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The Modern Girl as Militant

Miriam Silverberg

Where can you folks clearly say that there is a typical Modern Girl?
KYAOKA TAKEMI
Let's get naked and while we're at it work our damnedest.
HAYASHI IRMERO

The Modern Girl makes only a brief appearance in our histories of prewar Japan. She is a glittering, decadent, middle-class consumer who, through her clothing, smoking, and drinking, haunted in the urban playgrounds of the late 1920s. Arm in arm with her male equivalent, the Modern Boy (the mado) and fished out in the Western flapper's garb of the roaring twenties, she engages in giubana (Ginza-cruising). Yet by merely equating the Japanese Modern Girl with the flapper we do her a disservice, for the Modern Girl was not on a Western trajectory. Moreover, during the decade when this female, a creation of the

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mass media, utilized her Japanese audience, she was not easily defined. Who was this "Modern Girl"? Why did she do what she did? These two questions, raised by the Japanese Modern Girl's contemporaries, are also the two problems posed in this chapter.

The Modern Girl was a highly commodified cultural construct crafted by journalists who debated her identity during the tumultuous decade of cultural and social change following the great earthquake of 1923. By asking first of all who she was, I am concerned with the representation of the Modern Girl as the Japanese cultural heroine of the 1920s, and not with the actual beliefs or practices of young women of that era. (In this essay, therefore, I do not call the heroine by her nickname, maga, for to do so would be to deny her the full respect that is due her. It would also depart from the practice of her time, when most commentators spelled her name out in full, as modern gaaru.) The second question has been appropriated from the title of the hit movie of 1930, *What Made Her Do What She Did?* (Nani ya hajō wo sasetae). In this saga of an orphan turned criminal, based on a play by Fujimori Seikichi, the heroine withstood varied forms of servitude, including domestic labor for a lecherous government official, before she took her revenge by setting fire to a Christian institution for wayward young girls. According to Fujimori's stage directions, published in 1927, at this point in the curtail was to fall on the electrically lit query, "What made her do what she did?" floating above the flames. The movie audience, which included members of the new salaried middle class, off-duty groups of geisha, and working men and women who had crowded into Asakusa, the honky-tonk night-life neighborhood of Tokyo, to watch the show had to formulate their own answers to this question—just as the historian must do when asking why the Modern Girl moved so vigorously through the closing years of the 1920s. To answer this question, the Modern Girl must be made a part of the political economy and socio-cultural transformations of her time.

**DEFINING THE MODERN GIRL**

The first documented reference to the Modern Girl appeared in August 1924 in the title of an article in the woman's magazine *Juso*. The author, Kitaawara Shin'ichi, established the character of the Modern Girl as apologetic but militantly autonomous, neither an advocate of expanded rights for women nor a suffragette; yet at the same time, she had no intention of being a slave to men. This self-respecting modern girl had liberated herself from age-old traditions and conventions, and now, suddenly, without any argument or explanation, she had stepped out onto the same starting line with men in order to walk alongside him. Kitaawara saw a reconstruction of gender accompanying this reordering of power, but he did not mean the fact that woman was becoming more like man both spiritually and physically, for what woman had lost in grace she had gained in a newfound animation.

Nii Itaru, who is usually given credit for coining the term *modern gaaru*, followed with his "Contours of the Modern Girl" in a 1925 issue of another woman's magazine, *Fujin kōrō*. He provided a character sketch of someone who, like Kitaawara's Modern Girl, was highly animated. She was also "bright and breezy" and shockingly fond of the double entendre and other erotic come-followers. One young woman, for example, after a single meeting with the author, had sent him a note that read, "I am lonely sleeping all alone today. Please come visit." Nii reported that he did not know how to interpret this message, but he was convinced that all contemporary young women were in the process of changing for the sake of "Liberation and freedom of expression." Nii admitted the contemporary young Japanese woman was aggressive and erotic, but was she in fact a "Modern Girl" like her European counterpart, the modern young woman, whom he likened to a bouncing ball of reason, will, and emotion, thrown at full force? And was the anarchistic Modern Girl a creature to be lauded as the proletarian emblem of revolutionary possibility, or should she be reviled as one final expression of a decaying class, owing to origins in the wealthier strata of society? Nii offered his readers choices, but he would not take a stand.

Nii's ambiguity set the tone for Japanese mass journalism. From 1925 until the early 1930s writers attempted to flesh out the contours provided by Nii, in such print media as a cartoon series about a Modern Girl and a Modern Boy entitled "Megaiko and Moborō", in sensational newspaper articles, in questions and answers in advice columns, and in special issues of popular magazines aimed at men and women. While

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5. Nii Itaru, "Modar gaaru no rinbãku," *Fujin kōrō*, April 1925, 24-31. Nii's colleague, Oya Setsuichi, is responsible for attributing the origins to Nii, but Nii gave credit to Kitaawara; see Hamali, "Joso," 229.


7. Menashi A. notes how the term *modern gaaru* won out over the label "woman of the new era" (shin jôtei no onna) in *Kitora kōshô no senri* (Yumiko, 1979), 214-15. Ueda, "Joso natsukasa," 115-90, follows what he terms the discourse on the modern girl through...
ambiguity remained, a composite picture of a Modern Girl does emerge from a select reading of articles written by journalists and feminist critics of the 1920s.

First and foremost, the Modern Girl was defined by her body and most specifically by her short hair and long, straight legs. In a brief discussion entitled simply “Woman’s Legs,” the prokurator writer Kataoka Teppai argued that, while other eras of Japanese history had been graced by slightly legs (which nobody had noticed), the preponderance of beautiful legs among contemporary young women had to be explained. His answer: the legs of the Modern Girl were a product of the ability of the human spirit to shape the human form; her legs symbolized the Modern Girl’s growing ability to create a new life for women. The author ended his polemic with the heartrending appreciation of the modern girl in motion: “Oh, inward! Dance! Leg! Leg! Leg! Leg!”

