Performing the Nation:

Magazine Images of Women and Girls in the Illustrations of Takabatake Kashō, 1925–1937

Barbara Hartley

1. This article examines the complex ways in which popular visual culture can operate subtly and obliquely to encourage the citizens of the nation state to perform the gender norms stipulated by the authorities wielding power in that state while also eliciting a sense of freedom in the viewing subject. The materials examined are visual images of girls and women featured in magazine illustrations produced between 1925 and 1937 by one of pre-war Japan's most prominent and popular illustrators, Takabatake Kashō (1888–1966). Although Kashō was also a prolific artist of representations of men and boys, this discussion will concern only his feminine images and the powerful and seductive set of gender norms this material presented for many viewing women and girls.

2. My interest here is in how Kashō's illustrations acted as an oblique non-didactic model for desirable behaviour (and attitudes) for girls and women in the nation state of pre-war Imperial Japan. Christine M.E. Guth has noted that at the time when Kashō was developing his skills as an illustrator in the second decade of the twentieth century there was a growing tendency in Japan to view art as 'an intimation of transcendent harmony and a key to the national spirit.' While Guth's discussion refers to the rarefied world of 'artistic' or creative non-commercial art, this tendency was also evident in the world of commercial art. Inoue Mariko, for example, points out in her discussion on the emergence of the schoolgirl, jogakusei, as a subject of art in Japan, that Kashō himself, with his widely circulated and popular images, contributed strongly to the establishment of the schoolgirl as an identifiable artistic trope among more high-brow artists. Similarly, commercial artists like Kashō were as complicit as their less business-orientated colleagues in the construction of the notions of 'transcendent harmony' and 'national spirit' referred to by Guth above. In fact, it was his very status as a popular commercial artist that saw Kashō's material become a benchmark of transcendent harmony for the women and girls of Japan, contributing implicitly and indirectly to a sense of national spirit among these women. His works can, in fact, be regarded as a gender template through which the actions and behaviours of many feminine subjects of Imperial Japan were deflected, constituted and refracted.

3. How did Kashō's material provide a performance model for the women and girls of Japan? This was achieved largely by the judicious arrangement of selected markers and signs in his material which, when positioned against each other, pleasurably fulfilled viewer expectations while also ensuring the absence of material that could offend official sensibilities. In fact, the unstinting presentation of opulently attired women strongly supported the notions of consumption prevalent
when Kashô was producing his texts. The coding of this opulence in a manner that created parameters for women's behaviour becomes evident when we examine selected constituent elements of Kashô's material. The elements to be examined here are 1) the presence of 'the gorgeous' in Kashô's illustrations; 2) the ability to embrace the West and dispel its threat; 3) the creation of arcady in the city; 4) the presentation of the sporting girl and the naked girl as symbols of the ostensible health and hygiene of the nation state; and finally, 5) the presentation of the privileged homemaking girl. By considering how Kashô constructs and deploys these elements, we gain insights into the impact of his material on the reading subject. However, before analysing the artist's visual texts, it is useful to examine the background of Kashô himself and also of the social conditions of his text production.

4. Born in Ehime in 1888, Takabatake Kashô studied in Kyoto prior to moving permanently to Tokyo in 1908 where he began to illustrate for various prominent publishing houses.[4] By the 1920s the artist was one of Japan's pre-eminent illustrators, producing material from 1923 for mass circulation magazines such as Shôjo kurabu (Girls' Club) and Shôjo gahô (Girls' Illustrated). Kashô's fame achieved new heights in 1925 with the publication of illustrations accompanying Ikeda Kikan's serialised novel, Bazoku no uta (Song of the Bandit). Throughout the ensuing decade, Kashô continued to produce images for serialised novels and to contribute to popular magazines, such as Fujo kai (Ladies' World) from 1928 and Shufu no tomo (The Housewives' Friend) from 1934. In 1935, at age 48, by which time his influence as an illustrator was beginning to decline, Kashô completed his tour de force work, entitled Utsuriyuku sugata (Changing Images), a six part screen painting, featuring women of the Meiji (1868–1912), Taisho (1912–1926) and Showa (1926–1989) Eras.[5] While he remained active until his death in 1966, Kashô's popularity waned considerably after the end of the war. There are a number of museums and exhibitions throughout Japan devoted to his work, including, most notably, the Kashô collection housed in the Yayoi Museum in Tokyo's inner city Taito Ward.[6] In addition to limiting material examined to images of women and girls, I will also confine the discussion to images produced between 1925 and 1937, dates that mark a number of important events in pre-war Japan.

5. As the second last year of the Taisho Era (1912–1926), a period characterised politically by party based 'democracy,'[7] 1925 saw the introduction of universal suffrage for all males over the age of twenty-five. However, Richard Mitchell notes that 'Taisho democracy was weak and authoritarian forces were steadily working to expand already powerful restraints on freedom of expression.'[8] Thus, 1925 was also the year of the ratification of one of the most all-encompassing of the restraints to which Mitchell refers, the Peace Preservation Law.[9] This legislation made it a crime even to think in a manner that opposed the Emperor or the highly porous notion of kokutai, the national body.[10] In contrast to the democratic impression created by the proclamation of universal male suffrage, the Peace Preservation Law considerably heightened the degree of official surveillance of the subjects of Imperial Japan. In the twelve years between 1925 and 1937, this surveillance incrementally increased, as is apparent by the numbers of artists and writers obliged to undergo tenkô, the process of publicly declaring the misguided nature of previous allegiance to radical causes.[11] By mid-1937, however, with the outbreak of total war with China and the rapid acceleration of Japan's expansionist aspirations, government intervention in commercial publishing activities became increasingly intrusive. Therefore material produced after this time is not considered here. Coincidentally, the period between 1925 and 1937 also includes the highpoint of Kashô's career as an illustrator.

