



LOVE IN MODERN JAPAN

Its estrangement from self, sex and society

Sonia Ryang

Love in Modern Japan

This compelling and controversial book proposes to see the concept of love as a national state apparatus. By looking at key historical and social events in Japan, the book captures how men and women in Japan are made “loving” members of the nation, subjected to the state’s intervention across the areas of life and death.

Ryang offers debate on ethnological case studies including ancient sexualized rituals and fertility festivals, the murder case of Abe Sada, the rape of Nanjing, the wartime institution of “comfort stations,” postwar pure love and Miko and Mako’s tragedy, the 1990s phenomenon of *enjokōsai* or aid-date, and the more recent wave of romancing a South Korean actor. By looking at love’s transformation through the prewar and postwar period, with an additional eye on ancient times, Ryang touches upon the emergent process of the modern self and relates love to Foucault’s concept of governmentality, biopower, and disciplinarity to give a wide-ranging historical and cultural analysis of love in Japan. Combining ethnographic, theoretical, and archival research, this seminal study will be of huge appeal to scholars of Japanese anthropology, feminist anthropology, and gender studies alike.

Sonia Ryang is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Stanley Family and Korea Foundation Scholar of Korean Studies at the University of Iowa. Her previous publications include *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin* (Routledge, 2000) and *Japan and National Anthropology: A Critique* (Routledge, 2004).

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For Samantha and Thomas

Contents

<i>Preface and acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Sacred sex	9
2 Sovereign and love	35
3 Pure love	64
4 Body and soul	95
In lieu of conclusion	126
<i>Notes</i>	131
<i>References</i>	151
<i>Name index</i>	169
<i>Subject index</i>	173

Preface and acknowledgments

This book follows my *Japan and National Anthropology: A Critique* (Routledge, 2004), its intellectual prequel. In that book, I asserted that anthropological studies of Japan in the West have been carried out in two completely opposite, yet intimately intertwined directions, both of which are epistemologically unsound: one is a tendency to generalize an observation of small corners and specific institutions that exist inside Japanese society into a general account of the Japanese and Japanese culture at large, with little painstaking theoretical exercise in between; the other is a trend to largely ignore the workings of the Japanese national state, when one talks about Japanese culture. I argued that such tendencies have created the situation where studies of Japan are seen as a specialty too special to make an impact on humanity at large.

In this book I look at one significant institution (or should I say concept), love, in close connection to Japan's modern nation-state—more precisely, its birth and maturity. By so doing, I intend to experiment on possibilities of ethnological inquiry into Japanese society and culture with the national state as an important—if not always visible—protagonist. I rely on concepts such as sovereign and biopower to explore such a possibility, hoping to make this study relevant to academic fields beyond the national confines of Japan.

Writing this book has highlighted one other reality that prevails our times—the realization that we live in dark times, in which one nation sends military force to another in the name of democracy and love for world peace, and in this very name other nations have joined in the act. Indeed, in the name of love for freedom, killing, torture, and suffering go on in the world. In the name of democracy, in government offices, incompetent individuals are given disproportionate authority through personal connections and rewards that they do not deserve. In the name of freedom, in ivory towers, decisions are made by a handful of individuals in power, whose interest focuses solely on benefiting their inner circles.

We do live in dark times and it is this realization that precipitated my pen to touch upon the subject of love, not because love is the solution or

the opposite, but unfortunately, more often than not, because love comes in as a factor to push us farther into darkness—we have witnessed in the history of humanity that love has behaved in most unexpected and at times grotesque ways.

On a more mundane, yet no less important level, this book was born from within my profession as a teacher, which was embodied in one of the most successful courses that I have ever taught to date, “The Anthropology of Love.” Every time my students expressed surprise, disgust, and compassion, I learned a great deal about love’s plasticity, multi-dimensionality, and cultural relativity. As such, my students’ contribution for this book is immeasurable.