Discussion of fashion is always talk about the female body, as another article, “Studies on the Moga,” made blatantly clear. In the course of his attempt to define the Modern Girl, Kiyosawa Kiyoshi emphasized the significance of her protruding buttocks by repeating how the traditional function of the obi (“to hide the ass”) had been abandoned by the modern girl, who wore her obi high. The preoccupation with the clothing of the Modern Girl also confirms Rosalind Coward’s thesis that “women’s bodies, and the messages which clothes can add, are the repository of the social definitions of sexuality.” According to Kataoka, the Modern Girl’s simple hairstyle was the outcome of a strategic decision to facilitate violent hugging, and her boldly colored and patterned clothing expressed her attraction to the fleshly vitality exuded by the Westerner. This Modern Girl went after the physical pleasures of love (renai), which meant that she sought “lesley” stimuli in “flirtation,” an activity that had spread from the United States to England, France, and Japan. (The author spelled it “flirtation” in English after he had transliterated it into the Japanese syllabary reserved for important terms.)

The intimate relationship between efforts to conceptualize the manga and the cultural reconstruction of gender is made clear in a section of Kiyosawa’s Modern Girl essay called “Man’s Education and Woman’s Education.” According to the author, gender differentiation in early 20th-century Japan began at birth, as baby girls were put into red kimono, and baby boys were swaddled in kimono decorated with images of the mythical peach-boy. At age six or seven, the boy child was reprimanded for the unmanly behavior of crying with the rebuke, “What is this—and you a boy...?” By the time the boy and girl were adults, they had been educated for entirely different societies; they were like two races separated.

11. Kataoka Teppai, “Modan gurau no kenkyu” (September 9, 1926), in Kataoka, Modern gurau no kenkyu (Katsukai, 1927), reprinted in Minami (ed.), Kindai shomin, 170: 161–64, 172. (The term renai, used to translate the Western term “love,” was, like the words for philosophy (tenyogaku) and society (shakai), a Meiji invention. Two Chinese characters—ren (or, in the Japanese pronunciation, rei), alluding to feelings of deep affection between a man and a woman, and ai, meaning to be drawn to something and yearning for it or feel a tenderness toward it—are combined to create the new word, which could only apply to a yearning for a member of the opposite sex; see Tomura Shizuki, ed., Josei kashii no chie de toda, prewar ed. [J.G. Tsubouchi, 1976], 166.)


by a broad river, living according to differing moral standards. Kiyosawa gave the Modern Girl’s resolution to this predicament: let the boy and girl start at the same place. 14

Although the Modern Girl’s bold gestures crossed gender boundaries, they were, according to her creators, unquestionably female. Her cultural identity, however, was less certain. Nii had begged the issue in his “Contours of the Modern Girl” when he claimed that European ways had been integrated into daily life in Japan, while simultaneously refusing to equate the Modern Girl with her Japanese sisters. 15 Kiyosawa also separated the Modern Girl of Europe and the United States from the Japanese Modern Girl, by suggesting a distinction between the function and the intent of the latter. Whereas both sets of Modern Girls stood “in the vanguard of a changing age to battle old customs,” the author feared this had not actually been the goal of the Japanese version, whose short hair might not in fact be an emblem of resistance but the “mark of decadence” of a woman still content to live by the actions and decisions of men. 16

Was the Japanese Modern Girl Japanese? Europeanized? Cosmopolitan? To the artist Kishida Ryōsui, who defined the short-haired Modern Girl by her body, clothing, and rapid style of walking on Ginza, she was all of the above. While she appeared for the most part in Japanese-style clothing, the face of this beauty, originally that of a Japanese person, had been harmonized to become, in a most natural fashion, a Western-style face. The Modern Girl was not indulging in the forced Europeanization of an earlier era; rather, Kishida concluded, she was part of a process whereby “all material civilization would . . . inevitably Europeanize Japan.” Japan was not to lose its identity; only after it had been thoroughly Europeanized could Japanese culture become non-European. 17

An alternate resolution to the ambiguity in the Modern Girl’s cultural identity was embodied in Naomi, the polymorphously perverse heroine of Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s fictional A Faint Line, whose exploits were serialized in the Osaka asahi shinbun and were during 1924 and 1925. 18 In the story, a nonsensically young engineer becomes obsessed by the body and costuming of his child-bride, whom he has rescued from her labors as a café waitress. As Naomi’s body and desires mature, he is overwhelmed by her sexuality, and both confused and enthralled by her constantly shifting personas, which challenges fixed notions of gender and culture.

Naomi’s bold transgressions across gender and culture boundaries identify her as a Modern Girl and illustrate Coward’s explanation of how social definitions of both female and male sexuality are projected onto women’s bodies, while “men are neutral.” 19 This is the case in Tanizaki’s melodrama, Naomi’s play with a fixed gender identity, expressed in cross-dressing, is transformed into a power play involving the final shift in a mistress-slave relationship. By the end of the story, the heroine has taken on male language to challenge the authority of her former mentor. In response, her husband’s speech does not become feminized, in a role reversal, but rather infantilized: he responds to her demands that he do whatever he desires of him with the staccato monosyllabic grunt of a domesticated male child. 20

Naomi’s chief desire is to act and look Western, an aspiration that is first encouraged by her mentor, who calls his Mary Pickford–look-alike protégée a “Yankee girl.” 21 Although her upward mobility into the ballroom society of the genteel dance ball challenges class distinctions, and her affection of male speech threatens the narrator, her appearance as a Westerner who is not Western (captured in the ambiguity of her untraceable name, “Naomi,” which appears Eussian but may not be) is her most magnificent statement. 22 Naomi’s identification with Pickford, Gloria Swanson, and Pola Negri remains titillating only as long as the hero is attracted to the hibara Western life-style, which is epitomized in the “culture house” chosen by the young couple for its Western architecture and furnished with imported goods aimed at a “simple life.” 23 In the end, he is drawn back to a “pure” Japanese-style house, and to a traditional notion of marriage and family. The ballroom dancing scenes are revealed to be battle sites of East-West confrontation: Naomi appears as an unrecognizable apparition in white face, and the author’s real con-

