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Nancy Rosenberger. *Gambling with Virtue: Japanese Women and the Search for Self in a Changing Nation.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. x + 277 pp. $26.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-2388-7; $57.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-2262-0.

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Revealing Selves

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This book seeks to identify changes in Japanese women's ideas of self over the course of three decades–the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. It examines women's relationships with their spouses, children, and other family members, as well as the relationship between their work and their sense of self. More than just a study of changes in Japanese women's lives over the latter part of the twentieth century, the book reflects on the ways in which the women themselves describe and understand their lives, their hopes, and their disappointments. It thus offers insight into the social challenges faced by Japanese women and their efforts to cope with those challenges. The book is not particularly path breaking for the specialist concerned with Japanese women, women's studies, or Japanese history, but it does offer a rich text for those new to the field.

The author, Nancy Rosenberger, is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Co-Director of the Business Anthropology Program at Oregon State University. In this book, she employs an ethnographic approach to tell the stories of the many Japanese women she met as an English teacher in the 1970s, as a researcher in the 1980s, and on her return visits to Japan in 1993 and 1998. Her own experience of Japan is thus occasionally told alongside the stories of the women she encountered. Having written previously about self-perception in Japan, Rosenberger here turns her discussion to Japanese women's particular sense of self.[1] To do this, Rosenberger conducted numerous interviews of women in Tokyo and Northeastern Japan–over four hundred in all–including women of various ages and socio-economic levels. This breadth is the most remarkable part of the book; it gives readers a glimpse into the lives of many women over the course of a generation, presenting much more than just a snapshot in time.

The book is organized into three main sections, each preceded by brief introductions or "glimpses," as she calls them, of the decades under discussion. The first section covers the 1970s, an era, Rosenberger observes, when women "reworked traditions" in the workplace and at home, but remained in many ways confined to the backstage. The second section describes the 1980s, when public discourses promoted both "individualization and diversification" in women's lives, stressing opportunities like part-time, outside-the-home work for middle-class urban women. Rosenberger shows this to be an oversimplification of the individuality actually felt and experienced by Japanese women in the 1980s. The third, largest, and best section of the book focuses on the 1990s, bringing together the various or "multiple selves" shared by women as described in the previous sections. Women in the 1990s, Rosenberger contends, were independent selves who also supported the family.

Throughout the book, Rosenberger portrays the varied ways in which Japanese women can be individualistic, thus breaking the tired stereotype of Japanese as group actors. She also offers an alternative to "western"

individualism by emphasizing that the Japanese as individual selves which she portrays succeeded in retaining and performing their individuality even while remaining "backstage," as she puts it. The delicacies of this balance between traditional role expectations and individual self-realization is reflected in the title of the book. The search for self in late twentieth-century Japan was a kind of "gamble," Rosenberger argues, but in a limited sense. The women she depicts "gambled with their virtuous feminine selves only up to a point" (p. 237). In other words, as Japanese women searched for themselves, they were not always willing to forsake their traditional selves in order to take on the new.

Although Rosenberger tries to relate the women's lives to the prevailing public discourses of the three decades under discussion, she does not do much to analyze the discourses themselves. In her introduction, she declares that "during these past three decades public discourses of media and nation have particularly targeted women as the agents of change in Japan" (p. 1). The reader must accept this premise without question, as Rosenberger merely invokes these public discourses without deeply examining or interrogating them. It is not that Rosenberger is necessarily wrong in her depiction of these discourses and their impact on the women in her book, but without direct analysis the reader is left with little against which to evaluate Rosenberger's claims. Moreover, a clear understanding of the impact of prevailing public discourses on the women in question would seem to be crucial for understanding how and why they pursued their lives as they did.

A more thorough analysis of the prevailing public discourses on women might also provide a better understanding of the metaphor of the "stage" that permeates the book. In this metaphor (derived in part from the work of sociologist Erving Goffman), the front-stage represents the area outside the home and the backstage largely concerns the area inside the home. Rosenberger theorizes that women perform a self on both a front-stage and a backstage, and that the two do not necessarily fit neatly together. Thus, "front-stage personas and backstage personalities may differ–contending, complementing, subverting, and overlapping with each other" (p. 60). But without a discussion of the particular discourses that shaped the expectations, opportunities, and experiences of the women in question, the reader glimpses only a partial view of the staging.

Rosenberger also neglects to discuss directly the relationship between broader historical changes and the life experiences of the women she interviewed. For a book that points out the differences among women between the 1970s and 1990s, this lack of a historical discussion is noteworthy. To be sure, Rosenberger mentions the rise of student groups and the women's movement in the 1970s, women's magazines and their shift in emphasis from middle-class housewives to housewife-feminists in the 1980s, the "standardization" of individuality in the 1990s, and such, but these "glimpses" into the decades in question do not amount to a full historical discussion. Rosenberger's short "glimpses" simply introduce the women she interviews as "living in a variety of circumstances and making diverse, sometimes contentious improvisations" (p. 73), a depiction whose level of abstraction is so high as to yield little concrete sense of historical context. Rosenberger would have done well to provide a clearer sense of how specific changes in Japanese society impacted the lives of the women she interviewed.

Even taken as a work of pure anthropology without historicization, however, there is room for improvement. The reader would benefit, for example, from a more forthright discussion of Rosenberger's methodology. The sheer volume of interviews is impressive, but the reader is left wondering how Rosenberger conducted her interviews. We do not know, for example, whether the text of the interviews as we read them is the process of contemporaneous recording and verbatim transcription, or note taking and later re-constitution by Rosenberger herself. To be sure, Rosenberger admits that the opening of part 1 of the book is a later re-constitution or, as she describes it, an "extended vignette," meant to illustrate what one woman's experience was like (p. 29). Parts 2 and 3 of the book, however, leave the matter open. It is thus difficult at times to distinguish between what Rosenberger actually heard during the interviews and interpretations she later drew from those interviews.

This book discusses both continuity and change in the search for self among Japanese women, a worthy topic indeed. While Rosenberger notes that women in the 1990s resisted the government's pressure to get married and raise larger families, Rosenberger also makes the important point that Japanese women–regardless of their class or social differences–excel at "performing" their gender in a way that enables them to cultivate and balance multiples selves, and that they have been doing so with ease for decades. That this performance remained an important part of Japanese women's lives in the 1990s demonstrates a significant continuity since the 1970s and, indeed, long before.

As a whole, this book makes the lives of Japanese women accessible to a broad audience. It would best be used in a class about Japanese society or Japanese women and society, or by general readers curious about the challenges faced by Japanese women over the past thirty years. What it lacks in theoretical and analytical rigor, *Gambling with Virtue* makes up for in vivid illustration.

Note

[1]. Nancy R. Rosenberger, ed., *Japanese Sense of Self* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University of Press, 1992).

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