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Frederick/Turning Pages

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In the so-called women’s press, we find survivals, superstitions, rituals, myths and modern mythology, formulated and systemized in accordance with new (and obscure) needs; and that in the fullness of the everyday, in a direct expression of the preoccupations and aspirations of the most immediately practical kind of everyday life. Moreover, this press represents an extraordinary sociological fact, which cries out to be analysed…. What does this enormous success mean? What new need does it reveal? Is it profound or superficial, valid or spurious? What structure of consciousness does it reveal? What contents?
—Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*

In an early scene of Mizoguchi Kenji’s film *Osaka Elegy* (*Naniwa eregii*, 1936), the telephone operator heroine Ayako reads a ladies’ magazine on the job.¹ The camera cuts to a headline: “Woman Corrupted by Money.” And as the plot unfolds, some combination of the power of the magazine’s suggestion and filial piety leads her to become her boss’s mistress and catch the “delinquent girl sickness” (*furyō shōjo byō*), alienating the very family she sought to help. By establishing Ayako this way, Mizoguchi’s elegiac portrayal of the young woman tracks many of the controversies enveloping the “ladies’ magazine” (*fujin zasshi*) in interwar Japan. Cultural critics complained that reading magazine narratives, whether confessions, serialized fiction, or advertisements, would lead young women down the wrong path, causing them to imagine the previously unimaginable.² In that context, Mizoguchi’s close-up on the printed page foreshadows the inevitable downward spiral of his heroine. But in another sense, according to the logic of his story, the magazine merely reflects a world of greed and sexual objectification that already surrounds the woman and leads her to do what she does. In the final shots, she walks away with assured steps and an ambiguous facial expression, both sad and resolute; we sense that it is the very existence of the delinquent girl concept that she read about in the magazine that may ultimately allow her to move beyond the burden of her family’s expectations. Just as the 1990s saw debates over whether the blame for schoolgirl prostitution or so-called
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compensated dating (enjo kōsai) fell on the men who sought the girls out, the media portrayals of such activities, or the overly successful promotion of designer handbags, so in the 1920s women’s magazines were a focal point through which were articulated crises over consumer capitalism, gender roles, and national morality. Whatever the magazine article’s final effect on Ayako, the camera cutting to its headline reproduces the prevailing view that women’s print journalism contributed to the structure of modern Japanese life, whether as germ, symptom, or potential cure for its ailments.

From the midteens through the 1920s, an unprecedented number and variety of magazines aimed at women appeared in Japan. With them came a corresponding rise in the influence of their articles, advertisements, and images on intellectual discourse, the literary establishment, and daily life. These magazines included a wide range of publications: literary journals, organs of political movements, and popular magazines featuring fashion, beauty, or advice on household management. By the early 1920s, the ladies’ magazine had become a distinct category of publication, one that numerous cultural critics debated and in which feminine roles such as housewife (shufu), new woman (atarashii onna), or girl (shōjo) were defined. Feminists questioned those definitions even as they used this same forum to express their own views, often critical of those very categories. And writers of fiction worried that these readerships would compromise their artistic integrity even as they relied on women readers to launch or support their careers. Faced with these trends, writers, editors, and activists became self-conscious about both the potential of and the danger embedded in this emerging print culture aimed at women. They struggled to determine its political valence and critical capacity in a context where “woman” was becoming an increasingly complicated category in discussions of modernity.

This book introduces and analyzes the major women’s magazines of the late 1910s through the 1930s. It argues that these publications are central to understanding not only women’s literature and culture of the period but also the overall shape of modern Japanese literature and Japanese modernity. It also provides a methodology for analyzing this type of popular cultural material by considering together editorial aims, audience responses, and close readings of the texts themselves. It shows the ways that differences in editorial purpose and forms of financial support often transformed the way that literature was written and read, to an extent that is often overlooked in traditional literary scholarship.

Rather than give a thorough narrative history of interwar women’s magazines or use magazines as a source to explore other issues in the social history of Japan, I take a broad approach in this book, looking at different types of
contemporary periodicals and a variety of texts within them. While chosen in part because they are major publications, the three magazines discussed in depth here also demonstrate a range of relationships to mass audiences, political goals, and artistic vision. Founders of Fujin kōron (Ladies’ review, 1916–), discussed in chapter 2, expressed their aim as enlightening the modern Japanese woman by presenting her with high-quality material, including fiction, political debate, and domestic science, and avoiding as much as possible what might be seen as commercially corrupted material. Chapter 3 looks at Shufu no tomo (The housewife’s friend, 1917–), a magazine that achieved tremendous commercial success, gaining a high circulation through practical advice, popular fiction, and skillful marketing techniques. The editors of Shufu no tomo focused on providing useful information and products and on keeping readers entertained. I will look at the types of reading practices and texts that were brought together as its editors sought out as wide a range of readers as possible. Nyōnin geijutsu (Women’s arts, 1928–1932), the subject of chapter 4, was intended to publish fiction and essays by women writers and participate in leftist political activism. It also was meant as an alternative to major commercial magazines, even as its organizers sought a level of financial stability themselves. At the same time, these characterizations often break down on examination, and a great many prolific writers contributed to all three of these very different publications.

Throughout, I will look at the modes of writing and visual imagery with which periodicals represented the emergence of women into public awareness, from their presence in advertisements, fiction, and articles to the way they were interpellated as audiences.4 It would of course be possible to look more closely at either fictional material or journalistic writing published in these magazines, but this division between fiction and journalism was itself a central issue in magazine production, with editors and critics often asking whether fiction ought to be entertaining, political, or enlightening, and whether it should be visually separated from or intertwined with commercial or journalistic materials. These questions can best be considered by looking at the relationships among genres and styles of writing.

