

# THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S MASS MAGAZINES AND THE FORMATION OF A NEW READING CULTURE IN EARLY TWENTIES JAPAN

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## Introduction

As technological growth, industrial expansion, and the acceleration of urbanization redefined the practices of everyday life in interwar Japan as well as in Western countries, this process of social change produced an explosion of new dynamic images of women. In the mass media, the growth of which was both a cause and effect of this social change, women appeared in the new guises of café waitress, housewife, dancer, and shop girl. In magazines, books, and movies, women became prominent icons of the modern city as they strolled through bustling shopping districts and became a presence on crowded busses and streetcars. These images of women were notable for their mutability as well as their novelty. The persona of the shopper changed as quickly as fashions in clothing: the housewife remade herself as she moved from one hobby to another. Such images defined the modern woman as both multifaceted and ceaselessly changing.

These new images of women challenged a widespread mythology of a monolithic Japanese woman, all cut from the same mold. Feminine stereotypes placed women within a family setting, stressing their gentleness and meekness. This peculiar family-bond and docile quality marked them as “Japanese” women. The images of independent working women or decadent outspoken flappers that circulated in the 1920s began to unloose the hold of this mythology, though the myth did not yield to the change immediately.

Even three decades later, director Ôzu Yasujirô's famous film *Tokyo Story* (*Tôkyô Monogatari*) (1953) addressed the disjunction between a stereotype of a single type of “traditional” Japanese woman and the complex identities that constituted the “modern” Japanese woman. *Tokyo Story* treats themes related to both urbanization and the breakdown of family values in the early 1950s, highlighting the ways these phenomena shape the behavior of the female characters that dominate the film. Ôzu directed viewers' attention to the contradictions inherent in the concept of the Japanese woman.

Though the tension in the figure of the feminine depicted in Ôzu's women remained as the central problematic of discourse on the Japanese woman long into the postwar, its origins go back to the 1920s, when the destabilizing images of the modern woman first appeared. While the intellectuals' response to changing gender roles cannot be overlooked, I am particularly concerned with what captured the interest of urban women in this period, and their in-

terests were reflected especially in women's mass magazines. In looking at the social and cultural construction of a new set of possibilities for women to act, mass women's magazines served as a force in the construction of new identities for Japanese women in the 1920s. Moreover, these media formulations, in turn, were shaped by the actions of women themselves.

With the publication of *Fujin sekai* (Woman's World) (1906), *Fujokai* (Woman's Sphere) (1910), *Fujin kôron* (Woman's Review) (1916), *Shufu no tomo* (A Housewife's Companion) (1917), and *Fujin kurabu* (Woman's Companion) (1920), a new and novel media product emerged to which large numbers of women had access. Because of the efforts women's magazines made to increase circulation, many young women who were not in the habit of reading women's magazines became regular subscribers. Rural housewives, for example, gained access to information about modern (*modan*) lifestyles utterly different from their own, a factor that contributed to the diffusion of new images. The rise of confessional articles (*kokuhaku kiji*) offered women in city and country alike an opportunity to articulate their feelings, and also presented alternative views of relationships as they detailed the love affairs of women.

By the 1920s, a media culture for women was an influential force in the circulation of information. Nevertheless, almost no one credited it with playing a positive role in effecting those changes in outlook which, figuratively if not literally, thrust the average Japanese woman into wider society. Because women's magazines formed a large portion of the mass magazines of the period, from the outset, they were subject to harsh criticism. Labels such as "conservative" (*hoshuteki*) and "unscientific" (*hikagakuteki*) described them in pejorative terms.<sup>1</sup> Novelist and literary critic Uchida Roan (1868-1929), who wrote a series of essays between August 1922 and May 1928 for the popular women's magazine *Josei* (Woman), phrased it this way:

Inasmuch as women's magazines are concerned with a woman's domain, they publish many articles on such things as cooking and sewing... The fact that the opinions and ideas relate to personal experiences is not bad, but experience which is not based on scientific principles, while it may have inspired the writer, is not beneficial for others. (Uchida 1987: 95)

Contemporary scholars in the field of Japanese journalism have censured prewar women's magazines for their so-called editorial conservatism and frivolity of tone. In Oka Mitsuo's opinion, "*Shufu no tomo* has a tendency to maintain the status quo and was unable to take a stand even against a lifestyle that treated women as inferior to men" (Oka 1981: 102). Fujitake Akira commented that women's magazines "made women compliantly conform to a set of moral standards that governed an entire country" (Fujitake 1981: 102). No doubt the criticism of contemporary Japanese intellectuals stems from the fact that even in the 1920s women's mass magazines continued to reflect a morality that was also prevalent in Meiji (1868-1912) period women's magazines.<sup>2</sup>

From the outset, *Shufu no tomo* printed articles like “Rules a Housewife Must Know” (“*Shiraneba naranu shufu no kokoro-e*”) (March 1917), “Suitable Sidework Even for Girls” (“*Joshi kodomo nimo dekiru yûri na fukugyô*”) (March 1917), and “Readers’ Recommendations for Becoming a Model Wife,” (“*Risôteki fujin no suisen happyô*”) (January 1926), that urged women to persevere under the most adverse circumstances and instructed them on how to live virtuous lives. Some women readers did not consider the inclusion of such articles that preached a doctrine they had been taught to respect from childhood offensive. An examination of the editorials and articles carried in women’s mass magazines shows that many parents, and the general public, supported the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryôsai kenbo*) philosophy of education on which the “official” morality for women had been made to rest from 1898. The reason was not because of its intrinsic values, but because it was familiar.<sup>3</sup> The intellectuals, however, were disenchanted both by the media’s tendency to promote this old set of values and the complacency of women readers to accept what they regarded as the status quo. Uchida expressed further dismay:

