# Atypical Girls in Yuri Seiko's Fiction for Girls

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**Abstract**
Yuri Seiko's fiction represents an atypical example of literary works published in the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine in the pre-war period. The two works examined in this essay constitute attempts to meet a commercial challenge posed by the success of the *Shōjo kurabu* magazine and an ideological challenge imposed by the authorities' demand for literary content to submit to official ideology. Although the resulting creations differ greatly from the period's more celebrated works of girls' literature, they offer valuable insight into the effect that external forces had on girls' fiction and challenge the notion that Japanese pre-war girls' culture existed in a sphere of its own.
**Keywords:** Girls' literature, popular literature, *Shōjo no tomo,* Shōwa era, Yuri Seiko

## Introduction

The period preceding the outbreak of the Pacific War (1941–1945) was a transitional era in the realm of Japanese fiction for girls. Established authors, such as Yoshiya Nobuko[1] 吉屋信子 (1896–1973), Kitagawa Chiyo 北川千代 (1894–1965), and Kawabata Yasunari[2] 川端康成 (1899–1972), were at the height of their popularity with girl readers, but at the same time, younger writers started professionally contributing to girls' magazines and publishing stories and novels for girl readers. Among these young writers, two stand out in particular: Matsuda Keiko 松田瓊子 (1916–1940), whose greatest success came posthumously in the immediate postwar years, and Yuri Seiko 由利聖子 (1911–1943), whose novels are a gentle criticism of pre-war girls' literature.

[1] Japanese names are written in the Japanese order with family name first.
[2] Although Kawabata's most famous novel for girls, Otome no minato 乙女の港 (Maiden's Port), had been largely ghost-written by his disciple Nakazato Tsuneko 中里恒子 (1909–1987), he later wrote several other popular novels for girls.

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The subtitle of Yuri Seiko's novels, s*hōjo bishō shōsetsu* 少女微笑小説 (*Humorous Novels for Girls*), invites its readers to smile at perceived vices of girls' fiction. These novels avoid the excessive sentimentality and decorative language that had become stereotypical features of Japanese girls' literature. This quality, combined with the novels' didactic elements, shows that Yuri's novels are a product of a time when Japan was rapidly transforming into a country where domestic matters were to be subjugated to military needs. However, multiple editions of Yuri's novels were published in the decade following the war's conclusion, which shows that these works had appeal even for the postwar generation, which was growing up in a vastly different world.

Japanese fiction for girls was not alone in undergoing changes in the pre-war period. In Britain, author Noel Streatfeild (1895–1986) published her popular first novel for girls, *Ballet Shoes*, in 1936 and started a trend of novels for girls' focusing primarily on careers rather than education or romance. At the same time, all the major authors in the genre of girls' school fiction in Britain were active through the 1930s and beyond, though the genre was destined for a decline in popularity after the war. In the United States, the long-running *Nancy Drew* series debuted in 1930 and popularised the genre of girls' mystery stories. The common thread uniting new developments in girls' literature in industrialised countries during the 1930s is a shift away from a focus on girls within families to girls developing careers and experiencing adventures outside the family circle or the structured environment of school studies. The novels of Yuri Seiko examined in this essay exemplify this shift.

This essay aims at illuminating the influence of contemporary social and market forces on Yuri Seiko's creations and how the changing needs of Japanese society are reflected in them. It suggests that the stories are a reaction to challenges posed to girls' fiction first by an increasing amount of potential readers with a wider range of social backgrounds and later by demands to fully submit to government authority in matters of content and ideology. Yuri's stories attempt to find a balance between the desire of existing readers for the familiar and new impulses.

