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News	superheroes <u>Attractions</u>
Ontario Canada World	At the `Shojo Manga! Girl Power!' Clubs exhibit, beauty and brains rule Concerts
Opinion/Editorials	Sep. 7, 2006. 01:00 AM
Letters	PETER GODDARD Events Galleries Galleries
National Report Obituaries	VISUAL ARTS COLUMNIST Movies
Editorial Cartoon	On Stage
Corrections	Her name was Oscar and she made the <u>Salons & Soirees</u>
Star Columnists	French Revolution what it is today — at <u>Out of Town</u>
> Advertisement <	least, from a Japanese pop culture perspective. Tag and Save
The Star's 2005 Winning Image's photo section sponsored by HP. Star P.M.	The above might be bewildering for anyone not already deep into Japanese comic culture being explored at "Shojo
Most Emailed	Manga! Girl Power! Girls' Comics from
Today's Paper	Japan," at The Japan Foundation.
RSS Feeds	Long-time readers of Shojo Manga, the enormously popular series of "girl
News Alerts	comics" in Japan over the past 50 years will recognize Oscar as the
Special Reports	gorgeous if tempestuous daughter of an aristocratic French family in
Film Festival	writer/designer Riyoko Ikeda's hugely popular <i>Rose of Versailles</i> series first published in 1973.
Virgin Fest	
GTA Elections	Lady Oscar dressed in swashbuckling male finery — think of Jessica
Afghanistan	Simpson as Captain Jack Sparrow in <i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> — and was
Canada in 2020	in love with André, the son of one of the family retainers. Their eventual
[More Specials]	sexual encounter didn't halt France's Revolution — in fact, Oscar died
Email Newsletters	before the Bastille was captured — but it led to a Japanese revolution among Manga readers.
My Scoreboard	
My Stock List	With Rose, the pre-teen innocence of '60s Shojo Manga, where little girls
My Subscription Notices	were taught to dream of marriage, was replaced by a more worldly vision
Announcements	of romance and sex. "This kind of love story could express a superior kind of love between people," says exhibition curator Masami Toku, a
Births/Adoptions	California State University professor of art education who lectured last

AnnouncementsKind of love between people, says exhibition curator Masami Toku, aBirths/AdoptionsCalifornia State University professor of art education who lectured last
night at The Japan Foundation. Rose eventually morphed into an all-
female musical, a film, an animated TV series and a live-action TV series.
It was the first translated Manga to appear in the West.





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Some observers believe Manga of every stripe has peaked in Japan, with the cell phone the likely cause, according to American writer/translator, Frederik L. Schodt. Unlike traditional North American magazine-style comics, Manga comes in a pocketbook-sized package, allowing for a more intimate experience being usurped by the all-purpose cell.

Nevertheless, Manga still remains one of the most powerful publishing phenomena anywhere in the world, making up for some 40 per cent of everything published in Japan (other than newspapers). Shojo Manga makes up some 15 per cent of that total.

The relative popularity in North America and Europe of *Pokémon, Hello Kitty* trading cards and *Sailor Moon* graphic novels in English barely begins to explain how deeply Manga has made its way into Japanese visual culture, starting in the late '50s.

Sculptural figures such as Kaikai and Kiki created recently by Takashi Murakami, the Andy Warhol of Japan, look as if they could have walked right out of Manga. In fact, Murakami doesn't see any disconnect between Manga and the woodblock prints or *ukiyo-e* that were popular in 18th- and 19t-century Japan. Contemporary Japanese artists can embrace cartoon forms Murakami explains, due to their understanding "of the cultural specificity of the form."

The word "Manga" itself seems to have originated with drawings made by the great Japanese artist, Hokusai Katsushika and published in serial form in Japan through the mid-19th century. Manga at that time meant "humorous pictures" of everyday life. Shojo Manga now more frequently depicts love in a wonderful, foreign setting among postcard perfect Caucasians and represents pure escape. (Lady Oscar's pencil-fine features do lead you to suspect she might have visited the same plastic surgeon as Michael Jackson.)

"Everything was devastated in Japan after World War II," Toku says. "Europe and America became ideal worlds for girls. Everyone there looked so beautiful. Shojo Manga had beautiful western images of blond hair, and big blue eyes."

So Shojo Manga pushes cuteness to heights rarely imagined outside of a children's beauty pageant. That's precisely its appeal.

Card Captor Sakura by Clamp, a contemporary collective of four Manga makers — the megastars of so-called amateur Mangaka — comes at cute from every angle imaginable. Clouds are sugary pink. The settings are a post-modernist play school. And Card Captor Sakura herself — a third-grader who saves the world every so often — has eyes that are rounder, bigger and glisten brighter than almost any in Shojo Manga.

In North America, the already small market given over to comics for girls — the adventures of the fashion-conscious Katy Keene, say — began to shrink noticeably in the '70s, when feminism put girl comic action heroine Mary Marvel out of business. But in Japan after *Rose of Versailles,* Shojo Manga went on a gender-bending binge with Manga girls dressing as boys and the boys dressing as girls all in the pursuit of the purest of pure love.

"Boys love" Manga — gay male love stories written for younger women — proved to be huge in the '90s, providing a cover for young women to work out fantasies deemed acceptable for Japanese males only. It also proved to be the source of sharp-minded parody of the pornographic variety.

Decades will have to pass before we'll be allowed to see a little boy-on-

boy action with Archie and Jughead in the *Archie* comics. But then, old style North American comics have always felt tight; uptight morally as well as tightly written and drawn, often in a hyper-realistic way.

The amorphousness of Shojo Manga — where the panels barely contain the action and narratives can dissolve in thin air — are in synch with characters whose sexuality seem as uncertain to themselves as it is to us.

It makes you think again about Godzilla.

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Catch Peter Goddard video- and webcast on the visual arts at <u>http://www.thestar.com/whatson</u>

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