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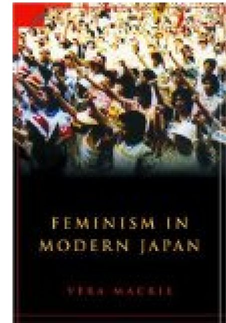
Vera Mackie. *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xiv + 293 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-82018-9; $36.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-52719-4.



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Work in Progress

This impressively researched volume, the product of more than twenty years of scholarship by Vera Mackie, a professor of history at the University of Melbourne, takes up the origins and guises of feminism in Japan between 1870 and the present. From primary sources and the work of post-World War II Japanese feminists and historians, Mackie traces the contours of Japanese feminism's prewar and postwar manifestations.

Feminism is unlikely to be the first thing that comes to mind in connection with modern Japan. Mackie's achievement is to make it seem central. She teases out the many strands of thought, practice, and activism that constitute feminism in Japan and makes them visible, explaining how they intersect with other elements of Japanese modernity, including anarchism, socialism, Christianity, imperialism, and consumerism. Transnational and social class aspects of Japanese women's struggles are also important to Mackie's vision of Japanese feminism as part of a growing international movement for women's rights and respect for their varieties of experience.

The book is comprised of ten concise, chronologically arranged chapters. A detailed glossary helps the reader keep track of the many people, organizations, and publications that fill the text. The bibliography can stand as a fairly comprehensive guide to the secondary literature on women in recent Japanese history. Undergraduates lacking background in Japanese history will probably find the book somewhat difficult, but the feminist perspective is also a valid introduction to modern Japan and one that challenges many stereotypes. Graduate courses on women's studies, gender, or modern Japan will certainly benefit from the inclusion of this highly readable text.

Whether as imperial subjects in the pre-1945 period, or as citizens in the postwar decades, the book focuses on the women who resisted the gender-specific policies intended to bend Japanese women and men to the will of the modern Japanese state. In documenting the alternatives they articulated to the constant discourse of female subordination, Mackie has written a history of "embodied practices of subjectivity" that documents how ostensibly universal policies produced differential meanings for Japanese men and women when passed through the social prism of gender.

The first four chapters after the introduction describe prewar feminism. The Meiji Civil Code eliminated Edo-era regional and class diversity in family relations, substituting instead a uniform version of samurai patriarchy under which married women were categorized with "minors and other legal 'incompetents' " (p. 23). Treated like colonial subjects, Japanese women were denied political participation, including the right to attend or speak at political meetings. But it was also during this time that women gained widespread access to education, leading to the development of suffrage associations, anti-prostitution protests, and other actions rooted in an emerging individualism that was often in an uneasy relationship with the "good wife and wise mother" ideology

that education was intended to propagate.

The generation of "new women" (chapter 3) who took the stage in late Meiji, "desired" the destruction of morals and laws "built on men's selfishness," but they did not demand it (p. 45). The feminists who established the celebrated journal *Seito* (*Bluestocking*) in 1911 and other journals were generally bourgeois literary types. In their salons they discussed women's situation as a choice between chastity and survival, debated whether individuals or the state should be the agents of social transformation, and formed groups such as the New Women's Association (1919), which enlisted the help of men to help women push for the right to participate in politics.

Despite the extensive treatment Mackie gives the early feminists, it is important to remember that the scale of their activities was small. Even when increasing numbers of unionized women workers swelled the ranks of feminist activists in the 1920s, the class and political differences between them that Mackie identifies (socialist, communist, anarchist, liberal feminist, maternal feminist) weakened their ability to influence the course of social change. Full political rights for women would only come after World War II. The period from 1930 to 1945 saw increasingly strict wartime economic and social controls combine to limit severely all forms of civil society expression. A few feminists retreated into relative isolation, while most others believed that cooperation with the state offered a way forward.

The immediate postwar period, in which women gained legal equality and political rights under the Allied Occupation and new Japanese Constitution, stands as something of a lost opportunity: The number of women elected to the Diet just after the war has not been equaled since. Following a short burst of enthusiasm for politics, Japanese women quickly turned their concerns to domestic stability, motherhood, and sexuality, including abortion. The housewives association known as *Shufuren* is cited as the representative feminist institution of this period. "The image of women marching as citizens but calling for the state to protect them suggests that the relationship between women and the state was still contradictory," writes Mackie (p. 125).

