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# FROM THE STAGE TO THE RING:

*The Early Years of Japanese Women's Professional Wrestling, 1948–1956*

Tomoko Seto

*Set against the background of uneven US-Japan postwar relations and a gendered media discourse, this article explores the early transformation of Japanese women's professional wrestling, focusing particularly on the blurred boundary between women's societal constraints and their own agency. Originating in 1948 on US military bases with a mixed-gender wrestling match between two older brothers and a younger sister seeking to support their family, the siblings, with a few others, soon shifted to presenting all-female bouts before American and Japanese audiences. The American female wrestlers' tour in 1954 sparked the proliferation of women's professional wrestling in Japan, inspiring more women to become wrestlers. In recent years, scholars of early postwar Japanese popular culture have applied a gendered lens to discourses of nation, sexuality, and intimacy. In keeping with this practice and to further complicate the field, this article argues that through the examination of the experience of women in the conspicuously gendered entertainment of wrestling, the tension between the "liberation" promoted by Americans and the patriarchal demands of postwar Japanese society is revealed.*

## Introduction

In September 2018, Lily Igari (b. 1932) gave a guest lecture to male students at Jiyū Gakuen Middle School in Tokyo about her experience as Japan's first female professional wrestler, initially catering to American servicemen stationed in Japan after its defeat in August 1945.<sup>1</sup> During the following Q&A session, one student asked, "How did you feel about wrestling in front of Americans, your former enemies?" To this, Lily replied, "We all had to eat," indicating that there had been no leeway for her, and most likely for her fellow performers, to consider their audiences' former enemy status due to the economic difficulties of the time.<sup>2</sup> The beginning of Lily's career as a professional wrestler for US servicemen was a direct result of the sheer necessity to survive by any available means in war-torn Tokyo. In her case, however, as the only daughter in a destitute family, her devotion to professional wrestling was also driven by her sense of filial obligation—her

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eldest brother, the vaudevillian Pan Igari (1916–1986), was responsible for introducing her to wrestling, inspired by the women's burlesque fights that he allegedly witnessed in nightclubs of late 1930s France and Shanghai.<sup>3</sup>

This article explores the formative years of women's professional wrestling in early postwar Japan as a case study to illuminate how, against the background of economic and ideological changes brought by the US Occupation, women of non-elite families worked as nontraditional entertainers. Since the late 1990s, historians of early postwar Japan have discussed the changing gendered discourse in popular culture against the background of asymmetrical US-Japan relations mainly in terms of *panpan* prostitutes and celebrities.<sup>4</sup> More recently, scholarly works have broadened the field by examining issues of gender and sexuality from multiple perspectives such as the gendered consequences of the defeat on popular entertainment; the popular media discourse of sex, love, and desire; and the Occupation authorities' regulations of interracial intimacy as part of American Cold War strategies.<sup>5</sup> These studies have offered a different analysis within the contexts of transregional politics and gender- and class-based ideologies and experiences of the popular culture of post-surrender Japan. In like manner, through seeking to understand the possibility of multiple receptions of the American presence in Japanese popular culture as expressed through both the lived experiences of Japanese women and the normative discourse in society surrounding a new format of sports entertainment, this study offers to further complicate our understanding of the field.

By tracing the less-studied early transformation of women's professional wrestling in Japan—described by one scholar in passing as simply an “erotic sideshow”—this article also aims to locate this conspicuously gendered genre of popular entertainment within the context of the changing social and economic conditions.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, in 1948, the initial format was indeed a mildly erotic mixed-gender “comic boxing and wrestling” show at GI clubs. However, against the background of the massive popularity of televised male professional wrestling from 1954 onward and the American female wrestlers' tour of Japan in the same year, women's professional wrestling in Japan evolved into a form close to that of contemporary Japan; that is, a sports entertainment managed by a few organizations, mostly headed by men. This formative development occurred over the decade following the defeat of Japan, which was marked by an ideological chaos entangled with the American model of “liberation” and Japan's emergence in the 1950s as a nation recovering under the US military umbrella. Throughout these years, the Japanese media discussed female wrestlers with varying degrees of curiosity about their bodies and skills.

To briefly introduce the later trajectory of Japanese women's professional wrestling, most of the organizations launched in the mid-1950s did

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not last beyond the end of the decade.<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, the Igaris separately began to engage in vaudeville entertainment. However, some women continued to wrestle, and a new opportunity arose in 1968 when the Matsunaga brothers organized All Japan Women's Pro-Wrestling (AJW). Through both extensive national tours and televised bouts, in the mid-1970s AJW produced several star wrestlers, including Mach Fumiake and Beauty Pair. The latter was notable for attracting loyal female fans for the first time.<sup>8</sup> By the 1980s, women's professional wrestling was firmly entrenched in mainstream mass entertainment: their arena matches were sold out, the weekly prime-time shows consistently had high ratings, and star wrestlers such as Crash Gals, Dump Matsumoto, and Aja Kong were often featured on variety shows for the general audience. Its heyday continued into the mid-1990s, after which the gradual decline of its fame led to the emergence of smaller wrestling organizations and AJW's closure in 2005. However, the 2010s saw a revived popularity, most notably of associations such as the World Wonder Ring Stardom, to which Kimura Hana belonged until her suicide in May 2020; and of two internationally acclaimed wrestlers, Asuka and Kairi Sane, who jointly won the WWE Women's Tag Team Title in 2019.<sup>9</sup>

The sources utilized in this article include interviews with former wrestlers conducted by other writers over the past two decades and by myself in 2020. Although these women's stories can be characterized simplistically as the transition from being constrained by their families to being liberated as individuals, I am aware, as feminist theorist Rosalind Gill claims, that feminist studies of young women's experiences and choices are too often "fetishized."<sup>10</sup> Gill calls for renewed attentiveness to the structural problems with the production of the dominant discourse simultaneously at work in the formation process of women's subjectivity. Feminist sociologist Shelley Budgeon similarly points out that "authenticity [of choice] requires the generation of an inward sense of uniqueness, but this can only be done through dialogue and negotiation with others."<sup>11</sup> Although Gill and Budgeon direct their criticism at the studies of relatively recent phenomena, their concerns are relevant to women's history in general. Therefore, when examining the former wrestlers' recollections, I attempt an approach of "critical respect," which listens to them with sympathy, "but does not abdicate the right to question or interrogate."<sup>12</sup> Their voices can be read not only as sources narrating their quests for autonomy, but also as sociocultural constructs that often made them unwitting accomplices to the reinforcing of gender norms. I also examine accounts in the 1950s popular media to interrogate the ways in which writers, mostly men, viewed the female wrestlers as a new category of Japanese women. Based on my exploration of these interviews and media narratives, I argue that these professional wrestlers were constantly negotiating the tension between the "liberation" promoted by the Occupation and

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patriarchal demands which reinforced the symbolic authority of a father and his heir in postwar Japanese society. It was through this negotiation that Japanese female wrestlers came to possess a self-awareness as trained professionals, while both responding to the expectations of their audiences and complicating gender norms that were in transition.

