

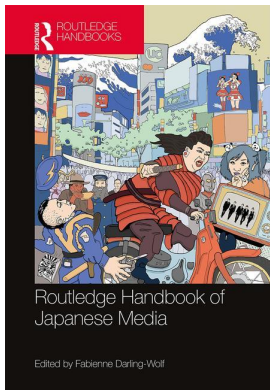
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### Gender, consumerism and women's magazines in interwar Japan

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## Gender, consumerism and women's magazines in interwar Japan

Barbara Sato

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According to a 2013 Japanese National Media Usage Survey, out of a total of 3,801 respondents, 93 percent between the ages of 60 and 69 depend on print media as their major news source and receive morning and evening newspapers delivered directly to their homes. More than 90 percent of young people in their 20s and 30s, however, turn to the internet for information (Nippon.com 2014). This is a far cry from the 1920s when a new broad-based reading public that included women bolstered the publication of mass women's magazines. As key instruments in shaping mass culture, women's magazines not only served as a tool for the mainstay of middle-class readers, but to a lesser extent they also played a role in formulating new identities for lower-middle-class and working-class women. Factory girls probably never visited a department store and goggled at the fancy cakes and foods on display, but magazine images had the power to dictate tastes. Editors and publishers provided the impetus to fuel ideas, but it was the women themselves who shaped these media formulations. The story of how changes in the commodification of everyday life acted as a progressive force in the self-identification of a growing spectrum of women in interwar Japan through the medium of mass women's magazines is the subject of this chapter.

Women's magazines were not the only media diffusing consumer culture. Newspapers, movies, radio, and records were also basic components of Japan's burgeoning consumerism. Both the *Asahi* and *Mainichi*, Osaka-based national newspapers, claimed circulations of over 1 million in January 1924. Tokyo boasted 112 movie theaters in 1922, and all 42 prefectures maintained at least one theater. When Hollywood idols Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, familiar faces in women's magazines, visited Japan in 1930, pandemonium broke out. Who would have imagined that *Kingu* (King 1925), the earliest general entertainment magazine, would reach its goal of 1 million readers in city and country in less than a year? The sound of radio signaled the debut of JOAK, Japan's first regular broadcasting station in 1925. Six months later, a radio page became a daily feature of the *Yomiuri* newspaper, forging a link between print media and radio. One had only to listen to the intermingling of words like "jazz," "dancer," "department store," "liquor," and "rush hour" in songwriter Saijō Yaso's 1928 hit tune *Tokyo Marching Song* about a love-struck office girl in the Maru (Marunouchi) Building, Tokyo's newest and biggest office building designed by an American architect, to recognize that popular customs, particularly from America, were being incorporated into everyday Japanese vocabulary.

Western culture put its stamp on Japanese institutions, intellectual pursuits, and the elite life-style in the Meiji period (1868–1912). By the early twentieth century, the social consequences of the institutional reforms began to leave a mark on society. Japan's development fell short of the economic expansion in Western countries, but the establishment of the media and the proliferation of an urban-centered and middle-class consumer culture materialized at approximately the same time, or separated at most by a few years. In Tokyo, Berlin, Paris, New York, Shanghai, and other metropolises in Asia, Africa, and Europe in the 1920s, simultaneous changes reflected in technological advances were paving the way for the transformation in morals, dress, and forms of mechanization in daily life that attested to a different esthetic based on speed. Among women, these changes became dramatic after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 struck Tokyo and its environs. “Jazz” and “department stores” were aspects of consumer culture throughout the world. Which elements emerged earlier, where, and under whose influence often become moot points.<sup>1</sup>

### Laying the foundation for mass women's magazines

Mass magazines reflected both the wider growth of the emerging new women's culture and the expansion of women's education. Neither of these elements had matured sufficiently in the late nineteenth century for substantive change to occur. In 1887, 28 percent of all eligible girls had enrolled in elementary school and some 2,363 young women attended the 18 higher schools established by the government. Chronologically, higher school for women was equivalent to men's middle school, which went from grades 7 to 11 (Ōhama and Kumakura 1989, pp. 72–3). Qualitatively, the subject matter differed markedly and the expectations held for women after graduation remained worlds apart from that of men. Although education provided a form of upward mobility for men, access to secondary and higher education was not yet considered a necessary option for women and economic conditions prevented it.

Educator and journalist Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), a major contributor to *Jogaku zasshi* (*Magazine for Women's Learning*, 1885), one of the earliest magazines to hail the attainment of equal rights and advocate a marriage based on love, lamented women's lack of social awareness. In his treatise *Onna no Nihonjinron* (*On Japanese Women*, 1885), Fukuzawa criticized the differences in the curricula for men and women. He urged husbands and wives to both take responsibility for educating their daughters. For starters, Fukuzawa recommended a school curriculum that placed economics and science above calligraphy and simple math. Key advocates for women's education, Shimoda Utako (1854–1936), Naruse Jinzō (1858–1918), Tsuda Umeko (1864–1929), and Hatoyama Haruko (1861–1938), all rallied on behalf of women after the state exercised control over higher schools in 1899 and clamped down on Christian mission schools, but the measures they advocated did not clash with the ideals of the state.

