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Manga Shōnen: Katō Ken’ichi and the Manga Boys

Manga Shōnen... what sweet-sounding words. Let's say it again. Manga Shōnen. I feel my chest tighten, such nostalgia arises. Manga Shōnen was my youth's first love... My first love, where have you gone?

—Tatsumi Yoshihiro, “Manga Shōnen wo aisu” (I miss Manga Shōnen)

So pined Tatsumi Yoshihiro in 1981, twenty-six years after the legendary magazine had folded, on the occasion of the first serious retrospective of its legacy: Terada Hiroo’s A History of “Manga Shōnen.” It was where he and his elder brother Sakurai Shōichi had competed against one another to get published in the monthly reader-submissions contest, Sakurai winning first in March 1949, then Tatsumi in July, then pooling their resources and appearing side by side in 1950 as leaders of the Children’s Manga Association (Kodomo Manga Kenkyūkai), their own amateur comics club, purportedly postwar Japan’s first.

Sakurai wrote, also in 1981, on the same occasion, “How we got to know, willy-nilly, the ABC’s of making manga was through Gakudōsha’s 1948-founded Manga Shōnen. The great children’s manga artists from both the prewar and
the postwar congregated there, testing their skills one against another. It was a dazzling spectacle, but at the same time it was the source of information on the world of manga, the textbook, the gateway.”

Among the prewar guard of Manga Shōnen were Shimada Keizō, author of the colonialist fantasy The Adventurous Dankichi (1933–39, Bōken Dankichi), Tagawa Suîhō, author of Norakuro (1931–41), and Haga Masao, the preeminent author of animal comics and picture books during the late 1930s and wartime 40s. On the postwar side was, above anyone else, Tezuka Osamu. It was in Manga Shōnen that his first large-scale magazine serial was published, Jungle Emperor (1950–54, Janguru taitei), about the white lion prince who learns the language and ways of the humans, and then returns to Africa to lead the animal kingdom. It was there that the first chapters of Phoenix (1954–55, Hi no tori) appeared. It was also home to his Manga Classroom (1952–54, Manga kyōshitsu), a how-to tutorial more inspirational than practical, designed to lend authority and not a little star glamour to the magazine’s reader submissions pages.

“When I hear the name Manga Shōnen,” recalled Ishinomori Shōtarō, the Guinness-recognized world’s most prolific cartoonist, “I immediately think of the color red. That’s red as in postbox red. How many times did I stick a letter or a postcard in praying for it to be accepted? The very first hurdle I had to cross was that mouth of the postbox.” The idea of reader submissions was not original, existing in newspapers and magazines since before the war, but Manga Shōnen carried it out on an unprecedented scale. Out of that crucible emerged not just Ishinomori and Tatsumi but many of the top sellers and innovators of postwar manga, including Abiko Motô and Fujimoto Hiroshi of the Fujiko Fujio duo and the king of gag manga Akatsuka Fujio. Submitting there were also boys who ended up famous in other fields, including graphic designers Yokoo Tadanori and Tanaami Keiichi, painter Tateishi Tiger, photographer Shinozuka Tiger, and novelists Komatsu Sakyō and Tsutsui Yasutaka. It was the place where aspiring creators from across Japan first saw their names in print, spurring many of them to better their skills to compete against their peers.

Manga Shōnen also inspired a few amateur comics clubs. In addition to Tatsumi and Sakurai’s in Osaka, there was also Ishinomori’s East Japan Manga Research Association (Higashi Nihon Manga Kenkyūkai) in Miyagi. Like
the Fujiko Fujio duo in Toyama, each had their own coterie magazines, hand-drawn and single-copy, passed from member to member, sometimes across thousands of miles, and in some cases eventually on to pros and publishers in Tokyo. In many cases, it was these *dōjinshi* that brought their organizers their first professional commissions, and that opened the door to their first face-to-face meetings with their hero, Tezuka Osamu.

“In hindsight, the value of *Manga Shōnen* lay in that part of it that was not directed toward the masses or general populace, that was only recognized by a portion of manga maniacs.”5 When manga critic and author Masaki Mori wrote those words for *COM* in 1968, he was speaking directly to the latter magazine’s attempt, inspired in part by *Manga Shōnen* and part by its rival *Garo*, to nurture a new wave of amateur talent and provide support for the various manga fan circles that had begun to mushroom across Japan, especially on university campuses, in the second half of the 1960s. *Manga Shōnen* also provided the inspiration for *Grand Companion*, *COM*’s reader supplement, which in turn spawned Comic Market, the manga fanzine fair that began in 1975 as a one-day, one-room annual gathering for about seven hundred people but has grown today into a twice-yearly, three-day extravaganza for
the small-city equivalent of 500,000. No doubt, in the history of fandom as a creative force in postwar Japan, *Manga Shōnen* has been seminal.