## Review of Literature

At the present moment, there is still not a large amount of literature available in English that deals with Japanese pre-war girls' fiction. Apart from a smattering of journal articles, the most important monographs are Deborah

Shamoon's (2012) *Passionate Friendships: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan* and Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase's (2019) *The Age of Shōjo: The Emergence, Evolution, and Power of Japanese Girls' Magazine Fiction*. Both works are concerned with the entirety of the 20th century and both share the assumption of discontinuity between the pre-war and postwar periods. Shamoon follows the mainstream line of girls' culture, and the chapters in her book that deal with the postwar period focus on comics. Dollase claims in her chapter on the postwar magazine *Himawari* ひまわり (*Sunflower*) that

> Under the surveillance of GHQ/SCAP, girls' magazines struggled to negotiate Americanism and their own culture and to find new educational goals. But none of them grew or developed to create a culturally impactful *shōjo* community. *Himawari* accepted American culture, while it simultaneously aimed to re–create a magazine like the ones from before the war. Two impulses, progressiveness and nostalgia, coexisted in the magazine and sometimes contradicted each other. In the end, *Himawari* no longer functioned as a girls' community; it was a space in which adults could reflect on their own postwar selves.[3]

Both of these attitudes stress discontinuity between pre-war and postwar girls' culture, but as this essay shows, discontinuity is only part of the picture. *Himawari* was the magazine that published posthumous works of Matsuda Keiko, which proved to be popular with readers and remained in print until the end of the occupation of Japan (1945–1952) before enjoying a resurgence in the 1980s.

Neither Shamoon nor Dollase focus on the changes that girls' fiction in Japan underwent in the years preceding the Pacific War. Chapter 2 of Shamoon's book is titled 'Pre-war Girls' Culture (*Shōjo bunka*), 1910–1937', implying that the pre-war period of girls' culture in Japan ended with the outbreak of Second Sino–Japanese War (1937–1945). Dollase concedes that the government's pressure on the *Shōjo no tomo* 少女の友 (*Girl's Friend*) magazine increased after 1937 but that the final breaking point came only in 1940 with the removal of Nakahara Jun'ichi 中原淳一 (1913–1983) from the position of cover artist for the magazine. Since some of the most popular works of girls' fiction of the pre-war period were published in the period between 1937 and 1940, most notably Kawabata's *Otome no minato*, Dollase's view appears to be more accurate.

[3] Dollase 2019: 83.

Dollase's book is the only mention of the subject of this essay, Yuri Seiko, in English secondary literature, with one paragraph noting Yuri's contribution to the Westernisation of Japanese girls' literature.[4]

As could be expected, there is a larger amount of literature on the subject of girls' fiction available in Japanese. However, much of said literature does not give particular attention to the period of 1937–1940. Of those that deal with girls' fiction in said period, the most recent as well as the most extensive treatment of the subject has been provided by Imada Erika 今田絵里香 (2019) in *'Shōnen' 'Shōjo' no tanjō* 「少年」「少女」の誕生 (*The Birth of 'Boys' and 'Girls'*). Imada's book is an extensive overview of magazine fiction for both boys and girls from its beginnings in late 19th century to the changes it underwent during the postwar period. The third section of Imada's work, which deals with increasing government pressure on magazines for young readers and the postwar changes in fiction for boys and girls, is the most relevant to the subject of Yuri Seiko. Imada also articulates the main points of difference between pre-war and postwar girls' fiction that are used in this essay to show that Yuri's fiction contains elements that would make it relevant to postwar readers.

Imada's (2007) earlier work *'Shōjo' no shakaishi* 「少女」の社会史 (*Social History of the 'Girl'*) focuses on the history of girls' communities that formed around magazines for girls in the pre-war period. While it is not directly relevant to the subject of Yuri Seiko's fiction and many of its general points are repeated in Imada's 2019 work, *'Shōjo' no shakaishi* still contains information relating to the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine not found elsewhere.

Due to the lack of literature on the subject of Yuri Seiko, this essay does not attempt to directly critique previous research. Instead, an attempt is made to supplement it by filling blank spots. While popular girls' literature has always been a commercial genre, it was also subject to pressure from educational and government authorities that sought to regulate its content. Therefore, it is appropriate to approach the subject from the perspective of New Historicism. Japanese girls' fiction in the 1930s was primarily published in popular magazines, which had to balance multiple aims and external pressures: commercial aims of the publisher in a competitive market, tastes of readers, making the content of the magazine unobjectionable to parents, and increasing demands from government authorities to push readers towards contributing to the national war effort. As such, this essay must first identify the various pressures and influences in play, before pro-

[4] Dollase 2019: 67.

