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### New women, modern girls and the shifting semiotics of gender in early twentieth century Japan

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## **New women, modern girls and the shifting semiotics of gender in early twentieth century Japan**

### **Keywords**

shifting, women, semiotics, gender, early, twentieth, modern, century, girls, japan

### **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Law

### **Publication Details**

Mackie, V. C. (2013). New women, modern girls and the shifting semiotics of gender in early twentieth century Japan. *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, (32 July), 1-13.

## Review Article:

# New Women, Modern Girls and the Shifting Semiotics of Gender in Early Twentieth-century Japan

reviewed by [Vera Mackie](#)

Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theater, Gender and Nationalism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001;  
Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media and Women in Interwar Japan*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003;  
Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006;  
Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006;  
Christine L. Marran, *Poison Woman: Figuring Female Transgression in Modern Japanese Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007;  
Dina Lowy, *The Japanese "New Woman": Images of Gender and Modernity*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007;  
Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Women Essays and Fiction from Seito, 1911–1916*, Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2007;  
Michiko Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009;  
Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010;  
Noriko J. Horiguchi, *Women Adrift: The Literature of Japan's Imperial Body*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

1. One hundred years ago, Hiratsuka Raicho [Haruko] (1886–1971) proudly proclaimed 'I am a new woman!' in an essay in the January 1913 edition of *Chuo Koron* (Central Review). She overturned what had hitherto been used as a derogatory label for women who failed to meet the expectations of respectable society.

I am a New Woman. I am the Sun! I am a unique human being. At least, day after day I desire to be so. The New Women not only desire the destruction of the old morality and old laws built on men's selfishness, They also try day after day to build a new world where there will be a new religion, a new morality, and new laws....<sup>[1]</sup>

2. 'New' and 'modern' are the keywords of societies undergoing transformation, and women are often seen to embody the 'new' and the 'modern' in both positive and negative senses. Hiratsuka's emphatic rejection of the past is a common rhetorical gesture for dealing with the transformations of modernity.
3. In the 1910s and 1920s in Japan, popular discourse focused on transgressive female figures who were seen to be the antithesis of good national subjects. In the 1910s, attention was focused on what were known as 'new women' (*atarashii onna*). In the 1920s, attention shifted to women known as 'modern girls' (*modan garu, moga*). In the first decades of our own twenty-first century, these new women and modern girls have become the focus of attention in an ever-growing library of academic articles and books. The early twentieth century discourses on the 'new women' and 'modern girls' are now being re-read for what they can tell us about the gendered dimensions of modernity in Japan. At the same time, there is a popular nostalgia about the material cultures of modernism, art nouveau and art deco which provided a backdrop for

the discussions of modern girls and new women.<sup>[2]</sup>

4. Modernity has been defined as a set of economic and social conditions including capitalism, bureaucracy and technological development. These social transformations are accompanied by new understandings of temporality and historical consciousness, whereby society is understood in terms of an opposition between the 'traditional' and the 'modern.'<sup>[3]</sup> 'Tradition,' of course, is not so much a pre-existing reality, but rather a past which is constructed in response to contemporary concerns.<sup>[4]</sup> In Japan, these processes were condensed into just a few decades in the late nineteenth century. Like other countries in Asia, Japan was the subject of Orientalist projections of an essential difference from Europe. Japanese intellectuals resisted these projections of their own country, but also developed ideas about Japan's own difference from neighbouring Asian countries.<sup>[5]</sup> The debates around new women and modern girls were also imbricated in these discussions. Women in Japan were explicitly and implicitly being compared with women in Europe, North America and other parts of Asia. This was a colonial modernity,<sup>[6]</sup> where Japan was embedded in a series of unequal relationships, through the threat of Euro-American colonialism and through its own role as a coloniser in East Asia.
5. In modern societies, relationships of class and gender replaced the status-based relationships and structures of feudalism. With the shift from feudal households to paid labour outside the home, individuals learned new working relationships. With the development of parliamentary democracy, civil society and a public sphere of communication and deliberation, there were new relationships between individual and state. Families were transformed from extended stem families to nuclear households based on a gendered division of labour. New gendered roles were defined, produced and reproduced through social practices and cultural representations. These processes were played out in Japan, too.
6. The keywords 'new' and 'modern' were applied to women as the embodiment of societal change. Dina Lowy traces the emergence of the figure of the new woman in Japan. She begins with the debates prompted by the staging of such plays as Henrik Ibsen's (1828–1926) *A Doll's House* (1879) and Hermann Sudermann's (1857–1928) *Heimat* (1893, known as *Magda* in Japan), in the 1910s in Tokyo.<sup>[7]</sup> The label 'new woman' (*atarashii onna*) came to be associated with the women of the feminist literary journal *Seito* (Bluestockings) which appeared from 1911 to 1916. The Bluestockings received media attention for their unconventional behaviour: drinking exotic liqueurs, sightseeing in the licensed prostitution district, engaging in scandalous love affairs, cohabiting with their partners and promoting feminist ideas. The appellation 'new woman,' as noted above, was transformed from a stigmatising label to a proclamation of independence through *Bluestockings* founding editor Hiratsuka Raicho's defiant essay.<sup>[8]</sup> Eventually, a Sino-Japanese version of the term 'new woman' (*shin fujin*) would be deployed in the name of the New Women's Association (*Shin fujin kyokai*), established by former Bluestockings Hiratsuka Raicho, Ichikawa Fusae (1893–1981) and others, and active from 1920 to 1922. Lowy also includes examination of leftist feminist Nishikawa Fumiko's (1882–1960) 'True New Women's Society' (*Shin-shinfujinkai*), and places Japan's new women in the context of similar figures in other national and transnational contexts.<sup>[9]</sup>
7. Barbara Sato, one of the pioneers in the study of new women and modern girls, identifies the importance of three gendered figures for the analysis of Japan's modernity: the new woman (*atarashii onna*), the housewife (*shufu*) and the working woman (*shokugyo fujin*).<sup>[10]</sup> Sato uses readers' correspondence in women's magazines to trace changes in women's subjectivity. Sarah Frederick has also used magazines as a source for understanding gender relations in the early twentieth century: mainstream magazines like *Shufu no Tomo* (The Housewife's Friend, established in 1908), more intellectual journals like *Fujin Koron* (The Women's Review, established in 1916) and the leftist feminist arts journal *Nyonin Geijutsu* (Women's Arts, 1928–1932).<sup>[11]</sup> Michiko Suzuki analyses women's fictional narratives from the 1910s to the 1930s, arguing that 'notions of modernity and progress were ... embedded in discussions of love, literary and otherwise.' That is, romantic love was another element of modern, gendered subjectivities.<sup>[12]</sup> Indeed, the perception that new women and modern girls were likely to engage in romantic relationships outside the family system was one of the reasons for moral panics about these figures. Although ideas of romantic love had been circulating since the late nineteenth century, these ideas were linked with monogamous

