Consumption of “New Look” and “Femininity” in Post-war Japan (Cosmetic and Perfume Advertising During 1950s)

Olga Khomenko
London University, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), UK
Kyiv Mohyla National University, Faculty of Humanity, Department of History, Ukraine

Abstract
This paper examines the process of constructing “new visual look” and new idea of “femininity” during 50s in Japan through product advertising of cosmetics in major women’s magazines. The main source for the advertisements was images in women’s magazine Fujin Koron and Josei Jishin, which representing two different social strata in Japanese society, as well as well as worlds of “housewife” and “working women”, “old” and “new” type of mass-media. The target market of much advertising during the period (women searching for new identities), were they only simple passive consumers of advertising, or rather also actively projected idealized images of the self in an active interaction with advertising as part of a creation of identity? The idealized image that emerged through this mediation by advertising was it necessarily always an ideal, which was actually realizable in terms of the material and social reality of the time? What else, beside the new look, they been offered and purchased with the new products?

Looking at the interplay between advertising, society and women during the period of 1950s in terms of the changing of the images of women deployed in advertising and the changes in social ideology affected by economic demands, allows us an insight into the ambivalent relations between reality and images, as well as consumption of goods, consuming of new type of images and role models for/by women and development of an active self-identity and new idea of femininity by women.

Key words: women images, cosmetic advertising, identity, femininity, consumption, lifestyle, Japan

Paper Type: Research paper

Cosmetic products offered women in post-war Japan a new look to typify a new era. After World War II women had started to spend more time outside the house. They went to work and they travelled, and in so doing the perception of one of the central codes of Japanese society was transformed, namely the distinction between ‘internal’ (‘uchi’) and ‘external’ (‘soto’). Japanese society famously distinguishes between the ‘internal’ (that which is of the self, inside the family, inside the home) and ‘external’ (that which is alien, outside the home and beyond the circle of contacts) (Doi, 1991). One’s attitude to people, things and events thus depends on where they are located. With the formation of the modern middle class and the emergence of a consumer society, it was the face, made up with cosmetics, that acted as a border or screen separating ‘private’ from ‘public’ and comprised a crucial element in the embodiment of individuality, identity, and difference from others (Peiss, 1998, p.43) . This is particularly true of Japanese women in the post-war period. Beforehand make-up of European origin would have been associated, depending on its intensity, either with the upper stratum of society (‘jyoryu kaikyu’) or with liberated women. It was after World War II that make-up became economically and also symbolically accessible to the middle class the ‘churyu kaikyu’, whose formation was taking place in earnest in exactly this period). The increasing availability of cosmetics in this period was the result of various factors: their mass production, the drop in the prices of these goods and the weakening of social stereotypes and stigmas surrounding cosmetics. Japanese women had the opportunity to put on make-up (intense or more subtle) without the fear of being cast as a practitioner of ‘the world’s oldest profession’. The material used here consists of advertisements for goods published in the women’s magazines Fujin Koron and Josei Jishin ("Housewife Observer" and
This study is based on the theory of symbolic self-completion advanced by Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982. The theory stresses that consumers, in choosing and purchasing goods on the basis of certain characteristics treated as socially legible symbols, do so symbolically to ‘complete’ their own personalities and, thus, to acquire new identities (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982, p.31). Ideally this theory both reflects and explains the changes affecting Japanese women in post-war society: with their ostensibly incomplete identities, Japanese women had become full-time housewives in big cities uncertain about how to assume their place as worthwhile members of the changing society around them. Women themselves clearly had an urge to become different. There was an additional historic social need for society to be able to ‘read’ these symbols and perceive the new individualities along with their affiliations with certain social groups.

Analysing changes in images of women in cosmetics advertising during the 1950s will allow us to answer a number of questions: What images were depicted in 1950s cosmetics adverts? What types of women were portrayed in this advertising? How did adverts affect Japanese women’s identities at the time? What were historical, economic, social, ideological, commercial and marketing circumstances of these portrayals? How were women represented in these adverts? What factors led to women being portrayed as they were: were these factors internal or external? Taken together, how realistic was the imagery in this cosmetics advertising? Before analysing the advertisements and beginning to answer these questions, it is necessary briefly to outline the history and particularities of Japanese and European make-up.

