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I'm Married to Your Company! Everyday Voices of Japanese Women, by Masako Itoh (translated, edited and annotated by Nobuko Adachi and James Stanlaw). Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, 232 pp., \$74.00 (hardcover ISBN 978-0742554634), \$24.95 (paperback ISBN 978-0742554641)

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I'm Married to Your Company! Everyday Voices of Japanese Women is not an ordinary translated book. Nobuko Adachi and James Stanlaw, both anthropologists, have not only translated the book from Japanese into English, they also edited and annotated the original Japanese book. Or, in other words, they seem to have been aiming at a translation in its more general implication—a cultural translation. The book written by Itoh Masako was originally published in 1995 under the title *Onna no Serifu 120* (120 Women's Words).¹

Itoh's book is a series of 120 essays and vignettes about the everyday lives of Japanese women, using the women's own words. They are a selection of pieces Itoh wrote in the women's magazine *Shufu no Tomo*. Each of the vignettes is titled by a Japanese phrase, presented in the English version in Japanese, *romaji* and English. The phrases are usually based on something Itoh has heard, and are written as a free-flowing narrative, or very often a sequence of the author's personal associations on a variety of themes including marriage and tradition, men, aging, and even nature and beauty. Itoh is neither an academic nor a professional journalist. She collected the stories mostly through her work at one of Japan's community centers, which can be found in many towns or villages, and provide adult education courses and workshops as well as recreational and cultural programs. While it is not clearly noted, it seems that this specific center is involved in programs for women's empowerment usually given through institutes which had been formerly called Women's Centers (*josei sentā*) and are now referred to as Centers for Gender Equality (*danjo kyōdō sankaku*). These educational and empowerment programs are given mainly for housewives, who are the 'ordinary' women whose voices this book attempts to bring forth.

Unlike the Japanese version of the book, which follows the chronological order of Itoh's magazine articles, in the English version the vignettes are divided into general themes including 'marriage and tradition', 'men', 'life and society' and 'social attitudes toward women'. The fourteen general themes are divided into three parts: 'Looking at...', 'How to Deal with...' and 'Thinking about...'. Each of the vignettes (usually not more than one page) opens with an introduction given by the translators. The latter is distinct from the original translated text by a different font and includes a general explanation which the translators consider necessary for the 'Western' reader for understanding the following text. Adachi and Stanlaw sometimes refer to the universality of a phrase, like in the case of 'men always want to lead women around' (p. 27), or, in other cases, to the specific Japanese cultural trait or to a specific event as the background for Itoh's original text.

The English version also includes an Introduction and a Conclusion written by the translators. In the Introduction, Adachi and Stanlaw clearly present their aim, which is rectifying misconceptions about Japanese women, especially related to them being meek and mild butterflies. The translators believe that bringing about 'real' stories 'from the trenches', the kind of voices which have been

1. The book was first published by Mirai-sha, the revised edition in 2002 published by Kōdansha Bunko carried the title *Kikisute ni Dekinai Onna no Serifu* (Women's Words We Cannot Ignore).

expressed through what they define as ‘conversation rituals’ or ‘ceremonies of communication’ (p. 4) amongst ‘ordinary’ women, are enough for defeating what in their view is the all-too-common Madam Butterfly image of Japanese women. However, in a manner loyal to the anthropological perspective which both translators seem to represent, they emphasize that they want to capture and present the voices of a certain woman, Itoh Masako, and a certain group of women, but certainly not all Japanese women.

Those ‘ordinary’ women whose voices we hear throughout the book are mainly housewives. Whereas the term ‘housewife’ seems to be universal, in fact, more than a word should be said about the extent to which the ‘full-time’ or ‘professional’ housewife (*senjyō shufu*) has gained its status as a clearly ascribed social role in the modern Japanese social structure. Regardless of the fact that even in the height of the Japanese economic recovery and the bubble years, less than 50% of the Japanese actually worked for white-collar elite organizations centered around institutions like life-time employment, seniority based wages and promotions and corporate paternalism, the idea of the salaryman as *Everyman* has gained an extensive ideological force and has become a ‘folk model’ (see Miller 1995). As the salaryman became both the corporate and the masculine ‘ideal’, the other side of the duality of the dominant discourse of gender was no doubt the *senjyō shufu* (full-time housewife) he would ideally marry (see Dasgupta 2000). In fact, the full-time housewife has become so strongly normative that some have argued that it has become synonymous with ‘womanhood’ (Ochiai 1997: 35).

The idea of the model woman as the perfect wife and mother neither developed ‘naturally’ in modern Japan nor was it an epitome of continuity with Japanese ‘tradition’. In fact, the Japanese modern state seems to have always had a vested interest in keeping women at home. The expression ‘good wife wise mother’ (*ryōsai kenbo*), which was coined by a Meiji intellectual as an attempt to capture and emulate the perfect Christian woman, became a guiding slogan for the prewar Japanese government. The state, which regarded the family as the essential building block of the national structure, emphasized the significance of women’s function as the cornerstone of the family and, in fact, made women civil servants who contribute to the good of the nation. After 1945, the state’s attempts to dictate womanhood have become somewhat less intense. Nevertheless, a transmuted vision of women as homebound wives and mothers continued to influence state policies toward welfare, education, employment, sexuality and reproduction at least until the late 1980s (see Uno 1993).