6. In the pre-war years, Kashô produced some of Japan's most pervasive cultural imagery. His corpus includes images of girls and mature women, images of boys (he is often cited for his so-called 'beautiful boys,' or bishônê, illustrations) and mature men, images of traditional settings, images of modern settings (the artist had a particular penchant for Pre-Raphaelite, Ballet Russe

![Figure 2. April 1930 Girls’ Illustrated, one of the magazines in which Kashô's illustrations regularly appeared. Source: Yayoi Bijutsukan website, URL: http://www.yayoi-yumeji-museum.jp/, site accessed 23 December 2007.](image)
and Art Deco inspired material), images of single figures, images of groups, putatively asexual and modest images of women and men, and girls and boys, and also of sexually provocative images, once again of both men and women, and boys and girls. There is many a voluptuously reclining bare-breasted mermaid or sexually nubile youth gracing the frame of a Kashô illustration. Research by scholars such as Mark McLeod[12] and Sabine Frühstück[13] highlights an intense fascination with sexuality in the era between the two wars, especially 'non-normative' sexuality. This interest was exemplified in the term ero-guro-nansensu, a popular expression of the era derived from the English words erotic, grotesque and nonsense.[14] This article, however, excludes Kashô’s more sexually explicit material to focus on the normative representations of girls and women with the appearance of economic privilege that featured in the mainstream magazine press. The issue of economic privilege is important since it contributes to the occlusion of the existence of poverty and class in Japanese society, an occlusion particularly significant to the performance of gender. Once Japan's late 1930s expansionist push resulted in war, subjects were urged to 'suppress desire until victory.'[15] However, during much of the period considered here, consumption by women was seen as a national duty, a confirmation of the success of the Japanese economy in the post Great War years. As a distraction from the ideal of robust but rational commodity consumption promoted by official Japan, poverty was certainly not to be featured in the popular press where it could create the impression that the munificence and largesse of the nation state may not have been as bountiful as the authorities suggested.[16]

7. Although Kashô’s illustrations covered a range of genres, the focus in this article will be on representations of women and girls featured in magazine front-piece illustrations, magazine advertisements, or illustrations for magazine articles. Material of this kind was produced under the auspices of mainstream publishing houses which, in pre-war Japan, operated in a space of tension created by the demands of both the state and the readership. While not in open conflict, neither did these demands necessarily always coincide. A number of scholars have demonstrated the extent of Japan's pre-war censorship regime.[17] Although radical publications often actively sought conflict with the state, collision with the censors was politically unpalatable for the conservative publishers of mainstream magazines. Moreover, incurring the wrath of the censors could also have financial consequences. In other words, regardless of political learning, the prospect of the monetary loss involved in having material withdrawn from the market was always a factor in choosing the content of a commercial publication.[18] This made it necessary for material printed at least to appear to acquiesce with officialdom.

8. However, the financial success of the popular press was also strongly dependent on the approval of what was an extremely wide-ranging readership.[19] Magazines, especially, were reading material for the new leisured classes. Members of this privileged social group had little desire to read or view print or visual text that passively confirmed the often dogmatic desires of the state. Rather than advice on how to comply with official doctrine, readers looked to ‘quality’ popular magazines, such as those which featured Kashô’s illustrations, for direction on how to achieve style and panache. The publisher's dilemma, therefore, was how to meet two demands that largely operated in opposition to each other. The ideal scenario, of course, was to be able to present material that amalgamated these two apparently contradictory elements. This was a feat that Takabatake Kashô brilliantly achieved through a complex mix of artistic flair and commercial acumen.

9. Kashô’s material provided a highly pleasurable form of instruction in codes of ideal femininity acceptable to the authorities. It was also embraced by viewing readers. However, this does not imply a deterministic relationship of equivalence between the policies of the state and images that circulated through popular culture outlets. On the contrary, as Miriam Silverberg has convincingly argued, certain elements of popular culture have the potential to contest state-sponsored social ideals. Silverberg observes that Japanese pre-war culture was characterised by:

   a critical tension between the coexistence of an ethnocentric, essentialist, and productivist state ideology and apparatus premised on ultimate allegiance to the emperor, in whom sovereignty resided, and the flourishing of [a] highly commodified consumer culture selling contradictory images of class, gender, cultural traditions, and leisure.[20]

A similar observation is made by Guth regarding popular culture and avant-garde movements. These groups, she notes, used the mass media in ways that 'threatened government efforts to maintain hierarchical and gendered forms of national culture.' Guth further argues that activities of this kind generated a backlash from the authorities, so that:
By highlighting social tensions, such artistic activities fuelled reactionary appeals to reinstate traditional moral values such as loyalty and filiality, as well as campaigns to promote good wives and wise mothers (ryōsai kenbo). [21]

10. Both Silverberg and Guth are correct in pointing out the capacity of popular art to contest and resist official discourses. However, the situation is less of a binary than either of the above statements suggests. That is, rather than cultural production being conducted either for the state or, if not, then of necessity against the state, I am arguing that art can sometimes simultaneously confirm and contest the social and political context of its production. Kashō was an artist whose images presented viewers with a fantasy space in which they could imagine themselves resisting the state while at the same time being encouraged or even schooled to acquiesce with official desires. As demonstrated by Guth’s reference above to the good wife and wise mother, the sole normative role for women in pre-war Japan, state sponsored ideals relating to femininity were particularly demanding in this context. [22]

