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Playboy, Shūeisha, and the Birth of Men's Magazines in 1960s Japan

Abstract: This article explores the transnational emergence of popular men's magazines in 1960s Japan. It highlights how Hugh M. Hefner's *Playboy* inspired Japanese publishers to create new men's magazines that incorporated elements of its style. Shūeisha's release of *Shūkan Pureibōi* (*Weekly Playboy*) in 1966, in turn, triggered a legal conflict over intellectual property infringement that lasted until 1973. The conflict convinced Hefner to partner with Shūeisha to produce *Playboy Nihonban* (*Playboy Japan*, also known as *Gekkan Pureibōi*, or *Monthly Playboy*). This partnership in 1975 signified the rise of Shūeisha as a general publisher and bookended the first era of popular men's magazines in Japan.

In April 1962, the Japan Productivity Center, one of Japan's most important industrial planning organizations and a major sponsor of technical missions abroad, sent its Magazine Research Group on a month-long trip to the United States to investigate the U.S. publishing industry. Eleven senior publishers, publishing executives, and their support staff took part in a whirlwind tour, meeting with industry powerhouses and trade associations such as Curtis Publishing Company, McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, Forbes Inc., Time Inc., and the Magazine Publishers Association. Perhaps the most memorable part of the trip came with the visit on April 9 to an influential if polarizing men's magazine publisher then based in Chicago: Playboy Enterprises.

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The trip to Playboy Enterprises (then known as HMM Publishing) generated considerable excitement within the all-male group. The group's report on the U.S. publishing industry, drafted upon the members' return and published in 1963, noted the glee with which people had met the news of the impending visit. "Everyone smiled in a suggestive way. One person had a bemused look, and another had the look of someone thinking, 'Boy, are you guys lucky!'"¹ Yet the visit left the Japanese executives duly impressed. They held wide-ranging discussions with major figures at Playboy Enterprises, including editorial director Auguste C. Spector, "Playboy Forum" editor Anson Mount, centerfold photographer Vincent Tajiri, and fashion director Robert Green. Although the delegates did not meet *Playboy* founder, editor, and publisher Hugh M. Hefner, a glance at his office gave the impression that he was a "magazine demon" (*zasshi no oni*), a workhorse who devoted his every effort to his magazine's success. The Magazine Research Group further heaped praise on *Playboy's* beautiful centerfolds, its "sophisticated treatment of sex," and its promotion of a modern American lifestyle. More strikingly, the follow-up report emphasized how *little* the *Playboy* editorial staff cared for appealing to a general audience. Instead, employees like Mount stressed *Playboy's* attempt to create a magazine with a "human, individual character" that brings enjoyment to its male readers' daily lives. "We thought," the report concluded, "that this is a splendid editorial stance."²

This visit opened the floodgates of interest in Playboy Enterprises. The enthusiasm with which the Magazine Research Group met its trip to Playboy Enterprises was reflected in other Japanese publishers' decisions to visit throughout the decade. By the end of the 1960s, Shōgakukan, Kōdansha, Magazine House (then Heibon Shuppan Kabushikigaisha), and most other major Japanese publishing houses had sent at least one representative to the Chicago offices of Playboy Enterprises, either as part of a tour group (*shisatsudan*), for personal study (*kengaku*), or for business.³ It is clear that these visits generated excitement about the future of men's publishing in Japan. For Shūeisha, then a smaller publishing house and subsidiary of Shōgakukan best known for its popular "visual" magazine, *Myōjō* (Morning

1. Nihon Seisansei Honbu Zasshi Chōsadan, ed., *Amerika no zasshi shuppankai* (Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai, 1963), p. 141.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 143–46. See p. 143 for Hefner as a "magazine demon," and p. 144 for the statement about *Playboy's* editorial stance.