companionate marriage. Indeed, Michiko Suzuki argues that love marriage (*ren'ai kekkon*, as opposed to arranged marriage, *miai-kekkon*) was associated with ideas of progress.<sup>[13]</sup> Romantic relationships outside the marriage and family system, however, were still seen as dangerous in the early twentieth century.

8. While terms like 'new woman,' 'modern woman' and 'modern girl' seem almost synonymous in other national contexts, in Japan the terms equivalent to 'new woman' and 'modern girl' each developed with slightly different nuances. The 'new woman' of the 1910s has something of a feminist tone, and individuals could proudly describe themselves as 'new women' after Hiratsuka's (abovementioned) manifesto. Actress Matsui Sumako, who played several of the characters associated with the modern girl debates, was photographed in a cloak ('*manteau*' in French), captioned with the short poem, 'Wearing a *manteau*—I am a modern woman' (*manto kite/ atarashiki/ onna kana*).<sup>[14]</sup>
9. The 'modern girl' of the mid-1920s is rather associated with the media and with consumerism. The term 'modern girl' is transliterated into Japanese as '*modan garu*,' and abbreviated and domesticated in the truncated form, '*moga*.' It is possible to argue that the '*modan garu*' is largely a media construction, a figure conjured as a focus for anxieties about gender and modernity.<sup>[15]</sup> This understanding of the '*modan garu*' affects our strategies for research. Rather than trying to match the label '*modan garu*' with actual individuals, the focus can shift to a tracing of the deployment of such terminology and an analysis of the cultural work done by media representations. Popular media constructions of gender provided reference points for actual individuals, who negotiated between various positive and negative portrayals of femininity. Or, to express this slightly differently, there was a semiotic system of gender. There were various ways of labelling real and imaginary women (and men, for that matter), and each term gained its meaning from its relationship with other terms in the system. Women were opposed to men, while new women and modern girls were opposed to 'good wives and wise mothers' (*ryosai kenbo*). Whenever a new term was introduced, the whole system was subtly transformed.<sup>[16]</sup>
10. Representations of transgressive women, then, had a pedagogical function, teaching women about which models of femininity they should emulate and which they should distance themselves from. In this context Christine Murrin has considered another stigmatised category: the 'poison woman' (*dokufu*). This phrase was used to label violent women from the late nineteenth century to the early post-Second World War period. Perhaps the most well-known example of such a 'poison woman' is Abe Sada (1905–?), who mutilated and murdered her lover in 1936. On her release from prison she saw out her days as a bar hostess, although little is known about her final years. Abe and her lover were portrayed in Oshima Nagisa's (1932–2013) film *Ai no Korida (The Realm of the Senses)* in 1976.<sup>[17]</sup> Although the actual number of such dangerous women was small, their transgressions had huge symbolic weight and revealed the tensions and anxieties of the society.

