

THE COMPLEXITY OF SEXUALITY, AND *KUROWASSAN*

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The magazine *Kurowassan* (*Croissant*) that Barbara Holthus examines in her paper, "Sexuality, Body Images and Social Change in Japanese Women's Magazines in the 1970s and 80s," is not necessarily known as a magazine which regularly features articles related to sexuality. There are many other magazines which treat this subject more frequently, more openly, more sensationally or more seriously. The magazine *More*, for example, conducted a large scale survey about sexuality and the result was published as *Moa Ripōto: The More Report on Female Sexuality* (Shûeisha, 1983).¹ In 1990, another inquiry was held and the result was published *Moa Ripōto Now* (Shûeisha). Another women's magazine, *An-An*, sometimes features special articles on sex in a casual and fashionable way such as "Be beautiful by making love" (*Sex de Kireini Naru*) (No.1165, April 30 and May 7, 1999. A combined volume) or "Anata wa Donna Sekkusu wo shiteimasuka? Anata no Sekkusu, Tanin no Sekkusu" (How Do You Make Love? Your Sex and others' Sex) (No.1192, November 19, 1999).

Compared to these magazines, *Kurowassan* appears to have less interest in the issue of sexuality. According to Junko Matsubara, by 1988 "Osōzai" (everyday dishes) became a subject that was picked up frequently in its "Tokusyu" (special articles). The magazine carried only "unproblematic" articles on cooking, beauty, health and so on.² Today, *Kurowassan* is known as a magazine that provides a wide range of information relating to women's daily lives. The information conveys a message which encourages readers to be sophisticated, creative, and a good judge in choosing what is really valuable and useful to them. Sometimes, the implication is expressed in the phrase "Otona no" (for mature women). A recent volume features "Otona no Takka" (daily goods for mature women), advising readers to live elegantly using goods simply, but tastefully designed and of high quality. The goods featured there are mainly miscellaneous things such as soap cases or towel hangers (No.527, October 9, 1999). The volume boasts that they have selected only "really good things." Travel is another *genre* that is often taken up. Advice to "produce" their own special travel itinerary is given. For example, *Kurowassan* No.428 (September 5, 1995) carries special articles titled "Otona muki no Aki no Tabi" (Autumn Tours for Mature Women).

Although the image of *Kurowassan* today appears to question whether the magazine is the best material for doing research on sexuality, the magazine started very differently, as Holthus rightly points out. At the beginning, it published quite a few articles related to sexuality. For example, Hiroyoshi Ishikawa ran a serial titled "Sex e no Chiteki Tankyū" (Intellectual Explorations in Sex) which covered a wide range of topics, from swapping (No.1, May 1977), to masturbation (No.2, June 1977), and lesbianism (No.6, October 1977). In this serial,

Ishikawa often used the term “sexuality.” He explained in a piece titled “Ūman-Ribu no Kekkō to Sekushyariti” (Marriage and Sexuality in the Women’s Liberation Movement) that sexuality was deeply related to a person’s personality (No.5, September, 1977). The serial examined most of the topics which were questioned in the second wave of feminism in relation to sexuality.

The issue of sexuality also often appeared in articles extracted from the French magazine *Parents*. In an article titled “Sekkusū to Kotoba” (Sex and words), the importance of conversation during love making as away to increase erotic excitement was argued (No.5, September, 1977). Another article titled “Mitsugetsu wo natgtuzuki saseru tameni” (How to Make the Honeymoon Last) gave advice to married couples for avoiding boredom during sexual intercourse (No.7, November 1977).

However, as Holthus points out, it should be noted that the concept of sexuality covers broad areas and aspects. *Iwanami Kōza Gendaishakagaku 10: Sekusyuaritī no Shakaigaku* (*Iwanami Lecture on Modern Sociology 10: Sociology of Sexuality*) and *Nihon no Feminizumu 6: Sekusyuaritī* (*Feminism in Japan 6: Sexuality*) cover a wide range of topics: lesbianism, virginity, sexual harassment, rape, eating disorders, nudity, commercialization of sexuality and so on. Furthermore, sexuality contains a variety of complex dimensions. Chic Asano examines anorexia and demonstrates the complexity of the syndrome. On the one hand, young girls suffering from anorexia accept the femininity represented by “sensitivity,” “vulnerability,” and “helplessness.” In the attempt to be “feminine” women, who are attractive in the eyes of men, lose weight and try to obtain “feminine” bodies. On the other hand, a “feminine” body is also represented by roundness and glamorousness. According to Asano, girls diagnosed as anorexic reject this idea of femininity and the value of men. They try to make their bodies like boys and become desexualized. The act of eating contains very different and contradictory aspects: accepting and at the same time rejecting women’s sexuality. Asano also points out the difficulty in distinguishing a “normal” diet from a “problematic” one. The conflict about femininity and sexuality represented by the body can be concealed in every woman’s mind.³