### **Comic Boxing and Wrestling, 1948–1951**

A picture, taken at the Yokota US Air Base in Tokyo in 1951, captures a stage performance by the Pan Sports Show (Figure 1). Lily, wearing a bathing suit, and her next-oldest brother Shopan (1929–2005) are “fighters” and the eldest brother Pan serves as their referee. Behind them, an orchestra plays jazz. From 1948 onward, the Igaris travelled around to US military camps in Japan to perform this scripted mixed-gender “comic boxing and wrestling.” Today, many sportswriters acknowledge their performance as the starting point of women’s professional wrestling in Japan, which predated the birth of men’s professional wrestling by approximately three years.<sup>13</sup> Yet scholars rarely detail the Igaris’ activities, presumably due to their format being too different from what eventually evolved in the mid-1950s. While this article sheds new light on this period in women’s professional wrestling in Japan, I acknowledge that the transition from comic to professional wrestling cannot be delineated clearly, as it mirrors the ambiguous perceptions of female wrestlers of the time.

In postwar Japan, musicians, comedians, and other performers found the most lucrative job opportunities on US bases. Following General Douglas MacArthur’s landing on August 30, 1945, the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) stationed its servicemen all over Japan. Although the US occupation of Japan officially ended in April 1952, new US forces serving in the Korean War often stopped over in Japan on their way to or from the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, US military personnel numbered between 150,000 and 260,000 on bases throughout the late 1950s.<sup>14</sup> According to ethnographer Aoki Shin, Japanese musicians and American servicemen came across one another in clubs on and off the bases, sharing these spaces of pleasure in which music and dance were presented.<sup>15</sup> Some of the Japanese performers whom Aoki interviewed remembered those who had put on variety shows, including Pan’s trio.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike men’s professional wrestling, developed with a Japanese audience in mind, women’s professional wrestling evolved from a form of entertainment for American servicemen. According to Lily, within a given thirty-minute slot, she and Shopan first fought as boxers wearing conspicuously large and heavy gloves of fifteen ounces, which were intended to dramatize the bout, and then took off their gloves and wrestled for the last



Image 1. Pan Sports Show at Yokota Air Base, Tokyo, 1951. Courtesy of Igari Sadako.

five minutes.<sup>17</sup> Variations of the ending of their show that received the most applause included Lily finishing Shopan by airplane spinning, and Shopan knocking down Pan the referee and then Lily stomping on Pan as he lay on the floor.<sup>18</sup> The initial format of the Igaris' comic boxing and wrestling can certainly be categorized as more vaudeville show than professional wrestling.

The climactic endings of these performances resonate with the discourse of the emasculation of Japanese men in the face of defeat. As discussed by literary scholar Michael Bourdaghs, for mainstream creators and celebrities the beginning of the Occupation meant a freedom of expression that had been denied by the previous repressive regime.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, "imagery and language suggesting that the Occupation amounted to national castration were common during the period."<sup>20</sup> Just as the 1948 film *Drunken Angel* directed by Kurosawa Akira features the threat of castration arising from the "realm of the feminine" in pop singer Kasagi Shizuko's "wild" performance of "Jungle Boogie," Pan's plot also spotlights Lily's emasculation of two men by means of her physical strength as expressed in the moves of boxing and wrestling, sports hitherto unimaginable for most Japanese women.<sup>21</sup> Lily stepping on, not around, Pan also explicitly ignored female propriety. In the eyes of American servicemen, who were allegedly promoting "democracy," particularly women's liberation, which was now included in the new constitution, this emasculation of the two Japanese men on stage (they did not introduce themselves as her older brothers) justified the Americans' "job in Japan." Lily's victory also surprised some occupiers because they typically found Japanese women to be "more cordial and friendlier" than men.<sup>22</sup> As will be described, the narrative presented on stage for Americans was in stark contrast with the Japanese media reports that mentioned Pan or Shopan as a trainer and promoter of their younger sister.

According to Lily, Pan felt that the mutual trust between him and his siblings made performing and travelling together easy.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the livelihood of the Igaris' itinerant group was not dissimilar to that of performers in *taishū engeki*, a small-scale itinerant variety theater that spread in 1920s Japan. Such troupes were usually comprised of family members, including children, and traveled together for months or even years.<sup>24</sup> It was common for children in an itinerant troupe not to attend school regularly, and Lily was no exception. But one notable advantage was that the children were able to learn the necessary theatrical skills as well as social skills from their adult family members and other performers, promoters, and audiences. Lily regards Pan as her *shishō* (mentor), since he taught her a variety of professional skills as they traveled and performed together, including Japanese- and Western-style dancing, acting, how to play musical instruments such as the *shamisen* and the guitar, and the basics of judo, boxing, and wrestling.<sup>25</sup>

Lily recalls that it was her sense of obligation to her family that primarily motivated her to practice hard.<sup>26</sup> As her father's illness during the war had resulted in the closure of his construction business, Lily and her older brothers, who had returned from military service, became the breadwinners. In 1946, when Lily was fourteen, Pan first brought her to the stage before a Japanese audience as a performer in his itinerant theater company. Shortly afterward, the siblings left the company and formed their own group to perform on US military bases.<sup>27</sup> At an audition for the purpose of licensing base performers, the SCAP granted Lily a higher payment rank than that of her brothers.<sup>28</sup> However, Lily handed all her earnings to Pan and her parents.<sup>29</sup> In the immediate postwar years, it was not uncommon for girls from poor backgrounds to work as entertainers in order to support their families. The Komadori sisters, a pair of twins who started their careers around 1950 in bars as teenage itinerant singers, later claimed that although they worked for the sake of their impoverished parents, they had performed against their will.<sup>30</sup>

Still, daughters earning wages for their family, whether willingly or not, was by no means a "traditional" Japanese practice. Starting in the late nineteenth century, women's virtues promoted by the Japanese state focused on diligence, frugality, and wage earning for their family. At the same time, state-sponsored media circulated stories of poor young women selflessly working to support their fathers and husbands, thereby discursively formulating the "cult of productivity."<sup>31</sup> In the twentieth century, wartime propaganda in girls' magazines utilized the images of hardworking girls defending the home front. After the war, "the same message of selfless sacrifice and devotion" was put forth, although this time its primary aim was to foster the economic recovery of the family and of the nation.<sup>32</sup> For teenage girls who had internalized the duty of sacrificing themselves for the war effort, it was ethically appropriate to work any job for the sake of their impoverished family members.

Itinerant female performers working with their male family members in occupied Japan were relatively protected, compared to their vulnerable counterparts such as *panpan* prostitutes.<sup>33</sup> An example of brotherly protection appears in a contemporaneous media account. An April 1950 news article titled "The advent of woman wrestlers: Plump bodies beating each other!" in *Sunday Movie* introduced the emergence of *nyotai resuringu* (women's flesh wrestling) by young women weighing 16 *kanme* (about 132 pounds).<sup>34</sup> The term "women's flesh," commonly used for striptease, clearly indicates the reporter's intention to depict the show as a kind of erotic show, potentially catering to men who preferred "plump" women. The report also hinted at the novelty of women's wrestling by adding that the show had, up until then, been performed exclusively for Americans on bases, but had recently been put on for a Japanese audience at a Tokyo strip theater.