ceeding to a reading of Yuri's work that takes these influences into account and identifies how Yuri deals with them in the realm of fiction. Two works of Yuri Seiko are considered in this essay, *Chibi-kun monogatari* チビ君物語 (*Tiny's Stories*) and *Chiisai sensei* 小さい先生 (*Little Teacher*). *Chibi-kun monogatari* is a work that showcases attempts by the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine to appeal to a wider audience, and below it is compared to Yoshiya Nobuko's novel *Benisuzume* 紅雀 (*Red Sparrow*), which is an example of the type of novel written to appeal to *Shōjo no tomo*'s main audience of girls from the urban middle classes. *Chiisai sensei* is a novel that traces a young girl's development from childhood to the adult role of a teacher and contains strong didactic messages suitable for a novel that assuages readers' doubts about official wartime ideology.

## The landscape of Japanese girls' fiction in the 1930s

In her article on stories published in the magazine *Shōjo sekai* 少女世界 (*Girls' World*), Shioya Chisato 塩屋知里 claims that out of the three major pre-war Japanese girls' magazines, *Shōjo sekai* is the one that has received the least scholarly attention. The reason she proposes is that the magazine ceased publication in the pre-war period and by the time girls' literature and culture became an object of study, not enough former readers remained alive to revive interest in the magazine.[5]

An opposite of such a situation can be observed with the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine. Not only did the friendships formed within the community fostered by the editor-in-chief Uchiyama Motoi 内山基 (1903–1982) endure into the 1990s,[6] but the magazine inspired its readers into pursuing literary careers. Tanabe Seiko 田辺聖子 (1928–2019) is one of the celebrated female writers whose career started with reader contributions to the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine. Muraoka Hanako 村岡花子 (1893–1968), famous for her translation of the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, also contributed to the magazine in late 1930s. Nostalgia of former readers, former readers who managed to become professional writers, and a connection to Muraoka Hanako all contribute to perception of *Shōjo no tomo* as the most popular girls' magazine in the 1930s.

However, by that period, the magazine had been losing ground commercially. A competing magazine, *Shōjo kurabu* 少女倶楽部 (*Girls' Club*),

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[5] Shioya 2013: 2.

[6] Imada 2007: 155.

founded in 1923, had managed to capture the majority of readers. *Shōjo kurabu* presented itself as a magazine that supported the official *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 (good wife, wise mother) ideology[7] and whose goal was to be 'fun and useful', appealing to both girl readers and their parents and teachers.[8] This proved to be a winning combination in a period when numbers of girls pursuing secondary education were increasing in rural areas and when *Shōjo no tomo's* focus on readers from urban middle classes started to appear increasingly exclusionary.

This is the first pressure that helped form Yuri Seiko's stories published in the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine. Yuri Seiko's stories attempt to appeal to readers from more 'conservative' backgrounds with a gentle mockery of perceived sentimentality and the snobbishness of urban girls' culture. On the other side, an appeal is made to parents and teachers by presenting stronger didactic messages in the novels.

At the same time, the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine was under increasing pressure from the authorities that corresponded to escalating Japanese military activity on the Asian mainland, first in Manchuria and then in China proper. The reading girl, *bungaku shōjo* 文学少女 (literally 'literature girl'), was becoming a threat to social order and was perceived as weak in logic and science[9] and as performing badly in school.[10] Imada notes that the visual side of girls' magazines also changed and that during the second half of the 1930s, images of healthy, tanned girls with round cheeks and images of girls working for the state in agriculture and manufacturing started to appear with increasing frequency, while images of film actresses all but vanished.[11]

A new ideal of girl, *gunkoku shōjo* 軍国少女 (girl of military nation), was being constructed, and it would eventually displace the sophisticated, fun-loving girl from the pages of *Shōjo no tomo*. The desired characteristics of *gunkoku shōjo* were devotion to the nation, health, and the possession of a strong body capable of labour and a scientific mind. The last sign of resistance to this ideal on the pages of *Shōjo no tomo* was Uchiyama Motoi's great willingness to publish letters from readers dissatisfied with the change in direction.[12]

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[7] Imada 2019: 357–359.
[8] Imada 2007: 115.
[9] Inagaki 2007: 74.
[10] Inagaki 2007: 152.
[11] Imada 2007: 78–79.
[12] Imada 2007: 175–176.

