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Women and Networks in Nineteenth-Century Japan. Edited by Bettina GRAMLICH-OKA, Anne WALTHALL, MIYAZAKI Fumiko, and SUGANO Noriko, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2020. 289 pp. (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, no. 90), ISBN 97804-72074693 (hardcover), 9780472054695 (paperback), 9780472127337 (e-book).

Angelika Koch, Leiden

This authoritative and eminently readable collection brings together the work of scholars from Japan and abroad who over the past decades have shaped research on the history of Japanese women and genders. With a novel emphasis on the titular concept of ‘networks’, it explores the multiple meanings that networks held for Japanese women in the nineteenth century – a period that straddles the traditional historiographical fault line separating the Edo and Meiji eras.¹ What sets it apart from previous English-speaking scholarly collections on the subject is its strong focus on microhistory, which breathes life into early modern women’s experience based on a close and rigorous reading of primary sources. Through snapshots from their lives, the reader is introduced to a diverse range of women: the female members of a mid-ranking samurai household on the island of Shikoku (ch. 1); the wives, daughters and daughters-in-law of prominent male scholars, writers and intellectuals (chs. 2, 3, 4, 8); a merchant-class coordinator for a new religion in Shinano province (ch. 6); the wives of daimyo caught up in the vicissitudes of the Meiji Restoration and the dissolution of the shogunate (ch. 5); sex workers sold to brothels in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters (ch. 9); one of the first generation of factory girls to undergo training at the Tomioka Silk Mill in the 1870s (ch. 7); and a late nineteenth-century Christian activist and educator (ch. 8). Taken together, these studies provide a picture of the family, women’s roles within and beyond the household, female mobility – and inevitably, the constraints that women faced.

1 For other reviews of this collection, see Sonia FAVI: “*Stranger in the Shogun’s City* by Amy Stanley and *Women and Networks in Nineteenth-Century Japan* by Bettina Gramlich-Oka, Anne Walthall, Miyazaki Fumiko and Sugano Noriko (review),” *Gender & History* 34.1 (2022): 311–13 and Garrett L. WASHINGTON: “*Women and Networks in Nineteenth-Century Japan* by Bettina Gramlich-Oka, Anne Walthall, Miyazaki Fumiko and Sugano Noriko (review),” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 49.1 (2023): 175–80.

The analytical angle of social networks lends itself particularly well to a historical study of women given its versatility in comparison with, for example, institutional or community-based frameworks, which are frequently male-dominated and hence less likely to highlight female actors. Networks, by contrast, have the potential to place women (and other marginalised historical actors) metaphorically and methodologically at the centre, positioning them as the primary node from which all other connections depart. Inherently relational as a concept, networks are arguably also better suited to systematically uncovering gendered power relations than, for example, life-course approaches that emphasise the individual in isolation. However, the understanding and application of this unifying method of the ‘network’ varies markedly between contributors. The majority of the chapters implicitly pursue a form of qualitative ‘ego-network’ analysis centred on the personal networks formed and sustained by individual women, such as Rai Shizu (1760–1843), mother of the well-known poet Rai Sanyō (ch. 2), and Bakin’s daughter-in-law Takizawa Michi (1806–58) (ch. 4). Others, by contrast, choose to explore the role of women in predominantly male networks, such as Nishizawa Naoko’s work on the women in Fukuzawa Yukichi’s family (ch. 8) and Yokoyama Yuriko’s chapter on the loan networks that provided funds to Yoshiwara brothels, in which women appear merely as a commodity to be sold, invested in and put up as collateral by male financiers and brothel owners (ch. 9). This variety of approaches allows for flexibility in exploring a wide range of networks and women’s multiple roles within them; yet at the same time it raises issues as to the nature of their definition. Do nameless fishermen encountered by daimyo wives on the road, for example, constitute part of these women’s networks? How can we account for the different qualities of such chance encounters vis-à-vis, for example, more long-term and stable kin-based or religious networks elsewhere in the book? What are the essential qualities of networks in the first place, and what should be included within their purview?