From a certain point of view, *Manga Shōnen* had always aimed at becoming the original manga lover’s manga magazine. After all, the magazine was named “Manga boys”—describing not comics that are defined by a specific readership (as is the case with the generic phrase “shōnen manga,” or “boys’ comics”) but rather readers that are defined by their relationship to a particular medium. And by the early 1950s, in an age when illustrated prose and the half-text and half-image medium of *emonogatari* were still dominant in youth magazines, more than two-thirds of *Manga Shōnen*’s pages were given over to comics. Likewise, the inaugural issue’s table of contents page included the following manifesto:

Manga brightens a child’s heart
Manga lightens a child’s heart
That is why children like nothing more than manga
*Manga Shōnen* is a book that will brighten and lighten children’s hearts
*Manga Shōnen* offers stories [shōsetsu] and other types of literature [yomimono] that will nurture a child’s heart to be pure and proper [kiyoku tadashiku]
Each and every work is a masterpiece
Children of Japan. Read *Manga Shōnen* and grow pure, bright, and proper!!

However, even in that manifesto one can read a divergent purpose. Manga might be the focus, but it is assigned specific and possibly lesser roles. It “brightens” and “lightens” while prose makes “pure and proper.” It makes the child happy while prose makes him strong and upright. In fact, while comics were foregrounded in the magazine’s title and editorial copy, for its first years more than half of *Manga Shōnen*’s pages were filled with character-building prose.

This division in media and the economy of their combination has roots in an earlier age, growing out of philosophies concerning proper male youth entertainment established in the 1920s, and those concerning the proper supporting role for manga that developed subsequently in the 1930s. What I would like to focus on in the present essay is the magazine’s founding and early years that were shaped by the artistic and ideological prerogatives of the pre-1945 period. *Manga Shōnen* might live forever in legend as the first love of “manga boys,” but it was born and reared as a very different kind of enterprise.
The prewar roots of *Manga Shōnen* could not be easier to prove. After all, the magazine was conceived and published by Katō Ken’ichi (1896–1975), a giant in the history of twentieth-century Japanese children’s culture. Born in Hiromae in the northern prefecture of Aomori in the late nineteenth century, Katō grew up in a climate of high national pride, supported by strong ideologies of national character formation, colonial expansion, and war victories over China and Russia. As a middle school student, Katō frequented meetings of the “Steel & Snow Society” (“Tessetsusha”), a right-wing group that aimed to make its male members “As Hard as Steel, As Pure as Snow.” Following graduation in 1916, Katō ran the group’s newsletter, “Cherry Blossoms of Japan” (“Yamato no sakura”), his first editorial job. After a short stint as a schoolteacher in Aomori, he moved to Tokyo in 1918 and found a job with Kōdansha in 1921. Within the year, he was put in charge of *Shonen Club* (*Shōnen Kurabu*), a monthly magazine aimed at boys roughly between grades five and eight. Founded in 1915, Club differentiated itself from other children’s magazines of the Taishō period by emphasizing character formation rather than (what was usual at the time) the magic of childhood itself. Its main goal, as Satō Tadao put it in 1959, was to instill a spirit of righteousness and romantic idealism so that boys could become proper men. And that is how the magazine has usually been remembered since.

Under Katō’s stewardship, *Shonen Club* became Japan’s leading boys’ magazine. In ten years, its print run increased almost nine-fold, from 80,000 at the time Katō joined the magazine’s staff to over 700,000 at the end of 1932, the last year he served as head editor. Its success is oftentimes summed up in the following phrase, Kōdansha’s company slogan: “Omoshirokute, tameni naru”—“Fun and good for you.” The ideal, Kōdansha founder Noma Seiji

![Figure 3. *Shōnen Club* (September 1932), cover by Saitō Ioe.](image-url)
Ryan Holmberg (1878–1938) explained soon after Club’s founding, was “not something that adults force their children to read, but something children enjoy and choose themselves to read. And thus while they are reading and having fun, they will, without knowing or realizing it, receive a kind of education.” If one or the other, Club is probably better remembered for the “good for you” side, as represented by the fairly humorless genre of the nekketsu shōsetsu, the “hot-blooded novel,” serialized bildungsroman aimed at teaching boys proper manliness. President Noma again: “What we should aim to impart to youth is the imperative of becoming ‘great men’ upon the central principle of moral education.” While Norakuro and Club’s insert premiums marked the magazine as an enterprise at the forefront of modern entertainment and consumer culture, its simultaneous emphasis on character building showed it to be at heart founded on rather conservative social values.

