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## **Floral Semiotics and Gender Ambiguity: Exploring Power Dynamics in Ryoko Yamagishi's Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi**

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**Floral Semiotics and Gender Ambiguity: Exploring Power  
Dynamics in Ryoko Yamagishi's *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi***

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the significance of floral semiotics in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* by Ryoko Yamagishi, focusing on how flowers symbolize gender fluidity and political power. Through semiotic analysis, the study explores how flowers, often associated with femininity, transcend these boundaries to represent Prince Umayado's challenge to patriarchal structures. As an androgynous figure, Prince Umayado uses floral imagery not just to question gender roles but also to navigate and subvert the power dynamics within the royal court. These symbols can thus be used to subvert gender dualism and situate the character in a heroic narrative of metamorphosis. This study analyzes the cultural meanings of floral symbols and their roles in the manga by drawing on Peirce's semiotics, Judith Butler's theory of gender performance, and Foucault's concept of power and discourse. It is shown that they are not simply empty decorations as they play an essential part in the creation and subversion of gender relations. Thus, floral patterns have served to undermine the conventional male dominance and question the construction of a masculinity/femininity hybrid by depicting masculinity as different from hegemonic masculinity. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by extending awareness of semiotics in the context of flowers, specifically in Shōjo manga, which entails and even subverts gender binaries. It demonstrates how floral imagery in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* challenges and redefines gender roles through new perspectives on gender, power, and visual symbolism. This work adds to existing studies because it allows scholars to discuss the diverse interpretations of floral imagery from different cultures and their influence on gender portrayal in visual storytelling.

**Keywords:** Floral Semiotics, Gender Fluidity, Power Dynamics, Shōjo Manga, Gender Performativity

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The study of Shōjo manga, particularly *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* (*Emperor of the Land of the Rising Sun*, hereafter *Tenshi*) by Ryōko Yamagishi, raises significant questions about gender representation, especially in its use of floral imagery. Historically, Shōjo manga has been influenced by patriarchal norms, with the stories about female characters solely reflecting popular feminine expectations. Such narratives primarily represented heteronormative stories which perpetuated old gender stereotypes about women. However, since the postwar times, specifically in the 1970s, Japanese feminist groups appeared to contest these gender biases and call for noteworthy accounts about women. Despite early feminist efforts, very little in the period made note of the fact that erotic and stereotypical portrayals recur in media from Shōjo manga.

Flowers are often used to reinforce femininity, yet their potential to challenge gender norms and shape evolving gender identities is often neglected. Shōjo manga often uses flowers as decorative motifs to showcase female beauty and vulnerability. As researchers McLelland (2005) and Napier (1998) stated, flowers in manga often correlate with female characters, thus reinforcing humanity's gender division.

This thesis addresses a significant absence of scholarship by investigating how flowers emerge from the typical gender symbolism used in the Shōjo genre. In *Tenshi*, Prince Umayado challenges these conventions with an androgynous presentation that subverts traditional gender roles. An excellent expression of the theme appears when Prince Umayado wears flowers on his head, which, throughout the centuries, were the symbols of femininity. This particular use of floral imagery raises questions about how gender representation is constructed and challenged in *Tenshi*, which this thesis examines. The flowers in *Tenshi* perform a dynamic role in addition to conventional representation. The flowers are essential in describing how gender interactions are

depicted in the Shōjo tradition. Focusing on these floral representations, the thesis explains how they disrupt traditional gender presumptions and contribute to a greater understanding of fluid gender identity within the genre. By focusing on these symbolic flowers, this thesis shows how Shōjo manga can serve as a site for deconstructing traditional gender roles and promoting a more fluid and inclusive conception of gender.

This thesis examines how *Tenshi* employs floral semiotics to challenge traditional gender roles and power dynamics. In particular, it investigates how the floral motifs in the manga represent gender fluidity and contribute to subverting binary gender classifications. Furthermore, it explores how flowers are used in the manga and how this affects power dynamics.

This thesis explores how floral imagery in *Tenshi* subverts traditional gender norms and challenges power dynamics, particularly within the context of Shōjo manga. This thesis is centred on the meaning of flowers in Shōjo manga and how they help analyze and question stereotypes about gender. Studying the approach in *Tenshi*, the thesis discovers how it uses flowers to break down the clear line between what is feminine and masculine. Because gender symbols can now mean different things, there is a chance to change the way gender is shown visually and give new ways to represent all sorts of gender identities.

This thesis challenges the usual ways floral imagery in Shōjo manga emphasizes beauty, femininity and being passive. By studying the use of flowers in detail, the thesis demonstrates that they do more than please the eye, as they also become tools for challenging common perceptions. The flowers in this manga signify gender fluidity and political opposition, mainly through the androgynous figure of Prince Umayado. This thesis demonstrates that rather than just being decorative, flower designs highlight the unbinary nature of gender and the power shifts.

A significant focus is placed on using flowers to illustrate Prince Umayado's gender performance. The thesis examines how Umayados' use of floral symbols hinders traditional ideas of gender and helps to demolish existing gender roles. In addition, the thesis examines how Umayado connects gender and power by using floral patterns in performance and what that signifies about the workings of the royal court.

In addition, this thesis applies the principles of semiotics to ideas about gender performance. The thesis provides a valuable structure for examining how floral images in *Tenshi* explore both gender categories and power structures in the world of Shōjo manga. By closely examining the symbolic meanings of flowers, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on gender representation in visual media, particularly in how Shōjo manga can serve as a site for rethinking and reimagining gender roles and power relations.

This thesis uses gender performativity, as developed by Judith Butler (1990, 2004) , and floral semiotics, drawing on the works of Charles Sanders Peirce (1931–1958), to explore how floral imagery in *Tenshi* subverts traditional gender roles and power dynamics.

Gender performance claims, in Butler's words, that people perform gender roles that society considers either masculine or feminine. Such activities are done repeatedly and managed by society, which paints gender as flexible and acted out.

With the help of Peirce, floral semiotics describe how flowers become essential signs in the story. In Peirce's view, signs consist of representamen, object and interpretant, helping to explain how the meanings of flowers change with culture and storytelling.

Using these theories, I explain how floral images adorn and disrupt existing ideas about gender and ruling authority. By using Butler's concepts on gender performance together with floral semiotics, the thesis considers why flowers in *Tenshi* become signs of resistance and non-

fixed identity. This theoretical approach is crucial for understanding manga's deconstruction of gender binaries and redefinition of power. In addition, Foucault's theory of power and discourse helps to reveal how these gender performances are shaped by, and sometimes resist, the broader structures of political control and social expectation.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a literature review on gender representation and floral semiotics in Shōjo manga, identifying existing gaps in the scholarship. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, combining Peirce's semiotics, Butler's gender performativity, and Foucault's theory of power to analyze how floral imagery in *Tenshi* reflects shifting gender and power dynamics. Chapter 4 offers a detailed analysis of *Tenshi*, examining how floral imagery interacts with gender fluidity and power dynamics across specific narrative scenes. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarizing the findings and discussing their broader implications for gender representation in visual media.

## **CHAPTER 2: Rethinking Gender and Power through Flowers: A Critical Review of Shōjo Manga Studies**

In Japanese visual culture, flowers are not only the decoration, but also play the role of emotion, blood, even resistance. In *Tenshi*, the author used several floral symbols and produced a great story.

How can floral semiotics and gender performativity contribute to analyzing gender representation and power structures in Shōjo manga? Shōjo manga, as Napier (2001, 91, 94) observes, often portrays young female characters as idealized, non-threatening figures whose femininity is essentially sexless, reinforcing traditional gender roles within post-war Japanese society. This chapter examines how existing literature on semiotics and gender performativity can inform an analysis of floral imagery and gender in Shōjo manga.

To create the analysis framework, this chapter aims to use semiotics theory as core theoretical foundations, especially focusing on how the floral signs played the role of cultural code and spreading the complex meaning of gender and power. Building on this semiotic foundation, the theory of Gender Performance and Foucault's concept of discourse and power will also be analyzed in this chapter. These two theories are used to complete and expand the floral signs' role of redistributing power and reshaping gender in Shōjo manga. Furthermore, exploration of the connection between gender and flower and recent literature about *Tenshi* also provide necessary context and comparative groundwork.

