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## The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture

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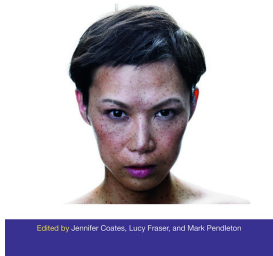
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## REPRESENTING GIRLS IN CINEMA

*Kate Taylor-Jones and Georgia Thomas-Parr*

Picture this: a white-gowned girl with long black hair crawling out of your television, each bloodied, nail-less finger gripping the floor as she pulls herself towards you. With this image of Sadako, one of the most easily recognizable horror figures from the last two decades, the girl takes centre stage. From innocent virgins to figures of pure evil, from idols to anime characters, the girl proliferates as a moving image across Japanese popular media. Girls are victims and survivors, threat and saviour, sexual objects and sexualized subjects, figments of the male imagination and self-defining creators of their own cultures of girlhood.

This chapter will focus on how girls have been represented in live-action cinema even though images of the girl extend far beyond film, permeating screens and billboards, from endless anime visuals to virtual YouTubers to characters in “dating-sim” games. These depictions usually reflect not the lived experiences of actual girls but rather youthful femininity as an image that transcends actual girlhood itself (Yoda 2017). The representation of girlhood is therefore intimately and inexorably intertwined with the cultural and historical moment in which is created, circulated, and debated.

### Constructing girlhood

Given the proliferation of girlhoods that are now present in the modern media-scape (Projansky 2014; Driscoll 2002; Harris 2004), it is hard to both define and draw the boundary around what constitutes “girl,” “girlhood,” “girl culture,” or even the more media-specific “girl-scape” (Yoda 2017). There is a wide lexicon to describe girlhood in Japan, of which the term *shōjo* is the most utilized. *Shōjo-ron* (“girl theory”) is a growing field of research but, as Laura Miller and Jan Bard-sley (2005) note, problematically, the term has often come to be used as catch-all phrase to label and define wide-reaching and diverse experiences of femininity. More problematically, it has at times been dominated by male writings *about* girls (Yamane 1989, 1993; Kawamura 1994, 2003). Critical theorist Ōtsuka Eiji’s *The Native Ethnology of Girls* (1989) is perhaps the best known of this literature and interlinks the girl with several of Ōtsuka’s preoccupations with consumption, media, and crisis. His work posits *shōjo* culture as a potential threat to the Japanese nation (1989, 249) via an increasing infantilization of adulthood, which is something that needs to be intensely resisted for Japan to flourish. Ōtsuka’s focus on the idea of the national body as under threat from the girl both articulates the girl as outsider in her oppositional status to masculine modes

of expression whilst simultaneously denying girls their own subjective and interrogative stance towards their own culture and modes of expression (for example, fashion, film, and music) via a dismissal of their experiences as valuable or worthwhile.

This dismissal by scholars is illustrated by Ōtsuki Takahiro's study on *rabukome* (romantic comedy genres) in *shōjo* manga when he argues that *shōjo* and *shonen* can be conflated. In his view, the boundary-crossing nature of *shōjo* means that it no longer holds a specific market or audience need. As Kukhee Choo (2008) points out, this approach privileges the male experience over the female and reduces the *shōjo* to a lesser companion to her male counterpart rather than an important figure in her own right. This male-orientated reading of *shōjo* and her representations are in contrast to female writers such as Honda Masuko (1982, 1986, 1990, 2010), Takahara Eiri (2006), Miyasako Chizuru (1984), Kawasaki Kenko (1990, 2008), and Inoue Miyako (2006) who see *shōjo* culture as identifiable, valuable, and filled with potential. Scholars writing in English, including Tomoko Aoyama (2010), Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase (2003, 2008), Sharon Kinsella (2014), Deborah Shamoon (2012, 2008), and Sharalyn Orbaugh (2003), have utilized this work in their own thinking on the subject and have explored the representation of the *shōjo* in a wide variety of cultural and media products and settings. Therefore, using the term *shōjo* incorporates a wide range of approaches and representations that, rather unhelpfully, do not always agree with each other.

*Shōjo* may be used to refer to a variety of different things, including a genre of manga and girls' culture, a symbol of the girl, and the liminal period between adolescent girlhood and womanhood. Defined by John Treat as an “[ambiguously] pubescent female with the physical traits of a woman, yet one who still has the sexual naiveté and innocence of a child” (1996, 280), *shōjo* was originally a pre-war term used in Japan to define a girl who deferred her marriage and, with this, (presumably) sex and pregnancy, by continuing her education (Takahashi 2008).

