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Contraceptive Diplomacy

REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS AND
IMPERIAL AMBITIONS IN THE
UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

Aiko Takeuchi-Demirci

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Abbreviations

EMCO	Eugenic Marriage Consultation Office
EPL	Eugenic Protection Law
FPFJ	Family Planning Federation of Japan
ICPP	International Conference on Planned Parenthood
ICW	International Council of Women
IPH	Institute of Public Health in Tokyo
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
IUD	intrauterine device
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MHW	Ministry of Health and Welfare (Japan)
OPR	Princeton Office of Population Research
PHW	Public Health and Welfare Section
PPWA	Pan-Pacific Women's Association
PPWC	Pan-Pacific Women's Conference
RF	Rockefeller Foundation
SCAP	Supreme Command for the Allied Powers
WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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Note on Japanese Names and Words

This book uses the Japanese convention of placing surnames first before given names. Macrons are used to describe long-vowel Japanese sounds. Exceptions are made when referring to Japanese words that are commonly used in English vocabulary (such as “Tokyo” and “Osaka”) or Japanese authors whose English-language works have been cited. All translations from Japanese-language sources are mine except for publications that provide their own English titles.

Contraceptive Diplomacy

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Introduction

Almost from the time of landing I had been deeply conscious that I was in one of the most thickly populated countries of the world. . . . I could not believe any country could contain so many babies. Fathers carried them in their arms; mothers carried them in a sort of shawl; children carried babies; even babies carried smaller babies. . . . It was even then too late for birth control to offset the inevitability of her overflowing her borders; the population pressure was bound to cause an explosion in spite of the safety valve of Korea. How long this could be delayed was a matter of pure conjecture.

—Margaret Sanger, *An Autobiography*

Margaret Sanger, the iconic leader of the American birth control movement, visited Japan for the first time in March 1922. By this time, she had already established her reputation as a controversial birth control activist both at home and abroad, and this was her first trip to Asia for the purpose of birth control advocacy outside the United States. She shared the impression that many American visitors had about Japan at the time—that the small island nation was packed with people, especially babies. It was here, even more than in her own country, where she found the dire need for birth control. But the significance of spreading birth control, Sanger believed, went beyond the individual needs of women and families. She was determined that the birth control cause could help resolve international tensions and contribute to world peace.

Contraceptive Diplomacy examines the development of ideas about birth control, contraceptive technology, and reproductive politics in the midst of

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imperial struggles between the United States and Japan by following the activism of Margaret Sanger and her Japanese counterpart, Ishimoto Shizue (later known as Katō Shizue after her second marriage in 1945).¹ These two feminists undertook a program of transnational activism in the mid-twentieth century, when liberal and radical actors across the Pacific came together to find amicable solutions to domestic and international tensions caused by industrial development and imperialist competition. For labor activists, birth control represented a tool to empower workers worldwide exploited under the global capitalist economy. For social reformers, it was a key to solve the problem of overpopulation, which they asserted was the root cause of many imperialist struggles, including Japan's aggressive expansionism in the Pacific. Intellectuals, philanthropists, and politicians across national borders exchanged social and scientific ideas about fertility control in the hopes of avoiding a fatal—seemingly inevitable—clash in the Pacific.

Sanger's new mission to spread birth control in Japan attracted the support of American reformers and scholars who embraced eugenic ideas. The development of the American birth control movement in the early to mid-twentieth century was deeply tied to white America's struggle for world hegemony. Concern about competition from Japan, coupled with eugenic fears about a declining "white civilization," pushed American leaders to cast aside wariness about the spread of birth control among white women and embrace it as a necessary tool to reduce the size of the teeming masses of Asia. The colonial enterprise of the crowded nation revived Western fears of a "Yellow Peril."² Japan's expansionism not only jeopardized American political interests in China but also seemed to threaten the lives of ordinary (white) citizens on the US mainland as the excessive population emigrated overseas and propagated at a higher rate than that of white Americans. Political pundits and intellectuals feared that differential fertility between the white and yellow races would eventually break the balance of power—or the white domination in world politics. In such a political and social context, it seemed justifiable—even humanitarian—to spread the practice of contraception to populations stigmatized as dangerously prolific and aggressive. These elites successfully separated the matter of birth control among nonwhite races across the world from the controversies at home over women's rights and sexuality when practiced among white middle-class women.