Contemporary Japanese housewives may regard the term *ryōsai kenbo* as somewhat old fashioned; nevertheless, they still see their main role as caretakers and guardians of the house (*ie o mamoru*). Since the late 1990s, a new orientation of housewives (*shin senjyō shufu shikō*) has been observed. The new orientation is epitomized in the expression, ‘A man [husband] works full-time and shares housework. A woman [wife] does housework and pursues hobbies (or hobby-based work)’ (Ministry of Health and Welfare 1998; see also Ogura 2003).

The centrality of the *shufu* identity, which seems to have changed faces but not necessarily died out, has also influenced Japanese feminism. Japanese feminists and scholars have often argued that the ‘*shufu*’ (housewife) is the focal point from which Japanese women reflect on themselves (see Ueno 1982, 1987). Thus, it is certainly not surprising that Itoh wrote a book which is basically a text of women empowerment addressed mainly at housewives.

It is on this point that my main critique of the book focuses. While I strongly support the idea that the voices of ‘real’ Japanese women should be heard, both in and outside Japan, while reading the book in its English version, I constantly had the disturbing feeling that I was actually reading two different books at the same time. One is a popular book aimed at Japanese housewives and the other, an English text that seems to assume that the original text is something else.

Itoh's original text is in fact one of manifold popular books which can be found at the best-seller's spots at any Japanese bookstore, usually for short periods of time. While these books are not exactly how-to books, they do address mundane and other issues in a very generalized, but at the same time personal and often practical manner. Thus, when Itoh touches issues such as housewives being married to their husbands' companies as the title suggests, or when she raises questions about female participation in the labor force or about relationships with in-laws, she is not studying gender issues and she is not bringing real voices as anthropological data, she is writing in a women's magazine-style as an advisor with a personal though authoritative tone. The 'other book'—the English explanations—treat Itoh's advice and thoughts, which are usually lightly given, as if they were profound and complex analyses of Japanese society in general and gender relations in particular.

Itoh no doubt touches on significant and sometimes painful subjects relating to Japanese patriarchal society, to the ways men see women as well as to how women regard themselves. However, Itoh speaks *to* Japanese women and not *about* them. She speaks to and with the women she has encountered through her work and during her feminist activities, as well as to the readers of one of Japan's oldest housewives' magazines *Shufu no Tomo* (Housewife's Companion). Itoh's way of writing is direct, honest and often thoughtful; however, the vignettes, which are based on her periodical magazine-style comments, cannot possibly—and moreover were not meant to—be an analysis of Japanese society. While the translators do their best to locate these vignettes both in general gender discourse and in the context of the particular Japanese social context, their short introductions are not enough to develop these very significant issues as they seem to be trying to do.

To give only one example of this problematic attempt: one of the serious issues in gender studies in general, and particularly in Japan today with its very disturbing declining fertility rate, is the balance between work and home, or, more specifically, the participation of mothers in the workforce. This significant issue is touched on by Itoh in a vignette titled 'My children are my life, but my work is my life's purpose' (*kodomo ga inochi, shigoto wa ikigai*) (p. 84). Itoh summarizes this major concern in two short paragraphs and concludes it pragmatically by saying that 'from these [women's] voices, I think that "work" saves women from the danger of being only devoted to child care, and "children" allow us to find a way of living as true human beings' (p. 85). This way of treating social and gender issues may be well enough and suitable for the eyes or ears of the reader expecting a personal authoritative magazine tone. However, in this case, like in many others throughout the book, the short introduction suggesting that American women also do not know if their jobs should come first is surely not enough to call it a serious tackling of a major issue.

After making my point about the weaknesses of the book, I must address the advantage of the vignette style. The latter is much more popular in Japanese writing than in English and it is a good way for bringing about many questions and issues for further discussion. For the non-Japanese reader interested in Japan and in Japanese women in particular, it gives a chance to come closer to the daily lives of real people.

While, it may be an overstatement to say that 'a team of a thousand sociologists and anthropologists' would be needed to summarize the conditions of Japanese women today, 'even incompletely' (p. 202–203), I totally agree with the idea that Japanese women's lives have never been as varied as they have become today. Japanese women now have more liberty to choose their life paths than they ever had before. Nevertheless, as the translators rightly note in their conclusion, while the *senjyō shufu* may have gained new faces, many Japanese women still yearn for some sort of a domestic role. One of the epitomes of this idolized role is the 'charisma housewife' (*karisuma shufu*), who aspires to reach new levels of perfection in performing her domestic tasks.

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