Being a *shōjo* in Japan also involves behavioural traits that are related to *kawaiii* (cuteness) (Treat 1996; Mackie 2009; J. Dale in this issue). The *shōjo* has always had a complicated connection between good and bad. She is, in many ways, the hyper-ideal female figure that adheres to modes of emphasized femininity, often including a focus on dress and make-up and “girly” character traits such as a caring nature and a desire to please. Nevertheless, she also encapsulates power and the possibility of disrupting structural hegemonies since, as Honda notes, “*shōjo* is neither adult woman or girl child, neither man nor woman” (quoted in Treat 1996, 281). In her desire to remain in a state of adolescence rather than moving into the category of adult women, Treat notes that this liminal status allows the *shōjo* to “detach from the reproductive economy of heterosexual reproduction” (1996, 281).

Honda articulates the nature of *shōjo* via the term *hirahira*, used to denote the ephemeral fluttering of ribbons and the poetic “lyrical word chains” (2010, 20) seen in the popular fiction of writers such as Yoshiya Nobuko (particularly her series *Hana monogatari/Flower Tales*, 1916–24) and the illustrations of Nakahara Jun'ichi. The alternative and potentially subversive narrative of *shōjo* is painted by Honda as tapping into the “acute sensitivities of girls” (2010, 27), something “alogical and unworldly” (2010, 36) and off-limits to “non-girls,” especially men. She notes that the concept of girls' culture always embodies fantasy and for Aoyama this is her “subversiveness against patriarchal norms” (2008, 208). Indeed, Honda's view of *shōjo* moved beyond regressive notions that reduce the girl to a set of polarities, instead working towards understanding the represented girl as being part of a paradoxical continuum: not “either/or” but “neither and both” (Honda quoted in Aoyama 2010, 40). Key in this process is the work of several scholars who have offered a vital historical focus on girlhood. Kawamura Kunimitsu's (1993) work on pre-war girls' culture, Watanabe Shūko's (2007) focus on Meiji and Taisho, and Imada Erika's (2007) exploration of the early Showa. All three studies explore the products produced by and for girls,

moving the *shōjo* away from ideas of nationhood towards a vision of *shōjo* as girls themselves engaged with, and as, *shōjo*. These female-authored insights into the world of girlhood offered alternative perspectives to the previously male-dominated area of Japanese scholarship on the subject. Inoue Miyako (2006) speaks of *shōjo* culture in Japan as being a counter-public sphere, governed by girls only. As Honda states, girls constructed a “girls’ imagined community” (Honda 1990 186), where they can explore and articulate their own desires and experiences. Nonetheless, this positive vision of girl-space coexists in a climate where the girl has been heavily commodified by visual media in an attempt to control and make sense of the girl (Dyhouse 2014; McRobbie 2009). With this in mind, it is important, as Shamoon notes, “to distinguish between those mainstream male authored texts aimed at male audiences and the image of the girl that emerged within girl’s culture” (2012, 11). Defining girlhood is therefore a complicated arena, where we might consider, as Catherine Driscoll aptly asks, “How do the ambivalences of girlhood affect the definition of girl culture?” (2002, 267). Indeed, “What girl culture might name, or how it might be used, is difficult to strictly delimit because what seems most obvious about it—girls—is what makes it hardest to define” (2002, 267).

### Screening girlhood

As discussed, the social and cultural dimensions that mark the status of girl as a category make her definition a complex topic. *What* the girl does is therefore perhaps more important than age as the defining marker of girlhood. As Jennifer Robertson (1998) notes, at its point of conception, the *shōjo* category itself was defined in the popular imagination in two Janus-facing figures of the early twentieth century: the “new working woman” (*shinshokugyō fujin*) and the *moga*, or “modern girl.” Both these visions of femininity caused widespread social concern in the 1910s and 1920s because they were seen as refuting what was expected and esteemed as being ideal of womanhood: the dominant Meiji vision of *ryōsai kenbo*, the “good wife, wise mother” who was confined to the role of domestic housekeeper (see Uno 1993). However, as Barbara Sato notes, not all *moga* were working women (and vice versa) but both were defined in that moment of modernity and cosmopolitanism (2003, 119). On the shoulders of the modern girl, the uncertain future of Japan came to rest.

