



PROJECT MUSE®

Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan
(review)

Sally A. Hastings

Monumenta Nipponica, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2005, pp. 118-121 (Review)

Published by Sophia University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mni.2005.0006>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/182359>

contractual relationship [that] evolved into one facet of the ‘reinvention’ of tradition” (p. 81). So, female workers were constructed as short-term employees working for pin-money and susceptible to regulation under a paternalism believed to be traditional. As Hunter notes, this became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy as employers “institutionalised a life cycle view of women’s work that would continue to characterise the Japanese labour market throughout the twentieth century” (p. 143).

This fine book should encourage much discussion about gender in Japan’s modern economic development. It should be welcomed by economic historians and economists less familiar with gender as a category of analysis and by gender historians seeking empirical grounding for cultural and social explanations of historical changes and continuities. Janet Hunter bridges the economic and cultural approaches convincingly.

Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan. By Sabine Frühstück. University of California Press, 2003. 270 pages. Hardcover \$50.00/£32.95; softcover \$19.95/£12.95.

SALLY A. HASTINGS
Purdue University

In this history of state control of sexual knowledge in modern Japan, Sabine Frühstück invokes Michel Foucault’s notions of power to show how discussions of sexual knowledge constitute a “complex texture of debates” (p. 3). Her subject matter is not simply the question of what was known about sex and how the state controlled (colonized) such information, but also the more complicated issues of how knowledge was conveyed to the public. She focuses our attention on the strategies directed at certain contested bodies: physical examinations of military conscripts, health inspections of licensed prostitutes, sexual education of children, and eugenic instructions to potential parents. The experts on sex whose arguments Frühstück analyzes came from a wide variety of professions: scientists, bureaucrats, journalists, politicians, clergy, and social reformers. Their knowledge derived from modern methods of observation, measurement, documentation, and statistical analysis.

Frühstück’s topic is an important one, for although policies regarding health, sanitation, and sex were essential to the building of the modern Japanese state, heretofore the dominant historical narratives have not taken these issues into account. Save for passing mention of the health of conscripts, the individual bodies of the imperial army are scarcely visible in standard historical accounts until they suddenly perpetrate rapes at Nanjing in 1937. Frühstück shows that for early twentieth-century policy makers, bodies were a central concern. The depiction of the individual as “a miniature of the social, the national, and the imperial body” (p. 3) linked knowledge about sex to the national fate.

In the first chapter, Frühstück uses the term “modern health regime” to describe the policies that Meiji authorities directed towards soldiers, prostitutes, and children to promote the health of both individual bodies and the body politic. She identifies the modern national military as one of the central institutions for the development of hygienic thought and practice, especially with respect to the prevention of venereal disease. Knowledge about bodies was intimately linked with surveillance. The mod-

ern health regime protected “the soldiers from prostitutes, the children from themselves, and the empire from its pathological subjects” (p. 54).

In Frühstück’s research on the normalization and dissemination of knowledge about sex, the development of sex education in Japan, the subject of chapter 2, is central. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, medical doctors and teachers began writing in professional journals about the sexual development of children. Frühstück’s analysis of a 1908 special issue of the *Yomiuri shinbun* on sex education provides us with a glimpse of the discourse of the day. Experts on sexuality envisioned both the school and the home as appropriate sites for education. A few authors invoked national difference to argue against sex education in Japan. The chief concerns of those who did advocate it were masturbation, venereal disease, and neurasthenia. The emphasis on the home as a site of such instruction reflected the modern family ideology the state instituted in the 1890s. The self-styled authorities on sexual education invoked the modern authority of the West to buttress their claims.