To clearly understand the use of symbols in works of art, it is important to analyze the theory of semiotics.

In Peirce's semiotics theory, he defined symbol as a representamen, an object and an interpretant. In semiotic analysis, meaning is generated through the interaction between the signifier, the object it refers to, and the interpretation produced by the observer. In this thesis, this

theory and Peirce's triadic model guides the exploration of how visual elements such as floral symbols are shaped by historical and social contexts. Meanwhile, this theory had also been used in several literatures such as Wiyogo and Kumala's (2023) paper about using semiotics theory in analyzing the use of symbols in the Novel *Night on The Galactic Railroad* by Miyazawa Kenji. The analysis in this article provides a better lens of using theory semiotics theory to understand the work of art. However, the article ignored some of the gender roles, which is one of the points this study wants to delve into.

Semiotics guides the analysis of how floral symbols transcend simple associations with femininity, but to deeply understand the connection between floral signs and gender roles in *Tenshi*, theory of gender performativity should also be considered.

Butler's (1990, 2004) theory of gender performativity further enhances this analysis, suggesting that gender is not an innate characteristic but a series of continually reiterated performances and actions. According to Butler, gender identity emerges through repeated citation of socially established norms, and these performative acts both reproduce and potentially subvert existing gender structures. The body becomes a site where gendered meaning is continuously negotiated through socially regulated performances. As Butler sees it, gender has also been critiqued for its limited sensitivity to non-Western contexts, particularly in societies like Japan, where gender performance is embedded within cultural traditions and institutional structures (McLelland 2005, Suganuma 2012).

Furthermore, Foucault's (1997) concept of discourse and power also provides a new angle for analyzing the work. In his opinion, power is not simply an oppressive individual but using discourse to construct truth, identity and standards of behavior. Behaviors not only construct language, but also a system of organization. For example, who can have visual power

and who can only have a marginal background. This system doesn't use violence to break the recent rules but constantly creates new orders. In the manga, this system is reflected in which types of characters are given high-frequency floral symbols, which flowers symbolize empowerment, and which mean demotion.

The three theories mentioned above build the theoretical framework of this thesis. Based on semiotics theory, this study treats floral symbols as the visual signs of cultural code. Their deep meanings are flexibility and can be influenced by special elements such as production, ideology and power. Butler's theory of gender performativity completes this framework, which shows that gender is not only the nature of the innate but also a social behavioral system which can be changed, influenced even be reconstructed by the visual code such as floral signs. At the same time, Foucault's concept of discourse and power can be used in the analysis of the role of these visual symbols in the construction of identity of characters in the work and in the redistribution of power in artistic historical narratives.

The interweaving of these three theories provides this thesis with a multi-level theoretical framework. Based on this framework, the following part will focus on the recent literatures in this field and evaluate their research points and ignorations.

Recent scholarship focuses on floral symbols, gender performance and the study of discourse and power mechanisms in mass media, especially in Japanese mass media. These literatures can be divided into three directions, holistic studies based on semiotics, studies of emotions mediated by Shōjo manga and research about power mechanisms focusing on the relationship between visual symbols and gender constructs.

The first type studies meticulously analyzed Peirce's triadic model theory's manifestation in Japanese culture. Peirce's triadic model provides a logical foundation about understanding

how visual symbols can make extended sense in work of art. (Chandler 2007) According to this framework, Amamiya, Sumiyama, and Masuda (2002) focus on the history of the composition of manga itself and analyze the changes in the presentation of Shōjo manga. They also emphasize that the concept of perceptual cognitive symbols in understanding the deep meaning of Shōjo manga. This provides a support of the formal presentation level of Shōjo manga. Besides, Cohn (2010) came out a point that Japanese manga panels are actually a kind of visual language. Their composition, use of symbols and rhythmic regulations are in accordance with the rules of grammar. These elements provide a symbolic method to understand how visual symbols such as flowers can spread and enhance emotional and gender information in manga. Although this article provided a partial reference, it only discusses the whole Japanese manga, some more detailed and in-depth analyses of specific visual symbols were still missing. At the same time, Yuan (2023) chooses floral symbols as objects. She used Japanese flower culture as an entry point, analyzed the role of flower as a cultural symbol in Japanese society. The article showed that floral symbol deeply influenced Japanese history, popular culture and religion for a long time. Analysis of the article on the relationship between popular and floral symbols provides a textual contextual foundation for understanding visual floral languages in Shōjo manga. However, the analysis of popular culture in the article is still too board, and the relationship between floral symbols and Shōjo manga is still not analyzed enough in enough detail. Hiroshi (2017) summarize his finding after attending Symbol Society of Japan meeting in 2015. He notices that more scholars are focusing on “pretty girl symbol” itself and they usually ignore the cultural as well as social potential behind this symbol. At the same time, as a complementary, Procita (2021) analyzes how floral symbols have influenced Japanese culture, which also mentions about the role of floral symbols in Shōjo manga.

Most of the authors mentioned above analyze Shōjo manga in term of semiotics but only focus on the symbols while neglecting other important elements in Shōjo manga.

Other scholars have also focused on gender issues in Shōjo manga itself. The prevailing view in this area can be summarized as: Shōjo manga not only shapes idealized images at the narrative level but also creates unique environments for the perception of gender at the visual level. For example, Honda Masuko thinks the decorative girlish ornaments such as ribbons, frills and lace are the great symbol of the Shōjo manga's imagination. (Honda 1992, Kilpatrick 2013) Various symbols present in Shōjo manga are also recognized to have important hidden meanings. The frequent appearance of floral symbols in Shōjo manga also led some scholars to discover the relationship between them. According to Prough (2011) we can know that Shōjo manga had a great link on gender issues and at the same time this link goes deeper into the economic sphere. Ogi et al. (2018) also pay attention to the connection between gender and Shōjo manga. They notice that in the development of Shōjo manga, the gender focus of the protagonist also changes a lot, which gives the Shōjo manga a chance to spread abroad. Based on this historical background, Mitiko (2018) pays attention to a type of character, the girls dressed as men (男装の少女) and explores how does the gender representation construct and change in Shōjo manga. She criticizes the lack of content that began to appear in Shōjo manga after 2000. In her opinion, some characters of girls dressed as men began as a rebellion against gender fluidity but in the environment of recent social culture, it is more of a backwardness framed by established gender paradigms. Moreover, Hirozane (2022) emphasizes how Japanese Shōjo manga's author drew on foreign history to express their dissatisfactions with social and gender issues. These articles emphasize the role of Shōjo manga in exporting ideas and influencing the perceptions of society.

These two articles both prove that many Shōjo manga's creators don't realize the changes of social gender perceptions.

These scholars provide a great deal of analysis of Shōjo manga as a cultural vehicle, which is an important reference point for this thesis. However, these articles focus more on the broader social level, and they lack analysis of the more symbolic elements in the work. Few of them explore how specific symbols such as flowers help define the gender of the main characters.

Drawing on theory of performativity, some scholars have increasingly explored how these narratives show, influence or even change the stable gender exceptions in Shōjo manga. According to Hurford's (2009) thesis, some main characters in Shōjo manga use ways of presenting their chosen gender and sexuality that went against traditional rules. This fits with gender performance theory's ideas of how gender selection works. Hurford chooses *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Pet Shop of Horrors*, and *Angel Sanctuary* as the research targets and uses these examples to push back against traditional heteronormative expectations and the gender consciousness dictated by a patriarchal society. There are also some scholars who choose to use many paradigms as a method of analysis. Mertz (2023) choose several Shōjo manga as models in her articles, including traditional *Ribon no Kishi* and *The Rose of Versailles* and recent *Kuragehime* and *Ouran*. In the articles she analyses multiple Shōjo manga, both Western and Japanese, traditional and modern. In her opinion, the way of gender selection and the behavior of gender expression in these manga not only show the wish of gender freedom but also challenge the seemingly necessary and immutable cultural structures.

These articles provide some meaningful lens of understanding the importance of gender performativity theory in Shōjo manga, but they only analyzed gender and ignored some symbols that represent gender.

