

# Sexuality and shopping : eugenics and female citizenship in urban Japan, 1920 - 1940

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SEXUALITY AND SHOPPING:  
EUGENICS AND FEMALE CITIZENSHIP IN URBAN JAPAN, 1920–1940

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On January 27, 1935, an anonymously authored article appeared in the mainstream *Women's Newspaper* (*Fujo shinbun*) decrying the exclusion of females from the “official definition of citizen.” Its rhetoric was sharper and more politicized than the social and political criticism often encountered today in the Japanese press.

Women (*fujin*) are not included in the official definition of citizen (*kokumin*). Not only are women prevented from voting and from running for public office, but collectively they receive only one percent of state funds earmarked for public education. Consequently, most girls' and women's schools are privately owned and operated. Moreover, “female” is a marked category: unless prefixed by a word for “female” (such as *fujin*, *joshi*, or *onna*), terms such as physician (*ishi*), reporter (*kisha*), and clerk (*ten'in*) refer to males exclusively, despite the theoretically ungendered meaning of these words and attendant occupations. Therefore, if the keepers of the male-centered (*danshi hon'i*) status quo are not going to distinguish between citizen (*kokumin*) and female citizen (*joshi no kokumin*), then they should make it absolutely clear that at least half of the total number of *kokumin* are female, and that women give birth to all the citizens. (Kokumin no hansū jogai 1935)

Four years before this article appeared, the legislative bill for female suffrage had been defeated and the state had initiated a social program of steady militarization following the Manchurian Incident in September, 1931.<sup>1</sup> A suffrage bill passed in 1925 had entitled all males twenty-five years and older with the right to vote, but females had to wait until so entitled by the post-war constitution of 1945.

The term *kokumin* itself dates to the 1880s when Meiji ideologues put their collective (if not always consensual) energies to the task of inventing an ideology of and for the new Japanese nation (Gluck 1985). Literally, “the people of the nation-state,” *kokumin* were the constituent members of the

1 I refer to “the state” in the singular, as a thing-in-itself, for the sake of convenience. I follow Corrigan and Sayer in regarding “the state” not simply as an “organ of coercion” or a “bureaucratic lineage,” but as a repertoire of agencies (sites, technologies, institutions, ministries) that collectively, albeit not without internal contradictions, shape and reproduce the dominant ideology, or status quo (1985:2–3).

imperial New Japan (*shin-Nippon*), although they were not all members in the same way, and certainly not in an equal way. As argued in the *Women's Newspaper* article, girls and women had been excluded all along from those conditions and practices of citizenship that constituted boys and men as bona fide members of the New Japan. The state sought instead to instill in females a collective identity of their unique *Japanese Woman-ness* which was summed up in the deceptively benign expression, Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*), coined in 1875 (Sievers 1983:22, 202n24). Females were thus both defined and constituted exclusively on the basis their sex and gender roles, which, moreover, were contingent upon a dominant ideology of compulsory and monogamous heterosexuality.<sup>2</sup> I am concerned here with the dominant ideology, or ruling definitions of the natural, against which the *Women's Newspaper* editorial was written, and wish to make visible the (il)logic of that ideology.

The article alludes to several modalities or conditions of citizenship recognized in the theoretical (if Eurocentric) literature on citizenship: civil, political, social, national, cultural, and sexual. Meiji ideologues drew from the European scholarship on political economy and social contracts in selectively adapting the rhetoric of nation and citizenship to the Japanese situation. Moreover, Japanese scholars today often cite the work of their Euro-American counterparts in framing their own positions. Therefore, the Eurocentrism per se of the theoretical literature on citizenship is not as problematic as it might first seem, although one must always be sensitive to the conditions and terms of cultural borrowing, and to the differential nuances and resonances of *apparently* similar concepts and institutions, such as citizenship.