Stories about [the poison woman] promoted normalizing visions of sexuality and gender that conformed to the promises of modernity, though the stories implicitly articulated the failure of those promises to include women.... Sexuality was an essential part of the representation of this struggle—sexuality and sexual desire came to suggestively symbolise the struggle to define women's place in society.<sup>[18]</sup>

11. Murrin's insights about the pedagogical functions of desirable and undesirable models of femininity can be applied to much of early twentieth-century cultural history, as exemplified in the moral panics about the figures of the 'new woman' in the 1910s and the 'modern girl' in the 1920s.
12. The late Miriam Silverberg described the modern girl as a subversive figure: as 'militant.' Her 1991 essay includes a survey of the media debates on the modern girl and her transgressions, a survey of writings in the feminist arts journal *Nyonin Geijutsu (Women's Arts)*<sup>[19]</sup> and the stories of some actual women who transgressed societal expectations in the 1920s. The word 'militant' might suggest political activism to many readers, but Silverberg rather seems to be suggesting that various kinds of everyday behaviour which challenged gender norms could be subversive.

13. Others have been more interested in women who did engage in political activism. Hélène Bowen Raddeker has explored the lives and thought of several anarchist women. Kanno Suga(ko) (1881–1911) was the first woman in modern Japan to be tried, convicted and executed for the crime of *lèse majesté*. Kaneko Fumiko (1903–1926) and her partner Bak Yeol (1902–1974) were tried in another important treason trial. Ito Noe (1895–1923) was the second editor of the Bluestocking journal, bringing anarchist thought into its pages. She was murdered by the police in the disorder following the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 with her partner Osugi Sakae (1885–1923) and his nephew.<sup>[20]</sup> Several members of the Bluestocking Society (*Seito-sha*) have been treated in English-language scholarship, along with translations of important primary texts.<sup>[21]</sup> We also have some translations of the works of women associated with the socialist and communist movements, but as yet few full-length biographies of individuals.<sup>[22]</sup>
  
14. The modern girl's partner in media representations was the modern boy (*modan boi*, or *mobo*), but it is the modern girl who has received the most sustained attention. In satirical cartoons we see the modern girl in short skirt, cloche hat and bobbed hair accompanied by a young man in similarly modern attire. They appear together strolling along the streets of Tokyo or relaxing in coffee houses or dance halls. Most scholarship simply refers to the composite phrase '*moga mobo*' (modern girls and modern boys) without analysing the modern boy from the point of view of gender, a project which would add to our understanding of the making of masculinities in early twentieth-century Japan.<sup>[23]</sup> There is, however, an emerging interest in the journal *Shinseinen* (New Youth, published from 1920 to 1950) which was directed at young men and depicted figures who might be seen as 'modern boys.'<sup>[24]</sup> Kyoko Omori argues that this magazine 'sought to help young people manage the increased mobility of modern society and successfully navigate its challenges.'<sup>[25]</sup> It was often male intellectuals and journalists who commented on and judged the 'modern girls.'<sup>[26]</sup> As they passed judgment on various desirable and undesirable models of femininity, they reaffirmed their own masculinity as commentators who had authority to write about their society.
  
15. The modern boy and modern girl can also be placed in the context of the cultural genres of modernism. The media fascination with the modern girl and modern boy in Japan roughly coincides with the period after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, precisely the period of the adoption of modernist cultural forms, art nouveau, and art deco.<sup>[27]</sup> Indeed, the fashions, accessories and décor associated with the modern girl and modern boy may be seen as forms of vernacular modernism which paralleled modernist experimentation in high culture.<sup>[28]</sup>
  
16. The Shiseido Corporation was important in the dissemination of images of femininity. Adachi Mariko has argued that the figure of the 'modern girl' as consumer was essential to Shiseido as it expanded its markets for soap, toothpaste and cosmetics in Japan and its colonies and occupied territories. In an evocative phrase, she argues that 'the representation of the modern girl was born from the desire of capital.'<sup>[29]</sup>
  
17. Jennifer Weisenfeld has explored the visual culture and material culture of the Shiseido Corporation as part of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Visualizing Cultures Project.<sup>[30]</sup> Women in bobbed hair, wearing short skirts and cloche hats, and made-up with Shiseido cosmetics, decorated the pages of *Shiseido Geppo* (Shiseido Monthly Report, 1924 to 1930), *Shiseido Gurafu* (Shiseido Graphic, 1933 to 1937), and *Hanatsubaki* (Camellia, from 1937, with a hiatus during wartime). Promotional items like postcards, matchboxes and *uchiwa* fans showed women strolling on Ginza; sitting in cafés, dance halls, automobiles, trains or ocean liners; or posed in front of aeroplanes. The figures in these two-dimensional drawings and photographs seem always ready to emerge into the three-dimensional world and to move: to dance, stroll, ski, swim, ride or play golf; or to travel from central Tokyo to the peripheries of Japan's empire.<sup>[31]</sup>
  