On one level, the argument of this book is simple: women’s magazines played an important role in modern Japanese culture and Japanese literature. They tell us a great deal about women’s lives. But I also want to make the larger claim that turning an analytical eye to women’s magazines can transform how we view Japanese modernity and the course of modern literature. Japanese critic Maeda Ai’s forceful argument to that effect several decades ago, which has recently appeared in English translation, makes my claim less bold than it might be. However, I take inspiration from his insight
about the unrecognized influence of the woman reader, an insight not yet fully explored despite some recent studies of aspects of women’s magazine culture by Rebecca Copeland, Joan Ericson, Barbara Satō, and Jan Bardsley that have also worked to illuminate this question from different angles. As Maeda shows, on an institutional level women’s magazines provided the primary source of income for many writers by the second half of the 1920s, and the nature of this financial support had some effect on what people wrote and which writers succeeded in the profession. Perhaps more important, in the cultural sphere, the woman reader played a key role in a number of major struggles over literary value whose influences still echo in criticism of Japanese literature today: the categories of “popular” and “pure” literature (taishū and jun bungaku), genre categories, canon formation, and the relationship between aesthetics and politics in evaluating literature. The institutional primacy of the woman’s magazine meant that it was frequently at the center of these tensions. This centrality also extends to intellectual history, where women’s magazines played a role in discussions of Japanese culture and everyday life, as has been shown in English by Harry Harootunian, Barbara Satō, and Miriam Silverberg. In particular, women’s magazines represented changes associated with Japanese modernity, including urbanization, consumer capitalism, Westernization, and transformation of gender roles; the same publications were, as we shall see, themselves products of and actors in those changes.

Maeda reveals the importance of women’s magazines primarily through close analysis of particular serialized novels in women’s magazines and debates among writers about popular literature. I turn my attention instead to the magazines themselves, both as institutions and as groups of texts (literary and otherwise), to help us understand their role as mediator between women readers and the world of cultural production. In doing so, I will expand upon Maeda’s insights on the way the content of serialized fiction reflected the looming presence of the woman reader and will think more generally about the interaction between gender and genre, including the complex ways this interplay was informed by the publishing world and may have affected both literary production and the lives of real women.

In particular, I would argue, editors choosing what to print and contributors choosing where to submit their work tended to bring certain types of fiction to the pages of women’s magazines, even as the texts found there are incredibly varied. On the whole, there is a historically situated feel to these works, perhaps because those selecting them felt the need to match text to readership by representing the present of Japanese daily life and women’s place in it. We see such choices that are affected by gender in the serialized
romance fiction in a housewife’s magazine and in both modernist and proletarian literature in a political literary journal. Because so often these works depicted the present, in a way more externalized than the interiority of the “I-novel” (watakushi shōsetsu), women’s-magazine fiction had a tendency to deal more directly with politicized topics, whether it dealt with them politically or not. Of course, male readers were also targeted according to economic class, age, region, and political affiliation; but most often the male reader was conceived of as just the reader in a more universal sense, the reader of the general-interest magazine (sōgō zasshi). In such ways, the sex of the reader and, most important, the way it was imagined had, I will argue, a strong effect on the genres, styles, and subject matter of the fiction found in women’s magazines—and, since writers relied on this venue for their livelihoods, on the landscape of Japanese fiction in general. I will show how this played out in three very different publications guided by equally different political aims.

I should note that, unlike in other recent studies of women’s literary magazines, the focus here is not on women writers or feminist articles in particular. This is largely because in many cases these were not at all the focus or primary content of these publications—something that should not be surprising to any reader of contemporary popular women’s magazines in Japan or the United States. Such texts by women will be considered as they fit into, as they do in important ways, the broader landscape of modern Japanese literature and thought during this vibrant period of print capitalism, a landscape that I argue can be well understood only with full attention to gendered categories, whether we are dealing with writings by men or women.

Again, another goal of this book is methodological. It is difficult to analyze texts that contain such a disparate set of political positions, genres, and rhetorical styles; as the Japanese word for magazine (zasshi, or broken into its two Chinese characters, zatsu and shi) suggests, they are made up of varied or miscellaneous (zatsu) writings (shi). Taken as a whole, women’s magazines provide a sweeping view of literature, culture, feminism, political events, and the daily lives of women during the period, the “fullness of the everyday” to which Lefebvre refers. At the same time, one should not assume that the texts are a “direct expression” of the desires of their readers even though they reveal so much about them. The very “fullness” and complexity of those “aspirations” and “desires” require a sensitivity to unpack and a close attention to the role of media in communicating them.

These publications pose difficulties in that they defy such standard divisions as literary criticism and history, literary studies and cultural studies, or
popular culture and literature. My goal is in part to provide a model of what a literary critic, broadly defined, might bring to such materials, whether categorized as literature proper or not. Throughout, I will consider these texts from the perspective of both their producers (editors, writers, and capital backers) and their consumers (readers and subscribers), as well as examine the media technologies themselves. The focus here is on the very “magazine-ness” of these publications: how texts are edited, how they are categorized (as fictional, polemical, confessional, personal, or expert), how advertising is presented, and how each magazine itself is promoted. I suggest that the material limitations experienced by both producers and readers of these publications affect the form and reception of their texts, be they polemical, literary, or commercial.

As collections of mixed writings, magazines are by nature self-contradictory. And from a feminist perspective, they often produce a certain ambivalence: they defined women’s roles—housewife, schoolgirl, mother—in newly restrictive ways, but they also generated new possibilities for different identities, whether through consumption of the products advertised there or by using the publications as vehicles for artistic creation or political activism. This ambivalence I will attempt to keep alive throughout my analysis, as this seems the most honest way to deal with the magazines’ contradictory content—a product of the capitalism because of which women’s magazines emerged, and after all what makes them so interesting.

The Emergence of Japanese Women’s Magazines

The circulation figures of individual magazines alone express the magnitude of the changes in reading habits among Japanese women in the 1920s. Magazines such as Shufu no tomo and Fujin kòron, discussed here, had print runs in the tens of thousands of issues when they were founded in the late 1910s. By the mid-1920s, the circulation of Shufu no tomo was over 300,000 in many months, while Fujin kòron climbed over 100,000 around 1930. Maeda Ai cites a rough calculation that 1.2 million issues in the category fujin zasshi were sold in January 1925. Figures from the government censorship office in 1927 also show the approximate total circulation for all women’s magazines to be about a million. This increase was not simply a shift in market share from one publication to another but appears to represent a tenfold rise in total periodical consumption by women. Surveys of women taken between 1920 and 1934 show that 7 percent of so-called factory girls (jokô) read newspapers and 20 percent magazines; of working women (shokugyô fujin, a term that
refers primarily to white-collar workers) 85 percent read newspapers and 75 percent read magazines during this period. Among women students (jōgakusei), the rates for both were above 90 percent. These figures suggest the importance of the interwar era for a discussion of women and mass culture in Japan. Men’s magazines also saw higher circulation figures, with newer popular magazines such as King (Kingu) appearing (in 1925). However, the category of women’s magazines accounted for the most dramatic expansion of the reading public.