This final change in the magazine's direction happened only in the year 1940, but the pressure had been mounting in the years before: the *Jidō yomimono kaizen ni kansuru shiji yōkō* 児童読み物改善ニ関スル指示要綱 (*Guide for the Improvement and Purification of Stories for Children*) was distributed in 1938 with the approval of Japan's Home Ministry. It condemned commercialism and encouraged the cultivation of Japanese spirit and virtues that included loyalty, service, humility, and courage.[13] However, to the surprise of Saeki Ikurō 佐伯郁郎 (1901–1982), the Home Ministry official and poet who prepared the guide, the publishers, writers, and artists active in creating children's literature (including literature for girls) were opposed to the guide's recommendations.[14] I suggest that in spite of Saeki's campaign being met with indifference and hostility, his guide had an influence on girls' fiction, as writers and publishers wished to forestall further official pressure.

### *Chibi-kun monogatari*: An ordinary girl

Like many other female authors of girls' fiction, Yuri Seiko got her start first as amateur contributor and correspondent during her school years. In 1932, she started professionally contributing short articles to both *Shōjo no tomo* and *Shōjo gahō* 少女画報 (*Girls' Illustrated*) magazines, but *Chibi-kun monogatari* (*Tiny's Stories*) was her first long serialisation, and writing for it the first time she used Yuri Seiko as a pen name. *Chibi-kun monogatari* began serialisation in the December 1934 issue of *Shōjo no tomo*, and stories in the series continued to appear for two more years. Part of the stories was published in book form in 1939[15] as *Chibi-kun monogatari*, with the rest published in 1941 as *Zoku Chibi-kun monogatari* 続チビ君物語 (*More of Tiny's Stories*). Yuri continued to write serialised works for *Shōjo no tomo* almost until her death in 1943, two months after her last serialised work ended without conclusion.[16]

Rather than a novel with continuous narrative, *Chibi-kun monogatari* is a series of short stories, connected by the figure of their protagonist. Hatsuko,

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[13] Dollase 2019: 68.

[14] Imada 2019: 385.

[15] Endō–Uchida 2009: 371 claims that Chibi-kun monogatari was published in book form in the year Shōwa 13 (1938), but the book itself is dated as being both printed and published in the year Shōwa 14 (1939).

[16] Endō–Uchida 2009: 371.

nicknamed Chibi-kun for her short stature, is first depicted as a live-in maid for a rich family. Her mother and older siblings had followed her father to Manchuria on unspecified business. Several chapters later, Hatsuko's living conditions improve when her mother returns to Japan. The family's economic situation improves even further when the rest of Hatsuko's family joins them.

A precarious economic situation, dependent on the male head of the family's ability to earn money, had always been a feature of pre-war Japanese girls' fiction since the genre's earliest years[17] and continued to be present for the entirety of the pre-war period. Yoshiya Nobuko's popular novel *Benisuzume* (*Red Sparrow*), which was serialised in *Shōjo no tomo* in 1930 and published in book form in 1933, shows a riches-to-rags-to-riches pattern. It features the story of a girl who, after the death of her parents, is thrown into poverty and forced to depend on the kindness of others. In comparison to *Benisuzume*, *Chibi-kun monogatari*'s story of Hatsuko's economic progress is much more grounded and features far fewer unlikely coincidences. At 18 to 19 years old in 1930, Yuri Seiko was still part of *Benisuzume*'s target readership, and there is a high chance that she had read the novel, especially as she was an avid enough reader of girls' magazines to contribute letters. Whether Yuri was consciously responding to *Benisuzume* or not, a comparison between it and Yuri's work is useful for revealing differences between the 1930 *Shōjo no tomo*, which was at the height of its commercial success, and the late 1934 *Shōjo no tomo*, which had to respond to losing ground to the *Shōjo kurabu* magazine.

