his partner, although the foreign, exotic name, Etoile, leaves a degree of ambiguity. However, neither character is represented graphically in this introductory panel. All we see is the window of the sunroom on a snowy day, which clearly sets the story in a foreign space, separate from the reality of the readers.

In the third frame on the next page, we finally see the characters, or rather parts of them. First comes a close-up of the face of a boy with black hair, then the hand of someone else at his feet, coupled with the words "*Kirei da, Etuaru…*" [You are beautiful, Etoile…].[14] Even when the words on the page are finally associated with the character that pronounces them, the association is not straightforward; the narrator is still missing a face and a name, while his lover, Etoile, is not given a voice. If *Runa no taiyō* outlined all the information for us in the first three frames, *Sanrūmu ni te* demands a much higher degree of interpretation on the part of the reader.

This creates an interesting effect within the representational strategies of the text. While the male homosexual romance and the foreign setting distance the girl readers from reality, the interpretive effort demanded of them draws them into the text more quickly and more deeply than realistic representation. Such approach is emblematic of the combination of distancing and identification that characterises the genre of *shōjo manga*. While the comics have often been criticised for fostering an escapist attitude towards reality, it is my contention that with their anti-realistic visual and verbal strategies they performed a more complex operation. Through a combination of estrangement and involvement, the comics offered their readers a space in which to distance the conventions of the society they lived in, and to reflect critically on its social and cultural norms.

This was in striking contrast with the contemporaneous genre of *seinen manga*, comics aimed and a male young adult audience. *Seinen manga* of the 1980s and 1990s such as Hirokane Kenshi's *Buchō Shima Kōsaku* (1983-92), that narrates the life of a successful salaryman, or his *Kaji Ryūsuke no Gi* (1991-1998), the story of the successful political career of a young politician from the Liberal-Democratic Party, displayed a high level of narrative and

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te kara tobidatte itta… sono kuse kare no moeru kokoro wa boku ni nokoshite… Etuaru, Etuaru! Ima ni natte kimi o konna ni aishite ita to wakaru nante! Takemiya Keiko, *Sanrūmu nite* (Tokyo: Asahi sonorama, 1976 [1970]), p. 3.

[14] Takemiya, *Sanrūmu*, p. 5.

graphic realism. Interestingly, this was often combined with a neoconservative agenda, and the *manga* promoted issues such as the remilitarisation of Japan and anti-immigration laws. Combining accurately researched content with an objectifying and photographic style had the effect of erasing the authorial function, making the comics' message pass for an objective, neutral statement of fact, downplaying its ideological content.

As Sharon Kinsella has noted, "the presentation of new political ideas within stories dense with factual detail tended to give the impression that these ideas were not political aspirations so much as educated descriptions of objective reality."[15] In contrast, through its reliance on fantasy and an anti-realistic graphic and narrative style, *shōjo manga* often became the vehicle for unconventional views of contemporary politics and society. Paradoxically, because of their reliance on an anti-realistic narrative and visual techniques, the comics have often been dismissed as superficial and escapist. To cite Kinsella again,

> In the mid-1970s early girls' manga was perceived by some left-wing critics as a reactionary cultural retreat from politics and social issues to petty personal themes. Girls' manga and soft (*yasashii*) culture were associated with the decline of political and cultural resistance in the early 1970s, sometimes referred to in Japanese as the 'doldrums' (*shirake*). But by the 1990s, individualistic personal themes in girls' manga were being perceived as stubbornly self-interested, decadent and anti-social.[16]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, scholars such as the aforementioned Ishida have reassessed girls' comics as a literary genre worthy of critical attention precisely for its graphic and narrative experiments. In particular, critical analyses of *shōjo manga*'s unique use of the visual-verbal medium of *manga* have been instrumental in the process of recognising the social and political value of their anti-realistic graphic and narrative style.[17] In the second part of this article, I will build on their work and expand on it to investigate one particular example of *shōjo manga*'s use of anti-realistic visual and verbal strategies as a platform for social and cultural critique, namely its

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[15] Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture And Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), p. 175.

[16] Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 138.