Two Meiji period (1867–1911) publishing houses, Jitsugyō no Nihonsha (1897) and Kōdansha (1911), paved the way for the circulation of books and magazines that would reach mass proportions in the 1920s. But Hakubunkan (1887), founded by Ōhashi Sahei (1863–1944), was the first to use marketing practices unique at the time and divide potential readers according to age, gender, education, and interests to create a variety of magazines for different segments of society. *Jogaku sekai* (*World of a Woman Student*, 1901), one of the fruits of its labors, amassed the highest circulation of all its publications. Like other late nineteenth-century women's magazines, *Jogaku sekai* included fiction and devoted space to hobbies such as tea ceremony and composing waka poetry. Above all, it proposed to “supplement those areas lacking in women's education today” and cultivate “wise wives and good mothers” (*Jogaku sekai*, January 1901).

In keeping with Ōhashi's philosophy, articles written by educators and intellectuals offered higher school graduates “moral” and “intellectual” guidance. In the first issue Nishimura Shigeki

(1828–1902), a founding member of the *Meirokeisha* (Meiji Six Society, 1872), examined the state of women's education (*Jogaku sekai*, January 1901). Miwata Masako (1843–1927), head of *Miwata jogakkō* (Miwata Women's Higher School, 1903), discussed the ramifications that changes in morality would have on young women in the March 1905 issue. Although a family section that introduced Western recipes became a regular feature, practical articles of the sort published in later mass women's magazines were noticeably missing. With a single issue selling for about 500 yen in today's currency, *Jogaku sekai* was not suited to the average woman's pocketbook. But then neither was it suited to the average woman's tastes.

As early as 1913, the Ministry of Education declared that the increase in women's magazines posed a threat to traditional Confucian morality. The authorities wasted no time in censoring those magazines deemed antithetical to the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) philosophy of education, the moral cornerstone of women's higher education from 1899 until after the Asia Pacific War. Interestingly, one of the first magazines to be targeted was *Jogaku sekai*, even though it intentionally allotted space to uncontroversial topics and pledged “to cover all facets of knowledge a woman needs to become enlightened and knowledgeable in the artful techniques of performing household tasks” (*Jogaku sekai*, January 1901).

### Mass women's magazines come of age

By 1912, almost 100 percent of eligible girls, or approximately 75,000, had registered in elementary schools and the over 200 government-sponsored higher schools throughout the country (Ōhama and Kumakura 1989, pp. 72–3). A new generation of literate young women with different capabilities began to emerge. Although enrollment figures and graduation figures differed, the increase in literacy, coupled with a degree of economic security, allowed an increasing number of women to purchase magazines. The publication of *Fujin sekai* (*Woman's World*, 1906) and *Fujokai* (*Woman's Sphere*, 1910), together with *Fujin gahō* (*Woman's Pictorial*, 1905), *Fujin kōron* (*Woman's Review*, 1916), *Shufu no tomo* (*Housewife's Companion*, 1917), and *Fujin kurabu* (*Woman's Club*, 1920), brought to the fore Japan's so-called “Big Four” mass women's magazines of the interwar period. Despite Japanese publishing houses' reluctance to make public circulation figures, by the 1920s the “Big Four” claimed over 1 million of the total sales of Japanese magazines. Gone were the days when women's magazines would be published to satisfy the whims of a small number of upper-class higher school students. Minemura Toshio, a well-known journalist writing at the time, said that with the exception of *Shufu no tomo*, all women's magazines hid their circulation figures rather than risk losses in advertising revenue (1931, p. 26).<sup>2</sup>

Initially, editors and publishers set out to produce a middle-class version of femininity. Yet the media they created failed to establish a clear relationship between class and gender. The picture that emerged presents a more complex multifaceted readership comprising a larger section of women than those ostensibly targeted. One key strategy lay in successfully wooing housewives. When *Fujin sekai* came out, it seemed like another mainstream woman's magazine. In less than a year, however, Masuda Giichi (1869–1949) had shifted its focus from preparing women for married life to the housewife's world after marriage. For precisely that reason, they incorporated practical family-oriented articles into the regular features. Even the frontispiece photos of a famous Osaka doctor and his adoring family playing croquet (*Fujin sekai*, April 1916) or Countess Hayashi's hygienic white-tiled kitchen (*Fujin sekai*, January 1919) had married women in mind. A smattering of articles covered world events such as World War I, but catering to housewives was indispensable for the magazine's staying power. Generally, *Shufu no tomo* is credited with being the first magazine to embrace housewives. In fact, *Fujin sekai*, the pioneering force behind family articles, deserves the distinction. Journalists writing during the 1910s called

*Fujin sekai* the leading magazine for ordinary women and a prototype for the next generation of family magazines.