The contents of today’s women’s magazines betray the hopes of the “new woman” (*atarashii onna*) because they show that most Japanese women still are not only on a different level than men, but because it’s like comparing the summit of a mountain to the bottom of the sea. When I see women on subways and trains who look like intellectuals (*sôtô na chishiki kaikyû no fujin rashii*) really enjoying reading women’s magazines, which are an even lower level than the gossip magazines (*kôdan zasshi*), it makes me so disappointed. (Uchida 1987: 96-97)

In reality, it was inevitable that the growth of a mass directed media would result in changes in media content. As women’s magazines went from small-scale endeavors with limited readership to mass-scale circulation operations, their character also underwent important changes. In order to garner the largest number of readers possible, the magazines were forced to publish articles that included a wide range of views from the conservative to the liberal. Every issue of *Shufu no tomo* centered on special themes like health tips for women (June 1919), birth control methods (January 1922), and Western clothes and the proper way to wear them (June 1923). Beginning in 1918 supplements ranging from 10 to 50 pages in length were periodically appended to the magazine as an added incentive to entice women buyers (*Shufu no Tomosha* 1967: 14).

As the fight for readers intensified, women’s mass magazines exhibited an even greater propensity for including a mixture of old and new, a factor that appeared to minimize the individual differences between magazines. Tsugawa Masashi, the editor of *Fujokai*, explained that “all the [women’s] magazines have their own special features, but because of their subtleties, a cursory reading leads one to think there are no differences. The reason is that the editors of the magazines are basically aiming at the same reading public, the masses; and the pressure to

achieve circulation goals is tremendous” (Tsugawa 1931: 56-57).<sup>4</sup>

Although standardization, rather than individuality, was a prominent feature of women’s magazines, not all the articles were uninspired or boring. Compared to women’s magazines in the early 1900s that were strongly colored by enlightenment thought, women’s mass magazines of the twenties reflected a new diversity. No way could these magazines have attracted young women readers if they continued only to print stories pertaining to such time worn subjects as female morality. Thus, women’s magazines filled their pages with a melange of articles ranging from the conventional to the latest in American trends and popular customs, a policy which made it appear as if they lacked editorial direction.

Nevertheless, while articles related to the *modan gâru* were interesting from a social standpoint, they did not directly transform a woman’s everyday existence. It is unlikely that reading about the *modan gâru* prompted young women in any number to imitate her themselves. Among the new articles it was the family articles (*katei kiji*) and practical articles (*jitsuyô kiji*) that best exhibited the character and role of women’s magazines in both reinforcing and propelling women away from conventional lifestyles. Because these articles dealt with the most basic concerns of a housewife’s life, such as cooking, housework, clothing, and the relationship between husbands, wives, and children, they offered women readers an opportunity to consider the direction their own lives were moving. In this way, mass women’s magazines created a social concern for women’s cerebral changes as well as their materialistic desires with consumerism as the go-between. It was not so much a question of whether or not one had the wherewithal to purchase new commodities, but how great an impression the allure of goods promised through the print medium.<sup>5</sup>

## Setting the Stage for Women’s Mass Magazines in the 1920s

The early 1900s no longer published women’s magazines merely to satisfy the needs and interests of young elite schoolgirls. Instead, women’s publications were moving from passive to competitive, profit-making ventures. In 1880 compulsory education, which originally had been fixed at four years by the Ministry of Education in 1871 and reduced to sixteen months during the decentralization of education in 1879, was extended without regard to gender to three years, and then back to the original four years. From 1906, it was increased to six years. With the foundation firmly laid for elementary school education, families began to recognize that females, too, were entitled to schoolroom learning. The choices narrowed considerably after that, but girls did have the option of entering a woman’s higher school (*kôtô jogakkô*). Although chronologically the women’s higher school was equivalent to the boy’s middle school (*chûgakkô*), which went from grades seven to eleven, qualitatively, the differences were vast (Harrington 1987: 170; Gluck 1985: 163-74). Clearly, women’s magazines became mass magazines as a part of the wider development of mass culture and a general publishing boom.<sup>6</sup>

In 1887, 285 of all girls of elementary school age were receiving an elementary education,

and 2,363 students were attending the 18 government controlled *jogakkô* then in operation. In 1898, one to two percent of girls continued their education beyond the elementary school level. A total of only 8,500 girls were enrolled in women's higher schools across Japan (Fukuda et al. 1990, appendix: 29). This was due both to the commonly accepted notion that higher education for women was unnecessary and also to economic conditions that blocked their way. Women's magazines operated under a similar set of economic restrictions. At a time when middle-class families were small in number, female readership was limited to a small number of elite households. Indeed, the cost of the *Ôsaka Asahi shinbun* (morning edition) in 1891 was 0.28 yen, equivalent to approximately 600 yen in today's currency. In 1920, the cost of a morning and evening set was 1.20 yen or approximately 2,400 yen today (*Shûkan Asahi: 1981: 161*). As a result, the social class of girls who subscribed to women's magazines overlapped with those who entered a woman's higher school. This explains why women's magazines that came out in the late nineteenth century were largely geared to higher school students' tastes and heavily colored with fiction and articles that were tinged with refinement. Naturally, magazines of this earlier period were far removed from the lives of young women who joined the labor force immediately following graduation from elementary school, or of housewives in the city and farming women in the countryside.