The prurient headline notwithstanding, the article proceeded to tell the story behind the scenes, highlighting the aspirations and effort of the Igaris rather than the show's obscenity. It quoted the trainer Pan's humble remark, "We have practiced for the show for only half a year," which the reporter followed up by saying, "But actually they are doing well."<sup>35</sup> The report continued:

The top female wrestler Ms. Lily is only seventeen, but thanks to her diligent training, now she is nearly equal to her brothers. Saying, 'You might not believe this, but I'm also good at Japanese- and Western-style dancing. I also play all kinds of musical instruments,' Ms. Lily appears to be a young lady with a pure heart. But if I put myself off guard and do something impolite to her, she will throw me down easily with her shout of 'Eiya!' To my surprise, further, this young wrestler is extremely popular among women, and two or three applicants come every day in the hope of becoming her disciple. MR [sic] Pan boasts, 'If we continue this way, soon we can have matches open to public at a wrestling hall.'<sup>36</sup>

As if negating his own introduction of women's "flesh" wrestling, the reporter emphasized Lily's hard work, skillfulness, and femininity, represented by her "pure heart." Although the report was certainly full of gendered curiosity, Lily was treated as a representative of like-minded young women who wished to engage in this new form of entertainment. Although the story featured two photographs—one of Lily pulling a move on another female wrestler and another of Lily's bust, shot as she stood smiling in her bathing suit—she rejected being viewed as merely a deviant woman whose exposure of her body parts reflected the expected context of men's erotic imaginations.

The reporter's relatively polite and favorable description of Lily was due largely to the presence of her older brother. Feminist philosopher Kate Manne claims that misogyny "threatens hostile consequences if she [a woman] violates or challenges the relevant norms or expectations as a member of this gendered class of persons."<sup>37</sup> Yet in this article, Lily by no means provoked misogynist hostility. In spite of her novel status as a female wrestler, she upheld the patriarchal ideal by letting her older brother speak about their preparation and prospects. Nonetheless, the photographs of the female wrestlers were presented in association with women in other erotic shows. Lily's article appeared right below an article on strippers, which included a photograph of a dancer showing her naked breasts. Some readers would have viewed Lily and the other wrestler as just another type of women publicly displaying their flesh, while others would have read the text and imagined Lily as a young woman persevering under her older



brother's guidance. As demonstrated in the article, Lily's image of being trained and protected by her older brother contributed to minimizing the stigma usually attached to young women in corporeal entertainment.

To the Japanese police, however, the Igaris' show did look obscene, and newspapers reported the arrests of Lily and Pan at a Tokyo strip theater on October 12, 1950.<sup>38</sup> That evening, Lily and Pan were opponents and another man was serving as referee in place of the absent Shopan. Lily recalls, "[At the police station] the detective claimed that the mingling of a man and woman in bathing suits was lewd. I told him, 'That's my older brother,' but he didn't believe me."<sup>39</sup> Pan also explained to the police, "Seriously, she is my younger sister. As the eldest brother, I even changed her diapers."<sup>40</sup> From the perspective of the police, the form of this novel sports entertainment was too dubious. In response, both Lily and Pan emphasized the fact that they were siblings, assuming this could persuade the police. Their claim seems to have worked in the end, since both were released the next day. The question of incest on display at this point seems to have been unimaginable, and a real brother and sister's engaging in a show that looked obscene was considered benign. As it happened, the news of their arrest brought more spectators to their show, and one magazine even featured a love comedy inspired by this incident.<sup>41</sup> Soon afterwards, the role of older brother extended into the symbolic realm when they established a pseudo-family organization to promote the growing business of women's professional wrestling.

### **From the Stage to the Ring, 1951–1954**

Although the transition from comic to professional wrestling cannot be clearly traced, more people began working with the Igaris. From the beginning of the trio's career, Pan constantly experimented with forms of comic boxing and wrestling through trial and error. By 1950, the group had added a new female wrestler, Tayama (Rose) Katsumi (1922–1975?), who is most likely the other wrestler photographed with Lily in *Sunday Movie*. According to Lily, Tayama in the prewar years had started out as a contortionist in a group led by the Japanese American Okamoto sisters, who had been performing in Japan since the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> After the defeat, Tayama continued to perform as an acrobat and began to play the saxophone in a band with her husband, a jazz trumpeter, on bases until his untimely death in the late 1940s. Tayama would later emerge as a competent heel—playing the role of an unruly villain—and win the first tag title with Lily in 1955. Around 1951, with two other female performers, Lily and Tayama toured military bases as a new group named the Pan Show, supervised by Pan. Their show featured performances of comic songs, a short comedy skit, and ended

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with a "garter match," during which the four women fought over a garter, a looped elastic ribbon, loosely tied around one thigh of each performer. Pan came up with the idea of the match based on what he had allegedly observed in a vaudeville theater in prewar France.

To amuse the audience throughout the garter match, Lily and the other women devised their own format. According to Lily:

During the garter match, I did not expect our audience to laugh. We [had] made them laugh during the earlier musical and comedy performances and switched our minds for the garter match. For me and the other girls as *senshu* (players), there was no room to care about the audience's laughter. If we did, we would have injured ourselves. We did it very seriously! There was no prearrangement at all. One spectator said about us, 'So powerful,' and another, 'Wow, awesome!' The match was not so garish. To protect the garter, we positioned ourselves lower, with the gartered leg pulled behind. And to grab the opponents' garter, we did many things like tackling and turning over each other. That made us disregard the aspect of a "show," but we did want the audience to enjoy our seriousness.<sup>43</sup>

Based on her referring to them as "*senshu*," or gender-neutral athletes, this garter match with basic rules was in her view more "serious." In fact, it incorporated athletic movements derived from amateur wrestling and martial arts, unlike the earlier form of the scripted mixed-gender match. Lily's concern about injury also suggests that the bout involved moves that required training, caution, and collaboration. Furthermore, because there was allegedly "no prearrangement," their bout included improvised moves that looked "powerful" and "awesome," but could appear to be too aggressive, too erotic, or too unpredictable. This performative possibility suggests what philosopher Judith Butler calls the "dramatic and contingent construction of meaning," potentially inspiring the wrestlers to obscure, rethink, or negotiate with gender norms.<sup>44</sup> For most of the American spectators, a women's wrestling show itself was a novel experience, because many states in early 1950s America prohibited matches involving female wrestlers, who were seen as obscene performers.<sup>45</sup>

Whether because of its novelty or "seriousness," the Pan Show's garter match seems to have amused spectators greatly, including one US serviceman Elmer L. Hawkins.<sup>46</sup> Although information about him is scarce, sources, including Lily's remembrances of Hawkins and a 1952 photograph of him with Lily, indicate that he was a technical sergeant stationed at Tachikawa Air Base.<sup>47</sup> Hawkins, an African American man in his early thirties with a background in amateur wrestling, met the Igaris in October 1952 through their mutual friend, Fujii Shigetoshi, a businessman and ardent fan of Pan

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and American professional wrestling.<sup>48</sup> Lily recalls that Hawkins assured Pan of his competence as a trainer and offered financial support to renovate the gym at the Igaris' house in Mitaka City, Tokyo. Upon the gym's completion in 1953, Lily recalls, "Mr. Hawkins even bought us a new ring."<sup>49</sup> Yet, she also assumes that Fujii had provided financial assistance as a way of bolstering Hawkins's trustworthiness, since she remembers Pan saying, "A sergeant's meager income would not be enough for such an expense."<sup>50</sup> In any case, as if to symbolize the renewed US-Japan military and economic alliance after Japan's independence in 1952, the Igaris boasted of the generous patronage from the US serviceman and began incorporating "authentic" American-style wrestling into their show.