In Shōjo manga floral symbols not only plays the role of decoration, but also frequently taking the place of shaping visual discourse as a useful tool. Some scholars used Foucault's idea to build their research. Foucault emphasized that power could use discourse to shape and create truth and visibility. Cohn and Ehly (2016) provide a phenomenon in traditional Shōjo manga. According to their studies, traditional Shōjo mangas are filled with maternal visual elements such as flower and these kinds of elements enhance the image of female submission and obedience. At the same time, they will teach readers which kind of emotion performance can be accepted by shaping special beautiful environments through flowers. This emotional system not only constructs the rules of aesthetics but also imperceptibly maintains the established gender standards. He (2023) also explores characters in light novel from different eras, especially how the characters acquire and exercise power and how the characters play the role of "female". Although this paper focuses on light novels, the author explicitly adopts the evolution of role power structures as the core of analysis. At the same time, the article's discussion of how females can take control of their voice is very informative. On the other hand, some scholars think flowers are playing a role in challenging the traditional patriarchal structure. For example, Anan (2014) chooses *The Rose of Versailles* as her research target. She pointed out that this work challenged traditional patriarchal gender cognition by comparing character shapes and floral symbols. This comparison construct a conflict between traditional and modern perceptions. Floral symbols do not serve only to glorify traditional images of femininity; it can also be a potential strategy for questioning and subverting traditional gender norms. *The Rose of Versailles* is an important example in the field of Shōjo manga studies, Hung (2013) explores the growth of the character's subjectivity and sense of political power. She thinks power changes are not only represent on changes in mandate but also show in character's self-acceptance.

The articles above explain the multiple functions of floral symbols such as glorifying female emotions, reinforcing traditional gender foundations and challenging patriarchal structures through metaphors. These findings corroborate Foucault's theory and also provide us with some ideas for analyzing the relationship between visual symbols, such as floral symbols, and the mechanisms of the functioning of power. But these authors only focus on some classic Shōjo manga and the conclusions drawn from these analyses are inevitably influenced by the social thoughts of the times in which these works were created. However, the relationships between symbols such as flowers, embodied in works created in later periods, and more diverse gender fluidity are also important.

Current research on floral symbols, Shōjo manga and gender power provide a great number of ideas and information for this thesis. The authors analyzed Shōjo manga, a widely influential art form from several perspectives, these also provides foundational support for the exploration in this study. However, there are still some shortcomings in current studies.

At first, most of the articles choose the classic Shōjo manga such as *The Rose of Versailles* as research object and focus on traditional femininity and early rebel ideas. These conclusions drawn from analyses with simple binary gender structures will leave the discussion on the surface and not applicable for analyzing works created in the new generation. At the same time, they don't pay enough attention to the trend of gender fluidity but pay more attention to the simple fusion and inversion of femininity and masculinity. More importantly, the number of studies on *Tenshi* is very small and most of them are just one part of a study on Shōjo manga. What is sorely lacking in the current field is a systematic study of floral symbols in *Tenshi* as well as *Tenshi* itself.

With the framework co-constructed by theory of semiotics, theory of gender performance and Foucault's concept of discourse and power, this thesis aims to analyze the role of floral symbols in gender construction and power configuration in *Tenshi*. This issue is currently a research gap. Moreover, this study still wants to fill the gap in this field and provides some new lens of the study of visual culture in contemporary Shōjo manga.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The main reason for this thesis to focus on *Tenshi* is the work's extensive use of floral imagery to represent gender ambiguity and power dynamics on both a visual and narrative level, which is highly compatible with the research questions of this thesis. The main character of the manga, Prince Umayado, demonstrates a fluidity that transcends the traditional gender binary by wearing floral ornaments that repeatedly appear in different scenes. At the same time, the symbolism of these flowers changes as the story develops, interacting in a complex way with the growth of Prince Umayado's political power. As one of the landmark works in the history of Japanese Shōjo manga, not only was *Tenshi* groundbreaking for its early narratives centered on gender fluidity and power dynamics, but the complex use of floral imagery also displays a high degree of visual symbolism. The rich visual symbols and narrative strategies in the manga provide sufficient and concentrated analytical material for semiotics and gender performance theory. In terms of analytical framework, this thesis combines semiotics and gender performance theory, using floral images as a semiotic unit of analysis to explore their symbolic function in the construction of gender identity and power dynamics. In addition, Foucault's theory of power and discourse helps to clarify how floral symbols and gender performance reflect larger political goals and social norms.

When organizing the material, I will first read through the entire *Tenshi*, systematically organizing narrative chapters involving floral imagery related to gender performance and power dynamics. Then I will build a preliminary analytical corpus by collecting material from important scenes. The criteria for scenario selection are based on three main considerations. First are scenes that show the gender ambiguity of Prince Umayado. The second are key plot points in the character's political manipulation through gender images. The third are narrative fragments in

which the symbolism of flowers shifts with the dynamics of power. After that, the selected scenes are carefully disassembled, and the floral images, character gestures, and narrative contexts are taken as semiotic units of analysis. I will use a semiotic framework to explore the symbolic function of floral imagery in *Tenshi* and analyze how floral imagery participates in the construction and subversion of gender identities and power structures with gender performance theory.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter seeks to answer the central research question: How does *Tenshi* use floral semiotics to challenge traditional gender roles and power dynamics? More specifically, this research investigates how floral imagery is used to subvert conventional gender categories and negotiate power relationships, focusing on the case of Prince Umayado. Floral motifs, which are often culturally associated with femininity, serve as important visual tools throughout *Tenshi*. This chapter investigates how such motifs operate within different narrative contexts to destabilize fixed gender expectations and engage with shifting power relations.

To analyze how these floral motifs acquire complex and changing meanings, this chapter applies Peirce's triadic model of representamen, object, and interpretant as a framework for decoding visual signs within narrative and cultural contexts. In parallel, Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a lens for interpreting how Prince Umayado strategically enacts gender ambiguity and negotiates power through visual and behavioral performances mediated by floral ornamentation. Rather than assuming fixed symbolic associations, the analysis investigates how these floral signs shift meaning depending on narrative context, viewer interpretation, and the character's intentional manipulation of visual codes.

This chapter proceeds as follows:

Section 4.1 provides a synopsis of *Tenshi*, introducing its historical setting, narrative structure, and the central character Prince Umayado, whose nonconforming gender expression becomes entangled with political power struggles.

Section 4.2 analyzes floral imagery as a semiotic tool of gender fluidity, focusing on how cherry blossoms and balloon flowers visually construct ambiguous gender performances that destabilize binary gender norms.

Section 4.3 shifts to the political dimension of floral semiotics, examining how Umayado's gendered visual strategies transform into tactical tools within court politics, where flowers such as balloon flowers, peonies, and camellias symbolize seduction, manipulation, and eventual assertion of power.

Section 4.4 explores how Prince Umayado's gender performance, initially subversive, becomes increasingly constrained by patriarchal structures. Through the shifting meanings of lily of the valley and cherry blossoms, this section highlights the tension between personal desire, structural conformity, and emotional compromise.

Finally, Section 4.5 synthesizes the findings, demonstrating how floral semiotics function as dynamic symbols mediating gender fluidity, affective strategies, and power relations throughout the manga.

## **4.1 Synopsis of *Tenshi***

Prince Umayado, the main character of *Tenshi*, is a fictionalized adaptation of the life of the historical figure Prince Shōtoku. The story begins when he is a young boy and follows him as he grows up and assumes power in the court. Prince Umayado has the power to levitate objects and communicate with people with his mind. Meanwhile, although he is a male, he always wears a floral hair ornament, and with his neutral and beautiful appearance and slender body, he is often mistaken for a young girl.

The story unfolded from Suga no Emishi's point of view. Emishi initially meets a bathing Prince Umayado on a walk and mistakes him for a young girl, only to discover his true identity later. Umayado gradually uses his ability and strategies to manipulate people's hearts and minds to expand his power in the court. In the midst of conflicting Shinto and Buddhist beliefs, power struggles at court, and succession disputes, he continued to consolidate his position. To secure

power, Umayado married Emishi's sister and adopted her illegitimate son with her brother as his heir.

The story involves a great deal of complicated family unions and emotional entanglements. Emishi is deeply in love with a princess, while his sister secretly adores her older brother and sets out to have sex with him. The story revolves around power struggles and complex emotional relationships, showing the fate of various characters under the harsh court system.

