

## BD in young girl-oriented magazines in France

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(trans. Gan Sheuo Hui)

### Overview

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, child-oriented publications in France have developed steadily. Among those were periodical magazines for young girls which eventually also published French comics or BD (*bande dessinée*).<sup>1</sup> Those magazines became a dear companion for French children over a long period of time. This paper studies the BD which appeared in young girl-oriented magazines. Even though these magazines were widely popular from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of them were either discontinued or integrated with other magazines by the 1970s. In Japan, on the other hand, *shōjo* manga published in *shōjo*-oriented magazines was proliferating. Although they were magazines of a similar nature, they experienced a contrasting fate in their development. What kind of medium were these young girl-oriented BD magazines in France? In this paper, three magazines (*La Semaine de Suzette*, *Fillette* and *Lisette*) are selected and categorized according to their publication years and contents. The percentage of BD that appeared in these three magazines is analyzed, alongside a comparison of their distinct characteristics to the situation in Japan from a media-historical perspective. Even though the sampling size in this research is relatively small,<sup>2</sup> this preliminary research wishes to shed more light onto young girl-oriented

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1 For convenience, “BD” is referring to French comics and “manga” is referring to Japanese comics in this paper.

2 The samples in this research are limited to the collections in the National Library of France and those obtained privately by the author during her stay in France. Unfortunately, only one

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BD, shōjo manga and stimulate the comparative study of both which has scarcely been conducted.

### 1. The layout of young girl-oriented BD magazines

A quick glance at contemporary BD immediately reveals its differences from Japanese manga. There is no publication of standard weekly or monthly magazines prior to their appearance in a *tankōbon* or a separated volume as in Japan. Instead, freshly commissioned works, printed directly into “album” format is the more common flow for publishing BD.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, BD has a strong image as being male-oriented reading material.<sup>4</sup> For a long time, females were not even considered as potential readers of BD. Nonetheless, historically speaking, it is too abrupt to conclude the lack of BD works or magazines that catered exclusively to female readers. Indeed, some evidence has demonstrated that there were publications of girl-oriented BD magazines which had been popular since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Subscription of child-oriented periodical magazines has a long history in France. *Journal d'Education*,<sup>5</sup> an educational magazine that was first published in 1768, is considered to be the pioneer of this type.<sup>6</sup> Being a small-sized monthly magazine, no

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weekly magazine per every ten years could be included in this study. The author is well aware of the difficulty to reach any generalization with these limited samples. However, this should not undermine the value of this research as to date, statistical content analysis of the girl-oriented BD magazines has still hardly been conducted. This research is carried out based on the available materials and it is the author's immediate priority to include a bigger sample in following research. See *9e ART: Les Cahiers du Musée de la Bande Dessinée*, vol. 6, 2001 for further reference about young girl-oriented BD.

3 The standard format for an album is slightly bigger than A4 size, 48 pages, fully colored and hardcover. The overall pace for the publication is about one volume per year. See Inomata (2006) for further reference on the comparison between the circulation of manga and BD.

4 According to Groensteen (2005), female readers of BD in 2003 were just roughly 20 percent of the overall total. However, it seems possible to estimate a higher number due to the spread of Japanese manga in France from 2000 onwards. An estimation of the number of female readers will be included in future research.

5 *Journal d'Education* has been translated as “educational magazine” in Japanese in this context. According to Suematsu's research of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century French children's magazines, most of the titles contained terms like “journal”, “gazette”, “revue”, “presse” or “courier” which mean “the record of a day” or “everyday's publication”. However, over the years, the word “journal” slowly expanded from its original meaning, it also referring to monthly or even periodical publications (Suematsu 1997: 64-67). Due to this reason, the term “journal” has been widely translated as “magazine/zasshi” in Japanese.

6 It is often believed the publication of *Emile ou de l'éducation* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762 stimulated new thoughts toward children, as being different to adults, which influenced the emergence of child-oriented magazines. *Journal d'Education* contained grammar, mathematics,

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illustrations were used in the beginning. Some illustrations were added to the main texts only much later. The period from 1857 to 1904 is often assumed to be the era where child-oriented magazines flourished in France as big publishing companies began to compete in the market (Kisaichi 2001: 136). It is difficult to trace exactly when BD were first published in child-oriented magazines. Nonetheless, even though there was no evidence of speech balloons, usage of multiple panels to convey a story was first observed in 1889 (Filippini 1980: 13). In 1905, *La Semaine de Suzette* (Suzette's Week), a young girl-oriented weekly magazine, was published by Gautier-Languereau. For 55 years, *Suzette* continued to publish many representative young girl-oriented BD, among them *Bécassine*, a serialized BD which still enjoys its fame today. *Suzette* also stimulated the establishment of other young girl-oriented magazines.<sup>7</sup>