Of the 500 or so students that were cumulatively enrolled in “The Anthropology of Love,” if any were to read this book, he or she will soon realize that it has no resemblance to the course. Whereas the course encouraged students to read widely from sociobiology, psychology, and medicine to anthropology, sociology, history, and literature of diverse cultures and times, this book focuses solely on Japan, but my objective of trying to understand love among humanity remains the same.

The tale of the birth of this book, as with the nativity of any book, has been complex. Suffice it to say that Stephanie Rogers, senior editor at Taylor & Francis/Routledge, made it happen. This is the second time that I have worked with Stephanie and I wish to state that she is by far the best editor that I have ever known. Her style of letting the author blossom into her autonomy is simply remarkable and a true gift. Helen Baker, also at Taylor & Francis/Routledge, helped me keep up with the schedule with her excellent support.

Dr Don Cameron improved the manuscript tremendously through his remarkable copy-editing and critically informed reading with his trilingual ability in English, Korean, and Japanese. I thank Don for imparting me his talent and energy. I also thank Beverley Winkler and Sarah Fry of Florence Production for their editorial input.

Comments and suggestions by three anonymous academic reviewers as well as Dr Philip Taylor benefited the manuscript. Ongoing conversations with my colleagues and friends, including Linda Angst, Norma Field, John Lie, Gavan McCormack, Marlene Mayo, Karen Nakamura, Mark Selden, Miriam Silverberg, Janet Shibamoto Smith, and S. Hoon Song strengthened this manuscript. The special friendships I am privileged to have with Nancy Abelmann, Jan Bardsley, Haengja Chung, William Kelly, Crystal Kim, Julia Kim, Eleanor Kirkham, Matthew Kroot, Eunja Lee, Youngmi Lim, Charles Lindholm, Vera Mackie, Laura Miller, Jacqueline Mintz, Sidney Mintz, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Jennifer Robertson, and Wendy Walker sustained and enhanced my work. Professor Alan Macfarlane’s work was again a major inspiration for my ideas and interpretations.

The earlier version of parts of Chapter 2 was presented in a workshop held at the Center for the Study of Women, UCLA, and in seminars in the University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, and Princeton University. I benefited immensely from feedback from Professors David Howell, Richard Okada, Amy Borovoy, and Sheldon Garon in Princeton. Part of Chapter 4 was presented in a panel organized by Christine Yano for the American Anthropological Association annual meetings in Washington, DC in 2005. I thank Chris for organizing it and Marilyn Ivy for her astute comment.

Inside “The Anthropology of Love,” guest lecturers deserve special acknowledgment. Professors Charles Lindholm and Laura Ahearn visited my course and gave lucid, stimulating, and thought-provoking lectures. Their insight enriched the students’ discussions as well as my research and was instrumental for inspiring many of my ideas.

The Gordon A. Prange Collection of the University of Maryland was an invaluable source of many of the key materials I use in this book. I thank the librarians there for their assistance.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude Ms Yada Shōko, the executive editor-in-chief for Daiwashobō, who granted me permission to translate and use parts of the 1963 publication *Ai to shi o mitsumete* (Facing Love and Death) for Chapter 3. All translations in the book from this and other Japanese texts are mine, unless specified.

I omit the macrons for well-known Japanese place names such as Tokyo. Korean transliterations follow the McCune-Reischauer system, unless the author uses a different spelling for his or her name. When citing East Asian names, I follow the native convention of listing the last name first, unless the cited text bears the author’s name otherwise, as in the case of the English text written by an East Asian author.

Finally, I wish to note how warmly my family supported me throughout the years of writing this book. My children, Samantha and Thomas, provide me with the meaning of my life and my partner, Bradley Kaldahl, continues to be the source of my strength.

While all those that are acknowledged helped me to make this book better, all shortcomings and faults of the book are mine.

