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The Agency and Motivations of Gender-Variant Women in Nineteenth- And Early Twentieth-Century Japan

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Abstract

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan, a number of women adopted a male gender performance. Scholars have examined the strategies governments and police deployed to push said women to adopt a female gender performance in alignment with their anatomical sex, however experts have not yet investigated the points of view of the gender-variant women themselves. By critically analysing contemporary testimonies on gender-variant women who lived in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan as recounted in *zuihitsu* (miscellanies), newspapers, and magazines and by applying the concept of agency developed by cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner, this paper aims to explore the complex social, cultural, and economic motivations for which gender-variant women adopted a male gender performance. By achieving this result, the paper will improve our knowledge about the lived experiences of gender-variant women in early modern and modern Japan.

Keywords: Gender History; Japanese Studies; Practice Theory; Social History; Women's History