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Introduction: Gender and Culture in Japan Today

Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton

During the planning, writing, and editing of this volume, gender has become a primary focus of public discussion around the world. At the time of writing, we are in the middle of a dynamic global re-consideration of gender and its relation to many different aspects of culture: public and private, global and domestic, and popular and “high” culture. Though these debates have manifested in new and intensified forms, they reflect long-standing contestations over the cultural politics of gender. The chapters to follow draw from decades of rigorous scholarship, embedded fieldwork, and the collective expertise of the community that Barbara Molony’s chapter describes emerging in 1975. In this short introduction, we will briefly sketch some developing concerns in the field that, we believe, will shape the scholarship still to come.

Aided by ever-evolving technologies of communication that carry news, updates, gossip, protest, and accusation around the world in seconds, popular understanding of the gendered behaviours, spaces, places, and identities that inform culture is at a moment of rapid expansion. In recent years, the “whisper networks” that once carried a large portion of what we know, and what we think we know, about others’ gender identities, gendered behaviours, and modes of engagement has become very public indeed, and this has significant implications for how we study gender today. At the same time, more traditional modes of tracking the operations of gender in daily life such as the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office and the World Equality Forum’s annual Gender Gap Report show slower yet significant changes in gender-related

circumstances at a population level and as global comparative statistics, respectively. This edited volume seeks to acknowledge the history of the field and begin to address seismic shifts in the wake of today's popular gender-related social movements, connecting these up with the macro trends emerging at a global level.

Shifts in the Field: Gender, Culture, and #Me Too in Japan

Since October 2017, people around the world have been sharing their experiences of gender discrimination and abuses of power on the micro-blogging site Twitter, using the phrase #MeToo. Japan's own #MeToo movement, which uses both the English language phrase and the Japanese #私 も, put the nation among the top ten users of the hashtag in the first weeks after Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano echoed activist Tarana Burke's 2006 use of the phrase, sparking the global movement (Pesek 2018). #MeToo-related tweets totalled around 60,000 over two months in Japan, the eighth largest by nation in the world according to an Asahi Shimbun study based on analysis by Crimson Hexagon (Mishima et al. 2017).

When a blogger using the name Ha-Chu accused a prominent Dentsu advertising employee of sexual harassment on 16 December 2017, the number of tweets increased by 10,000 from 17-18 December, pushing Japan to third place worldwide among nations using the hashtag. #MeToo surfaced again when opposition lawmakers held up papers bearing the slogan in the Diet before a joint hearing on allegations of sexual harassment against the Administrative Vice Finance Minister Fukuda Junichi on 20 April 2018 (Yamagishi 2018). Following the delivery of a formal letter of protest from TV Asahi News Corp to the Finance Ministry complaining about the alleged sexual harassment of a female reporter, Internal Affairs Minister and State Minister

for Gender Equality Noda Seiko announced plans to hold hearings for women working in the media to discuss sexual harassment. As the initial response to the global #MeToo movement diversified in Japan into #WithYou, a hashtag acknowledging the reluctance of victims to speak up about sexual harassment and abuse, 86 female journalists formed the Women in Media Network in May 2018, organizing to build solidarity for victims and expose perpetrators.

While aspects of the on-going conversation around #MeToo in Japan resemble the wider global discourse on the topic, certain issues and phrasing specific to Japan can shed light on the gender-related harassment issues that do not yet have a name in many other countries and languages. For example, alongside #WithYou, Japanese media coverage also includes discussion of the “black box,” the term journalist Itō Shiori has used to describe the way allegations of gendered abuses of power are boxed up and concealed from view (Itō 2017). In this respect, Japanese media discourse was ahead of the global turn to examining gender-related abuse and harassment in popular culture and everyday life. Almost five months before #MeToo began trending globally in October 2017, Itō brought the issue to national attention. Itō held a public press conference at Tokyo District Court on 29 May 2017 to announce her intention to file a petition to re-open a case against Yamaguchi Noriyuki, then the Washington Bureau chief of the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS). Itō accused Yamaguchi of drugging and sexually assaulting her on 3 April 2015 (Watanabe 2017). After viewing security footage to confirm her recollection of the events that occurred at the Sheraton Miyako Hotel in Tokyo, Itō filed a criminal complaint with Takanawa police station on 30 April 2015 (McNeill 2017). On June 8, 2015, the case was transferred to the First Section of the Metropolitan Police

Department in Tokyo and Itō was informed that a scheduled arrest warrant for Yamaguchi had been cancelled. Prosecutors dropped the charges against Yamaguchi on 22 July 2016.

