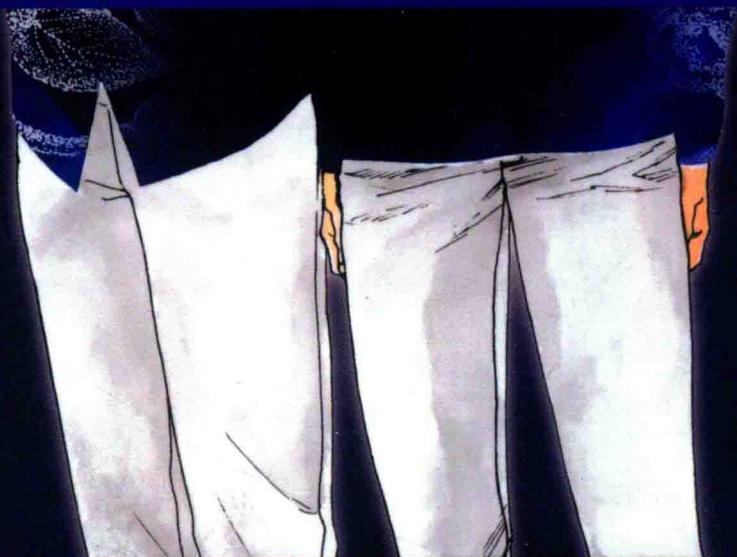




BOYS LOVE MANGA AND BEYOND



History, Culture, and Community in Japan

Edited by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike,
Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker

BOYS LOVE MANGA AND BEYOND

HISTORY, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY IN JAPAN

Edited by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaïke,
Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker

University Press of Mississippi • Jackson

www.upress.state.ms.us

The University Press of Mississippi is a member of the Association of American University Presses.

An earlier version of "The Evolution of BL as 'Playing with Gender': Viewing the Genesis and Development of BL from a Contemporary Perspective" was originally published as Fujimoto Yukari, "Shōnen'ai/yaoi, BL: 2007-nen genzai no shiten kara" (*Shōnen'ai, yaoi*, and BL: From the perspective of 2007)), *Yuriika* 39, no. 16 (December 2007): 36–47.

An earlier version of "Representational Appropriation and the Autonomy of Desire in *Yaoi/BL*" was published as Ishida Hitoshi, "'Hottoite kudasai' to iu hyōmei o megutte: Yaoi/BL no jiritsusei to hyōshō no ōdatsu" (On the declaration "Please leave me alone": The autonomy of *yaoi/BL* and the appropriation of representation), *Yuriika* 39, no. 16 (December 2007): 114–23.

Copyright © 2015 by University Press of Mississippi
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America

First printing 2015

∞

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Boys love manga and beyond : history, culture, and community in Japan / edited by
Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-62846-119-0 (hardback) — ISBN 978-1-62846-120-6 (ebook)

1. Young gay men—Comic books, strips, etc.—Japan. 2. Romance comic books, strips, etc.—Japan. 3. Women cartoonists—Japan. 4. Young women—Books and reading—Japan. 5. Girls—Books and reading—Japan. 6. Sex in popular culture—Japan. I. McLelland, Mark J., 1966– editor. II. Nagaike, Kazumi, editor.

III. Suganuma, Katsuhiko, editor. IV. Welker, James, editor.

PN6714.B69 2015

741.5'952—dc23

2014029775

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

BOYS LOVE MANGA AND BEYOND

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most chapters in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond* were first presented at the workshop “Glocal Polemics of Boys Love: Production, Circulation and Censorship,” organized by Kazumi Nagaike and Katsuhiko Suganuma at Oita University in January 2011. The workshop was cosponsored by Oita University’s Center for International Education and Research and the University of Wollongong’s Institute for Social Transformation Research. We would like to thank the discussants, Romit Dasgupta, Vera Mackie, Paul McCarthy, Sharalyn Orbaugh, Ulrike Woehr, and Taimatsu Yoshimoto, as well as all the presenters and attendees who contributed to the success of this event. The current volume brings together the papers delivered at that workshop that focus on Japan, along with translated essays by Fujimoto Yukari, a well-known *shōjo* manga (girls’ comics) critic, and by Ishida Hitoshi, a scholar who has written extensively on BL. A separate edition of papers from the workshop that examine the transnational dimensions of boys love fiction was published as “Transnational Boys’ Love Fan Studies,” volume 12 (2013) of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, edited by Kazumi Nagaike and Katsuhiko Suganuma.