In the postwar Japanese jazz scene, historian E. Taylor Atkins notes, "the conventional racial hierarchy was inverted," because Japanese players and aficionados cherished the perceived authenticity of African American jazz musicians.<sup>51</sup> Although the racial hierarchy was not fully inverted in the field of wrestling in Japan, having a trainer from the United States, the perceived *honba* (homeland) of women's professional wrestling, legitimized what the Igaris were attempting. Both Shopan and Lily's fond memories of Hawkins testify to his enthusiasm, which could certainly have been affected by the inverted racial hierarchy. In any case, Hawkins likely had in mind the American female professional wrestlers who had become increasingly popular on TV since 1950, as well as his own sense of mission as an American to "liberate" Japanese women.<sup>52</sup> Further, this coaching arrangement had the approval of the eldest brother Pan, who represented the family, thereby securing his patriarchal authority. Consequently, although they were at the center of the performance, the female wrestlers were not in a position to make decisions, even about their own training site.

Nonetheless, the shift to the purportedly serious all-women's garter match and the prospect of the renovated gym changed Lily's professional attitude as a wrestler. Lily recalls:

I told Pan, 'I'm sorry, but I want to withdraw from working on the bases and concentrate on full-fledged wrestling once our new gym is completed.' This was my first request I made directly to him. And then, by myself, I went to practice at Waseda University's amateur wrestling club to build up my body. Waseda's coach Mr. Hatta kindly allowed me to practice on their mat with the [male] club members. Mr. Hatta once asked me, 'Even though you are a girl, why are you practicing so hard?' I replied, 'I'm doing this to feed my mom and dad.' He burst into laughter.<sup>53</sup>

The coach at Waseda University was Hatta Ichirō, head of the Japan Wrestling Federation. In 1931, Hatta had introduced men's amateur wrestling

to Japan and at this point in 1952, was promoting wrestling in Japan as an Olympic sport and a prominent form of mass entertainment.<sup>54</sup> In Lily's recollection above, her reply to Hatta amused him, perhaps because of the juxtaposition between her "feudal" attitude and the novelty of her interest in wrestling. Lily's claim to be wrestling for her family's sake seems to have validated her exceptional presence as the only female trainee there; by showing her filial piety, she avoided being seen as a potentially dangerous female intruder.

Meanwhile, presumably moved by Hawkins's encouragement and Lily's determination, Pan also sought to present women's professional wrestling not as floor shows, but as entertainment bouts in the ring. While the Igaris continued comic boxing and wrestling on the US bases for the time being "to earn life expenses," in late 1952 Pan inaugurated the All Japan Women's Wrestling Club (WWC) and began training female wrestlers more systematically.<sup>55</sup> The early recruits included Hōjōji Hiroi, who initially had a supporting role in the trio's performance, and Katori Yumi, whom Pan had scouted at a strip theater.<sup>56</sup> There was also a convert from women's sumo wrestling, Tomoe Yasuko.<sup>57</sup> In the mid-Meiji period (1868–1912), away from its mainstream male counterpart, women's sumo as an itinerant performance had attracted audiences at festivals in marketplaces and shrines mostly in the countryside. By the late 1930s, some were popular enough to tour in the "South Seas" and Manchuria for the Japanese military, although a sumo historian in 1943 lamented, "Women's sumo nowadays is mere *misemono* [a side show]."<sup>58</sup> After a brief interruption that lasted until the war's end, women's sumo reemerged, mainly attracting a male audience until its decline in the late 1950s. According to Lily, because Tomoe had already mastered the basics in her previous career, it was not difficult to practice wrestling together.<sup>59</sup>

The wrestlers stayed at the house of the Igaris for a few weeks prior to every scheduled bout or tour and practiced together. Their training seems to have been relatively relaxed, however. An October 1955 magazine reports that the WWC's daily schedule consisted of getting up at eight in the morning, running for an hour, exercising with a jump rope, having breakfast, and then free time until the afternoon. The afternoon workout, supervised by their trainers, lasted from one to five, during which they practiced moves including a headlock throw, hammer throw, flying kick, and judo's ground techniques.<sup>60</sup> Trainers included Hawkins, a few white servicemen, and Japanese amateur wrestlers and martial artists. Pan also brought the renowned judoist Kimura Masahiko in as a coach, who would soon serve as a tag partner and later an opponent of the star professional wrestler Rikidōzan in 1954.<sup>61</sup> As part of their training, the coaches also emphasized the entertainment aspect because as Shopan said, "However powerful the

wrestlers were, if spectators could not recognize it, it would be meaningless.”<sup>62</sup> Lily also implemented her own idea of effective training: “Because the rhythm was important to our movements, I brought a record player to the gym and played big band jazz as we practiced. The use of music helped us move more rhythmically.”<sup>63</sup> She merged the training of amateur wrestling and judo with the rhythmical choreography derived from her own experience of comic boxing and wrestling. The WWC wrestlers were thus capable of both adjusting to the new training regimens and honing their performance skills themselves.

Headed by Lily’s older brothers with their male supporters, the WWC emerged as a patriarchal enterprise supervising Lily and her friends. Symbolically, the older brothers protected the younger sisters from possible sexual exploitation and other forms of harassment by outsiders. This symbolic formulation was in stark contrast to the story of their American wrestling counterparts, who were often sexually exploited by their promoter Billy Wolfe, the nominal husband until 1953 of the champion Mildred Burke.<sup>64</sup> Despite the public appearance of Japanese women’s professional wrestling as challenging gender stereotypes and obscuring the line between propriety and obscenity, behind the scenes the WWC reinforced the patriarchal hierarchy and the US-Japan alliance. Later, Pan would cast the organization as the vigilant protector of female wrestlers, saying, “We will make every effort to avoid making our women’s wrestling a plaything for lecherous men [unlike women’s sumo].”<sup>65</sup> Pan attempted to project an image of decent female wrestlers unsullied by male spectators’ erotic curiosity. At this transitional juncture, Lily certainly acted according to her own will and voiced her own opinions about enhancing the training, but uncritically celebrating her agency fails to situate her initiative in the social and familial contexts of the time. Her empowerment was permitted within the sphere of her elder brother’s patriarchal endeavor, which sought to cultivate an audience in newly independent Japan while maintaining the symbolic bond with the US military.