18. Chihiro no ai was serialized in the Osaka asahi shinbun from March through June 1924, and in Janai from November 1924 through July 1925; the version cited here is from Tanizaki Jun’ichirō zenshi, vol. 10 (Chūō kōronsha, 1937), 380. For an English translation, see Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Naomi, trans. Anthony H. C. Chang (New York: Knopf, 1985).
20. For a passage describing how the hero poses Naomi in various guises, and the cross-referencing, see Tanizaki, Chihiro no ai, 45, 264. I am grateful to Lucy North for the concept of “hairless slave relationship.”
22. Tanizaki, Chihiro no ai, 264.
23. Tanizaki uses the Western term hibara, derived from the transformation of “high collar” to mean fashionably Western, rather than modern, or “modern:” The hibara fitting, or “culture house,” was the term for the Western structures erected for the new middle class during the post–World War II era.
cern turns out to be his discomfort with anything that “smells” Western and is therefore a threat to the authentic Japanese family. Tanizaki projected this fear onto a Modern Girl.25

While journalists grappled with the Modern Girl’s purported sexual activity, her gender identity, and her cultural identification, they were almost unanimous in proclaiming her unquestionable autonomy. Charges of promiscuity leveled against the Modern Girl, according to Kitamura, stemmed from the new, public nature of women’s activity. She summed up these charges in a composite sketch:

She went for a walk with a man in Ueno Park; I spotted a glimpse of her at a Dotonbori café; she was kicking up her heels at the dance hall; I discovered her going into the movies. When I watched her walking she was moving her left and right legs one after the other; I saw her yawning and decided she was tired out from walking for a man; she decorated her hat with a flower—I wonder who she got it from. She needed, she must be run down from being with a man; etc.; etc.; etc.; etc.; etc.26

Kitamura noted that while sins are committed in the dark, the so-called disgraceful conduct of the Modern Girl was conducted in broad daylight. The Japanese woman was no longer secluded in the confines of the household, but was out in the open, working and playing alongside men. This was her real transgression: she would not accept the division of labor that had placed her in the home.27

The trumpeted promiscuity of the Modern Girl, who moved from man to man, was thus but one aspect of her self-sufficiency. She appeared to be a free agent without ties of filiation, affect, or obligation to lover, father, mother, husband, or children—in a striking counterpoint to the state ideology of family documented in the Civil Code and in the ethics taught in the schools.28 According to one critic, the Modern Girl had not simply abandoned motherhood: she was anti-motherhood. Even Hiranaka Raicho, the feminist theorist of the World War I era, agreed. Although she portrayed the Modern Girl as the daughter of the New Woman and as someone who had the power to create the future because of her thoughts, emotions, action, and everyday life, Raicho did not imagine her having any daughters of her own.29

The autonomy of this Modern Girl who “strutted down the street” on route to and from work derived from her economic self-sufficiency. Katoa surmised that the term modan gairu had originated as a substitute for the vague reference “that sort of woman” which had been attached to the urban working women employed by stores and businesses after the First World War, and Kitamura warned that “it would be problematic to mistake the short skirts and the ability to endure chilled legs as the be-all and end-all of the Modern Girl,” because the work and the morals of this “new working woman” differed from those of the “old household women.”30 According to Kitamura, this heroine’s livelihood positioned her beyond the reach of state and family: “Since the old morals have been broken and new morals have not yet come about and new standards of chastity have not been established, working women, in their system of thought, are a nomadic people. Nomadic people have neither laws nor national borders. All they can do is move as their convictions move them.”31

Although Tanizaki’s Naomi remains a consumer whose appetite for moving pictures and carefully chosen foreign and domestic order-in-delicacies is matched only by her desire for a large assortment of male companions, the Modern Girl, according to many accounts, was not merely a passive consumer of middle-class culture, for she was depicted as producing goods, services, and new habits. She thereby differed from the New Woman of the previous era, who had exhibited resistance to outmoded traditions but had offered no new model for an everyday life.

28. Of course, women workers in the textile industry constituted 71 percent of the work force in private industry by 1910, as E. Patricia Turumi has documented, but this social reality was not reflected in official ideology regarding women’s place within the family. Kan'en Yamanaka suggests that in addition to separating the two parts of the compound word kotta into its constituent kota or kou (nation) and ko or ki (family) in order to posit an analogy between the two terms, historians of the construction of modern Japanese ideology might recognize how men have been placed within the nation and women within the family. See E. Patricia Turumi, "Female Textile Workers and the Failure of Early Trade Unions in Japan," History Workshop 18 (Fall 1984): 5; and Kan'en Yamanaka, Japanese Political Ideology in the Late Meiji Period (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 123-47.
The modern girl as militant, which was consistent with the ability of early-20th-century women to come to terms with the contradictions of gender in society, ignored the ambivalent and contradictory images of Western women, and instead developed a model for resistance. To do this they adopted the traditional female ideal, which was a vanguardist model, and used it to express their political and anti-militarist resistance. The "one hundred percent" model of the modern girl was based on the traditional image of the Japanese woman, and emphasized the need for women to be educated and active in public life. This was reflected in the activities of the Women's National Association, which was founded in 1905, and the Women's Peace Movement, which was established in 1920. These organizations were seen as a way of promoting women's rights and the modernization of Japan. The modern girl was also associated with the transformation of Japanese culture, and was seen as a symbol of progress and modernity. However, the modern girl was also criticized for being too westernized, and for not being able to accommodate the traditional values of Japanese society. This led to a debate about the role of women in modern Japan, and the competing visions of how Japanese society should be transformed.
The model for such a Modern woman was Takamure Ine, the anarchist feminist.\textsuperscript{38}