3. The Japan Productivity Center sponsored another visit to Playboy Enterprises on June 19, 1969, and published the group's findings the following year. See Dai 5-kai Kaigai Shuppan-Hanbai Senmon Shisatsudan, *Jōhōka jidai o tatakau Ō-Bei no shuppan sangyō: Dai 5-kai Kaigai Shuppan-Hanbai Senmon Shisatsudan hōkokusho* (Nihon Seisansei Honbu and Nihon Shuppan Hanbai, 1970). According to former Playboy executive Robert Gutwillig, Kōdansha also visited Playboy Enterprises in the 1960s. Robert Gutwillig (former senior vice president, Playboy Enterprises), interview with authors, September 30, 2017. Hereafter cited as Robert Gutwillig interviews.

star), this interest in *Playboy* began a chain of events that led to the birth of *Shūkan Pureibōi* (hereafter, *Weekly Playboy*, 1966–), a collaboration with Playboy Enterprises to publish the monthly magazine *Playboy Nihonban* (hereafter *Playboy Japan*, 1975–2009; also referred to as *Gekkan Pureibōi* [Monthly *Playboy*]), and its emergence as a respected, major publishing house.

Despite this interest in *Playboy*, scholars still do not consider Hefner's magazine as playing a major role in the publishing industry in 1960s Japan. This is understandable. The 1950s and 1960s experienced great economic, social, artistic, and cultural vitality, which found clear expression in the dramatic growth of general-interest and youth publishing. Scholarship on publishing during these decades thus largely focuses on domestic trends. The best of this scholarship views the expansion of mass-market general-interest magazines and the emergence of “youth magazines” (*wakamono zasshi*) not only as distinct processes but also as wholly national in origin, generated by Japan's blossoming consumer and middle-class culture. It argues that the male publishing industry emerged as a natural result of rapid economic growth. Stated differently, Japan's economic “miracle” and the rise of middle-class salarymen generated an explosion of new weekly magazines, which focused and fueled aspirations for modern living and consumer excess.⁴ This research is critical to understanding the shifting publishing landscape in 1950s and 1960s Japan. But it does not tell the whole story.

Attention to the expansion of general-interest publishing and the emergence of new youth magazines as distinct and domestic processes, in fact, obscures as much as it illuminates. First, in addition to “youth” publishing, magazine readership in the 1960s also became increasingly gendered. The decade witnessed not only the appearance of new magazines that targeted a young adult male audience but also the masculinization of older general-interest weeklies to compete for this growing male readership. Inspired by the dramatic success of new men's magazines like *Heibon panchi* (hereafter, *Heibon Punch*, 1964–88) and *Weekly Playboy*, many existing general-interest magazines shifted their content to entice this growing audience. In this sense, one of the more-important yet less-noticed trends in the cultural history of 1960s Japan was the birth of men's general-interest magazines

4. Most scholars argue that the expansion of the media in postwar Japan resulted from the growth of consumer culture and do not point to a direct connection between the new youth magazines and the weeklies. For example, see Martyn David Smith, *Mass Media, Consumerism, and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Bloomsbury, 2018). For a general outline of how weekly magazines targeted Japanese salarymen, see Asaoka Takahiro, “Kōdo keizai seichō no tōrai to shūkanshi dokusha: sōgō zasshi to sono dokusha de aru sararīman o chūshin ni,” *Zasshi media no bunkashi: henbō suru sengo paradaimu* (Shinwasha, 2012), pp. 129–62.

as a popular category. We refer to this as the rise of “men’s magazines.”⁵ Second, we believe it is misguided to view the advent of men’s magazines through wholly domestic lenses. In this context, the 1962 visit and subsequent visits by Japanese publishers to Playboy Enterprises suggest a more complicated story. The birth of men’s popular magazines in Japan was not solely a national story; it was also a *transnational* story of borrowing and conflict, one in which Hefner’s *Playboy* played an important role.

This is not to say that all men’s magazines in Japan had *Playboy* as their progenitor—men’s publishing had deep roots in Japan’s prewar past. Publishers had searched for ways to appeal to men in popular general-interest magazines from as early as the 1920s. From the 1920s to the 1950s, magazines (in fits and starts) published hedonistic, consumerist, erotic, and sexualized content that targeted a male audience: from pornography to male fashion, consumer articles to pulp erotica or the bizarre.⁶ Many of these trends toward men’s publishing were evident also in the *kasutori* print culture of the early postwar era, which featured erotic visual and textual content that was partly to entertain and entice and partly to educate. *Kasutori* print culture thrived with the Allied occupation of Japan but suffered a precipitous decline in the mid-1950s, once Japanese authorities placed more stringent regulations on pornographic publishing.⁷