This rise in women’s magazines as a part of mass culture occasions my focus on the post–World War I era, but it is worth looking at precursors to the magazines discussed here. Japanese high school textbooks and popular histories sometimes take the beginning of Japanese women’s magazines or journalism to be Seitō (Bluestocking, 1911–1916), because it was entirely run by women and was much talked about in contemporary newspapers. While this publication was important, Seitō’s originality as a ladies’ magazine is often exaggerated; several publications in the Meiji period (1868–1912) were aimed at women audiences, most famously Jogaku zasshi (Women’s education magazine, 1883–1904). Edited by Iwamoto Yoshiharu (a Christian educator), Kondō Kenzō, and Ōba Sōkichi, Jogaku zasshi aimed to raise the status of Japanese women and solicited contributions by many important thinkers, including Christian socialist reformers such as Kitamura Tōkoku and women activists such as Kishida Toshiko. As Rebecca Copeland has shown, it also provided a forum for a number of important but insufficiently studied Meiji women writers, including Wakamatsu Shizuko and Shimizu Shikin. And finally, Meiroku zasshi (Meiji six journal, 1874–1875), although not likely read by many women and having a small circulation, also disseminated debates on women’s issues, with discussions by intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yūkichi and Mori Arinori.

Although we might place the beginning of the modern ladies’ magazine in the Meiji period, it is not true that Japanese women did not read before the 1880s or had never been targeted as readers. The activity of women writers during the Edo period (1600–1868) is also usually underestimated. There were certainly many neo-Confucian texts aimed at women, and more-entertaining books often claimed to address women and children. Although not periodicals per se, some of these texts had similarities in terms of disposability and circulation that would be worth exploring in another study. There are also volumes of fictional works written by women during the seventeenth to early-nineteenth centuries, indicating that women with access to education continued to be both producers and audiences of literary works even during the periods when they had the fewest opportunities for literary
production. In the Meiji period, the “small newspapers” (koshinbun), a popular counterpart to the major or “large newspapers” (ōshinbun), were commonly read by women. Hirata Yumi has suggested that during the late 1870s and 1880s women, often geisha, regularly published letters in newspapers. She argues that their writings in feminine letter-writing style constituted a certain “woman’s voice” later lost as journalism shifted from local dialects to standardized language. After that shift, women’s literacy came to be represented, she argues, by the image of an enlightened schoolgirl or woman teacher who was tied to the state. The writing of such women, educated in standardized language and modern genbun itchi (unification of speech and writing) style, was—or was presumed to be—better suited to publications aiming at a national audience, as standardized speech was increasingly a focus of national education.

In this sense, Jogaku zasshi and other contemporary publications linked to antiprostitution and civil rights movements do provide one appropriate starting point for histories of modern Japanese women’s magazines; they constitute a shift toward creating a public space where people would discuss the position of women in the Japanese nation, and in a way that included women in their anticipated audience. However, their audiences were generally upper-class, urban men and a few women, although the frame of reference was “Japanese women.” Many encouraged (and drew readership because of) essays by male intellectuals discussing women (known as josei ron). They often argued that raising the position of women in Japan would raise Japan’s position in the world, either by making Japan part of international movements (such as suffrage or prohibition) or by incorporating the country into Western “civilization” through Christianity, education, or morality campaigns such as the antiprostitution movements. Meanwhile, standardization of national language in these journals meant that they participated in the formation of a national imaginary.

Magazines aimed at enlightening elite Meiji women were transformed into commercially successful enterprises by publishers such as Iwaya Sazanami’s Hakubunkan, which created many popular magazines for women and children, including Nihon no jogaku (Japanese women’s education, 1887–1889), Fujio zasshi (Women’s magazine, 1891–1894), and Jogaku sekai (Women’s education world, 1901–1925). These were followed by a stream of magazines, founded between the turn of the century and the end of the Meiji period in 1912, that aimed at a larger audience of upper-middle-class women. Several of these publications managed to expand their audience widely over time and still exist today, including two quite different publications, Fujin
gahō (Ladies’ pictorial, 1905–) and Fujin no tomo (Ladies’ companion, 1906–).¹⁹

Fujin gahō largely consisted of high-quality photographs and emphasized the lifestyle of elite women. Fujin no tomo, on the other hand, run by Hani Motoko, a liberal Christian woman who also started the Jiyū Gakuen school, emphasized education, rationalization of household tasks, and raising the status of women through promotion of middle-class ideals partly inspired by Christian liberal thought.²⁰ Although most cite Hiratsuka Raichō’s Seitō, in part because it seems more radical and was cause for scandal, Hani’s Fujin no tomo has the greater claim as the first major women’s magazine run by a woman. Both magazines, along with socialist publications such as Shin shin fujin (The new true woman, 1913–1923), were part of the emergence of magazines run by women in the late-Meiji period. Many factors made that possible, but most obvious are the convergence of a rise in publications aimed at women, increased education for women, and a willingness on the part of other publications to print writings by women to a sufficient degree to encourage them to pursue careers as professional fiction writers and journalists.

Still, Seitō created the greatest stir. Compared to Hani’s domestically oriented Fujin no tomo, which tended to advocate lifestyles befitting a genteel middle class, Seitō’s references to Western feminism, claims to female power (such as in Hiratsuka Raichō’s opening words in the magazine, “In the beginning woman was the sun,” in reference to the sun goddess Amaterasu, mythical progenitor of the imperial family), and representations of sexuality were more shocking to the public. The very claim that Seitō would be written entirely by women also invited attention. It is partly because of the various scandals surrounding its members that it is important for thinking about women in print culture. In Seitō’s years of publication, we see women becoming public figures because of their participation as active producers of print culture. Women’s public political activity—whether explicitly political or not—tended to be transformed into scandal and sensation throughout 1920s print journalism.

