

## ◆書評◆

Jan Bardsley

*Maiko Masquerade:**Crafting Geisha Girlhood in Japan*

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Who would have thought that there was a serious, scholarly monograph to be written about maiko? Jan Bardsley shows in her deeply researched and carefully constructed book that there most certainly is. Bardsley has long been interested in representation, especially “the construction and influence of cultural icons” (xii), and she has explored some of these icons in her earlier work.<sup>1</sup> In this book, she examines “representations of the maiko as a cultural icon of Japanese girlhood for a national audience” (3). The texts she analyzes include guides to life and work in Kyoto’s hanamachi; memoirs by former maiko and geiko; as well as movies, “light novels,” television series, and manga. Apart from the chapter on movies, which

looks back to Mizoguchi Kenji’s *Gion bayashi* (1953), Sugie Toshio’s *Janken musume* (1955), and Fukasaku Kinji’s *Omocha* (1998), Bardsley focuses on work produced in Japan in the 2000s, mostly by women.

There are discussions of Yamato Waki’s manga *Kurenai niou* (2003–7), itself based on Iwasaki Mineko’s memoir *Geiko Mineko no hana-ikusa: Honma no koi wa ippen dosu* (2001; translated as *Geisha, A Life*, 2002); Koyama Aiko’s manga *Maiko-san-chi no Makanai-san* (2016–2020), centered on the okiya cook Kiyō and her maiko pal Momohana; the NHK morning drama *Dandan* (screened 2008–9); and Nanami Haruka’s 54 volume light novel series

1 See the collection of essays *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Bardsley’s “Transbeauty IKKO: A Diva’s Guide to Glamour, Virtue, and Healing,” in *Diva Nation: Female Icons from Japanese Cultural History*, ed. Laura Miller and Rebecca Copeland, 133–50 (University of California Press, 2018).

*Chiyogiku ga iku* (2002–14), featuring the teenage boy Okamura Mikiya who crosses gender to masquerade as the maiko Chiyogiku. There is also a chapter focusing on maiko visual comedy in everything from hand towels to manga. These amusing twists on maiko as icon serve to “mute the historical weight of [Kyoto’s] world heritage sites” and satirize the constraints of being a maiko. (162)

Bardsley’s is no breathlessly adulatory account. Throughout, she astutely places the maiko’s masquerade—the “endless public performance of compliant femininity” (137)—in a broader socio-political perspective. For example, in her discussion of three first-person accounts of life in Kyoto’s hanamachi, she observes:

the personal success story as a genre complements the neoliberal climate of the 2000s in Japan where the responsibility for one’s lifelong health and financial stability rests on one’s own shoulders. These kinds of success stories tend to translate forms of discrimination and structural inequalities into personal hurdles that one must overcome. One must steel individual resolve, not buck the system. (86)

Likewise, in NHK’s *Dandan*, “the maiko as the quintessential Japanese girl comes

to understand her role in maintaining her arts community, sending a powerfully conservative message about the end-goal of girlhood in Japan,” and “reassur[ing] viewers of the nation’s well-being, its procreative future, and their identity as Japanese.” (134)

*Maiko Masquerade* began as an attempt to answer questions posed by students in the “Geisha in History, Fiction, and Fantasy” first-year seminar, later undergraduate course, that Bardsley taught at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, for many years. In 2002, I had the pleasure of discussing Masuda Sayo’s memoir *Autobiography of a Geisha* (Columbia University Press, 2003) with students enrolled in the seminar and can vouch for its seriousness of purpose and the high standards expected.

It is no surprise, then, that *Maiko Masquerade* is designed for classroom use. Bardsley begins each chapter with a clear scene-setting section, describing the subject she will explore and the sources that will illustrate the journey. She ends each chapter with a summary-conclusion. Her website features links to teaching materials: reading questions, writing exercises, and discussion activities, all requiring real engagement from students. (See: <https://janbardsley.web.unc.edu/welcome-to-teaching-materials/>). She uses a wide range of texts and colleagues

will find their research generously cited throughout. I can see the book working in a first-year seminar as well as a variety of other courses: on gender, girlhood, or popular culture in Japan; on Kyoto as both Old Japan and Cool Japan (25); and in those examining the creation of imagined communities and national narratives.

Bardsley shows that despite the performative effort required of a real maiko, her image “works in Kyoto to create spaces of female pleasure, sites and things that particularly welcome girls and women, domestic and international, to play, eat,

shop, do makeovers, and engage in romantic fantasies of the maiko’s shōjo girlhood.” (21) She finds that women professionals—writers, academics, artists—have also become consumers of hanamachi culture, enjoying parties (*ozashiki*) with geiko and promoting its salon culture. (203)

*Maiko Masquerade* is full of many surprising discoveries. Bardsley writes with a light touch that successfully draws the reader in to her analytic project. Even to one who lives here, Kyoto and Japan appear different now.