

ANALYZING *FUJIN SENSEN* AND *ONNA EROSU* WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN JAPAN

MUTA Kazue

Analyzing feminist magazines involves a three-step process: the first step concerns the content or discourse level; the second step deals with feminist magazines from the level of media analysis; and the third step views feminist magazines within the context of the feminist movement.

Content or Discourse Analysis

At the first level of analysis, Andrea Germer makes an excellent choice in focusing her study on the magazines, *Fujin sensen* (The Woman's Front) and *Onna erosu* (Woman Eros). Although these magazines are not well known even to Japanologists, both are important historical sources that bear witness to women's voices.

As Germer pointed out, in *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu* we find an increased awareness to the realities of everyday life, sexuality, and the body. *Fujin sensen* showed a new perspective that is not found in its predecessor, the feminist literary magazine *Seitô* (Blue Stocking) (1911-1916). *Fujin sensen* questioned the division between private and public, and even addressed issues such as menstruation in an attempt to kindle opposition to the patriarchal system.

Similar issues were raised by the second wave of feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. According to the orthodox history of feminism, the second wave of feminists realized that "the personal is political," and dealt with the issue of women's bodies in an attempt at consciousness-raising. In this respect, I am tempted to call the *Fujin sensen* feminists the long-lost sisters of the second wave of feminists. Such a view allows us to re-examine the impact and meaning of the second wave of feminism as well as the overall history of feminism. Exploring how and in what vocabulary the *Fujin sensen* feminists raised their voices on "personal matters" in the 1930s holds much interest. A more detailed analysis of feminist discourses might disclose how women in prewar Japan constructed reality and gave meaning to their personal lives and their bodies.

Fujin sensen is somewhat puzzling because of its diverse points of view. Germer pointed out *Fujin sensen*'s attempt at political correctness. A brief look at the magazine gives the impression of elitism, but some articles reveal the reality of everyday life for the lower classes. As Germer showed, articles by women like Takamura Itsue and Matsumoto Masae totally negated the family, while other articles pursued the image of an ideal family as opposed to the traditional family. The voices in *Fujin sensen* often sound mixed, if not incoherent. This

diversity may be related to the personal differences among contributors. Even so, the feminism advocated in *Fujin sensen* seems immature in comparison to that of *Onna erosu*.

Feminist Magazines from the Level of Media Analysis

The second level of analysis is concerned with women's magazines in the context of contemporary society.

Fujin sensen was not the only feminist magazine in the 1930s, just as *Onna erosu* did not stand alone in the 1970s. Where can these magazines be located in the configuration of journalism, women's voices, or the contemporary feminist movement? Where can they be located with regard to other women's media or the counterculture media? These are issues I will address in this level of analysis. Viewed within the context of other media, marked differences exist in the two magazines. When *Fujin sensen* was launched in 1930, already numerous women's magazines were being published, such as *Shufu no tomo* and *Fujin kôron*. Many were conservative journals and adhered to the *ryôsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideal that *Fujin sensen* vigorously criticized. On the one hand, there was a common link with the more conservative magazines. On the other hand, *Fujin sensen* took a stand against the authoritarian family. Even in commercial magazines like *Shufu no tomo*, however, some articles voiced antipathy to the authoritarian family. But the ideas were not expressed as political or ideological arguments. The magazines' antipathy took the form of a heart-rending story about a despondent wife, or a fortunate wife with a compassionate husband. It would be wrong to assume commercial women's magazines in pre-war Japan were devoted solely to the *ryôsai kenbo* ideology that championed traditional family values. Magazines did advocate the *ryôsai kenbo* ideology, but not always as a suppressive tool. The "good wife and mother," as she was idealized in commercial women's magazines, was a happy wife who devoted herself to her husband and children.

In this regard, *Fujin sensen* was not so different from other magazines of the period. By the same token, it also was not so distant from other social movements. As Germer clarified, *Fujin sensen* was the sister journal of *Kaihô sensen*, a magazine that maintained ties to the anarchist peasant movement and enjoyed a close relationship with activists and journalists, although one its slogans was "Down with Men!" Here, *Onna erosu* appeared different. For one, the magazine was launched when the woman's liberation (*ûman ribu*) movement was at its height in Japan. Print media by and for women flourished in the 1970s, although most publications were no more than small-scale newsletters (*minikomi*). Indeed, an analysis of these journals and *minikomi* would show a striking similarity in language and terminology. Although they comprised a minority, they created a sub-culture of which *Onna erosu* was a part. Ironically, this caused *Onna erosu* to appear isolated from contemporary society.

The inaugural message in *Onna erosu* expressed ideals that ran counter to those found in contemporary commercial women's magazines. *Onna erosu* and other *ûman-ribu* magazines

had little in common with commercial women's magazines that came out in the 1970s. The early 1970s marked a peak in the number of full-time housewives in Japan. *Ūman-ribu* represented the other side of the coin, both being a result of Japan's high economic growth. As Germer mentioned, like other aspects of the *ribu* movement, *Onna erosu* was connected to diverse social movements, championing the causes of Koreans, Okinawans, handicapped persons, and farmers who demonstrated against the Narita airport project. But the women kept their distance from male-centered movements and organizations. They were disappointed with leftist and counterculture male activists.