*Beniszume*'s protagonist Mayumi is wilful, beautiful, and proud. All of those qualities are seen as proof of her strong character, which makes someone admirable. Even though circumstances force her to depend on people outside her family, her fortunes are restored at the end of the novel. In short, she is an example of ideal heroine of girls' fiction, described by Imada Erika as *saishokukenbi no ojōsama* 才色兼備のお嬢様 (a talented young lady). According to Imada, this type of protagonist is characterised by eye-catching beauty, excellent intellectual capacities, athletic ability, material riches, and the ability to express and understand emotions.[18] In contrast to Mayumi, Hatsuko is a completely ordinary girl. Her appearance is never noted as remarkable, except for her height. Her academic and athletic abilities are average. Her material circumstances improve, but they never

[17] For example in Numata Ryūhō's short story Shōzōga 肖像画 ('Portrait') from his 1910 collection Wakakusa 若草 (Young Grass).

[18] Imada 2019: 246–253.

reach extravagant heights. Her emotional capabilities are important only in a few of the stories. As a protagonist, Hatsuko's most notable attribute is her passivity that makes her act more as an observer and victim rather than as a participant in any given story's events. In this she is contrasted with Rieko, the spoiled daughter of the family at whose house Hatsuko lives in the earliest stories. Rieko's constant selfishness and antagonising of Hatsuko are the main sources of conflict in the stories. As Hatsuko is the heroine, her feminine passivity is rewarded in the stories and when Rieko or Hatsuko attempt to act on their own desires, they are punished accordingly.

In conflicts between Hatsuko and Rieko, it is Rieko's slightly older brother Shūzō who forces Rieko to apologise for her misdeeds. Although Shūzō is gently mocked by the narrative for his pretensions to scientific knowledge and adult airs, his judgment of his sister is always correct and he acts as Hatsuko's protector.

> 'Are you done grouching now? You shouldn't be like that. If you want to see Chibi-kun, you should say so. You make everything complicated because you grouch so much. You're a kid, but you've got an especially complicated emotional personality. I figured that out using Freud's psychoanalysis.' [...] 'She wants to see Chibi-kun even though she bullied her so much,' thought Shūzō and found such childishness charming.[19]

The brother–sister relationship in *Chibi-kun monogatari* is the opposite of such relationships in *Benisuzume*. Mayumi acts as a protector and caretaker of her younger brother, and in the family that takes the orphaned siblings in, the younger sister is emotionally wiser than her older brother, the current head of the family. Shūzō, on the other hand, is positioned as being in an undisputed position of authority over both his sister and Hatsuko. He remains in this position even in later stories set after Hatsuko's mother return to Japan.

Rieko and Hatsuko reconcile enough for Rieko to continue appearing in later stories, but the relationship remains antagonistic and there never comes any sort of dramatic event that would change the relationship's nature. Imada Erika identifies *yūjō shōsetsu* 友情小説 (friendship novels) as a genre within girls' fiction typical for *Shōjo no tomo* that focused on relationships between girls and provided an example to follow in real life.[20]

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[19] Yuri 1939: 95.
[20] Imada 2007: 189.

However, in *Chibi-kun monogatari* friendship between girls is secondary, merely an accessory to the unequal friendship between Hatsuko and Shūzō.

Shūzō is the voice of reason, curbing Rieko's excessive emotionality. In an episode where Rieko gives money to a beggar, it is Shūzō who realises that she has been tricked by a con artist.

> 'The same beggar?'
>
> 'The same. He can't move his legs since the Mukden incident… It was written on the box he had for collecting money'.
>
> [...]
>
> Shūzō was grinning. Chibi-kun did not know why. Not only did she think that giving money to a poor beggar was a rare good deed from Rieko, but she was sure that if she herself saw a poor beggar, she would be sure to give him money. It was strange that Shūzō would make fun of something like that.[21]

Later on, Shūzō is proven right when the group meet the beggar returning home on the same train as them.

> Rieko lowered her voice and whispered, 'Shūzō!' Her eyes couldn't let go of a man who had just boarded the train. 'It's that beggar!' The man was wearing dirty, shabby clothes and one look was enough to know that he was a beggar.
>
> (Hmm, so that's Rieko's beggar!)
>
> Shūzō looked at the beggar. He was holding crutches, but both his legs were healthy.
>
> (Church in the morning, crematorium at noon, and now he's heading for Shinjuku. Beggars are busy people.)
>
> Shūzō watched him with a smile.[22]

Rieko's actions based on emotions are shown to be foolish. Indeed, excessive emotionality is one of the many flaws in Rieko's character. Acting on one's emotions, a stereotypically feminine trait, is always met with negative consequences. In the rare cases where Hatsuko shows initiative instead of being passive, she is shown to be acting emotionally, and it is made obvious that Hatsuko should have heeded the advice of adults and Shūzō.

