



## Shiseidō's 'Empire of Beauty': Marketing Japanese Modernity in Northeast Asia, 1932-1945"<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

*According to a 2011 news release by the company, "Shiseido is focusing on expanding sales in emerging markets with the aim of becoming 'a global player representing Asia with its origins in Japan'." The cosmopolitan image of the company overlaying its Japanese identity lends itself to intriguing prewar parallels and debates over cultures representing both East and West. As noted by Frank Dikötter in his study of early Republican Era (1912-1949) Chinese material culture: "The endless circulation, domestication and recycling of objects with the advent of the global economy has frequently offended the guardians of cultural barriers: the notion of 'hybridity' has been used to perpetuate the illusion of 'authenticity'." This hybrid "Empire of Beauty" rather than purely Japanese idea of beauty unveiled in Russia, along with Shiseidō's new Asian focus, are in fact much older business concepts dating back to the early 20th century. Not surprisingly, like other Japanese companies in the 1930s, Shiseidō also began its advent into emerging markets in the prewar period, where the progress of cosmetic penetration into northeast Asia paralleled imperial Japan's military intrusions.*

*In addition, Shiseidō's unique modernist visual culture sold images of an empire of beauty, where women consumers on the continent helped support an emerging politics of national identity in their product choices. The company's intersection of modernist advertising and national propaganda reveals the multifaceted interests of organizations like Shiseidō involved in marketing the Japanese empire and its appealing modernity.*

### **Introduction**

According to Juliann Sivulka in her study of American advertising from a cultural history perspective, "For the mass national market targeted by marketers, the ideal consumer had always been female. Techniques such as market segmentation and targeted promotions emerged at the same times as this conception of the consumers as largely female. As a result, those marketers, who understood that the woman's market could be developed, also

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was originally read in a *shashi* [company history] panel featuring Shiseidō, "The Shiseidō Culture: Design, Fashion, Marketing," at the 2013 Association for Asian Studies (AAS) held in San Diego on March 24, 2013. I thank our discussant Sarah Frederick, panel organizer Hiro Good, panel chair Gennifer Weisenfeld, and panelist Rebecca Nickerson for their comments and the opportunity to showcase my work in this venue. Research through a Triangle Center for Japanese Studies (TCJS) travel grant at the Perkins-Bostock and East Asian Libraries at Duke University in May and June 2012 allowed me to collect secondary and primary sources for this new project. Part of the research for this article was conducted in Tokyo, Japan in July 2012, funded by a U.S. Department of Education HOPES Grant and a Faculty Research and Development Grant from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP). In addition, a China and Inner Asia Council (CIAC) grant from the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) funded a month of research in May 2013 at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey where I was affiliated as a summer visitor. Final portions were completed while at Florida State University (FSU). I am deeply grateful to all the organizations and institutions that helped fund and provide the resources for this new project, as well as the inspiration I received from numerous individuals.

shaped the idea of *consumption as a feminine activity*.<sup>2</sup> This article is part of a larger project on images of women advertising "western" commodities (wine, cigarettes, and soap/cosmetics) filtered through a specifically Japanese modernity—which, as a cultural historian, I read as indicative of a rising East Asian consumer culture generated by women in the early 20th century and one paralleling the extension of Japanese imperialism. Originally inspired by a desire to catch up with the western powers and its military incursions onto the continent, Japan's "imperial modernity" was inherently hybrid, neither exclusively western, nor Asian, but rather, a combination of these elements.<sup>3</sup> Women were also an important part of its spread (through their choices of commodities) due to their growing economic power as bourgeois consumers, and thus, were targeted by advertisers throughout Japan's empire. This concept will be investigated through the lens of Shiseidō.

The Japanese cosmetics firm Shiseidō, with a venerable history dating back to 1872, was, and continues to be, an important global purveyor of beauty products geared primarily towards women, and currently serves as a significant player in the northeast Asian market where it once sold versions of Japanese imperial modernity and beauty in the 1930s using the same techniques highlighted by Sivulka. Without a doubt, its advertisements, company records, and periodic company histories (*shashi*) serve as invaluable resources to cultural historians, art historians, media scholars, and those investigating crucial stages in Japan's modern histories of consumerism and business expansion throughout Asia from the late 19th into the 20th centuries. Though sometimes not all aspects of a company's history are made accessible to researchers due to corporate wishes to maintain a positive image (and Shiseidō is no exception to this), ultimately much of this research may be embraced due to a firm's desire to add to its prominence and self-historicizing (as long as it does not interfere with sales, like in a boycott).<sup>4</sup>

An intriguing example of Shiseidō's "self-historicizing" through *shashi* was in a venue where the corporation hoped to expand its business operations—the capital of contemporary Russia, a country situated both in Asia and Europe. In Moscow, the company utilized its history as a form of promotional activity in the form of a massive display. Two years ago in the arcades of the famed GUM Department Store in the city's venerable Red Square, Shiseidō held an event entitled "Shiseidō Exhibition/1872-2011/Empire of Beauty." Stretching nearly 90 meters, the exhibit featured "Shiseidō's history and aesthetic sensibility through exhibits of an array of products, posters and other items introducing Shiseidō's corporate culture."<sup>5</sup> Its designers hoped that potential customers coming in to view the event would naturally like to personally experience the products arising out of the corporation's historical unfolding. In addition, the firm's famed beauty consultants were on hand to offer product samples and demonstrations to express Shiseidō's particularly Japanese principle of *omotenashi* [spirit of hospitality].

<sup>2</sup> My italics. Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising, Second Edition* (Windsor, CT: Wadsworth, 1997, 2011), 44.

<sup>3</sup> Though somewhat different from the way I use it in the Japanese context (a subjectivity applied to a certain aesthetic or object which connotes Japanese imperialism and modernity), the term "imperial modernity" has previously been used by cultural studies scholars, like Nigel Joseph, who fails to give an exact definition, but views it as a new kind of modern subjectivity that is enslaved to either consumerism or the state in the context of empire: "Rather than argue, then, that the postcolonial situation generates new modernities, or radically reconfigures the old ones, I suggest that the experience of empire lies behind what is arguably an already familiar reading of modernity, one whose outlines I attempt to sketch with the help of Tocqueville, Weber, and Foucault. Modernity is identified plausibly with the emergence of the modern nation and the parallel emergence of the individual who exists in a curious relation of autonomy and subservience to the nation... Here is a model of modernity that deliberately looks past the rosy vision of Enlightenment optimism and liberal individualism and chooses to dwell on a particular constellation of features: enslavement, usually to a form of consumerism, docility towards power, and finally, a subjectivity that somehow rationalizes these imperatives in such a way that they emerge as exemplary freedom." (p. 3) My italics. See Nigel Joseph, "Robert Clive and Imperial Modernity," in CLCWeb: *Comparative Literature and Culture* Volume 12, Is 2 (2010): accessed at: <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/2>> Thematic issue New Modernities and the "Third World," V. DeSousa, J.E. Henton, and G. Ramanathan, eds.

<sup>4</sup> Paraphrasing of Sarah Frederick, introduction to her comments as discussant for the "Company History" panel, "The Shiseidō Culture: Design, Fashion, Marketing," held on March 24, 2013 at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.