18. As Weisenfeld notes, Shiseido's promotional activities were also associated with the figure of the *shokugyo fujin* (working woman). The early twentieth century in Japan saw the creation of new feminised occupations. The word *shokugyo fujin* has rather a professional tone, associated with such occupations as teachers, switchboard operators, typists or shop assistants in department stores. Other new occupations were rather more stigmatised and demonised. The café waitress, the dance hall girl, the stage actress, the movie

actress and the artist's model were gendered occupations in the service industries, involving embodied work which often included an element of sexualisation. These occupations also took women out of the home and into public or semi-public spaces, where they became a spectacle to be looked at.<sup>[32]</sup> Let me reiterate that we need to be careful not to collapse the media-generated figure of the 'modern girl' with the actual women who pursued these various occupations. Rather, women negotiated between the official discourse of 'good wives and wise mothers' (*ryosai kenbo*), media representations of sensational figures like the 'new woman' (*atarashii onna*), 'modern girl' (*modan garu*) or 'poison woman' (*dokufu*), and the occupations which were actually available to them in a rapidly industrialising society where the majority of the population was nevertheless still engaged in agriculture. Identities were formed and femininities (and masculinities) were constructed in negotiations between these different reference points.

19. We do have studies of women in some of these new occupations. Alisa Freedman devotes a whole chapter of her monograph, *Tokyo in Transit*, to the female bus conductor, or 'bus girl' (*basu garu*), in early twentieth century Japan. The bus conductor was an occupation which was gendered as feminine, in contrast to some other countries.<sup>[33]</sup> Bus girls can be associated with other feminised occupations such as flight attendant (*ea garu*), or waitress (*jokyu*). The suffix '*garu*' was used for women in service jobs. Other terms for feminised occupations used the suffix '*jo*' (literally 'daughter' but also translatable as 'girl'). The term '*dansu-jo*' (dancer, taxi-dancer) is a hybrid term, formed from the Japanese transliteration of the English word 'dance' (*dansu*) and the Sino-Japanese '*jo*.' The café waitress, by contrast, was linguistically domesticated with the use of the Sino-Japanese term *jokyu* (waitress, literally 'woman who serves'). Miriam Silverberg and Elise Tipton, in their studies of café waitresses, each remind us that waitressing was hard work, often poorly remunerated, and that these women workers were subject to particular hazards such as sexual harassment and outright sexual exploitation.<sup>[34]</sup>
20. Ayako Kano has explored the development of the modern occupation of the actress (*joyu*) in the theatre. We have noted above the staging of Sudermann's *Heimat* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in Tokyo in 1911 and the associated debates on the 'new women.' The lead actress in both plays, Matsui Sumako (1886–1919), also attracted controversy. This was a period of transition when *onnagata* (men who played female parts in the *kabuki* theatre) were being replaced by actresses on the stage. In 1891, the government removed the ban on women appearing on the stage which had been in force since 1629. The controversy over the profession of acting was compounded by the sensational lifestyle of Matsui, who had an affair with the married theatre director Shimamura Hogetsu (1871–1918), and committed suicide after his death. Another early actress, Kawakami Sadayakko (1871–1946), had been a geisha. Both Matsui and Kawakami took on the role of the *femme fatale* Salomé in Japanese productions of Oscar Wilde and Richard Strauss' opera of the same name. In popular discourse there was a slippage between several stigmatised categories: geisha, actress and mistress. Such roles as Salomé (who had the head of John the Baptist presented to her on a plate) perhaps reminded viewers of the category of *dokufu* (poison woman).<sup>[35]</sup> Similarly, the first women to be artist's models came from the pleasure districts.<sup>[36]</sup> In the public mind, all of these forms of embodied work were looked down on, so that it was perhaps easier for women in already stigmatised occupations like geisha to become actresses or artist's models than more conventionally 'respectable' women.
21. Tanizaki Jun'ichiro's 1925 novel *Chijin no Ai* (A Fool's Love) has been celebrated for its portrayal of the quintessential modern girl, Naomi. What is also notable, however, is that Naomi is surrounded by women in all of these other new occupations, while the main male protagonist, Joji, belongs to the new category of *sarariman* (white collared worker). Naomi herself had been a café waitress; and the main characters—Naomi and Joji—live in a house formerly occupied by an artist and his model. In the novel, the semiotics of gender, class and ethnicity are played out in the streets of Yokohama, the beaches of Kamakura, and the movie theatres and dance halls of Tokyo, where Naomi is compared with respectable middle-class women, the 'white Russian' dance teacher Madame Shlemskaya, the actress Kirako and the vulgar young woman Ma-chan. Naomi models herself on movie actresses like Mary Pickford (1892–1979).<sup>[37]</sup> Michiko Suzuki reads the novel as a parody of contemporaneous discourses of progress, romantic love and self-cultivation.<sup>[38]</sup>