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Sanger's birth control advocacy also found ardent supporters in Japan, who saw reproductive control as an effective tool to build a Japanese citizenry capable of competing with other imperial powers and leading the Asia-Pacific world. Japanese intellectuals with a penchant for new Western ideas asserted their ability to master—and even surpass the West in—birth control technology, which was seen as part of a neo-Malthusian economic theory.³ For them, birth control represented modernity, scientific advancement, and a key to eugenic improvement of the Japanese race. The liberal elites strove to teach the idea not only to the Japanese masses but also to other Asian people. Tied deeply to notions of national prosperity and racial fitness, birth control advocacy in Japan survived, with a brief interruption, the pronatalist regime of the wartime government and further expanded during the postwar years, when overpopulation seemed to threaten the racial well-being of a defeated empire.

The transnational politics of reproduction helped gradually break down the social and legal barriers against birth control, enabling the democratization of birth control information and technology even in the domestic context. Had it not been for these extended discussions on birth control in international politics, many women across the world would have had more limited access to knowledge and tools of reproductive control. As Linda Gordon has argued, the primary obstacle to birth control was politics, which in turn often thwarted technological development of contraceptives.⁴ I further extend this idea by maintaining that international politics and transnational networks helped advance birth control ideas and technologies when laws and social barriers in the domestic context frustrated the efforts of activists.

Even with the support of some liberal elites and professionals, birth control was still a radical subject that most Americans avoided discussing in public, much less endorsing. When she continued to face countless obstacles and alienation at home, Sanger often felt more welcome abroad. While one might imagine that she would face just as many protests and just as much bigotry—or perhaps more—among the indigenous people for preaching such a controversial topic, instead, as Sanger recalled, she was greeted with “respectful attention,” “decency,” and “consideration” in Asia.⁵ In particular, she came to see Japan almost like her second home, visiting the country seven times throughout her lifetime and forming lasting friendships with a number of Japanese men and women and their fam-

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ilies. By earning the respect of the Japanese people and their government, Sanger made her ultimate goal to win the battle against sexual oppression in her own country.

This book situates Margaret Sanger's political trajectory in broader intellectual trends and movements that transcended national borders. The birth control cause attracted the interest of transnational elites from across the political spectrum: first the radical socialists, then liberal reformers, and eventually some conservative nationalists. Sanger and Ishimoto flexibly shifted their sails according to the social tides and political winds of the time, soliciting support from those with political and financial influences. Along the way, the nature of the transnational birth control movement had evolved as well, although political ideologies that gained influence in the movement during certain times (liberalism, nationalism) did not completely replace another (radicalism).

The eugenic philosophy was a key concept that remained central to the birth control movement throughout the decades. Broadly defined as theories of individual or racial betterment, the idea fascinated many intellectuals and professionals—moderate, conservative, as well as radicals—who believed in the evolutionary notion of progress and development. A number of scholars have exposed Sanger's involvement in the eugenics movement in the domestic context. They tend to interpret Sanger's commitment to eugenics as her own political decision to align with elite conservatism, making birth control into a racist campaign benefiting only the white race.⁶ While it is true that the stronger backing of eugenicists had transformed the birth control movement in general from a grassroots, anti-establishment campaign to a centralized and professionalized cause, this view tends to overlook how ideologically powerful and widespread the eugenic philosophy was at the time. Eugenics in the early twentieth century represented a cutting-edge science that traveled beyond national and racial borders and attracted the era's most brilliant and progressive intellectuals across the world. The transnational circulation of knowledge about race betterment, in turn, affected domestic politics, economics, laws, scientific research, and social norms about procreation and the future of the nation. The transnational birth control movement, in other words, developed alongside the global spread of the eugenics movement.

A close examination of the individual works of transnational birth control activists illuminates the limits of liberalism in advancing the rights

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of women and racial minorities. Sanger, Ishimoto, and many other birth control supporters, including eugenicists, were liberal reformers who strove to bring peace and stability to the world by assisting the “needy” peoples. They sincerely believed that the poor and the fertile races needed the guidance of white Americans; otherwise, the nation—and the world—would descend into chaos and even extinction. By presenting this imperialistic logic of humanitarianism, their transnational activism often masked the fundamental and structural inequalities and injustice that US and Japanese imperialism had generated.