11. The circulation and consumption of images that allowed for some resistance to the increasing dominance of the authorities in late 1920s and early 1930s Japan, instilled a sense of modern individuality and freedom in the viewing subject. By liberating the subject from a sense of imposition, such material paradoxically primed viewers for ultimate compliance. Kashō’s images of women and girls created an imaginary realm in which resistance to state norms was permitted, but in a manner that also encouraged overall acquiescence. Although this hybrid production is to some extent the very role of a fashion publication, few illustrators achieved it as successfully as Kashō. This is not to say that the artist consciously set out to achieve such an end, or that the state identified his material as playing such a role. Nevertheless, a distinctive artistic flair saw Kashō draw on the discourses circulating in the society around him and then, in turn, re-code this material in a way that obliquely and pleasurably instructed viewing women and girls how to perform the normative gender roles sought by the state. In fulfilling these requirements, women and girls were also able to express wilfully their own desires, a remarkable achievement in a nation state which increasingly sought to deny this possibility for all subjects, both women and men.

12. The introduction of universal male suffrage and the ratification of the Peace Preservation Law were important political events in 1925 Japan. However, it is unlikely that either made as direct an impact upon the daily life of the average subject of Imperial Japan as the emergence of the notion of bunka seikatsu, cultural lifestyle, [23] a movement that sought the modernisation of daily life through the introduction of commodities from the West. Although both the goods and the changes they announced were often met with practical and ideological concern, conservative social institutions were caught up in the ubiquitous nature of the movement in the same way as more socially innovative groups. Sheldon Garon, for example, notes that, while castigating extravagance, the government sponsored travelling exhibitions featuring washing machines and other appliances that would improve hygiene in the home and lead to more efficient and effective domestic practices. [24] Thus the mid-1920s in Japan became a time of emphasis on materiality and ‘a culture of objects and their circulation’. [25] Japan had struggled with the notion of modernity since the time of the Meiji Restoration, alternately embracing Western ideas with obsessive fervour and demonising the West as a source of corruption of traditional values. However, by the 1920s both Western ideas and Western commodities had become an integral part of the Japanese landscape, produced and reproduced domestically and thus no longer seen as unfamiliar imports to be either admired or despised. As Smith notes in his discussion of the idea of Tokyo as a city:

Whereas earlier ‘civilisation’ was viewed as alien and curiously out of place, the new customs and technologies of the 1920s were perceived as emerging naturally from Japan’s growing industrial economy. The city was no longer a ‘showcase’ for novelties from abroad, but rather a powerhouse of innovation. [26]

13. Kashō’s aesthetic sensibilities might have eschewed the literal presence of washing machines in his illustrations. However, there are clear markers that the women and girls featured in his illustrations have access both to ‘the new customs and technologies’ of Japan’s ‘growing industrial economy’ and the leisurely, well-balanced lifestyles ostensibly created by the acquisition of these goods. Women’s magazines, the source of the images discussed here, were significant in this sense since they not only reflected the presence of these material items in 1920s society, but were also ardent proselytisers for the cause of modernity and the new cultural lifestyle.

14. It is impossible to discuss gender in 1920s Japan without reference to ‘that icon of consumption
and mobility,’[27] the modern girl, modan gaaru, abbreviated to moga, one of Japan's most ubiquitous symbols of modernity.[28] Silverberg is one of a number of commentators pointing to the key role of girls and women in the new commodity culture which enveloped Japan in the 1920s.[29] With her capacity to earn funds, limited though her income may have been, and, moreover, to engage in independent sexual activity, the modern girl presented a strong threat to 'settled forms of patriarchally dominated order and reproduction.’[30] Ostracised by the state and its functionaries, whose voyeuristic tendencies she nonetheless serviced, the 'antics' of the modern girl are exemplified in the provocative and intractable behaviour of Naomi, loved by the eponymous fool of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's novel, Chijin no ai (1924–25, literal translation Fool's Love; trans. 1985 as Naomi).[31] We have noted that since mid-Meiji the sole normative model for women was ryōsai kenbo, the good wife and wise mother, discursively constructed as a woman who suppressed her own desires to meet the needs of her husband and sons. The modern girl, however, was having none of this. Popular representation featured her smoking, drinking, engaging in 'loose' sexual behaviour and generally destabilising the 'transcendent harmony' of the nation by a narcissistic devotion to Western commodities.

15. Discussing the café waitress as representative of this new young woman, Elise Tipton notes that:

   Typically, she was depicted wearing Western clothes and jewellery, hair relatively short and often permed, cigarette in hand and drinking a Western cocktail. Even in shin-hanga [new woodblock prints], which tended to refashion moga into traditional beauties [bijin] merely dressed in modern clothes and hairstyles, moga are shown in café and cabaret settings, exuding sexuality and suggesting promiscuity.[32]

Kashō's works unflinchingly accepted the challenge to propriety presented by the modern girl. By skilfully appropriating her consumerist image into his material, he successfully colonised and domesticated her threat of social disorder. Some features he retained, such as the short perm and Westernised attire. However, by modifying or disguising and thereby appearing to discard the more 'depraved' elements, he gave new and reassuring meaning to girls with modern tendencies, ultimately transforming them into compliant, gracious harbingers of social accord. Chaste introspection replaced promiscuity, while cigarettes and cocktails became books and flowers. Where the modern girl took to the streets as resistance against the stifling confines of domesticity, Kashō's girls refrain from displaying themselves in urban public space. His women are decidedly modern; nonetheless, they appear, at least, to forego any attributes that might compromise the role of good wife and wise mother. Similarly, the parameters of this official norm are discreetly and cunningly expanded permitting the women in Kashō's images, like their street-wise modern girl counterparts, to express themselves freely as consuming subjects. To understand precisely how this effect was achieved it will be useful to examine issues such as the 'gorgeous' impact of Kashō's work, his ability to dispel the threat of the West, his presentation of arcadian motifs in an urban setting, his suggestions of national health and hygiene through representations of sporting girls and the unclothed body, and his confutation of homemaking with grace and privilege.