It was not until the 1960s that major Japanese publishers began to create what became known as “men’s general-interest magazines” (*dansei sōgō zasshi*), or “men’s weekly magazines” (*dansei shūkan zasshi* or *dansei shūkanshi*). In the process, men’s magazines became mainstream in terms of both popularity and cultural impact. This emergence of men’s magazines in 1960s Japan coincided with the meteoric rise of *Playboy*. The rise of *Playboy*, in turn, fed into notions of the lucrative potential for men’s magazines and provided forms from which new popular Japanese men’s magazines like *Heibon Punch* and *Weekly Playboy* could borrow.

Nowhere is the centrality of *Playboy* more clearly seen than in the almost wholly unknown backstory behind the formation of Shūeisha’s *Weekly Playboy*, which according to some data was the most popular weekly maga-

5. For more on men’s magazines as an overall category, see Dian Hanson, *The History of Men’s Magazines* (Taschen, 2004–6).

6. Much so-called “grotesque” (*ryōki*) publishing in the prewar era featured pornographic images, sexology writing, and pulp literature for men. For research on such publishing, see Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan’s Imperialism, 1895–1945* (Duke University Press, 2010), and Jeffrey Angles, “Seeking the Strange: *Ryōki* and the Navigation of Normality in Interwar Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2008), pp. 101–41.

7. For more on *kasutori* magazines, see Yamaoka Akira, *Kasutori zasshi ni miru sen-goshi: sengo seishun no aru kiseki* (Orion Shuppansha, 1970), and Yamamoto Akira, *Kasutori zasshi kenkyū: shinboru ni miru fūzokushi* (Chūō Kōronsha, 1998).

zine in postwar Japanese publishing history. The broader story began in 1966, when Shūeisha sent a representative to Playboy Enterprises to inquire about a partnership for a new weekly men's magazine in Japan. This trip, and Shūeisha's subsequent decisions to release a men's magazine bearing the "playboy" name, triggered a legal conflict over intellectual property infringement with Playboy Enterprises that lasted until 1973.⁸ The dispute ended in an unconditional victory for Shūeisha, forcing Hefner's company to partner with Shūeisha to produce a monthly Japanese version of its iconic magazine, *Playboy*. The partnership with Playboy Enterprises to produce the highly popular *Playboy Japan* in 1975 not only signaled the emergence of Shūeisha as a general publisher, but also bookended the age of the rise of men's magazines in Japan.

Playboy, Heibon Punch, and the Changing Publishing Landscape

The appearance of popular men's magazines may have been a transnational story, but their emergence was deeply influenced by trends in Japanese publishing that reached back to the 1920s. The first major trend was the extraordinary popularity garnered by women's magazines. Following their emergence at the start of the twentieth century, by the 1920s women's magazines had become such an important phenomenon that the reading public equated "mass" culture with women.⁹ By the 1960s women's magazines dominated the mainstream publishing world, leading enterprising executives to seek opportunities for general-interest men's magazines as well. A second trend, which lasted from the "grotesque" publishing of the 1930s to the *kasutori* culture of the 1950s, witnessed publishers attracting a smaller male readership through the use of pornographic images, pulp literature, sexology writing, the bizarre, and consumerist content.

The third, and most important, trend was the birth of popular general-interest magazines, symbolized by the meteoric rise of *Kingu* (King). Alongside *Ie no hikari* (Light of the home, which targeted a rural audience), it was one of the few prewar magazines to reach a sold circulation of over one mil-

8. The only sources that mention the dispute are Shūeisha's 1997 company history and a book on international publishing by a former Playboy Enterprises executive. Both of these sources contain some truths about the overall controversy, yet both paint an incomplete picture. See Shashi Hensanshitsu, ed., *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi* (Shūeisha, 1997), and Lee Boaz Hall, *International Magazine and Book Licensing* (Praeger, 1983).