As transnational birth control leaders immersed themselves into eugenic or neo-Malthusian debates about racial betterment and national well-being, they tended to neglect the needs and health of individuals whom they claimed to save. By the postwar period, they were working along with demographers, scientists, and policy makers in their efforts to develop modern and effective contraceptives—specifically the oral contraceptive pills and intrauterine devices—in the battle against global population explosion, while failing to improve women’s social status or to spread sexual and reproductive education. In other words, advances in reproductive technology and the wider availability of contraceptives to women of all social and economic statuses did not guarantee the expansion of women’s health and reproductive rights. A feminist mission to give women across the world the tools and knowledge to decide their reproductive fate had thus, over four decades, evolved into a state endeavor that effectively disempowered racially and economically marginalized women.

The Transpacific Politics of Reproduction

Contraceptive Diplomacy situates the history of reproductive politics at the intersection of transnational feminist activism and US-Japanese relations. It narrates the development of contraceptive knowledge and technology from a transnational standpoint, specifically, a transpacific one, closely examining how international politics affected domestic conversations on race, gender, and sexuality. Women activists, in particular, became key agents and facilitators of transnationalism.⁷

Whereas many studies on Japanese modern history either end with the demise of the “empire” after the Pacific War, or start with the rise of a new

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“democratic” nation in the postwar era, this book covers the period before, during, and after World War II. It highlights the continuity of transnational exchanges between American and Japanese intellectuals, politicians, and activists across the twentieth century. The military battles in the Pacific in the 1940s were not the sole defining event in the history of US-Japan relations. Reproductive issues, as they were intricately tied to nationalist concerns over population size and racial quality, appeared prominently in political debates regarding some key global struggles that affected US-Japan relations: the Russian Revolution of 1917, the immigration restriction movement in the United States in the early 1920s, the imperialist struggles for Asian territories in the 1930s and 1940s, the postwar Allied Occupation of Japan, and the beginning of the Cold War in the 1950s. All of these major events in world politics involved extended discussions over protecting or building stronger national bodies in face of competition with the Other: the capitalist, another race, or the communist.

The story of a transpacific politics of reproduction serves to decenter the Euro-American viewpoint in cultural and intellectual histories. Based on multinational and multilingual research, this study illuminates the *mutual* interactions and influences between individuals and institutions in Japan and the United States over the matter of reproductive control. It takes into account historical contexts, political ideologies, and social thought in both countries, against the backdrop of Japanese as well as American imperialism. While the legacy of European colonialism and Euro-American connections provided a powerful subtext, transpacific relations played critical roles in the development of political thought and racial theories that affected the birth control movements in both nations.⁸

Despite their rivalry, Japanese and American liberals shared much in common in terms of political ideology and geopolitical interests. Individual politicians and intellectuals had formed cooperative and oftentimes friendly relationships.⁹ Indeed, birth control advocates in both countries were able to maintain contact throughout the war years, albeit with limitations in an environment of mounting diplomatic tension. This is by no means to suggest that there was no tension between the liberal actors of the two nations, which often expressed itself in racial terms.¹⁰ Nonetheless, birth control activists represented a sizable group of influential individual actors who searched for ways to build mutually beneficial relations even during difficult times in official foreign relations.

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The transnational circulation of knowledge regarding female fertility first took place as a form of what historian Akira Iriye calls “cultural internationalism,” an idea and movement that flourished during the inter-war period in the context of Wilsonian internationalism.¹¹ While World War I damaged European nationalism and colonialism, the United States emerged more powerful and expanded its influence abroad, especially in the Asia-Pacific region through the Open Door Policy. American liberals sought to bring Japan into the American-led “community of ideals, interests, and purposes,” an initiative to which many Japanese leaders responded positively.¹² The elites often expressed these international endeavors in the form of liberal, humanitarian ideals, even while they were fundamentally driven by economic and geopolitical interests.

American-led internationalism, as William Appleman Williams illustrated, was a form of imperialism without direct territorial governance. The goal of US “imperial anti-colonialism” was to achieve world domination without having to actually go to war. The new international order was based on the balance of power, not the denial of power itself. It was an “essentially conservative” system that privileged America’s efforts to achieve both domestic well-being and world hegemony.¹³ Sanger and her supporters, many of whom were liberal internationalists, aimed to bring a “slow process of reform” without the need of a radical revolution.¹⁴ While many of them, both American and Japanese, were actually anticolonialists, in that they opposed imperialist aggression and emigration resulting from overpopulation, they cannot be presumed to have been antiracist champions of participatory democracy in weaker, poorer nations. In the end, their version of anticolonialism promoted an orderly world safe for the interests of imperial superpowers. The liberal internationalists’ efforts in most part fell short of extending their humanitarian impulse and professed principle of self-determination to non-Western peoples.

