



Kerry Ross. *Photography for Everyone: The Cultural Lives of Cameras and Consumers in Early Twentieth-Century Japan.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. Illustrations. 256 pp. \$26.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8047-9564-7.

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In stark contrast to the overwhelming historiographical focus on the art photography strand of the history of Japanese photography in the first decades of the twentieth century, Kerry Ross's original research into the adoption and evolution of photography in Japanese society demonstrates how Japanese photographic practices were produced through the complex interplay between middle-class consumer behavior, profit-driven camera companies, and movements to popularize photographic art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He resituates the discussion of Japanese photographic history to shift away from the overwhelming concerns with the aesthetic representation of the medium. Ross highlights a "skewed historical understanding of the social and cultural meaning of photography" in relation to the scholarship on art photography movements, because, he argues, photographic journals, magazine adverts, photographic suppliers, camera manufacturers and photographic retailers' records, and how-to and hobbyist literature in the wider archive have been overlooked (p. xiii).

Ross's study of these sources leads us to understand how photographic practices were developed and aimed at the emergent market of middle-class consumer photographers. He identifies

important factors driving the evolution of photography in Japan: the vigorous debates among photographers on the best uses of photography and the desire to "divorce photography from technology and establish it as a legitimate art form equal in status to painting." Another critical factor is art photography's evolution into pictorialism, and then into modernist aesthetic, to "express the disjuncture and alienation of urban life after the Great Kanto Earthquake" (p. 3).

Ross identifies parallel developments that helped popularize photography in the first few decades of the twentieth century and organizes them thematically into five chapters: the retail revolution led by camera shops in "A Retail Revolution: Male Shoppers and the Creation of the Modern Shop," gendered market segmentation in "Photography for Everyone: Women, Hobbyists, and Marketing Photography," the role of how-to books in democratizing photography in "Instructions for Life: How-to Literature and Hobby Photography," the birth and growth of camera clubs in "Democratizing Leisure: Camera Clubs and the Popularization of Photography," and finally the aesthetics and techniques of amateur photographs in "Making Middlebrow Photography: The Aesthetics and Craft of Amateur Photography." He concludes with an epilogue that looks at photogra-

phy consumption during and immediately after the war, from 1937 to 1945.

Ross's work reveals a whole world of overlooked actors and sources that helped shape consumer behaviors, from photographic supplies and camera retailers like Asanuma Shōkai and Konishi Roku (the forerunner of Konica), to photographic magazines, such as *Shashin Geppō*, *Shashin Shimpō*, *Kamera Kurabu*, and *Kōga*. Particularly interesting is how these actors divided their consumer photography marketing along gender lines, regarding the masculine consumer as logical, rational, and research based, and the feminine consumer as less technically inclined. These actors had tremendous influence over both consumer behavior and the way consumers were represented in their publications and marketing materials.

As avid consumers of photographic commodities and active participants in the world of shopping, men were often positioned as needing guidance in their shopping. Shopping as a masculine activity had to be rational, dispassionate, and research based. Retailers created a shopping experience that matched male shoppers' expectations. Everything from the material experience, its architecture, and layout, to its management style drew on rational, dispassionate retail strategies, using glass display cases that allowed for direct comparisons between products and a salaried workforce in Western suits that provided knowledgeable and reliable service. These tactics dovetailed seamlessly with the way marketers and commentators positioned photography and the camera as the most modern and rational of consumer technologies.

Ross introduces us to such camera companies as Asanuma Shōkai and Konishi Roku and their tremendously influential activities that shaped the photographic market through not only their photographic products supply in the early 1870s but also their manufacturing and retail of photographic equipment in the first half of the twentieth

century. They were instrumental in developing the consumer photographic market and played a critical role in transforming photography from a professional/commercial activity into something the average Japanese consumer could take part in and get better at as well by reading their publications or the magazines they supported.

Ross casts a light on the earliest efforts by both commercial and amateur photographers to create photographic societies to further the practice of the medium in Japan, as that country began its arduous path to modernization. He demonstrates how along with museums, galleries, and exhibitions, camera clubs became primary settings for the democratization of fine arts in Japan by spreading the idioms and practices of artistic expression to a much broader audience. Of particular importance here is how the structure of these common-interest societies were rehearsal spaces for democratic participation. Members became familiar with democratic structures and social participation through these new societies and clubs, which were denied to them in the larger society at the time. Ross tells us how neologisms began to be coined in this period to convey the meaning of a society sharing common interests to an association to have fun and traces the origins of these types of groups to the Edo period.

Ross zooms in primarily on the prewar decades of the twentieth century, spanning the late Meiji, all of the Taisho, and the early Showa periods. While he traces the origins of photographic practices to the early Meiji and late Edo periods, there is much less emphasis on the development of popular photographic practices of these earlier times, in part because photography was much more commercially focused, more studio based, and much less accessible to consumers.

Ross's *Photography for Everyone* is a must-read for anyone interested in the impact of industry and the adoption of state-of-the-art technology by everyday Japanese consumers at the dawn of

the twentieth century. It is also relevant to historians of photography, as it opens windows into the development of the photographic industry, and its understanding (and even grooming) of its consumers into gendered, technologically advanced, and democratic participants in the production of visual culture in the first decades of the twentieth century.

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