In cinema, early female stars such as Aizome Yumeko, Hara Komako, Mizukubo Sumiko, and the better-known Tanaka Kinyuo and Hara Setsuko, offered a wide range of “girlhoods,” from the traditional to the nonconformist, for the cinematic audience to enjoy throughout the 1920s and 1930s. A popular example is Ozu Yasujiro’s 1933 silent film *Dragnet Girl!* (*Hijōsen no Onna*), where two very different types of girl come into conflict. The hard-working law-abiding innocent Kazuko (Mizukubo Sumiko) is placed in opposition to the gangster’s moll Tokiko (Tanaka Kinuyo). Whilst Tokiko sports sleek modern clothing, Kazuko’s attire is traditional kimono—clearly setting up visual markers that defined girlhood as both old and new, both pure and deviant.

Girlhood would continue to be defined by its in-between status as Japan entered into the war. As Dollase notes, *shōjo* culture, as an experience of creative communality, often bypasses more negative (specifically wartime) girls’ culture that girls’ magazines such as *Shōjo no tomo* imparted to their young readers (2008). *Shōjo* may be a time of play, but wartime required a focus on a more military experience (*gunkoku shōjo*) in order to best serve the nation-state. This is evident in Kurosawa Akira’s 1944 film *The Most Beautiful* (*Ichiban utsukushiku*), which follows the experiences of a group of young women working in a lens factory. In a complete self-sacrificial subservience to the war effort, the drive for these girls to act like their male counterparts is shown in their desire to have the same production targets as the men. At the same time, the film

stresses a patriarchal need for girls to remain dependent on male advice and leadership, shown in images of tear-stained faces and occasional lapses in judgment.

Following Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War/s and the subsequent US-led occupation, the *shōjo* became an icon of victimization with whom the nation could identify (Coates 2016). The body of the girl became the locus of fears about miscegenation, Japan's failure as a nation, and concerns for what the postwar would bring. As Kinsella notes, anxieties "about the necessity to bodily reproduce a distinctive Japanese race" (2014, 126) are often visualized as female. Girls would play an important role in the immediate postwar cinematic focus on rebuilding Japan with films such as *No Regrets for Our Youth* (*Waga seishun ni kui nashi*, Kurosawa Akira, 1946) and *Drunken Angel* (*Yōidore tenshi*, Kurosawa Akira, 1948) visualizing the girl as the site of a new future and the affective means via which older society could come to terms with the new Japan (Horiguchi 2011; Coates 2016). Features such as *24 Eyes* (*Nijūshi no hitomi*, Kinoshita Keisuke, 1954), *Children of the Bomb* (*Genbaku no ko*, Shindō Kaneto, 1952), *Escape at Dawn* (*Akatsuki no dassō*, Taniguchi Senkichi, 1950), and the 1965 remake *Story of a Prostitute* (*Shunpuden*, Suzuki Seijun) and *The Tower of Lilies* (*Himeyuri no tō*, Imai Tadashi, 1953) feature the bloody, irradiated, and dying bodies of young girls as representations of Japan's status as "innocent" victim.

The image of the girl would also play a pivotal role in debates on Japan's future. Whilst the abused bodies of those who had lived through the war were still highly visible on screen, a new figure began to emerge: the girl growing up in the postwar moment. As Japanese democracy developed and postwar hardships began to fade, consumerism once again took hold and the girl would operate as the site to debate the changes Japan was undergoing. Film directors such as Naruse Mikio, Suzuki Seijun, Imamura Shōhei, Kinoshita Keisuke, and Ōshima Nagisa featured the girl as a site of social anxiety around postwar development. From the anarchic vision of girlhood seeking sex and violence in Ōshima's *Cruel Story of Youth* (*Seishun zankoku monogatari*, 1960) to the heartless Utako of Kinoshita Keisuke's *Tragedy of Japan* (*Nihon no higeki*, 1953), who rejects her loving lower-class mother in favour of the financial benefits her married lover appears to offer, girlhood operated as a site of both anxiety and desirability.