From the vantage point of American birth control activists, the support of eugenicists was crucial to the expansion of the birth control cause across national borders, especially to non-Western countries. High-profile political leaders such Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, as well as civilian reformers and eugenicists, shared the same fears that the rise of Japan posed a threat to world stability.¹⁵ US political leaders recognized Japan’s military power and accorded it a special position in Asia, but only to protect and expand US interests in China. In the end, Japan was still inferior

and unfit for leadership. Eugenicists used science to justify white leadership and colored subordination. Without the “superior” qualities of self-restraint and foresight that white men possessed, they argued, the yellow race would lead the world to chaos and darkness. Japan’s desperate search for an outlet for their surplus population as a result of their “reckless” breeding seemed to be a case in point. It was part of the “white man’s burden” to educate the Japanese in the civilized practice of birth control.

Even as they struggled to make sense of the inferior status assigned by Westerners, Japanese leaders selectively used Western power and knowledge to advance their own interests. Many Japanese advocates of birth control were transnational figures who actively consumed Western knowledge, interacted with Western intellectuals, and occasionally traveled abroad themselves. They often invoked the concept of Western progress and Eastern backwardness when they advocated the need for fertility control as a token of modernity. Such admissions did not suggest that the Japanese passively accepted their inferiority. Rather, Japanese elites envisioned themselves as leaders of the Pan-Asian regional order—more suited to the task than Americans, since they were, after all, Asians too—and as the only “Oriental” nation that had successfully assimilated “Occidental” modernity. In many cases, Japanese intellectuals sought not just to emulate Americans but to exceed them in their mastery of contraceptive knowledge and technology. Other times, they found the need to reject, adapt, or modify American-imported ideas and practices to adjust to domestic politics and indigenous demands. By mastering Western knowledge and practices, Japanese supporters of birth control claimed to set an example for other Asian countries to emulate.

This book highlights, in particular, the role of private ambassadors and transient visitors in fostering cross-cultural and cross-racial relationships across the Pacific.¹⁶ It features the works of those who lived or traveled abroad for shorter periods of time, ranging from weeks to several years, and who frequently moved back and forth between their “native” and “adopted” countries. Their citizenship and loyalty to their home country remained the same, but they invested a great deal of time and energy in learning about their adopted country and negotiated an identity that bridged nations. Just like permanent and long-term immigrants, these transnational figures played crucial roles in challenging and redefining another country’s conceptions about race, citizenship, and national identity

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through discussions over reproduction. They often faced obstacles in entering the other country, but their relative mobility and flexibility allowed them to communicate and travel across borders even during volatile times for official diplomatic relations.

The cultural diplomacy of birth control activists in fact had impacts on policy formation and lawmaking in both direct and subtle ways. Their transnational ties, for example, brought a crucial change to the birth control law in the United States in 1936, when Sanger and her supporters won a lawsuit against the US government for confiscating a package of pessaries sent to their clinic from Japan for medical use. The court decision of acknowledging contraceptives as a legitimate part of medical practice in effect nullified the Comstock Law, a law that had forbidden the distribution of any birth control information or devices since 1873. Soon after the decision, the American Medical Association formally endorsed contraception.¹⁷ In Japan, a number of influential birth control advocates became members of the National Diet or ministry officials during the US Occupation after the war, including Ishimoto (by then Katō) Shizue. With the help of US officials, these Japanese bureaucrats played crucial roles in drafting and passing the 1948 Eugenic Protection Law (*Yūsei hogo hō*), which legalized abortion and stipulated programs for birth control instruction. The purpose and actual outcome of these national policies and laws aimed at reproductive control did not necessarily reflect the original spirit of birth control activism, placing national interests over those of women. Nonetheless, these policies and laws helped bring the idea of reproductive control to national attention and advance the knowledge and technologies of contraception.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that the cultural diplomacy of elite citizens always dovetailed with official concerns for racial or national prosperity. The transnational birth control movement differed from most other forms of cultural diplomacy led by missionaries, businessmen, and other liberal elites, in that discussions of female sexuality were potentially subversive to the male-oriented national order.¹⁸ In fact, exchanges of information about birth control between the United States and Japan first took place through a network of radicals and socialists who were dissatisfied with the imperialist and capitalist social order. Birth control, they argued, could liberate women workers across the world subjected to inhumane exploitation by capitalists for both reproductive and wage labor.