An instrument of consumer capitalism, women's journalism moved from a passive to a competitive profit-making venture. In 1912, the *Yomiuri* published a series of articles on the "new woman" (*atarashii onna*), inspired by Nora, the protagonist in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879), who abandoned her husband and children in search of herself. Two years later they included the first one-page woman's section, but it was discontinued the following year. Understandably, magazines that focused their energies on average women elicited a positive response from readers even if the *modus operandi* presumed a fixed role for women in society. Unlike men who used the workplace and after-work socializing as a means to develop contacts with fellow workers and friends, most women were prohibited from forming outside relationships not only by a lack of time, but also by societal restraints against such behavior.

When it became clear that lower-middle-class and working-class women could negotiate articles and advertisements that attached phonetic symbols to the Chinese characters, editors targeted them, too, although the models they advanced endorsed a middle-class culture. Many less-privileged women had only the equivalent of an elementary school education. The hardships that they endured were real. Some worked as domestics in private homes, cleaners in offices, bus girls, ticket takers and ushers in movie theaters, café waitresses, and others made up the more "elite" corps of factory workers. A reader in western Japan, who cleaned her brother's dry cleaning shop, wrote that by living frugally she could save 1 yen from her 15 yen monthly salary for her subscription to *Fujokai*. On a good month she took in a movie on her day off, but she emphasized that reading magazines was what sustained her (*Fujokai*, February 1927). Up to then, these women had not relied on print communication as a major source of information.

The shift to encompass lower-middle-class and working women's needs was not without tensions and contradictions. From the standpoint of education, a chasm separated women readers. On the basis of family incomes, however, less-privileged women and middle-class women readers differed slightly. Most readers who graduated from higher schools identified with the middle class though their status was grounded less on income and more on graduation from a higher school. Because prewar educational policies prevented young women from entering middle schools, higher schools enjoyed some prestige. A poor higher school-educated housewife striving to advance socially boasted about "marrying up," when in reality she toiled long hours at home as a seamstress. Her world differed from the middle-class paradise she yearned for, but she justified her plight by saying that at least she did not have to perform manual labor like working-class women (*Fujokai*, August 1926). Less-privileged women's links with their more fortunate sisters were tenuous, but they were not always a deterrent.

In rural areas, mass women's magazines may have filled an even greater void in women's lives than in the city. Although insecurity marked the conditions of many women's lives, a farm woman who subscribed to *Shufu no tomo* from the time of its inception and suspended her subscription because of financial difficulties, expressed joy at having saved enough money to renew. She said that for someone poor and uneducated like herself *Shufu no tomo* was indispensable for her mental well-being (*Shufu no tomo*, April 1925). According to an article in the *Asahi* newspaper (June 19, 1932), most of the 819 young women who applied for employment at an agency set up for country folks in Tokyo Station were lured to the metropolis after reading about new jobs in mass women's magazines. The Japanese National Income Tax records for 1903 show that only 2.3 percent of the total population fitted the category middle class with an annual income of between 500 and 5,000 yen. In 1918, the percentage climbed to 6.5 percent, and in 1921, it reached 10 percent of Japan's total population (Minami 1965, p. 180). The fact that magazines

and newspapers were among the few affordable consumer products to reach mass proportions during the interwar years attests to consumerism's limited purchase.

### Surveying readers

Numerous government and private surveys taken in the 1920s furnish information on women's reading practices and salaries. Among the 2,000 higher school graduates interviewed for a 1924 government survey who fit the rubric of professional working woman (*shokugyō fujin*), over 40 percent received between 26 and 30 yen a month or approximately 60,000 yen today. The second most common salary was between 31 and 35 yen or 70,000 yen today. Of that number, 1,184 women read magazines and 845 read mass women's magazines. That amounts to almost 80 percent of all participants with 71.4 percent under 24 years of age and single (Tokyo-shi shakai kyoku 1982, p. 81). Based on figures compiled in 1921, the average monthly salary for male government employees was 96 yen and 98 yen for office workers or approximately 190,000 yen today.