Networks tend to have a ‘positive bias’,² revolving around successful connections while often occluding failed and non-existent ones. Consequently, they are apt to portray women as pivotal, active links in their own right within their diverse (ego)-networks; yet at the same time one must not lose sight of the ‘negative’, blank spaces – the absences, exclusions and missing links. The book deftly incorporates both viewpoints, affirming fe-

2 Kate DAVISON: “Early Modern Social Networks: Antecedents, Opportunities and Challenges,” *American Historical Review* 124.2 (2019): 476 (456–82).

male agency while also delineating its constraints. It is not surprising that many of the networks encountered in the contributions are household- and kin-based ones, and that factors such as age, class, status and position within the household greatly impacted the types of connections women were able to form. Shiba Keiko's chapter, for example, reminds the reader that the travel-based experiences of daimyo wives represented a temporary extension of their networks and were an extraordinary state of affairs compared to their more secluded everyday life rhythms in daimyo mansions, where these high-status women's interaction was limited to family and attendants (ch. 5). Nishizawa Naoko in her contribution also thematises the tension between Fukuzawa Yukichi's enlightenment ideals of gender-equal 'association' (*kōsai*) and the exclusively male nature of most of his intellectual networks, along with the fact that even female social networks within the Fukuzawa household were dominated by men (ch. 8).

A particular strength of the compilation is its meticulous qualitative reading of primary sources, including documents penned by both men and women, and those of an official character alongside more intimate, private records of women's lived experiences, such as letters and diaries. Luke Roberts' chapter demonstrates how a comparison between such different layers of documentation can be particularly instructive, strikingly illustrating the patriarchal bias of government (or what he has elsewhere called 'outer') records vis-à-vis 'inner' family records in samurai households. Official genealogies, for example, discursively erased women's identities, defining them merely as 'daughters' or 'wives' of male household heads, while also glossing over low-status servant-concubines, who in practice often played a significant reproductive role in perpetuating samurai households. 'Inner' genealogies and records, by contrast, included women as a matter of course – and demonstrate the vital activities of samurai women in this sphere, as Roberts shows for the Mori household on Shikoku (ch. 1). Even writings penned by women analysed in other contributions, such as the extensive diaries by Rai Shizu, were often preserved and deemed worthy of reprint mainly due to their association with men, being incorporated into 'complete works' (*zenshū*) and archival collections bearing the names of their male relatives. Yet a lack of historical records does not indicate a lack of female activity, but rather a lack of interest on the part of male record keepers, past and present. As Rebecca Corbett has also recently observed with regards to

early modern female tea practitioners,³ the female presence often remained invisible unless male participation rendered a gathering noteworthy. Against this androcentric slant of the historical record, the present collection rises to the challenge of flipping the narrative and shedding light on the web of women's connections.

Chief among these connections are household and kin relations. As becomes evident across various chapters, women at various levels of samurai society were part of close-knit networks with both their natal and marital families, often playing a central role in maintaining these bonds through practices such as letter writing and gift-giving. Anne Walthall, for example, cites the stream of vivid letters written by Orise, the wife of Hirata Atsutane, to her grandchildren and relatives in Edo that helped bind the family together despite their enforced geographic estrangement during her husband's banishment in Akita (ch. 5). Women were central in maintaining the coherence of the family and reproducing the household, although this was not necessarily dependent on their childbearing ability, which plays a comparatively minor role in the chapters. Given the prevalence of adoption and the widespread acceptance of offspring borne by concubines, samurai wives' reproductive labour in its broadest sense included a variety of duties designed primarily to replicate the house (*ie*) rather than the bloodline.⁴ This included raising any children of the household irrespective of whether they were biologically related, and in many cases arranging suitable marriages for them and securing a future heir – through adoption if necessary. Rai Shizu raised not only her own two surviving children but also the adopted successor to the Rai household, as well as the latter's son and her own wayward son's child (ch. 2). Takizawa Michi, on the death of her father-in-law and husband, sought to secure the household's succession and its position as shogunal guard by adopting in successive husbands for her daughter (ch. 4).

Yet a woman's contribution to the household was by no means limited to reproductive and domestic labour such as childrearing, cooking, sewing and managing servants, and several chapters point out that samurai wives were often left to manage household affairs in the absence of a suitable male head

3 Rebecca CORBETT: *Cultivating Femininity: Women and Tea Culture in Edo and Meiji Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2018.