A good example is *Jogaku sekai* (A Woman's School World). Published by Hakubunkan from 1901 to 1925, it catered to the hobbies of young women's higher school students with free time and a degree of economic security. This was indeed an extravagant undertaking. Inasmuch as one copy sold for 20 sen, equivalent to approximately 400 yen in today's currency, it was not suited to the average young woman's pocketbook. Neither was it suited to her tastes. Educators and intellectuals formed the majority of *Jogaku sekai's* contributors. In keeping with the magazine's philosophy, they collaborated to create a journal for the continuing education of women's higher school graduates, who allegedly needed further "moral" and "intellectual" guidance. Early Shôwa (1925-1979) journalist and critic Kimura Tsuneyoshi was convinced that the high priority allotted fiction contributed to the magazine's downfall: "There were so many articles that never answered the needs of women...If they had changed the cover and illustrations, it would have been similar to *Chûgaku sekai* (Middle School World, Hakubunkan's publication for male junior high schoolers)" (Kimura 1931: 253). Nevertheless, *Jogaku sekai* claimed one of the highest circulation figures among Hakubunkan's publications until after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), when it was eclipsed by rival publisher Jitsugyô no Nihonsha's *Fûjin sekai*.<sup>7</sup>

When *Fûjin sekai* appeared, it seemed to be just another mainstream women's magazine. It, too, catered to schoolgirls and young unmarried women, and showed a regard for "traditional" culture and refinement. However, approximately one year after its founding, in addition to articles that emphasized education, school life, and plans for the summer holidays, or prepared young women for married life, articles pertaining to the woman's world after marriage stood out. Particularly conspicuous was the amount of space set aside for culture and

entertainment. Even the short pieces that introduced famous families and their life styles clearly were directed towards married women. With the popular writer and gourmet Murai Gensai (1863-1927) as editor, *Fujin sekai* mirrored Murai's personal interests in popular literature, housekeeping, and food (Okano 1981: 248-49).<sup>8</sup> When Kimura described the difference between *Jogaku sekai* and *Fujin sekai*, he replied that "while *Jogaku sekai* would have been suitable reading for men, not one page in *Fujin sekai* [would have] been" (Kimura 1931: 253). The female reading public appeared to have entered a transitional stage. The abrupt shift in *Fujin sekai*'s editorial policy reflected the expansion in numbers and diversification taking place among readers.

Although *Fujin sekai* eventually was overshadowed by magazines like *Fujokai*, *Fujin kôron*, *Shufu no tomo*, and *Fujin kurabu*, critics then and now have called it "the most representative of the general magazines put out for average women during Meiji," and "a prototype for the next generation of family magazines" (Inoue 1931: 7). Generally, *Shufu no tomo* is credited with being the first magazine to set its sights on young married women as readers. In actuality, *Fujin sekai* deserves the distinction. It was precisely for this reason that *Fujin sekai* incorporated practical family-oriented articles into its schedule of regular features. Clearly, its editorial policy served as a model for Ishikawa Takemi (1887-1961), *Shufu no tomo*'s founder. (Although the general public referred to Ishikawa as "Takemi," the correct reading of his given name was Takeyoshi.)

Ishikawa defied all criticism when he chose a title for his magazine that singled out the housewife as the foundation on which to build the magazine's readership. He strongly believed that a woman's life began only after marriage. The married woman had a "mountain of things" to learn and be taught, and for Ishikawa, this was *Shufu no tomo*'s chief mission (*Shufu no Tomosha* 1967: 40-41). According to the Tokyo City Office Survey of 1922,<sup>9</sup> out of 2,000 women interviewed, 1,184 women were magazine readers, and 845 of that number read women's magazines — almost 80% of the total (Tôkyôshi Shakai Kyoku 1982: 107). In fact, the large numbers of young married women and working women who joined the ranks of women readers during the 1920s spurred the growth of the new women's magazines. From information gleaned from the readers' columns, housewives, in particular, comprised a large portion of the readers and became an indispensable factor in the tremendous rise in circulation that resulted.<sup>10</sup>

It should be pointed out, however, that because Japanese publishing companies did not make their circulation figures public, the published figures are unreliable. In 1931, *Shufu no tomo* reported a monthly circulation of 600,000 and a rate of 0.5-1% in unsold, returned magazines, *Fujin kurabu* reported 350,000 and a return rate of 25%, *Fujin kôron* 200,000 and a return rate of 15%, and *Fujin sekai* 120,000 with a 45% return rate (Minemura 1931: 26-27).

## A Turning Point in Women's Journalism

Notwithstanding the restrictions on women's education, by 1912, 97.6% of the eligible girls were enrolled in elementary school, and 208 government sponsored *jogakkō* operated throughout the country with a total of 75,128<sup>11</sup> In the tens and twenties this increase allowed increasing numbers of women to purchase magazines, and helped create the potential for a new reading public. Conscious of the marketing potential among this new readership, the editors of most newly founded women's magazines that came out in the 1910s aimed at producing mass magazines.

Over 40% of the 2,000 working women interviewed for the Tokyo City Office Survey of 1922 received a monthly salary of 26-30 yen, or approximately 60,000 yen today; the second most common salary was 31-35 yen, or approximately 70,000 yen today (Tokyo-shi Shakai Kyoku, 1982 Introduction). The average monthly income for male government employees based on figures compiled in 1921 was 96 yen and for office workers 98 yen or approximately 190,000 yen today.<sup>12</sup> Since the price of *Shufu no tomo* was 17 sen, or 0.17 yen, (340 yen today), which amounted to approximately 0.5% - 1% of a working woman's monthly salary, even women with low paying jobs probably could have afforded to purchase one magazine (*Shufu no Tomosha* 1967: 53). In fact, in January 1922, *Shufu no tomo* went so far as to become a bimonthly publication, although this policy was discontinued after only one month. Editorial difficulties were no doubt a major factor, but economics probably also played a role in this decision. (*ibid*: 39).