The next few paragraphs will focus on analyzing the three most representative magazines. *Suzette* (1905-1960),<sup>8</sup> a magazine mostly read by girls from middle-class families, *Fillette* (1909-1964),<sup>9</sup> a comparatively mass-oriented magazine which produced *L'espiègle Lili*, another widely popular BD, and *Lisette* (1921-1973),<sup>10</sup> another symbolic magazine which was established slightly later than the other two. Interestingly, the content and layout of most early young girl-oriented magazines looked alike due to the success of *Suzette* that inspired other magazines to follow its style and format.

*Suzette*, *Fillette* and *Lisette* were selected for this study because they all published BD for a relatively longer span than the other magazines. In particular, their establishment between the 1910s and 1920s and the continuation after the war are valuable parameters to trace their transformation from before to after the war. For the research method employed, one issue was selected from each magazine across a ten-year span.<sup>11</sup> All the contents were broken down according to genre and

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science, art, history, religion and other educational topics. This magazine was actually more youth-oriented than child-oriented (Ishizawa et.al. 2009: 54).

7 These magazines include *Anette*, *Benjamine*, *Bernadette*, *Blondine*, *Capucine*, *Cendrillon* and *Mireille*.

8 *Suzette* was momentarily discontinued from issue 27 (1940/06/06), but resumed 1946/05/30. Issue 144 (1960/08/25) was the last issue of *Suzette*.

9 *Fillette* was momentarily discontinued from issue 1755 (1942/03/08), but resumed on 1946/05/02. After publishing its issue 600 in 1963, *Fillette* restarted its numbering from no.1, but ended with issue 42 in August, 1964.

10 *Lisette* was momentarily discontinued from issue 11 (1942/03/15) and resumed on 1946/05/12. Issue 44 was the last issue printed in 1964.

11 Wherever possible, the samples were selected from the first issue of the month. See reference for the complete list of issues that have been studied in this research.

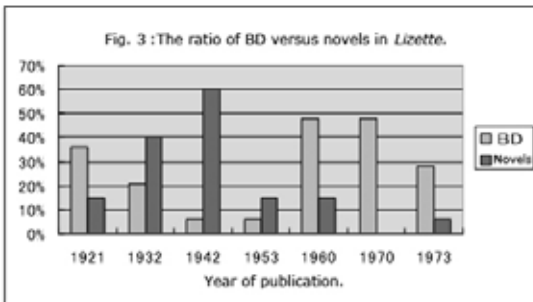
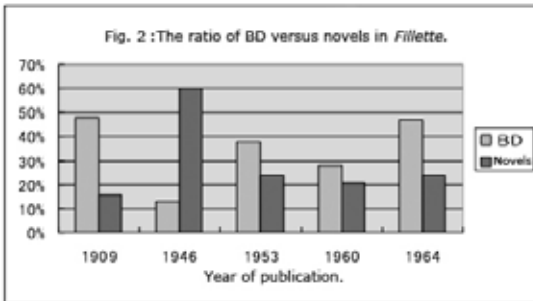
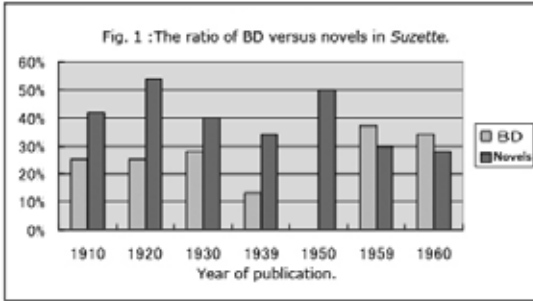
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calculated for their percentage in each magazine. The content of these magazines was divided into seven categories such as, “BD”, “novel”, “handicrafts” which included cooking and sewing, “correspondence section” which sent out invitations to readers or published editorial messages, “information column” which published everyday tips or reprinted articles from overseas, “games” which contained crosswords puzzles and “advertisements” which promoted the subscription of the magazine or advertised commercial products such as stationery. In this analysis though, special focus is given to the changing percentages of BD.