While the chapters on prewar feminism give us insights into the heroic lives and ideas of individual feminists (Hiratsuka Raicho, Yosano Akiko, and Yamakawa Kikue to name a few), individual women are comparatively less prominent in Mackie's postwar narrative than the role of laws, publications, groups, and ideologies in producing new gender consciousness and practices. This shift is necessary because, as Mackie writes, "The story of feminism in the postwar years is testament not only to the importance of such legal reforms but also to the limitations of purely legal change, unless accompanied by social, institutional, conceptual and discursive changes" (p. 136).

These changes were the objects of feminist activity in the 1970s, the decade that was perhaps postwar feminism's high water mark. It was during this period that women became "the subjects of their own struggle," suggesting the formation of a class for itself (p. 149). The proliferation of women's groups, such as *Tatakau Onna* (Fighting Women) grappled with issues as varied as sexual freedom, political economy in the context of Japan's place in the cold war, and immigrants' rights. They rejected the bifurcated view of women as either mothers or whores, and sought, instead, to elaborate a path to equality through sex that was liberated from relations of domination and subordination. Marginalization and exclusion from direct political action in the "new left" social movements convinced many of the activist women of this generation that their male compatriots lacked gender consciousness. Meeting their foreign sisters at the international feminist forums of the 1970s and 1980s, they came to see the commonalities in various forms of discrimination.

Domestically, mothers' struggles over childcare and the problems of latchkey children raised consciousness of gender discrimination among ordinary women. Mackie argues that this consciousness made these women "feminist," even if they would reject the label "housewife-feminist." The 1970s also saw an explosion of feminist publishing. The works produced included translations of feminist books from Europe and the United States as well as homegrown accounts of sexual awakening that alerted women to how deeply patriarchal norms had penetrated Japanese women's bodies. The 1970s also marked the birth of women's studies, including efforts to unearth the history of Japanese women, from which Mackie draws.

The final two chapters, "Action" and "Difference" bring the story up to the present. During the 1980s and 1990s, Japanese feminists pursued gender equality legislation at home and expanded their connections with international feminism through activities related to the International Women's Decade (1975-1985). Feminists also worked to make Japan live up to its obligations as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This required reforms to education, labor law, and family law. Ironically, the

elimination of discrimination allowed employers to do away with protections for women, such as the prohibitions against night work and excessive overtime. Feminists, who hoped that the end of workplace discrimination would bring improved working conditions to all workers, discovered instead that women who did not work like men would be categorized in ways that kept them out of full-time, regular employment. Discrimination simply became less overt.

With the 1977 formation of the Asian Women's Association, Japanese feminists began to bridge the gap with Asia caused by Japan's imperial past. Confronting Japan's imperial history made Japanese feminists aware of how the Japanese state and corporate interests were implicated in ongoing projects of domination in Asia. In taking up the concerns of migrant workers, for example, Japanese feminists had to grapple with the interplay of gender, race, and class, and in the process, began to lose their provincialism. The links between Japanese masculine domination of foreign women and the edifice of hierarchical control that made Japanese women the subjects of violence at home became clear in 1991 when stories of "militarized sexual violence" involving the so-called "comfort women" in World War II gained worldwide notoriety.

Mackie's enlightening narrative inspires the reader's sympathy for the feminist project in Japan (If only Ito Noe had lived!). Nevertheless, I wondered why "the state" was constantly used as a euphemism for masculine domination. Why sugarcoat or otherwise obscure the root of the problem? This history of Japanese feminism can also be read as a shadow history of patriarchy's changing form.

The book puts to rest many questions about the feminist past and is likely to be the standard text on the history of Japanese feminism for years to come. But it leaves the reader wondering whether Japanese feminism has a future. Japan's cadres of radical feminists are aging and housewife-feminism, while arguably widespread, seems too unconscious to achieve the feminist goal of "a form of citizenship which did not deny their embodied experiences" (p. 233). Continued progress requires each succeeding generation of women to raise their voices, yet, as Len Schoppa argues in a new book, many women are opting to silently exit the struggle for a full slate of life choices.[1] Will feminism overcome femininity? *Feminism in Modern Japan* is a guide to the first stage of a work in progress, a compelling appraisal of where Japanese women have been that makes us hope Mead was right when she insisted that small, committed groups are the only thing that has ever changed the world.

Note

[1]. Leonard Schoppa, *Race for the Exits: Unraveling Japan's System of Social Protections* (Cornell University Press, 2006).

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