These early magazines have been well covered by books on Meiji magazines, women writers, and feminist thought.²¹ There is another whole set of studies on Seitō alone, including an excellent new volume that breathes new life into the topic with essays on such subjects as readership, visual texts, and lesbianism, issues not much discussed in the past.²² A new volume in English by Jan Bardsley provides both analysis of Seitō and translations of important selections.²³
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The present study covers the subsequent period, beginning in the late 1910s, when we can begin to talk about a broad-based mass print culture aimed at women, reflected both in the volume of publications and the general consciousness of ladies’ magazines as a category of Japanese culture and publication practice. The shift was not instantaneous but rather an accumulating quantitative shift that led to a qualitative one, such that by 1920, whether they embraced or were ambivalent about it, the producers and readers of all the publications analyzed here could not but see themselves as participants in a specific mass-marketed publishing category.

Along with the magazines discussed here—Fujiin kōron, Shufu no tomo, and Nyōnin geijutsu—there was a wide range of others during the same period. Fujiin kurabu (Ladies’ club, 1920–1945; 1946–1988) became a strong competitor to Shufu no tomo although it was not marketed so explicitly to married women. Its content tends to be more urban and fashionable than Shufu no tomo’s, with a greater percentage of articles on white-collar work, fashion, and romance; its mission statement said it was “not highbrow, and not lowbrow either, just a good-quality magazine.”24 In 1933 and 1934, Fujiin kurabu and Shufu no tomo competed fiercely and battled to produce the most appealing special issues and extra inserts to attract more readers each month.

Josei (Woman, 1922–1928) was a publication that truly celebrated modernism and the image of women in it. The magazine covers featured art nouveau and art deco depictions of women in dramatic poses. This publication and its publisher, Puratonsha (Platonic publishers), had strong ties to Osaka and the Kansai region, having offices both there and in Tokyo, and were funded by the Club cosmetic company. The writings and layout conveyed a cosmopolitan and fashionable atmosphere through visual references to and translations of European literature and culture. The magazine started out running articles on women’s issues, mostly by male intellectuals and journalists, similar to pieces in Fujiin kōron, though it had a less political stance. It carried writers with progressive and socialist views, such as feminist Kamichika Ichiko and Marxist cultural critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, along with much more conservative authors. Later, it put a greater emphasis on literary works. Some of the best-known authors published here were Tanizaki Jun’ichirō—the latter part of A Fool’s Love (Chijin no ai, translated as Naomi) was published here—Izumi Kyōka, Akutagawa Ryōnosuke, and Nagai Kafū. Later, so-called new sensational writers such as Yokomitsu Riichi published here as well.

The more countrified Ie no hikari (The light of the family, 1925–) targeted rural women and their families. With fewer photographs and less use
of color than most women’s magazines, it was reasonably priced. Its circulation reached 100,000 copies by 1931, one million by 1935, and in 1949, it began distribution to Japanese immigrants in Brazil.\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ie no hikari} provided practical information on farming, illnesses, and child rearing, along with serialized fiction, but it also printed essays by major intellectuals interested in rural life such as Yanagida Kunio.\textsuperscript{26} The reprints of this magazine would be worth a study in their own right for the insight they give into rural life in Japan.

Many magazines were devoted to more specialized topics, such as the little-known \textit{Japanese Business Girls}, aimed at English-language typists, or the organs of political groups such as \textit{Fusen} (Female suffrage), connected to Ichikawa Fusae’s female suffrage organization, \textit{Fusen kakutoku dōmei}.\textsuperscript{27} Many writers and groups of writers also published literary journals and pamphlets on a smaller scale. For example, writer Yoshiya Nobuko produced her own “pamphlet” \textit{Kuroshōbi} (Black rose, January–August 1925). She chose to call it a pamphlet (\textit{panfuretto}) rather than a magazine so that it would not be subject to the same print journalism censorship regulations as magazines.\textsuperscript{28} Uno Chiyo’s ambitious fashion magazine \textit{Sutairu} (Style) started in 1936.\textsuperscript{29} Many of these might be considered precursors to today’s important Japanese publication category of “minicommunications” (\textit{mini kami}).

Thankfully, the Fuji Publishing Company has reprinted many of these smaller-run publications and made them increasingly available to researchers. Unfortunately, longer-running popular women’s magazines such as \textit{Shufu no tomo} and \textit{Fujin kōron} discussed here are too expensive to reprint in full and are difficult to find outside publishers’ libraries and the National Diet Library. They usually were not purchased by academic libraries in Japan, and only a handful of issues of these publications can be found in North American libraries. My effort here is to introduce several major publications in detail rather than providing a survey, but there is clearly a rich body of material available for further study.

\textbf{Print Technology, Publishing, and Entertainment Media}

What was happening in the interwar period such that so many women’s magazines could emerge and gain such importance and success? Several related factors came together at once to make national commercial magazines possible: changes in print technology and distribution in the publishing industry, changes in the economic and institutional structure of society that affected both women and print culture, and an increasing interest in women’s
issues as culturally important. When these factors, the perceived need for women to read more and enlighten themselves, and the sociological factors of education, labor, print technology, and urban life all came together, Japan saw its explosion of women’s magazines.

Although there had been a lively commercial print culture in the Edo period, the scale of publishing increased markedly during the Meiji and early Taishō (1912–1926) eras. The first newspapers produced by metallic movable type were published in the 1870s, but only ten years later did the technology become widespread and begin to expand distribution beyond the possibilities of woodblock printing. Around 1887 postal systems became efficient enough to distribute mass-produced reading materials on a larger scale, and changes in the postal classifications for periodicals allowed magazines to be sent nationwide at a much lower price. This wider distribution enabled broader professionalization of authors and journalists by the turn of the century, such that the leading writers came to be called a “new element of society.”

In the early 1920s, women’s magazines, especially Shufu no tomo, were at the cutting edge in terms of printing techniques. A history of magazine advertising suggests that women’s magazines in general and Shufu no tomo in particular were the most important in this area; for example, Shufu no tomo was one of the first to have both the front and back cover printed on the same high-quality paper and using the same number of colors, a practice that allowed for a high-end advertisement on the back cover. Along with magazines, two important developments in publishing were the mass-produced anthology (zenshū) and the one-yen book (enpon). The former collected major works of individual authors, characteristic works of particular genres, or canonical writings, as in the Anthology of Contemporary Japanese Literature, whose selection and marketing Edward Mack has analyzed in depth. One-yen books marketed fiction and nonfiction in low-priced formats, mass produced on a large scale. Many critics in the 1920s suggested that women’s magazines played a similar role among women as did the enpon among men: they were mass-produced objects that might be disposed of after reading.