Both *Onna erosu* and *Fujin sensen* were minor radical feminist magazines. *Fujin sensen* was published at a time when women were more socially and politically disadvantaged than when *Onna erosu* came out. *Fujin sensen*, however, did not seem to have been any more isolated from contemporary society than *Onna erosu*. *Fujin sensen* claimed a distribution rate of 5,000 copies, while *Onna erosu* sold no more than 2,000 or 3,000 copies, with the exception of the first issue that reported sales of 20,000 copies.

Still, *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu* cannot be compared only by distribution figures. *Onna erosu*, the first nation-wide circulated feminist magazine put out in the *ūman ribu*'s era, was one among many feminist magazines and *minikomi* publications. Rather, I would like to emphasize that feminists, including those connected with *Onna erosu*, isolated themselves from the majority of women and men in other social movements by creating their own sub-culture.

Feminist Magazines as a part of the Feminist Movement in Japan

On the third level, *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu* can be examined from the vantagepoint of the history of Japan's feminist movement. What role did these magazines play in the history of feminism? What implications did they hold for present day feminism? What was, or is the state of Japanese feminism? These are some of the questions that I will concentrate on in this section. Germer's paper did an excellent job of pointing out interesting similarities and differences between the two magazines. I am most interested in the similarities and continuities as a means to consider the ramifications they held for the history of the feminist movement in Japan.

First, the themes addressed and the modes of expression applied in *Onna erosu* were extremely radical and astonishingly similar to the articles found in *Fujin sensen*. Both magazines opposed the family system and waged a fight against male domination in society. In spite of the forty-year interval, the women's voices in both magazines seemed to resonate in unison. This is not unusual if we think that perfect equality between the sexes has not been achieved in Japan, or anywhere in the world. Women today, much like the feminists in *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu*, still have a long way to go.

On the other hand, the similarities revealed the particular difficulties the feminist movement in Japan has encountered. The feminists connected with *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu*

were forced to assume radical and somewhat dogmatic stances, precisely because they could not achieve real political power. *Onna erosu* feminists lacked power, much like their predecessors who were active in *Fujin sensen*, in spite of the changes in the social system. This holds true not only for the *Onna erosu* feminists, but also for the women's movement as a whole in the 1970s. Although consciousness raising persisted and a radical mood prevailed, few women were inclined toward business and politics. They were too idealistic to exhibit such qualities. The *Onna erosu* feminists remained outside the system. They were consumed by their battle against patriarchy, a battle that assumed a significant place in regulating their daily lives. For them, opposition to women's exclusion from politics or business was of secondary importance. They were proud to stay outside the system. In fact, they never had a chance to become prime movers in the system.

Second, both *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu* repeatedly published articles on motherhood and family. Particularly striking is that *Onna erosu* printed only a few articles on work or about improving the social and financial status for women. Rather, they took up issues related to family, sexuality, and reproduction. In this regard, I cannot help but think that the timing of the second wave of feminism in Japan was unfortunate. As discussed above, the seventies brought high economic growth and ushered in the full-time housewife. Society offered few opportunities for ambitious women to develop their abilities for careers in business, politics, or in other positions concerned with the "other" world, which might be called the "real" world. Women were suffocated in the family and in society. They had yet to find a site that they could call their own.

This discussion is related to the third and last similarity between the two magazines. As Germer demonstrated, both magazines saw *Seitô* as its predecessor in the context of feminism, and it helped create a tradition of feminism. *Seitô* was launched, however, first as a literary magazine, and Hiratsuka Raichô was apolitical. As the magazine grew, *Seitô* became more political, and so did Raichô. But it continued to emphasize cultural and social matters like the issue of virginity and the family system. *Seitô*, and the so-called "new women," in contrast to the new women in the United States never achieved financial independence, as I have previously argued (Muta and Shin 1998). *Seitô* feminists were constantly struggling with the issue of the patriarchal family and could achieve little in a practical sense. *Seitô*, nevertheless, occupied a monumental position for feminists in Japan, as attested to by *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu*. It seems a bit tragic, however, that *Seitô*, which was founded in 1911, remained the most important referent or model for later feminists to rely on.

To conclude my discussion of *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu*, I would have liked to include a current feminist magazine as a further point of comparison, but, in fact, there are none. Several magazines concerned with women's studies are being published, but no magazine exists for general feminist readers except the *minikomi*. This is surprising since women's books and feminist publications have been expanding since the 1980s. Why are there no feminist magazines?

In Japan, feminism flourished in academia, but not as a social model. Clearly, it goes beyond the scope of this critique to discuss why feminists prevail in Japanese academia in spite of the lack of a feminist movement. Instead, a word about what the absence of a current feminist magazine tells us about the magazine as a form of media. A magazine depends on the interaction between the publisher and the readers. A magazine only becomes “alive” with the help of its readers, as did *Fujin sensen* and *Onna erosu*

NOTES

Muta Kazue and Jiweon Shin, “Kindai no sekushuariti no sôzô to ‘atarashii onna’,” *Shisô*, No.886, 1998: 89-115.