Acquiring mass readership meant meeting the needs and wishes of hitherto untapped readers, who would have to decide to buy and read the magazines. This in itself was an editorial challenge. Indeed, the key to an increase in readership lay in successfully wooing housewives. In an article in the March 1927 issue of *Kaizō* regarding the state of women's magazines, proletarian literature activist, and social critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1892-1931) commented:

I don't think there is another foreign country that has achieved the success Japan has in marketing women's magazines. There are a number of reasons for this, but the main reason is because of the peculiar structure of Japan's family system. In Japan a housewife's work is clearly defined in its separateness from a man's work, and it is also extremely time consuming. Consequently, the articles that make up the bulk of the magazine deal with a variety of topics like bringing up children, information related to illnesses, cooking, sewing, knitting, flower arranging and other artistic pursuits, and proper etiquette. In a country where a family system like Japan's prevails, these are the things that a housewife absolutely has to know. (Hirabayashi 1975: 70)

The initial technique for winning the support of housewives, a feat that *Shufu no tomo* deftly accomplished, involved expanding on and perfecting the family articles which, like those

carried by their predecessor, *Fujin sekai*, were subdivided into practical articles, or *jitsuyô kiji*, and fashionable, or *ryûkô kiji*. With the exception of *Fujin kôron*, in the early years of publication, all the new mass women's magazines soon followed *Shufu no tomo*'s example. Although the *katei kiji* differed slightly from publication to publication, depending on the editor's point of view, the articles shared the same purpose — to introduce housewives to useful information about home and family. Female journalist Inoue Matsuko described them in this way:

When there was a shake-up in the cabinet, events concerning government policy, or the rising and lowering of rice prices, were reported in the daily newspapers. All of these things directly or indirectly affected the home. Generally speaking, however, *katei kiji* referred to articles specifically related to a rational [*kagakuteki*] approach in the home. Of concern were the various problems that confronted the housewife in a narrow sense: economizing in the kitchen, making things by hand, entertaining, considering new trends, hairdressing, beauty tips, techniques for washing, cooking, sickness compensation, the family budget, and administering to the health needs of children (Inoue 1931: 1-2).

Although World War I coincided with the founding of *Shufu no tomo*, for example, one could easily have read the magazine unaware that a war was raging in Europe. According to one history of the journal, “the fact that only a smattering was written about the war was a conspicuous feature of the magazine” (*Shufu no Tomosha* 1967: 46).

## Practical or Jitsuyô Kiji

Historian Hirota Masaki has noted that with the publication of *Fujin sekai* for the first time articles related to the home did not fall into the conventional mold whereby a mother merely imparted information to a daughter (Hirota 1990: 255). *Shufu no tomo* took these concerns one step further. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that *Fujin sekai* set the stage, and *Shufu no tomo* performed the role. Information now meant offering advice on the latest, most up-to-date methods of homemaking. A sampling of the practical articles that appeared in the first issue of *Shufu no tomo* in March 1917 is illustrative. “Building a Convenient House on a Low Budget” (“*Anka de tateta beni na ie*”) taught the reader about the benefits of an eat-in kitchen or that if entry to a home was limited to the front hall or kitchen, locking the house would be simplified. Health related articles like “Fool-proof Home Remedy for Gastrointestinal Disorders” (“*Kanarazu naoru ichôbyô no kateiryôhō*”) were a regular feature in all the women's mass magazines, but especially frequent in *Shufu no Tomo*.

When journalist Nii Itaru commented that “There well may be large numbers of women who read women's magazines, but that doesn't necessarily mean that women have become any more intelligent,” he left no doubt that he disapproved of these magazines' contents (Nii 1931:



276).<sup>13</sup> Based on the assumption that practical articles reflected the attitude that household work was women's work, magazines that made these articles their *raison d'être*, like *Shufu no tomo*, earned a reputation among intellectuals of being ultra-conservative. In the eyes of someone like socialist Yamakawa Kikue, who called for a genderless society, the overall tone of the new mass magazines caused women to "look inward" rather than "outward" (Yamakawa 1982: 137). In Yamakawa's article titled "Discussion on the "Present State of Women's Magazines" (*Gendai fujin zasshi ron*"), she scathingly remarked:

Women are made to feel self-satisfied with their present status as slaves in the bedroom and slaves to the family. [Women] become ostentatious and hedonistic. (Yamakawa. 1982: 298)

Yamakawa went on to say:

...The *jitsuyō kiji* that are concerned with women in the home are practical articles without any practical value. And the articles on sex are nothing more than wordy descriptions about the coquettish behavior of prostitutes...Among the *jitsuyō kiji*, doctors' statements on child-rearing and caring for the sick are filled with generalities.... How frighteningly crude and unkind that no warning is given about the dangers of these articles. (Yamakawa 1982: 293-94)