**Gorgeous Kashō and the promise of modernity**

16. Kashō's illustrations are a riot of voluptuously coordinated primary colours evoking a celebration of the life-force. An almost intoxicating sense of the 'gorgeous' is created by extravagant patterns based on motifs such as striking florals and art deco designs. In addition to being a deliberate marketing strategy, this gorgeousness can be read as an expression of what Harry Harootunian describes as Japanese enthusiasm for 'the promise offered by the new everydayness.'[33] Harootunian argues that, in contrast to the generally more cynical attitude in the West, Japan was 'willing to explore the possibility of newness for a life vastly different from the one most recently lived in the immediate past.’[34] While questions might be raised by the dichotomy implied here, there is no doubt that Kashō's vibrant colour is an expression of optimism for modern life itself. Although the slight pathos of the melancholic expression on the faces of both his women and men, and girls and boys, prevents the images being labelled joyous, the clarity of colour and firm lines immediately capture the attention of the reader in a highly pleasurable way.

17. As a child, Kashō attended kabuki performances with his mother, who encouraged his artistic aspirations in defiance of her husband. The principles of costuming and colour coordination of the traditional theatre would ultimately be integrated with modern tropes such as art deco motifs to give Kashō's artistry a highly creative
and distinctive flair. It is ironic that while the beautifully coordinated and coloured clothing featured in Kashô’s work invokes a notion of access to material goods associated with the street-loving modern girl, Kashô’s girls are more likely to be hakoiri musume, girls in a box, an expression which gives the sense of being wrapped in cotton wool. However, through a complex amalgam of signs and markers these cloistered girls, too, often appear to be gravitating towards the daring centre of the modern. Ultimately this confirmation of modernity in Kashô is not just a confirmation of the West, but a bold confirmation of the nation and its imperial aspirations. The gorgeousness of his illustrations proclaims the success of the national project. Viewing women are thus reminded of their duty to support this project by the diligent consumption of the commodities necessary to perform their gender in a manner befitting the daughters, wives and mothers of the modern nation state, Dai Nippon, Great Japan.

Figure 3. One of Kashô's gorgeously attired, cloistered girls from a late 1920s Land of the Girl [35] Source: Bessatsu Taiyô, Takabatake Kashô: bishônen, bishôjo gen'ei, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985, p. 15.

Embracing the West and dispelling its threat

18. The integration of Japan and the West was one of the greatest achievements of Kashô's gorgeous illustrations, paradoxically derived in part from his early kabuki experiences. Kashô's magazine material often gives a strong impression of Westernisation, while also conveying images of girls and women in traditional guise and in surrounds which feature long standing tropes from Japanese art. Silverberg has noted how the introduction of modern life was initially seen as an imposition of Western standards and the erasure of traditional Japanese ideals. Against this, she argues convincingly for the need to understand that, rather than the replacement of one with the other, the 1920s 'construction of a mass culture' gave new meaning to all its constituent elements. [36] This process involved not the replacement of but the 'recod[ing] of Western institutions and practices for indigenous Japanese consumption.' [37] This re-coding and assimilation is clearly operating in Kashô's material. Furthermore, by presenting his Western images in contexts unambiguously marked as Japanese, Kashô is able to defuse any sense of threat associated with the West. His material thereby appropriates and re-locates Western standards in Japanese settings, thus also transforming the conventional meanings attributed to the latter. [38]

19. With regard to clothing, women were less swift to westernise than men. Both Silverberg[39] and Matsumoto Shinako[40] refer to a 1925 survey of clothing worn by passers-by on the streets of the Ginza conducted by social ethnologist, Kon Wajirô. Matsumoto refers to a follow up survey carried out in 1930. On the first occasion, 66 percent of men wore Western dress while only one percent of women had discarded traditional attire. However, the latter figure had climbed steeply to 35 percent at the time of the second survey. [41] Kashô's illustrations, too, show a preponderance of women in Japanese style dress, although there is also no shortage of figures in Western apparel, often unthreateningly presented in tandem with a girl in traditional Japanese attire. In terms of cultivating national consciousness, it was insignificant whether or not Kashô's women or the women who viewed these images did or did not discard their kimonos. To the extent that the artist's sensibilities foregrounded dress and clothing of whatever ethnic origin, the illustrations resonated with Japan's aspirations as an international power. The outfits worn by the women featured in Kashô's illustrations were made from a range of fabrics including wool, silk and cotton. Whether a
Western-style frock or a Japanese kimono, the fabrics were, in many respects, markers of Japan's success as an international economic power. Janet Hunter has demonstrated how the textile industry generally was critical to Japan's emergence as a modern industrialised state. By 1931 the three largest cotton-spinning firms in the world were all Japanese. The focus in Kashō's material on the clothing and fabrics worn by girls and women indirectly evoked Japan's international standing in the industrial world in the same way that images of heavy machinery and building projects did in more masculinist publications. By accompanying the apparel featured with the accessories of the West, Kashō subtly affirmed both the pleasurably modern and Imperial Japan's industrialist and expansionist desires.

