



ISSN: 1500-0713

Soft power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency
Reviewed by Daniel A. Metraux

The Political Economy of Japan's Low Fertility
Reviewed by John Hickman

The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning
Reviewed by Jan Bardsley

Source: *Japanese Studies Review*, Vol. XIII (2010), pp. 165 - 175

Stable URL: <https://asian.fiu.edu/projects-and-grants/japan-studies-review/journal-archive/volume-xiv-2010/165-combined-book-reviews.pdf>

Takeshi Matsuda, *Soft Power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 372 pp. ISBN: 0-8047-0040-0 (hardcover), \$60.00.

Reviewed By Daniel A. Métraux

Takeshi Matsuda in *Early Postwar Japan* offers an in-depth examination of the cultural aspects of Japanese-American relations from the inception of the American Occupation in 1945 through the late 1950s. The U.S. Occupation is often portrayed as a great success story – Japan became an avowedly democratic and prosperous nation with a strong pacifist bent. Professor Matsuda, however, finds at least some fault with this glowing picture, strongly asserting that the highly paternalistic cultural diplomacy of the Americans created a sense of permanent dependency on the part of the Japanese. He finds that while Japan proudly boasts the elegant trappings of electoral democracy, the country itself remains highly elitist and submissive due in part to American efforts to reinforce the domestic importance of intellectual elite.

Matsuda argues that any comprehensive foreign policy is shaped by three legs – political, economic, and cultural. These three elements were strongly emphasized during the Occupation, but with mixed results. The cultural or exchange programs and enduring friendships represent the positive side of the picture. Matsuda notes the enduring importance of the International House in Tokyo, as the rest of the world structural dependencies on the part of the Japanese represent the downside of these policies.

The United States made a concerted effort to develop a genuine exchange in both directions, but as historian John Dower notes in the Foreword, however, this was easier said than done. The two-lane street amounted to a multilane highway on the U.S. side and single lane in the other. Certainly in American eyes, the United States was – and still remains, more than a half century later – the supreme military commander of defeated Japan. American policymakers and cultural emissaries have never abandoned their early postwar assumption of moral, cultural and intellectual superiority; and the Japanese elites whom the United States has so carefully cultivated, in turn, have rarely failed to acquiesce to such cultural hegemony (xiv+xvi). Matsuda sadly recounts how an abiding psychology of dependence on the U.S. continues to grip Japan, but this is a malady.

The American presence in Japan brought about an explosion of Japanese studies in the United States and American studies in Japan, which has built strong bonds between the two nations. A critical American Occupation goal was to democratize intellectual and university life in Japan by opening a whole slew of new universities, but this project failed to get off the ground. Instead, by working with old school Japanese bureaucratic leaders and by emphasizing the importance of the major universities of prewar Japan, the U.S. strongly encouraged the reemergence of a cultural and intellectual elite in Japan. Matsuda is very critical of Japanese scholars, who live in their proverbial ivory towers while fostering their own work but contribute very little to the welfare of society and, most damningly, fail to openly question or criticize government programs and policies. Japanese intellectuals are said to be simultaneously elitist and submissive. This problem, Matsuda notes, represents one of the key failings of attempts to build constructive democracy in Japan left virtually intact of intellectual weaklings. The Japanese elite who had been nurtured to become pro-American gained ever greater power and influence in the postwar Japanese society. The Japanese bureaucracy, too, actually attained greater authority than it had possessed at the height of mobilization for war. Yet, the postwar Japanese elite were pathetically weak before authority and lamentably deficient in thought and behavioral developments. This has led to a weak elitist form of democracy in Japan that prevails even today.

Matsuda's portrayal of Japanese university life is very much on target. When I taught at Doshisha Women's University, professors were graduates of Doshisha University. Only a small handful of professors had any involvement in non-Doshisha activities of any kind. While a good number of professors at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia, my home institution, hold local political office and are actively involved in community affairs, such is not the case with a vast majority of Doshisha professors. When I tried to submit an article to a Doshisha-based scholarly journal, I was told that only full-time Doshisha professors could submit articles. I very rarely heard any discussions on politics in Japan unless I tried to start one.