The first three types of citizenship have been distinguished by T. H. Marshall who, writing in 1949, identified them as emerging sequentially

2 Theoretically, sex, gender, and sexuality signify different things, although they are often conflated in popular discourse. "Sex" (*sei*) denotes both a physical act (not limited to heterosexual intercourse) and the physical body distinguished by either "female" or "male" genitalia—or both, to varying degrees, in the case of intersexed persons—and their usual capabilities, such as menstruation, seminal ejaculation, and orgasm. "Gender" (*sei no sei, jendā, rashisa*) refers to sociocultural and historical conventions of deportment, costume, voice, gesture, and so on, attributed to females and males. "Sexuality" may overlap with sex and gender, but it pertains specifically to a domain of desire and erotic pleasure more complex and varied than reproductive heterosexuality (see ROBERTSON 1998:17).

over several centuries, although it is more useful to think of them forming, since the twentieth-century, a “pattern of concentric circles” (Dahrendorf 1994:13). *Civil citizenship* emerged in the eighteenth century and centered on the rights “necessary for individual freedom, such as rights to property, personal liberty and justice.” Built primarily in the nineteenth century, *political citizenship* “encompassed the right to participate in the exercise of political power.” *Social citizenship* is a twentieth century construction emphasizing “the citizen’s rights of economic and social security” (van Steenberg 1994:2). For Marshall, the emergence of social citizenship marked “the end of the history of citizenship,” in that the existence of social rights that give the formal status of citizenship a material foundation enable citizens to exercise their rights to full participation in the national community (3).

Marshall’s optimistic teleology has been roundly criticized as overdeterminedly “British,” overlooking or ignoring other possibilities of citizenship not only in contexts broader than the nation, but in different societies (4). Neo-Republican, cultural, race-neutral, gender-neutral, global, European, Asian, international, ecological, and so forth all name different modalities of citizenship—none of which are univocal—identified and debated today (van Steenberg 1994; Evans 1993), even though their histories may predate their recognition as academic subjects. Some, in fact, were indeed evident in early twentieth-century Japan, as indicated in the *Women’s Newspaper* article.

The anonymous author of this article claims that the official definition of citizen is misleading because females, unlike males, are not *constituted* as citizens. Lacking the rights of civil, political, and social citizenship, the author argues, females are bound together instead by a linguistically-determined, categorical identity, namely, “Woman.” Civil, political and social rights elude them because individual females do not have access to those protocols and practices which enable them to become competent citizens who can participate fully in the national culture. This, despite the participation of females in other communal practices and sanctioned social collectivities—such as neighborhood associations and patriotic societies—which, after the Manchurian Incident, were increasingly orchestrated by the military state (Turner 1994:159; see also Tomlinson 1991:68–101).<sup>3</sup>

3 The Peace Police Law enacted in March 1900 (and modified in 1922 and 1926), which

The one type and condition of citizenship acknowledged in the *Women's Newspaper* article that was readily available to females by virtue of their anatomy was sexual citizenship: "women give birth to all the citizens." In other words, through their reproductive capabilities within a framework of monogamous heterosexuality, *married* Japanese females were able to participate in the public sphere and national culture as competent—that is, fecund—citizens. *Unmarried* and/or childless females on the other hand, were portrayed in the mass media, advertisements, and public hygiene exhibitions as pathological and antisocial; they were prone to laziness, more likely to age prematurely, and susceptible to hormonal distress (e. g. Bijin ni naru kotsu 1939:190).

Two more modalities and conditions of female citizenship can be identified: consumer citizenship and eugenic citizenship. As we shall see, these two modalities formed different sides of the same coin, in so far as females were concerned. Eugenic citizenship is actually a supertext, or transcendent context, of sexual citizenship in that eugenics, or "selective breeding," was the objective toward which heterosexual relations should take place. Likewise, consumerism was both a modality of and trope for citizenship—and especially "female citizenship"—in early twentieth-century Japan. Japanese women were accomplished consumers well before they were ever voters. Because consumption was inextricably associated with the body and its cosmetic, nutritional, and sartorial enhancement, the link between consumer and eugenic citizenship was naturalized by the state and the commercial sector alike. Thus, the spectacle of the maverick Modern Girl (*moga*) and her flamboyant display of material excess, was harshly censured by state ideologues, who sought to limit the identification of sexuality and shopping to the Good Wife, Wise Mother.