22. Other occupations received less sustained media attention. In rural areas women worked on farms or looked after their younger siblings as *komori* (childminders). Rural women staffed the textile factories in the metropolis or large regional cities.<sup>[39]</sup> Barbara Sato, in her contribution to a collection on the *Modern Girl Around the World*, demonstrates how female factory workers negotiated their identities with reference to media representations of modern girls. These factory workers, too, were interpellated as consumers. They constructed their identities through their consumption practices, even if this involved buying cheap confectionery rather than expensive fashion items. Building on her earlier work on modern girls and new women, Sato reads correspondence with women's magazines to explore the subjectivity of working-class women in early twentieth century Japan.<sup>[40]</sup>
23. After her essay on the 'Modern Girl as Militant,' Silverberg explored the gendered cultures of modernism in early twentieth century Japan in a series of essays.<sup>[41]</sup> In her monograph from 2006, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, Silverberg analyses the figures of the modern girl, café waitress, and the modern housewife in movie magazines and women's magazines.<sup>[42]</sup> She is largely concerned with the culture of the metropolis—in the twin senses of mega-city and imperial centre—but situated in a consciousness of the mechanisms of imperialism and colonialism.

I call the men, women and children of these Japanese modern years of the 1920s and 1930s consumer-subjects in order to express the double-edged nature of Japanese mass culture during that era. The consumer was both a subject of the emperor and a subject with agency, acting as autonomously as the imperial system would allow. Japanese women and men were both privy to a network of pleasures offered within mass culture and subject to an increasingly tight web of state controls on freedom of expression and consumption. And when considering them as imperial subjects, we must also recognize that not only was the imperial reign said to span countless generations, it also covered the contemporaneous geographic terrain of empire.<sup>[43]</sup>

24. Mark Driscoll builds on some of the themes introduced in Miriam Silverberg's work on modernist cultures in metropolitan Japan, but gives equal attention to events in the peripheral puppet state of Manchukuo (established in 1932). He traces three stages of Japanese capitalism and imperialism, which he calls 'biopolitics,' 'neuropolitics' and 'necropolitics.' Biopolitics (in Foucauldian terms) is concerned with the management of the population and labour power. Neuropolitics is concerned with the commodification of new forms of sensory pleasure. Necropolitics refers to the use of enforced labour—men and women who were kept in a state of bare life: enforced sexual slavery in the case of colonised women, enforced labour in mines and construction in the case of colonised men.<sup>[44]</sup> Driscoll examines sensational literary texts which depict the 'modern girl' and 'modern boy' in violent and sexually explicit contexts (including some stories in the *Shinseinen* [New Youth] magazine), and links these literary representations with the actual violence of capitalism and colonialism.<sup>[45]</sup> Driscoll reminds us that the prosperity which made possible the *flanerie* of men and women in the metropolis was bought at the expense of ruthless exploitation in the colonial peripheries.
25. Noriko Horiguchi, in her book, *Women Adrift: The Literature of Japan's Imperial Body*, does not explicitly focus on new women and modern girls, except for a couple of brief mentions. Her analysis, however, does help us to situate representations of the new women and modern girls in the discourses of gender, empire and nation. As noted above, modern girls are associated with mobility: moving into public spaces, using new transportation technologies, working in occupations concerned with transportation, and travelling from Japan to its peripheral territories. Horiguchi focuses on three women writers from the first half of the twentieth century: Yosano Akiko (1878–1942), Tamura Toshiko (1884–1945) and Hayashi Fumiko (1903–1951), each of whom traveled overseas and wrote about their experiences.<sup>[46]</sup>
26. Yosano Akiko wrote about her travels with her husband Yosano Tekkan (1873–1935) to China, Manchuria and Mongolia in 1928, in a trip which was sponsored by the South Manchurian Railway company. In earlier years she also travelled extensively in Europe.<sup>[47]</sup> Tamura Toshiko travelled between Japan, China, the US and Canada, and her writings provide insight into the situation of Japanese migrants to North America. Hayashi travelled around Japan and to several places in Southeast Asia and Europe. In 1938 she traveled to China on assignment for the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* (Tokyo Daily News); and in 1940 she was a



member of the so-called 'pen squadron' of the Ministry of Information, which also included writer Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973).<sup>[48]</sup> The titles of Hayashi's novels invoke ideas of travel, mobility and impermanence. *Horoki* (Diary of a Vagabond) depicts a woman's travels around Japan, engaging in various forms of precarious work. The main character of *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds), is a typist who works for a time in (what was then called) Indo-China for the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, moving between Japan and its peripheral occupied territories.<sup>[49]</sup>

