

Advertising, Women, and Japan

The Evolution of Commercial Art and Social Roles in the Taisho and Showa period

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In Japan today, women are far behind men inside the workforce. Society is trying to change the conditions to have more women succeed in their jobs. This report focuses on ‘advertisement’, ‘women’ and ‘Japan’, and argues that the roots to this problem can be found in the Taisho and early Showa period. The purpose of this report is to examine the advertisements of early Japan and discuss its effects on creating Japanese female roles.

Before looking closely into Japan and advertisement, the first section will discuss the importance of studying advertisement today. Advertisement influences several aspects of the human society, yet it is a new field of study that is recently brought to attention. Questions that will be discussed throughout this report are organized to sort out the flow. The second section will focus on the history of Japanese advertisement and state how the society before the Taisho period was run by men. Taisho period was the peak era Japanese advertisement and this section is meant to look at the background to it. It is necessary to understand what was consumed, by whom, where and how advertising helped vendors to sell their products. Hence, this section will focus on the early days of advertising in Japan. “Early days” will refer to two divided eras – the pre Meiji period, and the Meiji period.. Questions such as “How were things sold and bought?” “What did people buy?” “What was the meaning of shopping for consumers?” will be answered, before discussing the process of advertising itself. The section concludes by analyzing the role of women in consumption, and how and where advertisement appeared to them. Consumption behavior in the traditional Japanese society will contrast with the following section.

The third section discusses the drastic changes brought to Japanese people’s lives through the Taisho period. The Taisho period (1912-1926), is known as the era of modernism. Japan went through a rapid economic growth which brought urbanization to the country. The rapid modernization changed the way people lived, thought, and

consumed. This section, looks into the patterns of consumption and then the advertising of the Taisho period. Modernity brought several changes to people's lives, and this chapter will continue to keep its focus on women. Understanding the Taisho consumption and how women lived this period, leads to a deeper comprehension of the poster images in the fourth section.

In the fourth section, actual advertisement posters are carefully discussed to look into what the society saw in women and how women's roles were thought by the people of the Taisho and early Showa period. Posters, for its high pictorial features that transmits direct images to the audience are picked up and considered the point of view of producers and consumers, men and women. Advertisements made to sell alcohol and beauty items are the main focuses of this section. How posters from the Taisho period reflect Japanese women and the society that they lived in lead to an understanding of Japanese women and society itself. Posters of the fourth section speak for themselves - Japanese women have created a prejudice that women are consumers from the period when society started to modernize. The ads represent this long lasting impact on Japanese society.

This report concludes that advertisements created the female consumption culture that stayed inside society ever since the Taisho period. This influenced the modernization of female roles to stop at a point where they stay as consumers. It was important for producers to keep reminding women that they were the ones who should be shopping. Women who saw the new modern female models inside posters believed that modernizing meant to look like the woman in the ad. They learned that by shopping to achieve the new western lifestyle, they could become the modern girl that everyone dreamed of being.

This spiral created the modern Japanese female consumer. Women who cannot get away from the idea that they are the consumers are behind work forces, stay inside their houses, and have a hard time becoming the ones who make people to consume. The Taisho posters reflect the lasting impact of the strong message towards women in Japan.