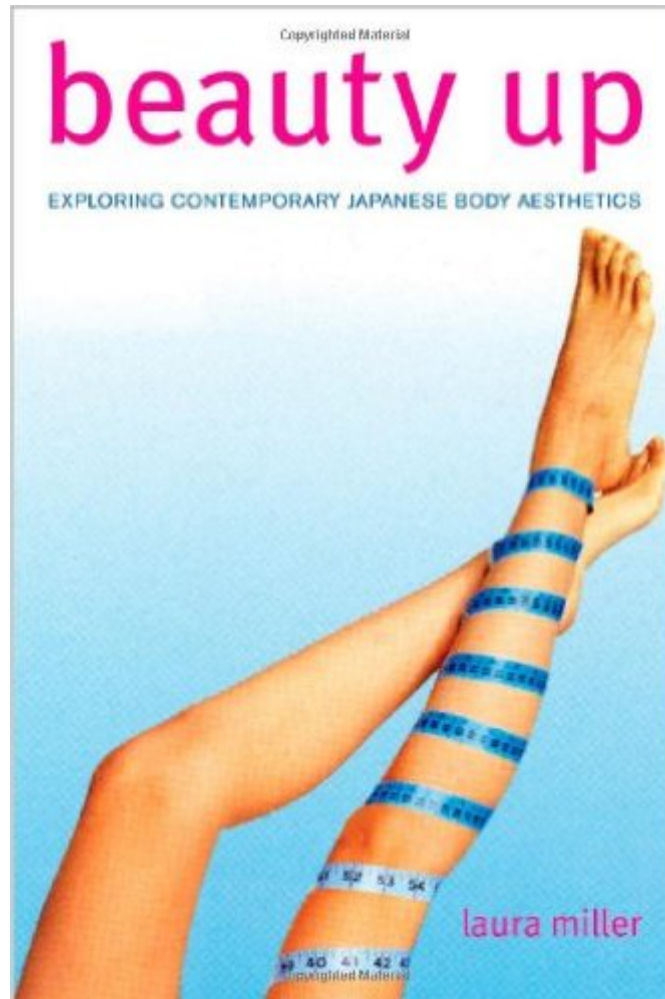


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Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics



Synopsis

This engaging introduction to Japan's burgeoning beauty culture investigates a wide range of phenomenon; aesthetic salons, dieting products, male beauty activities, and beauty language; to find out why Japanese women and men are paying so much attention to their bodies. Laura Miller uses social science and popular culture sources to connect breast enhancements, eyelid surgery, body hair removal, nipple bleaching, and other beauty work to larger issues of gender ideology, the culturally-constructed nature of beauty ideals, and the globalization of beauty technologies and standards. Her sophisticated treatment of this timely topic suggests that new body aesthetics are not forms of "deracialization" but rather innovative experimentation with identity management. While recognizing that these beauty activities are potentially a form of resistance, Miller also considers the commodification of beauty, exploring how new ideals and technologies are tying consumers even more firmly to an ever-expanding beauty industry. By considering beauty in a Japanese context, Miller challenges widespread assumptions about the universality and naturalness of beauty standards.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It seems to be de rigueur for the introduction or first chapter of any cultural studies book to be a catalogue of theoretical approaches, with the author strictly delineating which ones she or he will adopt in the remainder of the book, and gravely acknowledging some other academic for "bring[ing] to our attention the existence of multiple centers and peripheries," etc. The first chapter of this book follows the same formula, but the mood and interest level brighten up as soon as these

preliminaries are out of the way. Even though the author makes a number of serious points about, among other things, the "construction" of gender in Japan, she does so with a light touch and a sense of fun. The book's focus is on how Japanese, especially in the 20-30-y.o. generation, conceive of and modify their bodies, especially through "beauty work" and "esute" (aesthetic) salons. The author convincingly shows that certain beauty practices long interpreted (in the West) as attempts to look more Western or specifically American (e.g. adding a fold to the eyelids using tape or surgery, lightening the skin, and dying hair blond(ish)) actually have a more Japanese meaning. (She also makes a good point by asking why is it that when a Japanese dyes her hair blonde we assume she wants to look American, but when an American kid pierces his nose or wears dreadlocks we say he's showing creativity or multicultural tolerance?) The book also helped me to accept (though not necessarily to understand) that the rock-stars and other overly smooth, tousle-haired guys I'd perceived to be androgynous "girly-man" types are perceived as manly by many young Japanese women.

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