<sup>5</sup> Shiseidō News Release, "Shiseido to Introduce Corporate Culture and Promote Sales at Event in Russia," February 2011: 1

However, such promotional activities are not new, and echo the actions in Japan and throughout the empire of Miss Shiseidō representatives developed in the 1930s. In addition, the spectacle of the emporium of goods evokes the museum-like exhibitions of exotic objects practiced by imperialistic nations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In contemporary times, with a Japan desperate to maintain its position as the world's third largest economy amidst the economic and political rise of China, Shiseidō was selling its own "exotic commodities"<sup>6</sup> in an exhibition celebrating its expanding "empire of beauty."

According to a 2011 news release by the company, "Shiseido is focusing on expanding sales in emerging markets with the aim of becoming 'a global player representing Asia with its origins in Japan'.<sup>7</sup> The cosmopolitan image of the company overlaying its Japanese identity onto its products lends itself to intriguing prewar parallels and debates over cultures representing both East and West. As noted by Frank Dikötter in his study of early Republican Era (1912-1949) Chinese material culture: "The endless circulation, domestication and recycling of objects with the advent of the global economy has frequently offended the guardians of cultural barriers: the notion of 'hybridity' has been used to perpetuate the illusion of 'authenticity'.<sup>8</sup> This hybrid "Empire of Beauty" rather than a purely Japanese idea of beauty unveiled in Russia, along with Shiseidō's new Asian focus, are in fact much older business concepts dating back to the early 20th century. Not surprisingly, like other Japanese companies in the 1930s, Shiseidō also began its advent into emerging markets in the prewar period, where the progress of cosmetic penetration into northeast Asia paralleled imperial Japan's military intrusions.

This paper will outline some of the major themes linking Japanese imperial modernity with Shiseidō's advertising, where an imperial aesthetic of whiteness equates with this modernity. Through the problematic notion of hybridity in the Japanese empire, we can see the tension between a specific ideal and the actual acquisition of "whiteness," whether symbolic or created by "whitening." On a geopolitical scale, Japan could never truly become "white," though its foreign policy elites tried to behave like the white imperial powers. However, individuals could use science to appear so on the surface--whether by acquiring the industrial trappings of modernity, surface infrastructure, or literal "physical" whiteness of skin color. For Japanese women, whiteness and skin pallor were especially important as a marker of high socioeconomic level, but with the growth of industrialization and the rise of scientific and chemical innovations, these could now be acquired artificially through cosmetics created by large companies. Women are often the gauge of modernity in any developing country, and Japan was no exception in the early twentieth century.

Due to its relative political strength, Japan was used as a barometer of modernity for other nations in northeast Asia, though its relationship to them was of tutelage or unequal colonial power relations. Whiteness and hybridity reflected Japanese imperial modernity in terms of how they expressed the ambiguities of empire. Whiteness was now indeed available to all, but at a price, and only allowed a simulacrum of "becoming Japanese."<sup>9</sup> Shiseidō's unique cosmetics advertising in the form of soaps, creams, and powders presents an interesting case study in the investigation of Japanese imperial modernity and the targeting of what I will call the "imperial consumer."

In current East Asia, Japanese imperialism is still a haunting specter of the past, with a rising China that demands to be seen as modern, scientific, and powerful--just like its neighbor to the east in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Its women now use whiteners to raise their social capital, just like Japanese and colonial women did in the 1930s when imperial Japan's power grew and loomed as a threatening force, even as it also expanded its commercial role throughout East Asia with clever advertising.

<sup>6</sup> This phrase comes from Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Shiseido News Release, "Shiseido to Introduce Corporate Culture and Promote Sales at Event in Russia," 1.

<sup>8</sup> Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Referenced in Leo Ching's book on Taiwanese inclusion into the Japanese empire, and how the island's largely ethnically Chinese inhabitants acquired the behaviors of their Japanese overlords through assimilation and imperialization. See Leo Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

## Recent English-Language Historiography on Japanese Imperialism, Consumption, and Popular Culture

In the past decade and accelerating recently, what I call "consumption studies" constitutes a new emerging trend in English-language studies of Japanese cultural history, which also diverged from prevailing trends emphasizing the bounds of disciplines in Japan where historical studies of consumption still tend to fall under the rubric of media or cultural studies, histories of advertising, or company histories. Historians like Minami Hiroshi have also studied these in the context of popular culture, most notably of the Taishō period, but this is still an exception.<sup>10</sup> In studies of social history, media scholar Yamamoto Taketoshi has examined both advertising as well as wartime national propaganda, each referred to in Japanese as *senden*, or "publicity."<sup>11</sup> Sociologist Yoshimi Shunya has investigated mass culture and politics and the role of advertising, but in 2002, also edited a volume of cultural history partially inspired by Minami that investigated Japanese modernity and imperialism in the twenties and thirties, including contributions by western cultural historians.<sup>12</sup> His 1992 text, *The Politics of Exposition: Imperialism, Commercialism and Popular Entertainment*,<sup>13</sup> had earlier made an impact on English-language cultural history and art history scholarship linking consumerism and Japanese imperialism.

Among English-language historians, Louise Young's pivotal 1998 text *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*<sup>14</sup> was one of the first to explore the nature of consumption and empire in Japan and its colonies in her chapter on "War Fever."<sup>15</sup> The Japanese Kantō Army's 1931 invasion of Manchuria generated a fascination with all kinds of products associated with northeast China, and fanned the flames of a media frenzy for the region and the consumer items that it supposedly represented. In a 2005 study focusing on the archetypal house and home in imperial Japan,<sup>16</sup> Jordan Sand emphasizes the growing importance of the bourgeois consumer, and the special role of women as consumers in determining fashion trends and controlling domestic space. He also reveals how the domestic addition of a bricolage of items representing Japan's colonial penetration into Korea and China graced the living rooms of early 20th century western-style dwellings, while the continued presence of *tatami*-matted rooms pointed to the persistence of older traditional norms from Japan.

In connection with Japan's hybrid imperial modernity, Miriam Silverberg's 2009 book, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*,<sup>17</sup> explores in "montage form" what she calls "modern sites" in the context of imperial Japan. These include the streets, cafes, and the movies. In Silverberg's analysis of the popular film magazine *Eiga no tomo* [Friends of the movies], she discusses connections between the phenomenon of montage and code-switching (a sociolinguistic term meaning the ability to switch from one "code" of understanding to another), which help viewers in "drawing conclusions about the relationship between culture and nation."<sup>18</sup> These ubiquitous phenomena in early 20th century Japanese popular culture are important in that they point to an "everyday acceptance of the everyday experience of imperial expansion."<sup>19</sup> Similar to Shiseidō's

<sup>10</sup> See Minami Hiroshi, *Taishō bunka* (Tokyo: Keisho shobō, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> See Yamamoto Taketoshi and Tsuganesa Toshihiro, *Nihon no kōkoku—hito. toki. hyōgen* (Tokyo: 1992), and *Kōkoku no* (Tokyo: Hosei University Press, 1984, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> See Yoshimi Shunya, et al., *Kakudaisuru modaniti: 1920--30-nendai, Iwanami kōza: kindai Nihon no bunkashi 6* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002.) This volume of cultural history includes contributions by scholars from Japan, the U.S., and Australia, including chapters by Yoshimi, Gregory Pflugfelder, Kitada Akihiro, Yoneyama Risa, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Gao Yan, Ikeda Shinobu, and Kim Heshin.

<sup>13</sup> Yoshimi Shunya, *The Politics of Exposition: Imperialism, Commercialism and Popular Entertainment* (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> See "War Fever: Imperial Jingoism and the Mass Media," in *Ibid*, pp. 55-114.