Frühstück’s third chapter documents the history of sexology as a scientific profession in Japan. She focuses first on the process by which the young scholars Yamamoto Senji and Yasuda Tokutarō developed survey research on normal sexual behavior. In contrast to earlier experts, Yamamoto and Yasuda concluded that masturbation was a normal component of sexual behavior (p. 92). Frühstück shows how sexual knowledge was associated with liberation and sexologists with socialist and revolutionary causes. Yamamoto Senji’s public lectures on sexology, for instance, resulted in his being dismissed from his academic positions, and unemployment intensified his participation in proletarian politics. The last section of the chapter discusses how Yamamoto and others propagated their views through serial publications supported by advertisements for sexual products as well as by more conventional sponsors such as department stores. In addition, the work of sexologists appeared in women’s and general-readership magazines.

Frühstück shows in chapter 4 how the debate about birth control and empire involved a heterogeneous array of participants, including feminists such as Hiratsuka Raichō. Feminists disagreed among themselves as to whether birth control was justifiable and, if so, on what grounds. Socialists argued that birth control was preferable to continental expansion as a solution to Japan’s population problem. Yamamoto Senji figures in this chapter as an advocate of birth control as a means of preventing abortions and infanticide. Frühstück points out that birth control constituted a methodology that was linked to eugenic measures such as sterilization. Proponents of eugenics favored early marriage with access to birth control. They argued that late marriage left individuals at risk for homosexuality, masturbation, illegitimate children, abortion, neurasthenia, hysteria, and suicide.

The final substantive chapter shows how sexology, which had defined itself as an instrument of liberation, was overshadowed in the 1930s by the emergence of the concept of “racial hygiene.” Censors collapsed the categories of “revolutionary” and “obscene.” In the wartime years after 1931, sexologists and advocates of birth control were silenced by censorship and legal prohibitions. As the war effort intensified, government pronatalist policies equated sex with reproduction. Under the rubric of “racial hygiene,” reformers promoted sterilization of “inferior persons” and “eugenic marriage.” The National Eugenic Law of 1940 institutionalized many of these policies. The popular media echoed the pronatalist themes of policy makers, suggesting

the congruence among “the empire’s expansive capabilities, women’s reproductive capacity, and men’s sexual potency” (p. 168). The commercial manifestation of these themes was a booming market in potency-enhancing drugs. The last section of this chapter notes the continuation of eugenic policies, sex education, and sexological research into the postwar era.

In the epilogue, Frühstück recounts events in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s when health officials invoked fears about AIDS to prevent legalization of the low-dose birth control pill, but then approved the anti-impotence drug Viagra in January 1999, just ten months after its approval in the United States. She notes that a greater concern for male sexual needs than for women’s desire to control their own bodies has been a constant in Japanese policy. Other factors that may have delayed approval of the pill were the vested interests of physicians and the rubber industry in continuing Japan’s reliance for birth control on condoms, diaphragms, and abortion. Moreover, the low birth rate in Japan has made some officials more interested in enabling pregnancies than in preventing them. Once the low-dose pill was approved in June 1999, Frühstück points out, Japanese women continued to have concern about side effects and the danger of sexually transmitted diseases.

The reluctance of Japanese women to use the low-dose pill reflects to a certain extent limited knowledge, and Frühstück ends her book with a short review of current survey research on sex in Japan. She shows that the type of research once carried out only by sexologists marginal to both the academy and the state has become the concern of government institutions and media conglomerates. The very pervasiveness of the discourse on sex shaped by government categories reproduces a normativity that is heterosexual and hierarchically gendered.

To supplement the wide variety of texts she draws on to document her important argument, Frühstück incorporates some striking illustrations. A sketch from an 1899 encyclopedia of a tall and muscular naked conscript towering over the uniformed physician demonstrates Japanese popular images of the ideal conscript and the nation he embodied (p. 29). A drawing from a children’s book that gives special attention to the weighing and measuring of recruits illustrates the centrality of both the quantification of bodies and pedagogy in the colonization of sex (p. 31).