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Their unrelenting activism made national and international headlines and provoked the interests of both the elites and the masses in the matters of reproduction and sexuality. Although the endorsement of professionals and politicians eventually blunted the potentially more radical nature of the birth control movement, the drive to create and spread more female-oriented contraceptive methods—rather than male-centered ones such as condoms—remained central to the birth control movement throughout the twentieth century.

By looking into an issue that fundamentally affected women themselves, this book sheds light on the role of women activists in international politics. Much of the history of international relations has been narrated from the perspective of male leaders, whether on official or private levels.¹⁹ Yet, as some historians have highlighted, the backdrop of imperial competition provided new opportunities for some women leaders to have their voices heard.²⁰ Although often marginalized and discriminated against by male scientists and officials, Margaret Sanger and Ishimoto Shizue represented various aspects of the birth control movement, uniting different political constituencies and maintaining transnational connections even during the difficult years of war. Their gender worked both as an advantage and disadvantage in their transnational activism. They suffered from gendered biases and discrimination in the field of politics and science and experienced extra difficulty convincing people to take their work seriously. At the same time, their femininity and exoticism often worked to lower the guards of their foreign audience over such a controversial topic as birth control. Their personal experiences as mothers reinforced their universal appeal to women's rights to control their bodies. In other words, their campaigns resonated more broadly and deeply with people beyond national or racial borders than the policies and propaganda promoted by male intellectuals and politicians.

Sanger and her feminist supporters always had ambiguous and volatile relationships with the intellectuals and elites surrounding them. Even as they depended on their power and money to expand their cause, they remained critical of the hypocritical and misogynistic arguments of their male supporters. During the 1910s and 1920s, many birth control feminists both in Japan and the United States piggybacked on the socialist movement, but their ties to that community quickly unraveled, not only because of persecution against radicals worldwide but also because of many

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male socialists' ignorance of women's needs and demands. Liberal reformers who aided the birth control cause after the socialist decline continued to distance birth control from the issue of female sexuality and liberation. While they advocated the benefits of birth control to the nonwhite races or lower classes, they stopped short of doing the same to women of their own race or class. Sanger's feminist circle, however, remained strongly critical of such artificial distinction between whites and nonwhites, rich and poor, in regard to women's right to control their own bodies. For that reason, the Sangerist style of birth control activism remained controversial and marginalized even among liberal internationalists. When they could not win the backing of their domestic peers, however, the activists turned abroad for support.

Because of their equivocal relationship with the nation, I refer to the overall activities of birth control activists as a *transnational* movement. I use the word "transnational" to describe the interconnected movements of people, ideas, and practices that extend beyond national borders, not necessarily representing the state, but those that are still based on the framework of the nation-state.²¹ Transnational initiatives often challenge and decenter state authority, while at other times reinforce it in unofficial manners. Sanger and her supporters' worldwide activism was truly a transnational endeavor, as they sought to reach out to men and women across the world on individual levels with or without the sponsorship of the government. At times, the state saw their campaigns as a threat to official diplomatic relations because birth control activists often deliberately challenged the state's patriarchal policies on women's sexuality and reproduction. Both the US and Japanese governments' attempts to bar Sanger from entering Japan illustrated the state's suspicion and antagonism against these individuals. At other times, however, state officials took advantage of Sanger's popularity and influence when, especially during the postwar years in Japan, population reduction seemed to dovetail with the nation's goal for economic and social development. Supporters of birth control in turn skillfully used state institutions and policies whenever such collaboration seemed advantageous to them.