In sum, the discourse on the Modern Girl was more about imagining a new Japanese woman than about documenting social change. For this reason, as Kateoka Tepei admitted, despite repeated themes there is no clearly defined image:

When we say the Modern Girl exists in our era we are not in particular referring to individuals named Miss So-and-so or Mrs. Such-and-such. Rather, we are talking about the fact that somehow, from the midst of the lives of all sorts of women of our era, we can feel the air of a new era, different from that of yesterday. That's right; where can you folks clearly say there is a typical modern girl? That is to say that the Modern Girl is but a term that abstractly eludes to one new flavor sensed from the air of the life of all women in society.\textsuperscript{39}

The Modern Girl resisted definition, but this did not mean that pundits did not keep trying to confine her. In the January 1928 issue of Shincho, although the members of a roundtable discussion on various facets of modern life agreed to talk about urbanization and new forms of "articulation, expression, language, gestures, writing, and clothing," they could not set aside the topic of the Modern Girl; they were obsessed by the desire to enclose her in one all-encompassing meaning. In the course of their conversation these critics determined the following about the model: (1) she was not hysterical; (2) she used direct language; (3) she had a direct, aggressive sexuality—she checked to see whether a man was compatible; (4) she scoffed at chaste-changing men, for her, was like putting on a clean white shirt; (5) she could be poor—clothing was now inexpensive; (6) she was liberated from the double fetters of class and gender; (7) she was an anarchist; (8) she accosted men when she needed train fare; (9) she had freedom of expression—which she got from the movies; and finally, an indirect commentary on the autonomy of this persona, (10) the noko (Modern Boy) was a "zero."\textsuperscript{40}

The women writers of Nyo rein geijutsu (Women's arts), the journal for and by women that appeared with rare exception from July 1928 through June 1932, did not use the term "Modern Girl," but their unabashed celebration of female creativity, sexuality, and autonomy was a potent contribution to the process of representing and thereby defining her.\textsuperscript{41} The magazine, advertised by well-heeled live manoequins at major

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40. \textit{Modan nenkan mondai}, Shincho, January 1928, 125-47.

41. The story of the woman who committed suicide after being called a Modern Girl by a mosque, but the strategic decision of these women not to yield the label "Mod-

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44. Akiko, "Kateoka hyogen," \textit{Nyo rein geijutsu 2, no. 1 (January 1929):} 104-6. This theme may have been influenced by an essay by Yamakawa that I quote and discuss in the conclusion to my book \textit{Gendered Song: The Modernist Manifests of Nekuna Shiguha} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). For Yamakawa's biting critique of the commodification of women, see Yamakawa Kikue, "Sekai toki toka no iro no anomai.
Nyoinin geijutsu used the weapons of the numerous magazines produced for mass circulation during the late 1920s—pictures and photographs, essays, fiction, theory, and roundtable discussion—and drew on both indigenous and foreign sources to champion women’s liberation.

The writers, unlike their male counterparts who were nervous about the cultural identity of the Modern Girl, made no attempt to distinguish “authentic Japanese” experience from that of the West. In addition to articles on Edo life and on domestic politics, the journal included writings by such thinkers as Alexandra Kollontai (whose works were causing a great sensation in Japan owing to rumors that they advocated ‘free love’), Katherine Mansfield, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Langston Hughes.

The writers for Nyoinin geijutsu talked about more than just art and theory. The women’s magazines of the 1920s featured articles on love and romance, and so too did Nyoinin geijutsu, in a series of pieces published in its earliest issues. One representative discussion was the “Roundtable Discussion of Other Angles on Love.” The fourteen women participants in the event, which was subtitled “Feelings and Sensation of Jealousy/Chastity and Love, Adulterous Love/The Eternal Nature of Love/Love in a Three-Sided Affair and in a Multi-Affair/ Sexual Desire and Love,” were tough, cynical, and, like the Modern Girl as represented in the media, realistic. The political activist Kamichika Ichiko questioned whether strong feelings leading to a marriage based on love could last fifty years into the marriage. It was well said, and she noted, if one had the time, but she was busy with her family and her work; there was no time for the cultivation of love. Another discussant claimed that only unattainable love was eternal.

Unlike the imagined Modern Girl, the modern women on the panel were confronting actual issues of bonding, relating, and reproducing. Yet significantly, in the process of defining the militant as a Modern Girl, these women, like so many of the women who appeared in Nyoinin geijutsu as either writers or the subjects of articles, defined themselves as being out in public. They openly expressed their feelings about both love and work. While they may have achieved the label “Modern Girl,”


45. Kollontai’s works were translated between 1927 and 1936 as follows: Red Love, trans. Masa Jiro (Gekakku, 1927); A Grand Love, trans. Natsuhana Hidetsuko (Shokai, 1930); Great Love, trans. Utsuboza Kenji (Seibundo, 1930); Working Women’s Revolution, trans. Osake Hakusho (Shogakukan, 1930); Motherhood and Society, trans. Osawa Kenichi (Taisho, 1931); and Women and the Family System, trans. Yamakawa Kikuchi (Seibundo, 1950).


the sentiment that women should move out of the household and into the streets was familiar to the readers of Nyoinin geijutsu. An example is available in the large print promoting a nationwide contest for the best lyrics for a “Woman’s March”:

Women have already kicked off their heavy shackles and escaped from the dungeons of their darkened hearts. What lies before us now is for us to pour into the streets like rain in a monsoon. What is left is the despotic fear of the factories, the tips of the spires of thought attacking the heavens. Lining up with all peoples we move forward into the world of all living things. Friends, at times like these we need a song that will sing, exhort, exhale, and push forward for us. 47

The image of a Modern Girl on the road was publicized in “Letters from a Trip to Kyushu,” co-authored by Yagi Akiko and Hayashi Furimiko—whose Hōshi (Tales of wandering), a sensational “diary” of her travels as a working woman spurned forward by desire, was currently being serialized in Nyoinin geijutsu. 48 The travelogue opened with Yagi’s expression of concern over Hayashi’s drinking. Hayashi, in turn, boasted of the romance and whiskey she had enjoyed with a “thall, modern” fan in Nagoya, and of her behavior toward the soldier on the train whom she had pinched so as to terminate moves that were not fast enough. This document about wine, men, and song—an update of Tsubaki hirayumi, the Edo classic about the picturesque amours of two declassé warriors—produced by two women writers on the road, proved that adventure was not gender-bound.