**Traditional Japanese make up from Heian to Taisho Eras**

A traditional style of make-up, associated with the kimono, had long existed in Japan. This style saw the face painted white with the eyebrows, eyelashes and teeth in black. Such make-up was not used, as in Europe, to accentuate women’s natural beauty, but rather to draw attention to the beauty of women’s attire and to inform society about her. The practice of bleaching the face and body, which still forms the basis for discrete Japanese cosmetic traditions, dates to the Edo period (1603–1868). In addition to emphasising dress, the main purpose of make-up in ancient Japan was to display a woman’s social status and class, as well as her age and marital status. It was possible, for example, to know if a woman was married or not by looking at her teeth (were they blackened?), eyebrows and hairdo (Murasawa, 1992, p.124). After the Edo period make-up’s use spread more widely in Japanese society, and it became a necessary element of feminine etiquette and a social norm among members of the middle and lower classes. Furthermore, it was during these times that women from the upper stratum of Japanese society started to treat make-up as a way to demonstrate their social status and to make publicly manifest their ‘good manners’ (Murasawa, 1992, p.125).

It was later that teeth blackening spread from the samurai stratum to commoners, but in the process its meaning had changed: among common women blackened teeth indicated that she was married. This practice, with its associated meaning, was prevalent in Japan for nearly a thousand years, until the Meiji era (1868–1912). The ceremony in which a girl had her teeth painted black for the first time was called ‘kanetsuke’, and its meaning and significance is similar to those of baptism in Christianity. Teeth blackening is generally regarded as a major component of cosmetics during the Edo period, as well being seen as a long-lasting and common sign of a woman’s marital status.

Literary sources also mention women with painted teeth. In *The Tale of Genji*, for example, Awayanagi lamented ‘a good girl, it’s a pity her teeth are black’, meaning that the beautiful girl was, unfortunately, married (Genji Monogatari, 2007, p.127). Therefore, previous in Japan a certain element of make-up could even be signifying a marital status of a woman.

Much later, when Japanese in the 1920s began to dress in a European manner, women began to learn about European cosmetics and to denigrate traditional Japanese make-up. During this time, changes in dress and appearance were significantly affected by mass media in a way incomparable with earlier eras: magazines and newspapers and the advertisements they featured showed new faces to
Japanese women. Yet it was the cinema that produced a peculiar effect by allowing viewers to see heroes and, more importantly for our purposes, heroines on the move. The heady arrival of foreign popular culture in the first years of the Taisho period (1912–1926) witnessed the opening of many cinemas in larger Japanese cities. People went to the movies and copied the style of dress of the stars they saw, and it is with this that we can speak of a substantial effect of Hollywood films on the formation of a new western-style of make-up in Japan. This marked the beginning of transformations, which Japan would continue to experience through the post-war years. In the Taisho period the expression 'to put on make-up' (‘keshou suru’) still meant ‘to put on [Japanese-style] make-up’ rather than make-up in the European manner, as suggested by the name of a colour-print from 1918 that depicted a woman clad in kimono applying bleaching to her face and neck (Hashiguchi, 1918).

Make-up pre- and post-war: from traditions to modernity

Before World War II all Japanese women who put on make-up every day could be divided into three groups: ‘women from the evening services business’ (‘mizu shobai no onna’); ‘modern women’ (‘MoGa’); and, professional women, who first appeared in the 1920s. They put on their make-up for work. Other women, though, spent most of their time at home and used few cosmetics—at home they could show their ‘real’ faces (‘sugao’). Make-up was viewed as essential to beautiful attire, which was only put on when leaving the house to ‘show oneself off’ to ‘outsiders’. Make-up was in this respect an instrument used to separate ‘internal’ from ‘external’, ‘own’ and ‘alien’ spaces.