When Tokyo prosecutors rejected Itō's petition to overturn the decision in 2016, she decided to go public with her case. In September 2017, the twenty-eight-year-old filed a civil lawsuit against Yamaguchi, a senior journalist with close ties to Prime Minister Abe Shinzō. Japanese and English language news outlets picked up the story almost immediately and followed Itō's case closely for a number of years (Otake et al. 2017; Watanabe 2017; Hernon 2018; Rich 2017). Yamaguchi responded to the allegations in an open letter to Itō published in the monthly magazine *Hanada* (Yamaguchi 2017), further fuelling media coverage. Japanese Twitter users' strong response to the #MeToo movement (Twitter 2018) and development of the original #WithYou response could be attributed in part to the on-going discussion of Itō's case at the time the hashtag gained popular attention around the world.

Itō alleges that a "black box" has been placed over her case, hiding the original crime, the unwillingness of law enforcement to investigate, and the prosecutors' reluctance to bring Yamaguchi to trial (Itō 2017). She argues that Japan's bureaucratic approach to the prosecution of sex-related crimes discourages victims from reporting rape and assault, much less sexual harassment and "power harassment" (a Japanese term for harassment perpetrated by those with social or political power). Despite documentary evidence, victims often report widespread unwillingness to believe their stories. For example, the TV Asahi News Corp journalist mentioned above gained the support of her employer only after circumventing internal resistance and taking her story,

complete with taped records of the conversations in question, to rival news outlet Shūkan Shinchō (Asahi Shinbun 2018). In 2014, a survey on violence against women conducted by the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (*Naikakufu danjokyōdō sankaku kyoku*) found that of 117 female respondents with experience of forced sexual activity, only 4.3 percent had contacted police (2014). In the same year, only 37.2 percent of those prosecuted for sex-related assaults were indicted. As McLaren argues in this volume, Itō's experience brings to light an entrenched culture of sexism and misogyny across the media industry that reflects Japan's wider social, legal, and political cultures. Other chapters in this volume also address the media representation of those cultures (Baudinette; Dale; Coates and Haapio-Kirk; Taylor-Jones and Thomas-Parr).

Yet as Linda Hasunuma and Ki-Young Shin argue, “backlash” both online and in print journalism has slowed the progress of the Japanese #Me Too movement to the point that South Korean #Me Too discourse, initially lagging behind, has now overtaken Japan in terms of accusations made and investigative discourse sustained (2019, 102). This would seem an appropriate junction to pick up the issue in scholarship on gender in Japan, exploring the roots of the online moment as well as its successes and failures.

More than a decade ago, *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field* (Mostow, Bryson, and Graybill 2003) raised the question of how “the cultural constructions of gender and sexuality serve the purposes of power” (Mostow 2003, 1). Following Chino Kaori's ground-breaking essay “Gender in Japanese Art” (*Nihon bijutsu no jendā*, 1993), which demonstrated that an idea of the “feminine” has been historically

appropriated by male elites, masking masculine power and its operations (Chino 2003), Joshua Mostow highlighted “the essentially gendered nature of power in Japanese cultural self-definition” (Mostow 2003, 8). The events, reportage, and responses described above underline the importance of continuing this investigation into the relations between gender and power, not only in the field of visual culture, but across public and private or domestic cultures, as well as in Japan’s legal system, educational sphere, and leisure cultures.

Today scholars and cultural commentators continue to debate the distribution of power across gendered demographics in everyday life. In 2018, for the first time, Japan rose rather than fell on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report; however, Gill Steel argues that we must move “beyond the gender gap” (2019) to understand the distribution of power relative to gender in Japanese everyday life. While Japanese women are reporting increased levels of happiness (Steel 2019, 6), Japanese men are reportedly significantly less happy, and the population overall are “fairly unhappy” (Steel 2019, 6). In order to better understand the nuanced distribution of power, happiness, aspiration, and satisfaction across the genders, this volume seeks to avoid conflating “gender” with “women,” “minority,” or “disempowered.” Instead we trace the operations of gendering across a broad range of positions, identifications, and daily life circumstances, to better understand the role of gender in Japanese culture today.