In other words, Hayashi Furimiko, the lusty author-heroine of Tales of Wandering, who was busy punctuating her autobiographical account of a down-and-out woman drifter with lyrical references to dancing naked women, was not an idiosyncratic anomaly. Rather, the Modern Girl’s protest, expressed through sensuality and mobility, could be communal. But Nyoinin geijutsu was not all about art, love, and exploration. Articles on women factory workers, and especially on labor in the Soviet Union, increased in later issues of the journal. The magazine’s final six months contained a series on the notorious Tōyō Musashin strike of 1930, which had culminated in street-fighting. 49 This strike also produced fictional heroines in a series of short stories published by Sata Ineko in 1931, one year after Sata had stood in support outside the factory walls.


48. Yagi Akiko and Hayashi Furimiko, “Kyushu-tabi hyakunen,” Nyoinin geijutsu 2, no. 9 (September 1929): 76–81; Hōshi was serialized in nine of eleven installments between October 1929 and November 1930 in most issues of Nyoinin geijutsu.

listening to the sound of the strike drums. Her four-part narrative, which appeared in disparate sources in the mass media, recounted violence both among the young women workers and between them and the hired thugs of the "Justice corps." Sata also presented propaganda produced by both sides, including letters to fathers and brothers appealing to the power of patriotism.

Like Yatsukichi's A Poet's Love and Hayashi Fumiko's epic Tales of Wandering, Sata's stories presented a militant as a Modern Girl galley of transgressing in both spoken language and body language. In her stories, class struggle and not cultural definitions were at stake when the student-activists refused to stay in their designated place as obedient workers. These young women were in the streets, but they did not dance, shop, or shout to work. Instead they were brawling as only men could. They used the rough male word for "1," ore, to refer to themselves, threatened to smash dishes, and literally wrestled physically over issues of ideology. Like most Modern Girls in the media they expressed sexual desires—they did take time to flirt with male co-workers—but this pastime was a secondary diversion. The abiding concern of the modern young women in Sata's stories, as in the articles in the closing issues of Nyomin geijutsu, was that they be allowed to continue to produce. They wanted above all to work.

What begins to emerge from the above overview of the varied commentary on the Modern Girl is that men and women writers for the popular press who talked about a new kind of woman believed that this cultural heroine was defining her own options in the new society (along with the lack of roles which were so incongruent that this name did not have to be spelled out). This modern woman transgressed by crossing boundaries erected by class, gender, and culture. Her resistance was usually not organized, but nevertheless it was cultural, as observers like Kataoka acknowledged, arguing that, as distinct from her predecessors in the Japanese women's movement, the New Woman, "like the grand waves of the Pacific Ocean," drew those before her into her activity. She had neither a leader nor an organization, but hers was the first nationally based movement of women; hers was the first voice of woman's resistance.

The Modern Girl, in other words, was militant. The only article in Nyomin geijutsu with the term "Modern Girl" in its title hints at this equivalence:

80. See Sata Ineko, "Kamisajou no nozomi," Kata, January 1931; "Shokkaniku," Bunsei shungiku, August 1931; "Ribu," Chibi koren, October 1931; and "Kyosei ikezaka," Chibi koren, January 1931; reprinted in Sata Ineko, K yosha, vol. 1 (Kobunsha, 1977). 219-25. Sata has explained that the women workers asked her for aid, and that she had been outside the dormitory in Kamidori during the strike interviews with Sata Ine, in Tokyo, October 1932; and in Kariya, August 1986.

81. Kiyosawa, "Modo no geiko no henkyo?" IDS.

WHY DID THE MODERN GIRL DO WHAT SHE DID?

In order to begin to explain why this Modern Girl did what she did, we must contextualize her representation within a history of Japanese women of the 1920s and 1930s that sees women as consumers, producers, legal subjects, and political activists. For the Modern Girl appeared during a historical juncture when Japanese women were acting in all of these capacities.

53. See Watanabe Enji and Sumi Kono, eds., Tokei no eikida, J oto kyoto no seikatsu no shigoto (Dougen Shuppan, 1938), 241-256; and Uchida Koichiro, Koyao no rekishi (Kawada, 1939), 179-94.
54. In this sense the Japanese "Modern Girl" was not unlike the "New Woman" of Weimar Germany. In the words of Anita Gramman, "This New Woman was not merely a media myth or a demographic's paranoid fantasy, but a social reality that can be researched and documented. She existed in office and factory, bedroom and boudoir, just as surely as in cafe, cabaret, and film. I think it is important that we begin to look at the New Woman as producer and not merely consumer, as agent constructing a new identity which was then marketed in mass culture, even as mass culture helped to form that identity; "Girlhood or Thoroughly Birocrazied Female: A New Woman in Weimar Germany," in Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change, ed. Judith Friedlander, Blanche Wiener Cook, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Carol Smith-Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 64.
material culture during the 1920s. Articles in women’s magazines devoted to sewing Western-style clothes, for example, suggest some shift toward non-Japanese dress. The magazine with the reassuring title of “Housewife’s Friend” (Shufu no tora), which was aimed at the housebound married woman, had run its first series on making Western clothing in 1917, and by 1928 such articles as “How to Make a Convenient House-Dress” were promoting Western attire as a stylish commodity. Nevertheless, the daughter of the poet Hagiwara Sakutarō recalls how neighborhood housewives had jeered, “Modern Girl,” when her mother—a friend of the author Uno Chiyō—first appeared in Western clothing in 1927. It would appear that many were not as quick to accept new fashions as they were to make use of a new media label.58