Although the Iraq War is not a core topic of this book, Matsuda compares the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the occupations of Japan and Germany after World War II. Matsuda notes that members of the Bush team claimed that American soft and hard power permanently shaped the future of these two nations and that their goal was to apply the same methodology to Iraq to create a peaceful and democratic

society there. Matsuda, however, warns that the occupation of Japan is very different from that of Iraq because the United States approached Japan with a genuine interest in understanding and appreciating Japanese history and culture. While the Americans did indeed approach the Japanese with a deep form of cultural imperialism, the U.S. had for several years prepared itself with a large reservoir of knowledge concerning the interaction of American and Japanese cultures. In contrast to the current situation in Iraq, the U.S. occupation of Japan was a democratic experiment supported by American soft power, as well as hard power. Before the actual occupation of Japan, America made the effort to define the general objectives of the occupation and formulate programs needed to meet the specific objectives of the United States.

Matsuda comments on Japanese-American relations in the postwar era, but also discusses the failure of Japan to develop a strong foundation for its democratic state. He offers a harsh but very necessary critique of Japanese intelligence, universities, and the lack of critical thinking in the nation's educational and political systems. American political leaders will find a very comprehensive overview of the strengths and weaknesses of American catastrophes, like Iraq. Matsuda's insights are profound, and his analyses are well developed. *Soft Power* is one of the best studies ever done on postwar Japan.

Frances McCall Rosenbluth, ed., *The Political Economy of Japan's Low Fertility*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. 240pp. ISBN 978-0-8047-5486 (hardcover), \$50.00.

Reviewed By John Hickman

Low fertility is increasingly perceived as a public policy problem by the elites in advanced industrial states. This edited volume by Frances McCall Rosenbluth does not challenge that perception but instead explores related aspects of the phenomenon in Japan, one of several Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries presenting fertility rates below population replacement levels. Integrating the eight articles in the book is the thesis, articulated in the editor's first chapter, that low fertility in Japan reflects the high costs women bear in both participating in the labor market and taking care of children. After addressing arguments based on cultural difference and household bargaining models, Rosenbluth articulates a very strong case that low

fertility in Japan is attributable to gender barriers to entering or reentering the corporate labor market, and that government support for childcare has been insufficient to rectify the disparity in career opportunity. The remaining seven chapters expand on different aspects of the relationship between work and childbirth.

Comparing women's labor force participation and incomes in Japan, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Britain and the U.S., Sawako Shirahase shows that the economic power of wives in households is crucial in explaining fertility levels (pp. 52-53). Excepting Italy, the incomes of married women are inversely associated with lower fertility (p. 45). Shirahase argues that Japanese women are discouraged from having children because it increases their economic dependence on other family members. They are reduced to making minor contributions to family income if they withdraw from their careers because of childbirth. While only 20.3% of Swedish working mothers contribute less than 20% of total household income, this is true of 51.1% of Japanese working mothers (p. 45).

Margarita Estevez-Abe critiques the belief that Scandinavian social-democracies have achieved more gender equality than alternative political economic regimes. Cross-national comparison of female labor force participation, occupational segregation, and gender wage gap for the OECD countries from the late 1990s are used to point out exceptions to that conventional wisdom. Anglo-Saxon countries, which have less generous maternity leave and public childcare benefits than the Scandinavian countries, also present high female labor force participation. Australia and Italy, she points out, also narrowed the gender wage gap. Unfortunately, more recent data indicate that while Australia and New Zealand continue to present a smaller gender income gap than many other OECD countries, the gender income gap in Italy is once again relatively large. According to the UNDP's 2006 Human Development Report, Sweden presents the smallest gender gap (.81), followed by Norway (.75), Denmark (.73), and Iceland (.71). Australia and New Zealand tie for fifth place (.70). Italy (.46) ranks barely above Japan (.44). Most countries within OECD, including the three other Anglo-Saxon countries, are in the middle range between Scandinavia/Oceania on one hand and Italy/Japan on the other.