When looking over past volumes of *Kurowassan* with this complexity in mind, I noted many descriptions and implications about sexuality that do not appear to be so at first glance, even after articles directly related to sexuality disappeared. Yoko Kirishima was one of the women who often appeared in the magazine as a new “role model” and who Junko Matsubara criticized for betraying readers by first encouraging them to stay single and later getting married herself.⁴ Kirishima was an essayist and a single mother of three children whose father was an American. Although pre-marital sex had been becoming more common, her life-style — having children without being married — was against the moral standard of the time and “sensational.”⁵

In my opinion, *Kurowassan*’s importance lies in its encouragement to women who are not young enough to be considered attractive. The attraction it pushes includes sensual attractive-

ness. In Japan, women's attractiveness tends to be attributed to youth. There is an old saying that the fresher the wives and tatami-mats, the better. There is also a phrase about "Christmas cakes" that means women over 25 are valueless just as Christmas cakes are useless after Christmas." Women over 25 were targeted as *Kurowassan's* readers. The magazine gives advice about fashion and beauty to its readers. Special articles such as "Chotto dake Bōken shite miyoka. Iropposa no Dashikata Kenkyū" (Why not be a Little Bit Adventurous? How to be Sexy (March 25, 1985), "40-sai: Utsukushisa no Kenkyū" (Forty: Pursuit of Beauty) (July 10, 1990), "Hadaka wo migaku" (Polish your Naked Bodies) (May 25, 1995) stress that middle age women can be beautiful, attractive, and sexy. Misae Abe says that it was epoch-making that the magazine printed close-up photographs, often large coloured ones, of middle aged women. Before, only young and beautiful models appeared in such photographs.⁷

Advice about diet and losing weight also has appeared once in a while. (For example, July 25, 1988, June 10, 1996). It was considered natural to put on weight when a woman became middle aged, especially after marriage and child birth. However, middle aged women are apparently more sensitive about their weight and take control over their weight more effectively than when the magazine first came out.

According to Pora Bunka Kenkyūjo's (Pola Cultural Research Institute) inquiry in 1993, *Kurowassan* was the fifth best read magazine among women aged 35 to 39, 40 to 45 and 45 to 49.⁸ The circulation of the magazine has consistently been more than 400,000.⁹ The magazine has been influential. The magazine's constant encouragement must have given readers confidence in feeling attractive, believing they have sex appeal in their 30s 40s and 50s. Thinking of the complexity of sexuality again, this advice can be ambivalent. Even middle aged women can become exploited by men's gazes. At the same time, middle aged women can have agency over their appearances and bodies. As Chizuko Ueno points out, women do not necessarily dress for the sake of men, but quite often for themselves.¹⁰

Thinking of these points, *Kurowassan* seems very good material to be analyzed about sexuality. Further development of Holthus's research is awaited.

NOTES

- 1 The next year, a report about male sexuality was published. *Moa Ripoto (2): The More Report on Male Sexuality*, Syueisha, 1984.
- 2 Matsubara Junko, *Kurowassan Shokogun Sonogo* (Croissant Syndrome: Aftermath), 1999, pp.123-124.
- 3 Asano Chic, "Zenzai-teki Syohin to shite no Shintai to Sessyoku Syogai" (Bodies as Potential Commodities and Eating Disorders" in Ebara op. cit.
- 4 Matsubara *Kurowassan Shokogun* (Croissant Syndrome).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 In Japan, many families eat cakes on Christmas eve.
- 7 Abe Misae, "Kurowassan was nani wo shitaka: Zasshi Kurowassan ga Onna tachi ni ataeta mono no Shotai" (What did Croissant give to Women), Waifu Henshubu, Anchi Kurowassan Syokogun:

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- Kekkon shinai Onnatachi no Sugao (Anti Croissant Syndrome: The Truth of Single Women), Syakai Shisô Sya, 1989, pp.30-31.
- 8 Matsubara, *Kurowassan Syokogun: Sonogo*, pp.127-8.
 - 9 Zasshi Shinbun Katarogu: 1980-1999.
 - 10 Ueno Chizuko, *Sukato no shita no Gekijo*.