

Historische Frauenforschung in Japan: Die Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit in Takamure Itsue's "Geschichte der Frau" (Josei no rekishi). By Andrea Germer. Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 2003. 425 pages. Hardcover €52.00.

ULRIKE WÖHR
Hiroshima City University

"The problem is . . . that the field of women's history in the West developed in complete isolation from its Japanese counterpart" (p. 59). This provocative quote gives a suggestion of the instructive and thought-provoking perspective to be found in this book, the title of which may be translated as "Women's History in Japan: The Reconstruction of the Past in Takamure Itsue's 'The History of Woman' (*Josei no rekishi*)."¹ It is the first full-length study in a Western language (and probably any language apart from Japanese) on Takamure Itsue, the founder of feminist women's history in Japan. The theoretical framework of this study, which draws, among others, on historiographical theory, the history and sociology of science, women's (or gender) history, and women's (or gender) studies, makes this volume an important contribution to all those fields. The discussion of Takamure and her work in the context of the social, intellectual, and political history of Japan from Meiji to the present (with a focus on the 1950s) further makes this book a valuable source for anyone studying modern Japan.

In the introduction, Andrea Germer emphasizes the significance of Takamure Itsue as a major theoretician of the first wave of the Japanese women's movement. In 1931, Takamure retreated from the movement—which nevertheless continued to support her—and turned to women's history, "in order to provide evidence for the necessity of building a society that will protect mother and child" and to conceive "a historical science from the standpoint of woman" (Takamure; quoted by Germer, pp. 17–18). Takamure thus imagined and practiced women's history not as a "supplement to history" (Virginia Woolf, 1929), but as a theoretical redefinition and conscious rewriting of history, and she did so much earlier than the pioneers of women's history in Europe and the U.S. Takamure gained recognition as a historian through her research on the marriage system of ancient Japan (*Bokeisei no kenkyū*, 1938; *Shōseikon no kenkyū*, 1953). In contrast to these earlier publications, *Josei no rekishi* (1954–1958) was primarily conceived for a general readership, which it found, most importantly, within the second Japanese women's movement from the 1970s onwards. Over its more than one thousand pages, Takamure develops a grand narrative from ancient times to the present, situating Japanese history within world history. It is these characteristics that led Germer to focus on *Josei no rekishi* (while drawing on Takamure's other writings, as well), the purpose of her analysis being to reconstruct Takamure's narrative of a "history of women," to reveal her theoretical premises, and to assess her contribution to research on women's history, which had been firmly in the hands of male historians before Takamure embarked on her life project. Germer also seeks to clarify the influence of Takamure's work on both researchers of Japanese women's history and the protagonists of the second wave of the women's movement.

In chapter 2, Germer gives an account of Takamure's life up to the time when she began to write *Josei no rekishi*, based on her autobiography and her journals (this is supplemented by a part directly preceding the analysis of *Josei no rekishi*, where the author explains Takamure's physical and mental condition during the 1950s, when she was writing this work). Here, the author reconstructs the biographical and sociopolitical contexts of Takamure's development as an intellectual (e.g., the circumstances surrounding the stillbirth of her child and the sense of alienation she experienced as a housewife, factors that became sources of her maternalism and her ideal of women as producers), as well as her early feminist and anarchist thought. Examining Takamure's start as a poet and her autobiographical self-representation in almost mythical terms, Germer points to the proximity between history and poetry, a connection that the following chapter on historiography emphasizes with reference to Hayden White.

Chapter 3 provides an excellent introduction to the theoretical and institutional development of women's history in the Western (mainly North American, British, Dutch, French, and German) and Japanese contexts. Germer goes on to compare the two traditions, developing her own position in contrast to analyses by Tomida Hiroko and Ueno Chizuko. Takamure's history writing and its reception within the women's movement and women's history since the 1970s, Germer argues, illustrate some of the characteristics that distinguish Japanese women's history from Western women's history. One of these is the already mentioned chronological lead in the formulation of a "female standpoint." Another peculiarity is the differentiation in Japanese debates on women's history between "native" and "foreign" approaches. Germer links this to the perceived opposition between a Western- (or, previously, Chinese-) influenced science in the service of the state (*kangaku*) and a science allegedly rooted in the lives and minds of the Japanese people (*minkangaku*). As a historian without academic training or affiliation, Takamure belonged to the second category. As we learn in later parts of the book, the native-foreign binarism was an important characteristic of Takamure's own work, but it also informed the debate among women's historians in the 1970s, in which Takamure's approach was contrasted to that of the Marxist historian Inoue Kiyoshi (*Nihon joseishi*, 1948), and it resurfaced in the controversy of the 1990s about whether or not to introduce the "Western" concept of gender into Japanese women's history. While admitting that such culturalist arguments do not play a major role in Western women's history, Germer reminds us that the so-called standpoint epistemologies developed by Black U.S. feminists incorporate affirmations of cultural difference and criticism of "White" theory. In both cases, the culturalist position is closely related to the demand that women's history be a political undertaking.