<sup>16</sup> Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, and Bourgeois Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

advertisements throughout the Japanese empire, Silverberg analyzes the magazine's import: "Rather than give its readers a clear-cut choice between the West and Japan, *Eiga no tomo* gave its readers a montage of images necessitating a constant code-switching between and among people and possessions marked Japanese and Euro-American."<sup>20</sup> Arguably, this consumption of hybridity mirrored the consumption of products very much influenced by Japan's imperial experience and insertion into the global marketplace.

Appearing in the same year as Silverberg's, Penelope Franck's article, "Inconspicuous Consumption: Sake, Beer, and the Birth of the Consumer in Japan," explored the beginnings of Japanese consumerism during the Tokugawa period, which aided later economic modernization in the Meiji period marked by the eclectic discovery of western or Asian products and items.<sup>21</sup> The ideas she developed emerged into a 2011 volume co-edited with Janet Hunter, *The Historical Consumer: Consumption and Everyday Life in Japan, 1850-2000*.<sup>22</sup> Historians in this edition observed the role of consumption of particular products (most notably the sewing machine and sugar) and their impact on Japanese modernity; several examined how these commodities benefited from Japan's imperial moment prior to 1945. A year later, Barak Kushner, who had contributed a chapter on sweetness and empire, published a socio-cultural—and arguably, political—history of Japan's rendition of the originally Chinese *ramen* noodle soup, which emphasizes the role of Japanese imperialism in food consumption.<sup>23</sup> His earlier 2007 work, *The Thought Wars: Japan's Imperial Propaganda*, explored the connection between advertising agencies and the propagation of ideas supporting wartime nationalism in domestic Japan and its empire, which includes sections on popular culture.<sup>24</sup> Prior to art historian Gennifer Weisenfeld's 2009 article on visual cultures of advertising and propaganda, Kushner highlighted the porousness between the messages expanded in advertisements and their connection to officials' nationalist preoccupations.

Weisenfeld, whose works can also be characterized as cultural history, is the foremost American expert on Shiseidō and its design history, having also tackled issues of visual cultures of imperialism in her earlier work editing a special *east asia positions* volume with a chapter<sup>25</sup> on the topic and a 2002 book-length study on the early 1920s constructivist group MAVO.<sup>26</sup> Her 2009 article on propaganda and advertising in the 1930s asserts that, in Japan, "Corporate advertising campaigns were often keyed to state policy initiatives tying private sector goals to national interests."<sup>27</sup> Montage and photocollage also mark these ads, including those of Shiseidō, highlighting the hybrid nature of a Japanese imperial modernity neither western nor Asian, yet containing elements of both. Her most recent 2010 publication on the topic, "Selling Shiseidō: Cosmetics Advertising and Design in Early 20th Century Japan," investigates the Shiseidō aesthetic of cosmopolitan western modernity tied to an innovative Asian company with an international reach.<sup>28</sup>

Although by no means an exhaustive list, all of the works of these scholars, including myself, point to a growing trend of interdisciplinarity for historians exploring the cultural ramifications of Japanese imperialism and its impact on consumption. In the context of the symbol-laden consumption of cosmetics products by Shiseidō, what I call "the imperial consumer" provides the link (and connection) between Japanese imperialism and modernity, or Japan's imperial modernity. However, before this concept is explored in the context of Shiseidō, I will examine how the company built up its (commercial) empire in Asia.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Penelope Francks, "Inconspicuous Consumption: Sake, Beer, and the Birth of the Consumer in Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 68, no.1 (February 2009): 135-164. Accessed at <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=3581016>

<sup>22</sup> Penelope Francks and Janet Hunter, eds. *The Historical Consumer: Consumption and Everyday Life in Japan, 1850-2000* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Barak Kushner, *Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen--Japan's Favourite Noodle Soup* (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japan's Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, guest editor, Introduction in *positions: east asia cultures critique* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 591-604, "Touring Japan-as-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues," 747-794.

<sup>26</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, *MAVO: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1905-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Publicity and Propaganda in 1930s Japan: Modernism as Method," *Design Issues* 25, no. 4, (Autumn 2009): 14.

<sup>28</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Selling Shiseidō: Cosmetics Advertising and Design in Early 20th Century Japan," MIT Visualizing Cultures website, 2010: 1-84. Accessed at [http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido\\_01/index.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido_01/index.html).

## Shiseidō's Asian Beauty Empire Then and Now:

In 1929, before the impact of the global Great Depression, and just prior to its increasingly international moment, the Shiseidō Company boasted a respectable \$0.9 million in domestic sales of its skincare products and color cosmetics.<sup>29</sup> Following the 1927 financial crisis that plunged Japan into economic recession even preceding the Great Depression, Shiseidō pioneered new distribution channels within Japan to stop competitive price-cutting by smaller retailers. In the wake of the devastating 1923 Kantō Earthquake in Tokyo that stimulated both cultural and economic innovation, a voluntary chain store system was initiated where such retailers were guaranteed twenty percent in profits if they upheld the prices set by the company and devoted an exclusive space to its products.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, 7,000 chain stores throughout the archipelago soon carried Shiseidō products throughout Japan and made them accessible to a growing middle class of female consumers.<sup>31</sup> By 1929, the company's only leading Japanese competitor, the Kaō Corporation, which specialized in toiletries (including bath and body, and shaving cream), boasted over twice Shiseidō's revenues with \$2 million in total.<sup>32</sup>

Both companies would soon go global, with their incursions into continental Asian markets intriguingly paralleling those of the Japanese imperial army. Kaō, in fact, even purveyed soaps to the Japanese military in China after 1938, and successfully applied to the collaborationist Nanking Regime for patents to safeguard its unique formula.<sup>33</sup> Shiseidō would also market its products in Manchukuo and China, and for some of its advertisements, used a popular, allegedly Chinese, propaganda film actress and singer.

In contemporary times, Shiseidō has pulled ahead of Kaō as of 2008, with beauty product revenues of \$7.011 billion out of a total corporate revenue of \$7.220 billion, covering a globally-accessible array of products, including skin care, fragrances, color cosmetics, toiletries, and hair care.<sup>34</sup> Intriguingly, the corporation garnered twenty percent of its revenue outside of its home region—presumably including Europe, the US, and Asia.<sup>35</sup> Currently, China serves as the fourth largest market in the world for beauty products, with \$17.7 billion in revenues of which a large proportion goes towards skincare—primarily skin lightening products.<sup>36</sup> As of February 2010, there were two production factories in mainland China, which corresponded with the company's "strengthening of (a) global production structure," while in May of the same year, Shiseidō acquired the Dah Chong Hong Cosmetics company in Hong Kong, as part of its "strengthening of (a) business scheme."<sup>37</sup> The large proportion of current business in the Chinese market also prompts the Shiseidō Corporation and other companies like Kaō to understandably act protectively towards their colonial past to ensure a steady consumer demand for their vast array of products.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Jones, *Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 368.