During Katō’s time, the subjects were relatively cosmopolitan. Patriots from Japanese history dominated, while Napoleon and Abraham Lincoln also had their life stories told. If such “great men” were one side of the genre, Horatio Alger-type great-men-to-be were the other. The classic here is Satō Kōroku’s Ah, Blossoms in the Chalice (1927–28, Aa, gyokuai ni hana ukete), about a school-aged boy who overcomes poverty to become an excellent student and role model for his community, proving to his wealthier peers that hard work, honesty, and courage—not wealth and power—make an individual truly noble. It is often argued that such lessons agreed with contemporary ideals of national subjectivity as promoted by the Japanese state, and indeed Katō himself later stated that his support for the nekketsu genre was informed by having associated with the rightwing Steel & Snow Society in his youth. Still it is worth noting that it was mainly after Katō’s tenure at Club ended in 1932 that the magazine became—the nation’s leading organ in promoting the virtues of the soldier’s sacrifice and the wonder of the expanding colonial periphery among Japan’s male youth. For many of the Kodansha circle, the “hot-blooded novel” and its principles of personal striving and moral character were so basic as to be adaptable across political situations—and so it would be in the postwar period.

Given this Meiji-esque reputation, it is often forgotten that Club also had
its purely “fun” side. While one could speak of the long-running “Funny Talk” (“Warai banashi”) column, with its comic stories of everyday mishaps and misunderstandings at home and in the classroom, the “omoshiroi” was more memorably expressed in the magazine’s manga pages. In addition to serials like Norakuro and Dankichi, since the late 1920s Club had also included a handful of mainly single-page comics. In style they largely held to the motifs and sense of humor of the older Meiji/Taishō-era children’s “Punch” pictures, narrating the unfolding of a pratfall or gag over the course of four panels, taking on more and more of the graphic sensibilities of modernist design and American and European “nonsense cartoons” over the course of the 1930s. A turning point in both Club’s commitment to manga and the medium’s position within mass youth publications came in 1931, the year Tagawa’s Norakuro began serialization. Helped by not a little bit of marketing, the runaway success of the manga and its merchandising quickly pushed Katō and Kōdansha to consider expanding its manga offerings within the coming year’s features and giveaways.

The main result was Happy Manga Library (Manga yukai bunko), begun New Year’s 1932. Printed duotone in red and pink halftone over black line work, on heavier whiter paper stock, this handsome section stood out physically as well as visually from the rest of the magazine’s pages. It included a new serial by Tagawa, this one about a hapless young samurai, as well as a number of short one- and two-page manga of the modernized “Punch” type described above. There were also a handful of games and trivia segments narrated through cartoony characters and speech balloons. Continuing through 1932 and into 1933 under the same name, in line with the times the section was subsequently retitled Manga Train (Manga ressha), then Great Manga March (Manga daikōshin) and Great Manga Advancing Army (Manga daishingun). There was increased military content, but by and large Club’s comics focused on
laughs at home and school. Character models, meanwhile, remained the domain of prose. There was a clear division in roles between media in *Club*. Nonetheless even Satō Kōroku, the doyen of character-building prose, thought manga had a purpose greater than amusement. He reportedly commended Katō on brightening the magazine by including high quality cartoons. It might even have been his suggestion to include more, so as to appeal to all members of the family, that lead to *Norakuro* and the *Happy Manga Library.*

So when one of Katō Ken’ichi’s sons, Katō Takeo, describes *Manga Shōnen*, on the occasion of a 2001 biography of his father, as “a revival of *Shonen Club,*” one should keep in mind *Club’s* diversity before racing for the stereotypes. As I will explain below, to an extent *Manga Shōnen* did aim to rehabilitate post-Meiji *bildungsroman* and the ideal of *risshin shusse* boyhood within the postwar context. But just as much a reflection of the magazine’s Kōdansha heritage was its investment in manga as a “brightening” supplement, as a medium that increased cheer as well as sales.

In January 1945, Katō was promoted to a senior managing position at Kōdansha. This is a position he would hold only until the end of the war. For in September of that year, the recently established Occupation government forced Kōdansha, judged one of the major engines of militarist ideology, to close its doors. Katō found work with a new publisher, Shōbunkan (later renamed Hōbunsha), where he edited *Baseball Shonen* (*Yakyū shōnen*), a boys’ magazine dedicated to what was thought to be the most democratic and American of sports. While the magazine was extremely popular, Katō’s tenure did not last long. In June 1947, the GHQ issued a list of “war collaborators” to be purged from public service or any position of public influence. On this list were the names of Kōdansha’s elite, including that of Katō. The fifty-year-old editor of twenty-five years was thus deprived of his career and means to feed his wife and six children.

It was thus secretly that Katō established *Manga Shōnen* and its publishing house Gakudōsha, literally “The Schoolchild Company.” Various measures were used to circumvent Occupation authorities. His wife Masa was listed as publisher and his eldest daughter Maruko as editor. A relative’s address was given for the company office, though until 1950 the entire operation was run out of the Katō home in Hongō. To avoid postal censors, his children hand-delivered letters directly to artists and printers. When the American M.P.s came around to check on his activities, Katō would retreat to a back room, silently sweating out their departure. Such dissimulation was no longer necessary after the purge was lifted at the end of 1950. But Katō took advantage of the freedom not to make Gakudōsha more his own but rather to rejoin Kōdansha, where
he remained in a senior capacity until his death in 1975. The reins of *Manga Shōnen* were handed over to his eldest son, Katō Hiroyasu.