In the first chapter of this volume, Molony praises the turn to studying masculinities in Japanese studies of gender across the last quarter century, noting that while men have been the subjects of a great quantity of scholarship, they had previously been

“unmarked by gender considerations” (in relation to literary studies see also Clark and Fraser). Also in this volume, Emma Cook argues for greater nuance to our understanding of Japanese masculinities, “also interrogating the complex ways in which women co-construct and reinforce norms and ideals of masculinities.” In the organization of this volume, we have attempted to challenge any simplistic binary understandings or easy boundaries around ideas of “gender,” “culture,” and “Japan.” For this reason, our opening section contextualises overview survey chapters on gender in Japanese history with studies of groups and individuals often relegated to the sidelines of the field, or considered other in relation to an imagined basic unit of subjectivity that is then gendered male or female. Encompassing studies on transgender rights and recognition in Japan (SPF Dale), and gender and its operations in non-Japanese communities living in Japan (Jamie Coates), we have attempted to begin from a stance that acknowledges variation in experiences of gender and gendering. As we progress through the volume, ways of studying gender that account for the deeply intertwined nature of groups, individuals, and experiences often presented as separate issues are showcased in chapters such as Allison Alexy’s chapter on intimacy, and Aya Ezawa’s study of the work-life balance. We hope that this volume will contribute to a field that continues to champion difference and nuance, producing even more varied approaches to the study of gender in Japan.

The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture

The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture sketches the contours of the field. The collection features both new work and updated accounts of classic scholarship, providing a go-to reference work for contemporary scholarship on gender in Japanese culture. The volume is interdisciplinary in scope, with chapters drawing

from a range of perspectives, fields, and disciplines, including anthropology, art history, history, law, linguistics, literature, media and cultural studies, politics, and sociology. This reflects the fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of the dual focal points of this volume – gender and culture – and the ways in which these themes infuse a range of disciplines and sub-fields.

The volume brings together scholarship from Japan, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, North America, the United Kingdom, and across East Asia. From senior academics widely regarded as leaders in the field who reflect on decades of scholarship, to emerging voices bringing fresh approaches and new case studies to research on gender in Japan, we have collected a diverse range of chapters that consider key issues relating to gender in Japanese culture from a variety of enlightening perspectives. Each chapter in this volume understands gender issues as pressing in our current circumstances and recognizes that these issues are beyond the capacity of one single scholar to fully address. We hope that this volume will become part of a wider conversation on the intersections of gender and culture in Japan that considers new angles while drawing from the path breaking scholarship that has reshaped the field over the decades.

The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture is divided into five sections, structured around key themes in the study of gender. “Theorizing and Historicising Gender and Japanese Culture” opens the volume with Barbara Molony’s historiographical overview of the field of Japanese history, updating earlier accounts to include significant works published in recent years. This opening section focuses on various disciplinary and subdisciplinary approaches to gender in Japanese culture,

including approaches from pre-modern and modern history (Pandey, Moloney), cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, queer theory, and linguistics (Inoue). Individual chapters chart the emergence, recognition, and development of a range of gendered identities and positions, from feminist identities (Kano) to transgender experiences (Dale). We attempt to trouble easy boundaries, considering gender issues from a variety of embodied perspectives, from the domestic to the migrant gendered body (Jamie Coates), and from the historical to the contemporary (Cook).

The next three sections of the volume are structured around key themes that have been central to the field of gender studies over time. In “Home, Family, and the Private Sphere,” contributors explore diverse family structures and intimate relationships. Though we have divided the volume into these sections, each section necessarily addresses the others; for example, the section devoted to the “private sphere” questions what might constitute a private realm, addressing issues of intimacy (Alexy), aging (Vainio), belief (Murayama and Baffelli), and reproduction (Hertog, Yasui). The private space of the home is nonetheless subject to publicly-mandated legal imperatives, as demonstrated in David Chapman’s chapter on “Gender and the Koseki” and Manami Yasui’s study of the shift in childbirth practices from private to institutional spaces. Aya Ezawa’s contribution assesses the work-life balance that determines much of family life in contemporary Japan, demonstrating the uneasy pull between the demands of the public and private spheres experienced by many working people.