Lower-middle-class and working-class readers, whose education and jobs situated them on the periphery of consumerism, also found refuge in mass women's magazines, although in smaller numbers. In 1920, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department conducted four surveys on the reading habits of women factory workers in the Tokyo area. All 2,350 participants listed mass women's magazines as their first choice of reading. Another survey sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs (*Shakai kyoku*) in 1924 attached a section on leisure activities. Even the factory women in western Japan, all of whom received daily wages, allotted between 3 to 7 percent of their monthly salaries for amusement. Reading magazines was also their favorite way to spend free time (Tokyo-shi shakai kyoku 1982, p. 39). In 1928, the reading habits of 4,543 women in Miyazaki prefecture, an outpost for factory women in southern Japan, came under review. Of the 2,813 women who read women's magazines, *Fujokai* topped the list. A survey taken the same year in the western Japan city of Kobe reported that out of 330 factory women, 161 chose *Fujokai* and *Shufu no tomo* as their favorite magazines (Nagamine 1997).

Leisure was a hard commodity to come by, and mass women's magazines represented a possibility for release from the tedium of their lives. Readers' letters indicate that less-privileged women waited excitedly for the monthly installments of romantic fiction like Kikuchi Kan's (1888–1948) melodramatic novels *Shinju* (*The Pearl*) (*Fujokai*, June 1924) and *Aijin* (*The Lover*) (*Fujokai*, March 1927). And a young woman from Nagasaki said that she empathized with the protagonist in *Aijin*. A new set of social and cultural patterns were taking root for women from different backgrounds. A housewife and mother of four children, whose husband earned 30 yen a month managing a factory, religiously set aside money each month to cover her subscription to *Fujokai*. In her mind, having one hour a day to read after the family went to sleep was worth being sleep deprived (*Fujokai*, August 1924). Since the price of *Shufu no tomo*, *Fujin sekai*, *Fujokai*, and *Fujin kōron* amounted to approximately 0.3–1 percent of the monthly wages of working-class women with basic literacy, as opposed to 0.5–1 percent of the average monthly salary of middle-class professional working women with higher school degrees, less-privileged women could presumably have purchased a single copy (*Shufu no tomosha no gojyūnen* 1967, p. 53).<sup>3</sup> Whether or not these women could have managed two magazines a month is questionable.

Some working-class women, unable to afford a monthly subscription, shared their monthly copies with friends. A factory worker from a spinning mill in western Japan wrote that she had been working in the same factory over ten years. "I'm overjoyed that we've started lending magazines in our dormitory" (*Shufu no tomo*, April 1925). This young woman occasionally read *Fujokai* and *Fujin sekai*, but she praised *Shufu no tomo*, her absolute favorite magazine, for giving a

10 percent discount on subscriptions taken out through the company. She admitted that the issue devoted to marriage preparations set her to dreaming. And she especially liked following fashion trends and learning about different foods and recipes. Much like readers in far-off villages, she, too, could obtain information about modern lifestyles unlike her own, a factor that contributed to the diffusion of new images. Another factory worker from the Sumida area of Tokyo, who took pride in her working conditions, put it this way: “Unlike what you may think, my factory is modern and the pay is good. I’m satisfied. If you want to know my favorite pastime, it’s reading *Shufu no tomo*” (*Shufu no tomo*, April 1925). Much to the disappointment of feminist and socialist Yamakawa Kikue (1890–1980), who located women factory workers, domestics, those employed in small businesses and labored on farms at the heart of the proletarian movement, their concerns were not always rooted in pressing issues like class and politics. Personal more “traditional” matters related to love and marriage taken up in mass women’s magazines occupied their thoughts. Yamakawa, a staunch advocate of gender equality, blamed the magazines for making women “ostentatious” and “hedonistic” (*Keizai ōrai*, November 1930).<sup>4</sup>

### New strategies

Acquiring mass circulation meant attracting diversified readers and catering to their popular tastes. Mindful not to alienate conservative subscribers, magazines were forced to include a variety of views from the conservative to the more liberal. Ishikawa Takemi (Takeyoshi) (1887–1961) took his cue from Masuda Giichi when he defied criticism and singled out the housewife as the foundation on which to build *Shufu no tomo*. Two of his techniques for increasing readership involved expanding on family articles (*katei kiji*) and subdividing them into the practical and trendy. Articles ranging from “Managing the Household on a Husband’s Thirty Yen Monthly Salary,” “Benefits of a Nutritious Diet,” and “The Importance of Locking the Front Door” (*Shufu no tomo*, February 1917), intended to impart constructive tips about home and family, filled the pages of the first issue. Within a matter of months other women’s magazines had followed suit. *Fujokai* chose the theme “The Economical Family” (*Fujokai*, July 1917; *Fujokai*, July 1918) for two issues and followed up with informative pieces such as “Newspapers – The Best Teachers for a Better Lifestyle,” (*Fujokai*, May 1918), “The Aims and Benefits of Purchasing Life Insurance,” (*Fujokai*, July 1918), and “Important Information for Using a Postal Savings Account” (*Fujokai*, September 1919).