9. See Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Duke University Press, 2003), p. 82. So popular were women's magazines that when famous publisher Noma Seiji and the Kōdansha editorial board founded *Kingu* (King), Japan's most popular prewar magazine, they seriously considered naming it *Kuin* (Queen) to pay homage to best-selling and influential U.S. magazine *Ladies Home Journal*. They patented both names to use with the magazine. See Satō Takumi, "*Kingu*" no jidai: *kokumin taishū zasshi no kōkyōsei* (Iwanami Shoten, 2002), pp. 26–27.

lion copies. Aimed primarily at urbanites, *Kingu* transcended gender and class lines. It was a catch-all magazine—affordable and thick, running several hundred pages and catering to all demographics, from white- to blue-collar workers, husbands to wives, parents to children, and old to young.¹⁰ By making readership inclusive and its material accessible, *Kingu* opened the floodgates for popular publishing that began to flourish in the 1950s. So popular was *Kingu* that postwar publications like *Heibon* (1945) were created in an attempt to recapture *Kingu*'s prewar popular appeal.¹¹ Since those who experienced the lean years of the war and early postwar era “had been starving to read” (*katsuji ni ueteita*), publishing houses proliferated in the late 1940s, and it was said that anything published would sell.¹²

By the mid-1950s, publishers were finally in a position to satiate Japanese readers. Japan's gross national product in 1955 exceeded even the best years of the prewar era, and the Economic Planning Agency released in 1956 a now-famous white paper that highlighted Japan's economic recovery and boldly declared the end to the postwar period. Eleven years after the end of World War II, Japanese families were largely liberated from the disorientation, deprivation, and despondency of the early postwar years; they aspired to a modern, middle-class lifestyle of abundance and prosperity. Magazine publishing fed into and focused these desires with new forms of “leisure” and popular-entertainment magazines (*goraku zasshi* or *taishū zasshi*). New monthly and weekly magazines proliferated, offering their mostly female readerships a “bright” and “modern” way of life. Thus began a publishing boom. According to Martyn David Smith, between 1954 and 1971 the total number of magazines published doubled, and there was almost a three-fold increase in weekly magazines.¹³

The rise of television and advertising fed into the explosion of new weekly magazines. Television arrived in Japan in 1953. By 1959, there were over two million subscribers to commercial television broadcasters, and 15 million people tuned in to watch Crown Prince Akihito's April 1959 marriage to Shōda Michiko. The new age of weekly television shows primed Japanese readers to the fast-paced content they would find in weekly magazines. More important, the booming advertising industry made magazines more profitable and less risky to create. In August 1952, the Japan Magazine

10. By far the best work on *Kingu* is Satō, “*Kingu*” *no jidai*. For recent work on *Kingu* in English, see Amy Bliss Marshall, *Magazines and the Making of Mass Culture in Japan* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

11. Heibon Shuppan Kabushikigaisha, *Dokusha to tomo ni 20-nen* (Heibon Shuppan, 1965), p. 27.

12. Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai, “Jidai to shuppan,” *Nihon shoseki shuppankai 50-nenshi, 1956–2007 [Web-ban]* (Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai and Nihon Shoseki Shuppan Kyōkai, 2007), p. 16.

13. Smith, *Mass Media, Consumerism, and National Identity in Postwar Japan*, p. 6.

Advertising Association (Nihon Zasshi Kōkoku Kyōkai) strongly recommended the cost-effective nature of magazine advertising. Magazines, the association argued, had a dedicated readership, were national in reach, were read over a long period of time, and were passed around from reader to reader. Furthermore, magazine advertisements were more visually pleasing than those in newspapers, made better use of space, and could be tailored to the specific interests of their readers. Publishers, in turn, commanded fixed revenues from advertising in the pages of their magazines, which decreased the economic risks associated with their new magazines. Indeed, by 1956, the revenues publishing houses generated from advertisements had overtaken the amount publishers spent on advertising in other mediums.¹⁴

These trends contributed to the “weekly magazine boom” of the late 1950s, wherein many publishing houses gambled on new magazines to compete with the traditional newspaper weeklies. The weekly format became so successful that, by 1959, weekly magazines outpaced their monthly counterparts in total sales.¹⁵ In the process, they became important influences on the ideals and aspirations of middle-class life. Smith captures this best when he argues that from the late 1950s, “popular magazines showed their readers what they should be, what they should aspire to, and what they should and could consume.”¹⁶