When Japanese women started making greater use of home appliances in the 1950s, the machines afforded them more free time and greater opportunity to spend time outside the home. According to data of the Tokyo Municipal Library on changes to the lives of Japanese housewives during the period 1916–1961, the use of the washing machine alone freed more than three hours in the average housewife’s daily routine. (Eto Tokyo Hakubutsukan)

The sale of cosmetics increased in volume during this time, as well. The mass production of cosmetics made it considerably cheaper and, thus, affordable to members of all strata of Japanese society, not just the upper stratus as before. It was argued with the 1950s that cosmetics even became a democratic good. Greater free time, more time spent outside the home, increasingly affordable, mass-market cosmetics: all this contributed to the fact that beginning in the 1950s make-up became a compulsory ritual performed each day by most Japanese women before leaving the house.

According to Yoshimi Shunya, after World War II western popular culture, and American popular culture in particular, found positive reception in Japan, despite disapproval of American policy (Yoshimi, 1987, p. 210). This positive Japanese response arose from a common Japanese association of American popular culture with a new, richer, and more attractive lifestyle compared with traditional Japanese culture. It was in this setting and thanks to movies and printed advertisements that society was able to take a different look at make-up, eliciting a change of attitudes towards women’s cosmetics. Observing foreign actresses on screen and in print, Japanese women for the first time had a feeling not only of jealousy but also of admiration, a desire to imitate them and even a sense of ‘liberation’, at least an initial sense on the level of their imaginings and dreams.

Popular American culture (‘taishu bunka’)—and cinema especially—aided the transformation of Japanese views on styles of dress and make-up. It was after the war that ‘the sexuality which society had been hiding and repressing for centuries eventually broke through’. For women, cosmetics ceased to be a mere element of etiquette, and they became something more, a personal ‘weapon’ and an element of an individual’s ‘sexual appeal’ (Ishikawa, 2000, p.193). It was at this precise time that Japanese society’s views on women’s beauty had begun to shift.

A closer look at the imagery of cosmetics adverts in women’s magazines before the war gives a greater sense of popular understandings of feminine beauty at the time. According to Naomi Wolf, beauty in any society is women’s beauty, and the ideals and customs of beauty in a society determine the norms of female behaviour in that society (Wolf, 1990, p.432). Observing changes in the understanding of beauty in the imagery of cosmetics advertising, therefore, permits a comparison of both the meaning of ‘beauty’ at different times and the complex of norms and rules respecting women’s comportment.

In general, all images of women in pre-war cosmetics advertising fall into two groups. The first comprises women who look like foreign actresses (FK, 1921.07, 10; 1926.12; 1931.02, 1934.01, 02; 1935.08), and the second ‘traditional Japanese beauties’ (FK, 1921.08; 1925.02, 1927.02; 1931.01; 1940.10). By the 1920s, however, those looking like ‘modern women’ (‘MoGa’) predominate, even in
images of traditional beauties (FK, 1921.07, 09; 1924.02). During the 1930s and 1940s adverts begin
to appear portraying women clad in *kimono* and women dressed in the European manner (FK, 1931.01, 03; 1934.01. 03). In this imagery men were generally depicted as gentlemen in European suits, even when shown beside *kimono*-clad women (FK, 1931.01, 03; 1934.01. 03). That is to say, despite the admiration of all things foreign—from movies seen to actresses imitated, from wearing European attire to putting on ‘modern girls’’ make-up—pre-war advertising still included much traditional imagery familiar from the *eaux-fortes*, colour prints and engravings of earlier times.

During World War II the volume, both of cosmetics products and of their advertising, decreased considerably. Even if adverts were published, images of women’s faces had been supplanted by images of the goods themselves (FK, 1942.10, 12). This can be attributed to the fact that luxury goods such as cosmetics destined for individual consumption did not square with the austerity of wartime rationing and privation. The literature and arts of the time were not encouraged to depict lifestyles of luxury. The Japanese writer Tanizaki Junichiro, for example, was vilified for his *Sasameyuki* [Light Snow], in which he depicted the extravagant lives of three sisters in wartime Tokyo (Tanizaki, 1988). The novel remained unpublished for a long time on account of its inappropriate portrayal of decadence during wartime.

By way of comparison, during the war advertising in the Soviet Union became propaganda in poster and leaflet form, and the publication of women’s magazines was suspended (Starzh and Uchenova, 2003). In the US, throughout World War II advertising continued to portray bright images of attractive women, despite the protests of puritanical conservatives. This advertising targeted real women in an effort to help them maintain their femininity as they took up men’s work as part of the war effort on the home front (Peiss, 1998, pp.241-243).