### **The Impact of the American Female Professional Wrestlers, 1954–1956**

Shortly after television broadcasts began in 1953, many Japanese people enjoyed the new genre of male professional wrestling by means of the *gaitō terebi* (plaza televisions) situated in urban public spaces for communal viewing. Most notably, the televised bout between the “Japanese” Rikidōzan and Kimura (although the former was Korean) and the “American” Sharp brothers (who were actually Canadians) on February 19, 1954 at Kokugikan Memorial Hall in Tokyo (a renowned venue for sumo) attracted an enthu-

siastic crowd. The historian Yoskikuni Igarashi noted: "During the match, the American wrestlers . . . resorted to dirty tricks. Rikidōzan, by contrast, showed that he adhered to principles of fairness, enduring hardship and rescuing [targeted] Kimura. Finally he exploded in anger and beat his opponents down with 'karate chops.'"<sup>66</sup> Yet later, "Rikidōzan marketed professional wrestling as a new, American fighting style," and eventually beat up and humiliated Kimura, the master of judo representing prewar Japan, in a separate one-on-one match.<sup>67</sup> Rikidōzan emerged as a new type of powerful "Japanese" man (while concealing his Korean origin) and demonstrated a new direction for the nation that its people eagerly embraced.

The path of Japanese female wrestlers was transformed even more significantly in November 1954 when, for the first time, a group of American female wrestlers toured Japan; Lily, Tayama, and two other wrestlers opened for them. Headed by the world champion Mildred Burke, the group which also included Beverly Anderson, Gloria Barattini, Ruth Boatcallie, Rita Martinez, and Johnnie Mae Young demonstrated a novel form of the "beauty of Euro-American women."<sup>68</sup> Magazines and newspapers covered the tour extensively, including the wrestlers' parade in convertibles through the streets of Tokyo.<sup>69</sup> Their bouts at Memorial Hall were televised, too. Reporters excitedly depicted the "monstrous power of Burke," and "amazing karate chops by Barattini," while also noting the contrasting offstage images of their beauty and graceful manner.<sup>70</sup> Burke recounts that she was initially shocked by the notable quietness of Japanese audiences in Tokyo. However, when they saw her in the ring kiss a young Japanese man who had brought her flowers by way of thanking him, the spectators suddenly responded with enthusiasm. Burke proudly recalls, "I was told that kissing in public was forbidden in Japan. Within fifteen seconds of my first appearance in public in Japan, I had cut down one of their cherished customs."<sup>71</sup> In her view, she demonstrated an American ideal of "liberation" for the Japanese, who were bound to their "traditional" values.

However, from the perspective of the mostly male Japanese audience familiar with both the new "Japanese" hero wrestler and the stereotype of interracial kissing in public between an American GI and a *panpan* prostitute, the masculine Burke kissing the Japanese man likely appeared to be a humorous role inversion.<sup>72</sup> She was an exaggeration of the "idealized western female figure, long limbed and amply proportioned," whom Japanese young men under the Occupation had admired.<sup>73</sup> Burke's image as an American beauty simultaneously served as a counter example of the ideal of the small and docile Japanese woman considered desirable by men of independent Japan. Alternatively, with a male reporter describing Burke and the others in glitzy gowns as "queens of fairy land," some men might have viewed the "queen" Burke's kiss as a sign inviting vicarious

pleasure in the “sadistic side” of the women fighting in the ring.<sup>74</sup> The image of active women as “sadists” resembles 1950s sexological magazines’ representations of the Japanese “horse-riding woman,” a perceived sadist whose male admirers were situated as masochistic or feminized men.<sup>75</sup> Regardless, although the Japanese female wrestlers appeared the same evening in preliminary one-on-one matches, there was no role for them to play in this seemingly dramatic scene of American female wrestlers being excitedly welcomed by Japanese men.

As a first encounter with women’s professional wrestling, the American female wrestlers impressed the larger Japanese public. That being said, some viewers did not react favorably. A housewife wrote a letter to *Yomiuri shinbun*, a major newspaper, to complain that “[Professional wrestling] by women resembles a strip show rather than a sport,” and thus its broadcast was “unbearable.”<sup>76</sup> This opinion resonated with the promotion of “healthy entertainments” by the contemporaneous New Life campaign, a reinvigorated form of the prewar social reform movements involving the state and female allies.<sup>77</sup> Still, others were attracted to the wrestlers for different reasons: a *Sangyō keizai shinbun* [Industrial and Economic News] reporter was particularly impressed by their beauty, refined skills, and “violence peculiar to women,” such as the pulling of the opponent’s hair and the biting of the opponent’s limbs while screaming.<sup>78</sup> Lily, with a professional’s eye, was also fascinated by how skillfully Barattini took advantage of the ropes and how cautious Burke was about her makeup and neat hairstyle in the ring.<sup>79</sup>

These Americans’ bouts sparked the formation of more organizations for Japanese women’s professional wrestling and spurred many women to join them. Within a year, there were at least eight women’s professional wrestling organizations nationwide, and in September 1955, they came together to form the All Japan Women’s Professional Wrestling Federation (hereafter Federation).<sup>80</sup> By then there were about two hundred female wrestlers in total, although this number included strippers who wrestled as part of their performances in strip theaters.<sup>81</sup> An October 1955 issue of *Pro-Wrestling*, a magazine catering to fans of male wrestlers, featured female wrestlers from the WWC and a new organization, the Tokyo Women’s Professional Wrestling (TWPW). This semiofficial report juxtaposed photographs of the intense training of female wrestlers with ones of their “feminine” private activities including sewing, cooking, and putting on makeup.<sup>82</sup>

This contrasting emphasis on their feminine images in private resonates with how masculine female players of male roles in the all-women’s Takarazuka Revue, active since 1913, were expected to appear feminine offstage. Its founder Kobayashi Ichizō believed that a “masculine female outside the context of the Revue was something deviant.”<sup>83</sup> Given the persistence of the male gaze’s eroticization of the female wrestler as a form of

stripper (who was not masculine at all), however, this report more likely sought to stress the female wrestlers' decency, rather than contrasting the masculine persona in the gym versus the feminine in private. Perhaps for the purpose of avoiding men's erotic gaze, further, the TWPW even prohibited its wrestlers from drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and dating men.<sup>84</sup> Since the WWC and other smaller organizations were not as strict, as indicated by one report of female wrestlers gulping down beer offstage, the TWPW's rules could also be meant to keep its fifty novices in line and reduce the possibility of bad publicity.<sup>85</sup> Regardless, the last rule indicates that same-sex relationships were unimaginable for the TWPW, ignoring some contemporaneous men's imagination of female wrestlers as lesbians and the female wrestlers' own sexuality. The semiofficial report and the TWPW's rules sought to convey the message that the female wrestlers scrupulously maintained gender and social norms.