<sup>30</sup> Louisa Daria Rubinfien, "Commodity to National Brand: Manufacturers, Merchants, and the Development of the Consumer Market in Interwar Japan," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1995, 238-248.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-248.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, *Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry*, 368.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Kaō Corporate Culture Representatives, Kaō Corporate Headquarters and Kaō Museum, Tokyo, July 13, 2012. Kaō representatives are understandably proud of their corporation's long history, and much of its past has been painstakingly cared for over the decades in the corporate archives. Intriguingly, I was able to view the soap wrappers that indicated this fact, but was not able to receive a scan for my research. The Kaō Corporation clearly is concerned with maintaining a positive image of its sales in China, and wishes to distance itself from its colonial past during a lucrative period of expansion into global markets. All corporations attempt to create products that appeal to a broad spectrum of customers—even those who maintain their exclusivity—and try to limit negative associations with their products. This is also the case in China, where what have been called "history issues" have been hot button topics in recent years, and a young, nationalistic population often expresses its views in protests against Japan and Japanese products.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, *Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry*, 372.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>36</sup> Shiseidō News Release, "Shiseidō to Introduce Corporate Culture and Promote Sales at Event in Russia," February 2011, 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

A variety of what the international media calls "history issues" has led to Chinese boycotts of Japanese goods in the past, most recently in 2005, 2011, and briefly, in 2012—potentially endangering a huge and profitable market. While oversimplified and trite, this blanket term is shorthand used by journalists, television anchors, and political scientists to refer to a whole host of unresolved issues that surround Japan's imperial aggression in China and northeast Asia. These tensions point to more vocal cohort of Chinese citizenry in confronting (and using) its nation's past as both a "card" to gain political advantages as well as a means to rectify past abuses by imperial Japan. The Chinese government allows a modicum of such dissatisfaction to be expressed publicly since it means greater cohesion for its people during a time of great disruptive socioeconomic change while, to a degree, popular nationalism also serves the state in achieving unity against a common "enemy." Regardless of the Chinese government's role, protests against Japan and boycotts of its goods point to the growing consumer power of a rising middle class in China with a greater say in what they want to consume and how they want their nation to respond.

However, now, as in the 1930s, despite their political views and increasingly vocal public opinions, young Chinese consumers still highly value white skin, which is often equated with stylish Japanese women (in addition to upper-class status and high educational achievement). Their purchases account for a large proportion of Shiseidō's current success in urban China, while \$18 billion is spent annually on skin lightening products throughout Asia.<sup>38</sup> At the end of 2005, a postwar anniversary year of particularly bitter Chinese protests against Japan, Saitō Tadakatsu, the chairman of Shiseidō's China operations, remarked upon his company's growing success with whiteners and pale-toned foundation creams. He noted that "Chinese people ask for [an] even whiter tone than what is selling well in Japan," and added, "When we try to sell them their exact color, they say, 'Too dark. Do you have anything lighter, brighter?'"<sup>39</sup> Other Shiseidō executives in areas once part of Japan's empire, like Taiwan, have noted a similar obsession with white skin. For example, Nydia Lin, senior executive of Shiseidō in Taiwan, emphasized that, "We promote the idea of whitening...the Chinese say, 'You can cover all your defective parts if you are white!'"<sup>40</sup> In contemporary times, as in the prewar (and even wartime) period, Chinese and Asian consumers are using scientific, modern means in the form of bleaching creams and concealing cosmetics to achieve a certain beauty ideal emphasizing white skin, with Shiseidō performing an important role in supplying this demand.

According to its official company website, Shiseidō started its "full-fledged international business" as early as 1931, when it began to export Rose Cosmetics to Southeast Asian countries.<sup>41</sup> One year later, Shiseidō exported its Blue Bird line (*Seichō* in Japanese, *Qingniao pai* in Chinese) of cosmetics, soaps, detergents, and toothpaste made by the Mitsui Company for "Manchurian" customers, to Northeast China—corresponding with the founding of the puppet state of Manchukuo. (In addition to consumer products, Mitsui had also purveyed items for the Japanese military since the Russo-Japanese War.) Japanese-occupied Northeast China, known as "Manchuria" prior to 1932, had long been connected to Japan through economic means since 1905, so it was only natural that Shiseidō would also expand its commercial operations there once a Japanese imperial presence had solidified into tutelary statehood. In 1935, a sales branch of the Shiseidō Corporation opened up in Shenyang, and, in the same year, it also published the informational magazine "Chain Store Research."

By 1938, the company ventured into other Asian countries after opening up sales branches in northern Chinese cities with a strong Japanese political influence, like Shinkyō (Changchun), Harbin, Dairen, Tumen, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Qingdao, along with other cities in the Japanese empire, including Seoul, Pusan, and

<sup>38</sup> Phillip Martin, "Why White Skin Is All the Rage in Asia: From Pills to Lasers to Cream, What's Fueling the Boom in Skin Whitening Procedures Across the Continent?" *Global Post*, (November 25, 2009), accessed at <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/china-and-its-neighbors/091123/asia-white-skin-treatments-risks>.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Sheridan Prasso, "Battle for the Face of China: L'Oréal, Shiseido, Estée Lauder--The world's leading cosmetics companies are vying for a piece of a booming market," December 12, 2005 Fortune magazine, Accessed at [http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune\\_archive/2005/12/12/8363110/](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2005/12/12/8363110/)

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Martin.

<sup>41</sup> See "Innovations in Aesthetics and Designs" in "About Shiseidō" accessed at <http://www.my.shiseido.com/about/story/innovations/index.htm>

Taipei.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, not only Japanese, but also Japan's imperial subjects in colonized China, Taiwan, and Korea avidly consumed Shiseidō cosmetics, welcoming the luminous pallor they promised, along with a western-inspired modernity, including hybrid elements unique to Asia—what I call "imperial modernity." Clearly, the demands of the imperial consumer had a hand in Shiseidō's success, which was aided by chain stores in smaller shops as well as larger department stores that sold Japanese products.

## The Role of Transnational Department Stores like Mitsukoshi

Into the twenties and thirties (and in many cases, several decades before), Japanese businesses like the Tokyo department store Mitsukoshi, which carried Shiseidō's cosmetics, expanded throughout the Japanese empire, into port centers of trade or railroad nexi like Seoul in Korea or Dairen in Manchuria.<sup>43</sup> Publicity for the establishments emphasized an aesthetic of modernity and a cosmopolitan flavor. For example, the graphic designer Sugiura Hisui (1879-1965) completed modernist poster advertisements for the department stores carrying the cosmetics, such as the Seoul Mitsukoshi branch in 1929,<sup>44</sup> when he became the design department chair at the Imperial School of Fine Arts in Tokyo. (Incidentally, a Shiseidō chain store also opened in Seoul in August of the same year).



Figure 1 Mitsukoshi branch in Seoul. Source: Mitsukoshi, *Dai Mitsukoshi rekishi shashin-chō*, Collection Waseda University Library.

This cutting-edge poster by a representative commercial artist from the imperial capital shows two couples, identifiable as Japanese due to the women's garb in kimono, strolling in a cityscape with three other women in the guise of "modern girls" wearing western clothing featuring fur-collared coats and cloche hats. The women sport red lipstick, and

presumably, white face powder (most likely manufactured by Shiseidō), while the corner of the store rises prominently behind them like the prow of a ship--a simulacrum of the branch in Osaka, Japan's traditional commercial center. Within Seoul, this colonial outpost of Mitsukoshi presented a familiar vision to Japanese

<sup>42</sup> Adachi Mariko, "Luxury, Capital, and the Modern Girl: A Historical Study of Shiseidō Corporation," *Joseigaku kenkyū* (March 2005): 99. Accessed at <http://hdl.handle.net/10466/10100>.

