

Gender and Sexuality in Modern Japan

Gender and Sexuality in Modern Japan describes the ever-changing manifestations of sexes, genders, and sexualities in Japanese society from the 1860s to the present day. Analyzing a wide range of texts, images, and data, Sabine Frühstück considers the experiences of females, males, and the evolving spectrum of boundary-crossing individuals and identities in Japan. These include the intersexed conscript in the 1880s, the first “out” lesbian war reporter in the 1930s, and pregnancy-vest-wearing male governors in the present day. She interweaves macro views of history with stories about individual actors, highlighting how sexual and gender expression has been negotiated in both the private and the public spheres and continues to wield the power to critique and change society. This lively and accessible survey introduces Japanese ideas about modern manhood, modern womanhood, reproduction, violence and sex during war, the sex trade, LGBTQ identities and activism, women’s liberation, feminisms, and visual culture.

Sabine Frühstück is the Koichi Takashima Chair and Professor of Modern Japanese Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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Gender and Sexuality in Modern Japan

Sabine Frühstück
University of California at Santa Barbara



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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	1
What Is Modern Japan?	2
Families and Households	3
Codes and Laws	6
Words and Concepts	9
Frames and Lenses, or How to Read This Book	12
The Chapters	14
1 Building the Nation and Modern Manhood	19
Measuring Hegemonic Masculinity	21
Is the Company <i>Man</i> a Real Man?	32
Manning the Changing Tables	37
2 Controlling Reproduction and Motherhood	47
Revolutionizing Birth	49
Contracepting Imperialism	57
Why Have Babies?	64
3 Redefining Womanhoods	70
Roles and Rights	71
New Women, Modern Girls	79
Suffrage and Pacifism	84
Women's Liberation: <i>Ūman Ribū</i>	87
Mainstreaming Feminism and Backlash	90
4 Sex at War	98
Systemic Military Sexual Violence	99
Amnesia and Legacies	106
Global Commemorations	115
5 The Politics of Sexual Labor	121
Liberating Prostitutes	123
Renewing the Oldest Profession	127
The Work of Sex Today	134

vi	Contents	
6	Queer Identities and Activisms	141
	Culture and Knowledge	142
	Queer Spaces	149
	Prohibitions and Rights	153
	Does Trans Transform Society?	162
7	Sexing Visual Culture	166
	Laughing at Semi-Naked Truths in Erotic Woodblock Prints	167
	Injurious to Modern Morals	172
	Dangers in the Realm of the Senses	173
	Viewing the Pain of Others with Aida Makoto	176
	Demystifying the Vagina with Rokudenashiko	181
	Silenced Females in Video Gaming	186
8	Epilogue	191
	At the Beginning: The Penis	191
	At Present: Mapping Sexual and Gendered (J-)Humanity	199
	<i>Bibliography</i>	206
	<i>Index</i>	233

Figures

1.1 Photograph of war veteran with child on his back, Domon Ken, 1950	page 30
1.2 Photograph of kabuki and film actor Nakamura Shidō with baby, <i>Harper's Bazaar</i> , May 2018	42
2.1 Fertility graph in supplement to <i>The Housewife's Companion (Shufu no Tomo)</i> , February 1933	54
2.2 Morinaga Dry Milk advertisement in supplement to <i>The Housewife's Companion (Shufu no Tomo)</i> , September 1932	56
3.1 Caricature of a modern woman's woes in <i>The World of Women's Learning (Jogaku Sekai)</i> , October 1914	77
3.2 Photograph of women and children fishing, 1919	78
3.3 Photograph of Yamada Waka during her visit with Eleanor Roosevelt, December 7, 1937	80
3.4 Photograph of policewomen's drum corps on the cover of <i>Japan</i> , November 1973	89
3.5 Campaign poster of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party featuring the slogan, "Your vote will improve Japan," 1968	91
4.1 Cover of David Hume's comic <i>Babysan's World: The Hume'n Slant on Japan</i> , 1954	109
4.2 Collage titled, "Made in Occupied Japan" by Shimada Yoshiko and Bubu De la Madeleine	110
4.3 The peace statue of a "comfort woman" in Moabit, Berlin, September 2020	117
6.1 Kamikawa Aya participating in a Tokyo Pride parade, 2019	155
6.2 Self-styled "unarchitect," actress, artist and drag queen Vivienne Sato, 2019	164
7.1 A sample of Rokudenashiko's <i>manko</i> figurines, 2021	182

viii List of Figures

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 8.1 | Russian brochure, <i>606 and Syphilis</i> , about the discovery and development of Salvarsan 606, the first effective treatment for syphilis, 1910 | 196 |
| 8.2 | Drawing titled, “The Dawn of the East Asian Race,” in <i>Asahi Gurafu</i> , March 2, 1938 | 198 |
| 8.3 | Amateur ethnographer Ella Lurie Wiswell as a child with unidentified Japanese girls, summer 1919 | 200 |

Acknowledgments

When my daughter was two years old, she sat on the toilet one day with one hand flat on her lower belly. Worried that she might have a bellyache, I asked what she was doing. She answered, “I am holding my penis.” (Daycare was useful in this way.) I casually proceeded to tell her that what she had is called “vagina,” and that it was boys who had penises. I asked whether she knew whether her father had a penis. She confidently answered in the affirmative. Did I, I probed. She said “yes” to that question too. (Full disclosure: I do not.) I was both amused and intrigued. Had she not just articulated a version of Freud’s “phallic stage,” associating the penis with power, and adopting the same for herself?

This book is dedicated to all those individuals, in Japan and elsewhere, who have forged their own paths through what has presented itself as modern sex and gender order, those who have, since the late nineteenth century, undermined and challenged the very power that has permeated it – the Fukuzawa Yukichis and Ueki Emoris, Yoshiya Nobukos, Hiratsuka Raichōs, Magnus Hirschfelds, Tōgō Kens, Kamikawa Ayas, Itō Shioris, Vivienne Satōs, and Igarashi Megumis, along with many others who remain unnamed. In the following chapters, I aim to map, to compress and chisel, to provoke, probe, and reshape key questions and problems that have continued to inform and impact that order.

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