From there we move into the more explicitly public realm of work and politics, exploring the relation of gender to law (Assman), labour (Macnaughtan, Takeoka),

and migration (Hof and Liu Farrer). “Work, Politics, and the Public Sphere” includes chapters on political and social organizing, from the experiences of women in electoral politics (Dalton) to the history of gender-related activism (Schieder) and the organization of spaces and communities for lesbian and queer women (Wallace).

In “Cultures of Play: Leisure, Music, and Performance,” contributors explore the ways in which gender informs cultures of recreation, including sport (Ikeda, Benesch), music (Overell), participation in digital cultures (Coates and Haapio-Kirk) and self-presentation (Monden, King). This section leads into the final two parts of the volume, which considers representations of gender in the culture industries and their products.

“Cultural Production: Literature, Cinema, and Popular Culture” charts gender representation behind the scenes, on the page or screen, and in the audience or readership of the popular culture industries and their outputs in Japan. From literature (Clark and Fraser), poetry (Campana), anime and manga (Ting), to magazines and fashion (Joshua Dale), visual cultures (Borggreen), cinema and media (McLaren, Taylor-Jones and Thomas-Parr) and pornography (Hambleton), this section takes a broad view of gender issues and representations in the field of cultural production.

Finally, “Texts and Contexts: Case Studies” presents a series of close readings of text and genre from the perspective of gender and its related issues. From the broad overview of the field and its history presented in section one, we narrow our focus to this final set of case studies, framed as a kind of “how to” section, demonstrating the application of the knowledge presented earlier in the volume. From Fusako Innami’s

reading of the dance writing of Kawabata Yasunari against the mixture of high and low cultures characterizing the interwar period, to Isolde Standish's re-consideration of her earlier study of gender and genre in the *ninkyō* or "chivalrous" genre of Japanese gangster film (*yakuza eiga*), this section demonstrates how textual analysis sensitive to gender and its operations can reveal nuance and complexity in a variety of areas of study. Individual chapters consider militarism in Japanese anime (Sugawa-Shimada), classic figures of gendered media discourse such as the "parasite single" (Nakano), and the experiences of gay men in Tokyo's vibrant Ni-chōme nightlife area (Baudinette). We hope that these examples of close analysis of texts, genres, and anthropological fieldsites will guide students and researchers towards applying the rich historical and theoretical traditions gathered together in this volume in their own work.

Nevertheless, we have not been able to include a number of important themes and approaches in gender studies in this volume. The popularity of Murata Sayaka's novel *Konbini ningen* (2016; translated into English by Ginny Tapley Takemori as *Convenience Store Woman* in 2018) highlighted to international audiences the intersections of gender and precarity in Japanese working cultures. These themes are touched upon in this volume (e.g. Jamie Coates; Hof and Liu Farrer; Vainio), but a greater range of scholarship exists in both English and Japanese. Similarly, while we cover a range of diverse communities, there is still a need for on-going work to challenge Japanese discourses of homogeneity. Gendered responses to Japan's role as a settler colonial state in places like Okinawa and Hokkaido is also only touched upon in this volume. Other exciting takes on gender studies in the Japanese context include

food and consumption, which is being explored from a range of disciplines, and environmental and animal studies.

As our understandings of gender and gender-related issues and behaviours are changing rapidly in today's fast-moving mediascape, new resources for the teaching of gender studies and Japanese studies become ever more necessary, as do new approaches to the topic. In many areas, including Japan, the recent online activism documented in the opening paragraphs of this introduction has chimed with pre-existing reporting on gendered and sexual violence, at varying degrees of public exposure. This volume makes a timely contribution to the fields of gender studies and Japanese studies, as well as those disciplinary areas directly addressed in individual contributions. In the chapters that follow, we consider the changing landscape of gender and Japanese culture today. In doing so we hope students, researchers, and other readers will join us in challenging existing conceptions of gender and imagining new futures for the study of gender and culture in Japan and beyond.

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