With the end of the war came a slow increase in the number of cosmetics advertisements in Japan. In this period a prevalent image in advertising was of the woman who, despite hard times, heard the call for a better life and met it with a smile on her face because ‘the restoration of peaceful Japan requires a happy face and Tango powder helps with that.’ (Fujin Kurabu, 1946.02.01, Vol.2).

**Women’s images in 1950s cosmetics advertisements, or love American-style**

In the wake of World War II, advertisements generally evinced an admiration for the US and American cultural understandings of beauty. Japanese women of the time admired Hollywood actresses whose on-screen performances were much more free than in pre-war films. One reason for the popularity of cinema in post-war Japan was the simple fact that people wanted to escape post-war reality, and to do that they went to the movies. In addition, changes in cinema technology in the 1950s brought colour films to cinemas, making them more entertaining and definitively more attractive to viewers. Until that time stars had had rather pale and monotonous make-up, a result of film being black-and-white. Furthermore, in the post-war period many Japanese women got access to many different cosmetics, which had previously only been used in movies but were now available for the mass market. These include powder ‘Pan-Cake’, which had been invented in the US for the movie industry in the 1920s and now promised to Japanese women the possibility of making their skin more transparent (Peiss, 1998, p.102).

This period is marked by adverts showing images of women as ‘twin sisters’ to American film actresses. Lipstick adverts from 1955, for example, had a Japanese woman in the image’s background with the face of a woman resembling Audrey Hepburn (FK, 1955.04). At this time cosmetics brands even had names appealing to popular interest in things American: ‘Hollywood cosmetics’, for example, and ‘Elizabeth’ (Elizabeth Taylor) (FK, 1955.02). Advertisements for ‘Kiss Cosmetics’ depicted a woman looking remarkably similar to Taylor (1955.12). Cosmetics manufactures undoubtedly used the love of the movies as a marketing strategy, and it is safe to say that advertising had absorbed the American, and specifically Hollywood, understandings of beauty that had conquered the imaginations of rank-and-file Japanese women. According to Shimokawa, following release of “Roman Holiday” in 1953 and “Sabrina” in 1954, Audrey Hepburn became popular throughout the world and Japan was no exception, the style “as Audrey” was tremendously popular among Japanese women (Shimokawa, 1997, p. 247).

Theorists of advertising assert that the farther imagery of women in advertising are from reality—that is, the more exceptionally attractive and beautiful the woman—the more this leads to ordinary women feeling imperfect and unable to attain the ideal (Solomon, 2004, p.295). Most Japanese women who compared themselves with the attractive faces of foreign actresses certainly felt themselves not
attractive enough. One perceived weaknesses was the size of their noses, with women thinking theirs too small. Adverts offered to correct this flaw, suggesting that the use of powder ‘will make your nose look a bit bigger’ (FK, 1958.11). Other adverts boldly declared that ‘from now on you can take portrait photos without the fear of looking bad, because the manufacture of a new powder had opened a “photo season”’ (FK, 1955.06). Not only did adverts reveal the existence of a psychological complex among Japanese women, but they actually increased that complex by manipulating women into buying cosmetics which, in turn, affected sales.

In fact, it was not post-war advertising that created this widespread complex about noses; Japanese did not begin to worry about their noses only after World War II. This anxiety has long been in evidence in Japanese society. Interestingly, available data suggest that the size of Japanese noses, as well as the height of Japanese people, have changed on average over the course of the past thousand years. In the Kamakura era (1185–1333), the average Japanese nose had a 20.34-degree curve. By the Edo period (1603–1868) it had increased to 22.82 degrees, the Meiji era (1868–1912) to 25.78 degrees and in the while in the 1940s during the Showa period to 27.47 (Shimokawa, 1997, p.357). Unfortunately there is no information available to show how the application of cosmetics affected the curvature of the nose.

