

Abstract

Title The History of Japanese Women's Magazines Thorough Fashion

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In Japan, women's magazines have been widely read from the early 1900s to the present, offering continually changing notions of modern womanhood for over a century. Yet most analyses of Japanese women's magazines concentrate only on their influence in discreet periods, failing to show major changes over time in their content, visual format, and audience reception. In contrast, this thesis traces the historical development of Japanese popular women's magazines throughout most of the 20th century (from the beginning of commercial women's magazines to the 1990s) from diverse perspectives. The major objectives are as follows: (1) To clarify the way in which Japanese popular women's magazines aimed at a mass readership depicted fashion, accessories, and clothes, analyzing their influence as well as how and why new magazines appeared; (2) To clarify the relation between popular women's magazines and the gender ideology of various decades through investigating these changes; (3) To present the alternative view of history of Japanese women's magazines from prewar to postwar, highlighting their subversive potential rather than viewing them narrowly as mere tools for transmitting patriarchal ideas to unwitting women.

To ground the project, I focus on the shifting narratives of dress and on visual pages. My analytical framework integrates a host of qualitative and quantitative methods and sources: textual analysis, content analysis, readers' research, editors' interviews, and publication data, together with analysis of changes in the fashion industry and women's life course. In doing so, this thesis shows how "visual fashion magazines" emerged and their multiple meanings within societal changes shaping women's lives.

The results of this study are as follows: First, textual analysis shows that before the emergence of "visual fashion magazines" in the 1970s, fashion reportage did not figure among the main articles in Japanese popular women's magazines. Prewar women's magazines ran articles aimed at enlightening readers about how to wear western clothes, emulate the style of upper-class ladies in the early period (till Taisho Era) and of actresses in Showa Era. Women's magazines introduced Empress Michiko's fashion in the 1950s-60s. But, most articles on clothes concentrated on home-sewing patterns and instructions for making clothes. Such articles framed clothing construction and maintenance as among the main household chores for a modern woman. This did not suggest fashion or dress-making as a means to self-expression.

Second, Japanese women's magazines showed conspicuous changes in the 1970s amid the nation's growing affluence. Magazines emphasizing fashion consumption (An-an and Non-no) and targeting young women were launched. As content analysis of these women's magazines produced around 1970 shows, they differ from previous magazines in the ratio of colored pages and advertisement to written text. They were much larger in size than previous publications. These "visual fashion magazines", avoided discussion of home-sewing and dealt with how to purchase and wear fashionable ready-made clothes. The large, colorful format of these magazines promoted fashion as a means to self-expression. Concern for dress was no longer a household chore.

Third, "visual fashion magazines" starting from An-an and Non-no created a new girls' culture, as distinctive from young men's culture, liberated from their parents, and centered around a new subjectivity bound to consumer culture such as fashion, travel and interior design. The articles focused on girls' tastes, girls' body, girls' space and girls' time: how to create a space reflecting her tastes, and how to experience the joys of travel on her own.

These magazines expanded their appeal to older readers and to married women, emphasizing self-expression. Some of these magazines showed the influence of the second-wave feminism in the 1970s-80s, especially in their coverage of letters from readers voicing their marriage, sexuality and work. Through the 1970s to 1990s, "visual fashion magazines" and even some other women's magazines which decreased the amount of fashion articles maintained their focus on consumption. These magazines aimed to persuade readers to identify as members of niche consumer groups with particular tastes and interests. They encouraged readers to spend their time and money for their own pleasure, promoting various consuming behaviors which sometimes had not been common or allowed to women before such as dining out rather than cooking. Readers found that they were able to find pleasure in these new dimensions, breaking out from long-established gender restrictions. The readers of these magazines were born after the late 1950s; they formed new generation of Japanese women whose life course differed from that of previous generations in their education, marriage, and job.

Women's magazines have been regarded as mere tools for transmitting patriarchal ideas to unwitting women. But this thesis proves that they can be interpreted differently. They might be found to have a subversive edge to them, promoting alternate choices. Notably, "visual fashion magazines" arose as Japanese women increasingly chose to pursue higher education and later marriage. It is essential to understand women's magazines within the historical context of women's changing lives, the shifts in the fashion and publication industries, and in terms of readers' reception.