> 'I'll take him with us. What's his name?' Rieko came closer as if she was going to take Hatsubei away and softly touched him.

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[21] Yuri 1939: 202–203.

[22] Yuri 1939: 206.

> 'No! I won't give him to anyone!' Chibi-kun's unusually strong voice startled not just Rieko, but also Mineya and mother.
>
> (As if he'd die. They keep saying he'll die to scare me and take him away.)
>
> She turned away and hot tears fell from her eyes onto the kitten's black back.[23]

In the quotation above, Hatsuko refuses to give up a found kitten to Rieko's family, even though the kitten is too young to feed on its own and Rieko's family owns a cat that could take care of it. The predictable consequence is that the kitten dies of hunger in spite of Hatsuko's best efforts. It is Rieko's enthusiastic reaction to the kitten that triggers Hatsuko's stubborn response. Female emotionality feeds on itself and literally causes death.

It is not just acting on emotion, but also excessive sentimentality that is viewed negatively, as shown in an excerpt from Hatsuko's diary:

> I wonder if she knows that the house is going to be sold. If she doesn't know and it happens all of a sudden, she's sure to be sad about it. If I was in her place, I'd cry. But maybe they'll build a better house after selling this one… I'm such a fool. I don't know anything, but I'm getting all sympathetic. That's weird, isn't it?[24]

Again, the emotional response is shown to be foolish. Sympathy given without full knowledge of the situation is wasted sympathy. This is also illustrated in a story dealing with Hatsuko's classmate Wajima, who at first appears to be an ideal protagonist for a girls' novel: a deputy class president, very smart and calm. She is described as a little weak and sickly, but always doing everything right.[25]

During the course of the story, Hatsuko discovers that both of Wajima's parents had passed away and that her older sister had quit school to work as a shop clerk to support the family. Wajima and her sisters are forced to move into a small house in a side alley, and every day Hatsuko and Wajima pass by the house on their way home from school. Wajima not only acts at school as if nothing had changed, but she walks past her new home with Hatsuko as if she still lived at her old address. Only after Hatsuko learns about all these circumstances is she allowed to feel sympathetic toward Wajima's circumstances and to feel admiration for Wajima's determination to keep

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23 Yuri 1939: 157.
24 Yuri 1939: 254.
25 Yuri 1939: 212.

up appearances even at the cost of her own health. The entire story could be written by Yoshiya Nobuko, but Yuri Seiko only allows Hatsuko's sympathy to be shown as legitimate once she understands Wajima's situation completely.

All the stories in *Chibi-kun monogatari* eschew hallmarks of girls' fiction published in the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine: the heroine is ordinary in all aspects, equal friendships between boys and girls are an impossibility, sympathy for others is often foolish, and an excess of emotion leads to destructive ends. These changes to the established norms of girls' fiction are not just the result of Yuri Seiko's desire as a new writer to differentiate herself from her predecessors. While humorous, the stories provide clear messages aimed at correcting faults in readers' characters and promote self-sacrifice, self-restraint, and obedience to one's parents and male siblings. In light of the challenge presented by *Shōjo kurabu* to *Shōjo no tomo*'s success, the stories are part of *Shōjo no tomo*'s attempt to widen its audience to meet the new market situation.

*Shōjo no tomo* lost its position as the most widely read girls' magazine, but *Chibi-kun monogatari*'s message made it suitable both for publication under wartime conditions and for eventual popularity during the period of Japan's occupation. In her description of changes in girls' literature in the postwar period, Imada Erika notices that pre-war heroines are of the *saishokukenbi no ojōsama* type and that postwar heroines can be described as *kawaii shōjo* 可愛い少女 (cute girls) to be doted on. Furthermore, Imada notes that the pre-war ideal of girls' behaviour is of girls supporting each other, while the postwar ideal is of girls supporting boys.[26] *Chibi-kun monogatari* fits the postwar mould better than it fits the pre-war period in which it was originally written and published.