Sonia Ryang, Baltimore
March 2006

Introduction

How should one write about love? Or can one ever write about love without writing also, if not more, about life—and death? What about power, gender, economy, beauty, language, body, and self, that is to say, about society? Some time ago, C.S. Lewis spoke of four loves: affection among familiar persons such as family members; friendship, or love between individuals as individuals, which was in his view the most noble and hence rare form of love; eros, or sexual love between lovers; and charity, love for one’s neighbors. Strictly speaking, however, all four loves are about relationships and the self’s engagement with them, rather than being an autochthonous ontology of the self as such. As Aristotle asked: “Do men love, then, *the* good, or what is good for *them*?” In other words, when we think about love, self’s integrity is tested and self and society are faced with each other.¹

The inquiry into mastery and care of self in Greek antiquity was closely related to the way in which men formed relationships with others, that is to say, others of certain socio-economic status and political membership. Men assumed appropriate self-care depending on the relationship in question, as different loves required different selves to be posited.² Love had to be thus situated in relation to the self and the care of the self. Love, therefore, despite all its seriousness and profundity, is not universal. No form of love—including agape, eros, philia, storge, *amour passion*, patriotism, filial piety, and paternalism—is supra-historical. But all love, even infatuation, comes in the guise of eternity, with a force that is beyond oneself, sometimes considered as madness and other times as sickness. Moreover, every love has its own story, structure and history, and its own social and cultural logic. This book is a study of love in one such context—Japan.

I must first clarify: this book is not intended to answer the question, “What is love?” Rather, it attempts to demonstrate, by looking at the way in which love is discussed, thought of, claimed and disputed, how the national state makes its population into “loving” national subjects. My task is a modest one: to suggest what an ethnological analysis of love as

2 Introduction

a modern state apparatus might entail. Although I shall be largely working around the concept of romantic love, I'd like to think about love here as a complex set of social functions. Rather than categorizing it as emotion or sentiment, which would inevitably create a separation from sex or lust, I shall maintain the broadest possible conceptualization of love and, as such, shall not divide it into categories such as romantic love, companionate love, passionate love, and so on. Instead, I shall attempt to reconfigure it in conceptually and historically specific ways in order to better describe love in the Japanese context. This means that I shall try my best to sustain the fusion of love and lust, or more precisely, ignore the distinction of love from lust.

In this book, I'd also like to approach love as political technology, maintaining my focus on the way in which love came to be installed and implemented as a state apparatus, shaping the population as self-policing, self-disciplining agencies of love. In this process, I use love to identify the efficacy of the modern Japanese state as a biopower, a form of power that aggressively concerns itself with the life and death of the population. I hold the view that the nation-state and its apparatuses are closely connected to the elements that are constitutive of modern self. Love is one such element, and a very powerful one at that. In moving from premodernity to modernity, Japan, like any other society, has gone through drastic changes in the formation and structure of self. This period has witnessed a metamorphosis of self from the passive, non-participating subject into the active, critically reflexive, decision-making, and self-determining agency. By looking at love's transformation, my exploration inevitably touches upon the emergent process of modern self.

As such, I relate love to Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality and systems of disciplinarity on one hand, and cultural specificities of life and death on the other. In the first connection, I take an approach attempting to locate the regulatory mechanism responsible for the creation of the "loving subject" in Japan. Such an inquiry necessarily requires an examination of how legal and cultural institutions and systems work on individual subjects. The historical shift of the topos of the sovereign from the restored ancient Emperor to postwar democracy is the key to this investigation. At the same time, it is also important to explore how individuals have responded to this process. In the second connection, and inspired by the works of Giorgio Agamben, I consider the making of humans into a being with *bios* or a socially and politically meaningful life—and accordingly, death—through the institution of love and loving.

When using the term "love" in the work that follows, I shall be referring to both the narrow and broad senses of social relations, the state of mind and body, and the ideas and actions, which we associate with affection, beauty, tenderness, commitment, passion, and devotion. However, analytically speaking, as stated on p. 1, I am concerned with love as a

social function and a political technology of the modern national state in parallel to what Foucault was concerned with in his examination of power.