## 4.2 Floral Imagery as a Semiotic Tool of Gender Fluidity

In *Tenshi*, flowers are more than just decorative elements; they are powerful semiotic symbols representing gender fluidity, self-transformation, and rebellion against societal expectations. Each flower in the manga carries heavy cultural connotations that highlight the central figure, Prince Umayado, and his journey and defiance of social gender expectations.

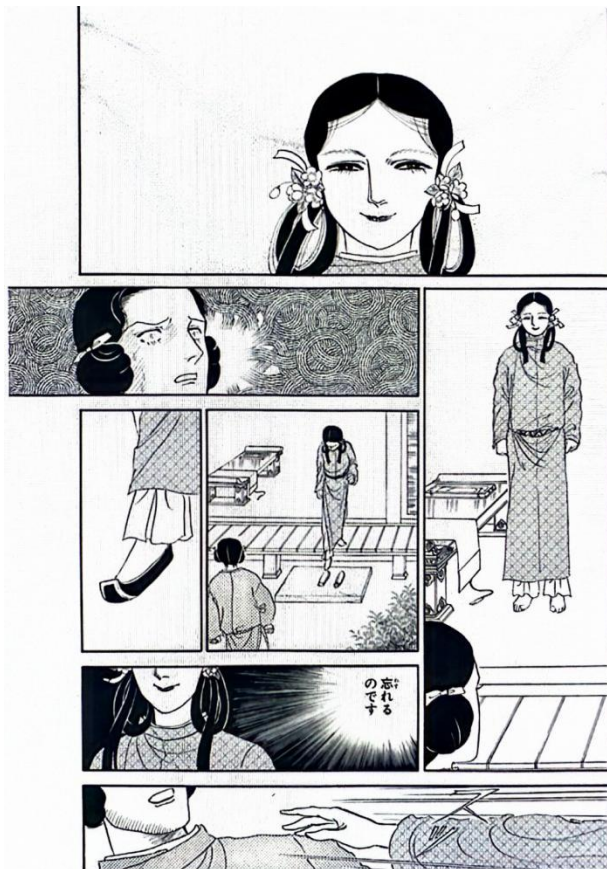


Figure 1. Prince Umayado's first appearance with sakura in his hair (Vol. 1, pp. 54, 57).

In this scene (Vol. 1, pp. 54, 57), Umayado is absent from the party but is just in his room, practicing his supernatural power. He was not aware that there was a stranger outside of his room, Emishi, which is not normal for him. After shock and anger, he changed his face into a calm and insincere smile, and his hair was decorated with cherry blossoms. From a semiotic perspective, the cherry blossoms function as visual signs (representamen) referring to cultural notions of impermanence and fragility (object), which viewers interpret (interpretant) as aestheticized femininity and vulnerability (Peirce 1931–1958). His feminist decoration is a strong contrast to his calm gesture, which eases the tension. By utilizing soft tone and a delicate appearance, Prince Umayado weakens the defenses of the visitor. His flower decorations became a kind of performance strategy, which means he is consciously manipulating others' impressions of him to help him control the whole situation with his gender ambiguity. Emishi's shock and shy expression when he recognized him proves the success of Prince Umayado's strategy. Thus, cherry blossoms is not only the symbol of beauty and impermanence, but also the delicately designed tool of gender performance.

Cherry blossoms in this scene are a gender symbol with cultural code significance. In Japanese cultural tradition, sakura is closely associated with impermanence, fragility, and vulnerability. Its short bloom represents not only the ultimate beauty, but also the fragility and fading (Shirane 2012, 134). In this scene, Umayado decorates cherry blossoms in his hair to make it into one part of his image, reinforcing the ambiguity of his gender.

Umayado appears with a neutral appearance and soft attitude when it should be masculine and dignified because he is a prince. He doesn't use the traditional symbols of male power, such as weapons, dignity cloths, or public space, but uses the feminist expression and

cherry blossoms in a private room to lead Emishi to see himself from a pure male's perspective. His soft tone, subtle smile, and flowers contribute together to the atmosphere without threat. And it successfully creates Emishi's sense of dislocation visually and psychologically. This sense of dislocation doesn't weaken his power but serves as a strategy to pretend that he is friendly. Prince Umayado actively controls the superior party in the narrative through his gender ambiguity.

From Judith Butler's gender performance theory, Umayado's behavior constitutes a performative reconstruction of gender expectations. In Butler's framework, gender is not a stable identity but constituted through the repeated stylization of acts, gestures, and expressions (Butler 1990). His rejection of the traditional male image is not represented by rejecting the male power but by disturbing the established gender cognition through his body gesture and visual language (such as cherry blossoms). He is not withdrawn, but actually in the core of the patriarchal structure. He disturbs the viewer's gender cognition by using feminist symbols through his performance. This performance is both compliant and rebellious. In this scene, his gender performance allows him to control the situation while staying within the boundaries of existing power structures.

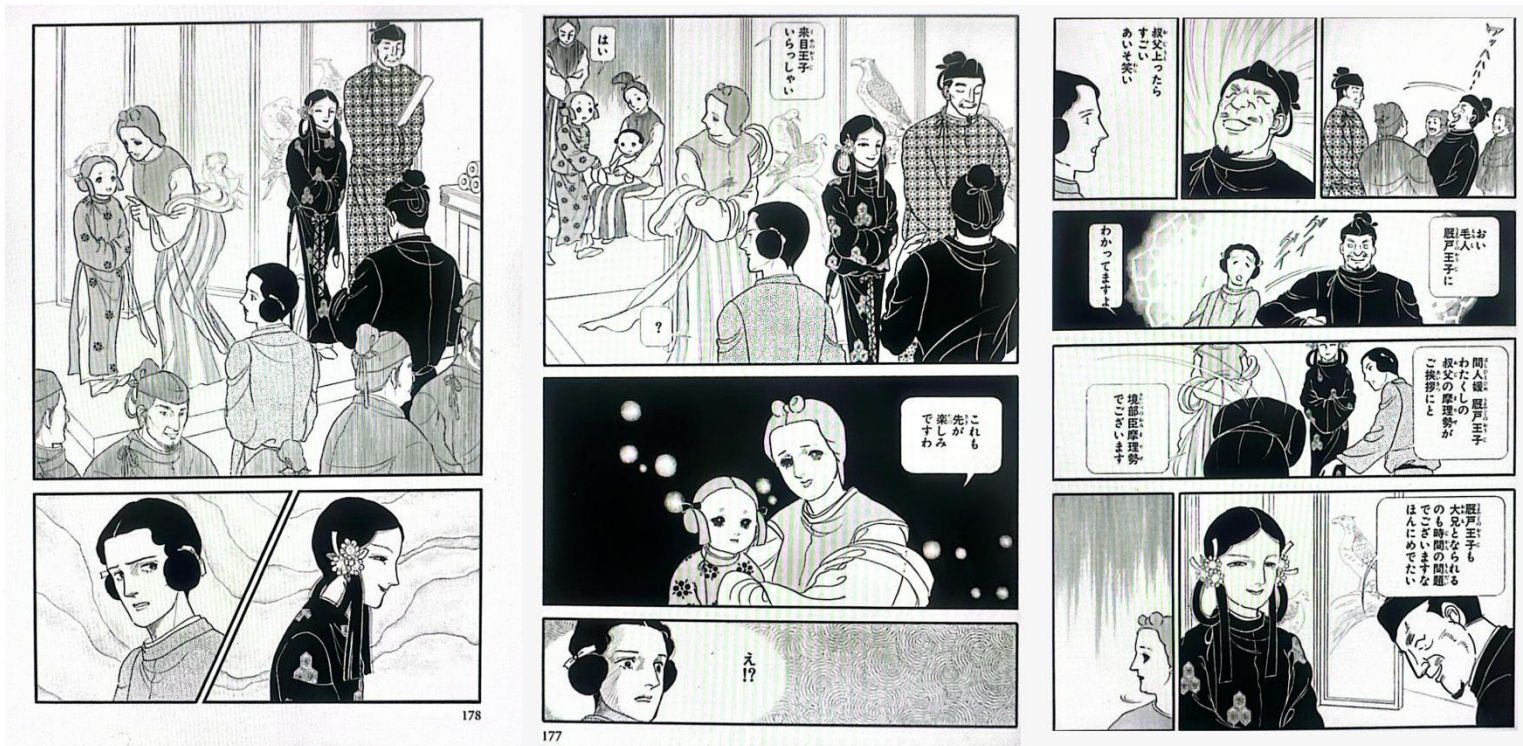


Figure 2. Prince Umayado at the banquet held to celebrate his father becoming the King

(Vol. 1, pp. 176–178)

In this grand and solemn scene, Prince Umayado accepts the court officials' congratulations with a faint smile in a dark dress code, which represents the calmness and propriety befitting his identity as a young prince. However, his mother Queen Hashihitohime suddenly stopped smiling when she heard the blessing of Umayado's possibility of inheritance, and she clearly expressed a preference for the younger second son to inherit the throne. These favoritist emotions in public not only break the superficial harmony but also expose the awkward position of Umayado in his family. While under the pressure of his mother's indifference and the court official's gaze, Umayado keeps smiling without fighting back. This silence is not depicted as weakness in the manga, but nearly a dramatic patience.