Considering that the Daily Life Reform Movement (*Seikatsu kaizen undō*), a government-inspired attempt to cut wasteful spending, took off at this time, it is not surprising that the quest for rationalization instilled housewives with values of frugality. Directives issued by the Ministry of Education urged people to use their time wisely, discard costly customs like exchanging senseless year-end gifts, and remember the health dangers of eating too much white rice. An important impetus came from the Western lifestyles that mass women’s magazines helped depict. Of course, not all practical articles met with success, just as not all things Western caught on. Tomatoes were touted as nutritional, but Japanese-style wheat noodles with tomatoes never titillated the Japanese palate (*Shufu no tomo*, December 1932). Nevertheless, editorial boldness that inspired women to try the untried, even in the kitchen cannot be underestimated. For housewives, indirect channels like mass women’s magazines that set the process of reassessing values into motion probably motivated them to act more than an organized movement from above.

Trendy articles whet readers’ imaginations and kept them abreast of the most up-to-date fashions from abroad, hairstyles, sports, and even taught them to dance the tango and the Charleston. “Makeup Becoming a Housewife” (*Shufu no tomo*, March 1917) and “New Fashions for Viewing Cherry Blossoms” (*Shufu no tomo*, April 1918) convinced women that they, too, could do

themselves up to look like the stars and become queen for a day. An advertisement in *Fujin kurabu* depicted a young woman in her 20s with a new contraption guaranteed to erase wrinkles in only a few days (*Fujin kurabu*, May 1934). Whether or not this contributed to sales is not known, but without a doubt photographs were a more convincing medium than illustrations for arousing women's daydreams. A housewife who ordered a small Western oven that she saw advertised in the mail-order section prided herself on making sponge cake and baked apples like they sold in modern department stores in only 30 minutes in her own home (*Fujokai*, January 1922).

Another ingenious technique Ishikawa used to win over readers involved soliciting short pieces and letters known as confessional articles (*kokuhaku kiji*). Ishikawa encouraged his readers to assume an active role in contributing to the magazine and he compensated them for sharing intimate thoughts about their private world with women they knew only by pen names and places of residence. This strategy allowed Ishikawa to bond with his subscribers, but it also helped him to cut down on expenditures. Confessional articles opened up for debate a woman's relationship to her husband, children, and in-laws and infused their lives with a sense of personal importance, unlike family articles, which furnished one-sided information from educators and critics. Forming attachments with other readers through their contributions was emotionally soothing. Some women came to realize that they were not alone in their uncertainty. For women legally forced to remain within the parameters of their roles, the dialogues they exchanged with other readers acted as a catalyst for articulating their wants. That said, confessional articles were not antithetical to the ideals of the good wife and wise mother. Only a small number of women in the interwar years asked themselves how or with whom they were going to spend their lives. For those who did, however, marriage stood out as more than an economic agreement that bound two households (*ie*).

Marxist literary and social critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1892–1931) was one of the few intellectuals to aptly capture the temper of the time when he wrote: “Among all the housewives and would-be housewives, I can't imagine anyone who hasn't experienced hopeless, tragic situations. Reading articles that express those sentiments easily win the sympathy of other readers. No doubt that's why women's magazines welcome all kinds of confessional articles” (*Kaizō*, February 1927). During the interwar period women's magazines were the first to include confessional articles. Their success prompted Ishikawa to go one step further. Troubled by the plethora of readers' letters about the difficulties negotiating the complicated web of Japanese-style family relations, in 1923 he made the advice column a regular monthly feature. Because options that might effect changes in a woman's status within the patriarchal family system were limited, the advice column did not counsel readers to radically alter the patterns of their lives. Nor could it solve their problems. But for women in a male-dominated society who were grappling with working outside the home, finding a husband, or adjusting to being married, discussions pertaining to “Work or Marriage” (*Shufu no tomo*, April 1925), “Married Life Phobia” (*Shufu no tomo*, November 1927), or “Learning to Cope if Your Husband Takes a Mistress” (*Shufu no tomo*, May 1933) gave them the option of contemplating the direction in which their lives were moving.

Evidence that editors perceived some obligation to less-privileged women, both as consumers and readers, is also apparent in the role that mass women's magazines played in supporting mail-order shopping, a form of consumerism that provided an innovative concept of buying for an unlikely class of consumers. An office clerk from Kyoto, who liked learning about new commodities and often browsed in department stores and marveled at the wide variety of standardized goods sold at uniform prices, emphasized: “Price, quality, and trends govern my choices.” Being on a limited budget, however, she relied on mail-order shopping to satisfy her needs (*Fujokai*, January 1923). Not all women experienced commodification as an external force. Conflating consumerism with the acquisition of goods bought in department stores and thus



only with middle-class consumerism exaggerates the amount of control middle-class women had over the larger process of consumption in Japan. American historian Richard Ohmann put it this way: “To grasp consumption as the same meaning across class lines is to falsify the reality of the time” (Ohmann 1996, p. 172).