Either because of the influence of cinema or because of a long-standing admiration of white skin (seen in so-called ‘bihaku’, the bleaching of the skin), this period after the war saw an increase in the number of Japanese women trying to look at least a bit whiter. Advertisements offered many new creams, powders and talcs which supposedly helped to produce the effect of a general whitening of the skin. Adverts emphasised the ‘amazing effect’ of such products, and one line of cosmetics was called simply ‘Magic Cosmetics’ (FK, 1955.11). The product range was said to have a durable effect, with consumers expressly warned to ‘stop using [the product] as soon as your skin gets whiter’ (FK, 1955.12). ‘White skin’ at the time was associated with the ‘attractive look’, and the adjective ‘white’ had even become a synonym for ‘attractive’ (FK, 1955.11). It may well be the case that such a shift in meaning had been affected by the white-skin beauties of black-and-white movies. This only served to reinforce admiration of the ‘white face’ in Japan, an admiration evinced by the long-extant view in Japanese society that white skin was a sign not only of beauty but also of high status. Women from the upper stratum of society did not work under the sun in rice fields. They resided in cities where they hid their faces under umbrellas and, as a result, their skin was whiter than that of rural women. This is why, with the start of the twentieth century, creams, lotions and even medical ointments designed to make the face whiter became even more popular in Japan then before (FK, 1921.10; 1926.12; 1927.02).

It is worth noting that Japanese movies, too, portrayed white-faced and western-clad women enjoying the high life of domestic comfort. The heroines, for example, in such movies as Tokyo Story (1953, Tokyō Monogatari), Tea over Rice (1952, Ochazuke no aji) directed by Yasujiro Ozu and Ginza Cosmetics (1951, Ginza keshō) by Mikio Naruse cast off traditional Japanese dress and make-up in favour of western styles, wearing European dresses, putting on make-up and generally looking whiter compared with actresses in previous films.

Images of pro-western, Hollywood-style beauty dominated cosmetics adverts in the post-war period. Not only that, the Hollywood-style beauties in advertising were not merely passive, sitting and standing around. These women—and their beauty—were shown to viewers as women in love. Advertising copy, slogans and tag lines, made this clear to readers. Even if an advert showed a woman alone, she was dreaming about love and romance. In 1955 adverts showed a couple kissing, reassuring readers that ‘your lipstick will not vanish even if you kiss’ (FK, 1955.12). Adverts in FK from 1958 showed a woman held in a man’s hands, saying ‘let’s love beautifully’ (FK, 1958.04).

In general, in the second half of the 1950s advertisements depicted love with the help of such epithets as ‘beautiful’, ‘attractive’ and ‘passionate’. It is noteworthy that, in order to illustrate the beauty and passion of love, adverts often made use of images of foreign couples. This can likely be attributed to the fact that most Japanese people at the time (due to a natural reticence or to certain perceptions of proper public behaviour, among other reasons), did not take joy in kissing in public. It was first necessary to create a new perception (‘ishiki’), in effect a precedent making the public performance of such activities attractive. For this reason, the first adverts for ‘Kiss Me’ Cosmetics used foreigners as the main personae: for them such behaviour was normal, even natural, and taboos had not existed to censure it for a long time.

Advertisers proved correct in their calculations of the possible effects of such imagery. In a country that had long been closed too much from the outside world, all foreign phenomena were at least
captivating if not entirely attractive. That was not all, however. In addition to the repugnance for kissing in public, for quite some time the Japanese language did not even possess a word for ‘kissing’ as such; there was only an diagrammatic and cumbersome word combination, ‘kuchizuke’, meaning ‘touch with the mouth’. The word ‘kiss’ (‘kisu’, ‘chu’) —that is, the word in current usage with the meaning equivalent to the English ‘kiss’—came into Japanese in the first decades of the twentieth century and became widely used only after World War II. This fact indicates that in Japanese culture, the kiss had not been a key element in courtship. Its meaning was not analogous to that in western cultures, where a kiss had been viewed as a turning point in genuine amorous relationships. According to Hakuhodo Agency survey, In twenty-first century Japan, twenty year-olds think of the kiss, in addition to explicit proposals to become ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’, as the point of transition from acquaintance to love. For the twenty and thirty year-olds of the 1950s, however, the transition was marked by the proposal and by the holding of hands (Hakuhodo, 2001).