In this scene, although the flowers worn by Prince Umayado are depicted rather simply, they can reasonably be identified as lotuses based on several observations. First, in the manga, the flowers feature a relatively prominent central core with about 8-10 petals, as well as being visually symmetrical. Secondly, considering that the manga is set in Japan during the Asuka period, the types of flowers that can be considered are limited. Finally, by referring to typical lotus depictions (Chandra 2004, vol. 10), I concluded that the flowers that Prince Umayado wears are lotuses.

In the framework of semiotics, the lotus, as a visual symbol (representamen), has its cultural object that originates from the symbolic meanings of purity, transcendence, and patience in the Buddhist iconographic tradition. In the Buddhist belief system, the lotus is often used as a typical symbol of the Bodhisattva figure. It represents the ideal of the practice of transcending earthly pollution and maintaining inner purity (e.g., the lotus seat of the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva). Viewers tend to interpret this as a form of gentle and noble self-control when they see the image of a lotus. It can also be interpreted as moral transcendence and high virtue (Coomaraswamy 1935, 19–21). Precisely because of this, the lotus in this court ceremony is not only the ornament but becomes an essential part of the audience's perception of Umayado's temperament.

As Butler (1990) argues, gender is not an innate identity but a performative construct produced through the repeated stylization of acts, gestures, and embodied practices. From this perspective, the lotus ornament becomes part of Prince Umayado's way of presenting his gender through carefully controlled behavior during the ceremony. The choice of lotus echoes Prince Umayado's behavior of "facing humiliation in silence" in this scene. Visually, the lotus decoration softens his masculine image as a prince, which brings him closer to the transcendent

and morally elevated self-control. It is precisely this contrast in gender coding that makes his silence and floral decorations together an ambiguous and undefined gendered gesture. In this public ceremony, rather than adopting the assertion and confrontation presupposed in traditional male roles, Prince Umayado chooses to respond to his mother's humiliation with silence. In addition, the lotus is often closely associated with the image of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and the gender of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva itself is highly ambiguous. This gender ambiguity allows Lotus to further reinforce Prince Umayado's neutral characteristics. The use of lotus further strengthens soft femininity, freeing the image of Prince Umayado from the stereotypical impression of the masculine ruling class to an existence that wanders between gender boundaries and constructs self-identity through visual strategies. And the existence itself is the representation of gender fluidity.

In these two scenes, Prince Umayado consciously uses floral ornaments as a means of gender expression. However, each type of flower carries out its strategic function in different contexts. When it comes to the first time facing Emishi, cherry blossoms, a flower symbolizing fragility, beauty, and impermanence, soften his image and create a sense of non-threat. Although Emishi knew he was a prince, this gentle appearance broke the usual expectation that male royalty is usually authoritative. Through this calculated vulnerability, Prince Umayado allowed Emishi to relax mentally, thereby gaining the initiative. And in the congratulatory ceremonies at court, he employs a more sophisticated visual strategy. By wearing lotuses, Prince Umayado appears calm and transcendent. At the same time, with the help of the binding of the lotus flower to the image of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, lotuses also enhance his femininity. Prince Umayado is still in the midst of a power struggle in the patriarchal system, but this visual choice allows him to avoid the arrogance and masculinity that heirs are usually expected to display. At this

moment, gender performance does not directly challenge the power structure. Instead, he eased the underlying tension through a gentle and controlled gesture, enhancing the officials' favor towards him without exacerbating conflicts. Whether it's cherry blossoms or lotuses, floral ornaments not only serve a decorative purpose but are also a strategic tool that he repeatedly adapts and employs in his gender performances and power relations.

### **4.3 Political Dimensions of Gender Performance**

In the previous section, we have seen how Prince Umayado skillfully blurs traditional gender boundaries to contrast a fluid gender image through flower symbols. While in *Tenshi*, gender fluidity is not just an expression of self-identity, but even more a tool to be used strategically in power. This section will further explore how Prince Umayado adopts a feminized appearance to take the initiative in a power struggle at court.

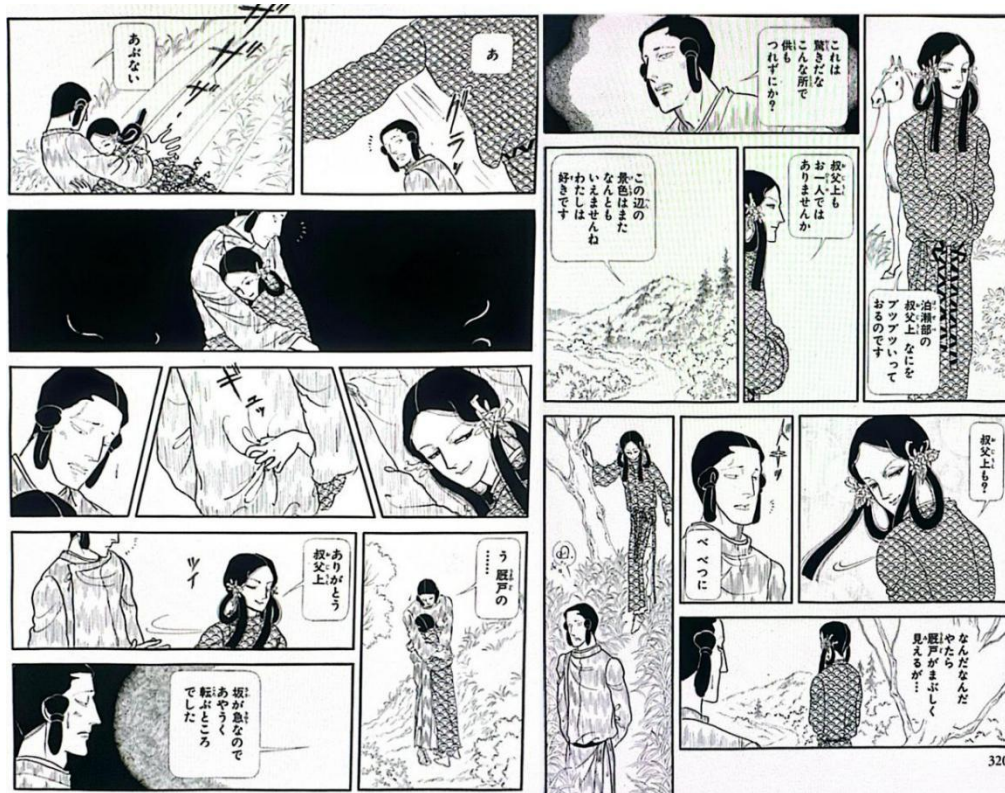


Figure 3. Prince Umayado approaches the puppet prince while wearing balloon flowers in his hair (Vol. 1, pp. 320–321).