<sup>43</sup> For photographs, construction data, and interior shots of the different branches of Mitsukoshi in Japan and its empire, see the following company histories in photos: Mitsukoshi, *Dai Mitsukoshi rekishi shashin-chō: sanseikō sōritsu nijū-nen kinen* (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Company, 1932), 143, 145; and Mitsukoshi, *Sangō kanji, Mitsukoshi shashin-chō* (Tokyo: 1941), unpaginated. Many of these valuable sources were donated by Waseda alumni who retired from the company, and found a home for their collections in the Waseda University Central Library.

<sup>44</sup> For an image of Sugiura's ad for the Seoul Mitsukoshi branch, see Karasawa, Masahiro; Kida, Takuya; Naitō, Yuko; and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, ed. *Kōkyōsuru Nihonjin: Kōgei-ka ga yume mita Ajia, 1910s-1945* (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 2012), 119.

customers who might have encountered a similar building back home. (This is similar to the comforting experience of consuming brand names, which promise a standard level of quality and communicate a particular lifestyle emphasizing status, but also reliability).

These venerable department stores headquartered in Tokyo spread the goods of the empire throughout areas colonized by Japanese in emporia celebrating veritable spectacles of imperial consumption mimicking a museum where all items on display were for sale. Mitsukoshi's imperial outposts harbored their own Shiseidō counters, where Japanese, Koreans, and Han Chinese could purchase their favorite products while being assured of high Japanese quality and scientific progressiveness. In outlets found in other department stores or smaller shops, consumers throughout Japan's colonies or spheres of influence could also find a version of Shiseidō's popular face powder geared specifically towards their market. Then, as in drugstores now, to highlight their prescriptive and "scientific" nature, cosmetics were displayed near patent medicines in see-through glass cases, though Mitsukoshi's exclusive name lent a more high-class cachet to the beauty products. Customers were reassured of the effectiveness of Shiseidō products when the company's "beauty consultants" wrote them individualized prescriptions to conform to their specific concerns--a practice still in place today.



**Figure 2 Mitsukoshi display cases cosmetic counters on right, Source: Mitsukoshi, *Sanseigō kanji, Mitsukoshi shashin-chō* Collection of Waseda University Library.**

While colonial consumers did not always agree with imperial Japan's political policies, their purchases of products from Japanese companies like Shiseidō revealed their acceptance of Japanese imperial modernity and scientific know-how.<sup>45</sup> This continued into wartime, when Japanese products continued to sell apace despite periodic boycotts. Purchases in areas under Japanese control helped corporations like Shiseidō to weather the frugality and restrictions placed on consumers in domestic Japan. According to Adachi Mariko, "...while domestic production control became severe, the selling companies in many Asia[n] areas set their main goal as continuing the sale of conventional goods, transferred resources [and] supplies and rearranged production processes...reacting to the closing down of domestic markets, the intensification of the controlled economy, and the reduction and total ban of production, the company started reaching into the colonies for resources[,] supplies, production plants and

<sup>45</sup> Chinese and Korean protestors often expressed their distaste for imperial Japan's political policies in mass protests and boycotts of Japanese products, most notably in 1919, 1925, and 1931. However, because of the presumed effectiveness of Japanese cosmetics and other items due to their modernity and scientific nature, activists had a hard time maintaining the momentum of the boycotts as customers returned to their favorite products. I thank Sheldon Garon for pointing this out to me in a discussion of my project at Princeton University on May 21, 2013.

markets.”<sup>46</sup> Throughout the empire into the late thirties, Japanese department stores showcased these scientifically advanced cosmetics, whose effectiveness was tied to Japan's imperial prowess and modernity.<sup>47</sup>

For example, in a Shiseidō outlet opening in Mitsukoshi's Dairen branch after 1931—the year of the Kantō Army's invasion of northeast China—consumers could buy Blue Bird Face Powder, a product developed for the "Continent," and sold in a yellowish-gold round cardboard box designed by Maeda Mitsugu in 1932—the date of the founding of Manchukuo. The graphics on the package created for the Asian market—a straight-haired brunette woman in a Louise Brooks bob—are somewhat simpler than Yamana Ayao's Japan-oriented design created in the same year of a Western, blond woman with slightly longer hair, the signature Shiseidō camellia, and a perm, juxtaposed against a rayed yellow and black background with stripes on the side of the box. Clearly, the Tokyo-based Japanese designers wished to create a subtle difference between the Western and Asian modernity communicated by both the "models," color schemes, and designs.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Shiseidō targeted its marketing strategies specifically to colonial Japanese and “Manchurian” consumers, with Blue Bird's signature yellow boxes featuring Japanese script instead of English to communicate a specifically Japanese modernity.

In general, Caucasian women (in stylized graphics by Yamana Ayao and others) most often appear in the advertisements geared towards domestic Japan, while images of women with a more Asian appearance dominate the ads focusing on the "continental" market. I read this as Shiseidō's attempt to specifically link the company with a scientific, Western, (Parisian and New York) fashion-oriented modernity in Japan, while in the Asian market from the early thirties onwards, it tried to highlight its Asian, and specifically Japanese, modernity. In this context, "Japanese" means up-to-date, modern, scientific, and the "rightful" leader of Asia in the field of fashion and beauty. Japan's imperial modernity as expressed by the company emphasized a hybrid form of aesthetics, which would resemble the propaganda slogans of "harmony" and the (collaborationist rhetoric of the) multi-ethnic and multi-cultural aims of the Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Naoki Sakai, in fact, has argued that cosmopolitanism lends itself to such ideology.<sup>49</sup>

While corporate interests and incursions into the Asian market paralleled those of the Japanese military, the company's vision of imperial beauty for the Asian continent would emphasize a harmonious melding of Japanese science and Chinese tradition, despite the deepening of Sino-Japanese tensions and conflict. The imperial consumer acted out her desires in the emporia of department stores, but her education on how to acquire a particular type of beauty promised by Shiseidō—whiteness acquired by scientific means that was modern, available to all for a price, and a marker of wealth and modernity---was often taught by the firm's beauty consultants themselves in a system paralleling Japan's imperial tutelage to subjects throughout the empire.

## Shiseidō's "Beauty Missionaries" and Mobile Beauty Salons

While Japanese business interests extended their reach into northeast Asia, department stores began to represent the visual trappings (and success) of the Japanese empire that could be purchased and enjoyed in the

<sup>46</sup> Adachi, "Luxury, Capital, and the Modern Girl: A Historical Study of Shiseidō Corporation," 100.

<sup>47</sup> In Chinese treaty ports like Shanghai, European, and especially American, consumer products were sought after for very much the same reasons. In addition, consuming an item from these regions or countries did not harm Chinese political interests, and could palliate nationalistic desires. For example, while browsing through copies of the Shanghainese women's pictorial *Liangyou* [Young Companion] from 1927-1937, I noticed that advertisements for American, and especially Chinese, products highlight this trend, and found Japanese products to be conspicuously absent.

<sup>48</sup> For the image of the two boxes, see Nagai Kazumasa and Kaji Yūsuke, *Shiseidō kurfeitebiwaku* (Tokyo: Kyūryūdō, 1985), 131.