Mary C. Brinton traces the historical development of clerical work in the United States and Japan from the late 19th century to the early 21st century using birth cohort labor force statistics. Her principal conclusion is that cultural difference in the relative statuses of age and education explains the markedly greater tendency for Japanese women to leave clerical work as

they grow older. Status in the Japanese workplace is more related to age than it is in the United States. "Older women in the workplace constitute an anomaly vis-à-vis younger men. As women, they generally have lower status, but their age gives them higher status. This produces a situation that can be disconcerting for everyone" (p. 105).

In an interesting analysis, Eiko Kenjoh investigates the relationship between female labor force participation and childbirth in Japan and four other OECD countries. Comparison of the Japanese and Dutch cases reveals a strong similarity in women's employment during the 1980s but not during the 1990s. In the 1980s, approximately 90% of Japanese and Dutch women participated in the labor market until their first childbirth, after which the percentage declined to approximately 30%. While that pattern continued in Japan in the 1990s, in the Netherlands women's participation in the labor market increased to approximately 60% at the time of the first childbirth. Kenjoh explains this and similar increases in Britain, Germany, and Sweden reflect changes in social attitudes and public policies more supportive of working parents. In the Dutch case, the change in the 1990s is attributable to "wider social acceptance of mothers who work, but also by the revolution in part-time employment" (p. 115).

If limited access to the labor market discourages fertility, then access to childcare and affordable education are essential in addressing the problem of low fertility. Patricia Boling surveys the development of family policy in Japan, including child allowances, tax allowances for dependents, parental leave, and public childcare. She explains the glacial nature of change in family policy-making as a survival of the closed political system consisting of senior bureaucrats at the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the social policy "tribe" in the Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research Council. Representatives of important stakeholder groups like parents of children in childcare were not invited to serve on advisory councils because "the process does not seem to welcome unscripted and, perhaps, critical comments" (p. 145).

Problems with public sector daycare provisions are investigated by Junichiro Wada. The first is that national, prefectural, and municipal government subsidies for both public and licensed private sector daycare facilities are accompanied by limits on fees paid that cause consumer demand to exceed supply. The second is that the "inflexibility of public childcare" reflected in the failure to provide extendable care, night care and interim care are caused by the resistance of public employee unions to the employment of part-time daycare workers (p. 159). He also blames working

mothers who gain access to limited childcare services for the limited availability of childcare to others. Those who gain access organize collectively to extract improvements which limit the expansion of childcare to working mothers who are still on waiting lists (p. 164).

The economic impact on families of private schools and *juku* or private sector “cram schools” is examined by Keiko Hirao. She notes that compared with other major OECD countries, public spending on education at all levels is low in Japan. University- and college-bound Japanese youth typically attend *juku* for several hours after regular school hours to prepare for the rigors of highly competitive entrance examinations. In the mid-1990s, some 59.5% of middle school students attended *juku*. Among Hirao’s most interesting findings is that single income families with one child spent 4% of their budget on education while two income families with one child spent 5.9% (pp. 181-182). The percentages for families with two children are 8.9% and 9.7%, respectively. Given the limits of the data, however, Hirao is unwilling to conclude that the costs of privatized education cause mothers to enter or reenter the work force.

Rosenbuth’s edited volume is a valuable contribution to the literature connecting demography and political economy. Many of the chapters offer not only useful content but also indicate opportunities for future research with important public policy applications.

Peter Pagnamento and Momoko Williams, *Sword and Blossom: A British Officer’s Enduring Love for a Japanese Woman*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2006. xiv+345 pp. ISBN: 1-59420-089-0 (hardcover), \$25.95.

Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux

Sword and Blossom is a love story between a late Victorian British Army officer and a beautiful Japanese woman he met while serving in Japan, but it is much more. Authors Peter Pagnamento and Momoko Williams provide us with an excellent look at early twentieth century life in Japan and a fascinating analysis of the British-Japanese military alliance which made this relationship possible. The British officer, Brigadier General Arthur Hart-Synnot, takes us on a historical tour of the Boer War in South Africa; reviews life at the front in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War; involves us in tours of duty in Hong Kong, India, Burma and Japan; and gives us a front row seat to the horrors of World War I in France.

Masa Suzuki, who met Hart-Synnot at the Officer's Club in Tokyo in 1904, gives us a clear view of family life and the status of Japanese women in the late Meiji era (1868-1912).