### Self-cultivation: a key word in women’s magazines

The rise of a consumer society found women turning to those women’s magazines that offered them a chance to achieve their desires and overcome their anxieties through self-cultivation or *shūiyō*. Just as editor-publisher Masuda Giichi had instilled less-educated young men with the vision of a connection between social success and self-cultivation in *Jitsuyō no Nihon* (*Business Japan*, 1895), he envisaged a bond between women and self-cultivation in *Fujin sekai*, its equivalent magazine for women. Unlike the esoteric concept that gained credence in the mid-nineteenth century and was associated with intellectuals like Abe Jirō (1883–1959) and Kurata Hyakuzō (1891–1943), who immersed themselves in religious and philosophical meditation in their search for salvation, Masuda’s popularized version of self-cultivation was an ideal for private fulfillment that afforded women more practical possibilities than the limited educational opportunities available in school. For him, a woman’s mission in life was to satisfy her husband, and self-cultivation would best enhance a woman’s role as wife and mother. That said, the morality that determined a harmonious home under a paternalistic system and celebrated a wife’s subservience to her husband also worked to deposition women in the workplace. In looking for ways that readers could relate to their publications, editors Tsugawa (Ryū) Shigemi (1880–unknown) and Ishikawa Takemi gave new meaning to self-cultivation, which became a keyword in mass women’s magazines from the teens and twenties.

Contrary to Masuda’s more conservative vision of self-cultivation that kept women tethered to the home and found a place in *Fujin sekai*, World War I and expanding Japanese capitalism provided the impetus to employ women as a new source of labor. Salaried occupations like office girls (*gāru*), shop girls, and skilled typists opened up for women. The words professional working woman caught on quickly, due in part to the attention mass women’s magazines accorded her presence in the workplace. From its inception, *Fujin kōron* promised to serve the interests of so-called “intellectual” (*chinōteki*) women and published monthly articles about the challenges that awaited them in the workplace. Over 70 percent of women with higher school degrees interviewed for the Tokyo City Office Survey of 1922 said they subscribed to women’s magazines because of the large proportion of articles on self-cultivation. The majority favored *Fujin kōron* and *Fujokai* (Tokyo-shi shakai kyoku 1982).

Some higher school-educated young women not driven to become professional working women solely for economic reasons spoke of work as a vehicle for self-cultivation. A telephone operator interviewed for the same survey explained: “Reading magazines enriches me spiritually.” A young typist anxious to better herself said: “My job will help me become a whole person.” A sales clerk believed work occupied an integral place in her life plans: “Being employed is really hard, but I want to get an idea of life after marriage.” A growing number of these women came to see work as a stepping stone for improving their future opportunities, but most would not have sacrificed marriage for a career. Nonetheless, they described their aspirations in personal accounts like “How I Landed my Present Job” (*Fujokai*, May 1921) and “Diary of a Professional Working Woman” (*Shufu no tomo*, June–September 1923). One only has to point to articles such as “A Guide to Opportunities for Women’s Employment” (*Fujokai*, May 1921), “Professional Working Women’s Salaries and Experience Required” (*Shufu no tomo*, March 1923), “Professional Working Women and Social Status” (*Fujokai*, January 1926), or “Professional

Working Women in Business – Successes and Failures” (*Fujin kōron*, December 1927) to know that mass women's magazines helped these women carve out a space they could call their own.

Higher education worked to break the pattern that located middle-class women's lives in a domesticated setting, but respect did not come along with most jobs. An analyst for the Office of Labor Statistics who traveled to Italy on a business trip voiced disappointment that in Japan the government did not value professional working women the way they did in Italy. She complained that in spite of their growing numbers only factory women received compensation from the state after giving birth (*Fujokai*, January 1926).

A survey carried out in the April 1925 issue of *Fujin kōron* reported that over 5,400 women nationwide had vied for positions as skilled typists, which along with department store sales girls represented the ultimate in modern jobs for higher school graduates. Even so, an elementary school graduate and devoted reader, who did not fit the label of professional working woman but longed to become a typist, sought advice. She was told to perfect her skills on the Japanese keyboard and not vie for a job that required using the English alphabet. Although her 30 to 40 yen monthly salary would be less than that of a higher school graduate, she could become a “lower-level” typist and still realize her dream. Another elementary school graduate longed to become a shop girl. She was advised to apply for a position behind the scenes that better suited her educational qualifications, perhaps as a waitress in the dining room. Her job would provide some economic independence and a chance to work in a fancy emporium, but from a different perspective. Many women complained, however, that their jobs left them totally exhausted, and they worried that they would be too tired to pursue activities for achieving self-cultivation. While their letters spoke of hope, obviously reality was more complicated than the ideals they embraced. Carl F. Kaestle (1991), an expert on reading and literacy, explained it this way: Readers “develop identities, choose allegiances, form beliefs, and conduct their day-to-day lives, but they [did] so within the constraints of cultural inheritances and economic hardships” (p. 51).