Nii agreed and added that "Perhaps *jitsuyō kiji* have the potential for being useful, but what is their basis scientifically and economically" (Nii 1931: 275)? Even assuming that the *modus operandi* of the majority of women's mass magazines was based on a conservative way of thinking that presumed a fixed role for women in society, the use of family articles to introduce women to various ways of thinking unintentionally brought an opportunity for upheaval within the home. While articles such as "An Economical, Attractive Hakama for School Girls," could hardly have been inflammatory, other articles such as "Women Determine their Own Fates" could not help but be provocative. The quest for rationalization (*gōrika*) became an underlying force behind the changes taking place in women's attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after World War I the government inaugurated the Daily Life Reform Movement or *Seikatsu kaizen undō*, one of the earliest organized attempts at achieving efficiency by cutting wasteful spending and simplifying everyday living.<sup>15</sup> Directives issued by the Ministry of Education urged people to use their time wisely, discard costly irrational customs like exchanging year-end gifts, and even warned about the health dangers of eating only white rice. Although the initiative for the reforms came from the state, the authorities were aided in their efforts by two private organizations started in Tokyo and Osaka in 1920 and 1921 respectively.<sup>16</sup> As the wife of a jurist who became involved in the movement commented:

...The need for this type of research finally has been recognized. All of us living in today's world — men and women alike, regardless of occupation — have to get together and find a way to make our lives rational [*gôriteki*] and economical as quickly as possible. We must strive to eliminate the tremendous waste that pervades society and the old-fashioned life style that we have come to know....

Among the many things we should learn from the American family's life style, most important is that the housewife's duty is to make her home a happy, warm place to live. (Morishita, March 1920: 53, 55)

Thus while housewives were preached to by the state, indirect channels like mass women's magazines set the more haphazard process of thinking and reassessing values into motion.

Of course, not all the practical articles met with success just as not all things Western caught on. An early issue of *Shufu no tomo* devoted two pages to extolling the benefits of the tomato in the hope of promoting a more nutritious and balanced diet (*Shufu no tomo*, July 1918). But tomato *tempura* (deep-fried tomatoes) and tomato *udon* (noodles) never titillated the Japanese palate. Still, editorial boldness in inspiring women to try the untried, even in the kitchen, should not be underestimated. The ramifications for women were greater than the editors might have imagined.

## Fashionable Articles or Ryukô Kiji

Even more than the practical articles, the timely, fashionable features known as *ryûkô kiji*, articulated things Western. The *ryûkô kiji* acquainted readers with the latest fads in fashions, hairstyles, and accessories and even the newest dance steps. "Make-up Becoming a Housewife" (*"Shufu rashiki okeshôhô"*) (March 1917), and "How to Convert Unused Kimono into Western Style Clothing for Women" (*"Fuyô no wafuku o fujin yôfuku ni shitatekata"*) (February 1925) are two examples of the types of fashionable articles carried in *Shufu no tomo*. Other women's magazines showed a similar trend, although the titles differed slightly. *Josei's* "A Study of Women's Clothing and Hairstyles Suitable for the New Age," (*"Shin jidai ni tekiô suru fujin no fukusô to riyô [rihatsu] no kenkyû"*) (March 1923), discussed the pros and cons of Japanese dress versus Western dress, making-over outmoded clothes, and hairstyles that probably would become popular in the future. "The Popularity of the Shawl" (*"Shôru no ryûkô"*) (*Josei*, October 1927), listed various uses for the shawl and called it a symbol of "today's *modanizumu*" (modernism). Detailed, step by step diagrams instructing women how they, too, could reproduce fashionable clothing for the entire family, do their hair to look more like the stars, or dance the tango and foxtrot appeared in most of the women's mass magazines.

Photography and department stores also played a part in the spread of *ryûkô kiji*.<sup>17</sup> Photo-

graphy offered a convincing medium for introducing the *modan* lifestyle. A particularly humorous picture carried in an early issue of *Shufu no tomo* depicted a couple wearing “his and her” pajamas in a bold striped pattern. The woman was seated on an ornate velour sofa and the man stood stiffly behind her, both poker-faced, as if posing for a family portrait (*Shufu no tomo*, September 1918). Whether or not this contributed to pajama sales is not known. Nevertheless, the expanded use of photographs in women's magazines were an addition to the line drawings and painted illustrations commonly found in early twentieth century women's magazines (Inoue 1931: 202, Satô 1931: 200).

The growth of the department store also infused new life into these “fashionable articles.” By 1921, major department stores like Mitsukoshi, Matsuya, Takashimaya, Daimaru, and Isetan were in business. Here one could see first hand, and perhaps even purchase what was being written about and photographed in the magazines.<sup>18</sup> Ironically enough, since the editors' purpose in publishing these “fashionable articles” was not to create a new role for women in society, they, too, deserved the label “conservative.” Yet, like the practical articles, they also offered a perspective on everyday living that women may have desired, but had not imagined within their grasp.

## Confessional Articles or *Kokuhaku Kiji*

In addition to capitalizing on family articles, *Shufu no tomo* was the first to emphasize another ingenious technique to win over women readers. This involved the solicitation of letters and other short pieces known as confessional articles or *kokuhaku kiji* which were written by the readers themselves and later published in great number in each issue.<sup>19</sup> *Fujin kôron* adhered to a similar editorial policy in an attempt to appeal to readers. For example, *Fujin kôron* decided on a monthly theme such as “Pride or Embarrassment” (“*Hokori ka haji*”) or “Educated Women and Marital Problems” (“*Kyôyô aru fujin to kekkon nan*”) (June 1924), and then formally requested contributions from readers pertaining to those subjects. *Shufu no tomo*, in response to the profusion of letters received concerning marital difficulties and worries arising from the complicated web of Japanese-style human relations, actually inaugurated an advice column in 1923. Considering that intellectuals and famous personalities had written the earlier confessional articles, the magazines' shift in policy reflected a conscious effort to move closer to the readers. In time, editorial policies that actively sought out readers' contributions spread to almost all women's magazines. Even *Fujin sekai*, the pioneering force behind the family articles, followed *Shufu no tomo*'s example, and from 1924, the magazine sponsored roundtable discussions in which readers became the main participants (Maeda 1989: 161).