The social history of the affective life of a real-life Modern Girl during the 1920s is even more difficult to recount. Were young women in fact as animated and promiscuous as they appeared in the claims of Ni and other writers who suggested that the Modern Girl’s gestures mirrored movie imagery? To what extent did the bravado of the women intellectuals in Nyūmin geijutsu reflect the self-assured attitude toward the opposite sex and toward sex reported in the media? One recorded exchange between a man and a woman on a commuter train in 1930 provides an illustration of brazen behavior that matches the accusations of critics who caught (or lauded) the Modern Girl accosting helpless men: A woman of thirty riding on a train was accused by a well-dressed stranger of acting shamelessly as a wife and of threatening the national good, because her permanent wave was “too good” and her powder too thick. The woman’s reaction was immediate and relentless. “Excuse me, but how do you know whether or not I’m someone’s wife,” she retorted. She then demanded his business card, threatened to visit his house that very day, and followed him off the train when he attempted to retreat.56

As noted by the witness to this incident, the woman protagonist was undoubtedly on route to the “Maruhāru,” the office building in the financial district of Tokyo famous for its female clerical workers in Western dress. Beginning in 1923, these women workers could have their hair permed at Japan’s first beauty parlors, and, according to contemporary sources, by 1924 women constituted 2,500 of the 30,000 white-collar workers commuting to the Marunouchi district. By the second half of the 1920s, approximately 8,200 women were employed at secretarial and service jobs in Japan’s urban centers.57

During the 1920s, at the same time as the Modern Girl was being defined, journalists and state officials were surveying the Working Woman. A comparison of the six categories used in the 1924 “Survey of Working Women,” one of the many surveys released by the Tokyo Social Affairs Bureau, with the categories used in “A Modern Girl Mental Test,” published in Fujin (Woman’s world), reveals that the discourse on the Modern Girl and the response to the Working Woman were part of the same social and economic history. While the six headings used by the Tokyo officials were teacher, typist, office worker, storekeeper, nurse, and telephone operator, the “Modern Girl Mental Test” had also included bus conductors, café waitresses, and urban women producers of services who could not be classified as middle class and who came from working-class backgrounds.58 Although the term shokugyō fujin was usually used to distinguish white-collar women employees from their sisters in the factories, the meaning of “Working Woman” remained ambiguous. As late as 1932 a commentator, who had read several works on the “working woman problem” in order to put the café waitress in a sociological perspective, still could not find a clearly defined concept to fit the label.59 Kon Wajirō’s typology of the Working Woman in his 1929 New Edition of the Guide to Greater Tokyo also illustrated the blurring of class distinctions when he included in his list women bus conductors, chauffeurs, women company representatives,


58. The term shokugyō fujin has come to be associated with a middle-class response to the creation of thousands of jobs in the expanded tertiary sector after the Russo-Japanese War and accompanying the economic boom during the First World War. See, for example, Katsuaki Nagaoka, “How Shall We Live? Social Change, the Family Institution, and Feminism in Prewar Japan” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1983), 114–39; and Murakami Nobukatsu, Teikoku no shokugyō fujin (Kumamoto Shuppan, 1963). In many instances, however, the Working Woman was associated with the Modern Girl or the working-class woman. See Kawai’s contention ("Modan guaru no kenkyū"), 149 that the term "Modern Girl" originated as a means of referring to the shokugyō fujin; and Onoyama Mieko’s query, "Is the Café Waitress a Working Woman?" in "Jōkō yōkoshibi," Chōi shinpo, April 1930, 151–52.
journalists, women office workers, women shop clerks, gasoline girls, women who handed out advertisements and matchbooks, the elevator girl (newly being paid), and the mannequin who had first appeared in 1928 (and was now found even in the provinces).

A living counterpart to the imaginary Modern Girl emerges from these various surveys. She is the single or married Japanese woman wage-worker who was forced into the work force by economic need following the end of the economic boom of the World War I years. The omnipresent working-class café waitress in novels and stories of the late 1920s and early 1930s is therefore a better indication of the Modern Girl’s true identity than the phantom figure of an aimless, nameless consumer frequently depicted in our history textbooks.

While women’s new position as producer was reflected in allusions to the Modern Girl’s economic autonomy, there was also an actual social corollary to her representation as free from family obligations. The struggle of Tanizaki’s hero to redefine his marriage with Naomi occurred at the very time that scholars and state officials, in response to the emergence of the “small” nuclear family, were actively considering the reconstitution of the modern Japanese family. Commentators on the Modern Girl have all ignored the fact that the discourse on this threatening woman reached its height just when the government was debating revision of the Civil Code, having recognized that the “law ignoring women,” as Oku Munee had called it, was not working. Inasmuch as the denial of civic responsibility to women had been promulgated not on a biological determinism but on a notion of the woman’s proper place within the family, changes in family life resulting from women’s newly expanded economic roles authorized an institutionalized ideological shift. By 1926, faced with the rise of wife-initiated divorces in urban Japan, pundits were openly lamenting the destruction of the family system.

By 1925, proposals challenging key provisions of the Civil Code, which in 1898 had granted full power to the male head of household, were under active consideration by the Rinji Hōsei Shingikai, a special investigative committee established in 1919 to revise the family provisions of the Meiji Civil Code. Women’s competence was acknowledged in the proposed changes that would seemingly eliminate the requirement of parental consent before marriage, make divorce easier for women, expand the parental rights of women, and grant women the right to manage their own property.