<sup>49</sup> See also Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitanism: Thinking and Seeing Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 30.

domestic space. Women were an important part of this process, and enjoyed rising purchasing power with the growth of an urban bourgeoisie. However, "brick and mortar" stores like Mitsukoshi were not the only means by which Shiseidō products were disseminated throughout Japan and the empire. The "Miss Shiseidō" Mobile Beauty Salons [*Biyō idō saron*] were initiated in 1935 after selection of the second group of Miss Shiseidō representatives. Beginning in Tokyo and then extending their reach into other regions of domestic Japan, Miss Shiseidōs came armed with a pen and prescription pad instructing women on how to scientifically manage a modern beauty regimen. According to Michiko Shimamori, "Miss Shiseido was, indeed, a beauty messenger carrying the media of self-expression to Japanese women."<sup>50</sup>

Only two years later, the Mobile Beauty Salons also extended throughout the Japanese empire to make appearances at department and chain stores in areas colonized by Japanese, like Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan<sup>51</sup>--paralleling the Japanese military's incursions into China after 1937. In addition, they came to visit meetings of the "Camellia Club," the company's customer loyalty program.<sup>52</sup> Called "beauty missionaries" by Shimamori, they were "taught cosmetic techniques and science, and dermatology; they were also educated in theater, music, Western painting, and other cultural activities. Rather than simply selling cosmetics in stores, they introduced the latest fashion trends..."<sup>53</sup> These representatives embodied Japanese imperial modernity, fashion, and scientific best practices as applied to beauty, which also strongly correlated with forms of cultural capital and high levels of cultural education.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital"<sup>54</sup> as a means of enhancing social mobility certainly applies to Chinese consumers' use of Shiseidō cosmetics (and desire to educate themselves about their benefits) both then and now. For Japanese and Japan's imperial (or colonial) subjects, these mobile beauty salons represented both embodied and objectified capital, which also had an institutionalized component through the reputation of the company. The women who were chosen had naturally pale skin and a certain physique which lent itself well to western dress--qualities representing embodied capital--and the cosmetics they used to enhance this inherent, natural beauty were a form of objectified capital. They embodied the Japanese imperial modernity of a company whose incursions into domestic and imperial markets followed Japanese political power.

Miss Shiseidōs actively promoted a kind of Japanese civilizing mission where their methods represented the most advanced practices of beauty emanating from the imperial center. Here, as in other colonial endeavors, Japanese companies and their representatives took the lead in developing a specific image of imperial womanhood for areas under Japan's political, economic, and cultural influence.

## Shiseidō's Advertising Icon from Manchukuo:

### The Actress and Singer Ri Kōran

In various media, glamorous models or stars advertised the cosmetics themselves, further embodying Japanese imperial modernity. The most famous of these was Fushun-born and Beijing-educated Japanese entertainer Yamaguchi Yoshiko (1920-present), known at the time by her Chinese name Ri Kōran, or Li Xianglan, who played in propaganda films [*kokusaku-eiga*], or *tairiku-eiga* ["Continental Films"] manufactured by the *Manshū eiga kyōkai* [Manchurian Film Association, or *Man'ei*], such as the blockbuster *Shina no yoru* [China

<sup>50</sup> Michiko Shimamori, quoted in Lynn Gumpert ed., *Face to Face: Shiseido and the Manufacture of Beauty, 1900-2000* (New York: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 1999), 84.

<sup>51</sup> Shiseido Corporate Culture Division, *Bi wo tsutaeru hitotachi: Shiseidō byūti konsarutanto shi* (Tokyo: Kyūryūdō, 2001), 27.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Shimamori, in Gumpert, ed., *Face to Face: Shiseido and the Manufacture of Beauty, 1900-2000*, 84.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" in J. Richardson, ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241-258.

Nights] (1940). Appearing in Chinese drag, Li's Japanese identity was an "open secret,"<sup>55</sup> while her productions were often interpreted differently by Chinese audiences in contrast to Japanese ones.<sup>56</sup> Japanese viewers first became aware of Li as a beguiling new rising talent after her appearance in Enoken's stage show as well as her role in the films she made with Hasegawa Kazuo.<sup>57</sup> However, in 1941, after discovery of her identity as Japanese, Japanese male fans continued to gush praise for the cosmopolitan actress, like in the following paean: "Your bewitching continental looks and beautiful voice are just as popular now as when you debuted as a Manchurian actress. Your personality and looks perfectly suit Manchurian, Chinese, Korean, or even Western clothes, depending on how one looks at you."<sup>58</sup>

Though from a family of bourgeois Japanese settlers brought over by the semi-governmental South Manchuria Railway Company, Chinese viewers also emulated Li's alluring voice and stunning good looks emphasizing her soft pale white skin. Nevertheless, what they most appreciated were her songs, and thus associated her image with appealing tunes. According to Norman Smith, Li "established a formidable career as a singer, popularizing several of the most beloved Chinese songs of the twentieth century,"<sup>59</sup> which included *He ri jun zai lai?* ["When Will My Love Return?"] *Mai tang ge* ["The Candy Selling Song"] and *Ye lai xiang* ["Night Fragrance"].<sup>60</sup> These songs would also become popular when performed in Tokyo, Japan's imperial capital, in 1941.

After Li's success as a film actress and singer, this made her a natural advertising icon for Shiseidō, which capitalized on her name recognition and desirable appearance. In addition, her superior skin quality also exemplified Japanese women's allegedly pure white flawless skin. Thus, she received an opportunity to appear in Shiseidō's advertisements. Historian Rebecca Nickerson highlights the importance of Li as the visual "face" of the company during its expansion into northeast Asia: "The message that these ads conveyed was that by using Shiseidō products Chinese women could become 'modern,' even if they could not, as Li/Yamaguchi could if she chose, become 'Japanese.'"<sup>61</sup> According to Nickerson, in 1940, after the company built its own Manchukuo-based factory, Li posed for cosmetics posters as the archetypal Chinese modern girl with bobbed, permed hair.<sup>62</sup> In early 20th century China, actresses held reputations as arbiters of style and "liberation" for women in the (commercial) public sphere, and their images could influence female consumer behavior. This was the case for domestic Japan as well.

On February 11, 1941, or on the alleged founding date of imperial Japan 2,600 years prior, Li performed in a show held at the Nippon Gekijō [Japan Theater] in Tokyo's Yurakuchō ward in honor of "Japan-Manchukuo Friendship," where she sang her songs from the films *China Nights* and *Sōshū yakkyoku* [Evening Song in Suzhou, 1940]. This solidified her image as an ambassadress of the intimate relationship between imperial Japan and its client state in Manchuria. Apparently, several thousand fans, those who were unable to purchase a ticket for any of the performances, swarmed the premises of the theater.<sup>63</sup> When Li was not singing in the program—she had

<sup>55</sup> Shelley Stephenson, "Her Traces Are Found Everywhere": Shanghai, Li Xianglan, and the 'Greater East Asia Film Sphere,'" in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 222-245.

<sup>56</sup> Washidani Hana, "Idō to "henshin"--Ri Kōran, "Dai TōA kyōei-ken" wo in Yomota Inuhiko et. al, *Ri Kōran to higashi Ajia* (Tokyo: Seikōsha, 2001), 40-55.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-277.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 78. See Taguchi Masao, "Ri Kōran ni okuru kotoba," *Eiga no tomo* (June 1941), 98-99.

