



**William R. Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure: Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan***

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. x+234 pp. \$48.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-3036-6.

*FERTILITY AND PLEASURE* represents an intriguingly varied literary and ritual history of women's heterosexuality in the Tokugawa era. The study grows out of Lindsey's concern with folk culture and the religion of everyday life, meaning that his work positions itself at the intersections of religious studies and cultural history. Proceeding from a general notion that ritual not only symbolizes but also enacts change, the book argues two central points. First, it explores the idealized roles of wife and courtesan, pointing out with great clarity the sometimes startling resemblances between rituals, symbols, and popular practices through which Tokugawa culture constructed the seemingly antithetical roles. Second, the study seeks to examine the ways in which ritual not only made women, but women made ritual. Lindsey's opening reading of Kitagawa Utamaro's image *The courtesan Hanaōgi dreaming of her wedding procession* is emblematic of his general style. He uses a close parsing of the image to show that while courtesans' rituals may have evolved from a wifely template, the influence seldom traveled in the opposite direction, signaling the very clear economic and social disparities between the wifely capital of fertility and the courtesan's coin of pleasure.

Decidedly structuralist in approach, Lindsey's study draws deeply on the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. The book coheres around a "triadic structure of values, institutions, and rites" (p. 16). Lindsey then uses these categories to delineate a three-phase model for women's sexual lives which take shape around rituals of "entrance," "placement," and "exit." The "Entrance" chapter argues that both the fertility and the pleasure models of female sexuality "relied on the ritual structure of *yometori* marriage" to effect a woman's transition into a household as a new wife or into a brothel as new labor (p. 54). The chapter identifies transportation—of a bride in a wedding procession, of a new erotic laborer into the quarters, and of a courtesan's promenade—as a liminal space in which women were called upon to perform their idealized identities. In addition, Lindsey examines the types of personal belongings women owned, contrasting the bridal trousseau with the meager list of items a new courtesan might maintain. These possessions were often symbolic of the women's idealized roles and of their unsettled position vis-à-vis the institutions which sought to incorporate them. The pawning of a wife's trousseau could comprise the grounds for divorce, thus underscoring a woman's inherent value and connection to her natal home. By contrast, courtesans might be given

material goods, such as bedding, which they could share only with the client who gifted it, suggesting the very limited degree to which these women were in control of their material surroundings.

While rituals of entrance and exit correspond clearly to the implied spatial trajectory *into* and *out of* social roles and institutions, the intermediate category of “placement” is perhaps less immediately meaningful. By “placement” Lindsey means to single out the rituals that quite literally make a woman aware either of her “place” in an institution or of her body itself as an ontological “place” of reproduction. This chapter is particularly rich in visual culture, as in Lindsey’s reading of the illustrations from two versions of *A Record of Treasures for Women* (*Chōhōki*), one from 1692 and the other from 1847. In the earlier text each fetal month is associated with a Buddhist deity and, in its early stages, the fetus itself is pictured as various Buddhist ritual implements, thus figuring the womb as a generative site of samsaric reincarnation. The 1847 text, while still including the illustrations, re-interprets fetal development not in Buddhist terms, but rather according to an “obstetrical gaze” which brings greater anatomical realism (p. 119). Thus, changes in the gaze directed on women’s uterine space clearly resonate with larger cultural changes in the later Tokugawa period, as increased intellectual focus on biology and other scientific discourses inculcated serious anti-Buddhist critiques.

The “Exit” chapter pairs a consideration of wifely divorce with the various strategies courtesans used to affect their departure from the licensed quarters via suicide, feigned illness, or the redemption or satisfaction of their contracts. The chapter nicely frames the famous “divorce temples” (*enkiridera*) against the backdrop of more accessible ritual sites for the severing of ties, such as the base of a particular tree or the Kurosuke Inari shrine within Yoshiwara’s precincts. The chapter explores all of these sites, and the rituals of cutting associated with them, as locales which allowed women to seize agency, often by strategically presenting themselves as somehow undesirable: disobedient or sick, for instance. This chapter also provides an interesting exploration of the symbolism of wrapping, the ways that dressing the female body either symbolizes the woman as a commodity of exchange, as with the wedding kimono, or effectively takes her off the market, as the courtesan’s donning of socks upon retirement.

Each of the chapters offers a refreshingly broad spectrum of textual engagement. One section brings an 1808 letter, written by the lord of Yonezawa domain for his granddaughter on the eve of her wedding, into conversation with Saikaku’s 1682 *The Life of an Amorous Man*, a 1715 treatise by a Shinto priest arguing for mutual love as the foundation for relations between the sexes, and the 1720 edition of *Who’s Who Among Courtesans* (*Yūjo hyōbanki*). Lindsey uses the widely divergent views to support his premise that Tokugawa society saw extended and active competition between multiple, contradictory models for heterosexual union. My one criticism of this approach is that Lindsey does not attend consistently to the question of varying motives in authoring, producing, and reading the works he considers. The organization of the book as a whole also makes, at times, for a disjointed rather than a clarifying

presentation, as the line of argument tacks back and forth between the idealized roles of wife and courtesan.

While Lindsey seeks to highlight the ways in which women comprised “active participants rather than passive subjects” (p. 42), his claim would be more forceful if it featured women’s voices rather than privileging those of men. Of course, a major factor here is that women-authored works are comparatively rare in the Tokugawa period. And Lindsey does attempt to read many of the male-authored works he cites against the grain, drawing attention, for instance, to the ways in which *The Greater Learning for Courtesans* (*Yūjo daigaku*) uses the central notion of filial piety (*kō*) to capture the ethical paradox of young women for whom the best way to support their families is to leave them. Lindsey quite rightly places their ethical struggle on a par with the ethical struggles that lie at the heart of much Tokugawa period literature, such as the famous play *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*.

Despite these infelicities, *Fertility and Pleasure* sheds important light on two of the more under-studied topics of Tokugawa culture: women and spiritual practice. Lindsey’s work is a particularly valuable contribution to gender studies in that it provides a more focused complement to Gail Bernstein’s groundbreaking edited survey *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945* (University of California Press, 1991). Further, Lindsey’s work expands upon the material found in Barbara Ruch’s *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Center for Japanese Studies, 2002), extending into new territory by focusing on folk custom and the practice of religion in everyday life.

Both the specialist and the general reader will be well-served by this volume. It is rich with specific examples which are certain to enliven courses on topics as varied as women’s studies, religions of Japan, Tokugawa culture, anthropology, and even perhaps performance studies. Lindsey has certainly succeeded in his goal to explore the ways in which everyday people not only “do” religion but also “make” it (p. 180).

Charlotte Eubanks  
*The Pennsylvania State University*