In Suzuki's *Gate of Flesh* (*Nikutai no Mon*, 1964), the young prostitute Maya idealizes the postwar moment as both a victim and a symbol of strength. After being raped by American GIs and left starving on the street to become prey to pimps, she falls in with a group of women who are happy to control their own sexuality for profit. The group live together and have only one rule: no sex without money. Their lives are disturbed when former soldier and convict Shintarō enters their hideout. Here, girlhood is not just narratively constructed but is also visually enhanced. The women wear bright dresses that make them stand out from the surroundings, and the over-the-top acting style the actresses were instructed to use includes "loud voices and broad gestures" (Vick 2015, 49) that move them away from the more nuanced and subtle acting styles of Japan's sweethearts such as Hara Setsuko. The image of the girl is superimposed with other patterns, colours, and shapes. When the girls torture one of the other prostitutes for sleeping with Shintarō, we see Maya's face superimposed onto her naked body as she internally contemplates her own desires for the forbidden male figure.

Girlhood in this way is marked both visually and spatially as the innocent girl of the pre-war features moves away from the safety of the home to the chaotic, lawless (often unidentifiable) ruins of the city and the prostitute's run-down hideout. Whilst she may be a victim, Maya is also capable of articulating, and acting upon, her own desires, and this new image of girlhood moves far away from the almost asexual girls of films such as *The Most Beautiful* whose desire was to serve the nation-state. Imamura's *Pigs and Battleships* (*Buta to gunkan*, 1961) ends on an image of the character of Haruko as she walks away from her arranged marriage with an American serviceman to a new life outside of the city of Yokosuka. In her experiences of abortion, rape,

and being arrested, Haruko's trajectory marks a move away from the "innocent virgin" girlhood trope. Yet, when most of the male characters are dead, it is the girl who will walk away to a new life.

The endless potential space of resistance that girlhood offers would be enhanced by the low-budget, non-studio films of the later 1960s. Furthermore, the move in the 1970s and 1980s towards exploitation cinema as a means to try to maintain audience shares provided fertile ground for new female exploration in Japanese film, from the female yakuza (Coates 2017) to female revenge films such as *Lady Snowblood* (*Shurayuki-hime*, Fujita Toshiya, 1973). However, as Miller and Bardsley (2005) note, the tendency to trivialize and eroticize girls means that "Bad Girls' efforts at resisting do not always creative new alternative as much as new models and categories that are similarly conscripting" (2005, 5). In short, "even potentially disruptive images may be neutralized once they are incorporated into mainstream media" (2005, 5).

An ideal example of this is the *sukeban*. The term *sukeban* (used to denote a delinquent girl of middle or high school age, or the boss of a girl gang, the female equivalent of *banchō*) references both a horror and a fascination with teenage subcultures (Sato 1991). Pulp magazine stories titillated their readers with tales of girls carrying razors under long school skirts and participating in violent crime purely for pleasure. With Suzuki Norifumi's *Girl Boss Guerilla* (*Sukeban gerira*, 1972) and the *Terrifying Girls' High School* (*Kyofu Joshi Koko*) series as notable key examples, the *sukeban* films sought to present an alternative female subculture that defines itself by its own rules whilst offering a substantial dose of softcore pornography. The women are brave, strong, sexually liberated, and more than capable of dealing with their male gang counterparts, as Sharp (2008) and Kozma (2012) note. A potential privileging of female subjectivity in the film narrative means that many see these films as the ideal space to offer a new and empowered experience of girlhood. However, the countercultural or recuperative narrative of filmmaking that feminist textual analysis has brought to the mainstream (Kuhn 1982) must also be contextualized in light of the modes of production and reception that surround the products. The pinky violence genre that the *sukeban* films belonged to were created inside a male-dominated system that allowed women very little power, despite some high-profile exceptions such as Hamano Sachi and Yoshiyuki Yumi. Whilst the girl-boss films may feature girls, girls were not necessarily their target market in their initial conception, given the "intensely gendered theatre spaces" in which they were shown (Zahlten 2017b, 64) that privileged and catered to the male viewer over the female. It is true that women would still have attended and enjoyed the films (and the arrival of the VHS and other forms of media has opened up the films to wider audiences), but the endless visual engagement with the girl gangs was made at the expense of engaging with actual girls themselves. Therefore, the girl-boss often became a site of male fascination and eroticism rather than female empowerment, with a clear privileging of visual fantasy over an informed, self-created, and diverse lived experience of girlhood.