The flourishing domestic publishing market served as the backdrop against which popular men’s magazines emerged. Nonetheless, these domestic trends only tell one side of the story. Publishers looked abroad for inspiration as well, and it was this process that led Magazine House and Shūeisha to *Playboy*. Their turn to *Playboy* is understandable. *Playboy*, after all, witnessed a meteoric rise from its birth in 1953 to become an iconic U.S. cultural product. Hefner’s magazine had generated fierce popularity in the United States and abroad from its brazen willingness to peddle female nudity and for its distinct vision of modern manhood.¹⁷ Moreover, the influ-

14. Yoshida Noriaki, “Zasshi bunka to sengo no Nihon shakai,” in Yoshida Noriaki and Okada Akiko, eds., *Zasshi media no bunkashi: henbō suru sengo paradaimu* (Shinwasha, 2012), pp. 20–23.

15. Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai, “Jidai to shuppan,” p. 17. In 1958, monthly magazines sold 465 million copies, whereas weekly publications sold 323 million. By 1959, weeklies had overtaken monthly magazines—520 million weeklies to 466 million monthlies. These are rough estimates and do not factor in an estimated 20 per cent average of returned copies. See Hashimoto Motomu, *Nihon shuppan hanbaishi* (Kōdansha, 1964), p. 652.

16. Smith, *Mass Media, Consumerism, and National Identity in Postwar Japan*, pp. 60–61.

17. For a detailed analysis of *Playboy*’s vision of modern manhood, see Elizabeth Fraterigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Natalie Coulter, “Selling the Male Consumer the *Playboy* Way,” *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2014), pp. 139–52.

ence of *Playboy* extended far beyond U.S. borders. By the 1960s it had created an international sensation. From French adult magazine *Lui* to Danish magazine *Color Climax* and British magazines *Penthouse*, *Mayfair*, *Fiesta*, and *Knave*, publishers across the world capitalized on the global revolution of sexualized publishing for heterosexual men spearheaded by *Playboy*. In this sense, *Playboy* was becoming a global phenomenon at the very point when Japanese publishers began preparing to create new men's magazines.

Playboy's popularity and its distinctive style drew Japanese publishers to its Chicago offices. Around six months after the Magazine Research Group's April 1962 tour, Shimizu Tatsuo, a publishing executive from Magazine House, visited Playboy Enterprises.¹⁸ Shimizu planned to establish Japan's first popular men's magazine, and the purpose of his visit to Chicago was to learn more about *Playboy's* editorial department.¹⁹ He no doubt also hoped to understand the secrets of success of the magazine "that monopolized the popularity of young American men." While in Chicago, Shimizu met with vice president and art director Arthur (Art) Paul and cameraman Don Bronstein (as he wrapped up a nude photo shoot), after making a special request to view *Playboy's* photo department.²⁰ There is little doubt that he found the trip inspiring. In a February 1964 edition of Magazine House's in-house public relations magazine, *Heibon tsūshin*, Shimizu announced the upcoming release of a new "men's entertainment weekly magazine," *Heibon Punch*, and stated that "concrete research began in autumn, one-and-a-half years ago"—when he visited Playboy Enterprises.²¹ Former *Heibon Punch* editor Shiozawa Yukito likewise noted that Shimizu studied foreign magazines and "went out of his way to visit *Playboy* magazine's editorial department" when planning for *Heibon Punch*.²²

This emphasis on *Playboy* owed much to Shimizu's desire to bring men's publishing into the cultural mainstream. Although a variety of publications had targeted a male readership since the prewar era, by the early 1960s there were still no truly popular mainstream men's magazines. Maga-

18. Magazine House got its start in 1945 as Heibonsha, and in 1954 it changed its name to Heibon Shuppan Kabushikigaisha before finally settling on Magazine House in 1983.

19. At least one publisher appears to have beat Shimizu to the punch. A short-lived weekly titled *Shūkan dansei* (Weekly man) was published from 1958 to 1959, six years before Shimizu created *Heibon Punch*. We found no evidence, however, to suggest that it had a lasting impact on the landscape of men's culture and magazines.

20. Shimizu Tatsuo, "Kaigai no zasshisha o tazunete," *Heibon tsūshin*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (July 1963), reprinted in Iwahori Kinosuke, *Heibon tsūshin kono 10-nen: Heibon Shuppan Kabushikigaisha shōshi, Iwahori Kinosuke rensai taidan* (Heibon Shuppan, 1970), p. 85.