4 In this respect, the microhistories in the present collection can be gainfully read in conjunction with the macro-perspective provided in Marcia YONEMOTO: "Adoption and the Maintenance of the Early Modern Elite," *What Is a Family? Answers from Early Modern Japan*, ed. Mary Elizabeth BERRY and Marcia YONEMOTO, Oakland: University of California Press 2019: 47–67.

of household. This was not a rare occurrence, given that prolonged tours of duty often required samurai men to be away from home for months (or even years) in service to their lord in Edo. In other cases, women had to take up the reins due to the tender age of the male heir upon the death of the previous head of household. Luke Roberts calculates that in the Mori household no less than one third of males were under the age of sixteen upon succeeding to the headship, with some as young as five. Mori Kuma (1685–1737), for example, had to navigate the fortunes of the household as the only remaining adult while raising five grandchildren upon the death of her son (ch. 1). Women arguably held power by proxy in such scenarios, acting as what feminist scholar Gerda Lerner in a different context has aptly termed ‘the stand-in wife’.⁵ Although deriving their authority from their husbands or sons, this does not change the fact that women were the *de facto* decision-makers and on-the-ground family heads for prolonged periods, even if the legal head of samurai households was inevitably a male in official documents. Wives and mothers of current and former male household heads, particularly those holding a senior position within the family, could sometimes exert substantial influence on major decisions affecting the household. This gendered power imbalance was particularly salient when a husband was adopted into the household (*muko-yōshi*) as a male heir – a relatively vulnerable position vis-à-vis the senior women despite being the legal patriarch of the family. As Itasaka Noriko’s chapter illustrates, Takizawa Michi ordered a divorce between her daughter and her newly adopted first husband within six months of their nuptials as he had turned out to be a poor match for the family; she remained at the helm of the household even after she had adopted in a second husband for her daughter – which led to resentment and bitter arguments (ch. 4).⁶

Women were also involved in the household economy and contributed various forms of productive labour – sometimes even finding employment elsewhere as servants, ladies-in-waiting, servers or sex workers. Takizawa Michi assisted her father-in-law as a scribe for his works of fiction in his lat-

5 Gerda LERNER: *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York: Oxford University Press 1986.

6 Other cases of the influence of senior women on divorce in households can be found in Harald FUESS: *Divorce in Japan: Family, Gender, and the State, 1600–2000*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press 2004: 32–37 and Luke ROBERTS: “Governing the Samurai Family in the Late Edo Period,” BERRY, YONEMOTO 2019: 149–73. In the latter, the mother of a samurai household head covers up the sexual misconduct of her daughter-in-law with a servant to prevent her son from divorcing her, thus imposing her authority in internal household matters against her son’s wishes.

er years and, as the wife of a physician, she also prepared medications for sale based on household formulas (ch. 4). Hirata Atsutane's wife, Orise, made extensive use of her kin networks to make ends meet when her husband's fall from grace and a consequent ban on the sale of his works left them in a financially precarious situation (ch. 3). Working women such as female servants and ladies-in-waiting, however, appear mostly as silent background figures in chapters centred on samurai women in this volume; positioning such often more marginal women as central nodes in their own networks could be a fruitful approach for future research if documentary records permit. The chapter most clearly focused on female labour in the collection is by Sugano Noriko (ch. 7), which discusses a relatively privileged group of first-generation factory workers at the Tomioka Silk Mill in the early 1870s. Seen through the eyes of Wada Ei (1857–1929), a samurai daughter who dutifully answered the Meiji government's call to train in new technical skills, Sugano paints a rather different picture from the standard narrative of exploitation and misery among later generations of factory women typically recruited from rural peasant families.⁷ Instead, she shows how the women described in Wada's diary formed networks based on their regional identity and, at least in Wada's case, appear to have taken pride in their work.