A NOTE ON JAPANESE NAMES AND TERMINOLOGY

Throughout the text we have reproduced Japanese names in the natural Japanese order, that is, surname first, except in reference to scholars who normally publish in English. Note that among the contributors to and editors of this volume, only Fujimoto Yukari and Ishida Hitoshi publish predominantly in Japanese, and thus their names are written in Japanese order.

Japanese text uses neither capitalization nor italicization, and the use of these features in Romanized Japanese is always problematic. We have tended to limit the use of capitalization to Japanese personal and place names. Japanese terms that have not found their way into common English usage are italicized when mentioned in the text, as are Japanese book titles. Macrons designating long *o* and *u* sounds in Japanese have been used when transliterating Japanese terms except in those commonly rendered into English, such as place names.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	VII
A Note on Japanese Names and Terminology	IX
An Introduction to “Boys Love” in Japan	3
MARK MCLELLAND AND JAMES WELKER	
A Genealogy of Boys Love: The Gaze of the Girl and the <i>Bishōnen</i> Body in the Prewar Images of Takabatake Kashō	21
BARBARA HARTLEY	
A Brief History of <i>Shōnen'ai</i> , <i>Yaoi</i> , and Boys Love	42
JAMES WELKER	
The Evolution of BL as “Playing with Gender”: Viewing the Genesis and Develop- ment of BL from a Contemporary Perspective	76
FUJIMOTO YUKARI (TRANSLATED BY JOANNE QUIMBY)	
What Can We Learn from Japanese Professional BL Writers?: A Sociological Analysis of <i>Yaoi</i> /BL Terminology and Classifications	93
KAZUKO SUZUKI	
What Is Japanese “BL Studies?”: A Historical and Analytical Overview	119
KAZUMI NAGAIKE AND TOMOKO AOYAMA	
Politics of Utopia: Fantasy, Pornography, and Boys Love	141
RIO OTOMO	
<i>Moe</i> Talk: Affective Communication among Female Fans of <i>Yaoi</i> in Japan	153
PATRICK W. GALBRAITH	

Fujoshi Emergent:

- Shifting Popular Representations of *Yaoi*/BL Fandom in Japan 169

JEFFRY T. HESTER

- Do Heterosexual Men Dream of Homosexual Men?: BL *Fudanshi* and Discourse
on Male Feminization 189

KAZUMI NAGAIKE

- Representational Appropriation and the Autonomy of Desire in *Yaoi*/BL 210

ISHIDA HITOSHI (TRANSLATED BY KATSUHIKO SUGANUMA)

Queering the Cooking Man:

- Food and Gender in Yoshinaga Fumi's (BL) Manga 233

TOMOKO AOYAMA

- Regulation of Manga Content in Japan: What Is the Future for BL? 253

MARK McLELLAND

- Works Cited 274

- About the Contributors 293

- Index 297

BOYS LOVE MANGA AND BEYOND

AN INTRODUCTION TO “BOYS LOVE” IN JAPAN

MARK McLELLAND AND JAMES WELKER

If you walk into a typical bookstore in Japan today, somewhere on the shelves you are likely to find various books depicting romantic and sexual relations between beautiful, stylish male characters. These male homoerotic stories might be found in the form of manga—the name for Japan’s globally known narrative comics—or in the form of “light novels” (*raito noberu*)—a local label for lowbrow, highly disposable prose fiction. If the store you’re wandering around is large enough, you might find these texts occupying an entire shelf, floor to ceiling, or even multiple shelves. In fact, it’s quite possible that the bookstore will have one section for manga and a separate section somewhere else for light novels, all depicting male–male romance. You may be able to find these sections by searching for a sign reading “*bōizu rabu*” in the phonetic *katakana* script or perhaps even “Boys Love” spelled out in English. The sign might also just say “BL.”

If you pull one of those BL books off the shelf and start reading, more likely than not you’ll find that those beautiful male characters within the book do not think of themselves as “gay.” What’s more, while the widespread availability and relatively high visibility of BL narratives might give the impression that it’s easy to be openly gay in Japan, if you examine not the stories themselves but the context of their creation and consumption, you’ll learn that BL is only tangentially connected with the lives of actual gay men. To the contrary, in Japan BL is generally assumed to be created and consumed by heterosexual girls and women. The fact that this widely held assumption is not altogether accurate is one of the many points about BL upon which the contributors to this volume shed light.