Indeed, the transnational birth control movement could also be described either as a form of *international* ambassadorship or even *global* enterprise. International, by definition, refers to the mutually supportive relationships between national governments or agencies. Many nonstate

actors who took part in international endeavors during the interwar decades worked dialectically with official diplomacy and voluntarily—and sometimes unknowingly—promoted the interests of the nation-state. In many instances, birth control activism closely aligned with the goals and practices of internationalism, even though they did not represent a central part of these elite activities. Furthermore, the population control programs during the postwar decades are often described as a global phenomenon that encompassed the entire world. Matthew Connelly's historical account of the global population control movement illuminates the postwar population control initiatives led by some of the world's richest and influential nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the United Nations agencies, and the World Bank.²² The process of globalization does not negate the boundaries of the nation-state either, even though the lines are less visible. In fact, what we see as global issues are usually based on American-led international networks to facilitate the function of capitalism. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation's public health projects often evoked American capitalism as well as liberalism. With it came both the positive images of American grandiosity and generosity and the negative connotations of American imperialism. The transnational birth control movement, to which these American NGOs provided significant support, shared many of the characteristics of internationalist and global activities.

The transformation of a transnational *birth control* activism to a global *population control* enterprise represented not simply a shift of terms but the changing nature of the cause itself. When Sanger coined the term "birth control," it had a strong association with sexual liberation and women's right to control their own bodies. Transnational radicals and socialists endorsed the idea as a challenge against Western capitalism and colonialism by giving power to female workers. As liberal elites took control over the movement, however, the term "birth control" gradually became interchangeable with—and was eventually replaced by—"population control" or "family planning/planned parenthood." Population control treated fertility control as a matter of global or international interest, and family planning confined the discussion to the context of the nuclear family and the well-being of the national body. Leaders of the global population control movement came to emphasize the benefits of having fewer children for the family, the nation, and the world rather than the liberating aspects of

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birth control in terms of women's sexuality and independence. They consciously toned down the radical images associated with birth control to attract the broad support and understanding of national leaders, including social and religious conservatives.

The transnational birth control movement thus came to embody many of the ideologies that guided US foreign relations: evolutionism, expansionism, exceptionalism, imperialism, liberal developmentalism, and the Cold War modernization theory—all based on the Enlightenment philosophy of linear progress from a “traditional” society to a “modern” one.²³ According to this line of thought, the United States had the moral obligation to “uplift” less developed, non-Western societies by applying their “advanced” experiences and “superior” knowledge, especially in the field of science and technology. While this evolutionary thought placed the West and non-West at opposite ends of the progression toward modernity, Japan did not neatly fit into this binary; the Japanese considered themselves “honorary whites”—racially Asian but culturally as advanced as Western countries—and therefore in an ideal position to guide other Asian countries.²⁴ At times, Japanese leaders consciously challenged the Western assumption of white superiority. Despite the rivalry and clashes, American and Japanese leaders worked side by side to bring reproductive modernity to the Third World through the use of the latest contraceptive technology, which, they assumed, would help solve other social, economic, and political issues. This modernizing project was a male-centered endeavor that paid little, if any, respect to cultural variables or the will of individual women. The top-down nature of the global population control movement would define the direction of future birth control initiatives for decades to come.

The Biopolitics of Reproductive Bodies

Contraceptive Diplomacy reveals the multiplicity of power struggles that took place over the female body, not only within a nation but also between nations. The knowledge and discourses regarding female reproduction have been socially constructed to justify hierarchical power relations: between men and women, Westerners and non-Westerners, whites and nonwhites, and the elites and the masses. Under the modern system of biopower, the sexual conduct of a national population was treated as an economic and

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political problem, regulated by the government yet constantly resisted and negotiated by multiple social actors.²⁵ Ideas about female bodies traveled beyond national borders, were exchanged through transnational contacts, and then readjusted to indigenous circumstances. In particular, this book analyzes the politics of the female body from three overlapping angles: the sexual body, the racialized body, and the national body. Intersecting ideas about gender, sexuality, and race operated to discipline the individual body to be more docile yet useful to the nation in the contest for world leadership.²⁶

The production of modern scientific knowledge and ideas reflected continuous struggles to discipline the female sexual body. Especially since the rise of modern science and medicine in the nineteenth century, the female body has been treated as the other, pitted against the rational male mind. It became a passive object to be controlled, tamed, and conquered by doctors, scientists, and politicians. As anthropologist Emily Martin shows, modern science has fragmented women's bodies, separating her uterus as a machine that produces babies under the supervision of doctors.²⁷ In modern Japan, similar references to women's "borrowed wombs" (*hara wa kari-mono*)—an idea that negated women's control or ownership of their own bodies—frequently appeared in medical textbooks and public discourses.²⁸ At a time when women were expanding their sphere of influence in politics and society, science served as a new rationale to legitimize female inferiority and subordination by attributing them to women's biology.²⁹