Masuda Nozomi pointed out the importance for entertainment purposes of the visualization aspect in young girl-oriented magazines in Japan. She presented the transition of the percentage of manga in *Shōjo Kurabu* (Girls’ Club) through various graphs (Masuda 2004: 1-16). Adopting her methods, three figures that represent *Suzette*, *Fillette* and *Lisette* respectively were created to show the percentages of BD in comparison to the percentage of illustrated novels, which was once the main content in these magazines.

According to the figures, the percentage of BD (*Fillette* and *Lisette*) was leading in the beginning and slowly decreased over the years but regained dominance after the war. At some point, BD in these three magazines surpassed the percentage of illustrated novels. All three magazines were discontinued during the war. After the war, in some magazines BD had either completely disappeared from print, or the number of pages had been shrunk due to the lack of paper supply. In 1960, BD in *Suzette* overtook the percentage of novels by reaching up to almost 35 percent of the magazine (fig. 1). A similar tendency could also be observed in *Fillette*, whereby in 1953, the percentage of BD reclaimed the larger percentage over novels. Even though the percentage slightly slipped back in the following years, BD occupied almost half of the contents percentage of magazine in 1964 (fig. 2). The percentage of BD in *Lisette* was slightly lower than novels in 1953. But it was reversed in 1960 whereby almost 50 percent of *Lisette* was BD, and a similar trend continued until 1970 (fig. 3). After the war, with the progress of time, the growing percentage of BD had become a common trait among *Suzette*, *Fillette* and *Lisette*. Indeed, a similar tendency was also observed in Japan around the same period, whereby in 1958, manga constituted over 50 percent of *Shōjo Kurabu*, which made it the main content of the magazine (Masuda 2004: 8).

From the late 1950s, photographs were being used in a similar way as single



panels of BD, with the addition of speech balloons, giving rise to picture novels, commonly addressed in French as *roman photos*. Furthermore, written descriptions of recipes and advertisements were replaced by pictures and illustrations. Some even employed pictorial sequences as in BD to convey their messages. By the late 1960s, idols' pictures increased. A similar tendency was also observed in Japan where pictures of idols and small music bands escalated in *shōjo* manga magazines such as *Shōjo Kurabu*. This overall tendency to emphasize visual representation is common to both France and Japan at that time.

Thus, the following conclusion can be made: BD had become the main content of those magazines around the 1960s. The magazines steadily became more illustrated, demonstrating a similar

tendency to the *shōjo* manga magazines in Japan of the same period. Yet, despite the similarity, these girl-oriented BD magazines disappeared in France by the 1970s. What were the reasons that led to such an outcome? The following section discusses various distinct characteristics of these magazines that differ from Japan.

## 2. The transition of the number of pages in young girl-oriented BD magazines

From here on, the discussion will focus on various aspects of the difference between young girl-oriented magazines in France and Japan, such as the number of pages, size

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and frequency of publication. Similarities are found in both media in terms of their structure and contents. However, girl-oriented magazines in France were thinner, more like a pamphlet when compared to the girls' magazines in Japan. This huge difference is no doubt due to the historical influence of the magazine format in France.

A mass-produced publication called *La Bibliothèque bleue* emerged in Troyes, located in northern France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> These small books only consisted of a few pages. From a contemporary point of view, *Bibliothèque bleue* is more like a booklet than a book. Concerning the form of *Bibliothèque bleue*, Mandrou described that “there were ink stains, papers were rough and could hardly be considered white. Blue paper was used as a cover and everything was sloppily tied together with a string. There were no such things as a heading or spine of a book” (Mandrou 1988: 24). Setting aside this imperfection, “the success of the publication stimulated other cities to imitate it before long” (Mandrou 1988: 24). As a result, *Bibliothèque bleue* became widely popular and was circulated extensively in major cities of France. *Journal d'Education*, the first child-oriented periodical in France published in 1678 consisted of 32 pages, and its small-sized format could be seen as an influence of *Bibliothèque bleue*. The thin booklet format of *Suzette* (1905-1960) and other young girl-oriented magazines that mainly consisted of 12 to 16 folded loose pages was very likely the influence by this tradition too.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, when Kinkōdō published the first shōjo magazine in Japan, *Shōjo Kai* (Girls' Association) in 1902, the magazine consisted of 126 pages. When *Shōjo Kurabu* was established in 1923, it had 232 pages. The dimension of both magazines was approximately 23cm x 15cm, similar to standard A5 size. The difference regarding the thickness of these girl-oriented magazines between Japan and France is noteworthy.