The analysis of *Josei no rekishi*, in chapter 4, is divided into two parts. The first examines Takamure's theoretical premises, sources, and methods as well as the underlying structure of the work, including a detailed analysis of the development of the narrative and of Takamure's concept of periodization. Germer shows *Josei no rekishi* to be based on original research on Japanese family history as well as on the critical use of an international and interdisciplinary range of secondary sources from the fields of traditional and Marxist history, archaeology, ethnology, folklore studies, and feminist philosophy. Particularly notable are Germer's reconstruction of how Takamure evaluates and integrates some of these approaches (including Motoori Norinaga, Friedrich Engels, Lewis Henry Morgan, Jakob Bachofen, Simone de Beauvoir, and the Marxist *Kōza-ha*) and the discussion of Takamure's use of mythology as a

historical source. Germer points out that Takamura's periodization of Japanese history is distinctly feminist. That is, based on her assessment of the status of women, she interpreted history, and Japanese history in particular, as evolving through three ages—a golden age characterized by the communist and matrilinear organization of economy and community as well as by a free and equal relationship of the sexes; an age of deterioration and decadence characterized by the reign of patriarchy, the enslavement of women, and their division into “wives” and “whores”; and a utopian age in which the qualities of the golden age were to be reinstated on a higher level. In accordance with this assumption, Takamura held that “antiquity,” associated with the second stage, began with the Muromachi period and continued into the Edo period, which she saw as belonging partly to antiquity, partly to feudalism. Meiji, too, she characterized as basically feudal. Germer explains this grand scheme as the product of Takamura's quest for answers to the contradictions of the society of her own day (which, as the present book shows convincingly, makes *Josei no rekishi* a source for the history of the 1950s). In her conclusion, Germer also emphasizes the romantic character of Takamura's view of history. In chapter 6, she suggests that this romanticism points to the modernity of Takamura's ideas and allows for intercultural comparisons.

The second, and main part of the analysis isolates “marriage,” “motherhood,” “love, sexuality, and prostitution,” and “female culture” as the four main themes of *Josei no rekishi* and makes a detailed examination of Takamura's approach to these themes. In several instances Germer suspends the focus on Takamura to pursue highly instructive discussions of, for instance, the characteristics and historical significance of the evolutionary social theories from which Takamura drew, or the ambivalent nature of maternalism. Germer also frequently contrasts Takamura's hypotheses—regarding, for example, the development of marriage patterns—with the findings of other researchers, thereby providing an overview of the development of scholarly discourse on the issue at hand. Through these approaches, Germer develops an understanding of Takamura's feminism as an egalitarianism inspired by postwar democratic ideals as well as by her concept of romantic love, but an egalitarianism that remained subordinate to her maternalism, which assumed a natural difference between the sexes and assigned a leading role to women. Germer also emphasizes the analogy that Takamura constructs between women and peasants, which is reminiscent of her earlier anarchism. This analogy allows Takamura to identify women as producers, as victims not only of patriarchy, but also of capitalism and a decadent civilization, and as part of the “masses” that would constitute the moving force of future society and history. Takamura's main theoretical achievements, according to Germer, are the historicization of marriage and the family, the establishment of gender as a category formed by society and, in turn, penetrating all social phenomena, and her pioneering role in the “discursivization of sex.” Takamura's shortcomings, some of which seem to contradict her achievements, are her unwillingness to modify her periodization in spite of contrary evidence, her essentialist and binarist assumptions about the nature of the sexes (and the resulting essentialization of heterosexuality), her participation in a culturalist and nationalist discourse deploying gendered metaphors, and her failure even to mention the role of women (and, particularly, “mothers”) in Japan's imperialist wars, the sexual exploitation of other Asian women by the Japanese military, and her own ideological collaboration in the Pacific War.

In chapter 5, Germer reconstructs the reception of Takamure's work up to the present within the fields of history and folklore studies, the feminist movement, and political theory, including feminist theory. It becomes clear that, apart from the posthumous celebration of Takamure's life and work, which was initiated by her husband, most of the authors who showed a scholarly or political interest in her writings took exception to various points linked to the shortcomings listed above, but, nevertheless, came to value highly her contributions to their respective fields. Within the women's movement, some welcomed Takamure's historicization of the family as a "strong weapon" (Tao Kayoko, 1973, quoted by Germer, p. 359). Others found in her assertions of sexual difference and a "female culture" reassurance regarding their own maternalism and developed from them a concept of a "female logic" contrasted to "male logic." The most recent opinions on Takamure that Germer discusses are reactions by women's historians and activists of the 1970s women's movement (sixteen of whom she interviewed) to the charge of "fabrication" that the historian Kurihara Hiromu made against Takamure in 1994, a controversy that points to the continuing impact of Takamure's work.

In her conclusion (chapter 6), Germer returns to questions of historiography, discusses the romantic, utopian, and poetic dimensions of *Josei no rekishi*, and emphasizes that these are the qualities that made Takamure's work a classic of women's history in Japan. It is not easy to come up with any weak points in this study, but if required to do so, one might mention the numerous repetitions, which, on the other hand, also make this a reader-friendly book.