In a few places it would have been helpful if Frühstück had contextualized her theoretically informed argument just a bit more. In the discussion of coeducation, for instance, it is never spelled out that prewar Japan had coeducation only through sixth grade. The fact that Mori Rintarō, the Chief Military Physician, and Mori Ōgai, the author of the novel *Vita Sexualis*, were one and the same is revealed only in the bibliography, thus obscuring the irony that a physician’s autobiographical novel was dismissed as an inappropriate instrument of sexual education (pp. 34, 78). Frühstück’s occasional lack of attention to peripheral detail has resulted in some errors of fact. Confusion with Yamamuro Gunpei is the most likely explanation for how the Christian labor leader Kagawa Toyohiko has come to be credited as the founder of the Salvation Army (pp. 97, 128). It is a bit harder to understand how the journalist Kawasaki Natsu became a medical doctor (p. 127).

Although this book is not perfect, it is brilliant and pathbreaking. Frühstück’s analysis of the intersection of power and knowledge about sex illuminates our understanding of vexing questions such as prostitution, birth control, and eugenics. These issues are at the heart of debates about women’s rights in Japan and Japanese war crimes

during World War II. Too often, such questions have been discussed in isolation from the national project. Frühstück demonstrates convincingly how international knowledge and national anxieties impacted intimate relations in modern Japan.

Toshié: A Story of Village Life in Twentieth-Century Japan. By Simon Partner. University of California Press, 2004. 210 pages. Hardcover \$50.00; soft-cover \$19.95.

MARIKO ASANO TAMANOI
University of California, Los Angeles

Publishers of academic books often indicate the scholarly fields under which the book might be listed. The publisher of *Toshié: A Story of Village Life in Twentieth-Century Japan* describes it as pertinent to “history,” “Asian studies,” and “gender studies.” The book might also be categorized as relevant to the fields of “oral history,” “modernization studies” (although nowhere in the book will the reader find the word “modernization”), and “village studies.” And yet *Toshié* defies the boundaries of all these established fields of the humanities and social sciences. The fluid boundaries of *Toshié* as an academic work parallel Simon Partner’s characterization of the life of the woman whose name provides the title for his book. Her story resonates in many ways with the larger, established narratives of the twentieth century, but also departs from them. Of course, Partner is interested in qualifying some of these established narratives and in correcting their problematic aspects. He does not stop there, however. By cross-referencing the accepted narratives of the history of rural Japan and the life history of Toshié, he aims to clarify her and her family members’ roles as agents of history. For a person like myself, who grew up in Japan and has studied rural Japan as an anthropologist, Partner’s account of Toshié’s life history has a compelling familiarity.

Sakaue Toshié was born in 1925, at a time “when two out of every ten died in childbirth or infancy” (p. 1), into a family of tenant farmers and day laborers. Indeed, as a child, Toshié lost two younger brothers to sickness. She still lives in the place she was born, Kosugi hamlet in the village of Yokogoshi, Niigata prefecture. The youngest of the four children of Kurakichi and Tsugino, Toshié was preceded in birth by her brothers Rikichi (then age twelve) and Takeharu (age five) and her sister, Kiyomi (age eight). Sakaue is the family name of Toshié’s mother, Tsugino; both Tsugino and her mother (Toshié’s grandmother) married men who thereupon were adopted into the Sakaue family. The book follows the extraordinary transformations of the Sakaue family, the village of Yokogoshi, and Japan, in a century of dramatic change.

In addition to the preface, where Partner lays out the main themes of the book, and the conclusion, the book has five chapters arranged in roughly chronological order: “On the Banks of the Agano,” “The Making of a Japanese Citizen,” “The Village Goes to War,” “Rural Life Under the Occupation,” and “Red Carpets and Whisky.” In the 1920s, the farmers of Yokogoshi led lives of “hard labor without chains” (chapter 1). In the 1970s, the same farmers became fully fledged members of mass consumer society (chapter 5). In the intervening chapters, Partner takes up the transformation of the farmers’ work habits (from communal to individual labor) and the integration of the village economy into the national cash economy. He also discusses the effects of the