21. *Heibon tsūshin*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (February 1964). Quoted in Shiozawa Yukito, *Heibon Punch no jidai: 1964–1988-nen kibō to kutō to zasetsu no monogatari* (Matsurikasha, 2009), pp. 332–33.

22. Shiozawa, *Heibon Punch no jidai*, p. 243.

zine House's first company history, published in 1965 to commemorate its twentieth anniversary, even emphasized that the decision to create a men's magazine was a result of a sense of opportunity that came from the overwhelming dominance of women's magazines. "The publishing industry," the company history noted, "was 'women only.' The monthly and weekly magazines were almost all targeting female readers."²³ Shimizu saw trendy magazines for men as a unique business opportunity that he was determined to exploit. And the rest of the publishing world was caught unawares: at the very moment he was preparing his new magazine, industry-wide rumors held that Shimizu was planning a new women's weekly!²⁴ This is understandable, as female readers had been the driving force behind the explosion of new weekly magazines in the 1950s. Whatever the case, Shimizu was prescient in seeing an opportunity for a new men's magazine. Upon its release on May 11, 1964, *Heibon Punch*—Japan's first truly popular men's magazine—became an immediate hit among male readers.²⁵

Nevertheless, most scholars categorize *Heibon Punch* and similar publications as "youth magazines," not "men's magazines." In doing so, they highlight publishers' efforts to tap into the explosion of consumer spending by Japan's baby-boomer generation, many of whom had reached young adulthood when *Heibon Punch* was first released. There is merit to such claims. In 1965, *Heibon Punch* polled its readers and found that 75.6 per cent were 20 years of age or older, 56.4 per cent were 22 or older, and 9.2 per cent were 30 or older. It was primarily read by Japanese "youth" and young working professionals. But the focus on its large youth readership obscures the equally important fact that its readership was overwhelmingly male. In-house surveys in late 1965 showed that male readers represented at least 97 per cent of *Heibon Punch*'s audience and 98 per cent of readers of its companion publication, *Heibon Punch Deluxe*.²⁶ *Heibon Punch* was much more than a youth magazine—it is better thought of as Japan's first popular men's magazine.

Strikingly, the influence of *Playboy* is palpable across *Heibon Punch*. Shimizu mentioned that *Heibon Punch*'s owl insignia, "Mr. Winkle," was inspired by the iconic *Playboy* rabbit logo and encapsulated the "night owl" lifestyle that Shimizu sought to present.²⁷ The inaugural issue of *Heibon*

23. Heibon Shuppan Kabushikigaisha, *Dokusha to tomoni 20-nen: Heibon Shuppan Kabushikigaisha shōshi* (Heibon Shuppan, 1965), p. 53.

24. Shiozawa, *Heibon Punch no jidai*, p. 333.

25. See Etō Fumio, *Miru zasshi suru zasshi* (Heibon Shuppan, 1966).

26. See surveys for *Heibon Punch*, "December 1965," and *Heibon Punch Deluxe*, "November 1965," published in *ibid.* These were in-house data based on surveys run by Magazine House.

27. Shimizu Tatsuo, "Mister Winkle tanjōki," in *ibid.*, pp. 178, 181.

Punch further paid homage to *Playboy* by featuring an “inside peek” editorial about Hefner’s Playboy Clubs.²⁸ *Heibon Punch* even used center-folds of blond women. Shimizu, in fact, saw blond women as so central to his magazine that he purchased nude pictures of white, blond European women from noted cultural photographer Ōtake Shōji and printed clothed pin-ups of blond American women.²⁹ He emphasized the striking beauty of *Playboy*’s blond secretaries in his official account of his trip to Chicago, so it is unsurprising that he initially viewed the blond “girl-next-door” image as a central feature of his magazine.