Figures 4, 5 and 6 demonstrate the change in the number of pages in *Suzette*, *Fillette* and *Lisette*. Starting with 16 pages, the number of pages of all these three magazines increased by double, and became roughly 32 pages by the 1960s. Yet, there was limited space allocated for BD. In many cases, the maximum of pages for each

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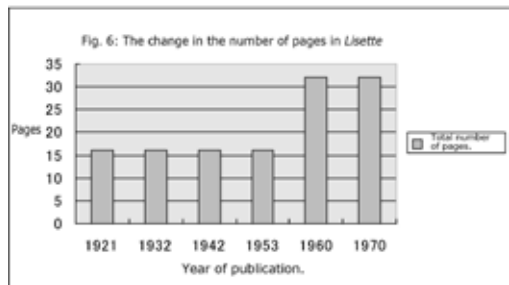
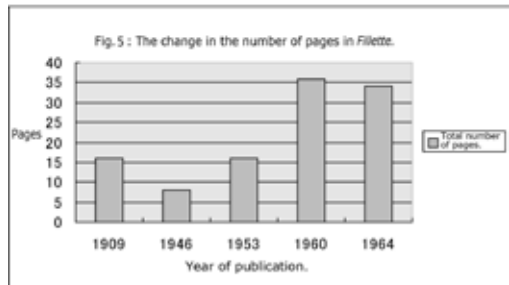
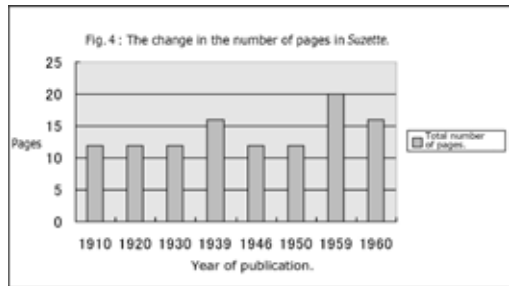
12 A bookseller and publisher in Troyes started *La Bibliothèque bleue* and it was sold by peddlers to peasants. The booklet was very cheap, priced at about one or two Sou (Mandrou 1988: 24).

13 Britain had a similar book form called chapbook since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the common form of a chapbook resembles the size of *bunkobon*, and usually contained about 16 pages. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many chapbooks were published where the paper was just folded, and which then looked like booklets (Kobayashi 1988: 21).

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work per publication; only 6 pages. Concerning the panel layout from the 1910s to the 1930s, the most frequent approach was to organize them in a vertical 3 x 3 arrangement. There was hardly any sign of speech balloons and it was more common to have explanatory texts printed below the panels. Moving into the 1940s, the individual use of speech balloons started, but the combination of speech balloons; explanatory texts was equally employed. By the 1960s, this mixture had not disappeared yet. In the same period, the panels were basically square-shaped and positioned sequentially. When making changes to the panels, the vertical length was usually maintained while the horizontal length was altered.

The percentage of manga in magazines was about 10% in Japan until the 1940s. Comic strips in rectangular panels arranged neatly over 1 or 2 pages were the mainstream. After the 1950s, the number of manga pages increased rapidly (Masuda 2004: 8). Many works became longer due to the popularity of story manga. The number of pages of each manga per publication also increased to 16 and later to 32 pages (Masuda 2004: 9). Entering the 1960s, the adaptation of different techniques such as close-up and arrangement of the panels in a looser layout could be seen.<sup>14</sup> Panels of similar shapes and consecutive pages were no longer popular, and



<sup>14</sup> Masuda examined two different versions of Tezuka Osamu's *Ribon no kishi* (Princess Knight) which were published separately in *Shōjo Kurabu* (serialized from 1953) and *Nakayoshi* (serialized from 1963). Her finding suggests that the 1963 version in *Nakayoshi* contained more story-manga expressions, close-ups of the characters as well as more freedom in terms of panel layout (Masuda 2002: 57-60).

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layout saw a huge transformation. It is generally agreed that this is the period where significant changes took place in manga expression. Simultaneously, the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s are also considered as the primary period in the development of shōjo manga expression. Yet the scenario was different in France. There, it was impossible to extend the length of the works due to limited space. Furthermore, it was also hard for the artists to develop new expressions under such conditions. One of the main reasons that contributed to the decline of the girl-oriented genre in France was that it did not have the same options to experiment and develop distinctive features as in Japan.