Japan's first woman newspaper reporter, Hani Motoko (1873–1957), a devout Christian and founder of the magazine *Fujin no tomo* and the coeducational school, *Jiyū Gakuen* (Free School, 1921), called for an egalitarian relationship between a husband and wife at home, but she said that working for a salary ran counter to a woman's nature (*Fujin kōron*, January 1919). Yamakawa wasted no time in rebuking Hani for her old-fashioned views that disregarded the economic reality that put women in the workforce, to mention nothing of the sexual discrimination they endured there (*Kokka gakkai zasshi*, February 1919). The question, however, entailed more than altering public perceptions of working women's capabilities and potential. The crux of the problem was that a woman's position in the workplace was an extension of her lowly position in the home. Even selecting a marriage partner was contingent on economics and the enhancement of the family's fortune.

Just as many intellectuals could not accept the social transformation being wrought by the spread of mass culture, which they called a by-product of a tainted middle-class consumerism with American roots, they had difficulty accepting the professional working woman (Kurahara, 1967). Although they recognized that young women entering society represented an unprecedented social development, their acknowledgment of the professional working woman was premised on a short-term social identity to be replaced by the housewife. In spite of factors like economic and spiritual independence that brought about an increase in professional working women or the awareness young women of marriageable age bore the potential burden that mothers and fathers-in-law posed, being married was taken for granted. Sending young women out to work implied a family's financial distress, and higher school graduates from middle-class families generally were not among job seekers before World War I. As the 1922 government

survey substantiated, the chief motivation for women joining the workforce in 1923 was supplementing the family income. Many middle-class parents who disapproved of working women had no option but to rely on their daughters.

## Conclusion

For middle-class and some lower-middle-class and working-class women the challenges that resulted from the maturation of the industrialized state after World War I became concrete from following the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. The rapid growth of mass women's magazines offered an opportunity for women to participate in the creation of this burgeoning culture. The media, which had served as a forum for the assertion of political and social rights for a small group of women at the time of the new woman, became a vehicle for the spread of consumerism and the lifestyle it embodied. Editors and publishers took advantage of the expanding reading public, of whom women constituted a major share, and targeted them as consumers. The culture they produced was a culture of the everyday, the mundane being the core of a woman's existence.

By reading and writing to the magazines, women who were not a part of an organized movement gave voice to the precarious relationship between their dreams and reality. Even some women from conservative families previously too timid to exert themselves in homes where despotic fathers ruled the roost gained the courage to contemplate change. It was in areas such as familial relationships, changes in work patterns, and the everyday details of life that mass women's magazines exhibited their greatest strength. Articles like "Palm Reading Determines Your Fate – Riches or Poverty" (*Shufu no tomo*, November 1927) and "The Sorrowful Life of an Old Miss" (*Shufu no tomo*, November 1927) did not make women any wiser. And pieces like "The Best Way to Improve Your Tennis Game" (*Shufu no tomo*, May 1926) introduced a way of life that bound up many readers in an imagined relation to consumerism. But features like "Contemplating One's Own Marriage Partner" (*Shufu no tomo*, January 1925) or "Designing a Modern Easy to a Use Small Kitchen on a Shoestring Budget" (*Shufu no tomo*, January 1927) introduced perspectives on daily life that women had not conceived to be within their grasp. Readers unable to shop at department stores and purchase what was being written about and photographed in the magazines took advantage of the inclusion of patterns and detailed diagrams that instructed them how to make "old-fashioned" kimono into modern Western frocks (*Fujokai*, January 1924), or sew a fancy chemise at home. Women learned that they could pick and choose forms of consumerism without being privy to it all.

Most intellectuals ignored the significance of the newly emerging alliance between mass women's magazines and women. They were as disenchanted by the magazines' tendency to promote an ideal of domesticity that made household tasks a woman's true work as by readers' willingness to accept the status quo. Family articles came under attack for being "unscientific," and critics complained that the advice offered was specious and filled with generalities. Women's mass magazines earned the reputation of being "feudalistic" and "conservative" by women activists like Yamakawa, Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971), and Yosano Akiko (1878–1942), in spite of the different ideological stances they shared (*Keizai ōrai*, November 1930). Novelist and literary critic Uchida Roan (1868–1929) decried women's mass magazines for betraying the hopes of the new woman. He voiced disappointment and anger when mass women's magazines failed to meet his expectations for a deeper engagement with modernity. Intellectual Nii Itaru shared Yamakawa's point of view and questioned why women so horribly repressed tolerated their circumstances. Oftentimes, however, it was the readers themselves who harbored distrust of overly radical change.