Gender too became a key category in the marketing of fiction. Magazine categorizations of texts played a part in shaping the definition of literature and the place of gender (of both audience and writer) in determining the value and publication of certain writings. For example, Rebecca Copeland’s analysis of Jogaku zasshi’s red-and-white covers—marking the intended readerships of different issues—and of the layout of the “Keishū sakka” (Lady writer) issue of Bungei kurabu (Literary club) demonstrates the importance of such layout in Meiji literature and the reception of women writers at the
Production and Consumption of Women’s Magazines

As we shall see, these practices continued particularly in the late 1910s in Fujin kōron, which also divided types of texts and printed special female writers editions. In the 1920s, such decisions became both more elaborate and less binary as commercial periodical publishers sought to create more diversified offerings to increase sales among readers of different genders, classes, ages, and regional status. Interestingly, they still found the category of ladies’ magazine useful to do this.

The simultaneous development of other forms of media was also important to the success and nature of women’s magazines. The emergence of film and radio enlivened Japan’s culture industry and of course played a part in shaping ideas about the relationship between mass-produced entertainment technologies and audiences—a relationship that was usually gendered. Radio broadcasts began in 1924. Film technology came to Japan soon after it was developed, with Edison’s Kinescope arriving in 1896 and the Lumière Cinematograph soon after. A large number of production companies emerged in the 1920s, and moviegoing became a part of everyday life and leisure culture. Just as certain types of magazine articles (such as “confessions” and “true stories”) and works of serialized fiction came to be closely associated with female audiences, over the course of the 1920s women were increasingly seen as the major audience for cinema, and genre films aimed at them increased in number. Together these new media forms interacted with the growing numbers of urban women to produce a strong awareness of women as an audience for mass culture.

Furthermore, the coexistence of these different media also encouraged a competition for visual prominence that raised the number of both visual materials and sensory-oriented writing in magazines. Magazines became a forum for radio- and film-related texts, such as radio dramas (or novels that would be adapted into that format) and stills, scenarios, and features on the everyday life of film actors. Those trends no doubt improved the appeal of the magazines themselves and increased their importance in women’s culture. Print technology had its influences on the visual qualities of magazines as well, and in the late 1920s technological advances allowed for a larger number of photographs of higher quality at a lower price. The popularity of film and radio meant that magazines were at the same time motivated to increase their appeal to the senses in order to compete, and their increasingly brightly colored covers, graphic design, and photo spreads made them all the more alluring. For example, a recent study of the popular magazine King (Kingu, 1925–1957), argues for the importance of the radio era and the talkie in forming the visual and rhetorical style of this very successful general-interest magazine. During the 1920s a critic made the same connection,
comparing efforts to draw audiences to popular film via an “encyclopedic, department-store-like” profusion of genres and styles to the sales efforts of thick periodicals such as *King.*

Women and Modern Life

Where did these audiences of women come from? The most common image of the 1920s Japanese woman is the “modern girl” in Western dress and cloche hat walking the urban street, going to the moving pictures, or riding the ever-expanding network of trains and streetcars. Such a woman appears in a 1929 cartoon titled “Where Will Women’s Magazines Lead Them?” (figure 1). The woman would be instantly recognizable as a modern girl, given her short skirt and bobbed hair, and the signposts represent much of what was negatively associated with the modern urban woman. The directional arrows list people, events, and moods linked with the bad influence of women’s magazines: secret hotels, dancing, encouraging adultery, encouraging vanity, Valentino, cosmetics, unwed pregnancy, illnesses of the uterus, and the names of a number of individual fiction writers and women reporters associated with women’s magazines and adultery scandals, including author Yamada Junko’s relationships with artist Takehisa Yumeji and writer Tokuda Shûsei, and newspaper reporter Nakahira Fumiko’s “Paris love triangle” that resulted in her husband’s attempting to shoot her. The admonitions clearly apply to more than just the reading material: they represent a number of anxieties about gender and modern life, namely, women’s sexual desire and promiscuity (especially married women’s) and the relationship of such behaviors to the writing and reading of fiction. While actual women looking like the one depicted here were very much in the minority, they stood for much wider ranging transformations in Japanese society, and real changes in the life courses of many women were certainly a major factor in creating a market for women’s magazines. Meanwhile, the perception that there were new ways of living and that those were important—whether as positive or dangerous trends—provided much of the motivation for and content of those magazines. Thus, we must consider some of the actual transformations in women’s lives as well as the imagined importance to the culture of new subjectivities and practices of women—and women readers—in the interwar period.

Women in large numbers moved to the cities, sometimes with parents, siblings, or spouses but often on their own. They frequently supported themselves and even family back in the countryside through their labor, commonly in manufacturing. From the turn of the century, women comprised about 80 percent of the workers in textile factories, arguably the cornerstone of Japanese
economic growth. During World War I in particular, there was a high demand for Japanese textiles, and many women workers were hired through contracts whereby salaries were prepaid to their parents, usually poorer farm families. The working conditions were tough; factories ran two twelve-hour shifts per day, and the women lived in crowded, tuberculous dormitories. Certainly, many had no leisure time to read magazines or otherwise participate in such urban entertainments as moviegoing and shopping, but surveys show that 20–40 percent of women factory workers did in fact read magazines, often shared in the dormitories and factory lounges. Moreover, although they were paid low wages, for some the separation from direct parental supervision allowed greater freedom in how they spent what money they had.

Many middle-class women also entered newer jobs in the service industry and urban offices. This category of women increased steadily as the white-collar sector and retail industries grew during the 1910s and 1920s. This trend created new sorts of occupations such as English-language typists, elevator girls and mannequins for department stores, switchboard operators, and even “gasoline girls” (gasorin gāru). Women in these occupations often lived away from family before marriage, especially if they moved to the city from elsewhere. Anecdotes in magazines themselves suggest that they read magazines and books at home, on the job (although one survey respondent complained that women were allowed to smoke or apply makeup but not read during breaks at her office), and while commuting by train or trolley. Most women’s magazine publishers put out special issues, series, and book publications on occupations for women; these often contained valuable details for women seeking employment—about salaries, necessary training, and methods for procuring these jobs; clearly, editors thought readers were interested in such labor. These same women sometimes continued working even after marriage, and in any case often continued to read periodicals. Some editors specifically conceived of articles on domestic management for housewives living away from the extended family who might formerly have taught them such skills.