In the mid-1950s, against the background of the recovery of the Japanese economy largely due to the Korean War's "special procurement," the motivation to work for many women shifted from family obligation to self-fulfillment. Accordingly, more women of their own volition entered the world of professional wrestling. The most exemplary case is another female wrestling pioneer, Obata Chiyo (b. 1936). In late 1954, during a chance visit to the TWPW's gym, she was so impressed by the wrestling moves that she immediately decided to become a wrestler, despite her parents' opposition.<sup>86</sup> Soon she became recognized as a leading wrestler of the TWPW and competed with Lily and Tayama.<sup>87</sup> According to her biography, Obata told herself, "I will rise to the top someday, earning a lot of money and driving a pink Cadillac."<sup>88</sup> Unlike Lily, Obata was determined to earn money primarily for herself, not for her family members. Considering that most female wrestlers around this time took up the sport because they "liked it," the mid-1950s economic growth, together with the earlier promotion of "liberation" by the Occupation, freed some young women from their family obligations and enabled them to choose what they did for a living—or so they claimed.<sup>89</sup> But still not all women could afford to think only of themselves. In early 1955, Yanagi Miyuki (1938–2002) who would later become the AJW's leading wrestler, responded spontaneously to an audition advertisement for another new group, the All Japan Women's Pro-Wrestling Association, not only because she liked playing sports, but also because she needed to support her farmer parents.<sup>90</sup> Another case of "spontaneous" motivation is manifest in a novice wrestler's comment: "[The] ordinary people's world does not tolerate a big woman like me," illuminating the intensity of social pressure on young women in relation to their appearance, although such a comment could inspire some women to find in professional wrestling an



opportunity to gain confidence in themselves.<sup>91</sup>

The choices of women like Obata and others need to be further contextualized in the gendered discourse surrounding female wrestlers. With the exception of *Pro-Wrestling*, media reports continued to associate female wrestlers with strippers in one way or another—in part because, as mentioned earlier, some strip theaters did feature strippers wrestling on stage. In a 1955 report in the major magazine *Central Review*, the cartoonist Kondō Hidezō explicitly disparaged the WWC wrestlers as “rustic, unsophisticated, and shabby.”<sup>92</sup> He then warned that women’s professional wrestling would decline soon, “because of its immaturity, far inferior to Rikidōzan’s professional wrestling and its lack of erotic taste, far inferior to striptease.”<sup>93</sup> Kondō’s disappointment in effect provides support for the view that some wrestlers were viewed as a novel spectacle but not an erotic one. Certainly, by then, the WWC and TWPW’s wrestlers had ceased to appear in strip theaters, unlike those of several other organizations. The author Nagata Hisamitsu, on the other hand, depicted female wrestlers favorably. Yet his assessment of them was the same as Kondō’s; Nagata valued female wrestlers precisely because they were not like strippers. Referring to a bout in a strip theater, Nagata says, “Of course I had initially expected an amazingly erotic show, but, thanks to its genre as a sport, the women’s professional wrestling was not so erotic to me.”<sup>94</sup> For him, women’s professional wrestling was “healthier than striptease, though they are in the same category of erotic [entertainment].”<sup>95</sup> Unlike Kondō, Nagata expected “healthy” erotic entertainment, his mocking reference to the demand by the New Life campaigners. As if combining these two commentators’ views, a self-claimed *abu* (abnormal) writer Oniyama Kensaku in a sexological magazine expected female wrestlers to enhance both their “abnormal” eroticism and skills by studying “more diverse and speedier” moves.<sup>96</sup> By “abnormal” Oniyama meant sadomasochism, and his ideal seemed to be a sadistic *and* skillful female wrestler, just as the case of the aforementioned “horse-riding woman” figure. Regardless of how they practiced and where they performed, then, female wrestlers as a generalized category were constantly subject to a male gaze with varying tastes that expected erotic performances almost exclusively.

Still, some contemporaries recognized how powerful female professional wrestlers could be. The physician-cum-actress Kawakami Keiko found some hope in them: “Female wrestlers can easily knock down the Sun tribe [delinquent men] acting violently at a beach. It feels soothing only imagining it.”<sup>97</sup> For Kawakami, female wrestlers embodied the potential for direct protest against men’s violence, a dream for many young Japanese women struggling against pervasive sexual harassment in public. A piece

in a collection of lesbian stories presumably by a male writer appropriated such a dream by depicting a lesbian professional wrestler who rescues a heterosexual young woman from male thugs.<sup>98</sup> Given the fact that “many heterosexual men were interested in fantasizing about lesbianism,” however, the story’s male readers likely disregarded the problem of men’s violence and the possibility of women having sexual desires of their own.<sup>99</sup> These contrasting perceptions of female wrestlers by women and men are best illustrated in a conversation between a female and a male reporter in *Mainichi Graph* [Picture News]; the former states, “[The wrestlers] are neither erotic nor grotesque. They are cheerful and nice girls engaging in their matches very seriously.” The latter agrees, but adds, “That is the point. That is why they look ineffably erotic and grotesque to men who enjoy watching them.”<sup>100</sup> In interwar Japan, *eroguro* (the erotic and grotesque) were a typical (and often satirical) pair of terms pointing at the modern culture’s “sensual pleasures” and “‘down-and-out’ social order,” respectively.<sup>101</sup> In the mid-1950s context, however, the dialogue above indicates female wrestlers provided “ineffable” imaginations, simultaneously foregrounding gendered expectations and potentially evading the dichotomy of “erotic and grotesque” and “serious.”

In reality, powerful female wrestlers appeared as threatening to the men watching their bouts in person. On September 11, 1955, the Federation held the First Japan Women’s Professional Wrestling Championship at International Stadium in Tokyo, (Figure 2). In this event, which attracted 8,000 people, a twenty-one-year-old newspaper deliveryman in the audience threw an empty milk bottle at the ring and hit Lily in the head, resulting in her hospitalization.<sup>102</sup> According to one news report, the man commented to the police, “That Igaris woman is too rough and I couldn’t stand it.”<sup>103</sup> This incident and his reported comment demonstrate that female wrestlers had come to be seen as a visible challenge to the patriarchal order: the man was moved to intervene out of his misogynist sense of entitlement. According to Lily, immediately after she was hit, Shopan ran around the arena, shouting, “Who did such a horrible thing to my dear younger sister?”<sup>104</sup> Although by then most of the new organizations were not family run, Shopan was quick to perform the protective relationship between the older brother and younger sister in public, sustaining the symbolic strength of the patriarchal order.

