

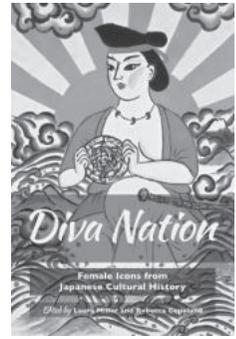
◆書評◆

Edited by Laura Miller and Rebecca Copeland

Diva Nation

Female Icons from Japanese Cultural History

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Maki Isaka

(Affiliate Faculty, Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota)

The present book is co-edited by two scholars with excellent records of editing anthologies respectively. Rebecca Copeland has edited, as editor or co-editor, several anthologies of weight with the themes of “Japanese women” and “literature.”¹ Likewise, Laura Miller has co-edited some important anthologies, the underlying themes of which lie in “gender” and “Japan,” broadly defined.² Now these superb creators of collaborative works have produced another welcome addition to Japan studies. In this book, the overarching subject is “diva nation.” Such a blunt but eye-catching phrase is greatly open-ended, which *might* appear somewhat too courageously risk taking, or even poten-

tially “vulnerable,” as a way of presenting a topic--whether as a concept or as a theme--that is as complicated and controversial as the one this book presents: The combination of “diva” and “nation.” The very open-endedness, however, is nothing other than one of the strongest suits of the book, engendering *Diva Nation*’s stimulating nature to entice readers to add their own “diva” candidates to the already diverse list of their divas.

In fact, diversity is one immediately visible characteristic of this book, including that of its diva subjects. In addition to an introduction, preface, and afterword, the book consists of ten main chapters discussing various divas across time, social

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- 1 Rebecca Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, eds., *The Father-Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2001); Rebecca Copeland ed., *Woman Critiqued: Translated Essays on Japanese Women’s Writing* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2006); Rebecca Copeland and Melek Ortabasi, eds., *The Modern Murasaki: Writing by Women of Meiji Japan* (Columbia University Press, 2006).
 - 2 Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley, eds., *Bad Girls of Japan* (Palgrave, 2005); Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley, eds., *Manners and Mischief: Gender, Power, and Etiquette in Japan* (University of California Press, 2011); Laura Miller, Alisa Freedman, and Christine Yano, eds., *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Modernity, and Labor in Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

status, biological sex, etc., ranging from mythical ones to historical figures and to modern and contemporary persons in various fields. A simple inventory will immediately imply that the book is not so much interested in defining “diva” as exploring its possibility.

Methods also differ significantly from one chapter to another. For example, the chapter on sixteenth-century Izumo no Okuni (pp. 77-94), the legendary founder of kabuki theatre, is a quite straightforward literary “profil[ing]” (p. 77) based on a namesake novel in the twentieth century by Ariyoshi Sawako. A seemingly similar yet differentiated approach to modern literary work on divas before them is taken in the chapter on Izanami and Kirino Nat-suo (pp. 13-33), which discusses the female deity and the author of *Joshinki* (The Goddess Chronicle), an imaginary sequel to the Izanami-Izanagi myth. Importantly, the chapter in question explores Kirino as a diva in her own right, whose “perfected . . . performance of aestheticized smartness [is] all the more provocative because it suggests defiance” (p. 15). The chapter on Himiko (pp. 51-76) analogously pays attention to later phenomena *on* the third-century “paramount chief of the earliest Japanese polity” (p. 51). There exists some room for discussion whether it is appropriate to call the historical Himiko herself a diva, for if the former was a successful “supreme ruler of 100 chiefdoms” (p. 51), the latter is, collectively speaking, “unruly women” (p. 3). Countless contemporary images and namesakes of Himiko, exam-

ined in detail by the anthropologist scholar, are however most certainly that which make this diva possible.

The aforementioned Okuni chapter is not independent of wide-spread common sense that kabuki theatre was founded by a woman and yet women were purged from the realm soon afterwards. (Importantly, such trajectory is not so unique to kabuki history, hence the presence and need of ubiquitous divas.) The introduction of the book reads, “When we entered the kabuki theatre, drawn initially perhaps by the alluring *onnagata* [actors performing women’s roles], it was Okuni who captured our imagination” (p. 1). While effective on the whole, the common sense above equates *onnagata* to men, and sometimes to cis-men at that, concealing the diverse nature of *onnagata* in and of themselves: transwomen *onnagata*, intersex *onnagata*, female *onnagata*, including highly masculinized “honorary-men” female *onnagata*, to name a few. This would be another promising matrix of varied divas, tempting us readers to nominate more female/feminine/feminized diva icons to the current list of “female icons,” as the subtitle of the book reads. The chapter on IKKO (pp. 133-150), a transwoman make-up artist in contemporary Japan, simultaneously appeases and further stimulates such desire. It was highly commendable for this chapter, and this anthology for that matter, not only to expand its scope beyond ciswomen but also to squarely deal with personal difficulties of the diva being a transwoman (pp. 134-141). It is vital to recognize issues

regarding personal difficulties--including but not limited to discrimination, PTSD, and other victim experiences, etc.-- are being shared by many divas across time and space, including Oprah Winfrey, as the chapter mentions (p. 134), as well as the subject of another chapter of the book: Uchida Shungiku, a writer and manga artist having come out as a sexual-abuse victim in her own family (pp. 151-167). As an old feminist phrase has proven itself true, the personal is political after all.

Due to the length limit, this review does not have enough room to discuss another five main chapters: female deity Ame no

Uzume (a.k.a. Ama no Uzume), whose dance in front of the heavenly rock door is conceptualized as the origin of performing arts in Japan (pp. 34-50); Misora Hibari, who dominated the popular song industry in post-World War II Japan (pp. 95-114); Yoko Ono, who is more famous for having broken up the Beatles than for her own artistic work or activities (pp. 115-132); contemporary author Kanehara Hitomi (pp. 168-184); ice skater Asada Mao (pp. 185-202). The list of divas is, and will remain, limitless, as this book convincingly suggests.

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