Gradually the heroines in advertisements became increasingly active participants in the lovemaking process, as it were. In addition to kissing couples adverts portrayed, for example, a woman getting ready for a date, with her use of lipstick emphasising the fact that she expects her suitor to kiss her during her happy encounter (FK, 1956.10). A lipstick advertisement from 1957 showed a woman dreaming about just such a pleasant date and the kiss she would get from the object of her affection (FK, 1957.03). During the rendezvous, the advert stressed, the lipstick would stay ‘intact’ (FK, 1957.01). The ingenuity of this cosmetics advertising partly lay in its evocation of different meanings. They could be read as suggesting that lipstick is a necessary tool in love and, if you buy it and wear it, then love—and a kiss—may soon come to you. In short, if the reader wanted a kiss, she ought to use lipstick. In selling lipstick the adverts, in fact, discuss kisses and love and, in talking about love and kisses, the adverts were selling lipstick.

In the 1950s advertisements had also begun to assert the need for quickly applied make-up suitable for the busy modern woman, and some combined this purported need for ‘express make-up’ with the desire for amorous encounters. ‘If powder is all I have,’ declared a woman in one advert, ‘it will only take me five minutes to put on my make-up’ (FK, 1956.01). Other adverts portrayed couples arranging to meet over the phone. The man told her, ‘Hello! Make-up for that in hurry,‘ and the woman set off, telling herself and the reader that ‘five minutes’ make-up is beauty for the whole day’ (FK, 1956.01; 1953.04).

An advertisement from 1958 showed a woman with radiant black eyes speaking about the ‘lipstick of hidden desires’ (FK, 1958.12). Such adverts—and the images and slogans they contained—animated Japanese women to buy cosmetics to evoke their hidden desire for mutual love. The adverts stressed that it was the use of cosmetics that enabled women to feel better, allowing her to expect a suitor to say, ‘You are so beautiful today. I’ve got an impression that a flower has come to bloom in my life’ (FK, 1958.04). Cosmetics advertising thus strongly suggested that the use of cosmetics would help women find love.

Some adverts did more than hint. Some brazenly declared that women using cosmetic powder would be more attractive and thus garner the attention of men. Advertisements of Pondji Cosmetics from 1955, for example, portrayed a woman in a beautiful dress surrounded by four men, all flirting with her (FK, 1955.01). In this way, adverts appeared to convey the message that the sole use of cosmetics was to increase one’s popularity with the opposite sex. Advertisements of the time for ‘Kiss Me’ powder assured all those using the product would find four suitors (FK, 1956.04). Another advert portrayed a Japanese woman surrounded by four European men in black suits. Given the unrealistic nature of such a proposal, the advert pointed out that ‘this is how things happen in America.’

These adverts easily attest to the significant amount of advertising in women’s magazines, but the question remains: was the primary purpose of the adverts to sell cosmetics products? Data on sales demonstrate not only the mass purchase of cosmetics in this period but also the mass use of them. A conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of this data: the mass consumption of cosmetic powder by Japanese women began with 1953, while that of lipstick, pencils and eyebrow dyes only with 1956. In other words, cosmetics manufacturers were actively advertising at the same time that sales of their products increased substantially. The adverts were, thus, effective in their primary role of increasing sales and eliciting response from many women–consumers.
Conclusion

Having analysed a number of images from post-war cosmetics advertising, it is clear that in many cases images of women in cosmetics advertisements were combined with images of love and romantic relationships. In most cases the heroine was a woman who either dreamed about love or was in love, she was in a rush to get to a date or get a kiss and, on the whole, she found herself dreaming sweet dreams. In addition to offering goods for sale cosmetics adverts also proposed the ‘added value’ of love, itself a new symbol, which, during the 1950s, took part in the shaping of Japanese women’s identities, in accordance with symbolic completion theory. They desired to be free and liberated.