The Modern Girl’s notoriety thus corresponded historically with the transition in state policy toward women’s position within the family. An equally important historic conjecture was the simultaneous appearance of the ostensibly apolitical Modern Girl and women’s political groups. The displacement of the term “husband-wife quarrel” (fujigenseta) by the more evocative “family struggle” (tate nogo) indicates the extent to which family reality belied state ideology in the 1920s, and corroborates Sharon Noggle’s suggestion that various interrelated political “configurations” during the interwar years may have served to “form a collective impression of rising politicization among women.”

Numerous militant feminist organizations emerged during the 1920s after the establishment of the liberal New Woman’s Association (Shin Fujin Kyōkai) in 1919 and the Red Wave Society (Sekananka), the first Japanese socialist woman’s organization, in 1921. In 1922, the ban on women’s right to attend political meetings was lifted. The League for Women’s Suffrage (Fusen Kōtomoku Dōmei) was well established by 1925, and as a result of the establishment of left-wing political parties following the promulgation of universal male suffrage in that year, women joined such auxiliary women’s associations as the Kanbō Women’s Federation of the Labor- Farmer party. Women were also active in both wings of the labor movement; in the tenancy movement; in the Organization of Women’s Consumer Unions (Fujin Shōkō Gomai Kyōkai).

For excellent documentation of the debate regarding revision of the code and the discourse surrounding the debate, see Nagy, “How Shall We Live?” 198–213, 255. See also Nikkei mujin mondai shirō shirai, vol. 5: Yuzawa (ed.), Kazoku mondai. For an article from 1924 on the destruction of the family which listed the end of the family as an economic unit, the power of the state, and the elevation of individualism at three reasons for the collapse of the patriarchal system, see Kawada Shōichi, “Kazoku mondai no rōiki Kazoku sekō iōkai no kai, in ibid., 440–55.

For a case of the term ōitsu shi, see Kishinaka, “Kōshin,” 197.
economic, and political structures and relationships. The Japanese state's response encompassed attempts to revise the Civil Code, consideration of universal suffrage, organization and expansion of groups such as the Women's Alliance (Fujin Dohinkai) and the nationwide network of jojakai (associations of young girls), censorship, and imprisonment of leaders. The media responded by producing the Modern Girl.

Yet the Modern Girl must have represented even more, for the determination that talk about the Modern Girl displaced serious concern about the natural regime of women's activity does not fully address her multivalence (figs. 11.1–11.4). Why, in other words, was she Japanese and Western, intellectual and worker, deviant and admirable? An answer is suggested by Natalie Davis in "Women on Top," which argues that the "unruly woman" in early-modern Europe, who whored, tricked, and traded, served both to reinforce social structure and to incite women to militant action in public and in private. The culturally constructed figure of the Japanese Modern Girl certainly meets these two

CONCLUSION: WHY THE MODERN GIRL DID WHAT SHE DID

The Modern Girl is rescued from her free-floating and depoliticized state when her willful image is placed alongside the history of working, militant Japanese women. Then the obsessive contouring of the Modern Girl as promiscuous and apolitical (and later, as apolitical and non-working) begins to emerge as a means of displacing the very real militancy of Japanese women (just as the real labor of the American woman during the 1920s was denied by trivializing the work of the glorified flapper). But whereas the American woman worker by the mid-1920s had allowed herself to be depoliticized by a new consumerism, the modern Japanese woman of the 1920s was truly militant. Her militancy was articulated through the adoption of new fashions, through labor in new arenas, and through political activity that consciously challenged social

66. For an excellent chronology, see Nihon fujin mondai shiryō shū, vol. 10: Kindai Nihon fujin mondai shiryō, ed. Marumo Hidetsu (Dentosha Shuppan, 1980).
67. For detailed statistics, see ibid.
requirements. Like the disorderly woman on top, the Modern Girl as
equivocal symbol questioned relations of order and subordination and
at the same time, through her cultural gender play and promiscuity,
served “to explore the character of sexuality.”

Of course, the Japanese Modern Girl is no more a copy of her premod-
ern European sister than she is of her kinetic American contemporaries,
but the term namakiki, meaning cheeky, bold, or brazen, which recurs in
Sota Ineko’s prewar writings and which she still likes to use in mock-criti-
ical reference to herself, is a powerful analogue to the notion of woman
as “disorderly.” The connotations of this word are not violent, but they
are certainly aggressive and transgressive: the person who is namakiki,
like the vaude, dares to take liberties. The symbol of a namakiki, upply
Modern Girls, who crossed gender and class boundaries and trans-
gressed sexually, may indeed have spoken to those who demanded ex-
expanded social, sexual, and economic liberation for women and men. In
this sense, she was admirable. But conversely, the Modern Girl did what
she did because woman’s new place in public as worker, intellectual, and
political activist threatened the patriarchal family and its ideological
support, the deferring woman who was presented in state ideology as the
“Good Wife and Wise Mother.” Inflected in this fashion, she was a
threat. Finally, the Modern Girl, who was both Japanese and Western—or
possibly neither—played with the principle of cultural or rational
difference. Seen in this way, she highlighted the controversy over adop-
tion of non-Japanese customs in everyday life and called into question
the essentialism (as opposed to the European physiological determin-
ism) that subordinated the Japanese woman to the Japanese man. This
thesis was indeed offered by the feminist Kitamura, who claimed that
“abor struggle, tenancy struggle, household struggle, struggle between
man and woman” were inevitable and had recently been joined to a new
battle: “a struggle over good conduct” that pitted Japanese against West-
ern behavior and used the Modern Girl to work out the struggle.”

