

Manga and Japanese History

Gender Debates and Shōjo
Manga in the Postwar
Decades



“Woman”: Japanese *ribu* (liberation) demonstration (1970s)

“The U.S.-authored draft of the postwar Japanese Constitution included an article explicitly mandating ‘the essential equality of the sexes’ . . . In the early 1950s, as the Occupation ended and Japan reevaluated its postwar legacy, conservatives began organizing to repeal some of the more progressive legal reforms. They were met with fierce resistance from grassroots organizations of citizens from all walks of life . . .”

—Julia C. Bullock, “‘Female Students Ruining the Nation’: The Debate Over Coeducation in Postwar Japan”



“Concealed beneath the sexism of these *bōkokuron* [female students are ruining the nation] arguments, we can therefore detect a persistent sense of emasculation, manifested in the impulse to protect humanities fields not merely from an influx of female students but from the larger threat of social change accompanying the transition to the high-growth economy of the 1960s.”

—Julia C. Bullock, “Female Students Ruining the Nation”



Top Left: From Toshie Kihara, *Mari and Shingo* (1977–1984)
Above: From Moto Hagio, *The Poe Clan* (1972–1976)

Riyoko Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles* (1972-): Female Agency, Same-Sex Romance, and Alternate Histories



The Limits of Queer Romance in Prewar Shojō Media

“Same-sex love in this context was neither an expression of a repressed inner self nor a subversion of a patriarchal system; rather, it was a socially acceptable means of delaying heterosexual courtship until girls had finished school and were available for marriage.”

–Deborah Shamoan, “Revolutionary Romance: *The Rose of Versailles* and the Transformation of Shojō Manga



Navigating Postwar Heteronormativity: “Homogender” Roles and Relations in *Versailles*

“Although Oscar and Andre’s relationship is in a biological sense heterosexual, it is still configured within the story as homogender. As a masculine woman and an emasculated man, Oscar and Andre physically and symbolically resemble each other in a way that is not far removed from the aesthetic of *dōseiai* that pervades both prewar girls’ magazines and boy-love shojo manga.”

-Deborah Shamoan, “Revolutionary Romance”



“We ♥ Oscar”: Versailles ~40 Years Later



Above: From all-female Takarazuka Revue performance of *Rose of Versailles* (2014)
 Right: From revived *Rose of Versailles* (2014)



Reading + Discussion Questions

- Based on Bullock’s “Female Students Ruining the Nation,” what tensions emerged surrounding the introduction of “the essential equality of the sexes” into the postwar Japanese constitution? For opponents of gender equality, what traditional cultural institutions did this constitutional article threaten?
- How might *The Rose of Versailles* be said to challenge conventional Japanese gender roles and relations?
- Contrastingly, to what extent does *Versailles* reify conventional Japanese gender roles and relations?
- How would you characterize the role of history in *Versailles*? Consider in particular why Ikeda, a member of Japan’s New Left, found inspiration in the events leading up to and during French Revolution.