More recently, the spirit of the *sukeban* can be seen in another female teenage group, all-girl motorcycle gangs, or *bōsōzoku*. The feminine *bōsōzoku*—more typically gendered as male in media and popular culture—would be famously brought to the screen by Nakashima Tetsuya in the 2006 film *Kamikaze Girls* (*Shimotsuma monogatari*, 2008). Based on a novel by Takemoto Novala, *Kamikaze Girls* follows the friendship of Lolita-obsessive Momoko and Ichigo, a member of an all-girl biker gang. The film seeks to bring to the audience a vision of a girls' culture that is not defined solely by girls' images but rather by their active and self-aware interrogation of their individual experiences of girlhood. Girlhood here is established as a site of potential power, as female friendship, creativity, and strength become defining tropes. In short, the *sukeban* motif becomes a site of female play and development. However, as Kuraishi Takahiro's part-journalistic, part-folklorist work on subcultures in Shibuya notes (2002), the media frenzy that

surrounded the rise of girls' subcultures like *bōsōzoku* or the *kogyaru* in the 1990s was a sign that girls were still considered a problem and a matter of national concern. Seized by the media in a cynical distraction from the failures of men following the collapse of the bubble economy (Kinsella 2014), the non-conforming girl once more provided an ideal scapegoat for societal issues.

This link between girlhood and the neo-liberal agenda would come to define the girlhood of the 1990s onwards. The role that the girl played in defining a new moment of play and consumerism had been seen in the literary field during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the novels of author Yoshimoto Banana rose to both critical and popular acclaim on the international stage. As Treat (1993) notes, Yoshimoto was seen as both *shōjo* herself (despite being notably older) and a key author in the construction of *shōjo*, with the direct address of *shōjo* author Yoshimoto to her *shōjo* audience “suggestively narcissistic” (Treat 1993, 380). This public move towards self-love and selfishness spoke to a broad range of female experiences and desires. Similarly, the so-called “girly” photographers (*onnanoko shashinka*) of the 1990s, Ninagawa Mika, Hiromix, and Nagashima Yurie, despite their markedly different styles, allowed for girls to see themselves and their lives as worthy of display on the walls of galleries. Girls' experiences became notable enough to warrant acclaim and, of course, monetization. Whilst girlhood had always been intertwined with discourses of consumerism, the contemporary idol would take this connection to new levels of intensity.

### The idol film era

Whilst idol studies go far beyond the scope of this chapter (see Aoyagi 2005; Galbraith and Karlin 2012), in terms of cinema, idol culture is nothing new. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, young female stars such as Yakushimaru Hiroko, Harada Tomoyo, and Watanabe Noriko (the *Kadokawa sannin-musume*, or “three Kadokawa girls”), provided an ideal platform for both film sales and cross-over merchandising between film, magazine, and music. These women were key players in what has become known as the idol film era. Films such as *Four Sisters* (*Shimaizaka*, Ōbayashi Nobuhiko, 1985), *Memories of You* (*Rabu sutorii wo kimi ni*, Sawai Shinichiro, 1988), and *Tōkyo Heaven* (*Tōkyō jōkū irasshaimase*, Sōmai Shinji, 1990) presented their young, attractive female stars in a variety of tales that range from crime drama (*The Tragedy of “W”/“W” no higeki*, Sawai Shinichiro, 1984) to romance (*Young Girls in Love/Koi suru onnatachi*, Ōmori Kazuki, 1986) all the way to science fiction (*The Girl Who Leapt Through Time/Toki o Kakeru Shōjo*, Ōbayashi Nobuhiko, 1983).

Contemporary girlhood is heavily entangled in both consumer culture and bodily surveillance. Aoyagi (2005) argues that, far from a liberating vision, female idols hold substantial capitalist value and contribute heavily to the creation of an endlessly consuming audience for media products. This is interesting in light of Alexander Zahlten's comment that in order “to remain semiotically flexible and mobile across media platforms, actresses had to remain as empty, and, in a sense, as unreal as possible” (2017a, 208). Idol cinema offered a space for female pleasure via characters they could both identify with and aspire towards, but, as Joanna Hollows notes, film also reproduces the female spectator as a consumer (2000, 53). In the current age, the girl idol (*shōjo aidoru*) is arguably now one of the most esteemed feminine positions in Japanese society. A ubiquitous figure on the contemporary Japanese cultural landscape, she has bought the teenage girl a level of visibility that is arguably unprecedented anywhere else. A cinematic vision of the phenomenon can be found in Miyake Kyoko's documentary *Tōkyo Girls* (2017), which follows the pathway of teen pop star Rio. Rio is bright, articulate, and hard working, and, in her navigation of male fans under the shadow of her inescapable ageing, she shows a firm sense of

