



**Book Review — *Geographies of Gender: Family and Law in Imperial Japan and Colonial Taiwan*, by Tadashi Ishikawa. Cambridge University Press, 2025. 283 pp. eBook/Hardback €105.04**

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 **Clay Darcy**

*Technological University Dublin*

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This book examines a multitude of fascinating issues relating to gender, family and law during the first half of the twentieth century in Imperial Japan and Colonial Taiwan. Covering issues as diverse as Japanese and Taiwanese betrothal gifting customs, forced marriage, daughter adoption, prostitution, sexuality and family dynamics, this monograph is rich in historical content and insightful analysis. Tadashi Ishikawa's *Geographies of Gender: Family and Law in Imperial Japan and Colonial Taiwan* uncovers how the Japanese metropole (the parent state of a colony) operated as a gendered space. This work focuses on the boundaries of, and tensions within, family and marriage in Imperial Japan and Colonial Taiwan.

The monograph takes an integrative approach to court case records, revealing, through a gender lens, the intersections of family and law in Japan and Taiwan between 1895 and 1945. Ishikawa examines what he terms “traditional” and “modern” understandings of gender in his study, and how these shaped women's and men's behaviours both within and outside the home. “Traditional” gender is conceptualised in terms of gendered practices, norms and ideals before, during and after the 1910s, while “modern” gender relates to the period following the 1910s (p. 5). The specific (re)configurations of gendered practices, norms and ideals in relation to family, marriage and sexuality that played out within the Japanese Empire and Colonial Taiwan are further conceptualised by Ishikawa as “circulations of gender” (p. 6). This term refers to recurring and arbitrary circular patterns of practice that worked to reinforce and perpetuate gender norms, structures and practices.

*Geographies of Gender* is broken into six chapters. The first two chapters delve into Japan's deteriorating international relations, its colonial politics and changing definitions of marriage and family. Chapter one

specifically focuses on how international relations shifted practices and approaches to family, marriage and sex. This chapter uncovers how the concepts of “freedom of love” and “love marriage” entered into the mainstream through “new middle-class readership of newspapers and magazines” and through separate external influences, namely Soviet Russia, the United States of America and the League of Nations (p. 43). Chapter two then examines the role of family, marriage and sex in redefining Japan’s imperialism and colonialism in Taiwan. The chapter highlights historical attempts toward social reform, specifically in relation to daughter adoption, premarital relationships and marriage gifts. Ishikawa contends that, while there were divergences in gender politics between Japan and Taiwan, there were also areas of convergence relating to gendered expectations of women. Nonetheless, tensions existed between “traditional” and “modern” perspectives on gender.

In chapter three, Ishikawa makes the point that, while Taiwan was colonised by the Japanese, it was not solely defined by this colonisation. Taiwan had its own approach to gender, family and marriage, which was shaped primarily in discursive spaces by male elites and the development of individualism. Ishikawa argues that Taiwanese masculinities developed more egalitarian forms, in opposition to the patriarchally constructed masculinities of Japan. Chapters four, five and six focus on courtrooms, where issues concerning gender, family dynamics and marriage were determined according to Japanese colonial laws. Chapter four examines how Japanese colonial courts and Taiwanese men placed the treatment of women and household relationships at the centre of how masculinities were constructed from the late 1910s to the mid-1930s. This culminated in a “contradicted logic of inclusion”, whereby premarital women were socially excluded and scrutinised with regard to their sexual propriety (p. 184). Chapter five returns to the concept of “circulations of gender”, with Ishikawa focusing on how matters relating to women’s freedom played out in Japanese courtrooms. Lastly, chapter six highlights the experiences of marginalised women in Japanese colonial courts and their efforts to gain greater agency.

Ishikawa’s conclusion centres on the argument that family and law played pivotal roles in how gender relations were reformed and reinforced in interwar Japan and Colonial Taiwan. This “circulation of gender” is

essentially a recurring temporal and spatial flux of tensions and interests working to (re)define the parameters of gender within the social milieu of Imperial Japan and Colonial Taiwan. Ishikawa systematically puts forward an articulate and authoritative argument supported throughout by historical and archival evidence. The use of court case files is particularly noteworthy; however, aside from a note on the text at the outset and a brief mention in the introduction, there is little detail provided on the research methods employed. Ishikawa states that an integrative approach was used but provides no account of how this was conducted. Greater methodological detail would aid those interested in replicating or conducting similar analysis in other jurisdictions. It would also offer some insight into how representative the case files are (the sample size is not stated) and further support the persuasiveness of the argument throughout.

*Geographies of Gender* takes both macro and micro perspectives on gender within this temporal and socio-geographic context. It makes a substantial contribution to the fields of gender and East Asian studies. The text is both articulate and accessible, appealing to a broad audience across the arts, humanities and social sciences. Most notably, this book would be of interest to scholars of sex and gender; East Asian studies; colonialism and colonial law; family studies; and those examining Imperial Japan and Colonial Taiwan from historical, sociological or anthropological perspectives. Ishikawa's study is suitable for recommended reading lists at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, making it a valuable addition to any higher education library catalogue.

**DR CLAY DARCY** (PhD) is a sociologist and lecturer in the School of Social Sciences, Law, and Education at TU Dublin, Ireland. His research interests include gender and masculinities; drug use and drug education; crime and historical police records. He is also a practicing visual artist.