27. Horiguchi focuses on the meanings of 'the body' and 'mobility' for each of these writers. Two of them—Yosano and Tamura—had been associated with the literary magazine *Seito* (Bluestockings), closely aligned in the contemporary popular media with the concept of the 'new woman.' The third, Hayashi Fumiko, contributed to the women's arts journal, *Nyonin Geijutsu* (Women's Arts). Horiguchi challenges interpretations which would see such women as simply resisting mainstream constructions of femininity and demonstrates each woman's complicity in the project of empire. It was Japan's imperialism and expansionism which allowed these women to travel to China, Manchuria and Indo-China.<sup>[50]</sup> Kyoko Omori has argued that Japanese governments encouraged such mobility in the first half of the twentieth century.

From the second half of the nineteenth century to the period of the Second World War, the Japanese government actively sanctioned the idea of large-scale mobility among its people, as seen in its active promotion of the ideology of *kaigai yuhi* (launching themselves abroad for success)...Following the nation's military victories over China and Russia in 1895 and 1905, respectively, and geared to promoting nationalistic success through the exemplars of its citizens, the government urged young people to practise the neo-Confucian idea of *shuyo* (the cultivation of the mind) and to undertake *kaigai yuhi* in the Americas, the South Sea Islands, Manchuria and Sakhalin. In other words, by expressly seeking to advance into the theatre of the Pacific Ocean, Japanese officials sought to promote what can be considered feats of colonialistic adventure on the individual level.<sup>[51]</sup>

28. The work of Horiguchi, Omori and others helps us to situate the representations of modern girls who were constantly seen to be 'in motion.' 'New women,' 'modern girls,' 'good wives and wise mothers,' and the actual women who negotiated between these reference points, can thus also be understood according to the framework of colonial modernity, which necessitates equal attention to events in the interconnected spaces of the metropolis and its peripheries.<sup>[52]</sup>
29. The modern girl has been placed in transnational context by a group of researchers based at the University of Washington. Their edited volume on *The Modern Girl around the World* includes two chapters on Japan and an epilogue by Miriam Silverberg. Ruri Ito focuses on the peripheral region of Okinawa, where the modern girl was little more than a phantasm. Ito places the women of Okinawa in circuits of mobility which included the metropolis of Tokyo, regional urban centres, and colonies like Taiwan and Korea.<sup>[53]</sup> Other chapters focus on the figure of the modern girl in North America, Europe, Africa, Australia and other parts of Asia. The editors of *The Modern Girl Around the World* refer to the 'near-simultaneous' emergence of the figure of the modern girl in disparate parts of the world. It is also useful, however, to trace the gaps and discontinuities. Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*, for example, prompted debates on women's role wherever it was performed, but these debates took place in the late nineteenth century in Europe, the early 1910s in Japan, and later in China and Korea. Similarly, many languages have phrases like 'new woman,' 'modern woman' and 'modern girl,' but the time span for the currency of these phrases moves from the 1890s to the 1930s in different parts of the world. As Liz Conor reminds us, we also need to consider which women were excluded from these categories because they belonged to groups which were seen to be 'outside' the parameters of modernity.<sup>[54]</sup>
30. The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group describe the modern girl as a 'heuristic device.' That is, by focusing on representations of the modern girl in a range of national contexts, they are able to gain an understanding of the gendered dimensions of modernity, the development of consumer capitalism and advertising, and processes of what they call globalisation *avant la lettre*.<sup>[55]</sup> Since the publication of *The Modern Girl Around the World* in 2008, a former member of the Seattle-based Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, Tani Barlow, has published a series of reflections on the project.<sup>[56]</sup> Barlow highlights the differences between comparative, global and transnational approaches to history, and

articulates the necessity of understanding the complexity of capitalism and colonialism in East Asia, with its intersecting systems of European, US and Japanese capitalist imperialism. She pursues these questions through a focus on the representation of modern girls in advertising directed at Chinese consumers by Japanese, European and US corporations and their licensees.

[L]ike many global projects [the Modern Girl Around the World project] also defaulted into a series of national studies, linked in a transnational fashion, while avoiding the actual drivers of global history, which are specie markets, exploitable resources, national monetary imperialism, commerce and commercially produced modern commodities, corporate strategies, state policy, diplomacy trade wars, hot wars, labor migration, primitive accumulation, industrial production and the specificities of use and exchange value and so on.<sup>[57]</sup>

That is, in her analysis of 'modern girls' in advertising, Barlow attempts to go beyond a simple analysis of gendered visual representations, but rather attempts to place these advertisements in a frame which acknowledges these interlocking and criss-crossing forms of capitalism, imperialism and commodity exchange.

