

**Introduction**  
**MANGA, MAIKO, AIDORU:**  
**GIRL COOL IN JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE**

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It is a pleasure to introduce this special section of *Japan Studies Review*. The articles by Jan Bardsley, Inger Sigrun Brodey, Kinko Ito, and Yuki Watanabe were originally prepared for the 2009 Southern Japan Seminar (SJS) in Miami hosted by the Institute for Asian Studies, Florida International University. We are grateful to Steven Heine, editor of *Japan Studies Review* and SJS President for inviting us to publish this special section, and appreciative of the several anonymous reviewers who refereed these papers. We also thank Dr. Heine for his inspired choice of discussant for our panel, Laura Miller, the Ei'ichi Shibusawa-Seigo Arai Professor of Japanese Studies and Professor of Anthropology at University of Missouri, St. Louis, and a leader in the emerging field of Girl Studies. We are delighted that Dr. Miller permitted us to publish her commentary, too.

Our exploration of popular cultural views of girls and women in contemporary Japanese culture highlights a range of images of female assertiveness, intentional innocence and sexuality, and imagined identities. Since we examine such mass-mediated phenomena as anime, manga, film, and television programs, our discussion also elucidates the commodification of fantasies of girlhood and the meanings attached to these in contemporary Japan. Articles by Bardsley, Brodey, and Watanabe train attention on diverse representations of girlhood, while Kinko Ito's article on ladies' comics discusses girls grown up and exploring adult sexuality. Miller's essay widens the lens to show how leaders of Japanese government and industry have exploited "girl cool" to promote tourism to Japan and consumption of Japanese popular culture, and introduces issues at the heart of Girl Studies.

The disasters Japan has suffered in spring 2011 make these earlier discussions of popular culture appear to be particularly light-hearted. How will suffering on such a monumental scale affect the narratives of girlhood and womanhood produced in Japan in the next decade and beyond? How will the apparent rise in youth volunteerism and the possibility of jobs related to relief shape this generation of young Japanese? These are questions that we will follow for years to come. We can anticipate that this

newest tragedy will be processed through popular cultural forms, much as have the nuclear devastation and national traumas of the past. It will no doubt be understood as marking a sharp cultural divide in a way that resembles the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. In consequence, this special section stands as one of numerous strands woven into Japanese culture “before 2011.”

Below, I briefly introduce the articles in the order that they will appear in this issue. Note that we follow East Asian practice in listing family names first followed by given names. We thank Jennylee Diaz and Maria Sol Echarren of *Japan Studies Review* for their work on this issue.

Inger Sigrun Brodey’s article, “*Ema*: The New Face of Jane Austen in Japan,” discovers how Jane Austen’s famed novel *Emma* (1815) has been re-imagined for contemporary audiences by manga artist Mori Kaoru. Mori’s award-winning *manga* series *Ema*, published from 2002 to 2006 in Japan, inspired an *anime* series that aired on Japanese television from 2006 to 2008. Brodey argues that despite differences in the narrative techniques employed by Austen and Mori, abundant connections exist between the two authors. Brodey finds that “Mori borrows plot elements from several Jane Austen novels, as well as visual images from the films of those novels” and her work, too, shows an interest in society, rank, and the concept of the gentleman. This investigation leads Brodey to consider how the Victorian setting of *Ema* may reveal nostalgia for Meiji Japan. She observes that Mori devises characters with the appeal of both traditionalist and feminist overtones by referring to Meiji New Women and *jogakusei* (girl students) as well as contemporary Japanese fascination with the English maid.

Nostalgia for visions of girlhood from bygone days also figures in Jan Bardsley’s exploration of contemporary representations of the *maiko* (novice geisha). “Maiko Boom: The Revival of Kyoto’s Novice Geisha” describes how maiko blogs, autobiographies, and dance performances, maiko-related goods and services, and even maiko movies and TV drama turned the novice geisha into a site of “good girlhood” around 2008. Bardsley shows how the maiko offers an alternative to depictions of teen characters involved in violent crimes in detective writer Kirino Natsuo’s *Real World* (2003) and Akutagawa prize-winning author Kanehara Hitomi’s best-selling novel *Snakes and Earrings* (2003). In contrast to the erotic display of contemporary pop singers such as Koda Kumi and the sexually explicit genre of ladies comics, discussed in the articles in this volume by Yuki Watanabe and Kinko Ito, the modest maiko serves to

assuage fears that Japanese girls may have gone wild. As Bardsley also shows, however, associations with the prim and proper have also rendered the maiko figure and Kyoto aesthetics ripe for parody.

In “*Erokakkoi*: Changing Images of Female Idols in Contemporary Japan,” Yuki Watanabe investigates how the concept of *erokakkoi* (erotic and cool) came to be embodied by mainstream female singing idols. Tracing the rise of one of Japan’s most popular singers, Koda Kumi, who is also known for her risqué costumes, Watanabe examines the social implications of the girl idol phenomenon in terms of increasingly ambiguous gender relationships in contemporary Japan. Watanabe delves into the construction of *erokakkoi* by drawing on some of Koda’s song lyrics, music videos, and media coverage, and considers these against the shifting images of mainstream female pop singers in Japan since 1980. She observes that Koda’s fans simultaneously appreciate (or at least tolerate) her overt displays of sexuality while also admiring her cool, and discovers that fans of Koda and other female idols consist of a widely heterogeneous mix of both genders.

Ladies’ comics, a popular form of manga aimed at adult women, contrast dramatically with the innocence and chastity associated with teenage maiko. As Kinko Ito explains, ladies’ comics portray all forms of sexuality, much of it taboo, in graphic form. Her article, “Framing the Sensual: Japanese Sexuality in Ladies’ Comics,” analyzes examples of the genre to discuss “their individualistic focus on carnal pleasure and the self” and observes how ladies’ comics comprise diverse texts that are “visual, informative, and imaginative.” Ito argues that dismissing the sexually explicit manga among these as merely “pornography for women” diminishes their potential as erotica that many women readers find pleasurable and empowering. Readers who wish to pursue this topic will want to read Ito’s recently-published book on this topic, *A Sociology of Japanese Ladies’ Comics: Images of the Life, Loves, and Sexual Fantasies of Adult Japanese Women* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

Laura Miller’s essay, “Taking Girls Seriously in ‘Cool Japan’ Ideology” offers insightful commentary on this section of *Japan Studies Review*. Examining the Cool Japan campaign developed in 2006 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Miller argues that “girl culture is often missing in enthusiastic celebrations of Japanese popular culture, particularly in formulations that are sponsored or promoted by mainstream and elite institutions.” She points out how the campaign through its deployment of such stars as the J-Pop group Puffy (comprised of duo Onuki Ami and

Yoshimura Yumi) or its invention of the three girlish Ambassadors of Cute were carefully calibrated to appeal to a wide audience without threatening to offend. Although such commodified representations do indeed have appeal, as Miller argues, they minimize the range of self-expression produced by girls in contemporary Japan in all kinds of venues. It is the ephemera of girls' shifting interests, fashions, and creative production that most renders their status ambiguous, portents of an indeterminate future, and investigating this is the focus of Girl Studies. Thus, Miller claims that the articles published here "are important because these scholars have immersed themselves in girl culture, unpacking the many different products and media that are appealing to girls and women, paying attention to phenomena that drive a huge part of the Japanese economy but which many critics oddly ignore or negate."