Katō Ken’ichi initially conceived of Gakudōsha as much more than a publishing house. He described the original vision behind the company in *COM* in 1968 as follows:

Initially I had meant to call it The Schoolchild Assembly Hall [Gakudō kaikan]. This was a strange name for a company indeed. But there were certain ambitions and ideals behind this strangeness. This hall was not just for all of the students of Japan but was designed as a business to support everyone who had something to do with schoolchildren. Naturally it would publish magazines and books for schoolchildren, but also textbooks. Also reference books. It would sell teaching aids and materials for schools. It would also sell equipment for exercise and sports. Instruments and specimens for science class, all the school supplies a schoolchild would need would be supplied by the company after close inspection by our research wing. Someday, a robust Schoolchild Assembly Hall would be built to provide rooms for teachers on business trips from the countryside and school groups on field trips. There would be lectures and film screenings and theatrical performances for students in the lecture hall. In the large sports grounds adjacent, we would host national student competitions. It might seem like a dream, but for a recently reborn Japan, nothing was more important than a robust education for our children. The provision of books, supplies, and facilities that would aid that robustness should have taken priority over all other reconstruction efforts.21

What motivated such grand ambitions? Nineteen forty-seven was probably too early for anyone to forecast the size of the postwar baby boom and strike out in business to take advantage of the coming voracious demand for educational equipment and facilities. Instead, considering who Katō was, it is hard
not to hear in such dreams of a national education center just two years after
the war, designed with a view to spiritual regeneration and hosting large-scale
congregations of student bodies, the heart of a man who had been a major
shaper of childhood during the age of the Japanese Empire.

Even in its earliest, most strongly Kōdansha-esque days, Manga Shōnen
is clearly a product of the post-1945 era. Still, the shape and content of the
early issues suggest that Katō did wish to put postwar regeneration on prewar
footing. The most explicit expressions come out in editorial matter. A number
of historians have commented on the fact that Manga Shōnen addressed its
readers in the same language that Club had, particularly through the name
“shin’ai naru aidokusha shokun,” which while translating uneventfully as “Dear
Beloved Readers,” is constructed in Japanese out of the vocabulary of filial
piety and imperial subjectivity. The vocabulary of prewar ethics did not end
there. “Children of Japan, it is because you are the treasures of the nation,”
explains the January 1949 issue, evoking an old Meiji period expression (okuni
no takara) that also appears in Kōdansha publications of the 1930s, “that we
send you this special jumbo issue, with the wish that you will be pure and
proper and bright.” 22 Elsewhere in the same issue:

Dear Readers, let us face the New Year together with hope. Adults also have
hope, but it does not shine as brightly as the hope that boys have. One
might even say that Boys are Hope. Boys are a solid mass of hope [kibō no
katamari]. They can become as great as they wish. They can become as
upstanding as they wish. This is the blessing that the gods have imparted
to boys [kamisama no tamamono]. Hope! Hope!

The notion that Japan’s future rests on the dreams of its male children is
not particularly surprising. Nor is the evocation of risshin shusse motifs of
personal striving and boundless horizons. Postwar chauvinism and economic
growth would have use for both ideas. But male youth as a solid unified body
of hope? The hope nurtured by Manga Shōnen as a blessing from the Shintō
kami? What a striking choice of language in 1949. The editorial continues:

Readers, filled with hope, Manga Shōnen is your friend. Like you, it also holds
big bright hopes. They say that Japanese boys and girls read Manga Shōnen,
but only really some do. When will this great magazine be read by each and
every boy and girl? When will each and every one of you become loving read-
ers of Manga Shōnen? This is the great hope that Manga Shōnen holds.

Beloved Readers Banzai! Manga Shōnen Banzai!” 23
Sales volume is obviously in mind. But again, given who Katō was, there was probably more than market share and money behind the idea that a single magazine, a single educational and entertainment product, might bind the entire population of the nation’s youth. When Japanese historians describe *Manga Shōnen* fondly as a “military training school” (*yobigun*) for manga authors, they are probably not aware that the very idea of a devoted reader community in *Manga Shōnen* was a reformulation of imperial-age youth mobilization. Curious that manga, the entertainment commodity, should replace the nation-state. How indicative of the changing priorities of a country shifting from militarism to consumerism.