Access to birth control became problematic to the patriarchal order because it gave women the power to regulate their own bodies, specifically their ability to reproduce offspring. As Silvia Federici demonstrates in her study on medieval witch-hunts, women's nonprocreative sexuality became a threat to the capitalist system, which was based on the devaluation of reproductive labor and the subjugation of women.³⁰ Over and over, therefore, we see male and elite leaders trying to take control of the discussions and knowledge concerning reproduction through legal restrictions, medical supervision, and the construction of social norms and knowledge. Both in the United States and Japan, the medical profession monopolized the knowledge of reproductive control, while politicians created and enforced laws regulating its dissemination. Abortion became illegal in Japan in 1880, for example, as the country adopted the modern system of reproductive control enforced in other Western imperial nations. In the United States,

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the Comstock Law of 1873 prohibited the mailing and advertising of any information regarding reproductive control as “obscene” material just as more and more women started to expand and explore beyond the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the Malthusian theory, espoused by intellectuals across the world, pathologized women’s reproductive roles as a cause of overpopulation, racial degeneration, and war.

In this misogynist climate, Margaret Sanger and her feminist supporters strove to give women equal access to medical and scientific knowledge, usually monopolized by men of power. They were only partially successful, however, as male leaders with political and financial power continued to dominate and regulate the production of knowledge regarding female reproduction. Even when these female activists initiated the changes, in most cases male politicians and scientists eventually assumed control over the outcome of laws, international meetings, or scientific research on contraceptives.

The imagery of the fertile female body was, moreover, frequently racialized in social and scientific discourses. If women’s reproductive role made them closer to nature and to animals, as Donna Haraway, Londa Schiebinger, and other feminist scholars have demonstrated in their investigations of modern science, then women of color were considered more likely than white women to “multiply like rabbits.”³¹ Asian women, in particular, were highly sexualized in the American imaginary.³² Combining these two images of Asian women’s fecundity and sexuality heightened anxieties about the dangers of the Yellow Peril to the Western world in the campaigns against Japan’s overpopulation and expansionism. Meanwhile, the Japanese elites who endorsed birth control utilized the racialized image of the nonwhite female body as a way to exhort their own people to become more civilized—if they could not be white or truly Western—by adopting the modern practice of contraception. In other words, the Japanese struggle for acceptance as an international, imperialist power was a process of deracialization of the (middle-class) Japanese body by simultaneously racializing others: the working-class Japanese, the mentally and physically “unfit,” other Asian ethnicities, and other peoples of color.

Finally, this book illustrates how the individual female body became a site of power struggles between two empires across the Pacific. Nationalism and imperialism accorded special meanings to the female body as a machine to reproduce strong and healthy future soldiers and citizens. Male

experts needed to place women under their guidance so that they could teach them rational marriage and sex that would lead to racial fitness and national prosperity. The nationalist leaders warned, however, that the selfish use of birth control by individual women would degenerate the race and lead to the demise of a nation. Historians have thoroughly examined the domestic policies of social control over sexuality as part of the nation-building effort, whether in modern Europe, Japan, or the United States.³³ This work goes beyond the framework of a single nation-state and closely examines how international dynamics and transnational relationships directly impacted domestic politics and discussions about the national body.

The foreign influences on the female body, moreover, were not necessarily unidirectional, that is, from the colonizers to the colonized. Rather, discussions over international politics and birth control reflected the struggles for “survival of the fittest” among different races and competing empires.³⁴ American eugenicists were apprehensive about the differential fertility between white women and women of color, both at home and abroad, which they feared could undermine white hegemony in the world. Japanese politicians and intellectuals used the Western-inspired knowledge about race improvement to build a stronger race that would lead the Pan-Asian empire. During the Cold War, American officials and scholars, self-proclaimed leaders of the “free world,” worked side by side with Japanese leaders to bring “reproductive modernity” to Japan, which would serve as a bulwark against the “uncontrolled fertility” of the communist empire in Asia. Japanese elites, on the other hand, used American power and resources to recover from racial devastation resulting from wartime and postwar distress and to reclaim their position as rulers of the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the apparent racist thinking and imperial politics behind eugenic policies and ideas, many eugenicists considered the study of race improvement a scientific endeavor that required collaboration among scientists and policy makers worldwide, including Asia. While the general interest in and knowledge on eugenics has mostly centered on Nazi Germany’s horrific eugenic genocide during World War II, this book demonstrates how eugenics represented one of the most internationally active fields of research, where intellectuals worldwide have exchanged theories and practices regarding women’s reproduction and race improvement since the early twentieth century. A number of important studies have brought attention to the transnational exchange of eugenic knowledge, especially