As its title makes clear, *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* examines various aspects of the BL phenomenon in Japan. Written by scholars working in diverse fields including anthropology, cultural studies, history, literature, and sociology, the twelve chapters that follow address a number of key questions about BL, such as: Under what

cultural and historical circumstances did adolescent girls and young women in Japan begin creating and consuming narratives about beautiful adolescent boys and men? What genres of BL have emerged in the course of its more than forty-year history? What is the significance of the differences between these genres? What kind of girls and women actually create and consume BL works, and what kinds of pleasure do they derive from reading and writing about male–male romantic and sexual interactions? What kinds of bonds among readers are fostered by a shared interest in such narratives? Do boys and men read BL too? Are they gay? If not, why do they enjoy BL? What do the boyfriends or husbands of BL readers and artists think about their girlfriends' and wives' interest in BL? How is the BL phenomenon received in Japan in general? The answers to questions such as these will be explored in depth in the chapters that follow. First, however, a brief introduction to BL is in order.

As we note above, BL narratives focus on male–male romantic and sexual relationships. They first drew the attention of publishers and the public in the form of *shōjo* manga (girls' comics). *Shōjo* manga is a category encompassing a wide range of comics that ostensibly target female readers from preadolescence to almost adulthood—though many *shōjo* manga works have had an actual readership that includes male readers and older readers.¹ While BL narratives featuring original characters and storylines have had a strong fan base since they first were published in *shōjo* manga magazines in the early 1970s, derivative works based on the characters and plots of existing manga, anime, films, television shows, and literature, as well as works narrating imagined experiences of actual celebrities and athletes have also long been very popular. BL narratives are produced and distributed through both commercial and non-commercial channels. In the commercial sphere, manga and light novels are most common, both of which are often first serialized in BL magazines before being reprinted in bound volumes. BL narratives are also produced and distributed commercially as anime, audio dramas, video games, live-action films, and stage plays, among other media. As with other genres, particularly popular works may be recreated across a range of media.

Outside the commercial sphere, the most common media form for the sharing of BL narratives remains “*dōjinshi*,” zine-like publications of highly varied quality. While most closely associated with original and derivative manga, *dōjinshi* may also contain text-based narratives, non-sequential illustrations, essays, and other musings. *Dōjinshi* are created and distributed by small “circles” (*saakuru*) of “*dōjin*,” that is, like-minded individuals. These circles are often *very* small; in practice, they can consist of even a single individual. Some circles produce *dōjin* webcomics, video games, and anime.

Although most chapters in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond* are primarily focused on the creation and consumption of BL manga found in commercially published books and magazines as well as *dōjinshi*, some chapters give attention to other media as well.

A number of terms have emerged to label and categorize BL media over the past four decades. Although these categories overlap and the terms' meanings have shifted over time, four have been predominant:

- *shōnen'ai*—This term combines "boy" (*shōnen*) and "love" (*ai*) and has been most widely used in reference to commercially published *shōjo* manga from the 1970s into the 1980s. It is sometimes used retrospectively today to describe these works, but the term, now more closely associated in popular discourse with pedophilia, has largely fallen out of favor.
- *JUNE*—This word comes from the title of a commercial BL magazine published from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s and has been used to refer to the kinds of manga appearing in the magazine. It has also been used in reference to works produced and consumed outside commercial channels, particularly original rather than derivative works.
- *yaoi*—An acronym for *yama nashi*, *ochi nashi*, *imi nashi* (which might be translated as "no climax, no point, no meaning"), this self-mocking label was coined in 1979 and disseminated by an influential *dōjinshi* circle. It became popularized in the 1980s in reference to BL works that have not been published commercially, but it is sometimes used to encompass both commercial and non-commercial works.
- *boys love*²—Pronounced "*bōizu rabu*" and usually written in the *katakana* script, this term first appeared in the commercial BL sphere at the beginning of the 1990s. It is most frequently used as a label for commercially published manga and light novels, but it can also be used as a label for non-commercial works. It is often abbreviated "BL."

In addition to their overlapping usage in Japan, note as well that the common use of "*shōnen'ai*," "*yaoi*," and "*boys love*" in English and other languages among fans outside Japan often differs from the meanings given above.³ (The emergence of these categories and distinctions between them are discussed at length in chapters by James Welker, Fujimoto Yukari, and Kazuko Suzuki.) For the sake of simplicity, in this volume we generally use "BL" as shorthand to encompass all of these categories, alongside more specific terms reflecting the context. Because the meaning of these terms varies by contexts, however, chapter authors often offer their own more specific definitions.

Other key terms used in the BL sphere in Japan not exclusive to BL culture include “*tanbi*” (aesthete or aesthetic), “*aniparo*” (short for “anime parody”), “*sōsaku*” (original work), “*niji sōsaku*” (derivative work), and “*sanji sōsaku*” (derivative work based on a derivative work).

