This edited volume is a collection of essays on understanding the lives and cultures of modern girls in Japanese society. The book contextualises the images of modern girls in Japan who are mobile. The transformations associated with their mobility are brought out very interestingly in the book. The book situates girl culture within the post-modern discourse or what is called the “new women” discourse and helps us to see how modernity itself needs to be understood as an expansive, long-term global project.

The book is divided into four parts, each providing a historical account of women’s lives and cultures either as debased or devalued victims of mass culture, or as victims of a system over which they had no control. It starts with exploring the lived experiences and cultural depictions of women who worked in service industries and other jobs that were inspired by ideas of mobility in 20th and 21st Century Japan. The author’s explore how the meaning of modern girls changes with feminist positions from liberal or Marxist or radical. The first part provides vivid accounts of middle-class women working in department stores of Japan and how such occupations became more desirable and emancipating in terms of adopting a Western-style modernity. The author examines how by going out these women were challenging the gendered division of labour between home and workplace. Such a trend led to huge influx of women workers in the departmental stores, though their labour was seen as temporary and women’s mobility to public spaces continued to evoke controversy. The reader is immediately drawn to the nomenclatures used by the author to address modern girls like “shop girl”, “elevator girl”, dancehall girls, etc., which sound fashionable and modern. But what is also interesting is the author’s analysis of life situations of women that brings out clearly that such roles of women or gendered performances in a Goffmanian sense are paradoxical since her true self remains hidden from the observer. Moreover, issues like occupational segregation, class and gendered jobs become prominent in the chapters.

Part II of the book on models and modes of transportation speaks about women’s involvement with technology and modern means of transportation. This section discusses about the stereotypical assumptions made about women servers particularly, the modern stewardesses who were portrayed as representing nostalgised figures of dutiful women who knew how to serve. Gradually, they represented public women, highly visible aboard international carriers, themselves being icons of jet age. What did matter to these modern girls is that they found the means to go around the world critically negotiating gen-
der, mobility and modernity. Similar to the more prestigious flight attendants, the bus guides, mostly young Japanese women were conceptualised as both ideal employees and erotic icons thereby exposing the contradictions inherent in women’s roles in the workforce. Particularly interesting is the exploration of how the notions of sexuality get constructed through women’s engagement in these professions. However, what was difficult to understand was whether women felt liberated in such professions and how such changes had contributed in women’s emancipation in a real sense whereby they took their own decisions and carried on with their professions with dignity.

Part III of the book on Modern Girls Overturn Gender and Class reflects how women’s entry into male-dominated jobs enabled them to challenge the traditional roles of women that promoted marriage and motherhood for them. Women as soldiers, in self-defense forces or in sports like soccer in contemporary Japan experienced upward class and professional mobility and had the ability to transgress social norms that pulled them back.

In Part IV, the author highlights women’s mobility transcending geographical boundaries. This part of the book discusses different dimensions of women’s mobility from beauty pageants to women travelling for education. It brilliantly discusses how representation of women in a much publicised international beauty pageant paved the way for a new role for women in the public sphere that was interlaced with consumerism and beauty work. These roles also portrayed the pleasures and constraints of femininity. This part narrates the story of a beauty queen and how such stories became popular with the advent of women’s studies in Japan and later led to a renewed and strongly feminist interest in women’s history. The latter part of this section discusses about women travelling to learn English language. It also speaks about the how women’s education changed and the role of colleges in sending Japanese women to the United States. To raise the level of women’s education in Japan scholarships were provided to encourage young scholars. Finally the book ends with a narration of a personal journey of a Professor from Japan to Oregon and how her association with two cultures acted as a cultural bridge between the two countries.

The book has immense potential for creating interest in the readers mind through its style of narration yet, it somehow remains weak on providing a strong theoretical foundation. Though it starts within the context of post-modern discourse, yet towards the end it could not justify the situatedness of women in different positions leading to creation of new discourses very much peculiar to post-modern feminist thought. In fact, both feminism and post-modernism can be seen to have radically altered the way in which the modern culture is understood and experienced. The creation of new knowledge