It is worth noting that among the various commercial magazines published in the 1920s, women's magazines were the first to devote space to readers' letters and confessional articles. This same practice continues today. The fact that contributions from women readers have enjoyed such popularity is related specifically to the circumstances of many Japanese women's

lives — especially women in the home. Unlike men, who used the workplace and after-work socializing as a means to develop a wide range of contacts with fellow workers and friends, women had fewer opportunities to leave the home. Being responsible for the management of the home naturally meant executing household tasks and caring for the children. Women were prohibited from making significant outside contacts not only by a lack of time, but also by societal prohibitions against such behavior. During a round-table discussion on the simplification of daily life that was held two months after the Great Earthquake, Shimanaka Yūsaku, editor of *Fujin kôron*, said that if women joined the labor force, ideally they would be able to share the burden with men in time of an emergency. But in reality, he pointed out that men were not ready to accept such a role (“Joryû shinsaigo danwakai,” 1923). A woman’s role was protecting the home, and she spent the bulk of her time there.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in rural areas the influence of women’s magazines may have loomed even greater than it did in the cities. The following letter published in *Shufu no tomo* in September 1928 describes the feelings one young woman entertained:

*Shufu no tomo* is my one and only friend. For someone like me tucked away in this mountain hamlet it is the only friend I have to teach me about all the new things going on in the world and to tell me interesting stories (Kimura 1992: 245).

In this way women’s magazines also filled the voids in the lives of some countrywomen and became part of their everyday existences.

Thus, by the early 1920s the new mass women’s magazines were reaching out to a broad stratum of women’s readers, many of whom had only the equivalent of an elementary school education. Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke said that one reason for the success of women’s magazines was that Japanese women, being less educated than men, were not intellectually prepared to read more challenging articles and probably only a few women ever read anything other than a magazine (Hirabayashi 1975: 70). Be that as it may, up to this time, most of these women, whether housewives or still unmarried, had not relied on print communication to express their hopes and disappointments nor as a major source of information. Although in 1914 the *Yomiuri shinbun* became the first national paper to include a section on women, the one page addition to the newspaper was discontinued in August of the following year.<sup>21</sup> It is not surprising that a genre that focused its energies directly on the average woman elicited a positive response from the outset. The authorities, however, exhibited a different way of thinking. As early as 1913, the government had decided that the increase in women’s magazines posed a threat to the so-called traditional morality. On April 20 of that year the Ministry of Education issued a decree to control those women’s magazines that opposed the “good wife, wise mother” philosophy. Although the sale of the February issue of *Seitô* Bluestocking and the May issue of *Jogaku sekai* both were prohibited as a result, obviously this decree was not effective.

Confessional articles, however, did more than just contribute to an increase in the number of women readers. They also effected a change in the social function of women's magazines. Needless to say, from Meiji to early Taishô, women's magazines contained a multitude of instructive articles that discussed proper everyday morality and manners. The light reading and short stories that were designed to entertain readers, as well as the practical articles, offered one-sided information furnished by women educators, critics, and intellectuals. The addition of letters and short articles written by women readers provided the opportunity for a reader's forum where a give and take of information between readers and magazines could prevail. In other words, a new balance was initiated between the readers and the media. For the woman cut off from society and isolated from other women, information garnered from readers' contributions became an indispensable source of knowledge about other women and their way of thinking.

Readers identified with the contributors, many of whom shared familiar problems and voiced familiar complaints. Emotionally, it was soothing to realize that they were not alone in their uncertainty. Slight though it may seem, women could experience a sense of release. Even women's higher school students (*jogakusei*), by virtue of their school environment, had created their own small society and formed relationships with other girls.<sup>22</sup> These young school girls already knew the special power that magazines possessed as a channel of communication among members of their age group. From the late nineteenth century several magazines for schoolgirls had provided space for the girls to write short letters about themselves under a pen name (Honda 1990: 187-88). As a result, a camaraderie or community developed among the young contributors that reflected the girls' everyday lives and the different dreams they hoped would shape their futures. It was all the more appealing for isolated young housewives to form attachments with other women through their contributions to women's magazines. These liaisons gave women an escape from the social mores that constrained their other female friendships. Literary critic Maeda Ai commented on the "personal style of communication" that was apparent in *Shufu no tomo* with the inclusion of readers' letters and confessional articles:

For housewives who had been shut up at home with no place of their own where they could communicate, personal accounts [*shuki*] provided a communication style that they could relate to easily. It was closely akin to the style of communication promoted by the advice column (Maeda 1989: 185).

By providing an opening for women to confront their problems and learn about other women's problems, mass women's magazines did contribute to the changes in women's views on love, marriage, divorce, and work. Even more significant, these women gained the courage to contemplate change. For them, women's magazines served as a practical handbook, a window from which to view the world outside their homes.<sup>23</sup>

## Love and Marriage: Editorial Bias

Because of their close connection to women's everyday lives, family articles were highly appealing. Even the confessional articles that readers submitted themselves grew out of the various problems and emotional upheavals of daily life. Despite the gradual increase of women in the work force, many middle-class women still felt pressured into staying home after marriage. It was only natural that women were drawn to family articles, advice columns, and readers' letters invariably centering around love, marriage and family problems.

