Intersections: Women's, Children's, and Social Histories in Modern Japan

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I

At the outset I would like to state that while this essay will mention works written in Canada, England, and Australia to some extent, as a scholar working in the United States, my remarks most systematically address the literature I know best, studies which were written in the U.S.A. In saying this, the intent is not to slight history produced in lands beyond the U.S. borders. Rather, the intent is to broaden the focus of the discussion by indicating the limits of my presentation. Indeed, I am very much looking forward to comments and/or interchange with other scholars that will expand the scope of discussion.

This presentation consists of three parts. First, a sketch of the trajectory of past interactions between modern Japanese women's history and other scholarly disciplines, including social history and feminist studies. Second, a consideration of the possibilities for newer intersections between women's history and another subfield of social history, the fledgling field of children's history. Third, some reflections on some implications of children's and women's history for modern and contemporary Japanese values.

II

Tracing the past trajectory of modern Japanese women's history in the U.S. we can see that its intersections with other subdisciplines and with social history have varied. In brief, this can be described as 1) development in tandem with Japanese social history, initially the field of Japanese family history, followed by social history of the Japanese lower classes in general; 2) a continuous interaction with fields outside of Japanese history and Japanese or Asian studies, especially with feminist studies; and 3) an evolution (or branching) of women's history into related subfields such as men's and gender history which in turn broadened and altered women's history.

At the outset perhaps it is worth noting that although the term social history might suggest analysis of changes in society as a whole, social historians have rather tended to focus on specific groups in society, for example the history of labor or the working class, old and new middle classes, the upper class, ethnic groups, racial minorities, families, students, and so on. In addition, it may be worth noting that the past trajectory of modern Japanese women's history in the U.S. roughly parallels the past trajectory of U.S. and European women's history in its intersections with family history, other subfields of social history, feminist studies, and the social history of other regions.

From the late 1970s, Japanese women's history germinated concurrently with Japanese social history. True, there were significant earlier works published in isolation—before the rise

of Japanese social history. These include Dee Ann Vavich's 1967 article on Ichikawa Fusae for the modern period and Joyce Ackroyd's "Women in Feudal Japan" in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 3rd series (1959). But from the late 1970s as in U.S and European history, larger numbers of Japanese historians' began to explore approaches to the history of the nameless masses, including women, through the history of the family. One of the early methods of family history was analysis of quantitative data. Patterns of fertility, male and female mortality, nuptiality (marriage), and divorce revealed much about the lifecycle experiences of women, and family history also shed light on women's occupations and geographic mobility.

But in these early years, qualitative, that is, non-quantitative, methods in social history also began to advance Japanese women's history. In 1982, Mikiso Hane published *Rebels, Peasants, and Outcastes: The Underside of Modern Japan*, a milestone in narrative (qualitative) social history. Drawing extensively on materials in the multi-volume *Nihon zankoku monogatari*, it made visible the lives of ordinary people suffering poverty and discrimination amid the modern Japan's military and economic progress, including the trials of daughters-in-law (*yome*) living with their husbands' families, the harsh lives of female factory hands (*jokō*), and stories of women sold into overseas prostitution (*karayuki-san*). Over time, dissatisfactions with the facelessness of statistical profiles and depressing tales of the victims of modern progress, led to the writing of narratives of women's agency or their struggles against constraints or oppression, for example Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Meiji Japan* (1983) and E. Patricia Tsurumi, "Female Textile Operatives," *History Workshop* (1984), and Vera Mackie, "Feminist Politics in Japan," *New Left Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1988).

Yet from the beginning, intersections between Japanese women's history and disciplines outside of history are evident. Japanese women's history intersected with social science studies of Japanese women, through joint publications and through social scientists' research on topics in the modern period. In 1976, Joyce Lebra and Joy Paulson published *Women in Changing Japan*, a interdisciplinary anthology spanning the modern and postwar periods. Anthropological studies have provided valuable insights into the lives, norms, actions, and attitudes of modern Japanese women, Robert J. Smith and Ella Lury Wiswell, *The Women of Suye Mura* (1982); Robert J. Smith, "Good Wives, Wise Mothers" (1983); Takie Lebra, *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment* (1984). Also, in turning to an anthropological method, historian Gail Lee Bernstein bravely crossed disciplinary borders, producing an insightful participant-observation study, *Haruko's World: A Japanese Farm Woman and Her Community* (1983).