## Conclusion

The defeat in 1945 forced many Japanese people to struggle for survival, both as individuals and as families. American military bases provided economic opportunity for entertainers, and the Igaris took advantage by devising a performance of comic boxing and wrestling. The success of the

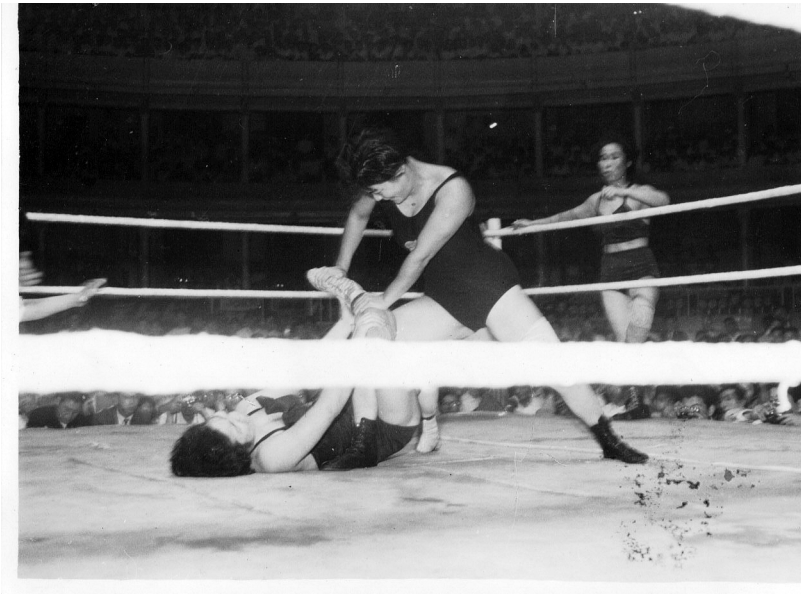


Image 2. The First Women's Professional Wrestling Championship at International Stadium Tokyo, September 11, 1955. From left to right: Lily, Obata, and Tayama. Courtesy of Igari Sadako.

performance led to the formation of their family-based professional wrestling organization supported by American and Japanese male collaborators. The American female wrestlers' tour in 1954 against the background of the recovered economy contributed to the proliferation of women's professional wrestling in Japan, attracting more women who spontaneously joined new organizations. As evidenced by frequent media appearances and successful bouts in major venues nationwide, female wrestlers fascinated and provoked their audience and general public throughout 1956. A close look at the development of women's professional wrestling reveals that it was driven by the changing economic conditions and US-Japan relations at the time.

The cases of the female wrestlers provide an example of the overlap between obligation and choice for young women. Lily's initially obligatory tie to her older brothers enabled her to cultivate her own skills in a new format, whereas Obata's will to become a top wrestler was consonant with the economic growth that encouraged women's public activities and the pervasive male gaze that expected women's wrestling to be erotic in one way or another. By constantly negotiating between the multiple ideas of novelty and convention forced on and chosen by them unevenly, female wrestlers

sought to establish their own ways of expressing themselves. However, we should not resort to an uncritical appreciation of their autonomy and choice because, although only a small example, this case study reveals that these women's lived experiences were in conversation with both cultural influences and power relations that permeated postwar Japanese society.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>For the sake of clarity, the Igari family members are indicated as Pan, Shopan, and Lily, although Lily started using her real name Sadako in 1953.

<sup>2</sup>Igari Sadako, Special Lecture at Jiyū Gakuen Junior High School, Tokyo (September 2, 2018).

<sup>3</sup>Shibata Shigeharu, *Joshipuroresu owaranai yume: Zennihon joshipuroresu motokaichō Matsunaga Takashi* (Tokyo: Fusōsha, 2008), 30–31.

<sup>4</sup>Earlier representative works include John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup>For example, see Michael Bourdaghs, *Sayonara Amerika, Sayonara Nippon: A Geopolitical Prehistory of J-Pop* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Mark McLelland, *Love, Sex, and Democracy in Japan during the American Occupation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Robert Kramm, *Sanitized Sex: Regulating Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Intimacy in Occupied Japan, 1945–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup>Keiko Aiba, "The Impact of Women's Pro Wrestling Performances on the Transformation of Gender," in *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, eds. Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden (New York: Routledge, 2016), 85–94, 85.

<sup>7</sup>Representative works on women's professional wrestling from the mid-1950s include Ida Makiko, *Puroresu shōjo densetsu* (Tokyo: Bunshun bunko, 1993); Kamei Yoshie, *Joshipuroresu minzokushi: Monogatarino hajimari* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 2000); and Akiyama Noriko, *Joshipuroresurā Obata Chiyo: Tatakau onnanno sengo shi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2017).

<sup>8</sup>Shibata, *Joshipuroresu*, 129.

<sup>9</sup>"Asuka WWE," *WWE.com*, accessed August 25, 2020, <https://www.wwe.com/superstars/asuka>.

<sup>10</sup>Rosalind Gill, "Critical Respect: The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism, a Reply to Duits and van Zoonen," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14, no.1 (2007): 69–80, 73.

<sup>11</sup>Shelley Budgeon, *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 150.

<sup>12</sup>Gill, "Critical Respect," 78.

<sup>13</sup>Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 14; Koizumi Etsuji, "Nihonsaidaino shō'wa hontōni okonawaretanoka," *G Spirits* 49 (November 2018): 41–47, 42–43.

<sup>14</sup>With Japanese names, I follow the conventional order of family name and then first name, except for authors who publish in English. Aoki Shin, *Meguriau monotachino gunzō: Sengo nihonno beigunkichito ongaku, 1945–1958*, (Tokyo: Otsuki shoten, 2013), 59–60.

<sup>15</sup>Aoki, *Meguriau monotachino*, 56–58.

<sup>16</sup>Aoki, *Meguriau monotachino*, 437.

<sup>17</sup>Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 34.

<sup>18</sup>Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 34–35.

<sup>19</sup>Bourdaghs, *Sayonara Amerika*, 13–14.

<sup>20</sup>Bourdaghs, *Sayonara Amerika*, 20.

<sup>21</sup>Bourdaghs, *Sayonara Amerika*, 20–21.

<sup>22</sup>Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 34.

<sup>23</sup>Igari Sadako, phone interviews by Tomoko Seto, March through May, 2020.

<sup>24</sup>Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 202.

<sup>25</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>26</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>27</sup>Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 32.

<sup>28</sup>Shopan Igari, *Reddosunēku Come on!* (Tokyo: San'ichi shobō, 1989), 169.

<sup>29</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>30</sup>Kawasaki Hiroshi, "Ongaku tamatebako: Komadori shimai," *Mainichi shinbun*, March 29, 2017, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20170329/dde/012/070/003000c>.

<sup>31</sup>Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890–1910," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 151–75, 172–73.

<sup>32</sup>Owen Griffiths, "Japanese Children and the Culture of Death, January–August 1945," in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. James Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 160–171, 168.

<sup>33</sup>Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 133.

<sup>34</sup>"Onna resurā shutsugen," *Sandē eiga*, April 23, 1950, 7. I acquired this source from Saijō Noboru.

<sup>35</sup>"Onna resurā shutsugen," 7.

<sup>36</sup>"Onna resurā shutsugen," 7.

<sup>37</sup>Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>38</sup>"Nisshōno sutorippuwo sōken," *Yomiuri shinbun*, evening edition, October 13, 1950, 3; "Nichigeki shōgekijōni teire," *Asahi shinbun*, evening edition, October 14, 1950, 3.

<sup>39</sup>Saijō Noboru, "Warau kami hirou kami: Asakusa hen," *Tokyo shinbun*, August 28, 2019, 14.

<sup>40</sup>Taki Daisaku, *Pan Igarino urakaidōchū hizakurige* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1986), 87.

<sup>41</sup>Noda Kaisaku, "Onnano resuringu," *Yomikiri kurabu*, November 1952, 98–118.

<sup>42</sup>Koizumi, "'Nihonsaidaino shō,'" 44; Aoki, *Meguriau monotachi*, 174.

<sup>43</sup>Shibata, *Joshipuroresu*, 36–37.