[17] See, for example, Fujimoto Yukari, *Watashi no basho wa doko ni aru? Shōjo manga ga utsusu kokoro no katachi* (*Where do I belong? The shape of the soul as reflected in girls' comics*) (Tokyo: Gakuyō shobō, 1998); Oshiyama Michiko, *Shōjo manga jendā hyōshōron: dansō no shōjo no zōkei to aidentitii* (*Girls' comics gender expression theory: the structure and identity of cross-dressing girls*) (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 2003).

representation of Japan's complex relationship with Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, and Occidentalism.

Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, and Occidentalism in *shōjo manga*

Foreign settings have been omnipresent in girls' comics from their inception. The first *shōjo manga* ever published, Tezuka Osamu's *Ribon no kishi* (*The Princess Knight*, 1953) was set in an imaginary European kingdom and told the story of Sapphire, a girl passing as a boy in order to inherit her father's throne. The format proved widely popular, and the combination of exoticism and gender bending quickly became a staple of the genre. European settings had a particular appeal among female readers. As Frederick Schodt notes,

> …far more stories in Japanese girls' comics magazines are set in Europe and the United States than is the case with boys' comics…Foreign settings create an exotic quality, with storybook scenery and fashions, and allow heroes and heroines to act in ways that are not always socially possible in Japan.[18]

This feature acquired further significance in the 1970s with the '*manga* renaissance' prompted by the activities of the *24nengumi*. 1970s *shōjo manga* almost invariably featured exoticised European settings and characters, and the romanticisation of Europe played an important part in the comics' critical reflection on the cultural and social norms of their time, particularly in the realms of gender and sexuality. As James Welker notes, in these comics, "the space of the foreign was at once the object of an insatiable longing and a means of sending and receiving messages about sexual and gender alternatives unavailable elsewhere."[19] In this respect, too, the subgenre of Boys Love was at the forefront, and most early Boys Love stories, such as Takemiya's *In The Sunroom*, but also her *Kaze to ki no uta* (*A Poem of Wind and Trees*, 1976-1984), were set in exoticised and eroticised in European countries.[20]

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[18] Frederick Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 92.

[19] James Welker, 'From *The Cherry Orchard* to *Sakura no sono*: Translation and the Transfiguration of Gender and Sexuality in Shōjo Manga,' in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, eds. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 160-173, p. 162.

[20] To cite just a few examples, Yamagishi Ryōko's *Arabesuku* (Arabesque, 1971-75) takes place in the Soviet Union; her *Shiroi heya no futari* (The Couple in the White Room, 1971) in France, as does Ikeda Riyoko's *Berusayu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles, 1972-73); Ikeda's *Orufeusu no mado* (Orpheus' Window, 1975-78) unfolds between Germany and Russia. Aoike Yasuko's *Ibu no musukotachi* (The Children of Eve, 1976-79) is set in England, and Morikawa Kumi's *Kimi yo shiru ya minami no kuni* (Knowst Thou the Country of the South, 1977) in Italy.

It is my contention that the exoticisation of Europe in Japanese girls' comics replicates and subverts the conventions of Orientalism as described by Edward Said. The *manga* portray the European Other as aestheticised, feminised, and sexualised in the same way as European scholars, travellers, and novelists had represented the 'Orient' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Said notes,

> Just as the various colonial possessions—quite apart from their economic benefit to metropolitan Europe—were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe.[21]

One effect of the construction of such image of the Orient as a site of sexual experimentation is a broader eroticisation of the Asian 'Other' as an object of simultaneous fear and desire. Much in the same way, for *shōjo manga* authors and readers Europe became the ground for sexual fantasies unthinkable in their own society, and this made it a source of both fascination and discomfort. I interpret these dynamics not a simple form of 'reverse racism,' but as an instance of Japan's complex relationship with Orientalism, which dates back to the nineteenth century.

Orientalism as described by Edward Said, in all its three meanings of academic study of the 'Orient,' geographical marker dividing the world into 'Orient' and 'Occident,' and discourse that constitutes "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,"[22] was concerned mainly with the 'Orient' as the 'Middle East,' that is, with Islamic South-West Asia. However, when the European colonial enterprise extended to East Asia, Orientalism often became the primary mechanism to confront the non-Western Other.