If such were the editorials, how about the packaging and content? One might as well begin with the covers. Saitō Ioe was famous as one of the primary cover artists for *Club*, reportedly creating covers for 240 issues, including all but one between 1934 and 1937, and even its very first in 1914. He was also illustrator for a fair number of the magazine’s stories. Satō Kōroku stipulated that his stories should be illustrated by Saitō alone. Saitō also painted most of the covers for *Manga Shōnen* until 1950. They are rendered in the same soft, precious-childhood quality. The old military themes might be gone; nonetheless many of the covers are interchangeable, especially those with boys playing baseball or enjoying the outdoors. The old association of youth with cherry blossoms reappears. One from April 1949 showing a boy in school uniform holding a large Hinomaru flag, in honor of the new school year, would have been perfectly at home in the 1930s. Others, like the January 1949 and February 1950 issues in which a schoolboy is holding a kite, or the January 1950 issue in which a boy is riding a winged horse into the New Year, are direct reworkings of earlier *Club* covers.

To some extent, the interior of early *Manga Shōnen* matched this familiar exterior face. Takabatake

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Kachō and Yanagawa Sōichi were among the many prewar illustrators that did work for *Manga Shōnen*. The authors of the magazine’s prose fiction were, in many instances, also the same. There was Yoshikawa Eiji, Kichijōji Hiroshi, and Ikeda Nobumasa, who published both under that name as well as that of Minami Yōichirō, author of best-selling hunting adventure stories in the 1920s and ‘30s. Doyen of prewar youth *bildungsroman* Satō Kōroku was also recruited. Katō clearly thought highly of his *Blossoms in the Chalice* and *A Direct Line* (*Itchokusen*), two of the author’s most famous *Club* serials, for a chapter of the former was reprinted in the magazine in 1951 and the entirety of the latter beginning in 1949. A simplified juvenile edition of Shimomura Kojin’s *The Story of Jirō* (*Jirō Monogatari*), a classic coming-of-age story in the Japanese countryside set in the early Showa period and that had originally begun publication in 1941, was serialized for two full years between 1951 and 1952. In its book edition, it became one of Gakudōsha’s best sellers. This last was not originally a Kōdansha title, but otherwise—“a revival of *Shōnen Club*” indeed.

However, what really activated the “hot-blooded” tradition both in *Manga Shōnen*’s pages and for the postwar period in general was not prose but *emonogatari*, and specifically that of Yamakawa Sōji. He, too, had Kōdansha credentials, having first been invited to draw for *Club* in 1939. The work he did for the magazine consisted of the same kind of exotic jungle and savannah adventures he had been creating for the *kamishibai* market since the early 1930s, as well as straightforward lionizations of the Japanese soldier in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. The Occupation might have softened the ideological tone of Yamakawa’s work for a time, but come 1951 and the wildly popular *Shonen Kenya* (1951–55, *Shōnen keniya*), he was back narrating the story of a stupendously intelligent and athletic Japanese boy, separated in Africa from his father by war, raised by the Masai, and protecting the continent from white colonialists. It and other Yamakawa jungle adventures were an important influence on *Jungle Emperor*, and made Yamakawa not only the leading *emonogatari* artist of the early postwar period but, according to the Japanese tax bureau in 1953, also the top grossing “gaka” (painter/illustrator/cartoonist), nine notches above the tenth-place Tezuka.25 Without the financial footing established by Yamakawa’s work for *Manga Shōnen* between 1948 and 1951, the magazine would probably never have been able to embark on its subsequent amateur manga adventure.

Yamakawa’s first serial for *Manga Shōnen* was *Silver Star* (1948–49, *Ginboshi*). It tells the story of Hurricane Tom Sullivan, a cowboy from Colorado so named for his fast gun and fast fists. A strong man, he is also a good man.
He has come to New Mexico to take part in the Santa Fe rodeo and horse race. But while there finds himself righting bad business. A majestic wild horse named Silver Star has been blamed for the disappearance of more than 250 horses from local corrals, and a price is put on his head. With the help of a local boy named Jim, Hurricane Tom pursues Silver Star, not for the reward but rather because just once in his life he wants to ride such a magnificent and powerful creature. His sterling conduct and values, a model for little Jim, are contrasted with those of a bad cowboy named Manuel, prone to lying, cheating, and greed. Eventually it is discovered that Silver Star was not responsible for the missing horses after all. A group has been stealing them with plans to take them across state lines and sell them. Tom busts the operation, punctuated with a punch to the ringleader’s jaw. Young Jim meanwhile knocks out Manuel for his dishonest behavior. The old Club pair of the strong male role model and his stalwart shōnen apprentice are back, even if they are now wearing cowboy boots.

In the summer of 1949, Yamakawa began a new title, a boxing story titled Knockout Q (1949–51, Nokkuauto Q). Seminonfictional, it narrates the adolescent years of Yamakawa and his boyhood friend, the boxer Kimura Kyū. Its setting—shitamachi Tokyo just after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923—is clearly meant to resonate with the straitened times of the early postwar, bombed-out city. Kyūgorō and the Yamakawa character Shōji become friends while living and working together as apprentices at a small printing plate workshop. Both are hard workers, conscientious of their responsibility to their parents and to the surrogate father figure for whom they work. Both also have a strong sense of decency, knowing right from wrong behavior, in contrast to the delinquents who think they own the neighborhood. Early on Kyūgorō becomes a model of courage and strength, and on more than one occasion protects Shōji and other children from ruffians. In street fights, he discovers his strength and inborn ability as a fighter. In the ring, his first opponent is a man a weight class above him, a decent boxer himself but marred by his lack of proper training and his tendency to smoke and drink. Kyūgorō, the superior moral character as well as the superior fighter, defeats him handily.