First and foremost, such portrayals of woman succeeded in their primary task of selling as many cosmetics products as possible. This was actually achieved by assiduously using a strategy meant to interest and entice, by making use of images that were familiar, understandable and desirable to consumers. Second, the advertisements purported to depict women’s desires. Apart from the desire to look good, arguably a desire inherent to all women regardless of time or place, post-war Japanese women longed for economic stability and better, more peaceful lives. Given the norms and understandings of the times, such a life first and foremost included marriage. It was by means of marriage and the purchasing power that came with well-chosen husbands that women could obtain different material goods and values. As women were not yet able independently to attain such living standards, marriage was normally the only available option.

There was a further historic demand placed on Japanese women: in this period the nation required women to devote all their time to taking care of their families, becoming housewives in order to help the country and its economy out of ruin. It would thus seem that images of women in love and of women with cosmetics (as well as images of housewives in advertisements for domestic appliances) contained an additional incitement to desire on the part of society and the nation to use advertising as a means to control its own citizens, their dreams and intentions and their contribution to the labour market.

The post-war sexual liberation of Japanese society also contributed to portrayals of women in love and liberated women in cosmetics advertising. Things which had been forbidden in Japanese society before the war were allowed afterwards, and long-oppressed passions burst out. In this period many erotic magazines came into mass circulation, as did similar books and comics. In addition, the government introduced the use of contraception (Yoshimi, 2004, p.10-11).

Most men who returned from the war wanted to start families, get married and have children. This period marked the apex of a wedding boom (Tokeikyoku, Showa 21-37). As advertisers fastidiously observed changes taking place in the society around them, the wedding boom was likely another cause for the dominance of love and romance as themes in cosmetics advertising.

It is with the 1950s that advertisements began to feature women differently. In the latter half of the decade, the mass media stopped labelling women ‘housewives’ or ‘madams’, instead calling them ‘women’. Evidence of this can be seen in the title of a new magazine, Josei Jishin [Woman Herself]. This title, whose pages are examined here, began publication in 1958 by the Kodansha Publishing House. Unlike the titles of magazines published earlier, its title did not include the word ‘housewife’ or ‘Mrs’; emphasis was placed on women’s personalities and their gender. Such older titles included the likes of “Shufu no tomo” (1912) (“A friend of Housewife”) and “Shufu to Seikatsu” (1935) (A Housewife and Her Life)). This slight shift in the titles of women’s magazines is itself clear evidence that Japanese society—or at least elements within it—had started to view women as more than housewives. Women warranted attention as individuals, ‘woman’, with free personalities. Ishikawa has called the period from 1956 to 1969 a ‘period of sexual liberation’, when previously forbidden and repressed energies emerged and, what was more, found expression and even embodiment in different arts (Takishima, 2000, p.202). People attempted to express themselves and their passions in the sphere of arts by expounding their personalities, their particular traits. During this early period of liberation in the late 1950s, housewives and salary-men sought their own identities, sure, but they also endeavoured simply to discover what it meant to be men and women.

The imagery of cosmetics and perfume advertising from the 1950s were manifestly influenced by American popular culture, a fact that arose for several reasons. First, images of beauty and of loving, sexual women were popular in the Hollywood movies that flooded Japanese cinemas at this time. This influence, particular as can be seen in the manner of portraying images, promoted the development of new modes of behaviour and new visual styles. Such “American –inspired” or “American-Loving” portrayals were not entirely new; they were a new layer of polish complementing the cultural base that
had been created in Japan in the 1920s by the ‘modern girls’ (‘MoGu’). According to Josimi Suinya, there had been admiration of American consumer culture in Japan since the 1920s (Yoshimi, 2004, p.14). ‘Progressive’ young people at that time had enjoyed jazz, watched Hollywood movies, worn hairstyles and make-up similar to those seen in the movies and dressed like movie characters. Young people had earnestly tried closely to imitate what they saw in the movies. Wearing American-style dress to work and going to the movies week in and week out were both typical habits of fashionable young urbanites in the 1920s (Yoshimi, 2004, p.10-11).

After World War II this lifestyle—with all the freedom, material wealth and democracy associated with American existence—came to be accessible to the wide stratum of the Japanese middle-class, where it had previously only been known to modern women and modern men (‘MoBo’). What had been a worldview, a lifestyle and a mode of behaviour and comportment exclusively enjoyed by MoGa and MoBo (often members of the elite (‘joyu-kaiku’)) became something shared by common housewives for the first time. Advertising played a significant role in the formation and establishment of imagery that became models for these everyday Japanese women.