<sup>59</sup> Norman Smith, *Intoxicating Manchuria: Alcohol, Opium, and Culture in China's Northeast* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 219 n. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Rebecca Nickerson, "Imperial Designs: Fashion, Cosmetics, and Cultural Identity in Japan, 1931-1943" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2011), 113.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>63</sup> This information was forwarded to me in email correspondence on May 10, 2013 with Mihō Ogura, a Shiseidō Corporate Culture Department representative, who found out these details from her contacts at the Shiseidō Corporate Archives in Shizuoka. I thank Ms. Ogura, who I met in July 2012 at the Ginza Shiseidō headquarters in Tokyo, for looking this up on my behalf.

scheduled an exhausting three performances that day—Shiseidō took photos of her for two of its advertising posters appearing in 1941.<sup>64</sup>

Figure 3 1941 image of Yamaguchi Yoshiko for Shiseidō cosmetics. Source: MIT Visualizing Cultures, *Selling Shiseido*



[http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido\\_02/sh\\_visnav03.html,1941](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido_02/sh_visnav03.html,1941) [sh05\_1941\_bk177a\_soap].

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

These included a Shiseidō soap advertisement featuring Li which shows her glancing provocatively at the viewer in the guise of the (Chinese) modern girl, while framed by a soft pink ostrich feather fan—a familiar trope in posters evoking China or Manchuria.<sup>65</sup> The feathers suggest the alleged softness of her skin attained by use of the product and situate the image within a broader context of publicity images of Shanghai actresses. In covers for the Shanghai-published women's pictorial *Liangyou* [Young Companion] from 1927-1937, Chinese actresses were often depicted in such a pose. In another Shiseidō face cream advertising poster, Li wears jade earrings and a silk *qipao* [a modified, tighter version of Chinese female garb], holding chrysanthemums.<sup>66</sup> While eulogized by Chinese poets in traditional couplets, this flower is also traditionally associated with the Japanese imperial family, giving the advertisement an imperialist flavor.

In both advertisements, Li models as "Chinese," or at least as a Japanese referencing a simulacrum of Chinese or Shanghai on-screen elegance that attempts to root her to a certain place (Manchukuo and Suzhou or Shanghai in China). Shiseidō's in-house photographers obviously made a conscious decision to portray her in such a fashion, and even added certain common tropes that Japanese viewers would have associated with glamorous images of Chinese women—the fan, direct gaze, short permed hair, and *qipao*. According to art historian Ikeda Shinobu, this practice came from an assimilationist impulse deriving from the nation's imperialism: "The image of a Japanese woman in Chinese dress signified... a hybrid 'China' that Japan sought to disengage from the West and to appropriate as part of the Japanese empire."<sup>67</sup> However, at the same time, each poster invokes the company's Tokyo headquarters with a diamond-shaped camellia logo containing "Ginza," citing the firm's Japanese-ness. Both aspects of the composition allude to Japanese imperial modernity in a certain cosmopolitanism (interwoven with an obvious message of exoticism), which Sarah Frederick views as a "possible way to move away from East-West narratives and categories of Orientalism and colonialism as the only factors at work," where "from the Japanese perspective, she (Li) is modern and Chinese, and Japanese."<sup>68</sup>

According to Nickerson, the portrayal of this image of Li was no accident and was carefully constructed by the firm as part of its globalizing image in Asia. She notes that, "As a company in the business of transforming women's physical appearance, Shiseidō's choice of Li/Yamaguchi as the face of its operations in China was powerful. Although it is unclear whether Shiseidō was aware of Li/Yamaguchi's dual identities, she was nevertheless a prime example of the transformative powers of cosmetics." For the Manchurian Film Association as well as Shiseidō, the chimera-like aspects of Li's media presence allowed her to become an important symbol of the hybrid nature of Manchukuo, with its alleged *minzoku kyōwa*, or "harmony of the five races," touted in propaganda by the state. As a Chinese woman, she helped to sell an exotic vision of continental beauty to Japanese customers, and presumably, to Chinese as an actress representing Japan and a Japanese company.

During my interview with members of Shiseidō's corporate culture division in Tokyo in July 2012, the company representatives noted that they could not find any extant sources of actual advertisements for Shiseidō, or any involving Li, that had appeared in Manchuria, Manchukuo, or Shanghai.<sup>69</sup> They mentioned that an art historian from Duke University, Jennifer Weisenfeld, had previously asked them about Shiseidō advertisements in Manchuria, but they were not able to come up with any specific materials. The limited time of my research trip, due

<sup>65</sup> Adachi, "Luxury, Capital, and the Modern Girl: A Historical Study of Shiseidō Corporation," 101.

<sup>66</sup> Mentioned in Stephen Mansfield, "Searching for a Sense of 'Home': Ian Buruma's Fictional Account of Yoshiko Yamaguchi's Career Takes Readers Across Manchuria, Japan, and Palestine," *The Japan Times* (March 29, 2009), book reviews, Ian Buruma, *The China Lover* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008) at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2009/03/29/books/searching-for-a-sense-of-home-2/>

<sup>67</sup> Ikeda Shinobu, "The Allure of a 'Woman in Chinese Dress': Representation of the Other in Imperial Japan" In Doris Croissant, Catherine Vance Yeh, and Joshua Mostow, eds., *Performing "Nation": Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2008), 377-379.

<sup>68</sup> Sarah Frederick, discussant's comments for the "Corporate Histories" panel, "The Shiseidō Culture: Design, Fashion, Marketing," held on March 24, 2013 at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with corporate culture representatives, Shiseido Corporate Headquarters, Shiodome, Tokyo, Japan, July 17, 2012.

to limited funds, precluded travel to Shiseidō's archives in Shizuoka, so I am not sure what is available there.<sup>70</sup> Most likely, Shiseidō advertisements did appear in Japanese-oriented newspapers and pictorials in northeast China, but my cursory explorations of the Chinese-language, Japanese-run *Shenjing shibao* [Shenyang News] have not come up with any results.<sup>71</sup>

Obviously, greater explorations of media sources in northeast Asia (northeast China, Korea, and even Taiwan) are needed. It is also possible that Shiseidō posters besides the two explored above may be stored in historical archives in China or were lost during wartime and the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution. However, these exchanges with two American scholars possibly indicate a tension between the company's desire to be helpful to researchers while also remaining protective of the firm's colonial past during a period of expansion into emerging markets like China and Korea, thus avoiding the residual negative effects of "history issues." Li's public disavowal of her role as a propaganda tool in Manchukuo may also play a part in this, with the Shiseidō Company possibly respecting her wish to no longer be associated with what she views as a shameful part of her past.

Into the postwar period, Yamaguchi's film career lasted two decades, from 1938-1958, after which she married the diplomat Otaka Hiroshi and lived briefly in Southeast Asia. Following stints as television anchorwoman and hostess in the sixties, she also served as one of the first female politicians in the upper house of the Japanese Diet from 1974-1992. In more recent years, as vice president of the Asian Women's Fund, she has been a vocal advocate of restitution for the victims of wartime sexual slavery by the imperial Japanese military. Noting that she felt "great guilt for having played a Chinese woman useful for Japanese purposes,"<sup>72</sup> Yamaguchi realized her culpability through her films in promoting a Manchukuo regime sustained by the shadow presence of the Japanese Kantō Army. Played by an ethnically Japanese actress in the guise of a Chinese woman, her characters were simulacra of what Japanese believed how Chinese women should act and dress. Of course, Shiseidō provided her cosmetics.