Throughout the story, Yamakawa draws parallels between sport and art. Via Shōji, his own growth as an artist is shown as having been directly inspired by his boxer friend’s success and determination. Interestingly, this begins in earnest after Kyūgorō starts winning in the United States. Like the post-shinsai setting, this feature too is clearly designed to speak to Japanese fantasies after the war and under the Occupation. As his friend slugs against unlikely odds through the brawnier Americans, Shōji begins to expand his
trade at the struggling printing plate shop, from simple etching to the more technical task of retouching. He also begins to submit “cheery and entertaining” cartoons to the city newspaper. Finally, after repeated rejection, his work is published. He is invited to attend meetings of Tokyo’s top adult cartooning club. Soon, however, he becomes disgusted with the scene’s crassness:

Right above Shōji’s cartoon was one showing a strange-looking dancer with her leg up in the air! And to the side another vulgar cartoon! There was nothing to be done about it, but Shōji’s mood soured and he turned bright red. He couldn’t show sensei, and certainly not Ryōko [his female friend],

Figure 7. Yamakawa Sōji, “Knockout Q,” Manga Shōnen (June 1950), page 45, detail.
that his work had been accepted. The world’s mores were running wild. People’s hearts were warped. Morals were on the verge of being forgotten.

Shōji crumpled up the newspaper and threw it. Here I am trying to become an adult! Putting adult interests into cartoons is fun, but is this all that adult cartoons can be? That day, Ogawa told me to draw even greater pictures. What is greatness? If there is nowhere to submit cartoons but to this newspaper, then I have had it with cartoons.27

Shōji vows never to draw “manga” again:

A manga athlete [manga senshu]? Gorō, I am done with manga! I have recently decided to become an illustrator [sashie gaka] instead. Illustration is more difficult, is it not? Nonetheless, I will become a famous illustrator athlete.28

This last he cries out to a fight poster showing the newly named “Knockout Q” facing off against the auratic American, sent to him by his friend from California.

The manga Yamakawa describes here as morally degenerate are specifically “otona manga,” meaning adult newspaper and magazine cartoons. He is referring specifically to the early Shōwa era of “ero-guro nonsense,” the diatribe against which would have been perfectly intelligible in the Occupation-period present thanks to the postwar kasutori boom. He does not mention children’s akahon, but it is hard not think that while railing against “adult cartoons” Yamakawa was also voicing disdain for the rising popularity of manga in children’s entertainment. For Yamakawa, it seems, there was no manga but the crass kind, as if the medium itself is degenerate. It is the artistic analogue to the drunk and smoking delinquents that Kyū first has to fight. It is adult society gone rotten. The professional ring for Yamakawa is illustration, and as the story concludes with Shōji being invited finally, after years of hard training, at the age of thirty-two by the editors of Shōnen Club to publish emonogatari in their magazine, it is clear what Yamakawa thought was the champion medium. Manga was the amateur circuit. It was not how boy artists became proper men.

This is a very different brand of artistic self-fashioning from that for which Manga Shōnen would become famous, namely the Tokiwasō paradigm of childhood fan obsession hatching into adult profession. But it would go
on to deeply influence Kajiwara Ikki, a childhood devotee of Satō Kōroku, turned writer for martial arts and wrestling *emonogatari* in the 1950s. In the late 1960s, Kajiwara would become a pop culture superstar as scriptwriter for so-called “sports guts” (*supokon*) manga for Kōdansha’s *Shōnen Magazine*—another magazine that has been called a “revival of *Shonen Club.*” The popularity of Kajiwara’s work, highly influential among *shōnen* manga and young adult *gekiga,* saw to it that the *Club*-esque portions of *Manga Shōnen* sent prewar *bildungsroman* deep into postwar culture.

It is typical to view the prose and early covers of *Manga Shōnen* as belonging to the Kōdansha past, and the commitment to manga as fresh and forward-looking as the first major step toward a postwar manga future. The magazine certainly played an important role in nurturing a new, more intensified wave of manga production. But considering the promotion of comics in Kōdansha publications beginning fifteen-plus years early, one cannot so simply put manga on this side of 1945.

One of the reasons Tezuka’s *Jungle Emperor* is important is that it demonstrated that manga could carry both, making children thrill and laugh while at the same time offering models of moral character. Previously, Katō seems to have aimed at striking a balance on more traditional Kōdansha editorial lines. There is one important difference, however. The figure of the *yūtōsei,* so important to pre-1945 Kōdansha and also central in Katō’s original vision for the Schoolchild Assembly Hall, seems to have been in *Manga Shōnen* largely marginalized, appearing mainly in small articles and cover motifs, and implied through educational maps and charts.