If we understand citizenship to be a "necessary feature of the project of modernity" (Turner 1994:155), then the modern department store was *the* public sphere in which women exercised their rights of citizenship, foremost among which was shopping! In fact, the inventor of the railroad station terminal department store, Kobayashi Ichizō (1873–1957), played an influential role in shaping girls and women into seasoned shoppers and consumers. Kobayashi established the all-female Takarazuka Revue in 1913 which,

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was aimed primarily at anti-government groups, included a ban on political activity by women, for whom "political" was broadly and loosely defined.



among other things, provided a framework for his capitalist vision of and for Japan. A consummate entrepreneur, Kobayashi served as the president of Tōkyō Electric Light, Japan Light Metal, Mitsubishi Department Store, and Tōhō Motion Picture Company, among other companies in Japan, Korea and China, and founded the Hankyū Department Store and railroad; he also served as minister of commerce and industry from 1940–1941. (I have written extensively about the Takarazuka Revue and will mention the troupe only in passing here. See Robertson 1998.)

Even before the Takarazuka Revue's first performance in 1914, Kobayashi organized a women's exhibition (*fujin tenrankai*) of consumer goods at Paradise, the early name of the Revue complex in Takarazuka, near Ōsaka (Kumano 1984:6–7). The exhibition was a vehicle for both stimulating suburbanization, consumer desires among women and providing a legitimate impetus for otherwise locally-bound (if not home-bound) urban women to board Kobayashi's Hankyū trains, disembark in the suburbs, and meander through his terminal department store before visiting the women's exhibition. In his efforts to capture the interest and loyalty of female consumers, Kobayashi went so far as to lower the floors of his trains to make boarding and exiting less awkward. He also staged a contest in 1923 in which women nominated and voted on a color for Hankyū trains (*Fujin muki no shinshiki densha o tsukuru*, 1923). The winning color was the deep maroon (not to be confused with the Imperial color) that distinguishes the trains today. Years later, in 1937, Kobayashi installed a modern beauty salon, beauty school, and women's hall in the Nihon Theater, one of several Tōkyō theaters under his banner (*Nihon gekijōnai biyōin, fujinkaikan no tanjō*, 1937).

In addition to consolidating a female clientele, his motive was to nurture among theater-going women a bewitching stage presence of their own: every woman could be a well-coiffed and costumed star, so long as she shone on the home stage. Not surprisingly, Kobayashi was antagonistic toward, and sought to resocialize, the New Women (*atarashii onna*), but especially the more iconoclastic Modern Girls, among his clientele, staff, and Revue actors. In his view, the *moga* in particular was not a programmed shopper but a decadent and unfeminine female *flaneur* who would lose track of herself in the spectacle of the metropolis. The problem with the Modern Girl is that she would *go* shopping—an occasion for *flanerie*—instead of *do* the shopping—an occasion for linking the household's economy to the capitalist private sector and the state. The *moga* was potentially dangerous in

that her very presence illuminated by contrast the limitations and constraints that sexual conventions and gender ideologies pose on women's lives (Gleber 1997:74).

The revue theater and the theater of capitalism merged in the lobby of the Takarazuka Grand Theater, completed in 1924 and rebuilt in 1935 after a devastating fire earlier that year. Lining both sides of the mammoth structure—and its twin in Tōkyō, completed in 1934—were restaurants and souvenir shops. Not surprisingly, several social critics drew analogies between the revue theater, with its montage-like juxtaposition of images and events, and the miscellaneous stocked department store, where publicity campaigns emphasized the spectacular dramaturgy of shopping (Iizuka 1930:44; Takaoka 1943:195). Kobayashi countered by demonstrating how a place of production was also a place of consumption. Inside the Takarazuka auditorium, the sumptuous sets and exotic foreign and historical settings provided spectators with an accessible and, importantly, *regulated* vision of what capitalism and commodity culture could mean in terms of entertainment, pleasure, and desire. The “masses,” and female aficionados especially, were recast as consumers, and the commodities on sale, from Revue performances to souvenirs, became part of the machinery of modern Japanese citizenship (Evans 1993:5; Iwahori 1972).