Heibon Punch was a trailblazing success. Audited publishing records note that its circulation hovered somewhere slightly shy of 500,000 copies in 1964 and that by 1966 sales climbed to 575,800, making it not only a wildly popular men’s magazine but also as popular as most general-interest magazines in Japan.³⁰ So successful was *Heibon Punch* that other publishers jumped on the men’s publishing bandwagon. *Hōseki* (Treasure) and *F6Seibun* (*F6Seven*) were released in 1965, followed by *Weekly Playboy* (1966), *Weekly manga akushon* (Weekly manga action, 1967), *Biggu komikku* (Big comic, 1968), and *Shūkan posuto* (Weekly post, 1969). At the same time, general-interest weekly magazines like *Shūkan gendai* (Weekly modern) began to masculinize their content to compete for the growing male readership. Under editorial director Makino Takerō, *Shūkan gendai* targeted salarymen by refocusing its content on three themes similar to those promoted by *Heibon Punch*: sex, money, and business success.³¹

From this point, men’s general interest publications flourished. In a 1970 industry report for Japanese advertisers, the Japan Magazine Publishers Association and the Japan Magazine Advertising Association drew attention to the new craze for men’s publishing. The report labeled 12 major

28. “Pureibōi kurabu o Tōkyō ni tsukurō to iu keikaku: banīgāru to suitchi suru nyūyōku o nozoite miyō,” *Heibon Punch*, May 11, 1964, pp. 30–33.

29. Shiozawa, *Heibon Punch no jidai*, p. 111.

30. Publishing statistics vary widely in Japan. Inconsistencies across independent reports are compounded by the fact that Japanese companies often report the number of copies printed (and shipped to distributors) as total sales, failing to account for the number of magazines returned. Distributors can return any unsold magazines for a refund. In the case of *Heibon Punch*, this has led researchers to conclude (erroneously) that *Heibon Punch* sold upward of a million copies by 1966. This, however, was the number printed, not sold. For independently verified publishing data on various Japanese weekly magazines in the postwar era, see Wakui Shōji, Handō Kazutoshi, and Amakasu Akira, “Zadankai: shūkanshi yo, doko e iku,” *Tsukuru*, May 1982, pp. 40–41. Amakasu Akira, notably, was a Magazine House star editor, who had even served as an editor-in-chief of *Heibon Punch*. For the most accurate publishing data on magazines and newspapers, see the Audit Bureau of Circulations Japan (<http://www.jabc.or.jp/>).

31. Kōdansha, *Monogatari Kōdansha no 100-nen*, Vol. 4 (Kōdansha, 2010), pp. 151–52.

general-interest weekly magazines as “men’s general-interest magazines” (*dansei sōgō zasshi*) for the first time, noting that the readership of these older weekly magazines now averaged 88 per cent male.³² Many new magazines appearing in the 1960s even began to subhead their mastheads noting that they were magazines for men. *Shūkan posuto*, for example, labeled itself “The Opinion Weekly for Men.” These two shifts in the publishing landscape of 1960s Japan—the emergence of popular, mass-marketed men’s magazines and the masculinization of many general-interest weeklies—signaled the arrival of the age of men’s magazines.

Shūeisha and the Origins of Weekly Playboy

This was the backdrop against which Shūeisha decided to create *Weekly Playboy*, one of Japan’s best-selling magazines of all time. Shūeisha leaders believed that *Heibon Punch* had captured the zeitgeist of the age, particularly among young adult men. They aimed to create a magazine that could “embody the vigor of youth identity” and “compete with *Heibon Punch*.” It was in the “playboy” name that they found their answer. For Shūeisha, *Playboy* was “the progenitor of the young men’s magazine,” and its corporate history acknowledges that incorporating “playboy” into the magazine was a way “to share in [*Playboy*’s] mission of appealing to young men.”³³ The “playboy” name was part and parcel of Shūeisha’s efforts to enter the men’s magazine market and compete with *Heibon Punch*.

