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House and Home in Modern Japan: Reforming Everyday Life,
1880-1930 (review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

House and Home in Modern Japan: Reforming Everyday Life, 1880–1930. By Jordan Sand. Harvard University Asia Center. 450 pages. Hardcover \$65.00/£41.95/€59.90.

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In this generally well-written and richly illustrated study, Jordan Sand makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Japanese society in the late Meiji and Taishō eras. His focus is the steadily widening discourse about the proper “family-centered” dwelling for, and the appropriately “cultured” lifestyle of, the new “middle ranks” (*chūryū*), or middle-class inhabitants of Japanese cities. Due attention is also paid to the tangible changes that had occurred in the home lives of this expanding sector of the population by the late 1920s and to the “cultural intermediaries”—among them, reformist intellectuals, bureaucrats, architects, home economists and journalists—who either championed such changes or lamented their seemingly slow realization.

Portions of the first half of Sand’s analysis, which is devoted to the quest for a properly family-centered home (*katei*) that began in the 1880s, will be familiar to many who study modern Japan, as that quest has for some decades been touched upon in scholarly writing about women and the family in modern Japanese history. Here once again we encounter the lack of privacy in the traditional Japanese dwelling and the priority given to the husband and his guests in the use of the best available space. We are then told (or reminded) of such revolutionary innovations as an internal corridor within the dwelling and more rationally designed kitchens and their impact on elevating the status of the wife and making her “manager” of the home. Sand provides a particularly vivid and nuanced portrait of the transformation of wives into home managers, however, and his chapter on that subject, “The Housewife’s Laboratory” (pp. 55–92), will no doubt find its way onto many reading lists for courses on modern Japan. What Sand also does, here and there in the first four chapters of the book, is to provide some of the rationale for the “privileges” husbands enjoyed in the dwelling *status-quo-ante* and to refer—tantalizingly—to the culture of male-centered *asobi* (play) and leisure pursuits within the home that would eventually be written out of the script of proper family life. His account in chapter 4 of the advertising campaigns of the early developers of housing estates for the emerging white-collar elite in Osaka, which enticed such men to consider the purchase of homes in the suburbs by subtly eroticizing the suburbs as a venue for conjugal life rather than a destination for extramarital pleasure, is truly pathbreaking and will, I hope, stimulate further research on the changing lives of middle-class men. Every gain for women (and their children) was, after all, a loss in some respects for men, and we need to consider the losses as well as the gains if we are to understand the social history of this period.

In the remainder of the book Sand examines the efforts to reform everyday life

(*seikatsu kaizen*) and the discourse about “culture life” (*bunka seikatsu*) that emerged in the 1920s. As he makes clear, the latter was a much wider discourse than earlier discussion of the *katei*, owing to expanded opportunities for both men and women to acquire a secondary education and markedly increased numbers of salaried white-collar households. Women’s magazines such as the *Housewife’s Companion* participated, as did a growing number of architects who now turned their attention to designing “culture houses” (*bunka jūtaku*) for middle-class urban and suburban residents. Using architectural drawings and photographs to telling effect, Sand demonstrates how the culture house emerged as a small dwelling combining Western and Japanese elements, suitable for nuclear families. He also documents the insinuation of architects into the house-building process and the responses of traditional craftsmen and geomancers to this challenge to their long-established roles. Finally, and of particular interest to the social historian, he shows how middle-class housewives gradually acquired influence over the “aesthetics of the domestic environment” (p. 345), their homes becoming not only “the site of childrearing and domestic labor” (p. 344), but also a venue for the expression of feminine taste.

Sand acknowledges from the outset that he is dealing with a minority within the population of early twentieth-century Japan. The urban new middle classes on which he focuses were outnumbered by the “old urban middle classes” of shopkeepers and the proprietors of small factories, not to mention the urban working classes and the country’s even larger population of farmers, whom he rather problematically refers to as “peasants” throughout the book. He makes a solid case, however, for examining this self-conscious minority and the evolving cultural project in which its members engaged over two generations. Fascinating in itself, that project also forms a basis for understanding the aspirations and behavior of much larger numbers of middle-class Japanese in the postwar era.

Frauenerziehung und Frauenbild im Umbruch. Ideale von Mädchenerziehung, Frauenrolle und weiblichen Lebensentwürfen in der frühen Jogaku zasshi (1885–1889). By Nadja Kischka-Wellhäusser. Munich: Iudicium, 2004. 380 pages. Softcover €34.20.

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Anyone who has used *Jogaku zasshi* for their research and read some of its articles will appreciate the work that has gone into this book and welcome the contribution it makes to our knowledge about the journal and the main force behind it, Iwamoto Yoshiharu (1863–1942). An important source for the early history of the women’s movement in Japan, *Jogaku zasshi* has received little attention from Western scholars, and even in Japan research had mostly concentrated on certain aspects rather than the general significance of the journal.

Established in 1885 as the successor to *Jogaku shinshi*, founded the year before and edited by Iwamoto Yoshiharu and Kondō Kenzō (1855–1886), *Jogaku zasshi* continued until 1904 as the first long-lived women’s magazine. Nadja Kischka-Wellhäusser’s declared aim is to examine Iwamoto’s central ideas regarding female