31. By studying the figure of the 'modern girl,' and her predecessor, the 'new woman' in Japan, we can gain insights into the gendered dimensions of modernity. In the first decades of the twentieth century these figures were the focus of mixed feelings of desire, fascination, indignation and revulsion. In recent decades in Japan, they are the focus of nostalgia in museum and gallery exhibitions, coffee table books and websites. In academic scholarship, each successive writer or collaborative research group brings new analytical insights to the study of new women and modern girls. First, they have been situated in the processes of modernity in early twentieth-century urban Japan. They are seen as gendered and classed figures who must be understood in their positioning among diverse forms of masculinity and femininity in the metropolis. This picture is then complicated by understandings of colonial modernity. The modern girls and new women can then be understood in terms of the relationships between men and women in the metropolis and the peripheries. This makes it possible to ask questions about the absence or presence of representations of modern girls in places like Naha, Seoul, Shanghai or Dalian. A transnational approach teaches us that it is not enough to simply make *comparisons* between representations of modern girls in different national contexts. Rather, we need to look at the *flows of influence and adaptation* between these places, and the structured economic and political relationships of inequality which link these places and shape the destinies of the men and women who reside there. Mobility studies teaches us that men and women move, that representations move, and that the very concept of gender is one which is constantly moving and being transformed.<sup>[58]</sup>

## Notes

[1] Hiratsuka Raicho, 'Atarashii Onna,' *Chuo Koron*, January 1913, reprinted in *Hiratsuka Raicho Hyoronshu*, ed. Kobayashi Tomie and Yoneda Sayoko, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1987: 41–43, p. 42. All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

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[3] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 13.

[4] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 'Introduction: inventing traditions,' in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1–14.

[5] Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

[6] Tani E. Barlow, 'Introduction,' in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani E. Barlow, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 1–20.

- [7] Dina Lowy, *The Japanese 'New Woman': Images of Gender and Modernity*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007. George Bernard Shaw's (1856–1950) play *Mrs Warren's Profession*, was also important in the debates on women's role in society in the *Bluestocking* journal. The play was first performed in London in 1902, in New York in 1905 and in Tokyo in 1913.
- [8] On Hiratsuka's life, see: Hiroko Tomida, *Hiratsuka Raicho and Early Japanese Feminism*, Leiden: Brill, 2004; Hiratsuka Raicho, *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, translated with an Introduction by Teruko Craig, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006; Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Women Essays and Fiction from Seito, 1911–1916*, Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2007.
- [9] On the transnational dimensions of the 'new woman' phenomenon, see Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham (eds), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004.
- [10] Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media and Women in Interwar Japan*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. See also: Barbara Hamill Sato, 'The Moga sensation: perceptions of the Modan Garu in Japanese intellectual circles during the 1920s,' *Gender and History*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 363–81. On the *shufu*, see Kazumi Ishii and Neriday Jarkey, 'The housewife is born: the establishment of the notion and identity of the *shufu* in modern Japan,' *Japanese Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (May 2002): 35–47.
- [11] Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006; see also: Ulrike Wöhr, Barbara Hamill Sato and Sadami Suzuki (eds), *Gender and Modernity: Rereading Japanese Women's Magazines*, Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2000, pp. 101–30.
- [12] Michiko Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 3.
- [13] Michiko Suzuki, 'Progress and love marriage: rereading Tanizaki Jun'ichiro's *Chijin no Ai*,' *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 357–84.
- [14] Matsui Sumako, *Botanbake* [Powder Puff], Tokyo, 1914, after p. 224; cited in Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theater, Gender and Nationalism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p. 127.
- [15] Miriam Silverberg, 'The modern girl as militant,' in *Recreating Japanese Women: 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein, Berkeley: University of California, 1991, pp. 239–66, p. 240.
- [16] In this context see Tani Barlow's comments on the emergence of 'woman' as a political entity and the specific figure of the 'modern girl': 'This is the value to me of Badiou's position that when contemporary philosophic thinking does encounter a term, "women", for instance, "it is not in the sense of a naming whose referent would need to be represented, but rather in the sense of being laid out in a series wherein the term subsists only through the ordered play of its founding connections.' Tani E. Barlow, 'What is a poem? The event of women and the modern girl as problems in global or world history,' in *Immanual Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins and Nirvana Tanoukhi, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011: 170–74, p. 178; citing Alan Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, London: Continuum, 2006, p. 43. This is also compatible with Saussure's view of the place of each sign in a semiotic system. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin; ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1959]. On the modern girl as a reference point for competing constructions of femininity, see: Ito Ruri, Sakamoto Hiroko, Barbara H. Sato, Tani E. Barlow and Vera Mackie, 'Joron: Higashi Ajia ni okeru modan garu to shokuminchi-teki kindai' [Introduction: The modern girl and colonial modernity in East Asia], in *Modan Garu to Shokuminchiteki Kindai: Higashi Ajia ni okeru Teikoku, Shihon, Jenda* [The Modern Girl and Colonial Modernity: Empire, Capital and Gender in East Asia], ed. Ito Ruri, Tani E. Barlow and Sakamoto Hiroko, Tokyo: Iwanami, 2010, pp. 1–21.
- [17] Christine L. Marran, *Poison Woman: Figuring Female Transgression in Modern Japanese Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 103–35. On Abe Sada, see also William Johnston, *Geisha, Harlot, Strangler, Star: A Woman, Sex and Morality in Modern Japan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- [18] Marran, *Poison Woman*, p. 171.
- [19] As Silverberg herself admits, however, the term 'modan garu' appears only once in the title of an article in the magazine: 'Ryuchi-jo no modan garu' [The modern girl in remand], *Nyonin Geijutsu*, vol. 2, no. 12 (December 1929): 77–81; cited in Silverberg, 'The modern girl as militant,' p. 255.
- [20] Hélène Bowen Raddeker, *Patriarchal Fictions, Patricidal Fantasies: Treacherous Women of Imperial Japan*, London: Routledge, 1997; Hélène Bowen Raddeker, 'Resistance to difference: sexual equality and its law-ful and out-law (anarchist) advocates in Imperial Japan,' *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 7 (March 2002), online: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue7/raddeker.html>, last accessed 1 June 2011; see also: translated excerpts of Kanno's and