In this scene from Volume 1, Umayado's father dies shortly after ascending the throne, causing him to rethink his political strategy. Because he was too young, officials supported another age-appropriate royal candidate, and Prince Umayado realized that he could not directly succeed to the throne. To overcome this obstacle, he chose to support another prince who was weak-willed, ambitious, and fond of beauty, as a puppet ruler he could control. Prince Umayado knows how to use his female-like appearance. He attracts the prince with a gentle voice and a feminine charm. He is slim and wears balloon flowers, and deliberately falls gently on this prince's body, evoking the image of a fragile young girl. In Japanese culture, balloon flowers (kikyō) are one of the seven autumn flowers (aki no nanakusa), symbolizing strength, resilience,

and courage. These qualities are also visually represented in traditional kimono design. These symbolisms are often incorporated into seasonal patterns, expressing emotional or moral ideals through material culture (Luu and McKinney, 2021).

In this scene, Prince Umayado no longer resists social expectations merely through ambiguous gender imagery but further transforms this ambiguity into a concrete strategy of power. Faced with a situation where his succession was blocked, the young and clever Prince Umayado immediately came up with a long-term plan to achieve his scheme of gaining power. Utilizing Peirce's triadic model of semiotics, the balloon flower can be understood as a visual representamen—a sign that visually appears as a decorative motif. Its object lies in culturally embedded meanings: in Japanese culture, balloon flowers symbolize strength, resilience, and courage. The viewer's interpretation of Prince Umayado's character—gentle in appearance but possessing inner fortitude—constitutes the interpretant. Balloon flowers symbolize inner strength and indomitable will, which echoes Prince Umayado's intentions - he is soft on the outside, but in reality, has an unwavering determination. Through a gentle tone, feminine appearance, and floral decorations that create a feminine aura (Chandler 2007), Prince Umayado uses "seduction" as a means to enter the core of court power, rather than competing for legitimacy through traditional masculine authority.

This gender expression is not based on self-identity but is a strategic political tactic. In Judith Butler's theoretical framework, this practice reflects achieving "control" through "compliance": He cleverly uses the stereotype of "feminine = non-threatening" to increase his power influence. He appears in a feminine posture but takes the initiative in the scene and becomes the actual controller.



Figure 4. Prince Umayado is determined to destroy the puppet king he has supported for many years (Vol.6, pp. 250-252).

Floral semiotics in *Tenshi* are central in political maneuvering and subverting power dynamics. As Prince Umayado's long-planned political scheme reaches its climax, He appeared wearing camellias at a critical confrontation. He has made up his mind to abandon the puppet king he has supported for many years and is ready to take power into his own hands. His expression was no longer the gentle and restrained one of the past but openly showed his desire for the throne.

In this critical scene, Prince Umayado no longer hides in the corner of power but asserts his dominance with an oppressive and magnificent presence. Wearing camellia on his head and a distinctive patterned dress, his expression is evil and decisive, and his whole look is no longer subtle, but directly conveys a visual aura of "unchallengeable". Utilizing Peirce's semiotic triad,

the camellia here functions as a representamen—a visual signifier through its floral form. Its object lies in cultural connotations rooted in Japanese tradition: the camellia (*tsubaki*) carries a particularly ominous symbolic meaning. It is often associated with death, largely due to the way its blossom falls to the ground whole, rather than petal by petal. As Bashō (c. 1694) famously wrote: 「落ちぎまに水こぼしけり花つばき」 “Falling upon earth, pure water spills from the cup of the camellia.” Here, the *tsubaki* bloom falls whole—its “cup” spilling water—suggesting sudden rupture and the metaphorical end of life.

Prince Umayado, at this point, no longer relies on gender-ambiguous tactics to manipulate the situation. Instead of taking the initiative through the viewer's misinterpretation of his neutral appearance. The viewer's understanding of Umayado's appearance, carrying a strong message of death and determination, becomes the interpretant. In this context, Prince Umayado's use of the camellia not only emphasizes the theatricality of his appearance but also signals the deadly seriousness of his political intentions.

At the same time, Prince Umayado no longer relies on a neutral or feminine appearance to charm others. He took it upon himself to incorporate the camellia, the symbol of death, into his appearance. By using strong and oppressive visual imagery, Prince Umayado indicates that he would take power himself. Rather than acting as a young prince who secretly manipulates power by using a gentle appearance, he's finally showing his ambition and control publicly. As Foucault (1978) argues, power is not just a tool to be used for repression but also can influence how people understand the world and how they act through discourse. In this scene, Prince Umayado is no longer just power gaming by following the rules of the patriarchal system but actively manipulates cultural symbols to reshape his image in the political stage. This active

shaping of meaning reflects Foucault's idea of discourse-power. By controlling the meaning of cultural signs, a person can influence how others see and react to power.

Through the analysis of two key political scenes, it can be seen that the gender performance of Prince Umayado in *Tenshi* is no longer limited to the level of personal identity but has been transformed into a clever political tool. By employing different floral symbols such as the resilient balloon flower and the ominous camellia, he expresses different political intentions. Therefore, the gender performance discussed in this chapter is not self-expression, but an act of rewriting power structures and manipulating visual language. In the image of Prince Umayado, gender can be both performed and strategized; flowers are both decoration and weapons. However, regardless of how the meaning of the flower changes, they still bloom in the patriarchal court. Although his strategy is flexible, it is also constrained by the system. How he continues to navigate between the patriarchal structure and his homosexual identity will be the focus of the next section.

#### **4.4 Between Compliance and Control within Patriarchy**

In the first two sections, we see Prince Umayado taking control of the initiative in the patriarchal system through floral ornamentation and gender performance. However, his power never came from outside the system. He has the right of succession because he is the king's son, the qualified heir recognized by the system.

In other words, all his acts of rebellion, such as adorning flowers and adopting feminine postures, occurred within the patriarchal system and were tolerated to some extent by it. Prince Umayado ultimately married the sister of the man he deeply loved, both to consolidate royal

power and to fulfill the structural arrangements of patriarchy. He gained power, but he could not attain the love he desired because it was not permitted by the patriarchal system.

This section will analyze from this perspective how Prince Umayado both challenges gender norms and has to conform to structural arrangements. His gender performance is both a weapon and a compromise; the flowers originally carried his intent of resistance, but in the end, they could only become decorations for his compromise before the power structure.



Figure 5. Prince Umayado decided to make this child, who has no blood relation to him, his successor (Vol. 6, pp. 130-132).

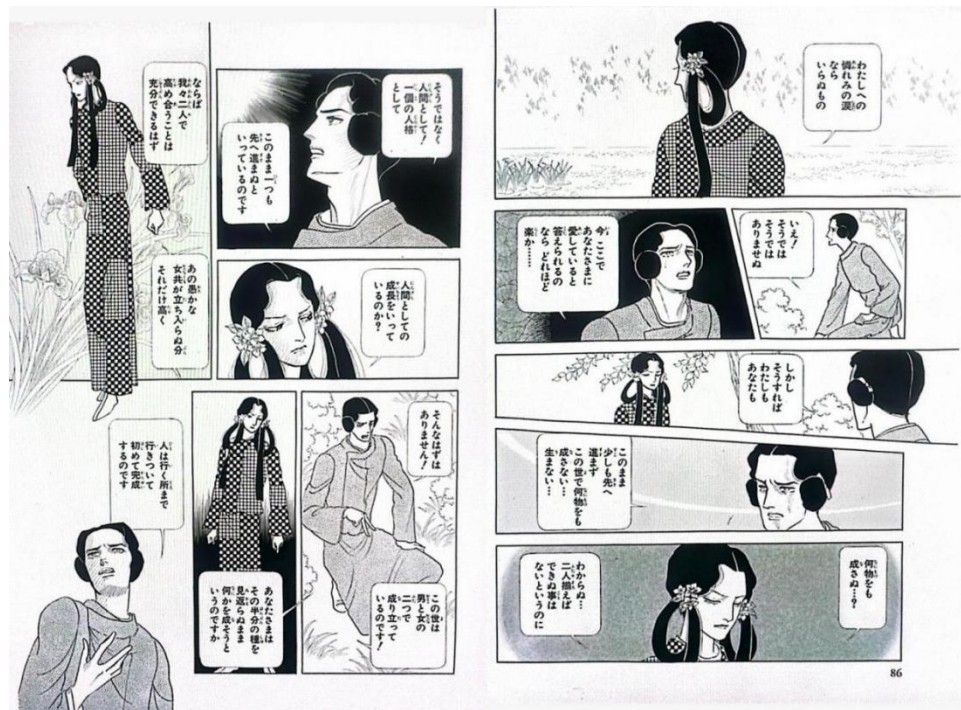
In this scene from Volume 6, Prince Umayado has already married Emishi's sister. Ironically, the marriage itself is based on a series of emotional mismatches: Emishi's sister deeply loved her own brother and secretly gave birth to his child, and Prince Umayado, knowing this, still chose to marry her and publicly expressed his hope that the child could inherit him. He acknowledged this child, who did not belong to him, as a father, using the key forms of patriarchy in marriage and inheritance to maintain an unavoidable political reality. Prince

Umayado appears wearing lily of the valley, holding a baby, with a calm expression and even a gentle smile. In Japanese culture, lily of the valley symbolizes "purity" and "silent love", and the flower's meaning deeply resonates with the emotions in the scene. Umayado's choices are not made out of genuine feelings but rather from suppressing his emotions and trying to find substitutes to satisfy his emotional needs. He married Emishi's sister but could not truly love her; he raised the child born to Emishi and another man as his heir but could not reveal the truth about the blood relationship behind it.