From its beginnings, Japanese women's history also intersected feminist studies, establishing a longterm, very fruitful relationship. Initially, feminist studies applied the methods of conventional discplines to analysis of women in cultures and societies; however later it began to generate its own theories and issues. Embedded in feminist theory and therefore in histories of women influenced by it are teleological expectations concerning women's equality or the empowerment of women as individuals or members of a collective other than women. In addition to the works by Sievers, Tsurumi, and Mackie already mentioned, some important works in this lineage include: Sharon Nolte, "Women's Rights and Society's Needs: Japan's

1931 Suffrage Bill," (1986); Mikiso Hane, trans., *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows* (1988); E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (1990); Vera Mackie, ed., *Feminism and the State in Modern Japan* (1995); Helen Hopper, *A New Woman of Japan: A Political Biography of Katō Shidzue* (1996); Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women: Gender, Labour, and Activism, 1900-1937* (1997).

Women's history also intersected a new, related subfield of social history as gender history, the study of mutually related constructions of the sexes (usually but not always male and female), began to emerge from women's history in the late 1980s. As some researchers pursuing women's history became aware of the limitations of focusing exclusively on female experiences and representations, they began to consider the masculine and feminine in relation to each other, giving birth to gender history. The turn toward gender history also sparked interest in specialized study of men's lives, especially men's sexualities. Since the 1990s, the new men's history has flourished. Foundations of the history of male gender in Japan include: Hiroshi Hazama, "Historical Changes in the Life Style of Industrial Workers," in *Japanese Industrialization and Its Social Consequences* (1976); Henry D. Smith II, *Japan's First Student Radicals* (1972); Donald Roden, *Schooldays in Imperial Japan: A Study in the Culture of A Student Elite* (1980); Earl Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: From Samurai to Salaryman* (1981); and sections of Andrew Gordon, *Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan: Heavy Industry, 1850-1950* (1985). Much of the later work in this field has explored male sexuality, in particular, the vivid contrast between early modern openness and acceptance of male-male eroticism and its antithesis, modern intolerance.

III

In contrast to women's and gender history, the field of Japanese children's history has developed more slowly. Like women's history, the roots of children's history can be found in family history, especially historical demography. The family reconstitution studies that yielded information on women as mothers, wives, widows, and daughters in households also provided glimpses of children and youths—for example their entry into households through birth, adoption, service, and marriage and their mortality rate; their departures from households due to death, adoption, service, and marriage; the numbers and ages of brothers and sisters. Which child succeeded to the headship and which children inherited property can be seen in family registers and tax and property records. Yet despite common origins in family history, in contrast to Japanese women's history, studies of children's history have not proliferated. For example, a recent search for articles in the database of the online service JSTOR using the keywords "Japan" and "children" produced zero hits.

Research in English on contemporary Japanese children, for example studies of education and children's problems in society, is more abundant, than English language historical research on Japanese children's issues. Given the growth or relative abundance of women's, men's, gender, and labor history and emerging analyses of colonial societies and minorities in the past two to three decades, there is reason to say that children's history is one of the last frontiers of social history. This statement can be made not only for the history of children in Japan and but also about the history of children in other geographic regions. Yet a historical perspective promises to add to new dimensions to understandings of childhood and children's

institutions, including those of the contemporary period. And intersections of women's and children's history in modern Japan may offer new perspectives on Japanese social history and Japanese studies.

There are perhaps several reasons for the lagging development of children's history. First, as in the case of the women's history and family history, there may be resistance to the historicity of childhood, like that can arise for women, womanhood, and women's experiences. The idea that childhood might have been different in the past, or that the relationship between parent and child might have differed in the past can be a source of discomfort. Leaving childhood unexamined, intact as it is today, is less threatening to our social world. Second, there is the more substantive reason—the thorny problem of evidence for children's history. Typically historical evidence is scarce for subaltern groups. Children in nearly all cases are a dependent or less powerful group in society, so for this reason records about them are more common than records of what they actually say about themselves. Furthermore, the process of human development itself makes it hard to find accurate first person accounts of their thoughts and actions. The younger the child, the less likely we are to have written accounts, or even records of the words spoken by a child. Thus we are quite likely to have records of children's actions, speech, or thoughts, by third parties. More than perhaps for any other social group, then, it is difficult to directly access children's historical experiences.