Women's networks thus extended beyond household and kinship bonds, as becomes particularly evident in the second part of the book, which is expressly dedicated to non-familial webs of relationships maintained by women. A fascinating example here is Miyazaki Fumiko's discussion of Matsushita Chiyo (1799–1872), a religious organiser in the new religion Fujikō, who stands out as the only female protagonist from a commoner, merchant-class background in this collection (ch. 6). New religions in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan often afforded women more opportunities than established religious institutions. Yet despite Fujikō's doctrinal emphasis on gender equality based on the belief that the preponderance of the Yang (male) principle over the Yin (female) principle had plunged the world into mayhem and required redress, Miyazaki makes clear that in practice female organisers were rare. Chiyo sustained transregional networks of believers and actively engaged in proselytizing and charitable public works, enjoying a high degree of geographic mobility that she partly owed to her status, financial situation and standing in her household, being from a

7 See the classic study by Patricia E. TSURUMI: *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990.

well-positioned merchant family that had adopted a husband for her. Religion also provided an important platform for Sumiya Koume (1850–1920), featured in Marnie Anderson’s chapter, to enter the public sphere as a Christian activist and educator (ch. 8). Religious activities generally offered women legitimate opportunities for mobility and, even for secluded daimyo wives, religious festivals, pilgrimages and visits to temples and shrines were occasion for a rare outing (ch. 5).

Another platform for building female networks beyond household and kin was provided by aesthetic pursuits, such as poetry, music and the tea ceremony. Such skills were not merely a mark of genteel, well-bred femininity as promoted in educational texts for women or a tool for female advancement in employment and the marriage market,⁸ but also functioned more generally as a space for building networks, often across status lines, for female as well as male participants. Rebecca Corbett has recently argued that women’s tea practice often remained within the family or household networks.⁹ Although a similar pattern can be discerned in the present collection, for example whereby female participants in poetry circles were often related to male members, this does not mean that women were not sustaining their own networks. Rai Shizu, for example, participated in poetry meetings with her son Sanyō and her brother-in-law, but at the same time maintained personal correspondence with poetry masters in Kyoto from her home in Hiroshima (ch. 2). Aesthetic skills could also sometimes be monetised, as in the case of Takizawa Michi, who acted as a music instructor to girls in her neighbourhood (ch. 4). And it is worth noting that such artistic and aesthetic networks – as is true of most of the networks featured in these chapters – were not purely homosocial environments but spaces in which the sexes could mix together.¹⁰ Although vastly outnumbered and often overshadowed

8 For such a perspective on women’s aesthetic skills, see for example Marcia YONEMOTO: *The Problem of Women in Early Modern Japan*, Oakland: University of California Press 2016: 51–92

9 CORBETT 2018: 42.

10 On women’s participation in aesthetic networks and artistic gatherings, see for example CORBETT 2018; Anne WALTHALL: *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998; Anne WALTHALL: “Women and Literacy from Edo to Meiji,” *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan*, ed. Peter KORNICKI, Mara PATESSIO and G.G. ROWLEY, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2010: 215–35; Eiko IKEGAMI: *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and Political Origins of Japanese Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005: 171–203; Patricia FISTER: “Female *Bunjin*: The Life of Poet-Painter Ema Saikō,” *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee BERN-

owed by men, women like Shizu, such as poet-painters Ema Saikō, Tokuyama Gyokuran and poet-activist Matsuo Taseko, were respected and accomplished members of male-dominated artistic circles and regularly participated in *kanshi*, *waka* and *haikai* poetry gatherings.

Overall, the book with its vivid and thoroughly researched accounts of individual women, their networks, family life, labour and other activities will make an excellent addition to courses on gender and women's studies in Japan, East Asia and beyond. Its focus on networks places women at the centre of activity; although this locus is primarily occupied by samurai women in the present volume, it could be fruitfully extended to commoner and more marginalised groups of women in the future. It could also be rewarding to combine such qualitative research on networks with quantitative methods from the Digital Humanities, including visualization. Exciting developments in this regard are already underway in the form of Bettina Gramlich-Oka's *Japan Biographical Database* (JBDB) project based at Sophia University, which currently includes over 12,000 entries – albeit a mere 387 for women. In conjunction with such endeavours, network studies will without doubt prove a powerful tool for innovative forays into early modern women's and gender studies.

STEIN, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991: 108–30; Patricia FISTER: “Women Artists of Japan,” *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Smith WEIDNER, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990: 219–40; Stephen ADISS: “The Three Women of Gion,” WEIDNER 1990: 241–63.

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