### **3. The Transformation of the Dimensions of Young Girl-Oriented Magazines**

Magazine format expanded from A5 to B5, in 1951 for *Shōjo Bukku* (Girls' Book) and in 1955 for *Shōjo Kurabu* (Girls' Club). *Ribon* (Ribbon) and *Nakayoshi* (Good friends) launched in B5 format in 1955. Around the same time, many magazines and reading material that did not expand their size were discontinued. It became obvious that whether a magazine was capable of offering visual enjoyment to its reader had become a core factor to its sustainability. However, the situation was different in France. When *Suzette* was launched, its dimensions were 32cm x 22cm. Later, the dimensions were reduced to 27cm x 21cm. As for *Fillette*, its initial dimensions were 29.5cm x 19.5cm and at one time before the war increased to 39.5cm x 29.5cm before the war. After the war, the size was reduced to 26cm x 20cm. The earliest dimensions of *Lisette* were 26cm x 19.5cm which was later increased to 28.5 x 19.5cm, but reduced to the original 26cm x 19.5cm after the war (Bera 1988: 583, 547, 566). Overall, these girl-oriented BD magazines were mainly altered in their sizes to around A4, or in some cases, to an even smaller size than A5. In brief, the magazines in France did not share Japan's situation where the magazines were transforming into bigger and more visible format as time progressed.

Yonezawa Yoshihiro has asserted that the tendency of expansion in these shōjo magazines also signified “the transformation of shōjo magazines to shōjo manga magazines” (1991a: 15). According to Yonezawa, “the modification of the sizes of these shōjo magazines had led them to be the main medium to publish post-Tezuka story manga, which eventually turned into shōjo manga magazines” (Ibid.: 36). The matter of altering the size from A5 to B5 of these shōjo magazines determined the direction



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and the development of Japanese shōjo magazines. Contrary to this, even though the percentage of BD in French girl-oriented magazines had increased, it did not motivate any changes to those magazines.

#### 4. The publication frequency of shōjo magazines

The frequency in which magazines were published is also noteworthy. In Japan, *Shōjo Kurabu* and *Shōjo Kai* were initially published as monthly magazines. However, the popularization of TV had ushered a weekly rhythm into the daily life of most people, including children (Yonezawa 1991b: 4). In order to cope with the demand to deliver information and news quicker to the consumers, many monthly magazines eventually turned into weeklies. On the other hand, the girl-oriented magazines in France were first established as weekly magazines, due to the influence of the weekly magazines tradition continued from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fig. 7 demonstrates the publication frequency of child-oriented periodicals from 1801 to 1987. From 1801 to 1850, 60% of those child-oriented magazines were monthlies and about 20% were weeklies.<sup>15</sup> Until 1900, the percentage of weekly magazines exceeded the monthly magazines. By 1950, about 70% of the magazines were weeklies and only 10% were monthlies. However from the 1950s, the situation reversed. Monthly magazines became dominant, rising up to about 70%. On the other hand, it was not until 1959 that *Shūkan Shōnen Magajin* (Weekly Shōnen Magazine) attracted attention in Japan, when it was launched as a weekly. Its appearance influenced of the general format of weekly magazines in the mid1950s (Kure 1997: 148). The weekly shōjo-oriented manga magazine came slightly later, that is, in 1962.

The shift of magazines from monthly to weekly in Japan was mainly a response to consumers who required more information to be delivered at a quicker pace. Contrastively, magazines in France were mostly established in weekly format following tradition. This fundamental difference certainly led to a diverse development. In the end,

Fig. 7: Publication ratios of French periodicals for children by year.

	Monthlies	Weeklies	Other	Sum total of magazines
1801-1850	60%	21%	19%	61
1851-1900	34%	44%	22%	41
1901-1950	9%	68%	23%	111
1951-1987	66%	15%	19%	151

<sup>15</sup> Figures compiled based on information from Fourment (1988).

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those girl-oriented BD magazines in France which were first printed more frequently as a weekly and in the thin booklet format faded out. Since there was no demand to go beyond their current status, it was natural that those BD magazines had no need to change their publication frequency, change the number of pages, or to look for new possibilities and expressions as in Japan.