After the ratification of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902, the British sent ten promising young officers to Tokyo to learn Japanese so that British and Japanese military officials could begin conversing with each other. Hart-Synnot volunteered for the mission and soon became amazingly fluent, with near native writing and speaking ability. A genuine scholar, he developed a deep appreciation for Japanese history and culture when he met Masa, the daughter of a lower-middle-class tradesman doing clerical work at the Officer's Club. They were immediately smitten and were soon living together in his small private apartment.

Because Hart-Synnot was so proficient in Japanese, they developed a hot and heavy correspondence where they shared their love and made fascinating observations about their lives and times. Hart-Synnot provides brilliant depictions of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and colonial postings in India, Burma and Hong Kong. We even view English gentry life at Hart-Synnot's family estate in Ireland and the destruction of the house by the IRA during the Irish Civil War of 1916. Fortunately, Hart-Synnot was also stationed in Japan for long intervals between other assignments and was thus able to live with Masa. Their romantic relationship was maintained despite the racial prejudice and social snobbery they endured. They became parents of two boys, one who died very young, and Masa even joined Hart-Synnot in Hong Kong for two long intervals. Hart-Synnot begged Masa to marry him, but her family wanted her home caring for her aged mother and feared that she would be racially stigmatized abroad. Her refusal, despite her intense love for him, was a move she would later deeply regret.

Like the story of *Madame Butterfly*, this relationship was ultimately doomed. Hart-Synnot always came back to his Masa, but his military duty and other assignments meant long painful separations as well. Hart-Synnot was considering retirement from the army in 1914 and a permanent life with Masa and her boys in Japan, but World War I got in their way. He was severely wounded and had both his legs amputated. He needed daily care and could not make the long boat trip to Japan. Luckily for him, he was able to marry his older British nurse who cared for him through his death in 1942. Masa was shocked that her lover married another, but they eventually reconciled and he maintained his financial support for her up through the start of World War II.

Their surviving Anglo-Japanese son, Kiyoshi, evolved into a brilliant athlete and scholar-author. He even met his father in France shortly before World War II when both were living there, but Kiyoshi died a tragic death at the hands of the Russians at the end of the war. Masa died in the 1960s.

Both Masa and Hart-Synnot saved each other's letters, but Masa's letters were lost during World War II. Hart-Synnot's letters to Masa, however, survive and authors Williams and Pagnamento have combed hundreds of these letters to provide a marvelous picture of this relationship, as well as an excellent history of this critical period. The book is clearly and beautifully written. The only drawback is that Masa emerges as a rather hollow person because her letters do not survive – we only see her through Hart-Synnot's eyes. This book would serve as a great supplement for a course on modern Japan or early modern Asia.

Kelly M. Foreman, *The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning*. Burlington, VT; Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008. 176 pp. ISBN: 0754650570 (hardcover), \$89.95.

Reviewed by Jan Bardsley

An outstanding contribution to the academic study of geisha, *The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning* opens a new window on this famous, but much misunderstood profession. Author Kelly M. Foreman, an ethnomusicologist, spent over ten years researching the topic, including nearly four years (1997-2001) in Kyoto and Tokyo studying *shamisen* alongside geisha, interviewing them, observing their stage performances, and participating in the *ozashiki* (private gatherings of patrons and geisha). Her book breaks ground in its detailed analysis of the arts practices of the contemporary geisha and the network of teachers, geisha associations, and patrons integral to keeping the profession alive. One comes away from this study with an appreciation of the geisha as unique in the classical arts world for her accomplishment in several arts, and for her ability to perform in the intimate setting of the *ozashiki* as well as publicly at festivals, in shrines and temples, and in major stage productions. The astounding cost in time and money required by the geisha's arts practice, her dependence on client patronage, and the ambiguity of her status in both the arts world and Japanese society make her position today, however, precarious indeed.