For most young women, the pressing concerns besides household tasks were finding a mate and adjusting to married life in the face of the challenges posed by the Japanese family network. The gossip columns that dwelled on the romances and marital difficulties of famous people enjoyed great popularity. Using sex and racy articles succeeded as a stimulus to lure women readers and provided rich sources for women's fantasies. Readers realized that there were already women in society who did not abide by the conventional standards that governed marriage and married life.

Undeniably, women's magazines played up those aspects of Japanese life that emphasized one's social standing. In 1921, Yanagihara Byakuren, a member of the nobility, left her husband for Miyazaki Ryūsuke (1892-1971), a leading member of the Shinjinkai (New Man Society) (1918-1929), a political group established by students in the Tokyo University Faculty of Law.<sup>24</sup> As the daughter of Count Yanagihara Sekimitsu, Japan's first ambassador to China and a cousin to the Emperor Taishō, Byakuren's behavior was shocking. Byakuren "brazenly" lived openly with the man she loved. Moreover, her letter to the *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* recounted a ten-year loveless marriage to a man twenty-seven years her senior, the nouveau riche owner of a coal mine in Kyūshū. She described an emotionally repressed life at the mercy of an incorrigible womanizer.<sup>25</sup> This was followed by a rebuttal printed in *Fujin sekai* by her husband whose conduct only aroused the further curiosity of readers.<sup>26</sup>

True, in most such incidents women received the brunt of the negative publicity. This attests to the pervasiveness of the restraints placed on women for behavior that did not necessarily deserve condemnation as a social aberration (Oka 1981: 68-71). Sensational coverage foretold the media's limitless potential to capitalize on women and sex. On the other hand, publicizing these affairs put female readers in contact with a class of women whose world differed from their own, but whose marital and romantic problems struck a not unfamiliar chord. These women, held up as paragons of ideal Japanese womanhood, actually had the courage to break loose and exercise their wishes. Prompted by incidents featured on the pages of women's magazines, women seemed all the more willing to share their own experiences — the vast number of letters and articles they submitted to the magazines offers that proof.

## Conclusion

Women's mass magazines of the 1920s, with their sensational stories aimed at expanding circulation, reflected the needs and feelings of a new type of woman whose emergence coincided with significant social change. This represented a marked contrast to women's magazines of the preceding period that aimed to educate and add cultural refinement to women's lives. Just as family articles became an identifying feature of mass women's magazines when housewives joined the ranks of readers, the majority of magazines formulated editorial policies that pursued topics women could relate to and feel familiar with. This is one reason why Yamakawa Kikue's thoughts on women's liberation and the role of women in the labor movement did not take hold on a broad level as a challenge to prevailing social conventions. Yamakawa expressed displeasure that *Shufu no tomo* enjoyed such tremendous popularity "with factory girls and maids who are out-and-out members of the proletariat, and even with girls working in small businesses or on farms who are close to the proletariat" (Yamakawa 1982: 290). Yamakawa believed these young women should have been interested in socialist causes, rather than the foolish bourgeois topics carried in women's magazines.<sup>27</sup>

It may be said that although intellectuals continuously attacked the editors of women's mass magazines for their conservatism, many women readers themselves harbored a distrust of overly radical changes. That is not to say that women opposed all change. The role that family articles played in altering conventional ways of thinking attests to women's ability to make changes. In the same way, articles about the family lives and romantic liaisons of others stirred a new awareness in women that often raised their own self-image. With the growth of women's magazines and the corresponding increase in female readership, even women from conservative families, previously too timid to exert themselves in the home, recognized from stories about women in America and Europe the possibilities of other ways of life. The confessional articles various women readers wrote revealed how many of these women in their own way were ready to seize the opportunities open to them.

## NOTES

- 1 Regarding the growth of mass women's magazines, see Maeda 1989: 161.
- 2 Oka and Fujitake's arguments correspond with Matsushita Keiichi's argument in his landmark article on postwar period mass culture. *Shisō* 389, November 1956: 31-56.
- 3 Japanese scholars like Mitsuda Kiyoko and Koyama Shizuko and the Western scholar Kathleen Uno tend to see *ryōsai kenbo* not as a "traditional" concept but as an ideological construct of the Meiji government, which came about with the establishment of an educational system for women. Another path breaking example of a new direction in Japanese gender history is the work on *ryōsai kenbo* appearing in Ulrike Wöhr's research. Mitsuda 1985: 100-29; Koyama 1991; Uno 1995; Wöhr 1997.
- 4 Although the editors of the magazines were male, some positions were open to women as reporters.
- 5 Robert Bobcock points out that "Desires appear in a state of flux...They are related to sexual potentialities of the human body as this has become articulated in images, symbols and representa-