20. Furthermore, the fact that the traditional Japanese dress depicted by this artist was far from conventionally traditional opened up spaces for even conservative women and girls to express their modern girl sensibilities nurtured by the advertising industry without generating the social and moral panic associated with their street wise sister. This option resided in Kashō's ability to successfully commodify traditional Japanese attire, while at the same time drawing the West into the sphere of local influence. Two images successfully demonstrate this trend. The first is an undated late 1920s magazine illustration. Initial impressions suggest traditional Japan. The figure carries a ribbed bamboo parasol and wears an outfit with kimonestyle front opening tied by what appears to be a traditional obi, the waist band used to tie a kimono. However, upon scrutiny, the image reveals multiple indicators of the West. These include a flower in the hair of the figure, shortened hem, visible Western style under-chemise, short string of pearls, and the ruched opening of the modified furisode, long sleeves worn only by young unmarried women. It is a tribute to Kashō's hybrid sensibilities that this sleeve opening design also suggests the cording sometimes featured on the wide sleeve openings of formal samurai attire. This is an outfit for the woman or girl seeking to acknowledge her Japanese sensibilities while expressing herself as an independent modern subject. It was also an outfit that created international alliances with her Japoniserie-inspired sisters in the West, suggesting a circular flow of cultural influences out of Japan through the West and back to Japan in modified form in the inter-war years.

![Figure 4. Fashioning Japan and the West, undated late 1920s illustration for a magazine. Source: Matsumoto Shinako, Takabatake Kashō: Taishō, Shōwa retro byūli, Tokyo: Kawade shōbo, 2004, p. 61.](image)

21. A similar image is featured on the cover of the May 1927 edition of Women's World. Here, the kimono clad figure of the woman initially signs the image as traditional. Closer viewing, however, notes a cluster of other markers, each one perhaps insignificant in itself, but which, when considered collectively, counterbalance the impact of the Japanese style apparel. Thus, rather than the formal seating style required of Japanese women, the cover figure sits casually leaning on one arm with her legs drawn up to the side. Tellingly,
her hair is bobbed and permed. Although objection to this style initially remained at the level of muffled protest from conservative sectors of society, Tessa Morris Suzuki notes that perms were cited in 1939 by a subcommittee of the National Diet which decreed this style 'strictly prohibited.'[44] The fabric pattern of the woman's kimono, too, is a bold collection of tan and white circles well outside the purview of traditional kimono patterns. Matsumoto, in fact, cites Kashō as a kimono pattern trendsetter. She also notes that legend has it that the artist never repeated the same kimono pattern twice in his corpus.[45]

Figure 5. Kimono for these modern times from May 1927 Women's World. Source: Matsumoto Shinako, Takabatake Kashō, Taishō, Shōwa retro byūiti, Tokyo: Kawade shōbo, 2004, p. 68.

22. Clothing was not the only marker of the West incorporated into Kashō's work. Many images are situated in a Western architectural setting. The artist's depiction of a trio of girls for an insert to the September 1931 edition of Girls' Illustrated places the three figures in the corner of a Western style verandah. A girl in Western style dress sits on an art deco style curved armless chair in the foreground, strumming a mandolin. Behind her stand two figures holding hands and leaning against the verandah balustrade. One is dressed in traditional kimono, rather than Kashō's more innovatively patterned attire discussed above. The other wears a sailor suit style blouse and skirt.


23. The initial impression given by the two figures in modern dress and the structure of the verandah,
which could be the porch in an early 1930s Hollywood narrative of domestic middle America, is of
the West. However, this is undercut by the girl in the conventional kimono. In addition, the figures
are set against an autumnal landscape background which, with its full moon and swaying susuki,
pampas grass, might be the setting of a pre-modern work of art. Both the attire and the
architecture operate to confirm a modernising presence and thus to diminish a sense of
compliance with official discourses. The presence of the strong Japanese elements, however,
ensures that this discourse is not inappropriately undermined or destabilised.

24. Many of the artist's illustrations feature pairs of girls (see Figure 7), one in Western dress, the
other in Japanese attire. However, Kashō has a skill for subtly foregrounding the Japanese
elements in this genre of illustration. Thus, rather than suggesting a productive coupling of Japan
and the West, the material ultimately announces a subsuming of the West into Japan and local
dominance over the foreign. A political rhetoric of European decadence and depravity may have
assisted the development of a strong sense of Japanese identity against the West that, since
Japan's entry to the modern era, had consistently refused to recognise the newly-emerged East
Asian nation as equal to the Anglo/European powers. [46] However, withdrawal or rejection of
Western mores, by now organically embedded into Japanese society, was untenable. In this
respect, Kashō's illustrations gave oblique guidance as to how Western ideals might be
incorporated appropriately into Japan, while confirming the ascendancy of the local over the
imported.