Due to the scarcity of historical studies, this discussion of "historiography" involves possible approaches to children's history more than actual approaches. For example, one can distinguish between the history of children, which implies tracing their subjectivity, that is, their consciousness of their own lived experiences, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the history of childhood, which traces the notion of childhood. Due to the problem of sources, investigating the former, how children of the past felt about their experiences in households and institutions, how they felt about how others perceived them, and how they regarded their parents, masters, and lessons, is an exceedingly difficult topic to explore. Children, especially young ones, have left few documentary sources, and in the past, visual and other types records of records are often scarce. So in studying children in history and other social sciences, researchers very often end up using sources about rather than by children, despite the inevitable limitations of these sources.

Other major possible approaches to the history of childhood include first, analysis of children and childhood in Japanese society and culture grounded in the structure and logic of the *ie* (Japanese household). A second major line of inquiry is examination of children in institutions beyond the home—in schools, orphanages, reformatories, and the like. Third, through a comparative approach is possible one would probe topics such as similarities and differences between the placement or functions of children in households and other social institutions or between children's experiences in one or more of these varied institutions (e.g. household, government, or schools). A fourth approach would analyze lineages of concepts of child, childhood, or child study in scholarly or popular literature. This could involve focusing on the nature and range of a distinctive children's culture in a particular historical period.

IV

Japan underwent a major social transformation in the modern period, a transformation from a society of households to a society of specialized institutions. Many themes in children's as well as women's history pursue the consequences of that transformation. In the transition from the early modern world of households to the modern and contemporary world of specialized economic and political institutions, children as well as women in some social groups and classes were transformed from producers to consumers and dependents in households, although the pace of change varied by class and by region.

In the *ie*, the welfare of individual members was secondary to household continuity. Since only one couple of each generation remained in the household, some children were destined to depart. Because maintaining household continuity as well as household status, property, and income had first priority, the child who stayed was more important than the child or children who had to leave. The flip side of the centrality of the succeeding child was the peripherality of the departing child. Household goals often resulted in unequal treatment of children — the successor and heir might receive better food and clothing and more affection than the departing children. Household interests even took precedence over the life a newborn when resources were inadequate for its upbringing.

Households were more than a place of residence; they were also enterprises. Average household size was not large, so children and wives in nonelite families typically labored in the family enterprise, especially in farm households. In addition to children born into households, others entered as adopted sons and daughters, servants, or apprentices. Children in wealthy families did not necessarily work in family enterprises, but in ordinary households, children engaged in productive labor as well as household maintenance chores. Because households were relatively self-sufficient, children laboring in household enterprises were producers as well as more than consumers of purchased products. So abandoned or runaway children, adopted children, and apprentices were welcome in households that needed additional workers. Rather than simply draining household resources as consumers, their labor could increase household wealth. But children in wealthy families might engage in consumption of goods more than activities that increased household income.

While school attendance rates had been rising in the early modern period, much vocational education for commoners took place in the daily routines of household and village. Children living at home learned skills and attitudes needed in adult life from their parents or neighbors, while apprentices and servants acquired social and occupational knowledge in the households of their masters. From 1872, the implementation of compulsory education for all children took children away from households for much of the day. However, until the end of the nineteenth century, students from prosperous households or former samurai households were more likely to attend. Some families could not afford tuition, and others needed their children's labor or the income they could earn.