This, then, is the significance of the Japanese Modern Girl in the
broadest context of prewar Japanese history. The Modern Girl stood as
the vital symbol of overwhelming “modern” or non-Japanese change in-
stigated by both women and men during an era of economic crisis and
social unrest. She stood for change at a time when state authority was
attempting to reestablish authority and stability. The Modern Girl of the
1920s and early 1930s thus inverted the role of the Good Wife and Wise
Mother. The ideal Meiji woman of the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s had

71. Ibid., 150. To this way the Japanese Modern Girl is also akin to her American sister,
the flapper, for as Paula Rast has shown, young women, even more than men, symbolized
disorder and rebellion in the United States during the 1920s; see Rast, The Damned and the
served as a "repository of the past," standing for tradition when men were encouraged to change their ways of politics and culture in all ways. In contrast, the Modern Girl served critics who wanted to preserve rather than challenge traditions during a time of sweeping cultural change.

The Modern Girl as un-Japanese and therefore criminal was the real subtext to such press headlines as "Modern Girls Swept out of Ministry of Railroads," and "Conquering the Moga and Moba." The sensational press coverage in 1925 of the trial of a "vanguard moga" in short hair and Western clothing accused of murdering a delinquent foreigner with whom she had been consorting illustrated both sexual and cultural transgression. This story and others like it served a dual function: they registered unease with non-Japanese customs and at the same time denied the existence of the political activity of Japanese women. The Modern Girl's crime, in other words, was a culturally colored crime of passion; it was not a politically motivated thought crime. Thus, a father in the 1920s could beg his reluctant son to become a Modern Boy or even a Modern Girl as long as he did not "go red." 72

The most graphic example of the Modern Girl as cultural transgressor, one that signaled an end to her ubiquitous presence, was presented in a series of ink drawings constituting a history of Japanese mores during the modern era, published in the pages of Chūō kōron in 1932. In the first image, a reference to Meiji society, two women in kimono gossip under a parasol as men in Western military garb drive behind them in a horse and carriage. The following five sketches (with only one small exception) elaborate on the demure figure in kimono. Only in the image standing for 1932 does one of the figures wear Western dress; a second reclines decadently on a lounge, and a third sits undemurely with her legs spread and her elbows exposed. It is, however, the illustration accompanying the title of this piece of image-journalism that reveals the intensity with which tradition was being defended by the early 1930s. Alongside the painterly calligraphy of the title is a woman in kimono sheathed in fur; above her head is a large gun, pointed at the characters for "modern traditions" (fig. 11.5). 76

The Modern Girl stood for a contemporary woman, but, like Naomi,

74. Satō, "Modanizumu," 41–42. I do not agree with Satō's notion of a two-stage development of the term "Modern Girl," which would have her stand first for Western customs and then later for criminal action. The positive and provocative connotations of her transgressions from the mid-1920s into the 1930s must, I think, be further explored.
75. Ichikawa Koizumi, "Ryōkōka ni miru modanizumu to ero guru hassen," in Mirai ni (ed.), *Nihon modanizumu*, 267.

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Fig. 11.5. From *Chūō kōron*, April 1932.
she was also an emblem for threats to tradition, just as the Good Wife and Wise Mother had stood for its endurance: To talk about the Modern Girl was to talk about Modernity. During the 1920s, her defenders, who saw her at the vanguard of a new imperial reign—the Shōwa era—were optimistic. One, who placed her appearance at 1926, saw her evolving toward complete fulfillment. This journalist predicted that future historians writing the history of prewar men and women in Japan would call the year when the term modern geiko appeared in magazines and newspapers "a turning point." But such forecasts did not prove true. By the outbreak of the Pacific War, boundaries reifying gender and culture (and denying class) were imposed as women were legally forbidden to dress in men's clothing, women's magazines were placed under tight controls, all vestiges of Western decadence, including permanent waves, were outlawed, and intellectuals expounded on "the overrunning of modernity."

Only further research will show to what extent the Modern Girl, whose identity in our historical representations has been split into the dual images of a Working Woman and a middle-class adolescent at play, expressed a new set of gestures. Such work could explicate how Japanese men and women during the 1920s and 1930s translated expressions and actions experienced in such sites as the Hollywood movie into their own class cultures in the course of their daily lives. For now we can conclude that confusions and fantasies about class, gender, and culture were projected onto the Modern Girl before she was displaced by yet another embodiment of the Good Wife and Wise Mother, characterized by renewed ties of filiation with "tradition," state, and patriarchy.

77. Kiyosaka, "Kekkō," 153, used the term completion (kansetsu) to denote fulfillment. Regarding the notion of periodization see Kiyosaka, "Moden geiko no kensetsu," 158.

TWELVE

Doubling Expectations:
Motherhood and Women's Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s

Yoshiko Miyake

Why did the Japanese government resist mobilizing women for war work despite the acute labor shortage that resulted when male workers were drafted during the Pacific War? It was not until August 1944, when a scarcity of raw materials and a series of air raids had already interrupted production, that the wartime cabinet decided to implement compulsory conscription of women for the munitions industry. Even then, the conscription ordinance applied only to widows and unmarried women between the ages of twelve and forty and specifically excluded those women "pivotal [hōshiki] to a family"—that is, women in their procreative years whose roles as housewives and mothers were indispensable for family cohesion. The mobilization of Japanese women for war work, while "greater than in the case of Germany... was far less than the strenuous effort in Britain."


2. Jerome Cohen, Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), 272. Mobilization of women in Great Britain was more comprehensive than in any other belligerent country except Soviet Russia. Under the compulsory registration of women between the ages of eighteen and sixty, women were required to work at least part time. To facilitate the mobilization of married women, the government took such major steps as the relocation of war factories to areas where labor reserves were available, the establishment of day-care facilities, the provision of centers, and the elimination of the requirement that professional women retire upon marriage. As a result, one of a total of 17.25 million women between fourteen and sixty-four years of age, about 7.3 million worked either in paid employment or were drafted.
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This is the beginning of the text.

...when the factories closed in Britain...

...the Household Work was not work...

...established in the early 1800s...

...and the introduction of... women.

...in the late 19th century...

...in the 1890s and 1940s.

...in 1944... Japan in the 1890s and 1940s...

...in the early 1900s...

...in the 1920s...

...in the 1930s...

...in the 1940s...