### 5. The disappearance of BD magazines for girls

There were efforts to save these girl-oriented BD magazines by merging them with other magazines, but unfortunately it did not work out. *Suzette* was stopped in 1960, followed by *Fillette* in 1964 and finally *Lisette* in 1973. A statement appeared in the last issue of *Suzette* which declared “recently most girls prefer magazines which cater to both girls and boys”<sup>16</sup> as the reason for its discontinuation. Another announcement added that *Le Journal de Mickey* would be sent as the replacement for those who subscribed to *Suzette* periodically. *Le Journal de Mickey* was advertised by *Suzette* as “appropriate for most age groups, and we believe it will be a success”.<sup>17</sup> *Suzette* tried to highlight *Le Journal de Mickey*’s mixed readership of boys and girls as its advantage to attract new attention. *Suzette* also commented that “girls are now attracted to TV idols and they are no longer interested in the morality tales depicted in *Suzette*” (Filippini 1980: 113). “The magazine itself did not match with the lifestyle of these contemporary girls. The stories about magic or spirits hidden in the roof were no longer needed” (Fourment 1988: 371). In the meantime, it can also be assumed that these young girls did not find the educational aspect of the magazines inspiring but old-fashioned and outdated. *Fillette* turned into a popstar magazine and *Lisette* was combined with *Nade*, but was also discontinued later (Fourment 1988: 371-372). According to Fourment (1988: 339), the disappearance of these girl-oriented BD magazines was the result of the emerging unisex magazines, and girls also more interested to read those ready-to-wear high class fashion and make-ups magazines which were initially aimed at mothers and teenage girls. In any case, when these girl-oriented BD magazines were no longer able to grasp the hearts of their young readers, their necessity could no longer be sustained and they were discontinued.

In contrast, new titles were emerging in Japan, many young shōjo manga artists debuted in the shōjo manga industry, creating a utopia for young female readers (Yonezawa 2007: 323). While shōjo manga became an established genre, BD still

<sup>16</sup> *La semaine de Suzette*, n 144, 1960/08/25, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> *La semaine de Suzette*, n 144, 1960/08/25, pp. 1-2.

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remained at its thin booklet format and did not experience the same development. As for the decline of girl-oriented BD, the comparison of different circumstances such as the scale of the market and boy-oriented media from the same period are helpful to provide another perspective,<sup>18</sup> but certainly the distinct form of these magazines is one of the main reasons.

### 6. Conclusion

This paper focused on the magazines that published girl-oriented BD, and it surveyed the changes of their structure through time. According to this analysis, the percentage of BD increased with the progress of time, overtook the percentage of novels and eventually became the main content of these magazines. In addition, the comparisons revealed that these magazines became more visual-oriented over the years. Similar tendencies were also observed in the shōjo-oriented magazines in Japan from the same period. In order to fully understand the circumstances that led to such a different development of girl-oriented magazines in Japan and France, the format of these magazines, the number of pages and the frequency of their publications were compared. The result of the survey showed that the format of girl-oriented magazines in France was influenced by the *Bibliothèque bleue* from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This tradition was among the reasons that caused different developments between Japanese and French girl-oriented magazines. In many ways, such backgrounds provide a significant clue to understand the contemporary girl-oriented BD arena in France.

As for future research, more detailed data analysis will be conducted. Researching the unique characteristics of girls' culture in Japan from a gender perspective could also be important. Besides that, it is possible to do a comparison from a gender perspective between girls in Japan that continue to form their identity through utilizing girl-oriented magazines, and the French perspective in which girls more promptly enter a society of romantic attraction with the opposite gender. When conducting girl-oriented BD research, manga research and comparative research of both, it is important to take into consideration the complex issues of different cultural climates and the contexts of each country.

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<sup>18</sup> Boy-oriented BD magazines in France were established for adolescences on the verge of puberty. Interestingly, the content of the magazines also changed, becoming more adult oriented as their readers grew up. In some cases, magazines were discontinued due to the result of questionnaires from their readers. See Inomata (2007: 6-13).

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\_\_\_ (1991b): *Kodomo no shōwa shi shōjo manga no sekai 2: shōwa 38nen-64nen (bessatsu taiyō)*. Tokyo: Heibonsha.

\_\_\_ (2007): *Sengo shōjo manga shi*. Tokyo: Chikuma bunko.

## Magazines

*La Semaine de Suzette*, 5 August 1910 , 6 January 1920, 2 January 1930, 3 January 1939, 26 December 1946, 5 January 1950, 3 September 1959, 25 August 1960.

*Lisette*, 17 July 1921, 25 December 1932, 11 January 1942, 16 August 1953, 30 January, 1960, 4 January 1970.

*Fillette*, 21 October 1909, 31 October 1946, 29 October 1953, 7 January 1960, 6 August 1964.