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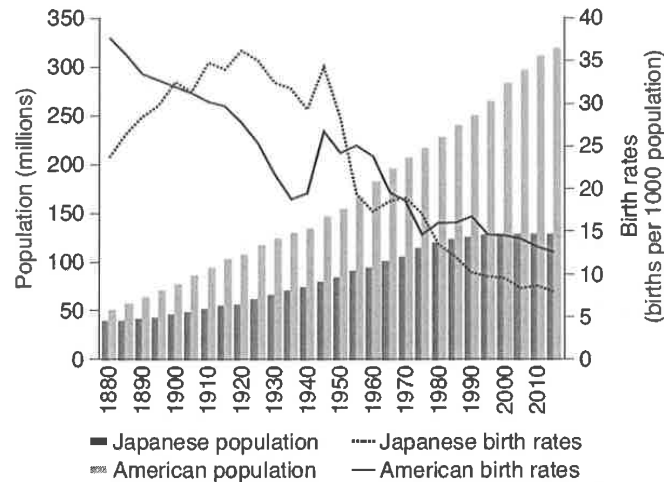


FIGURE 0.1. Population and birth rates in Japan and the United States, 1880–2014. From Statistics and Information Department, Minister's Secretariat, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, "Vital Statistics," <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/81-1a.html>; Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, "Population/Family," <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/chouki/02.htm>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Vital Statistics of the United States," <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/vsus.htm>; United States Census Bureau, "Statistical Abstracts of the United States," https://www.census.gov/library/publications/time-series/statistical_abstracts.html.

across the Atlantic between the United States and Europe and transhemispherically between the Americas.³⁵ However, comparatively little attention has been paid thus far to the transpacific history of eugenics.³⁶ This book highlights the American attempts to spread eugenic measures in Japan as well as the Japanese desire to learn the most advanced knowledge of race improvement from Americans (and Germans). Through both competition and cooperation, leaders of both nations applied the latest knowledge of eugenics to women's reproductive bodies to articulate their visions of a nation and race that would dominate the Asia-Pacific world.

...

Because this work focuses on the thoughts and activities of transnational leaders, it may be replicating the same faults of these elite activists: not fully

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taking into account the experiences of women affected by these birth control initiatives and acknowledging their perspectives. The lack of sources has often made it difficult to assess how women themselves felt and how they actually responded to these top-down discourses. However, we can still see a glimpse of their views revealed in some of the personal accounts of birth control leaders or in national surveys. Contrary to many elites' stereotypes about the ignorance and lack of awareness of average women, evidence often suggests the agency of women to either acquire birth control information for their own personal use or to reject any semicoercive measure that went against their will or the needs of the family. Of course, the majority of women did not even have a chance to express their opinion or were led to believe that whatever the officials or doctors said must be in their best interest. It is nonetheless meaningful to know that some women actively made efforts to take charge of their own bodies and their lives, however limited their choices might have been.

Indeed, history has revealed that it was the power of women's own will that ultimately gave momentum to birth control movements across the world. Despite eugenicists' warning about the impact of Japan's high fertility on world politics as well as the quality of the race, Japanese birth rates had been on a downward trend, except during the brief wartime and postwar years, since the 1920s (Fig. 0.1). During the postwar years, Japan achieved a remarkable reduction of birth rates by relying primarily on "traditional" methods of contraception—such as condoms, the withdrawal method, and even abortion—instead of the more "advanced" means promoted by global population control leaders—the pill, intrauterine devices, and sterilization. In other words, technology had little to do with the reduction of fertility, even though the spread of birth control ideas and practices might have prompted the development of contraceptive technologies. Broader changes in social structure and industrialization also affected reproductive patterns, but in the end women's own determination played a key part in Japan's fertility trend. Sanger may not have *caused* the decline, but she served as an important catalyst to this lasting trend that permanently affected Japanese women's reproductive practices and the fate of an entire nation.

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