Only a decade had passed, after all, since the 1930s and the original debates concerning the role and effect of manga in children’s character formation and education. Harm, degeneration, profit over principle, junk over nutrition, derisive laughter over cheery humor, ugly art: the concerns about especially cheaper, more garish, and more freewheeling *akahon* expressed during the late 1930s reappeared with increased intensity after the war.²⁹ Deciding to begin a manga magazine in late 1947 and thus at the cusp of the *akahon* boom (which is said to have peaked in 1948 or 1949), Katō had to face this anticomics climate head on. As far as the mainstream was concerned, flesh-and-blood “*manga shōnen*” were the worst kind of children. So you have in editorial copy the repetitive use of “*akarui*” (cheer or brightness). Likewise, the reassuring line “an enjoyable and cheery magazine for the entire family” was used as a header through much of 1953.
The division implied in the inaugural manifesto is fairly easy to perceive. The early manga of Manga Shōnen have very little of the gravity of Satō Kōroku or Yamakawa Sōji’s texts. This is partially by editorial design, no doubt, but also due to the fact that most of the magazine’s initial contributors were carryovers from a past in which manga that served pedagogical functions did so mainly for small children, not boys on the verge of adolescence and manhood.

Old Club star Shimada Keizō’s first serial for Manga Shōnen, Atomic Genkichi (1948, Genshi no Genkichi), begins with a boy receiving a pair of atomic-powered shoes from a “foreign country.” He flies around on them, crashes into a bird, catches the tail of an airplane, before ending up in Shimada’s traditional haunt, a land of coconut trees, elephants, and silly black-skinned savages. It is little more than slapstick. Longer-running was his Dumpling Wizard (1949–51, Dango sennin), about a bearded Daoist immortal who comes down from his mountain refuge to mix with the common people . . . a curious theme in the new age of the “human emperor.” With his divine powers, boundless wisdom, and absolutely ordinary geriatric absentmindedness, Dumpling Wizard causes all sorts of trouble. A child swipes his staff, for example, and uses it as a baseball bat. The ball breaks through a tree, through a utility pole, through a policeman’s handlebars, before striking Saigō Takamori’s statue in Ueno Park and giving “the last samurai” a fat welt on his head. When similar shenanigans appear in the classic Kodansha publications (though I have never seen icons like Saigō disrespected), they typically have a point, sweetening the pill of righteousness and good behavior that most Club and other Kodansha manga slipped down the reader’s throat. Laughter seems to have lost its tame and purpose. It is enough just to be omoshiroi, yukai, and fun.

Haga Masao had been the prime author of “animal comics” in the pre–1945 period, writing mainly for Kodansha’s young kid publications. He also drew...
a number of different titles for *Manga Shōnen*, spanning the magazine’s first year to its last. Best-known is *Blackie* (1948–50, 1955, *Kuro*). Blackie is a black mutt, first a stray helping puppy orphans find a home, who gets into trouble looking for food and so forth. These are presumably references to the many homeless adults and children in Japanese cities at the time. By making them into adorable animals, an artist could transform the homeless into likable characters without dealing with the stigma of human vagrancy. Appropriately, when revived in the mid-’50s, Blackie had himself gained an owner. Still he likes to break leash now and then, and run off with the pack. As an index of the holding power of the Kōdansha legacy in *Manga Shōnen*, for a few months following the end of the original run of *Blackie*, Haga revived *Little Bear Kurosuke* (1950–51, *Koguma no Korosuke*), the title he had inherited from Yoshimoto Sanpei in 1940, the lead manga in Kōdansha’s kid monthly *Yōnen Club*.

Most famous of the early *Manga Shōnen* comics was Inoue Kazuo’s *Bat Kid* (1948–49, *Batto kun*), often regarded as Japan’s first baseball comic. Ostensibly the most American of sports, baseball had also served since at least the late 1920s and Satō Kōroku’s *Blossoms in the Chalice* as a vehicle for more traditional values. But unlike in the prewar “hot-blooded novel” or its *emonogatari* offshoots like *Knockout Q*, in Inoue’s *Bat Kid* sport itself does not serve primarily as a forum for the protagonist’s physical or moral growth. The little hero does learn humility and the value of hard work on the diamond. Baseball itself, however, is not a metaphor for anything. It is not the meeting of different classes as it is in Satō Kōroku’s novel, not cutthroat society in miniature as it would be later in Kajiwara Ikki’s work. Inoue’s character is instead the paradigmatic “yakyū shōnen,” the fanatic “baseball boy” who spends his days dreaming of becoming a baseball star and surrounded by the paraphernalia of the sport. The life lessons he learns are incidental to this core fantasy. Thrift and saving are important, for example, because otherwise he would not be able to buy a bat. Diligence and patience are necessary, likewise, because otherwise he will never get on the team. And so forth.