### ***Chiisai sensei*: Premature service**

While *Chibi-kun monogatari* was an attempt to meet market demands, *Chiisai sensei* (*Little Teacher*) was an effort to meet the authorities' demands for girls' fiction that would reflect wartime ideology. It was no longer sufficient for girls to be obedient and to exercise self-control; they also had to be resilient and physically capable of serving the nation. At the same time, the

[26] Imada 2019: 441.

novel recognises the misgivings that girls might have about their roles and attempts to assuage them.

Even as a child, the heroine Chinatsu is capable of a great degree of understanding for others, including her apathetic and cruel aunt, who takes care of Chinatsu in place of her parents. As such, Chinatsu is well equipped for her eventual employment as a teacher at a private secondary school for girls where she would be involved in her students' lives.

Chinatsu's eventually working at a private, not public school is important not only because of the role it plays in the narrative (the school's principal is eventually revealed to be Chinatsu's mother), but also because it permits Yuri certain leeway in depicting girls' education and permits her to criticise certain aspects of it.

An example of such criticism is Chinatsu's efforts to help a talented student named Shihoya by recommending her work for publication in the school magazine. The incident clearly showcases the limitations of the school system when it comes to recognising girls' intellectual achievements.

> No matter how good she was, Shihoya had yet to earn the happiness of being published in the school pamphlet '*Wakaba*'. Her previous composition teacher used to say things like 'Shihoya's compositions are not childlike'.[27]
>
> 'I think Yamamuro's composition is much more childlike and carefree. Shihoya's composition feels like it was written by an adult-shaped chick'.
>
> I remembered that the teacher who did not accept Shihoya's composition was Miss Kuota. 'I thought her subject was interesting...'
>
> 'An inquiry concerning the national anthem! The theme sounds like she learned about it from her older brother. Do children of fifteen or sixteen even use words like inquiry? The other composition is much clearer'.
>
> Yamamuro's composition was called 'At the stationery shop', a child's fantasy about buying colourful stationery. It was lovely and beautiful. However, I think that if children's compositions are limited to these subjects, they won't be able to improve. Even though dreams and fantasy are good…[28]

The criticism of limiting girls' creativity to appropriate subjects is apparent, and it is further reinforced by the revelation that Shihoya's composition was accepted by a scholarly publication whose editor was impressed by her young age. Chinatsu's remark that dreams and fantasy are good acquires special interest in the context of debates following Nakahara Jun'ichi's departure from the position of *Shōjo no tomo*'s cover artist in 1940. Hiromi

[27] Yuri 1942: 130.

[28] Yuri 1942: 131–132.

Tsuchiya Dollase quotes the editor-in-chief Uchiyama Motoi's response to letters from readers expressing disappointment with the magazine's new warlike direction:

> The readers seem to take the idea of a dream as something fragile… True dreams will be born in reality and have to give us the power to cultivate healthy and strong lives. We tend to mix up real dreams with illusionary dreams. The influence of illusionary dreams is like opium.[29]

The chapter of *Chiisai sensei* concerning Shihoya was published in the June 1940 issue of *Shōjo no tomo*, the last one to feature a cover by Nakahara, so it predates the debate by several months. However, it is in accord with Uchiyama Motoi's attitude toward the change where he complied with the government's demands, but allowed readers to vent their frustration on the magazine's pages. Dreams and fantasy are good, and it is only a gifted minority of girls that can be expected to mature early and be interested in matters of national importance, such as the anthem. Chinatsu's thoughts on the subject position girls as being in an intermediate stage of life where they are more than children and as such should strive to grow, but at the same time, girls are not quite adults and should not be expected to perform or be forced into adult duties.

The question of girlhood and premature adulthood is examined in another chapter of the novel. One of the classes that Chinatsu teaches is an ethics class, which dispenses with official textbooks and takes the form of classroom discussion. The question of the Japanese family system is put forward in a fifth year class,[30] which is described as difficult:

'I often heard the word "Why?", which didn't happen much in the second year class. It was often followed by the words "And then?"'[31]

Chinatsu's troubles with defending the Japanese family system and the role of a girl within it are made clear when a student presents a highly critical opinion:

> 'System of large families significantly interferes with and affects all individuals'.
>
> […]
>
> 'Such as?' I prompted her to continue.