Along with these sociological (if not neutral) categories of working women were the more scandalous feminine images of the era, most famously the “modern girl” or moga analyzed in some detail by Miriam Silverberg and Barbara Satō. This flapper-like figure was very much a media phenomenon, as we have already seen in the cartoon, although she had as her referent real women, especially those who wore particularly outlandish Western clothing, employed certain kinds of heavy makeup, and used rough or masculine speech. The modern girl was joined as an object of scandal by the so-called delinquent girl (fūryū shōjo), the counterpart of the male delinquent boy. As
mentioned earlier, many criticisms of women’s magazines blamed them for creating, fostering, or catering to problem women. What role magazines did play in these trends is complex, but it is clear that just as women’s magazines increasingly provided guides to or admonitions about life in the city, they also played a part in making that life what it was. If women’s magazines emerged from a market created by social changes, they also became agents of those changes by representing new identities, aspirations, and fears associated with the lives of modern women.

Along with transformations in the working lives of women, the success of women’s magazines was conditioned by changes in compulsory education and increasing numbers of women attending school. The Secondary Girls’ School Act, passed in 1899, required that prefectures provide girls’ higher schools (kōtō jogakkō), and by 1907 the compulsory education for boys and girls was determined at six years of elementary schools, although there were both noncompliance and a lack of sufficient schools.44 But as a result of economic factors and further government initiatives in 1918, the number of girls’ higher schools tripled again between 1918 and 1928; the younger readers of the magazines analyzed in depth here would have been educated during that period.45 The 10 percent of the high school–age population who enrolled in the higher schools, along with the large group that had attended elementary school, provided a large potential readership. Although there were few women in universities even in the late 1920s, publications such as Shufu no tomo were designed to be readable by elementary school graduates and, as was common, included phonetic readings for all kanji (Chinese characters) in parallel text (sō rubi), making reading less difficult.46 Women’s magazines also creatively combined visual and written text to make reading easier. We see that magazines did not simply appear as a result of the increase in education and literacy level, but actively participated in fostering that audience and its reading ability.

Similarly, magazines both were enabled by and enabled the expansion of consumer capitalism, retailers, and advertising. The growth of women’s magazine circulation paralleled that of the advertising industry. For example, the advertising research groups at Waseda University and Meiji University started in 1918 and 1920, and in 1925 Mannensha began publishing Kōkoku nenkan (Advertiser’s annual), a journal of statistics and information on advertising. Advertising agencies began appearing about 1910 and slowly grew in complexity. Their main activities were to buy blocks of space in various publications, sell this space to advertisers, and act as advisers to advertisers.47 It was in this capacity that they began to offer advice on the character of publications and their suitability for particular advertisers, and
while this sort of research was less sophisticated than it is today, it did allow for a strong relationship between the new magazines and eager advertisers.

The rise of the middle-class family brought with it new sets of perceived needs for home products and leisure goods. The department store became a major symbol of this aspect of urban life. Magazines themselves became one of those products and provided a major forum for the increasingly organized advertising industry. As many have noted, a key concept in the understanding of consumption in this period is “cultured life” (bunka seikatsu). References to the cultured life at first appear in theoretical treatises by cultural critics describing what life should be, but increasingly the term denoted a lifestyle to which all middle-class couples had access, characterized by rationalized architecture and appliances, often—but not necessarily—Western or Americanized.

The casual lifestyle of Jōji and Naomi in Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s A Fool’s Love (or Naomi) is the classic fictional example of the cultured life: we note their Western house, lack of maid, frequent use of take-out meals and other urban conveniences, and interest in privacy. But the term came to refer broadly to many aspects of modern life and sets of products that were advertised under its name. As Minami Hiroshi has argued in his seminal work on Taishō culture, the term “culture” (bunka) was also a key word for both the state and conservative public intellectuals who saw the concept, along with shumi (a difficult-to-translate concept that includes leisure, entertainment, taste, and hobbies), as a safer, less political goal for the middle class than the Meiji era’s “civilization” (bunmei). Culture should be promoted, many argued, through both the fine arts and the improvement (kōjō) of the lower reaches of mass culture. The improvement of women’s culture, like Meiji civilization, was essential to improving the nation, but this was often seen in negative terms: the lowest common denominator of popular culture—women’s consumer culture—must be improved if Japan was to avoid social decay.

Magazines, then, had a particularly interesting relationship to that concept of culture, because their content could, on the one hand, be seen as fostering the best side of the cultured life. This lifestyle could be seen as stable and rational, and women’s magazines as a way to participate in its improvement. Although they were profit-oriented, each commercial magazine discussed here also had in its mission statement an appeal to this idea of improving what women read or improving their daily lives through modernization and rationalization. On the other hand, as the “Where Will Women’s Magazines Lead Them?” cartoon and Tanizaki’s novel suggest, this proliferation of products and the new identities associated with them could be threatening. Moreover, in both instances it is a female figure—the woman reader, consumer, and sexual being—who represents the most
anxiety-producing aspects of this lifestyle; we will see women’s magazine texts representing various perspectives on this tension.

As should be clear, this study is influenced by recent work in both literary and historical studies that seeks to reevaluate the place of women and gender in the categories of “modernism” and “modernity” and that has begun to show the ways in which the stories of modernity and modernism can look quite different when, to borrow the title of a recent volume on the subject, “women’s experience of modernity” is taken into account. In particular, the relationship between the “high art” associations of literary modernism (or the hard social-scientific connotations of “modernization”) and everyday life quickly transform themselves when the story is retold from the perspective of female subjects. Interestingly, in some respects women have long been a salient feature in studies of Japanese modernity. This is in part due to the attention that major social scientists and cultural critics in the interwar era paid to the changes in women’s lives as they related to broader social transformation. Through the studies by Harry Harootunian, Miriam Silverberg, and Barbara Satō, we see the ways that such thinkers as Aono Suekichi, Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, and Kon Wajirō saw the effect of capitalism and mass culture on women’s lives as central to Japan’s understanding of its own modernity and national culture.