Traditionally, scholars have treated love as pertaining mainly to the refined class or literate cultures and, as Bronislaw Malinowski implied, assumed that savages had only a sexual life. More recently, love has been studied in the context of discourses and poetics of emotion, as a global assertion of individuality, a material practice within the capitalist market, an expression of social relations, and the key to assessing historical change in a community.³ In a subtle way, however, recent studies of love have implied a certain distinction between love and lust, romance and sex.

I should remind the reader of the point I made earlier: if my use of the term “love” appears to include or envelope what we might prefer to call “sex,” that would be because in the case of Japan, the moment we introduce a divide between love and sex, romance and lust, and mind and body, the conceptual integrity of love appears to break down. From a different angle, Foucault, in writing *History of Sexuality*, turned the question of repression into that of the discourse of repression; hence, rather than asking why we are repressed, he asks: “Why do we say we are repressed?” The question remains: in a culture where sexual repression was not the issue, such as Japan, then, can we still talk about love? For, sexual repression or the discourse thereof became institutionalized on the basis of the love/lust distinction.⁴

I am not, however, asserting that in some transparent manner non-Western forms of love have no mind-body distinction, while Western loves are Cartesian. The distinction between love and lust exists in most societies, yet the rationale behind it differs dramatically. In the case of Japan, it is important to register that historically, love was an institution that included sexual consummation, and, as such, to consider them separately as we tend to do in Western (more precisely, Christianized) discourse is a misstep. It was Sigmund Freud who emphasized that all loving feelings are inevitably the reincarnation of sexual undercurrents of emotional tension.⁵ This is not what I mean about Japan, either. Freudian theory is itself premised on the distinction between love and sex, and hence the denial of this distinction. When discussing ancient Japan, where this distinction was alien, it would therefore be a mistake to base an exploration of the concept of love on the presumption of such a denial.

For this reason, throughout this book I maintain certain skepticism or, shall I say, uncertainty about the possibility of defining love. When so-called Westernization, seen as modernization’s conjoined twin, reaches and interacts with various traditions, inevitably, the alchemy leads to interesting and unpredictable results. The ingredients react to each other, not exactly as planned in the recipe—if there was one in the first place—and produce a concoction that is twisted, paradoxical, and unique. This might of course be seen as unvirtuous, decadent, or even perverted by some

4 Introduction

observers, including those of differing cultures and of differing generations of the same cultural tradition. At times, judgments are reversed, with younger members of a population either denouncing their antecedents as defiled or conversely, celebrating the past as free and savagely noble. I am trying to see Japan from this kind of angle—that of a synchronic concoction, rather than a diachronic continuity. As such, the historical framework which I adopt in this book can only be taken as a heuristic device assisting the analysis.

However, there is no recipe or master chef. Rather, there are ideas and institutions that react to each other in strange ways. The role of the modern Japanese nation-state is decisive, but that, too, is not so obvious, since in a mere 100-year period following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan underwent an intense process of change. Its political form, it is typically argued, was changed from prewar emperor-worshipping militarist totalitarianism to postwar democracy. In the past seventy years alone, its economy shifted from state-nurtured capitalism and colonial expansionism to wartime mobilization, then to economic liberalism and later to affluent late capitalism, currently facing recession after an extended boom period. In the meantime, its population went through a generational shift combined with various transformations in kinship structure and family composition.

Few better examples could be found in which to examine the state as biopower as that of wartime Japan, where life as well as death was dedicated to the restored ancient sovereign, the Emperor. This period commenced not with the attacks on Pearl Harbor, but rather with Japan's incursions into China at the very start of the 1930s, and constituted one long state of emergency, one long state of siege, in which the power of the sovereign became unlimited, ubiquitously perceivable and universally visible. Wartime Japan's extremities, including the recruitment of "comfort women" (i.e. sex slaves) for Japanese soldiers, the phenomenon of the kamikaze bomber, the massacre and rape of Nanjing, and other unimaginable atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese military, need to be understood in the context of this power. Meanwhile, at the everyday domestic level, the National Eugenics Law of 1940 determined that individuals with "lesser genes" (i.e. the disabled, the terminally ill, and the disfigured) should be sterilized, and healthy women were encouraged to have an average of five children, in order to achieve the national goal of populating Japan with 100 million "babies of the Emperor" or *tennō no sekishi*.