business ability. She is an ideal example of the young woman who is aware of the limited (and limiting) power and validation made available to her in her state of girlhood and negotiates the reward system under the processes of neoliberal self-autonomy that, as Diane Negra writes “fetishises female power and desire while consistently placing these within firm limits” (2008, 4). In the case of the girl, her period of liminal power is constrained by social ideas around ageing and desirability. *Tokyo Girls* focuses on Rio’s endless work to produce her body in the idealized format that appeals to her male fan base. Her bodily presentation, both online and offline, is a fantasy, not reality, that she is selling, and in world of the teen idol, this fantasy is based firmly on the transitory category of youth. Girlhood therefore is conceived of as a temporary state, marked by the endless passing of time.

For girls, as Judith Butler notes, adolescence exists in the state of flux. It is a temporal process that is (re)constituted via a competing process of reiteration and destabilization (Butler 1993). This can be seen in the 2016 film *Japanese Girls Never Die* aka *Haruko Azumi Is Missing* (*Azumi Haruko wa yukuefumei*, Matsui Daigo), where the image of the girl is both seen and unseen, reiterated and then destabilized. Haruko’s missing-person poster is ignored, but when two teenage graffiti artists begin to use her image in Warhol-esque prints across their town, the local population take notice. In this film, the image of the girl and real girls are both in flux. Girlhood in this film is constructed on both the spatial, visual (the missing poster and the art work), and temporal plane (the film offers a non-linear timeline). Haruko is depressed, lonely, and endlessly told by the family and co-workers that time is running out as she approaches her early twenties. With the clock ticking on her “desirable” state of girlhood, Haruko is caught in a liminal space, an in-between moment that neither the “real” woman nor her image can escape from. Spatially, girlhood in the film exists in a variety of formal (work, home) and informal (parks, river banks, car parks) spaces. Haruko operates in what Augé calls non-places; “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a place which cannot be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity will be a non-place” (1995, 78). For Augé, spaces of transition such as airports, leisure parks, large retail outlets and shopping malls, and rail stations are designated non-spaces (1995, 79), yet, as we see in *Haruko Azuma is Missing* and in numerous other films such as *Our Little Sister* (*Umimachi Diary*, Koreeda Hirokazu, 2015), *Suicide Club* (*Jisatsu Sākuru*, Sono Sion, 2001), *Bounce Ko-Gals* (*Baunsu kōgarusu*, Harada Masato, 1997), and *Wolf Girl and Black Prince* (*Ōkami Shōjo to Kuro Ōji*, Hiroki Ryūichi, 2016), the spaces of girlhood are rarely formal ones. Girlhood and non-place are therefore closely interlinked. Haruko decides to “go missing” after she sees a group of violent teenage girls beat a man by the side of a river, and the film concludes as she and her female friends vanish on a road trip, destination unknown. For the cinematic girl, the non-place is the site where she flourishes, existing in a state of temporality and flux.

## Conclusion

Metaphorically speaking, the girl, caught between a nostalgic past and uncanny future, may be seen as representing the fleetingness of time itself (Kawasaki 1990; Wilson 2017). If the *shōjo* condition is one that rejoices in and gains power from liminality, perhaps this is why her position as an image captivates in the way that it does. The photographic image freezes her in her liminal state, defying the passing of time and, with it, her inevitable womanhood. As Robertson contends, “controlling the *shōjo* was desirable because she was fascinating, attractive and weak, and it was necessary because she was powerful, threatening and different” (Robertson 1998, 158). As theories of the *shōjo* have argued, the *shōjo* as an icon has the potential for delivering progressive



messages for girls, to enhance and develop her ability to be “liminal, transformative, liberatory and potentially resistant” (Orbaugh 2003, 206). However, on the other side of the coin, many *shōjo* protagonists and narratives also arguably conform to a postfeminist ideology that has significantly less positive connotations. These two sides once again illustrate the contradiction that is so inherent to the symbolic figure of the girl, which continues to intrigue the cinematic gaze in Japan and worldwide.

### Related chapters

- 30 Gender, Manga, and Anime
- 31 Cuteness Studies and Japan
- 32 Gender and Visual Culture
- 33 Gender, Media, and Misogyny in Japan

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