25. Even the features of Kashō’s girls herald the triumph of Japanese standards over the West. Unlike
the large, round-eyed girls created by Nakahara Jun’ichi (1913–1988), [47] one of the artists who
succeeded Kashō as an iconic illustrator, Kashō’s girls have Japanese eyes. They do, however,
like Nakahara’s girls, have small mouths (Figures 7 and 8). Honda Masuko has noted how, in the
case of Nakahara, these small mouths signal that the girls thus depicted neither speak nor eat. [48]
Unlike Nakahara’s grotesquely slender girls, Kashō’s rounded women and girls definitely enjoy
their food. Their tiny mouths, however, almost certainly signal silence, with the occasional exception of the girls who sing or whisper secrets to each other. Of course, small mouths were not unique to the feminine ideals of Japan. The tiny mouth opening of silent movie star and 'It Girl,' Clara Bow, demonstrates the global preference for features of this kind. However, consideration of the thoughts of right wing ideologue, Kita Ikki (1883–1937), provides insights into more nationalistic implications of the small mouth. In an argument rejecting calls for women's suffrage, Kita noted that women should refrain from public debate since 'to make women accustomed to verbal warfare is to do violence to their natural aptitude.'[49] This restraint, which he saw as inherent in the Japanese model of good wife and wise mother, was contrasted against what he judged the 'piercing quarrels' of woman from China and the 'stupid talkativeness' of the American woman.[50] Kashô's acquiescent girls well encapsulate what the ultra-rightist Kita believed to be the feminine ideal in Japan.

26. The groups of girls and women in Kashô's images, not all of whom contrast the East and the West, played another important role in supporting official discourses of social cohesion. Harootunian notes the massive dislocation that occurred when girls migrating to the cities could find work only in prostitution.[51] This city migration led to the breakdown of the extended family, the rise of the nuclear family and the fragmentation of social relationships. Thus, in spite of the promise of new horizons and the mythological opportunities associated with modernisation, this trend also led to social disintegration, alienation and isolation. Kashô's groups of girls conceal this threat, presenting instead the model of a harmonious feminine community. For some, the new mass culture and the patterns of consumption that accompanied it threatened to 'unhinge older, fixed social relationships and subjectivities.'[52] Barbara Sato, too, has noted the 'social tensions' resulting from the 'alteration of a woman's physical appearance.'[53] Kashô's group images, however, aestheticised the new social context and thus 'negat[ed] the divisions, fragmentation, and conflict'[54] which reverberated beneath the 'cultural lifestyle' grounded in devotion to the commodity. Rather than conflict or division, Kashô's material suggests the essence of Japan as the intersection of the space of social relationships (aidagara) among the devoted subjects of Imperial Japan and the space of the natural environment.[55]

\[Figure 9. The harmonious community of Kashô's women and girls from the cover of an edition of Girls' Illustrated. Source: Bessatsu Taiyô, Takabatake Kashô: bishônen, bishôjo gen'eî, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985, p. 9.\]

Arcady in the city

27. Whether in Japanese or Western apparel, solitary or in groups, Kashô's women and girls are clearly educated cosmopolitan girls with the grace and deportment that comes from urban privilege. Their cultured expressions and gestures, calm and slightly dolorous visages, fingers cocked as demurely as those of a girl in a Gainsborough image, belong to the newly educated jogakusei, the girl school student, and her older sisters, mothers and aunts from the better suburbs of the capital. While Kawabata Yasunari's Asakusa kurenaidan (1929–1930; trans. 2005 The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa) [56] was proclaiming the old lower town area of
Asakusa, with its carnival atmosphere, professional flâneurs and androgynous women, as the centre of Japanese modernity, Kashō was re-locating this centre firmly in the heart of the financially endowed sector of the city. The quality clothing which adorns his feminine figures makes them suitable advertisements for the department stores which were the flagships of 1920s and 1930s Japan’s high consumer culture. By the 1920s, department stores had sectors catering to a less than privileged clientele. However, the clothing, hairstyles and accessories of Kashō’s women are markers of the money and social position which qualified consumers to shop in the most expensive sections of these stores. It was irrelevant that few magazine readers could afford to emulate the opulent commodities featured in a Kashō illustration. His material was embraced as both an aspirational benchmark and a fantasy to ease the harsh experience of the real everyday life.

Figure 10. A damely cultured Kashō girl from the cover of an edition of The Land of the Girl. Source: Bessatsu Taiyō, Takabatake Kashō: bishōnen, bishōjo gen’ei, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985, p. 25.

28. In order to access the commodities with which they are adorned, Kashō’s women and girls must have ventured onto the streets leading to the department stores. However, his figures are rarely depicted on the street and, with the exception of the commodities themselves, the street is a notable absence in the magazine material being examined. Almost all Kashō’s girls and women featured on magazine front pieces and in other magazines illustrations are framed by arcadian borders. Pendulous blossoms of flowering wisteria, wreaths of fragrantly voluptuous lilies, lightly scattering ginko and momiji maple leaves, black-eyed scarlet poppies, and even the seven grasses of the Japanese autumn, all often accompanied by an encircling butterfly: these are the symbols that surround women and girls in many Kashō illustrations. The flower is an image of femininity in places other than Japan. However, its pervasive presence there is evident from the fact that one of the most popular pre-war narratives for girls was a collection of short stories by Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973) known as Hana monogatari, or Flower Stories (1916–1924).[57] The wild popularity of these texts, in which girls gather to exchange and sigh together over melancholic stories of other girls, made Yoshiya one of the richest independent women in Japan. It is uncertain whether or not Kashō is invoking this material intentionally, although he did illustrate some of Yoshiya’s narratives. Nevertheless, the floral presence in his illustrations would certainly have evoked Yoshiya’s stories in viewers. The café girl may have felt at home rubbing shoulders with the reprobates, idlers and other denizens of the streets, the place where consumption
29. The arcadian setting of Kashô’s illustrations is not limited to flower borders. His texts often feature more distant landscape backgrounds of rural settings with shrubbery, trees, and the occasional mountain range. These images recall the ideas of Yanagita Kunio, who at the time Kashô was illustrating, was developing a theory which stated that the essence of Japan resided in the rural and provincial areas of the archipelago. Yanagita contrasted the countryside as a site of warmth and companionship against the anti-social and ultimately inhuman setting of the city. By locating the girls and women draped in the opulent commodities of the department store in a rural setting, Kashô manages to signal approval of the consumer culture situated in the urban centres of Japan while also reifying the essential ideals seen to reside outside these centres. However, in spite of being located in floral bower or grassy knolls rather than the streets of the Ginza or Marunouchi, the gorgeous attire of the girls and women featured in Kashô’s illustrations signals that the city is never far away.