The Gei of Geisha clears the way for discussing contemporary geisha by distancing them from the sexualized fantasies that continue to color their reception abroad and even in Japan. This book takes the geisha as a subject, not an object, and views her as one who strives to master an Edo-inspired chic known as *iki*. Foreman emphasizes that today's geisha, literally translated as "arts person," is defined by her practice of multiple arts (dance, music, tea ceremony, and others) and her accomplishment in many genres within an art. This makes her unusual in the classical arts world in Japan, where most practitioners, especially professional stage musicians, devote themselves entirely to one art and genre. Foreman explains that young women interested in becoming geisha are attracted to the well-rounded, more diverse arts education the profession requires. They also appreciate the financial support provided to novices by the *karyūkai* (geisha network); the convenience of being able to take lessons from different teachers at a single location – the *kaburenjo* or dance hall of one's particular geisha district (*hanamachi*); and the opportunity for immersion in an almost daily series of lessons with no obligation to earn their keep by teaching, as other arts professionals often must. The geisha career involves women in a closely knit, communal world of geisha houses (*okiya*), teahouses (*ochaya*), art guilds (*ryū*) headed by an *iemoto* headmaster, and an association (*kumiai*) of geisha houses. It is also a hierarchical world in which geisha identities and loyalties are fixed by their location in specific *okiya*, *hanamachi*, and *ryū*.

Foreman conducts her analysis of the geisha profession from a strongly feminist perspective, and this, too, presents a new view of geisha. She argues that discrimination against women in Japan, although ameliorated by the Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1986 and the Basic Law for Gender Equality in 1999, has not ended in the world of the classic arts. The Kabuki stage remains open only to men, and although geisha study the shamisen professionally with the same masters as Kabuki professionals, they are not allowed in Kabuki. A law initiated in 2000 forbidding civil servants from any involvement in the *karyūkai* even in their leisure time meant that politicians, a group long associated with geisha gatherings, could not serve as *ozashiki* patrons or guests— a move that meant such a loss of income for Tokyo geisha that many were forced to retire. The law also casts the geisha as a victim at worst and unsavory at best. Foreman further observes that as practitioners of *multiple* arts, even the most accomplished geisha are not eligible for the honor and financial support of being named a Living National Treasure of Japan as others

skilled in Edo-era arts and crafts are. When Foreman broached the possibility of other kinds of support for geisha, such as arts grants, however, she discovered that most preferred to rely on the current system of client patronage.

Foreman's feminist analysis of the geisha as independent career artists depends a good deal on the light she sheds on contemporary patronage. The patron, or *danna*, represented in modern Japanese literature and film has often been depicted as little more than a rich and lecherous scoundrel. Today, patrons are women and men who come from many walks of life (medical professionals, artists, photographers, administrators), who appreciate classical dance and music and may study or even perform themselves on an amateur basis. Foreman observes they may use the title *suponsaa* (sponsor) rather than *danna*. Patrons must have the financial wherewithal to pay the high fees of the *ozashiki*, which in turn provide income for geisha. Patrons are also expected to support the geisha arts by buying tickets to the annual stage productions and by contributing to *okiya* with, for example, a new instrument or other needed items. Relations between geisha and patrons are not intended to lead to romantic liaisons, although at times these do occur.

Although patrons and geisha alike appreciate the performance space of the *ozashiki*, both know that geisha train most intensely for the annual lavish stage productions such as *Miyako Odori* (Dances of the Capital) performed each spring in Kyoto by members of the Gion Kōbu *hanamachi*. As Foreman discusses in detail, geisha bear all costs for such productions, sometimes even going into debt. Participation in such productions as well as *ryū* recitals is mandatory.

The Gei of Geisha updates and builds on Liza Dalby's well-known anthropological study, *Geisha*, based on her fieldwork in Kyoto in the 1970s¹; a 25th anniversary edition was recently released. Both books make an excellent case for understanding geisha based on their actual motivations, work, and communities. They also pave the way for more research on geisha at different historical junctures and locations in Japan. G.G. Rowley's excellent translation of the autobiography of one-time geisha Masuda Sayo, who died in 2008 at age 83, for example, offers the contrast of an impoverished woman living in a much different era who experienced

¹ Liza Dalby, *Geisha*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983).

abuse in an *okiya* and by *danna*.² Although Dalby's and Masuda's books are available in paperback, Foreman's remains a steeply priced hard back. One hopes that all interested in geisha, patronage, and the arts in Japan today will nevertheless seek out a copy.

² Masuda Sayo. *Autobiography of a Geisha* trans. G.G. Rowley (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).