While in contemporary Japan, appreciation for “beautiful boys” (*bishōnen*) in general and BL narratives specifically are most closely associated with adolescent girls and women, the depiction of the “beautiful boy” (*bishōnen*) has long been a romantic and sexualized trope for both sexes and commands a high degree of cultural visibility today across a range of genres from kabuki theater to pop music, anime, and manga. The celebration of youthful male beauty in Japanese culture arguably stretches back at least to the Heian period (794–1185), when prominent female authors celebrated the charms of aristocratic young men in texts such as the eleventh-century *Tale of Genji* and Buddhist priests penned “tales about beautiful boy acolytes” (*chigo monogatari*) for the reading pleasure of other Buddhist priests.⁴

It is not until the Edo period (1603–1868), however, that we see the development of a self-conscious literary tradition devoted to extolling the charm of youthful male beauty. This is associated particularly with famous novelist Ihara Saikaku, author of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (1687), which contains love stories featuring relationships between older and younger samurai and rich townsmen and young kabuki actors. Homoerotic themes were also prevalent in the kabuki and puppet theater of the times.⁵ During the Edo period the valorization of male–male love in the literary canon was also reflected in actual practice with many high-status individuals, including several shoguns, being renowned for their appreciation of youthful male beauty. Stories depicting male–male relationships (as well as such male–male relationships themselves) were described at this time as *nanshoku* (male–male eroticism), within which there were several categories, including the samurai-oriented *shudō*, or the “way of youths,” a term that also named the norms which these relationships were expected to follow.

Yet, to speak of a tradition of “boys love” in Japan would be misleading since the historical and cultural contexts in which images of youthful male beauty have occurred differ widely over time and have been assigned often contradictory meanings. Furthermore, a history of boys love in Japan cannot be reconstructed without also attending to the changing nature of ideas about love itself in the Japanese context. In a compelling study of romantic love in Japanese and European literature, Takayuki Yokota-Murakami advances the provocative notion that romantic love as it was elaborated in European novels at the end of the nineteenth century was a concept unknown in Japan prior to the influx of Western culture beginning in the

mid-nineteenth century.⁶ He notes that "the 'equality' between male and female lovers or spouses described in Western literary discourse was often quite incomprehensible to . . . intellectuals" in the Meiji period (1868–1912).⁷ There were no terms in Japanese at the time that could adequately express the fusion of spiritual and physical love that underlay Western notions of romantic love. Moreover, Confucian morality, which became increasingly influential in the latter half of the Edo period, saw women as inferior, sometimes evil, and certainly not as suitable objects of admiration.⁸ To the extent that anything similar to the Western concept of "romantic love" existed in Japan prior to the Meiji period, it had been explored in the context of tales of "devoted male love" between older and younger samurai.⁹

The absence of a native Japanese term approximating the English word "love" is conspicuous in early Japanese translations of Western novels where it was sometimes simply transliterated as "*rabu*." Yet, as Leith Morton notes, "there is no doubt that by mid-Meiji a revolution was underway in regard to notions of love, marriage and the status of women."¹⁰ By this time the notion of "romantic love," connoting elements of spiritual attraction between men and women, was being expressed in the newly coined compound "*ren'ai*," which combines the meaning of physical love contained in "*koi*" (also pronounced *ren*) with "*ai*," whose meaning had begun to encompass the wide range of feelings indexed by the English term "love." This "shocking new perspective" became an important talking point in the Japanese media and was popularized via women's literature and magazines and via Christian educators at private girls' schools.¹¹ Despite the misgivings of many social commentators, the discourse of romantic love had an enormous impact upon culture generally, especially upon literature. As Jim Reichert has pointed out, lacking indigenous examples, Japanese novelists had to find convincing ways to develop "new literary languages [and] new approaches toward characterization and plot" in order to realistically depict romantic heterosexual relationships.¹² One casualty of this process was that male–male erotic relationships, that is, *nanshoku* and *shudō*, both of which had been well represented in the literature of the previous period, were excluded from the new category.¹³ Their association with the now discredited "uncivilized" and "feudal" practices of the Edo period further placed male–male eroticism outside the bounds of civilized morality.

By the late Meiji period, the uptake in Japan of Western sexology that pathologized homosexuality, alongside the developing hegemony of heterosexual romantic love, had led to a narrowing of sexual identification and practice. Male homoeroticism did continue as a minor theme in Japanese literature, but as Jeffrey Angles points out, those authors who specialized in

this type of fiction had to resort to a range of strategies to disguise their interests.¹⁴ No longer could the “love of youths” be valorized as an ennobling experience or a cultural ideal.