In wartime Japan, men and women loved each other via the Emperor's love and reproduced children for Him. I call this love "sovereign love" in Chapter 2. The notion of sovereign is particularly important to understanding love in the Japanese context. Unlike in France, for example, where a rather clear replacement of the royal sovereign and the *ancien régime* with national citizens' sovereignty had occurred in coordination

(in retrospect) with the intellectual trajectories of the Enlightenment, preparing the French population for modernity, Japan's modernity developed hand in hand with the reinstatement of the Emperor as the sovereign. Thus, Japan's first modern population assumed the form of the imperial subject. There were some exceptions; for example, many in the society's lowest strata failed to join the modern nationhood and participate in the national form of love, that is, sovereign love. To illustrate this point, I draw upon the 1936 incident of Abe Sada, a former prostitute who ended up murdering her lover and castrating him afterwards. I juxtapose this incident with what I see as the more orthodox aspect of sovereign love displayed by the Japanese military in the city of Nanjing one year later in 1937, and in the military "comfort stations," especially those operating during the height of the Pacific War.

Once we look at the love of the ancient Japanese, we know that the imperial gaze during the Heian period (late eighth to eleventh centuries) and that during the period from the Meiji Restoration until the end of World War II were two fundamentally different institutions. For Japanese ancients, as stated on p. 3, love meant holism: it included from the outset bodily fusion usually taking the form of sexual consummation. I try to show this in Chapter 1 by referring to the *Manyōshū* or the Book of Ten Thousand Songs, compiled in the late eighth century AD, by drawing upon the poetic and ethnological insights of Origuchi Shinobu, one of the most important twentieth-century Japanese thinkers, and by examining the historical and ethnological insights of Takamura Itsue, one of the most intriguingly original feminist scholars in modern Japan.⁶

I also address in Chapter 1 the ritual-like, sacred aspects of sexual play in festivals and in the marketplace, observed in diverse geographical locations and timeframes. Such practices included offering one's wife and/or daughter to a stranger that knocked on the door, seeking overnight shelter in a remote mountainous lodging, for example, or the custom of *yobai* (nightcrawling), which instituted a nightly rotation of males (married or unmarried) visiting females (married or unmarried) in the village—a custom that existed until postwar Japan in some areas. The notion of the sacred becomes the key to understanding these and other similar institutions. The polytheistic existence of the sacred, as illustrated in the existence of various little deities—gods of the street corner, gods of the intersection, gods of the village border, and so on—strictly speaking challenged the possibility of the monotheistic sacred, the best example being the restored imperial sovereign of Meiji Japan. Chapter 1 thus prepares the reader to see the anomalous, or should I say, following Hannah Arendt, perverted structure of sovereign love.⁷

War's end did not bring down the ethos and practice of the wartime state of siege overnight; rather, it reconfigured them—a fact which is often overlooked. The institution of *junketsukyōiku* (purity education) promoted

6 Introduction

by the Ministry of Education constituted one such reconfiguration. Purity education elevated female premarital virginity the utmost criterion of love, while the 1940 National Eugenics Law remained unrepealed until 1996. As such, the values and norms of eugenics lived on through the love and romance of postwar Japanese men and women. It is therefore no wonder that the national demographic goal continued to be upheld—though with the state now in the background as opposed to the incessant mention and reference to the Emperor in prewar times—and was finally achieved in 1967, reaching the 100 million population mark.