In his analysis of the early works of Western scholars on Japan, such as Basil Hall Chamberlain, George B. Sansom and Edwin O. Reischauer, in light of Said's theories, Richard Minear finds many Orientalist features in them, particularly an aestheticisation of Japanese culture and an emphasis on its traditional nature that reifies it and essentialises it as exotic and backward, an object of condescending fascination.[23] Japanese reactions to Orientalist discourse, and to Western representation of itself more broadly, have always been ambivalent. In the Meiji period, advocates of modernisation and

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[21] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 190.

[22] Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 2-3.

[23] Richard Minear, 'Orientalism and the Study of Japan,' *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (1980), pp. 507-512. On Orientalism and representations of Japan see also Toshio Miyake, *Occidentalismi: la narrativa storica giapponese* (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2010).

Westernisation espoused a Eurocentric vision of the world, and strove to position Japan on the side of the progressive and powerful West rather than on that of backward and oppressed East. This was paralleled from a very early stage by anti-Westernist positions, which advocated a rediscovery of Japanese, or more broadly Asian, values against Westernisation, proposing a 'return to Japan' or 'return to Asia' as a better alternative.

Interestingly, the 'return to Japan' discourse was to an extent premised on an internalisation of Orientalist representations, since it portrayed Japan in terms very similar to European descriptions of the country, as traditional, beautiful, spiritual, and emotional, only valorising them as superior rather than inferior. This ambivalence was even more pronounced in the return to 'Asian values,' which supported one of the main assumptions of Orientalism, the reduction of the cultural and linguistic variety of the Asian continent to a single idea of the 'Orient.'

In this perspective, *shōjo manga*'s eroticisation and aestheticisation of the West, that 'orientalises' Europe as a land of beauty, tradition, and pleasures, is a particularly complex and thought-provoking operation, that further complicates our understanding of Japan's relationship with Western culture more broadly, and with Orientalism specifically.

A particularly interesting aspect of *shōjo manga*'s 'reverse Orientalism' is the comics' representation of Christianity, which mirrors the Orientalist stereotype of Asia as inherently more spiritual and/or superstitious than modern Europe, as a "place of pilgrimage" and a source of spiritual regeneration for the spiritually depleted industrialised West.[24] By focusing on the exotic aspect of Western religion, the comics further 'orientalise' Europe and portray it as more spiritual, emotional, and irrational than modern Japan.

Christianity was a prominent object of 1970s *shōjo manga*'s exoticising fascination; the comics were often set in religious schools, and priests, churches, angels, crucifixes, Bibles, crosses, and rosaries were constantly showcased [Figures 1 and 2]. Many stories also displayed a fascination with diabolism and black magic.[25]

Interestingly, this aestheticised Christianity in postwar girls' comics tended to coincide with Catholicism. This is arguably related to the peculiar position of the Catholic religion in the country. When Christianity was reintroduced to Japan in the nineteenth century after a 250-year ban, missionaries of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox faith all came to the

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[24] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 168.

[25] For a discussion of Christianity and Diabolism in 1970s shōjo manga, see Rebecca Suter, 'From Jusuheru to Jannu: Girl Knights and Christian Witches in the Work of Miuchi Suzue,' *Mechademia,* vol. 4 (January 2009), pp. 241-256.

country, and their proselytising had roughly similar results.[26] However, Catholic missionaries did not interact with society at large, preferring to concentrate exclusively on conversions. As Helen Ballhatchet points out,

> The general trend of Roman Catholicism for most of the Meiji period was to ignore political developments and movements for social reform in favor of building a community of believers centered on the priesthood and isolated from mainstream society.[27]

Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, while not much more successful in terms of sheer numbers of conversions, had a much greater impact on mainstream Japanese society, to the extent that *Kirisutokyō*, the word originally used to refer to Protestant Christianity and still sometimes used in this narrower sense, is to this day normally assumed to refer to Christianity as a whole.[28]

In the post-war period, Christianity has arguably exerted only minor influence on Japanese society. The number of Japanese affiliated with a Christian Church of any denomination today is estimated at less than one per cent of the entire population; while there are a number of Christian schools at the primary and secondary level, their curriculum follows the national one, and their impact on education more broadly is arguably rather small. Within this context, Catholics have an even more marginal status. Yet it is precisely this marginality that has made them an object of curiosity within the realm of fiction. For this reason, the representation of the Catholic religion in shōjo *manga* presents us with thought-provoking reflections on the comics' use of 'reverse Orientalism.'