Just seven years earlier, Inoue had finished a serial for *Shonen Club* titled *The Happy Kid* (1938–41, *Yukai kozō*). About a yūtōsei from the countryside who makes his first step toward manhood by becoming an apprentice for a greengrocer in the city, the early chapters of the manga are structured such that each provides a specific moral lesson. The protagonist even keeps a chart recording his good deeds and bad. With *Bat Kid*, on the other hand, there is only a shadow of pedagogical intent. Still the book edition published by Gakudōsha not a year into serialization was voted number one in the “Most Excellent Picture Book and Manga Exhibition” (*Yūryō ehon manga ten*) at
the Mitsukoshi Department Store in 1948, a golden seal of approval from a staunchly middle-class venue that this was the paradigm of “good child” manga. It is not hard to imagine that the war had created distaste for didacticism. Neither is it hard to imagine how “enjoying life” might have taken precedence amid the hardships of the early Occupation period, so soon after the conscriptions and the firebombs. A whole segment of one chapter of *Bat Kid* depicts his parents specially making eggs for him: a rare fortifying treat for game day. The joy that manga can provide apparently no longer needs moral education to be justified. It was work enough to be happy and healthy in the immediate post-1945 period, and so likewise it seems that laughter had become an adequate end in itself, as long as it was “refined.”

If there was one artist’s work that expressed the end of an era, it was certainly that of Tagawa Suihō. It would be a few more years before Norakuro’s civilian chronicles in the magazine *Maru*, but Tagawa’s many short comics for *Manga Shōnen* indicate that the artist had already decided to age his former stars rather than trying to create new ones. Even the titles seem to be getting on in years: *Uncle Manga* (1951, *Manga ojisan*), for example, and *Manga Village* (1951–52, *Manga mura*). Norakuro was still active elsewhere, but the rest of Tagawa’s Kōdansha crew has settled down in the bucolic outskirts of Tokyo. They while away their days cooking, chatting, and immersed in hobbies. Old people are like children, they say, and indeed that is the case here. They make model airplanes and have spats over nothing in particular.

When assessing children’s culture, there is always the over-the-shoulder factor to consider, the adult parent who the editors know will also be taking a gander. Is that who Tagawa was drawing for? If so, it is designed to gain their approval in a clever way, by saying that this is a magazine that you can trust because you know the people behind it. It might not be the exact manga you
grew up with in the 1930s, but it is populated with characters you know, your trustworthy childhood friends. How smart to make the characters older than they should have been considering the mere passage of not quite twenty years. Who could be more harmless than the elderly? It is as if one generation further above had aged, not Norakuro’s but Tagawa’s, in other words the postwar parent’s parents, their teachers, their Kōdansha.

If Manga Shōnen was going to go forward, clearly something new was needed. But for now, at the threshold of the 1950s, this was where the magazine was, its manga a mix of playground where kids could just be kids and limbo for the old Kōdansha spirit.

Notes

   4. Ishinomori Shōtarō, “Posuto no aka” (The red postbox), in “Manga shōnen” shi, 124.
   9. Satō Tadao, “Shōnen no risōshugi” (Boys’ idealism), Shisō no kagaku (March 1959), n.p.
12. Ibid., 17.
13. On these concepts in relationship to early twentieth-century children’s culture.
and pedagogy in general, see Mark Jones, Children as Treasures: Childhood and the Middle Class in Early Twentieth Century Japan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).


16. For a general sense, see Ryan Holmberg, “Sugiura Shigeru’s Sense of Humor,” The Comics Journal online (July 2012), reprinted in Sankakuboshi (Summer 2012).

17. On the background of this project, and more generally on the relationship between Club and manga, see “Zadankai: Shōnen kurabu no omoide” (Round-table discussion: Memories of Shonen Club) in Ozaki Hotsuki, Omoide no Shōnen kurabu jidai: Natsukashi no meisaku hakurankai (Memories of the Shonen Club era: An exhibition of nostalgic masterpieces) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997), 321–32.


20. Ibid., 25–33. To give a sense of Katō Ken’ichi the person, Katō Takeo relates the following anecdote about his father. Eldest daughter Maruko, fronting as Gakudōsha’s head, once disparaged General Nogi as a “worthless leader who marched his soldiers needlessly to death.” Her father exploded in anger, yelling and smashing his tea bowl (92–94). However one judges his postwar work, it seems that Katō, the person, maintained the loyalties of his youth to the very end.


23. Ibid., 86–87.


25. Fujiko Fujio, Futari de shōnen manga bakari egaitekita (All the two of us did was draw shōnen manga) (1977; Tokyo: Nihon tosho sentaa, 2010), 88–90.


27. Ibid., 226.

28. Ibid., 227.

29. For an overview of the postwar antimanga campaign, see Takeuchi Osamu, Senso manga 50-nen shi (Fifty years of postwar manga history) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1995).