Editor's Introduction: "Celebrating 60+ Issues of

U.S.-Japan Women's Journal"

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Editor’s Introduction: “Celebrating 60+ Issues of U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal”

Alisa Freedman

We are honored to publish this Project Muse issue, “Celebrating 60+ issues of the U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal.” In my editor’s introduction, I explain this important landmark in our journal’s history and the seven interdisciplinary articles selected to commemorate it. The chosen articles showcase work by scholars at different stages of their careers (see author bios below), demonstrate diverse approaches to the study of gender and Japan, and highlight key themes of U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal. They offer new information and model best practices in academic writing. I accompany this introduction with a handy guide to “Publishing in Academic Journals: Pro Tips from U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal” based on what I have learned as the journal’s editor-in-chief (2016–2022) and the questions I have been asked by authors and reviewers. This special issue has been prepared to encourage scholars to publish journal articles and to celebrate the positive impact of journals in the production of knowledge.

U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal is peer-reviewed and published twice a year, in print through the University of Hawai’i Press and online through Project Muse. We promote scholarly exchange on social, cultural, political, and economic issues pertaining to gender. We are the world’s oldest academic periodical devoted to the study of gender and Japan. The journal was founded in 1988 by Japanese feminists who were educated in the United States and were inspired by 1970s and 1980s American feminist magazines used to cultivate the field of Women’s Studies by disseminating information and encouraging debate and by the longstanding Japanese tradition of publishing new work first in magazines and then, if influential enough, in books.¹ They believed in the power of journals to construct notions of gender, transnationalism, and the nation-state and to expand worldviews. Until 2000, U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal was published in both Japanese (Nichibei josei jānaru from 1988) and English (English Supplement from 1991). It is now published solely in English (with the table of contents also available in Japanese) in order to promote international communication, reach a larger readership, and build an international community of scholars. English is currently the global language for academic writing.

Our mission has been to foster the work of young researchers and to ensure that the achievements of established scholars are not forgotten. We dedicate this commemorative issue to the previous editors who have cultivated generations of feminist thinkers: Drs. Yoko Kawashima, Noriko Mizuta, Sally A. Hastings, and Jan Bardsley. As Drs. Hastings and Bardsley wrote in their essays for our fifty-first issue, editing the U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal has been a means to engage both deeply and broadly with the field and to establish networks of scholars.² This commemorative issue also acknowledges the behind-the-scenes work of our publication manager, Donovan Colleps, and journals manager, Alicia Upano, at the University of Hawai’i Press, whose jobs are described in the accompanying publishing guide. Our journal cover design features a detail from Kiyokata Kaburaki’s (1887–1972) “Fujibitai” (Widow’s Peak—Beautiful Woman Doing Her Makeup, courtesy of the Mizuta Museum of Art, Josai Educational Corporation). This bijin-ga (beautiful-women genre of painting) captures the optimism, potential, and humility of a woman preparing to enter the public sphere, and shows how the past resonates in the present.
This issue reprints seven articles, published between issues 51 and 60, that exemplify how the content of *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* extends across time periods and academic fields. These articles advance comparative study among Japan, the United States, and other countries and represent scholarship in history, memory studies, literary studies, literary translation, journalism, popular culture studies, and anthropology—a few of the many academic disciplines covered in *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal*. They display academic skills in close reading, translation, archival research, collaboration, and ethnographies. They clearly present information, organize ideas, and articulate academic methodologies.

This issue centers on three of the many themes common to *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* articles: mobility, storytelling, and activism. Four articles profile women from diverse backgrounds who worked abroad during different historical moments and changed how people in Japan, the United States, and France regarded each other. Kristina Vassil draws from the fields of memory studies, literary studies, and cultural history to tell the transnational story of Okei (1852–1871), a young servant and refugee from the Boshin War (1868–1869) who, in 1869, became one of the first Japanese people to live in California. Vassil tells the story of the lower classes who are often overlooked in historical narratives, which are often premised on the achievements of the rich and powerful. She analyzes how writers, historians, and tourism agencies have turned Okei’s short life into legend to suit their ideological agendas. Scott Mehl translates, analyzes, and contextualizes journalistic accounts of poet Yosano Akiko’s (1878–1942) five-month stay in Paris in 1912, the last year of the Meiji Period (1868–1912). Mehl shows how journalists and newspaper readers regarded Akiko as a spokesperson for Japanese women and her poems as articulating sentiments about classical culture and Meiji modernization; he thereby reveals the role that Japanese literary figures played as cultural ambassadors in Western Europe during a time of fascination with Japanese culture and concerns about Japan’s rising militarism. Marlene Mayo analyzes the role of Esther B. Rhoads (1895–1979), a Quaker educator who worked in Japan in the prewar period and returned in 1946 as one of only two authorized representatives of LARA (Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia). As Mayo writes, Rhoads served as an “agent of reconciliation” between the United States and Japan and a “friend in need” for people suffering from hardships caused by the war.² Vassil, Mehl, and Mayo show how Okei, Akiko, and Rhoads worked within the systems they found themselves in to create better conditions for people of all genders.