Utilizing Peirce's triadic model of semiotics, the lily of the valley can be seen as a representamen. It appears visually as a delicate floral symbol. Its object refers to traditional Japanese meanings, such as purity and silent love. However, in this scene, the interpretant has changed. The flower no longer simply represents feminine delicacy or emotional subtlety. Instead, it symbolizes Prince Umayado's emotional restraint and his reluctant acceptance of patriarchal duties. He accepted children who did not belong to him through his own marriage and identity and tried to maintain political stability.

In Judith Butler's framework of gender performance, this scene exemplifies a different kind of gendered performance. At this time, Prince Umayado no longer gains power through a feminine appearance as in the past but appears in a manner that conforms to institutional arrangements. When he has already reached the peak of power, his gender expression is no longer to manipulate power relations but stems from emotional repression and practical compromise. His performance follows what Butler describes as regulatory norms. These are social rules that define how people should behave according to gender in order to maintain social order. By taking on the role of husband and father, he conforms not out of personal desire but out of political necessity.

This scene reveals the complexity of Prince Umayado's gender expression. He is neither a complete rebel nor a simple conformist. His behavior exists in a state of ongoing negotiation, constantly making concessions between personal feelings and institutional expectations. Through the changing meaning of flowers like the lily of the valley, his gendered self reflects a tension between personal identity and social structure. It shows both silence and submission within the



system of power.

Figure 5: Prince Umayado finally chose to express his love to Emishi, but was rejected (Vol. 7, pp. 86-87).

In Volume 7, the long years of emotional entanglement between Prince Umayado and Emishi finally come to an end. In this face-to-face conversation, Emishi hesitated for a moment, almost saying the word "love," but in the end, he chose to return to the set of values he insisted on, such as "marriage between men and women" and "following the natural moral order." Throughout the conversation, Prince Umayado wore cherry blossoms, his expression calm and

restrained. Although he still tried to salvage the relationship, he was also aware that there was no longer any possibility between them.

Cherry blossoms, a flower symbolizing the "ultimate beauty" and "impermanence of life" in Japanese culture, appear particularly cruel in this scene. It is no longer a tool used by stablemen to showcase feminine charm or a gentle image, nor is it a visual strategy he employs in power struggles. Instead, its fleeting and destined-to-wither nature symbolizes the end of Prince Umayado's personal feelings. In the past, he used flowers to create a way of existence that did not belong to the traditional male power structure, and he also took the initiative in politics. But in this private relationship, he cannot control their future. The reason for his failure is not because he is not gentle enough or feminine enough, but because the rules of the entire social structure have long determined his failure.

From Peirce's semiotic perspective, the cherry blossom in the scene functions as a representamen. In the earlier context, the object it referred to be the cultural idea of charm, femininity, and strategic ambiguity. The interpretant formed in the viewer's mind connected these meanings with Prince Umayado's ability to use softness as a form of power. In the later scene, although the representamen remains the same, the object it relates to has shifted. It now points to powerlessness and emotional defeat. As a result, the interpretant changes. The flower no longer evokes influence or charm but instead signals that Prince Umayado has lost the ability to change the outcome. He still wears the flower, but its meaning has been transformed. Emishi ultimately chose to obey the "natural moral order" he believed in, rejecting the relationship and Prince Umayado's emotional expressions that did not conform to patriarchal norms. At this moment, Prince Umayado was no longer the person who could flexibly manipulate others. He became a "qualified heir" who was rejected, incorporated into the system, and powerless to resist.

In the two scenes analyzed in this section, the flowers also undergo a transformation from an "expression of resistance" to a "symbol of compromise". They are no longer a tool used by Prince Umayado to manipulate power, but rather the last visual trace of a relationship that he can no longer dominate. The flowers remind us that in the script set by the patriarchy, even what looks like "resistance" is sometimes just another form of obedience.

## 4.5 Conclusion

According to the analysis in this chapter, the flower meaning in the *Tenshi* as the entry point had been used to explore the multiple interactivities between the gender ambiguity, power dynamics. Based on methods of semiotic analysis, gender performance theory, and discourse and power theory, the explanation of how the flower became the cultural symbol which surpassed the decoration meaning in the manga narrations.

The background of *Tenshi* was described in section 4.1. This chapter introduced the manga's characters' background sources as well as the story development line in a generalized manner. At the same time, the key conflicts and the standpoints were well sorted out. Sections 4.1 brought out the key analyses with the role of overarching.

In Section 4.2, according to Butler's theory of gender performance and Peirce's semiotic theory, the analysis explained the question: how the two kinds of flower decorations Cherry Blossoms and lotuses helped Prince Umayado shape one neutral temperament which disassociated between male and female as the visual representaments. In different contexts, flowers were given different significance such as soft, stoic and resistance. With the purpose of enhancing character's trouble feeling by the traditional gender rules, floral symbols showed that gender was not a simple and stable causality but could be constantly evolved and reconstructed

according to visual languages. At the same time, the explanation of the flowers' meanings reinforced the idea that flowers were not only decoration, but they were also powerful weapons and tools in the gender performance of character's struggle for power.

Section 4.3 forwardly pushed the discussion about the gender visual strategy earlier, focused on the strategies that Prince Umayado had used to turn the state of gender ambiguity into one useful tool during power struggles at court. He played the role of stoicism and false submission represented by the balloon flowers, aimed to soften his image and seduce while controlling a weak puppet prince. Meanwhile, during the period of sudden political change, he used one intimidation and ruptured image which represented by camellias. At that time, he shaped one cold and incontrovertible visual sovereign. The two different visual representaments of balloon flowers and camellias were separately corresponded to the two gender play periods induction and purge. The flowers were not traditional beauty symbols but even became the symbolic tool of power. The big transformation showed that Prince Umayado's gender performance had changed from the serve of personal show to covert power control. These actions were embedded in the processes of institutional functioning and power allocation.

The description that Prince Umayado's gestures of defiance still didn't break the structural control of patriarchy system was shown in section 4.4. He tried his best to get the status of the initiative, but political legacy was based on birthright, His power was always the production of internal authorizations. During the main episodes such as the political marriage with Emishi's sister, claiming Emishi's illegitimate child and the break of the relationship between he and Emishi, the meaning of flowers changed a lot. Lily of the valley's meaning of the silent atonement turned into self-repressed emotions, and the meaning of Sakura had changed from the earlier gender-bending to the finally uncontrollable relationship ending. The flower

decorations lost their symbol as a tool to fight against the gender rules and gradually became simple and compromising decoration symbols which followed the arrangements of the patriarchal systems. Gender plays still limited by the structure. The shift from proactive actions to passive deference was effectively illustrated.

The flower symbols in *Tenshi* participated in the shaping of gender gestures, affective strategies and political actions by their special visual charms and symbol powers. The connection between floral symbols and power showed that flowers were both externalizations of gender and witness to structural contradictions. During these power struggles, flowers were used to cover up, confuse others and compete for the initiative but they finally became witnesses. Prince Umayado's resistance was resisted by a powerful system; he could only complete the already finalized script with these flowers. However, this series of fights, performances and failures proved that the meanings of the flowers were not stable; they were strongly influenced by the battle between patriarchy and individual desires.