As opposed to sovereign love, postwar Japan's purity education came in the form of citizen's rights. Under the postwar US Occupation (1945–52), Japan's national education system was reformed, with hundreds of schools now becoming coeducational, while the burden of purity landing solely on the body of female students. The genealogy of the evolution of female students or *jogakusei* parallels that of Japanese modernity, and provides important clues to understanding love in the Japanese context. If, under the Meiji government, *jogakusei* symbolized civilization, modernization, and enlightenment, in postwar Japan, female students became a primary site to embody the nation's purity. With this in mind, in Chapter 3 I introduce what I call the national romance of Miko and Mako (nicknames), a model of pure love which ended tragically and prematurely with the death in 1963 of Miko, a beautiful college student whose face was destroyed by the surgery undertaken on the incurable cancer on her facial bones. This story, as will be shown, is exemplary in many ways of what the Ministry of Education's purity education demanded of Japan's young men and women.

The nation-state is not the only actor in determining the population's loving, living, and dying. Even in a so-called democracy, the population itself actively takes part in self-reform, self-policing and self-education in complicity, collaboration, and coordination with state apparatuses through their interaction with educational, cultural, and media institutions. Through such activities, individuals become law-abiding, rule-following, and producing-and-consuming members of the nation, and indeed, citizens. In fact, this process is more clearly visible in democracies as freedom of thought gives the population many different avenues through which to voice what it deems to be its own opinion and to assert its own lifestyle in terms of rights and entitlement. Furthermore, the state remains for the most part hidden in the background, appearing as an impartial and non-interventionistic entity, while in reality its role is precisely to condition individuals to think of the state as invisible. Love is one such context in which the apparatuses of the modern nation-state engage directly with the population, yet the population is made to (and is more than willing to, at the same time) believe that it is the person who is in love, and not that this very notion of love is one manufactured and promoted by state apparatuses such as the education system and the media.⁸

I use the concept of governmentality more explicitly in Japan's postwar context. Here, it is said, Japanese were granted democracy, and love became liberated from the imperialist state project and the Emperor's gaze and available, equally and freely, to citizens as their personal choice. However, while the end of the war brought an end to Japan's state of emergency, and a system in which the imperial sovereign possessed unlimited power, the national state came to replace this entity in its role of monitoring and policing the population in an omnipresent yet now largely invisible way. With the withdrawal of the state into the background, the sphere of the mundane came to be subjected more fully, to its last cell, to the operations of state apparatuses in such fields as education, culture, media, and public health. I shall further explore this logic in Chapter 3.

The continuation of elements of prewar demographic policy during the postwar period allowed Japan to avoid accepting immigrant workers in order to sustain the labor-intensive stage of postwar economic recovery. The exclusion of former colonial subjects who had remained in Japan after the war was rearranged, and this group, mostly Korean, was denied participation in the national sovereignty. They were abandoned to a precarious existence with no civil or political rights. More frighteningly, with no connection to the Japanese nation-state, they became "naked human beings" without human rights in a world where such rights were given only to citizens of a polity or sovereign nation—what Agamben called bare life.⁹

With this in mind, in Chapter 4 I present a study of a more recent time, in which the paradoxical long-term side effect of purity education makes itself known in ironic and twisted ways. I explore three contexts: the world of underage prostitution by female high school students or *joshikōsei*, conventionally called *enjokōsai*, which I translate as "aid-dating"; the novel *Shitsurakuen* (Paradise Lost), which details an adulterous affair and captured the imagination and desire of married men and women in Japan, selling three million copies in 1997 alone; and the phenomenon described by the media as "Yongfluenza" among middle-aged Japanese women in the early 2000s—a term derived from the name of the lead male actor, Bae Yong Joon, in the extremely popular South Korean *junai* (pure love) television drama *The Winter Sonata*, first aired by the publicly owned NHK network in 2003. I intend to explore these popular-cultural carriers of love in conjunction with the anxiety of the Japanese state in light of the crisis it is facing due to the continuing record low birthrate and the onset of the aging society. The manifestation of this anxiety comes in diverse forms, including the persecution of non-nationals such as Korean female students. Love, in this context, takes on yet another form—that of ambiguous denationalization. While the Japanese state is not abandoning the fundamental principle of its foundation—Japan being the nation only of the Japanese—ideas relating to how "Japanese love" should be and