<sup>44</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990), 190.

<sup>45</sup>Scott Beekman, *Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 77–78.

<sup>46</sup>Igari, *Reddosunēku*, 210.

<sup>47</sup>In my research on Mr. Hawkins, I received generous help from the Facebook group Tachikawa Airbase Japan 1945–1977 organized by Michael Skidmore.

<sup>48</sup>Igari, *Reddosunēku*, 197–198, 204, 210.

<sup>49</sup>Shibata, *Joshipuroresu*, 38.

<sup>50</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>51</sup>E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 251.

<sup>52</sup>Jeff Leen, *The Queen of the Ring: Sex, Muscles, Diamonds, and the Making of an American Legend* (New York: Grove Press, 2010), 156.

<sup>53</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>54</sup>Shiomi Shunichi, "Sengoshoki nihonniokeru resuringuno tenkaini kansuru ichikōsatsu: 1950 nendai shotōno nichibei resuringu ni chakumokushite," *Ritsumeikan sangyō shakai ronshū* 46, no. 3 (2010): 81–102, 83–85.

<sup>55</sup>Shibata, *Joshi puroresu*, 39; Koizumi, "'Nihonsaidaino shō,'" 44.

<sup>56</sup>Igari, *Reddosunēku*, 201.

<sup>57</sup>Koizumi, "'Nihonsaidaino shō,'" 45. For a brief history of women's sumo in English, see Chie Ikkai, "Women's Sumo Wrestling in Japan," *International Journal of Sport and Health Science* 1, no. 1 (March 2003), 178–181.

<sup>58</sup>Kamei Yoshie, *Onna zumō minzokushi: Ekkyōsuru geinō* (Tokyo: Keiyūsha, 2012), 19, 36, 72–73; Yokoyama Kendō, *Nihon sumōshi* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1943), 154.

<sup>59</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>60</sup>Ogata Keishi, "Onnamo makenai puroresu jidai kitaru," *Bēsudōrumagajin zōkan* 3 *puroresu*, October 1955, 14.

<sup>61</sup>Koizumi, "'Nihonsaidaino shō,'" 44.

<sup>62</sup>Igari, *Reddosunēku*, 211.

<sup>63</sup>Igari, Interview.

<sup>64</sup>Leen, *The Queen*, 116–23.

<sup>65</sup>Igari Noboru, "Onnaresurāno sosen," in *Rakugakichō: Kaishō 65nin shū*, ed. Takeno Tōsuke (Tokyo: Amatoriasha, 1956), 163–65, 165.

<sup>66</sup>Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 123–124.

<sup>67</sup>Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 126.

<sup>68</sup>Robert Schmidt, "U.S. Girl Grapplers Hit Tokyo," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, November 12, 1954, 14.

<sup>69</sup>"Hanayakani tonai parēdo," *Sangyō keizai shinbun* Osaka edition, November 11, 1954, 7.

<sup>70</sup>"Manjō kōfunno rutsubo," *Sangyō keizai shinbun*, November 21, 1954, 6; "Sugoi baratinino karateuchi," *Sangyō keizai shinbun*, November 22, 1954, 6; "'Tokyowa sutekine,' Joshipuroresu ikkō kyō hatsuno kōkai renshū," *Sangyō keizai shinbun*, November 11, 1954, 7.

<sup>71</sup>Leen, *The Queen*, 241–243.

<sup>72</sup>McLelland, *Love, Sex*, 99.

<sup>73</sup>Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 149.

<sup>74</sup>Matsushita Kikuo, "Joshiपुरoresuringu haikenki," *Shūkan sankei*, November 28, 1954, 18–19, 18; Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan: From the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 121.

<sup>75</sup>Ishida Hitoshi and Murakami Takanori, "The Process of Divergence between 'Men who Love Men' and 'Feminised Men' in Postwar Japanese Media," *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 12 (January 2006), accessed August 15, 2020, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/ishida.html>.

<sup>76</sup>Shibazaki Hatsue, "Kenzenna terebi bangumiwo," *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 26, 1954, 5.

<sup>77</sup>Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 168–169.

<sup>78</sup>Ishikawa, "Sekai joshiपुरoresuwo mite," *Sangyō keizai shinbun*, Osaka edition, November 23, 1954, 4.

<sup>79</sup>Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 44.

<sup>80</sup>Kamei, *Onnazumō*, 213.

<sup>81</sup>Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 14–15.

<sup>82</sup>"Joshiपुरo keikoba hōmon," *Bēsubōrumagajin zōkan 3 puroresu*, October 1955, 26–30.

<sup>83</sup>Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 59.

<sup>84</sup>Akiyama, *Joshiपुरoresurā*, 57–58. In 1968, the founder of AJW Matsunaga Takashi imposed on AJW wrestlers these same rules as the "three taboos," believing they would prevent addiction, shortness of breath, and hesitating to be aggressive, respectively. Shibata, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 149.

<sup>85</sup>Akioka Yoshiyuki and Yamauchi Michiko, "Ringuno metoratachi," *Mainichi gurafu*, 1956, April 8, 8.

<sup>86</sup>Akiyama, *Joshiपुरoresurā*, 49–50.

<sup>87</sup>Akiyama, *Joshiपुरoresurā*, 59.

<sup>88</sup>Akiyama, *Joshiपुरoresurā*, 52–54.

<sup>89</sup>Ogawa, "Joshiपुरo senshu meimeiden," *Bēsubōrumagajin zōkan 3 puroresu*, October 1955, 31–34.

<sup>90</sup>Kamei, *Joshiपुरoresu*, 38–39.

<sup>91</sup>O, "Joshiपुरoresuno uchimaku," *Shūkan sankei*, March 22, 1955, 22–23, 23.



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<sup>92</sup>Kondō Hidezō, "Onna puroresu ni namerareru no ki," *Chūō kōron*, November 1956, 260–267, 261.

<sup>93</sup>Kondō, "Onna puroresu ni namerareru no ki," 262.

<sup>94</sup>Nagata Hisamitsu, *Sarariman no enikki* (Tokyo: Gakufūshoin, 1955), 255.

<sup>95</sup>Nagata, *Sarariman no enikki*, 256.

<sup>96</sup>Oniyama Seisaku, "Joshi puroresuringu zakkan," *Kitan kurabu*, November 1955, 152–154, 154.

<sup>97</sup>Kawakami Keiko, *Onna dakeno heya* (Tokyo: Shikisha, 1956), 155–156.

<sup>98</sup>Kyōgoku Miki, "Hageshii onna," *Mebanano itazura: himerareta resubosu monogatari* (Tokyo: Amatoriasha, 1959), 204–213.

<sup>99</sup>McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 84.

<sup>100</sup>Akioka and Yamauchi, "Ringuno metoratachi," 8.

<sup>101</sup>Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5–6.

<sup>102</sup>"Joshi puroresu senshu fushō," *Asahi shinbun*, September 12, 1955, 7.

<sup>103</sup>"Bottle KOs Lady Wrestler," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, September 13, 1955, 20. The comment is also cited in Japanese in the above *Asahi* report.

<sup>104</sup>Igari, Interview.

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