Kaneko's writings in Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 51–124; Kaneko Fumiko, *The Prison Diaries of a Japanese Woman*, translated by Jean Inglis, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997; on Ito Noe, see also: Miyamoto Ken, 'Ito Noe and the bluestockings,' *Japan Interpreter*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Autumn 1975): 190–204; Stephen S. Large, 'The romance of revolution in Japanese anarchism and communism during the Taisho period,' *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (July 1977): 441–67; on the High Treason Incident, see Masako Gavin and Ben Middleton (eds) *Japan and the High Treason Incident*, London: Routledge, 2013.

[21] Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun*; Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan*; Tomida, *Hiratsuka Raicho and Early Japanese Feminism*; Tomoko Yamazaki, *The Story of Yamada Waka: From Prostitute to Feminist Pioneer*, translated by Wakako Hironaka and Ann Kostant, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985; Laurel Rasplica Rodd, 'Yosano Akiko and the Taisho debate over the "new woman",' *Recreating Japanese Women: 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein, Berkeley: University of California, 1991, pp. 175–98; Gaye Rowley, *Yosano Akiko and the Tale of Genji*, Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, 2000; Yosano Akiko, *Travels in Manchuria and Mongolia*, translated by Joshua Fogel, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001; Janine Baichman, *Embracing the Firebird: Yosano Akiko and the Birth of the Female Voice in Modern Japanese Poetry*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002; Phyllis Birnbaum, 'He stole her sky,' in *Modern Girls, Shining Stars, the Skies of Tokyo: 5 Japanese Women*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 55–102; Dee Ann Vavich, 'The Japanese woman's movement: Ichikawa Fusae, a pioneer in woman's suffrage,' *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 22, nos 3/4 (1967): 402–36; Patricia Murray, 'Ichikawa Fusae and the lonely red carpet,' *Japan Interpreter*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Autumn 1975): 171–89; Barbara Molony, 'Ichikawa Fusae and Japan's prewar women's suffrage movement,' in *Women in Japanese History*, ed. Gordon Daniels and Hiroko Tomida, London: Global Oriental, pp. 57–92; Barbara Molony, 'From "mothers of humanity" to "assisting the Emperor": gendered belonging in the wartime rhetoric of Japanese feminist Ichikawa Fusae,' *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 1 (February 2011): 1–27; Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 45–72.

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[26] Silverberg, 'The modern girl as militant,' pp. 239–66; Sato, 'The moga sensation,' pp. 363–81.

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[43] Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, p. 4.

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[51] Omori, 'The art of the bluff,' p. 265.

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[56] Barlow, 'What is a poem?,' pp. 155–82; Tani Barlow, 'Debates over colonial modernity in East Asia and another alternative,' *Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 5 (2012): 617–44; Tani Barlow, 'Advertising ephemera and the angel of history,' *positions: asia critique*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 111–58, pp. 140–51. Barlow was also reflecting on the experience of working with a collaborative research group on the modern girl in East Asia, which resulted in the publication of a Japanese-language collection: Ito, Barlow and Sakamoto (eds), *Modan Garu to Shokuminchiteki Kindai*.

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[58] Georgine Clarsen, 'Gender and mobility: historicizing the terms,' in *Mobility in History: The State of the Art in the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility*, ed. Gijs Mom, Gordon Pirie and Laurent Tissot, Neuchatel: Editions Alphil, Presses Universitaires Suisses, 2009, pp. 235–41.

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Published with the support of Gender and Cultural Studies, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

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