Seen as representative of a whole range of potential and actual changes in society, “woman” was asked to stand for a great deal. In the context of nineteenth-century Europe, Andreas Huyssen notes that “a specific traditional male image of woman served as a receptacle for all kinds of projections, displaced fears, and anxieties (both personal and political), which were brought about by modernization and the new social conflicts.” As Rita Felski has argued, conceptions of “authentic femininity . . . positioned woman as an ineffable Other beyond the bounds of a masculine social and symbolic order.” In this context, women become the Other for a set of modern discourses that “obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the private realm of male activities.” These often contradictory attempts to use woman both as a receptacle for tradition and a symbol of mass culture can also be observed in Japan.

Contributors to women’s magazines, and intellectuals in general, often used the term “woman” to stand for other issues they discussed: either as a symbol of traditional Japaneseness or, in the case of the new woman and modern girl, as emblems of how much was really changing. As Sharon Sievers has noted, women served as a “repository of the past” for many intellectuals, a stabilizing imaginary in the face of change.
time, the radical transformations in the lifestyles of so many women as they moved to urban areas and worked in modern jobs in offices and factories necessitated a complete reimagining of that very category of “woman” for it to acquire any meaning. This is also one of the insights of Joan Ericson’s work on women’s writing and its categorization as joryū bungaku (women’s-style writing): at the same time that women became more active in modern literature, there seemed to be a need for a stabilizing category to define their writing in terms of femininity. Thus the modernist style of Hayashi Fumiko’s Diary of a Vagabond (Hōrōki, 1928) is often defined by critics in terms of femininity rather than modernism.58 Journalists’ interest in modern women’s culture also often constituted a metonymic usage of women to represent the ills of modern consumer society and mass culture. And in the context of non-Western modernity, these changes were often represented as Westernization, with the changes in women’s fashion and appearance standing in for a discussion of the influence of Western culture. This tendency often seems self-contradictory, with Westernization (and Americanization) simultaneously used to represent improved, rationalized domesticity and bad influences on women, as creators of the modern girl, new woman, and delinquent girl.59

Women’s Magazines and Approaches to Popular Culture

Despite some assumptions one might have about a book about magazines, and women’s magazines in particular, this is not a book about popular culture. More properly, such wording alone fails utterly to capture the controversial nature of such a concept as “popular” in interwar Japan. Nothing would more have horrified some of the journalists, editors, and fiction writers whom I will examine than to have their work labeled with any of the many Japanese terms translatable as “popular” or as “mass” culture, while at the same time at least one considered it her life’s work to deserve that title.60 Women’s magazines were as much part of defining what John Guillory has analyzed as the “cultural capital” of literature as they were part of popular culture. In the 1920s and 1930s, print culture in general, including the broader range of literary journals, intellectual magazines, and popular magazines, along with enpon discount books and zenshū collections, played the central role in determining literary value.61 As I examine the narrower topic of women’s magazines, the broader issues at hand are those surrounding the creation of the now-familiar categories of mass (taishū) and pure (jun) literature, as they came to be known in Japanese literary criticism, and the broader effects of the emerging mass cultural forms in the interwar era on Japanese culture
more generally. The relationship between gender and those categories was important but not simple.

In literary studies, there has been increased attention to the role of print culture and mass culture in the history of modern literature and literary modernism. It is now common for studies of modern literature to gesture to the role print culture played in its emergence; they seldom fail to mention the roles of magazine and newspaper distribution, serialization, and expanding readership. Too often, however, these honorable mentions remain only that, seldom examining that print media itself: the way such publications are put together, the concerns of editors who put them together, the type of people who read them. Recent exceptions in criticism of Japanese literature have tended to focus—and usefully so—on the role of mass culture in the thematic and formal qualities of modernist fiction writers. I will do the same, but my emphasis is instead on the world of print culture itself.

In a broader sense, it is worth remembering that we tend to make value judgments of literature that stem in some way from the work’s context and audience, even when that is not the primary focus of our criticism. How we might think about these relationships without being deterministic is a concern of this study. In considering literature in the context of categories such as “popular culture,” it is important not simply to think of literature as a set of options from among the open marketplace but also to seek other ways of looking at the range of literary expression and its interaction with politics and the real lives of readers—something that can be seen in part through its modes of dissemination.

As mentioned earlier, women’s magazines were an important forum for modern Japanese literature. Much critically acclaimed fiction by famous authors may be found serialized in women’s magazines: Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s *A Fool’s Love* and *The Makioka Sisters* (*Sasameyuki*), Satō Haruo’s *Melancholy in the City* (*Tokai no yū’utsu*), Hayashi Fumiko’s *Diary of a Vagabond*, and Kawabata Yasunari’s *The Izu Dancer* (*Izu no odoriko*) to name only a few. The origin of many of these famous works in women’s magazines is often forgotten, and recalling it can lend insight to their critical reception. At the same time, to attempt to lend respectability to this topic via a list of names is as problematic as it is necessary. Both works accepted as great and others less acclaimed make women’s periodicals important to modern literary criticism, as they all coexisted when pure fiction and popular literature—marked by such terms as *tsūzoku shōsetsu* (commonplace fiction, novels of manners) and *taishū bungaku* (mass or popular fiction)—were emerging. As Seiji Lippit discusses, the discourses on the Japanese I-novel theorized in the same period were “part of an attempt to define a ‘pure’ literature, which meant excluding...
both political issues and mass culture. Women readers were crucial to both of these exclusions. They were important to an understanding of what mass culture and popular literature meant, of course, because they were the most rapidly growing audience for it. But also—and this is easily forgotten—many writers, intellectuals, and publishers defined high-quality modern literature based in part on what was printed in magazines such as Fujin kōron because that magazine attempted and claimed to determine good literature for women readers. Works by women also had a complex relationship to the I-novel because they were so often taken to be autobiographical romans à clef and valued when they expressed, as Joan Ericsen has shown, a certain “womanliness” based on personal experience. And yet, such works by women are not usually marked as part of the I-novel tradition.