The sporting girl and naked girl: peons to the nation’s health

30. The sporting girl is a strong trope in Kashô’s material and is often regarded as an indication that, unlike his contemporary, Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934), this artist was happy to free his women from the gender constraints operating at the time. It is true that where Takehisa’s women appear dolorously passive, women in Kashô swim and recline at the beach in bathers, strap on skis, frolic with dogs, play traditional badminton, hanetsuki, and engage in a range of other boisterous activities. There is general agreement amongst feminist educators and scholars that the involvement of women in sport is a factor in securing independence for women and girls. However, comments made in 1931 by Japan’s first Olympic medallist, Hitomi Kinue (1907–1931), regarding physical activity as a means of building the body of the mothers of Japan make it clear that sport for women at this time was about improving the health of the women giving birth to the men of the nation. While, in contradiction to the intentions of the authorities, participation in sports undoubtedly contributed to women’s
independence, it is unlikely that this was the objective Kashō had in mind for his physically active girls. In fact, rather than contesting norms, these girls are, in fact, obliquely complying with the standard interpretation of young women as potential wives and especially mothers. There is also a more jingoistic suggestion operating in Kashō’s sporting representations. Hitomi’s discussion focuses very strongly on how the performance of Japanese sportswomen in international competition profiled Japan against other nations on the world stage. The notion of Japanese women having the ability to triumph over the women of the world reverberates obliquely beneath these sporting girls.


31. With respect to girls and women in a state of undress, Kusamori Shin’ichi has noted Kashō’s women know no penchant for displays of semi-nakedness, if not outright nudity. However, it is often difficult to read even the almost naked women who feature in magazine advertisements for soap or bathroom products as suggestive or sexualised, in spite of the considerable expanse of skin that they bare. Although Kashō was not at all averse to producing sexualised images of women, he was generally pragmatic enough to desist from this tendency in his illustrations for circulation through the popular press. I earlier noted the aversion of the authorities of the time to poverty. A similar distaste was held for ill health. The rounded, well-nourished and glowing bodies of Kashō’s girls know no illness. The images thereby occlude, for instance, the fact that a tuberculosis epidemic swept the nation in the first half of the twentieth century, or that malnutrition-induced beriberi was rife among impoverished working class women throughout the empire. Notwithstanding the vague suggestion of discontent in their visages, the healthy, well-formed bodies of Kashō’s demure women and girls signal a nation from which health and hygiene problems have been eliminated.

Figure 13. The rounded, glowing body of a
The privileged homemaking girl

32. We have seen that Kashō quarantined his women and girls from the street. In addition to placing them in floral bowers and on grassy knolls, the artist was also adept at depicting his girls in domestic situations. However, in the same way that these images erase poverty and illness, they also give no indication of the drudgery that domestic life visited on women. Jordan Sand provides a detailed account of the discourse of home and womanhood which featured in various print media from the time of the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War.[64] While Sand focuses mainly on the household management elements of this discourse, the women and girls in Kashō’s images play a much more decorative domestic role. A 1927 Girls Illustrated image is exemplary in this respect and also demonstrates many of the elements of Kashō’s work discussed above. A gorgeously clad girl in kimono, her hair in an almost mannish bob, sits on a Western style chair, knitting. Her hair and her attire thus admirably amalgamate Japan and the West, while her demeanour suggests grace, leisure, elegance and comfort. There is no sense of the ‘haggard mother’ cited by Vera Mackie in her discussion of women factory workers in 1920s Japan,[65] or of even mild exhaustion brought on by her domestic role. All in all, this illustration is, to use Matthew Arnold’s definition of modern culture, ‘sweetness and light.’[66] strongly suggesting that
domestic confinement is a blissfully pleasurable state.


33. While the modern girl might have strolled audaciously down the street, Kashō’s girls were more likely to be found sitting at a window gazing out at the street. Kusamori has expounded upon the artistic elements at work in illustrations of the ‘woman at the window’ genre in Kashō's corpus, noting that it was also a trope in the work of other prominent artists of the time, including Takehisa Yumeji and Katō Masao (1898–1987).[67] To Kusamori, the prominent feature of Kashō’s ‘woman at the window’ material, and the element that distinguishes it from similar works of Japan's Edo Period, is the fact that the girls so depicted are often lost in a reverie “redolent of melancholy and ennui.”[68] In fact, in commenting on the apparent dissatisfaction of these girls, this critic invokes the famous line by prominent feminist, Hiratsuka Raichō: 'In the beginning, woman was the sun,' a lament for the loss of the respect and social position the writer believed that women held in primitive times. The elevated position held by the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, was proof of this respect. Noting that Kashō’s career began at about the same time that this statement was circulated in 1911, Kusamori implies that, at some level, Kashō was aware of and represented the restrained position of women in his work. However, of significance for this discussion is the fact that he does so in a manner that, while it acknowledges the confinement of women, presents this in an opulent and highly decorative manner which ultimately suggests that such a state is desirable. The aestheticisation of the melancholy of these women is related to the gorgeousness of their attire and, when at the window, by the opulence of the curtain fabrics and other accessories by which they are framed.