To clarify my point, I will conclude by looking at the specific articulation of these dynamics in two different versions of a comic, the first in the genre of *seinen* and the second in the genre of *shōjo*. Both series are adaptations of a novel by Yamada Fūtarō's, entitled *Makai Tenshō* [*Demonic Resurrection*], published in 1967. The novel centred around the figure of Catholic samurai Amakusa Shirō Tokisada, also known by his baptismal name of Jeronimo, the leader of the last Christian rebellion of Japan before the final ban on the foreign religion in 1638. In the novel, Shirō is resurrected after the rebellion in the form of a demon, and after similarly resurrecting several other renowned samurai, such as swordsman celebrity Miyamoto Musashi, sets out

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[26] According to Helen Ballhatchet, at the end of the Meiji period (1868-1912) there were about 67000 Catholics, 90000 Protestants, and 32,000 Orthodox Christians in Japan. Helen Ballhatchet, 'The Modern Missionary Movement in Japan: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox,' in ed. Mark Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 35-68, pp. 57-58.

[27] Ballhatchet, 'The Modern Missionary Movement,' p. 42.

[28] Ballhatchet, 'The Modern Missionary Movement,' p. 44.

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to destroy the Tokugawa government that had crushed the rebellion and caused his death. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the work was adapted into comic book format. In the *manga* versions, significant differences emerged between the texts aimed at male and female audiences, both on the stylistic and on the ideological level.

Tomi Shinzō's *Makai Tenshō* (1994) belongs to the genre of *seinen manga* or *gekiga*, comics geared towards an audience of adult males. The comic is drawn in the realistic, detailed drawing style typical of the genre [Figure 4]. The text consists mainly of dialogue in balloons, supplemented by a few third-person narrative passages, in boxes clearly separated from the drawing, which summarise the plot and provide details on the historical and geographical setting.

These stylistic choices result in a focus on action in the narrative, and a large proportion of the story is taken up by fights among the samurai demons. Similar to the *seinen manga* analysed by Kinsella, this is combined with conservative ideological positions, particularly in the approach to the theme of cultural difference embodied by the Christian samurai protagonist. Amakusa Shirō, portrayed in Western-style clothes and religious paraphernalia such as crosses and rosaries, is clearly marked as foreigner, and is presented as the ultimate villain of the story. The character is contrasted with that of Yagyū Jūbei, the principal enemy of the demon gang. If Shirō is culturally foreign and inherently evil, Jūbei combines conventional attributes of samurai masculinity and of moral and cultural integrity. His attire is clearly Japanese; he is portrayed as a protector of women and children, and stubbornly resists Shirō's offers to resurrect him as a demon. His cultural and moral purity emphasises by contrast the pernicious nature of Shirō's foreign demonic nature.

Kugo Naoko's *Makai Tenshō—beato no kōshin* (*Demon Resurrection: The Pilgrim's Progress*, 2003) rewrites the same story in a very different light, by imagining a love affair between Shirō and his former rival Jūbei. This is presented in the typical blurry, anti-realistic graphic style of Boys Love, which emphasises the ambiguity of the characters and of the narrative. While in the *seinen* version Jūbei was an emblem of straight masculinity and cultural and moral integrity, in Kugo's version he is presented as a decadent rebel, endlessly drinking *reishū* (cold *sake*) and smoking from a long thin pipe (*kiseru*). He refuses Shirō's attempts to lure him into becoming a demon, and invites him instead to sip plum wine with him among the flowers of his garden. The seduction between the two is mutual, to the point that Shirō falls in love with Jūbei and abandons his plan to lead his gang of demons towards world conquest, focusing instead only on conquering his former rival. This is the

cause of his ruin, and the comic ends with Shirō dying in the arms of Jūbei, ambiguously saying: "it feels good."[29]

While in the *seinen* version Shirō's evil foreignness was contrasted with a morally, culturally, and sexually straight alternative embodied by the character of Jūbei, in Kugo's version everything becomes blurred. No character is clearly demonic or human, Japanese or foreign, good or evil; everyone is hybrid and ambiguous. This is reflected on the visual level in a non-realistic drawing style, with blurred lines, unusual angles, and a complex intertwining of text and image that reproduces the ambiguity of plot structure and characterisation (Figures 5 and 6).