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[29] Uchiyama Motoi, "Henshū kōki," Shōjo no tomo 33, no. 9 (1940): 252, quoted in Dollase 2019: 69–70.

[30] The final year of girls' secondary education under the pre-war system for students aged 16 to 17 years old.

[31] Yuri 1942: 150.

> 'I don't have a specific example, but', Yamagata stalled and closed her eyes for a moment, 'The wife and children are not allowed any freedom in what they do. If there are any older family members, even the father is bound to an extent'.
>
> Her voice had a tone of rebellion to it. My heart started to beat faster. I hoped there would be someone to give an opposing opinion. Nobody raised a hand, maybe because of the earnestness in Yamagata's voice. Five seconds… ten seconds… fifteen seconds passed in silence.
>
> 'For example? Do you mean that grandfather might want to see nō theatre, father a play and you want to see a movie? Something like that?'
>
> Yamagata looked straight at me. She was probably angry because I made fun of her earnest feelings with an inconsequential example.
>
> 'It's not such a trivial issue', Yamagata continued in a grumpy tone, 'Father, mother, children aren't able to entertain a feeling of independence and their ambitions are smothered'. She sat down.[32]

Neither Chinatsu nor the author are able to come up with a convincing defence of a system where women are educated, while at the same time being deprived of a chance to make use of their education. In light of imperial ideology likening the emperor to the father and the citizens to his family, Yamagata's criticism appears to be even more subversive and dangerous. However, her attitude is justified by her lack of selfish motivation and her desire to sacrifice herself for the sake of her family, which does not allow her to drop expensive extracurricular activities for the sake of keeping up appearances. Within the story itself, the conflict is resolved through unconvincing platitudes about waiting for the right moment before departing towards adulthood: girls are expected to make sacrifices for their family and nation, but not just yet.

*Chiisai sensei* is a novel that was serialised during a period of rapid change in the *Shōjo no tomo*'s direction, and it attempts to straddle both sides of the issue. Girls' self-sacrifice and eagerness to assume the role of workers are seen as praiseworthy, but at the same time they are often premature. Shihoya's case shows that only an exceptional minority of girls is mature enough to take interest in national matters. Yamagata's case further shows that even if girls are willing to serve the nation/family, they should not do so until they are more mature. Girls should be girls, and it is wrong to turn them into adults prematurely. By the time of the novel's publication

[32] Yuri 1942: 155–156.

in book form in 1942, it was almost outdated. The demands of war forced the government to mandate increasingly more students attending secondary schools to participate in war production. Unlike *Chibi-kun monogatari*, *Chiisai sensei* did not find success in the postwar years. The 1942 edition is the only edition on record at the National Diet Library.

## Conclusion

Neither work discussed in this essay is an example of typical fiction published in the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine. This can be explained by looking at the context in which they were originally published. *Chibi-kun monogatari* represents a situation where market competition forced an attempt by the magazine to widen its readership by showcasing more conservative values that would appeal to rural readers, parents, and teachers. While the stories did not succeed in this goal, their deviation from the pre-war girls' fiction made them a perfect fit for postwar publication.[33]

On the other hand, *Chiisai sensei* is a novel formed by wartime ideology, exactly half of which was published before a drastic change in *Shōjo no tomo*'s direction. As such, it attempts to comply with the demands of official ideology, while at the same time it questions its applicability to girls, the novel's target audience. Without reference to the specific historical time and place of the pages of the *Shōjo no tomo* magazine in 1940, the novel loses much of its interest.

Taken together, the books show little of Yuri Seiko as a person. As her first professional work and a work published close to the end of her short life and career, the novels are dissimilar and do not reveal any subject or theme in which the writer was especially interested. Yoshiya Nobuko, as adept as she was at writing for different audiences in different times, always puts emphasis on women's relationships and their mutual support, even when writing war propaganda. What the books do show is the effects of external market and government forces on girls' fiction in Japan in the second half of the 1930s.

[33] Although postwar edition was not available for comparison, it is reasonable to assume that they would contain textual changes, such as removal of references to Manchuria and the Mukden incident.

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