- tions in the decades since the invention of the cinema, magazines and colour photography, and above all, television. The desires of the unconscious, however, remain untamed. Bobcock 1993: 93.
- 6 On technological advancements and the growth of mass magazines see Sugimura 1931: 17-27.
  - 7 The name *Jitsugyô no Nihonsha* (Business Japan) reflected the new importance placed on business expertise following the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95).
  - 8 Murai was the author of the best-selling novel *Shokudôroku*.
  - 9 Tôkyô-shi Shakai Kyoku, ed. *Shokugyô fujin ni kansuru chôsa* taken under the name *Fujin jiritsu no michi* and reprinted in *Kindai fujin mondai meicho zenshû zokuhen*, vol.7, Nihon Tosho Sentô 1982. Hereafter cited as Tokyo City Office Survey of 1922: 107.
  - 10 For information on readers' letters in early women's magazines in Britain, see Beetham 1996, particularly Parts III and IV. Mott, though dated, still offers a detailed source on early women's magazines in the United States.
  - 11 "Joshi shogakko shûgakuritsu" and "Joshi chûtôgakkô kôtôgakkô tôkeihyô" *Meiji-ikô kyôiku bunka tôkei* (Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan chôsa rippo kôsakyoku 1957), reprinted in Ôhama and Kumakura 1989: 72-73. On early women's higher schools, see Fukuda et al. 1990 3-13.
  - 12 Chimoto 1990: 192. Also see Iwasaki 1982: 60-61.
  - 13 Yosano also expressed her disapproval of women's magazines from early on. *Yosano* 1980: 315.
  - 14 In the 1910s, articles featured in American magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* and *House Beautiful* introduced so-called "minimal houses" that were designed to simplify a woman's household tasks and give her time to get out and hold a job or do volunteer work. "Rational plans, efficient technology, and easily cleaned surfaces seemed the key." See Wright 1993: 217.
  - 15 *Kan'i seikatsu* (Simple Life), a magazine that reflected ideals for social reform advocated by Sakai Toshihiko, Ôsugi Sakae, Kôtoku Shûsui, Kamitsukasa Shôken (the magazine's publisher), and others, was published from 1906-1907. American writer Charles Wagner's book *The Simple Life* was already translated into Japanese at this time.
- Atina Grossman points out that in Germany during the Weimar Republic "The pivot of the new rationalized domestic culture was the 'modern superwoman'; a health- and nutrition-conscious consumer and socializer of children, gainfully employed, and a willing and active sex partner" Grossman 1983: 158.
- 16 The special issue of *Fujokai* (May 1918) is devoted to daily life reform; Morishita March 1920, May 1920, and July 1920, as well as Nishikawa 1920.
- The directive warning against white rice no doubt was a result of the Rice Riots (*Kome sôdô*) (1918) and the rising cost of rice. Sukemori Kinji, one of the original members of the Seikatsu Kaizen Dômeikai (1920), referred to problems related to rationalization of lifestyle dealt with by the organization in his text book *Joshi shinsahô* (Kinkôdô, 1928) that already was in its his seventieth printing at that time. See Appendix titled "Seikatsu kaizen dômeikai chôsa kettei jikô," 1-14.
- 17 Regarding the impact of photography on mass culture from the late Meiji period see Minami et al. 1965: 136-39.
  - 18 Regarding the popularity of consumer goods, see Ogi, Haga, and Maeda 1986: 78-79. Also see "Modan raifu — zadankai," 1928. On the birth of the department store, see Hatsuda 1993.
  - 19 From 1918, *Shufu no tomo* regularly solicited contributions from readers about their problems. Murakami Nobuhiko considered this a two-sided policy. Although he believed it originated in order for the magazine to lower its editorial expenses, Murakami also considered it a way for "Ishikawa [Takemi] to connect with the readers" Murakami 1978: 124.
  - 20 It has been noted that an important change in the woman's role came in Meiji with a more affluent lifestyle. See "Shôwa shoki no mura ni okeru haha yakuwari kihan no henyô — zasshi *Ie no hikari* o tôshite," *Joseigaku nenpô*, no.II November 1990. Also see Ogi, Kumakura, and Ueno 1990: 362-65.
  - 21 By 1921, other newspapers like the *Asahi*, *Kokumin*, *Jiji*, *Miyako*, *Hôchi*, and *Mainichi Evening News* followed suit and ran a woman's page. For a more detailed discussion, see Inoue 1931: 199.
  - 22 See Pflugfelder, forthcoming. Caroll Smith-Rosenberg points out that in the United States "an abundance of manuscript evidence suggests that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women routine-



ly formed emotional ties with other women. Society casually accepted such deeply felt, same-sex friendships. From at least the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries, a female world of varied and yet highly structured relationships appears to have been an essential aspect of American life. (Smith-Rosenburg 1996: 366).

- 23 Joke Hermes remarks that "Reading women's magazines, even if it is not important in itself, may still have its place or its importance in the structure of everyday routines, and thus lose its meaning while not disappearing entirely from readers' memories" (Hermes 1995: 19).
- 24 Henry Smith noted that Miyazaki was expelled from the Shinjinkai because of his liaison with Byakuren. Enchi Fumiko said that the general consensus of opinion was that Byakuren had been influenced by the socialist leanings of the Shinjinkai and that Miyazaki had been behind her open letter to the *Asahi shinbun*. See Smith 1972: 60; Enchi 1980, vol.1: 28-29; See Miyazaki's open letter to the *Tokyo Asahi*, "Yôko o sukuu no ga watakushi no gimu to Miyazaki Ryûsuke," October 23, 1921, in Uchikawa et al. 1988: 672.
- 25 "Byakuren ga otto ni ketsubetsu no tegami," in Uchikawa et al. 1998: 162.
- 26 "Denzaemon ga byakuren no ketsubetsujô ni hanron," *Tokyo nichichi shinbun*, October 24, 1921, in Uchikawa et al. 1988: 673. Also see *Fujin sekai*, December 1921, vol.16, no.12, special issue on the Byakuren incident.
- 27 Rayna Rapp and Ellen Ross ("THE 1920s Feminism/Consumerism, and Political Backlash in the United States") took a stance similar to that of Yamakawa's: "Looking at the twenties, we were struck by the contrast between the opening up of life style opportunities for some women and the weakening of feminism as an organized, political movement to transform all of "woman's condition." *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*: 59.

Miyake Yasuko chided intellectuals like Yamakawa for placing their hopes in popular women's magazines that she said were read purely for entertainment and in no way reflected the intellectual level of women. Miyake 1928: 39.

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