Such narrative and graphic strategies enable the comics to tackle a higher degree of moral and intellectual complexity than its *seinen* counterpart. In this respect, the text is emblematic of *shōjo manga*'s playful and critical approach to culture and society, which enables the comics to take full advantage of the potential of the visual-verbal medium of manga as a platform for ideological critique of both Japanese and Western social and political formations. The case studies I examined in this article thus prove that far from constituting "a reactionary cultural retreat from politics and social issues to petty personal themes," as critics of the 1970s claimed,[30] *shōjo manga* from the 1970s to the present has consistently built on its ability to straddle word and image, East and West, to subvert cultural and gender normativity.

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[29] "*kokochi ii…*" Kugo Naoko, *Makai Tenshō Beato no kōshin* (Tokyo: Asuka Comics, 2003), p. 177.
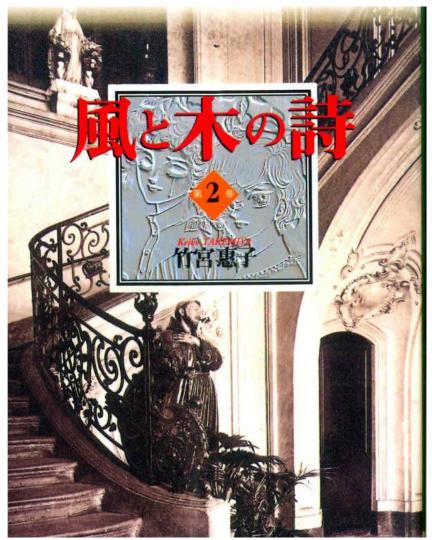[30] Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 138.

Figure 1: Front cover of Takemiya Keiko's *Kaze to ki no uta*, Hakusensha collectors' edition.

Figure 2: Front cover of *Suzue Miuchi's Best Works*, vol. 4.

Figure 3: Front cover of Takemiya Keiko's *Kaze to ki no uta, tankōbon* edition.
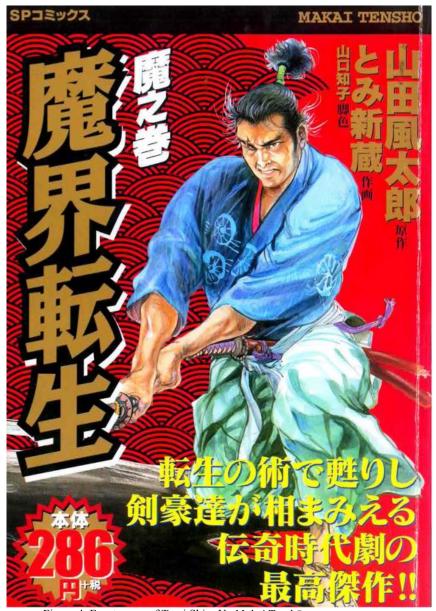
Figure 4: Front cover of Tomi Shinzô's *Makai Tenshō*.

Figure 5: Front cover of Kugo Naoko's *Makai Tenshō*.

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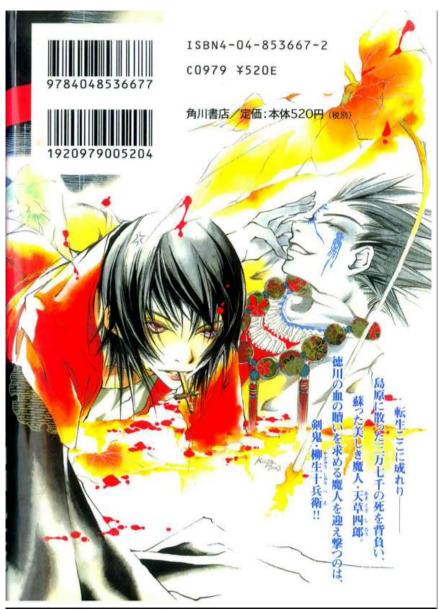
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Figure 6: Back cover of Kugo Naoko's *Makai Tenshō*.