It is at this point chronologically that chapters in this volume begin to examine the prehistory of BL with Barbara Hartley’s discussion of Taisho-period artist Takabatake Kashō. The Taisho period (1912–1925) saw significant economic growth and technological developments in Japan that resulted in major advances in the living standards of the urban population and in educational advances for both girls and boys. A vibrant literary culture developed, especially around popular monthly magazines aimed at differing readerships such as housewives, businessmen, and boys and girls. Kashō was one of the best-known illustrators of the period and created beautiful illustrations of both girls and boys used as cover art and to illustrate the content of leading boys’ and girls’ publications. In boys’ magazines, Kashō tended to represent boys as young, beautiful, and sometimes effeminate-looking male figures that, as Hartley points out, “project an air of homoeroticism.” Indeed, as Hartley, citing well-known Japanese cultural critic Takahara Eiri, remarks, many of the scenarios featuring these beautiful boys also featured depictions of older men, thus referencing the *chigo* (boy acolyte) tradition of Buddhist iconography discussed above. Kashō’s illustrations of boys reflect the homo-social environment of the early twentieth century and in many of his pictures “there are no girls or women in sight.” Given that contemporary accounts suggest that all male environments such as boarding schools and military barracks were sites for homosexual activity, it would be reasonable to assume that the homoeroticism of many of Kashō’s beautiful-boy figures inspired interest and desire in the eyes of some male readers.

It is to a potential audience of female readers that Hartley draws attention, however. She notes that many girls would have had access to these images through brothers and other male relatives who subscribed to the magazines. Whereas girls’ magazines offered depictions of women and girls in training for “respectable domesticity,” boys’ magazines focused on an outdoors’ lifestyle of exploration and adventure, with boys often seen fighting and dying alongside their male comrades. These male figures—inflected with an oblique and therefore perhaps all the more thrilling sexuality—no doubt attracted interest among female readers. Noting that such images could also be featured in girls’ magazines, such as *Shōjo no tomo* (Girls’ friend), Hartley suggests that it was precisely the absence of women in the frame of these pictures—and hence their homoerotic charge—that may have attracted girl readers. Hartley speculates that the girl viewers of Kashō’s illustrations may have interpolated themselves into the pictures and thereby the scenarios

they represented in an attempt to discover "something beyond the flower girl aesthetic that characterized much narrative for girls." Hartley proposes that the homosocial world of Kashō's beautiful boys anticipates in some ways the cross-gender identifications that later come to characterize BL.

James Welker's historical overview of BL manga also stretches back to this period. Referring to a growing body of scholarship charting the prehistory of *shōjo* manga, Welker draws attention to the role Kashō and his male contemporaries—as well as to the *shōjo* literature they were illustrating—in creating the aesthetic foundation for *shōjo* manga in the postwar. The predominantly male artists creating *shōjo* manga in the 1950s and 1960s would pick up and further develop the images of delicate girls with large twinkling eyes, providing a portal into the illustrated girls' psychological state and inviting identification by viewers. In the 1970s, the creation of *shōjo* manga was taken over by a new generation known as the Fabulous Year 24 Group (*Hana no nijūyōnen-gumi*), or just the Year 24 Group, as most of them were born around the year Showa 24, that is, 1949. In English, they might more fittingly be called the "Fabulous Forty-Niners." Building on such developments in manga and borrowing elements from foreign and domestic literature, film, history, and folklore, the Fabulous Forty-Niners invigorated *shōjo* manga with lavish illustrations and complex narratives. These new works were appreciated for their literary qualities by a readership well beyond the targeted audience of *shōjo* manga magazines.

It is also at this time that some Fabulous Forty-Niners began creating narratives featuring romantic—and eventually sexual—relationships between beautiful adolescent boys. While they were not the first women writers to show an interest in male homosexuality, nor the first artists to create *shōjo* manga with male protagonists, this new "*shōnen'ai*" manga arguably set the stage for the emergence of diverse genres of manga and other media that would depict male–male romantic and sexual relations in subsequent decades, continuing to the present. Welker traces the historical development of these BL genres from the first manga published in commercial magazines in the early 1970s to a highly diverse market combining commercial and non-commercial production and distribution channels, with an estimated annual domestic size approaching \$25 million. He draws attention to key sites of creation and consumption, particularly commercial magazines and "spot sale events" (*sokubaikai*) for *dōjinshi*. In tracing the emergence of these genres as well as the etymologies of the labels "*shōnen'ai*," "*yaoi*," and "boys love" (*bōizu rabu*), Welker suggests points of overlap in the development of the genres themselves that may account for their frequent conflation in popular and critical discourse on BL.