## Hybrid "Continental" Style, Cosmetics, and Fashion

Interestingly, most of the ads by Shiseidō and other cosmetic companies who geared their products for the Manchukuo or China market showed a model in a *qipao* as a means to maintain her specifically Chinese identity (at least in terms of clothing).<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, in Tokyo, Japan's imperial capital, tastemakers and fashion commentators like the clothing designer and journalist Masu Cate [Hirai Masuko] (1902-1955) inspired Japanese women's fashion choices with more Western, New York or Parisian-inspired clothing as alternatives to traditional kimono.<sup>74</sup> Cate's writings in *Fujin Kōron* [Women's Review] showed particular images of what modern, working Japanese women should wear to the office and other venues.<sup>75</sup> However, throughout urban China and Manchukuo,

<sup>70</sup> I plan to spend an extended period of time in Japan and the Shiseidō archives in summer 2014 to conduct research for a larger portion of this project.

<sup>71</sup> Intriguingly, Li's face did appear in advertisements of her films.

<sup>72</sup> Otaka Yoshiko, (translated for *Japan Focus* by Melissa Wender) "Looking Back on My Days as Ri Kōran (Li Xianglan)," Accessed at <http://www.zcommunications.org/contents/42844/print>, 3. (original in *Sekai*, September 2003, 171-175).

<sup>73</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, a Chinese woman wearing a "China dress" or *cheongsam* might be interpreted as making a nationalist statement in favor of her Chinese identity. However, the bias-cut *qipao* developed out of a hybrid version of the Manchu long gown and form-fitting Western dress. See Hazel Clark, "The Cheung Sam: Issues of Fashion and Cultural Identity," in Valerie Steele and John S. Major, eds., *China Chic: East Meets West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 154-165. I thank Susan Naquin for giving me this volume during my visit to Princeton in May 2013. In Japan, "China dress" [*Shina fuku*] held an entirely different connotation, as it was tied to Japanese imperial ambitions. See also Ikeda, "The Allure of a 'Woman in Chinese Dress': Representation of the Other in Imperial Japan" in Croissant, Yeh, and Mostow, eds., *Performing "Nation": Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940*, 347-381. Ikeda discusses the imperialistic nature of Japanese artist Yasui Sōtarō's famous 1934 portrait of Odagiri Mineko, the wife of a Japanese businessman, housed in the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo.

<sup>74</sup> See Hirai Kazuhiro, *Aru modan garu no Shōwa shoki--Masu Keeto daiki* (Tokyo: Kindai bungei-sha), 2009.

<sup>75</sup> See Hirai Kazuhiro, ed., *Masu Kēto bunshū--Shōwa wo karen ni itika modan garu no kiroku* (Tokyo: Kindai bungei-sha, 2011).

women hoping to communicate a contemporary modernity in their fashion choices were more likely to adopt a bob along with the hybrid Chinese *qipao* over Western garb.

For example, the Japanese firm Club Cosmetics created an ad for its *Shuang meiren pai* [Two Gorgeous Girls] brand geared to the China market in the 1920s, which also shows a woman in the same sort of long, tight, short-sleeved garment with a white feather brushing her skin to show off its softness. Echoing the ad in an albeit more refined version—appearing in a two-page spread in 1934 in *Shūfu no tomo* [Housewife's Companion]—even Wanrong (Elizabeth) (1906-1946), the empress of Manchukuo married to the former Qing emperor Aisin Gioro (Henry) Pu-Yi (1906-1967) whose bespectacled portrait in a western suit appears on the wall behind her, wore a silk *qipao* in tastefully refined colors of light green and violet, holding a (Chinese) white feather fan to her face.<sup>76</sup> Like Ri Kōran's allure, Wanrong's propaganda appeal to Japanese women and others also arose out of her ability to transgress national and ethnic boundaries with ease, albeit in a more restrained fashion, to communicate the melding of Japanese, Manchu, Western, and Asian. Not all Shiseidō advertisements (like Li's posters) or general media featured such glamour and a high-class image in communicating "continental" style. Due to the ubiquity of images emanating from Manchukuo after its founding and establishment as "empire" under Pu-Yi in 1934, popular Japanese interest in the new nation abounded.<sup>77</sup> For example, by the mid-thirties, when the government began to exhort settlement schemes, Japanese women featured strongly in portrayals of the intrepid settlers from rural Japan. However, this did not mean they would always appear as dowdy or unfashionable.

Indeed, Shiseidō's cover for the *Hanatsubaki* [Camellia] newsletter from November 1938—the year of the Japanese imperial army's brutal conquest of Nanking and China's coastal cities—shows a smiling, rouge-lipped and plump-cheeked rural woman with a signature white complexion holding a sheaf of wheat.<sup>78</sup> Though portrayed as hard at work and productive in her labor, she still seems smoothly maquillaged and maintains her Japanese (relative) pallor—courtesy of Shiseidō. Even in the developing regions of the new state, the cover seems to convey, Japanese women need not sacrifice their fresh-faced beauty despite rugged conditions if they wear the right cosmetics (i.e. those formulated by Shiseidō).

Ironically, at a time when sales in Japan plummeted during the intensification of the war effort in China and luxury goods were targeted for elimination or substitution, Shiseidō and other Japanese cosmetic firms ramped up their advertising campaigns in Manchukuo and Korea, which had relatively stable political systems at the time.<sup>79</sup> While women in domestic Japan were exhorted by the increasingly fascistic regime that *Zeitaku wa teki da* ["Extravagance is the enemy!"], Japanese women of all classes in Manchukuo had a "duty" to project an attractive imperial modernity in their appearance. Not even a sequestered Manchu Empress could escape from such a construct promoted by the Japanese-led Manchukuo regime and its connected corporate interests, such as those of the *Shufu-no-tomo* magazine that photographed her.

## Conclusion

During the 1931-45 Japanese occupation of northeast China and China proper in the late thirties, numerous Japanese businesses, including Shiseidō, extended their reach into Manchukuo and elsewhere in Asia, where the Japanese imperial modernity they sold communicated success and prosperity under imperial Japan's auspices. After

<sup>76</sup> *Shūfu no tomo* [Housewife's Companion] (March 1934) Tokyo: Shūfu-no-tomo-sha, 1-3.

<sup>77</sup> Annika A. Culver, *Glorify the Empire: Japanese Avant-Garde Propaganda in Manchukuo* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 43, 81-84.

<sup>78</sup> For the image, see Nagai and Kaji, *Shiseidō kuriteibiwāku*.

<sup>79</sup> Shiseidō advertisements in Korea are a fascinating research topic in themselves. I thank Jungwon Kim, assistant professor of Korean history at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, for mentioning these. However, my inability to read Korean limits my research of these materials, which deserve further study.

1931, the company's first outlet opened in Mitsukoshi's Dairen branch, and by 1937, its Mobile Beauty Salons traversed the Japanese empire with "Miss Shiseidō" representatives passing through Manchurian cities and those in Korea and Taiwan. Throughout the colonies, Shiseidō expanded a view of Japanese women's flawless white skin, along with consumers' willingness to embrace modern, scientific rational practices to improve domestic life in the name of beauty.

In addition, Shiseidō's unique modernist visual culture sold images of an empire of beauty and a specifically Japanese imperial modernity, where women consumers on the continent helped support an emerging politics of national identity in their product choices. The company's intersection of modernist advertising and national propaganda reveals the multifaceted interests of organizations like Shiseidō involved in marketing the Japanese empire and its appealing modernity.



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