In the wake of World War I, Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, along with Yamakawa, insisted on total gender equality and denounced the patriarchal family system, which, coupled with the private ownership of property, he believed formed the basis for discrimination against women (*Tane maku hito*, August 1922). After the Great Kantō Earthquake, when he re-evaluated his stance on the American influence impacting changes in daily life and perceived the positive effects of consumerism on women, he credited mass women's magazines with helping to thrust the average woman into wider society. Undeniably, the sensational coverage aimed at expanding circulation reduced the quality of mass women's magazines and foretold the media's limitless potential to capitalize on gossip and sex, but rather than castigating the low level of women's mass magazines, Hirabayashi blamed the wretched state of women's education that dictated women's reading choices. In an article he contributed to a popular socialist journal on the state of women's magazines, he wrote: "There probably isn't another country in the world that has achieved Japan's success in marketing women's magazines. Women's and men's work are totally separate. For a woman, things like childrearing, treating illnesses, and proper etiquette are what she needs to know" (*Kaizō*, March 1927). Hirabayashi's treatise on women grew out of the same socialist tradition as that of Yamakawa, but he went beyond the Marxist reform of society and linked women's liberation with technological development known as "mechanization" (*kikaika*).

Mass women's magazines played up those aspects of Japanese life that emphasized one's social standing. The marital difficulties of famous people and love-related scandals aroused the curiosity of readers. Women came into contact with a class of women whose world differed from their own, but whose problems struck a familiar chord. Readers learned that there were already women in society who would not abide by the traditional standards that governed married life. Prompted by such scandalous incidents some women, who lived emotionally repressed lives at the mercy of incorrigible womanizers, were more willing to share their own experiences. Indeed, confessional articles and personal testimonies aired in advice columns dealt with the most basic problems women encountered.

Mass women's magazines had their basis in a patriarchal system, but to label them repositories of established routines and gender conventions downplays the complexities, both ideological and economic, marking their production. Publishing companies were male-dominated. Editors and publishers performed a balancing act in constructing a relationship with their readers. They could use their power to manipulate women readers, but they could not force them to follow their views. Women absorbed the information offered them and they construed the content in their own distinct ways. Gradually, some women came to understand that it was neither shameful nor abnormal to enter the workplace or marry the person of one's choice. The writings of intellectuals did not trigger these admissions. It was the efforts of women themselves, even though the role they played in the construction of mass magazines was secondary to that of editors and publishers. In other words, intellectuals provided the building blocks for these revelations, but the initiative lay with women readers themselves.

Just as magazines were in the process of redefining their readers, women were in the process of redefining themselves. Not all women were victims of ideological precepts they swallowed whole. For most readers of mass women's magazines "awakening" did not mean wanting to change completely how they lived. These women did not form women's clubs and assert their right to property or demand suffrage. The "awakening" they envisioned through self-cultivation was directed more at satisfying their own expectations for a successful marriage or in the workplace than at the hope for total independence. Self-fulfillment had become an ideal for some women, but it was still hard to attain. It would be unreasonable to fabricate women's lives around the contents of mass magazines, but mass women's magazines became sites for a partial redefinition of women's roles – useful sources of information and barometers for testing change. Socially

and psychologically the way was being paved for the broader gender changes that were to affect women's lives and position them in public and private space as a result of postwar reforms and the efforts of feminists.

## Notes

- 1 In the aftermath of World War I, the word *taishū* was used synonymously with that of *minshū* to mean "the people." Following the Great Earthquake, *taishū* came to convey the meaning of mass, as in mass society or mass production, and it referred to the cultural shift that involved people at the "mass" level. Discourses on mass society and the controlling influence of the media on the general public became a much debated topic, particularly among Western sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s, when mass culture identified in its most visible forms took off in earnest.
- 2 In 1931, *Shufu no tomo* reported a monthly circulation of 600,000 and a rate of 0.5–1 percent in unsold, returned magazines in accordance with the Japanese system that allowed for returns on unsold issues. *Fujin kurabu* reported 350,000 and a return rate of 25 percent. *Fujin kōron* claimed 200,000 in circulation with a return rate of 15 percent, and *Fujokai* reported 120,000 and a return rate of 45 percent.
- 3 In January 1922, *Shufu no tomo* attempted to become a bi-monthly publication, but it failed after the first issue. Economics along with editorial difficulties probably dictated the company's decision.
- 4 Although Yamakawa praised *Fujin no tomo* (*Woman's Friend*, 1903) for publishing progressive articles on childrearing and hygiene, she chastised the magazine for its overly Christian bias, which ran counter to her socialist ideals.

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