One must be cautious, however. Even though many cosmetics adverts appeared in women’s magazines in the 1950s, cosmetics products were not yet affordable to most Japanese housewives. At the time, the salary of the average family of two residing in the big city totalled 13,238 yen. Of this, 700 yen was typically spent on ‘cosmetics and hairdressing’. By 1955, of 29,169 yen, this same expense had already risen to 832yen, and by 1959, to 910yen from a salary of 38,873 (Tokeikyoku, Showa 21-37). Yet, looking more closely at the cosmetics products in advertisements reveals the paltriness of the expense. The powder cost 150 yen, the lipstick’s price ranged from 150 to 680 yen, creams from 300 to 1,500 yen and perfume from 120 to 1,800 yen. As a woman would need lipstick, powder, pencil and eyebrow pencil to apply the barest modicum of make-up, one can easily see that a Japanese woman would have needed to spend more than 1,000 yen. Until 1959 the average woman’s budget would not permit such spending. Although cosmetics had become slightly more affordable, because of mass-production it was unlikely women would purchase all these cosmetics in any one-month, a stark reality especially true of perfume, whose cost varied from 400 to 700 yen.

Women were not able to afford all the cosmetics and other goods they saw in advertisements, but this did not prevent them from dreaming about lives where such expenses would be possible. In those days such a ‘good life’ was readily associated with a prosperous American existence, with happy-faced housewives enjoying their domestic appliances and their life of relative leisure. Japanese women, whose everyday lives were far from such an idealised image, explicitly felt jealousy. It is well established that domestic “modernization” similar what happened in Japan in the post-war period had taken place before World War II in the US (Sivulka, 1997, p.222-223).

It was the faces of happy housewives that dominated adverts for home appliances. In contrast, it was for women dreaming of getting married that advertisements proffered cosmetics products as a tool for making someone fall in love with them, which, in turn, would lead to marriage. The imagery in advertising for Kose Cosmetics, for example, depicted happy brides with the caption, ‘On this happiest day, to you who is the most Beautiful’ (FK, 1959.05). This message, however, could be read conversely: make-up and other efforts to make oneself more beautiful were necessary to achieve the goal of getting married. While such images of beauty and love were most prevalent in JJ, with its target audience of single women, similar images and the trend towards more of them can be observed in FK, whose readers were thought to be married women and housewives.

This tendency was understandable in American magazines: in American advertising cosmetics were consistently represented not only as tools that made marriage possible but also as tools to keep husband and family happy thereafter (Hill, 2002, p.95). In Japan, though, cosmetics appeared as little more than a necessary expedient for securing marriage. At the time society held the view—and still does—that, once married, a woman abandoned her womanhood (‘onna sutere’) and embodied motherhood for her family (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1997). This can be seen circumstantially in the practice of Japanese couples calling themselves ‘mother’ and ‘father’ instead of using each other’s given names once they have children. Women forgot their womanhood, perhaps with the understanding that by getting married and having a family she was thought to achieve all her goals. In some ways, then, magazine images of the appearance-conscious ‘woman in love’ may have targeted married women but it did so in a way that contradicted wider cultural norms and discourses about women’s positions and duties.
References

Josei Monogatari (2007), Kojyunsha, Dai 1 maki, Tokyo.
Edo Tokyo Hakubutsukan, Showa no Shufu no Seikatsu ni kan suru tenjikai, Tokyo.
Hakucho (2001), Nichijo seikatsu to Seikatsu Shukan ni kan suru Chosa, Hakucho Shuppan, Tokyo.
Iwanami Kouza, Kindai Nihonshi no bunka Shi, Vol. 9, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.
Murosawa H. (1992), Kao no Bunka shi, Tokyo Shoten, Tokyo.
Starykh N. and Utchenova V. (2003), Istoriya Reklamy, St. Petersburg.
Fujin Kurabu, 1941. 02.01, Dai 27 Maki, Dai 2 Go, Tokyo.
Yoshimi S. (2004), Reisen Taisei to “Amerika” no Shouhi”, in “Reisen Taisei to Shihon no Bunka”