“Until the enfranchisement of women in the postwar constitution, female citizenship ... was apprehended as consumership, and a tenacious connection was established between women and commodity culture” (Robertson 1998:154; see also Silverberg 1991). Moreover, in the eyes of non-feminist ideologues, including Kobayashi, monogamous marriage and motherhood constituted the only legitimate context for female consumer citizenship. According to the dominant ideology of complementarity (as opposed to equality) dictating household relationships, males (husbands) were responsible for modes of production, and females (wives) were in charge of modes of consumption. Females acting on their own behalf outside of the household, or outside of the context of marriage, were regarded by the state as socially disruptive and anomalous.

What B. Campbell has written about English women (and in effect all Britons) today, was certainly true about Japanese *married* women in the early 1900s: “Citizens were to realise themselves not in their social being, not through politics, but through consumption” (1987:159, quoted in Evans 1993:6). It is thus cruelly ironic that

by 1940, when civilians began to experience firsthand the dire ramifications of war, the state initiated an antiluxury movement—"a spiritual mobilization of the people"—directed at reforming women's alleged penchant for conspicuous consumption (New Order for Living 1940). Similarly, a timely Takarazuka Revue, *The Battle Is Also Here* (*Arasoi wa koko ni mo*; 1943), ... presents girls and women as incorrigible materialists—the result of their infection by Anglo-American "germs"—who must reform their selfish ways if Japan is to win the war. (Robertson 1998:154)

The military state also exploited perceived link between consumer citizenship and eugenic citizenship, the latter which was also expressed in terms of "pure blood" (*junketsu*) and the concomitant necessity of "mental hygiene," or correct thinking. Appeals to both pure bloodedness and mental hygiene were conjoined components of "racial hygiene" (*minzoku eisei*), which constituted the ideological core of the Japanese eugenics movement (Robertson 1997).

Because the female members of a society serve literally as the biological reproducers of all citizens, in many respects they are even more rigorously implicated than males, both sexually and culturally, within the discourses and institutions of eugenics and racial hygiene. This was certainly the case in the imperialist New Japan where special attention was paid in the discourse of eugenics to the improvement of female bodies, which were evaluated and measured according to a physical aesthetic of "healthy-body beauty" (*kenkōbi*). Numerous healthy-body beauty contests were staged in the 1930s, including the Miss Nippon contests of 1931 and 1934 (Robertson 1997). The Miss Nippon contests were jointly sponsored by the *Asahi shinbun* and the Takashimaya Department Store. In the words of a judge, a gynecologist, in the 1931 contest, the "superior female contestants from all over Japan would give birth to a splendid second generation" (Konpakuto, 1931:17). The choice of name—Miss Nippon—for such "superior females" accentuated the interlaced relationship between eugenic and consumer citizenship.

The main reason for the Education Ministry making sports part of the mandatory girl's school curriculum in the early 1900s was to create the necessary conditions for the development of bigger and stronger females who could produce more and sturdier babies. By the early 1930s, local governments had already opened marriage counseling centers where sexological and eugenic information and advice were dispensed to the mainly female clients. The centers also helped to locate eugenically suitable husbands for