Amanda Seaman analyzes how authors Yamauchi Reinan (1959–2011) and Ogino Anna (b. 1956, educated in France and emeritus professor of literature at Keio University) wrote literary fiction based on their struggles with cancer to creatively raise awareness of how the disease disrupts women’s life courses and relationships. Seaman reads their stories as part of a subgenre of *tobyouki*, “struggling with illness narratives.”³ *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* is proud to offer the first English translation of Ogino’s quasi-autobiographical short story, “Nue,” which draws from Japanese folklore and Noh plays, among other literary influences, to depict a cancer victim’s emotions and bodily suffering. Using an approach premised on close reading and inspired by third-wave feminist theories, Grace En-Yi Ting demonstrates how to read visual and narrative tropes of *shojo* manga (girl’s comics) to understand the stories they tell about gender norms and women’s agency. Ting encourages readers to look carefully at prevalent images of sweets and desserts in *shojo* manga and to consider how they symbolize power relationships and “essential[ize] girls and women in terms of decoration, indulgence, excess, and emptiness.”⁴
Leng Junxiao uses tools from the fields of anthropology, media studies, and digital ethnography to investigate the development of and backlash to #KuToo, the 2019 online feminist movement in Japan that began with a Tweet about how the requirement that women wear high heels while at work causes health issues and gender discrimination. Through her interdisciplinary analysis of stories, including those told through social media, online forums, participant interviews, and published memoirs, Leng analyzes how #KuToo “culturally resisted patriarchal workplace norms based on shared personal experiences of foot pain.” Although ultimately unsuccessful in changing this dress code, #KuToo disclosed exploitative workplace and political cultures and empowered women to try to change them.

All of these seven articles explain that, due to laws, social conventions, business practices, and other factors, women have faced different choices in work and family and different access to education, jobs, and politics than people of other genders. They show how women have coped with public and personal traumas, initiated movements for change and equality, and formed communities. They account for diversity among Japanese women and dispel stereotypes. They capture accounts omitted from historical records. Concurrently, they teach us how to persuasively write academic articles.

Contributors to the “Celebrating 60+ Issues of the US–Japan Women's Journal”

Alisa Freedman is a professor of Japanese literature, cultural studies, and gender at the University of Oregon and editor-in-chief of the U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal. Her books include Japan on American TV: Screaming Samurai Join Anime Clubs in the Land of the Lost (AAS Asia Shorts Book Series, Columbia University Press, 2021), Tokyo in Transit: Japanese Culture on the Rails and Road (Stanford University Press, 2010); an annotated translation of Kawabata Yasunari’s The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa (University of California Press, 2005); and coedited volumes on Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan (Stanford University Press, 2013) and Introducing Japanese Popular Culture (Routledge, 2018). She has published widely on Japanese modernism, Tokyo studies, youth culture, gender, television, humor as social critique, teaching pedagogies, and intersections of print and digital media, along with publishing translations of Japanese literature. Alisa has been nationally recognized for excellence in mentoring.

Leng Junxiao is a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, University of Tokyo. Her research focuses on digital feminist movements in contemporary Japan. Based on participant observations and semi-structured in-depth interviews, her doctoral dissertation explores digital activisms of irregular female workers, sexual violence survivors, and young students who experience menstrual poverty.

Marlene Mayo is an associate professor emerita at the University of Maryland. She edited The Emergence of Imperial Japan: Self-Defense or Calculated Aggression? (D.C. Heath and Company, 1970), coedited War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia, 1920-1960 (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), and authored over twenty articles and book chapters. She has curated and compiled important archival resources, including the Marlene J. Mayo Oral Histories with Americans who Served in Allied Occupied Japan (University of Maryland Libraries).
Scott Mehl is an assistant professor of Japanese at Colgate University. Trained as a comparatist with a specialization in modern Japanese literature, he works on the intersections between Japanese literature and literature in other languages, often with a focus on the history of literary criticism. His essays and translations have appeared in *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal, Comparative Literature Studies, Monumenta Nipponica, Japanese Language and Literature, Japanese Studies*, and other venues. He is the author of *The Ends of Meter in Modern Japanese Poetry: Translation and Form* (Cornell University Press, 2022).

Ogino Anna is a prizewinning fiction writer, critic, and professor emerita of French literature at Keio University. She received the Akutagawa Prize in 1991 for her short story “Water on One’s Back” (Seioiri mizu) and the Itō Sei Literature Prize for *The Crab, He, and I* (Kani to kare to watashi, 2007), chronicling her partner’s struggle with and death from cancer.

Amanda C. Seaman is a professor of modern Japanese language and literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. A scholar of modern women’s literature, genre fiction, and gender studies, she is the author of *Bodies of Evidence: Women, Society and Detective Fiction in 1990s Japan* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004) and *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016). Her other publications include translations of Japanese women’s literature and writings on Japanese popular culture and Japanese food culture. Her current research explores the representation of illness and the afflicted in postwar Japanese literature, film, and popular media.

Grace En-Yi Ting is an assistant professor of gender studies at the University of Hong Kong, specializing Japanese women writers and girls’ culture, transnational feminisms, and queer politics.


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4 Amanda C. Seaman, “Plotting Illness: Cancer in Ogino Anna’s ‘Nue’ and Yamauchi