34. The period between 1925 and 1937 was a time of monumental social upheaval in Japan. Recognising the imperative for the introduction of Western commodities, Japanese officialdom also understood the danger inherent in too enthusiastically embracing these items and the values they represented. To suppress these ideals, however, was a practical impossibility, given that both Western standards and products had become entrenched in everyday life through the expansion of the cultural lifestyle movement. Furthermore, the production of goods to fuel this movement benefited Japan's nationalistic objectives to achieve international economic and industrial status. In the context of both concern and enthusiasm for the modern, but a desire to insulate and protect local traditions, Takabatake Kashō's images of the demurely fashionable young Japanese woman, adequately Westernised without being contaminated, became the ideal performance template for the women and girls of Japan. It was a sign of the artist’s aesthetic genius, in addition to his highly developed business and media acumen,[69] that, sensitive to the discursive demands of an
increasingly totalitarian state and also to the modern sensibilities of his readers, Kashō was able to produce images which satisfied both. Whether it was a youthful matron attired in gorgeous kimono, incongruously draped with fox fur stole, a cloched, high-heeled young woman chatting with her traditionally dressed sister, or a kimonoed adolescent girl in a department store delicately sipping soda through a straw, Takabatake Kashō’s images blend ostensibly contradictory elements, creating a feminine model according to which viewing women and girls could perform the might of the nation state, Imperial Japan.

Endnotes

[1] Source: Matsumoto Shinako, Takabatake Kashō: Taishō, Shōwa retro byōti, Tokyo: Kawade shobo, 2004, p. 9. The author acknowledges the generosity of the Yayoi Museum, Tokyo, holder of the copyright for all Takabatake Kashō’s illustrations from whatever source, for granting permission for the author to use the seventeen images which appear throughout this article.

[2] I would like to sincerely thank both anonymous reviewers of this article for their very careful, detailed and extremely helpful feedback.


[6] As he became older, Kashō became more interested in nihonga, modern art conducted according to traditional Japanese art conventions and generally with traditional, rather than modern, subjects. The screen can be seen as an example of this shift.

[7] For more about the Yayoi Museum and the associated Takehisa Yumeji Museum, see http://www.yayoi-yumeji-museum.jp/about/yayoi/collection.html. This site features examples of Takabatake’s illustrations.


[10] Providing a definition for this very slippery concept, which translates literally as 'national body,' is difficult. Mitchell notes that following the tabling of the Peace Preservation Law in 1925, which referred specifically to *kokutai*, a complaint was made that even scholars could not define the concept. Home Minister, Wakatsuki Rejjirō, replied that it simply meant nation combined with the Emperor. Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan*, p. 198.


[16] Mikiso Hane canvasses the poverty in modern Japan. The chapter on textile workers in this writer's book is particularly insightful, concluding with reference to the 1930 Kanebō strike and a testimonial from a Kanebō worker regarding the gruelling nature of the work and the low pay. Hane sums up the chapter with a discussion of the harsh conditions and exploitation that was a feature of textile work and a comment on the fact that modernisation really only increased 'the wealth and comfort of a small elite at the top.' See Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, pp. 203–204.


[18] This is one of several sections in the article which owes its current form to reviewer input.


[27] My great thanks to an anonymous reviewer for providing this excellent phrase.


[29] See Silverberg, 'The modern girl as militant.'


[33] Harootunian, Overcome by Modernity, p. 97.

[34] Harootunian, Overcome by Modernity, p. 97.

[35] Land of the Girl is the translation used in this article for the name of the magazine Shōjo no kuni, to distinguish it from Shōjo seikai, Girls' World.


[41] Although Silverberg analyses the first survey in detail, she does not refer to the later survey. However, Matsumoto makes a point of comparing the two surveys.


[43] Serquey Braquinsky, Atsuhi Ohyama and David C. Rose, 'Cooperative technology adoption under global competition: the case of the Japanese cotton spinning industry,' presented at University of Chicago Economics and Legal Organisation workshop, 27 July, 2002, URL: http://pluto.fss.buffalo.edu/classes/eco/sb56/Braquinsky-Rose.pdf, site accessed 27 July 2007, p. 18. Here Braquinsky et al. examine the development of the cotton industry in Japan from the Meiji Era. They note that by 1936, with a total of 7 percent of the world's total spinning equipment and with mills conducted both locally and off shore, Japan was behind only Great Britain and the United States in terms of production output.


[46] The treatment meted out to Japan at the Treaty of Versailles is a case in point. Here, Japan's racial equality clause was rejected at the behest of the then Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, who felt that support for such a clause would make it difficult for him to win a looming election. See Naoko Shimizu, Japan, Race and Equality, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 125–30.


[48] Honda, Ibunka toshite no kodomo, p. 141.


[59] In the context of health, one of the advertisement illustrations which brought Kashō to prominence was for Chūōjō, a preparation for 'women's complaints.'


[66] Although this phrase originated with Jonathon Swift, it was popularised by the high modernist, Arnold, in his *Culture and Anarchy*, first published in 1862.


[69] I am once again indebted to one of the article's anonymous reviewers for pointing out that at the height of his popularity Kashō was very media and business savvy in addition to being a gifted artist.