With increasing school attendance, children's participation in productive activities declined. As the modern period progressed, lower class children were transformed from household workers into students, joining middle and upper class students in that role. So childhood became defined by time spent at school instead of labor for a household, by consumption

rather than production, and economic dependence rather than productive labor. The modern child as dependent, student, and consumer was born. Furthermore, as more and more students enrolled schools' age graded curricula, the stages of life became more uniform. Entry into elementary school at age 6, and graduation at age 10 (then age 12). Still later graduation from middle school, then high school, and college

Thus in the modern period, the rise of the school as an institution for children beyond the household had an impact on the very nature of childhood. The rise of the school also had an impact on the nature of parenthood. The role of parents in children's education declined, and shared routines of daily life in households diminished. The separation of workplace and home under industrialization also had a considerable impact on household life. To the extent that participation in industry became defined as the work of adult men, the household became largely the domain of women and children who found it more difficult to engage in productive labor. While farming, petty retailing, and many crafts remained household enterprises, the prestigious occupations lay in the advanced sectors of the economy. Thus the development of specialized institutions of modern education and industry were instrumental in transforming children into students, dependents, and consumers and women into domestic dependents. In the modern period, the transformation was incomplete for poor or entrepreneurial households that still required children or women to engage in income earning activities, but by the late postwar period, the removal of children under 18 from wage labor was nearly complete. Yet the remaking of childhood, a far-reaching change, was an accidental achievement of the modern Japanese state.

As we have seen, children's history and women's history have intersected in the early family history of the late 1970s, and through analysis of the impact of modern, specialized educational and economic institutions on children, women, and households the possibilities for fruitful intersection continues. Clearly, post-Restoration policy changes reshaped the social worlds of the household and village, altering expectations if not always the actual behavior of children, youths, and women.

If we can speak of, or debate, Japan's passage to modernity, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, it doubtless involved more than simply the creation of new economic and political institutions; Japan's post-1868 transformations also generated changes in childhood, womanhood, and home life which are taken for granted today. In *Gender and History* (1986) Linda Nicholson argued that for America and Western Europe, in the evolution of modernity the household which once had been all--the fundamental social, political, and economic unit of society under control of a patriarchal head--gave way to a polity based on individual participation (and the gradual expansion of the electorate) and an economy dominated by production of goods in large, nonfamilial workplaces. Extending this analysis to Japan and extending its social range, we can note that a large share of the preparation of children for their adult lives takes place in institutions outside the home—in elementary, middle, high schools, colleges, and *juku* (schools providing extracurricular lessons). Although the totality of the transformation of social life was not deliberately orchestrated, distinct public and private "spheres" in society and new, more differentiated places in them for children, women, and men were forged in the modern era.

V

An understanding of the transformations of childhood and womanhood resulting from development of specialized economic and educational institutions may offer insights into processes of change ongoing in other parts of the globe—not just "advanced" countries like Japan, the United States, Canada, France, and Australia, but also developing or newly industrializing nations in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Currently it is impossible to say whether the rise of the child as dependent, student, and consumer is irreversible. Only the future will tell. It is already clear that the ideologies and practices of female domesticity are malleable; faced with state priorities, national emergencies, labor shortages, new international standards, and the like, the twentieth century has already seen efforts to bring women out of the home in to the workplace and politics in many countries and regions of the world.

The demands of states for patriotic citizens and economies for highly trained workers have fostered the current educational system, featuring the age grading of children in specialized institutions, as opposed to or in addition to village age grades or apprenticeship and learning through observation and imitation in the households of the past when home and workplace were one. The banning of child labor is related in part to states' priorities to socialize children into the culture of the nation, to ensure loyalties beyond the smaller worlds of household, community, or region. Compulsory education laws make it clear that the primary responsibility of families, parents, and children is to make sure that children attend school instead of engaging in income earning activities. Yet playing the devil's advocate, one could question prolonged, enforced dependence of children as counterproductive to social continuity in the long run, especially in advanced consumer driven economies. If children live for consumption, and disdain labor, they may balk at performance of essential economic tasks such as the manufacturing of products and the management of their sales and distribution, undermining the economic and social foundations of their societies.

This is not an argument for a return to the early modern / modern household society, grounded in the subordination of men, women, and children's interests in the name of eternal continuity of the stem family (*ie*). But I do wish to suggest that over time there has been variability in the ideas and experiences of childhood, motherhood, and home life and broader social experiences. This in turn provides a basis for suggesting that Japanese today, like people in other societies around the world, do not have to be content with past or present models of childhood or womanhood. The human variety found in past and present societies may underwrite variety in societies of the future.