Women’s magazines also help us to think about this moment in the separation between literature and both popularity and politics. First of all, since women as a group became a focal point for thinking about the nature of modernity and its effect on culture, literature aimed at women (whether by its authors or the editors who chose to place it in publications with various expressions for “women” in the title) became invested with ideological significance. Even Kobayashi Hideo, often derogatory about ideological criticisms of literature, waxed moralistic on the fiction of the popular woman writer Yoshiya Nobuko and its inappropriateness for girls—and this when reviewing a novel aimed at adult women. Second, as with any form of commercial publication, women’s magazines brought together and revealed with particular salience the relationship between literary texts and consumer capitalism. The choice of which novels to serialize was affected, though never in simple ways, by financial concerns. Publishers might try to attract readers by choosing a popular author or novel with an alluring title, by avoiding or cutting works to avoid the financial disaster of postpublication censorship, or by formatting to combat accusations of commercialism in favor of an image of literary cultural capital. These manipulations become most apparent when we look at works in their context of publication, editorial business practices, and accompanying texts. Writers too showed ambivalence about the new professionalism or commercialism associated with their efforts, but at the same time were impressed with their ability to affect large audiences. As Maeda Ai argued, women’s magazines, in part because of the big sums they paid, brought authors, sometimes unwittingly, into the debates on the effects of the “popularization” of literature. By the late 1920s, intense arguments on the political role of art, surrounding but not limited to the proletarian literature movement and women writers and readers, played an important part in this discussion. The role of feminism and other political movements in
the work of women writers, along with the role of the woman factory or office worker as reader and writer, became central to questioning the relationship among reading, art, and activism.

In looking at consumer culture aimed at women, women’s studies has sometimes worked to revalorize the study of women’s popular culture, formerly denigrated as lowbrow or sentimental. In their less subtle manifestations, however, such criticisms unwittingly associate the popular with the feminine without historicizing that relationship. In other cases, they imply that the cultural history of gender can be found only in this realm, reinscribing the links between modern womanhood, mass culture, and popular literature, often without questioning these assumptions. Other scholars discuss the intellectual history of women’s issues, feminism, or women authors through their “important” and “serious” discourses, preselected through such publishing practices as anthology and translation. While this is done out of convenience, it makes it difficult not only to contextualize those materials but also to see why they have been selected in the first place. Focusing on publishing itself thus helps reveal the values of editors in the past and scholars in the present.

The false binary between political action and consumption has also been thoroughly criticized. There are not only moments when readers resist a reading that is intended, but also where even a dominant reading might inspire political action that goes against it. Rita Felski ascribes a potential to fiction often dismissed as “melodramatic” or “escapist,” pointing out that although there are “problems underlying any…automatic equation of the popular with the transgressive,” “the politics of escapist forms is more complex than many critics have allowed, in that their negation of the everyday may hold a powerful appeal for disenfranchised groups.” Nan Enstad has shown some of the complex ways that reading popular novels enabled the participation of working-class women in labor movements in the United States. She clarifies that this is not an inherent property of the reading material itself, a stance that “would be to ascribe to popular culture objects a particular capacity for action and render working women passive.” It is rather that in some cases such fiction may provide some “utopian hope” necessary for political action in that, for instance, “a walkout is in part an imaginative process of coming to identify oneself as a striker as one takes dramatic public action.”

Many of the mass-produced materials for women had potential to inspire utopian hope in some of their readers, whether in the form of intensified outrage at the exploitation of factory girls, identification with same-sex love, or affirmation of feminine culture—any of which might or might not have been politically inspiring for any given reader. The fact that so many contemporary Japanese feminists have turned to this period for inspiration
no doubt indicates this potential. But in the lively magazine culture, such opportunities, of understanding and imagining beyond everyday life, did not necessarily trump political and economic realities. Mizoguchi’s film character Ayako and her counterparts could not so easily avoid economic obstacles, and the same print culture that might provide imaginative alternatives did foster new “needs” that might not benefit them, as well as new names to berate those who did not adopt them properly—moga (modern girl), fiuryō (delinquent)—or to praise those who needed in the right ways—shufu (housewife), chûryû fujin (middle-class lady).

By considering several magazines that intentionally but quite differently positioned themselves within the relationships among commercial goals, interests of women readers, and political action, I seek to shift attention from shallow questions about the lack or presence of potential for resistance. I ask what reading practices are encouraged by different texts and the conditions under which they are available to be read, keeping in mind that some publications are produced in forms that may encourage cultural transgression more than others and that editors and writers attempted with varying success to induce particular effects with their publications.

Miriam Silverberg’s groundbreaking article about the discourse on the Japanese modern girl, “The Modern Girl as Militant,” turns to the magazine Nyonin geijutsu, discussed in chapter 4, to consider whether there might be a female counterpart to the largely male discourse on the modern woman in the 1920s. She writes that Nyonin geijutsu’s “unabashed celebration of female creativity, sexuality and autonomy was a potent contribution to the process of representing and thereby defining” the modern girl. A cursory reading might give the impression that Silverberg thinks definitions created by women are the most authentic—that therein might be found the real modern girl. But her use of the word “representing” reminds us that these self-representations are nonetheless representations, while her tantalizing suggestion that there might be a real “militant” to be found in this discourse on the “modern girl” is worth questioning further. My methodology for this analysis involves looking at the forms and production of these magazines in order to consider what difference that might make in their effects, effects to which we cannot have direct access. Raymond Williams has argued that studies of “the effects” of such media are not often enough efforts to “understand right inside the productive process how these difficult modes of address and forms are actually constructed.” By considering directly the form and texture of Japanese women’s magazines, I intend to present methods for reading such representations that allow us to interrogate with more specificity their potential militancy or lack thereof. It is only then that we can begin
to ask whether representations created by women were more feminist or culturally transgressive than those by men, whether commercially oriented publications were less or differently a part of women’s political consciousness than explicitly activist ones. Nearly all representations of modern women can be read as having some sort of potential for a critical reading, and we can find room for resistance by readers and social critique by writers in almost any publication. Here, I would like to begin to sort out, through close reading of these texts and an attempt to “understand right inside the productive process,” how these transgressions might differ from one another. We may not learn what made Mizoguchi’s Ayako do what she did, but I hope to show enough of what the magazines she read were like to imagine an answer to that question.