the women (Furuya 1935; Okada 1933).<sup>4</sup> Yasui Hiroshi, a physician who headed one such “eugenic marriage” (*yūsei kekkon*) clinic, pointed out that improving the quality of citizens hinged not on prolific reproduction, but on the “propagation and multiplication of excellent offspring” (*yoi ko o umeyo, fuyaseyo*). “Thus,” he explained, “the first order of business is for people to marry a spouse selected on the basis of ‘citizens’ or national eugenics” (*kokumin yūsei*) and thereby help to raise the caliber of the “Japanese race” (Yasui 1940:15). Yasui was a harsh critic of the prevalence throughout Japan of marriages between consanguineous, or “blood,” relatives—mainly first and second cousins—and sought to inform the public about the relationship between genetics (“blood”) and certain congenital diseases and deformities. At this time, “blood” was used in two different but related metaphorical senses: as shared hereditary material and as “racial essence.” The two senses were conjoined in the anti-miscegenational policies of the imperial state. The eugenic counseling centers were designed in part to shift the responsibility of arranging marriages from family members, who were likely to include “blood relatives” among the suitable candidates, to state agencies with an investment in “citizens’ eugenics” and the concomitant emergence of “pure-blooded” Japanese families (Yasui 1940:14).

Beginning in the 1930s, the state and its constituent agencies also began sponsoring public exhibitions on the theme of eugenic citizenship. A female hygiene exhibition (*fujin eisei tenrankai*) held in November 1931 at the Red Cross Museum in Tōkyō, was followed in December the following year (at the same venue) by a marriage hygiene exhibition (*kekkon eisei tenrankai*), and, several years later in May 1936, by a childbirth exhibition (*osan no tenrankai*) (Tanaka 1994:218). It was probably no accident that the sequencing of the exhibitions imitated the official sex and gender roles for females: first a Good Wife, then a Wise Mother. Also evident in the exhibitions was the commodification of sexual and eugenic citizenship through the display and promotion of a hygienic lifestyle and the consumer products necessary to achieve and sustain such a lifestyle.

Fertile mothers were praised publicly by the Welfare Ministry, which in the late 1930s, began referring to them as forming a *kodakara butai*, or

4 The earliest such office, presaging the state’s eugenic push, opened in Tōkyō in the spring of 1933, a time when race hygienists were lobbying for eugenic legislation, including a Sterilization Law (FURUYA 1935; OKADA 1933).

“fertile womb battalion” (Yokoyama 1994:60–61). In this way, females—or at least their reproductive organs—were conscripted for military service. Households too were referred to as *kodakara ikke*, or “fertile womb households,” 1,907 of which were singled out for government honors in 1943 (*Kodakara ikke no sōryoku atsumete*, 1943). Such expressions imbued historical, sociocultural structures like households, battalions and nation-states with a reproductive corporeality—the *kokutai* or *Volkskörper*—by appropriating the physicality and childbearing (i. e., citizen bearing) capabilities of postpubertal females.

Mental hygiene, or thought control, was construed by the state as an important aspect both of consumerism and racial hygiene, for like the nation’s colonial subjects, ordinary Japanese too had to be physically and mentally colonized and assimilated into the *kokutai* of the New Japan. Consumerism should not devolve into spectacular egotistical display, but rather should highlight the central and symbolic, if also unequal, position that females as a class occupied in society in their capacity as eugenically sound home economists.

Just as the physical development of girls and women alluded to a parallel development of boys and men, so too was the mental development of girls and women a barometer of the national temperament and an index of the progress of boys and men toward hygienic being. Women were socially indoctrinated to become Good Wives, Wise Mothers who were knowledgeable shoppers for and skillfull consumers of household and health technologies. The department store was a sanctioned public space where the dramaturgy of national capitalism could be tightly choreographed and directed. And when wartime conditions took a turn for the worse, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, department stores were reinvented as guardians of frugality whose patriotic duty was to redefine for women the new conditions of their consumer citizenship. Takashimaya, which earlier had sponsored the Miss Nippon contests, staged “wartime lifestyle” exhibitions that represented conspicuous consumption both as a female problem and as dangerous and un-Japanese, promoting instead the ideal of a thrifty, *monpe*-clad woman who was a clever economizer (Tōkyō ato deirekutazu kurabu, 1976). The anonymous author of the *Women’s Newspaper* that I quoted from at the outset, argued that females were not included in the official definition of citizen (*kokumin*). However, as is so clearly evidenced by the discourse of “female” citizenship, there must have been awakened at the same time an awareness

of the terribly irony that citizenship itself is an architect of an official, “legitimate” inequality (Marshall 1963).

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