In summary, according to the explorations and discussions, gender couldn't be reduced to a straightforward experience or a simple identification. They were the social processes of been viewing, judging and controlling. Visual language symbols like flowers could be led into opportunities to undermine gender rigidity or tool of structure continuations. This manga provided a meaningful approach to the study of the relationship between gender and power. We couldn't ignore the role of symbols, their flexibility often projected in subtle ways on characters' gender selections and changes in power structures.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis investigates the role of floral semiotics in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* by Ryoko Yamagishi. Special attention is given to how floral imagery not only symbolizes gender fluidity but also serves as a tool to subvert traditional gender and power structures within Shōjo manga. With the help of Peirce's semantics theory, Butler's gender performance theory and Foucault's concept of discourse and power, this research argues that the floral symbols in manga are beyond mere ornamentation. Floral symbols can also play the roles of disrupting traditional gender roles and challenging settled differences between male and female. According to the analysis, the floral symbols which were related to Prince Umayado played the role of breaking traditional gender limitations. Traditional female visual elements had changed into the symbol of expressing resistance, prompting gender non-conformity and reconstructing power system.

One of the main findings of this thesis is the recurring floral symbols in *Tenshi* play the role of symbolizing and leading gender mobility. In traditional understanding, flower is an important symbol of enhancing character's femininity and creating romantic environments. This kind of characteristic is extremely apparent in Shōjo manga, a kind of manga which is heavily influenced by gender conventions. However, *Tenshi* subtly rewrote this visual language, assigning flowers a role of non-traditional gender expression. The floral symbols associated with Prince Umayado are particularly significant in constructing a narrative of gender resistance. These flowers which relate to Prince Umayado have qualities such as free movement, resistance and independence. They traditionally are aligned with female characters in Shōjo. However, their genderless forms challenge the rigid male-female lines which Prince Umayado's tale addresses. In this context, flowers are not only aesthetic symbols but become active makers of gender non-conformity. They highlight the politics, struggles and individual resistance in the story, providing a clear critique of traditional gender exceptions. Embedding these floral symbols into scenes of

higher emotion or strong symbolism such as playing music and doing self-reflection is highly meaningful. According to these episodes, it is easy to get a glimpse of the point the manga was trying to make. When the traditional gender roles are disturbed, someone who resists conventional male gender rules may claim a new gender identity.

In addition, this study finds out that flowers also played the role of reflecting the change of people influence in the “power game”. At the same time, the floral symbols also reflected and emphasized the idea of gender mobility that contradicted traditional social rules. In the episode about Prince Umayado, flowers usually symbolize the reversal of gender perceptions of male and female. Based on this finding, this thesis claims that *Tenshi*'s author had turned the usual impression of flowers as passive or weak into symbols of strength, resistance and challenge to authority. While breaking traditional perception of female elements, this finding also gives a new framework for gender, focusing on flexibility and resistance to old organization systems. At the same time, these episodes also showed that floral symbols provided Prince Umayado a new understanding of gender. This gender identity went beyond the traditional definitions of the male roles. This non-binary gender expression created by visual symbols also showed how *Tenshi* elevated the “flowers” from mere decoration to a visual toll of resistance.

Characters in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* are not clearly male or female. The gender fluidity brought by floral symbols strongly impacted traditional gender rules in Shōjo manga. *Tenshi* demonstrated support for gender fluidity on the one hand and reflects dissatisfaction with the power structure under traditional patriarchal society on the other. Although the revolt was unsuccessful, the signals of revolt shown through the floral symbols would affect the public's perceptions of gender structures and power relations.

Theoretically speaking, the use of floral symbols further corroborated Peirce's symbolic triad theory. In the traditional context, flowers usually symbolize the meaning of femininity, beauty and vulnerability. However, the interpretant constructed by these flowers was redefined in *Tenshi*. They had become the symbol of challenging traditional gender limitation. Flowers no longer represent only female but the cultural concept of refusing gender boundaries and being strong in the midst of softness. This kind of process was one of the main mechanisms in *Tenshi*. Visual symbols participated in the reconstruction of gender identity and social structure.

Integrating Judith Butler's gender performativity theory with Peirce's semiotics offers a robust analytical model for understanding how gender is not an inherent trait but a socially constructed performance. Based on this framework, flowers act as signs of defiance and the strong urge to reinvent ideas about gender in manga. Prince Umayado performed a new kind of gender expression. At the same time, this finding also shows how symbols of flowers challenge the limitation of outdated gender rules and offer new lens of understanding gender issues.

Moreover, according to Foucault's concept of discourse and power, this thesis argues that *Tenshi* constructed a challenge to traditional gender and power system through floral visual language. In the traditional sense, flowers were closely related to femininity. They are a kind of tool to maintain female's soft and passive roles within the traditional patriarchal discursive structure. However, in *Tenshi* the situation was reversed. As a male role, Prince Umayado was placed at flower's visual language and presented a state where power and feminine vision coexist. Flowers' bloom and princes in politics often appeared at the same time. According to this situation, the feminized visual language moved away from the representation of weakness and gradually became a symbol of legitimized power. At the same time, these changes also meant power can be reconstructed by symbolic rules. Flowers became a form of visual discourse, and

softness wasn't equal with weakness. Beauty can also represent resistance and challenge. *Tenshi* made an internal criticism of traditional gender and power discourses by employing a visual symbolic system that links flower and power.

This study explains the floral themes present in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* which may encourage someone to do a quantitative analysis of how many manga use flowers. Analyzing flowers across many Shōjo manga helps reveal how they mean different things in different settings and plots. As a result, we can argue further that Shōjo manga's uses of floral images are important for questioning and re-visiting gender.

Although this study uncovers important points about floral semiotics in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi*, a few limitations exist. First, since the research centers on one manga, the results may not fit with all kinds of Shōjo manga. In *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi*, flowers are shown for a special reason, and their significance might change based on cultural, social and gender themes found elsewhere. At the same time, this research is more inclined to case study, the following research can show this visual system's universality through statistical class methods supported by data.

It would also be interesting to examine how floral meanings are connected to aspects such as race, social class or sexual preference. When flowers are viewed together with identity factors, researchers find out how their use fits into cultural stories and if it agrees or disagrees with society's existing views. Because of this, we can explore why flowers are often a symbol of gender and different aspects of someone's identity. Moreover, cross-cultural and cross disciplinary research methods can also be used in this topic and can determine whether this situation is uniform across different cultural languages. *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* is a manga aimed at young female readers. Future researchers should look at how flowers and their

meanings are used in manga outside of Japan and compare these uses to those found here. Comparing various societies can help us understand how flowers mean different things in each culture and how these meanings change over time.

The research adds essential insights to the field by discussing how flowers fight against and rewrite patriarchal systems in Shōjo manga. Over the years, flowers have represented how beauty, femininity and fragility belong only to women, helping to maintain typical gender stereotypes in Shōjo manga. Still, *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* is different because it uses flowers to critique these stereotypes and suggest like Judith Butler's theory argues, that we view gender as an activity rather than something strict or fixed.

By analyzing how flowers in the manga function as signs of resistance, this study expands the understanding of how visual semiotics can question and disrupt the hegemonic gender ideologies that have historically governed Shōjo manga. With this, flowers no longer function as decorating objects. Instead, they become vivid displays of gender identity and political opposition. For this reason, the flowers in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* have more than a decorative meaning; they represent important cultural and symbolic ideas that fit with the book's themes of power, gender identity and opposition to male rule.

In other words, the results of this study make it easier to examine floral semiotics in Shōjo manga and visual culture in greater depth. Analyzing the symbolic use of flowers in *Hi Izuru Tokoro no Tenshi* allows this study to show how visual art in manga can prompt society to reconsider gender, power and identity rules. Future research should continue to build on these findings, exploring the dynamic relationship between symbols, gender, and power and expanding the analysis to encompass a broader range of cultural perspectives and narrative contexts.

In summary, according to the analysis in this thesis, *Tenshi* used flowers as a medium and created a waving and complex system of gender and power. This manga expanded the understanding of gender expression, symbolic politics and cultural discourse through the method of using visual symbols. *Tenshi* also showed that even the softest and most beautiful symbols can also carry the most profound social criticism and cultural reflection.

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