Shūeisha even hoped that Playboy Enterprises would help develop its new magazine. In the spring of 1966 (likely early May), Ohga Tetsuo, president of Shūeisha’s parent company, Shōgakukan, visited Playboy Enterprises, apparently on behalf of Shūeisha’s managing director Hongō Yasuo. During his meeting, Ohga stated that Shūeisha intended to release a weekly magazine in Japan bearing the “playboy” name. He suggested that the two companies collaborate in its production and even share content. By having its most important executive offer the proposal, Shūeisha was indicating the seriousness with which it viewed the proposed partnership. The proposal also illustrates that Shūeisha leaders had a very clear picture in their minds about what they were trying to accomplish. They grasped the advantage in bringing over the hottest U.S. men’s magazine to compete aggressively against *Heibon Punch*. At the same time, this highlights that

32. The magazines they identified included *Shūkan asahi*, *Sandē mainichi*, *Shūkan asahi geinō*, *Shūkan ekonomisuto*, *Shūkan yomiuri*, *Shūkan shinchō*, *Shūkan taishū*, *Shūkan bunshun*, *Asahi jōnaru*, *Shūkan gendai*, and *Shūkan posuto*. The Japan Magazine Publishers Association in effect discarded its old “general interest” label and began to consider them men’s magazines. Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai and Nihon Zasshi Kōkokukai, *Zasshi sōgō chōsa: dansei shūkanshi* (Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai, 1970), pp. 7, 11.

33. Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, pp. 98–99.

Shūeisha understood that Hefner's high-brow monthly format would not be as successful financially as the weekly format. It was the prize of the weekly magazine market, not the monthly one, that Shūeisha sought to capture.

Shūeisha prepared for Ohga's visit to Chicago by securing the rights to a "playboy" magazine trademark in Japan, one that had been filed eight years earlier, in 1958. The original owner of this trademark was an enterprising publisher named Masunaga Zenkichi, who is often described in books about Japanese publishing as a man of great prescience and business sense.³⁴ Masunaga, in fact, had made an impact on the publishing world of early postwar Japan by printing the low-brow pulp pornographic magazines dubbed *kasutori*. His most famous *kasutori* magazine, *Fūfu seikatsu* (Married life), ran from 1949 to 1956 and had a peak printing run of 350,000 copies.³⁵ Even after the decline of *Fūfu seikatsu* and *kasutori* print culture, Masunaga never lost sight of the profitability of erotica. On August 23, 1958, he registered with the Japan Patent Office the "playboy" (*pureibōi*) name for magazine titles (then category 66) in *katakana* script. The Japan Patent Office approved it less than 18 months later, on January 14, 1960.³⁶ There are two possible reasons why Masunaga registered the trademark. On the one hand, it is highly probable that he sought to capitalize on the *Playboy* brand and to make a Japanese imitation of Hefner's magazine. On the other hand, it is also possible that he saw the trademark as an investment and hoped that another publisher, perhaps even Playboy Enterprises, might purchase it from him. In the end, Masunaga chose the latter path. He sold the *katakana* "playboy" trademark to Shūeisha. Masunaga's daughter, Kasuya Hisako, vividly remembers her father returning home after a late night out drinking, bragging of selling the "playboy" trademark for ¥3 million, a small fortune at the time.³⁷ The Japan Patent Office registered the transfer of the trademark to Shūeisha on April 30, 1966.³⁸ Ohga's visit to Chicago most likely occurred shortly after making the agreement to purchase Masunaga's trademark.³⁹ (See Figure 1.)

34. For Masunaga's life and business ventures, see Ōwa Morito, *Kōsetsu shuppankai* (Nihon Editā Sukūru Shuppanbu, 1977), pp. 139–45; and "Gendai no shuppanjin #3, sugureta ongaku kanshōka," in Matsumoto Noboru, ed., *Gendai no shuppanjin gojūninshū* (Shuppan Nyūsussha, 1956).

35. For these figures, see Nakaki Tsutomu, "'Fūfu seikatsu' toiu zasshi ga atta," *Will*, June 2010, p. 154.

36. "*Pureibōi*" (category 26: magazine title), August 23, 1958. Validated on January 14, 1960. Trademark 546606. The original application is also referred to in File S41-024985, Japan Patent Office (hereafter JPO).

37. Kasuya Hisako surmised that her father intended to make a *Playboy* knockoff but that unstable finances in the late 1950s kept him from doing so before he finally sold the trademark. Kasuya Hisako, interview with authors, August 15, 2016.

38. See the files associated with trademark 546606, File S41-024985, JPO.

39. The Shūeisha company history notes that it had the "playboy" trademark in advance of visiting Playboy Enterprises, and that Hefner's company threatened Shūeisha with legal

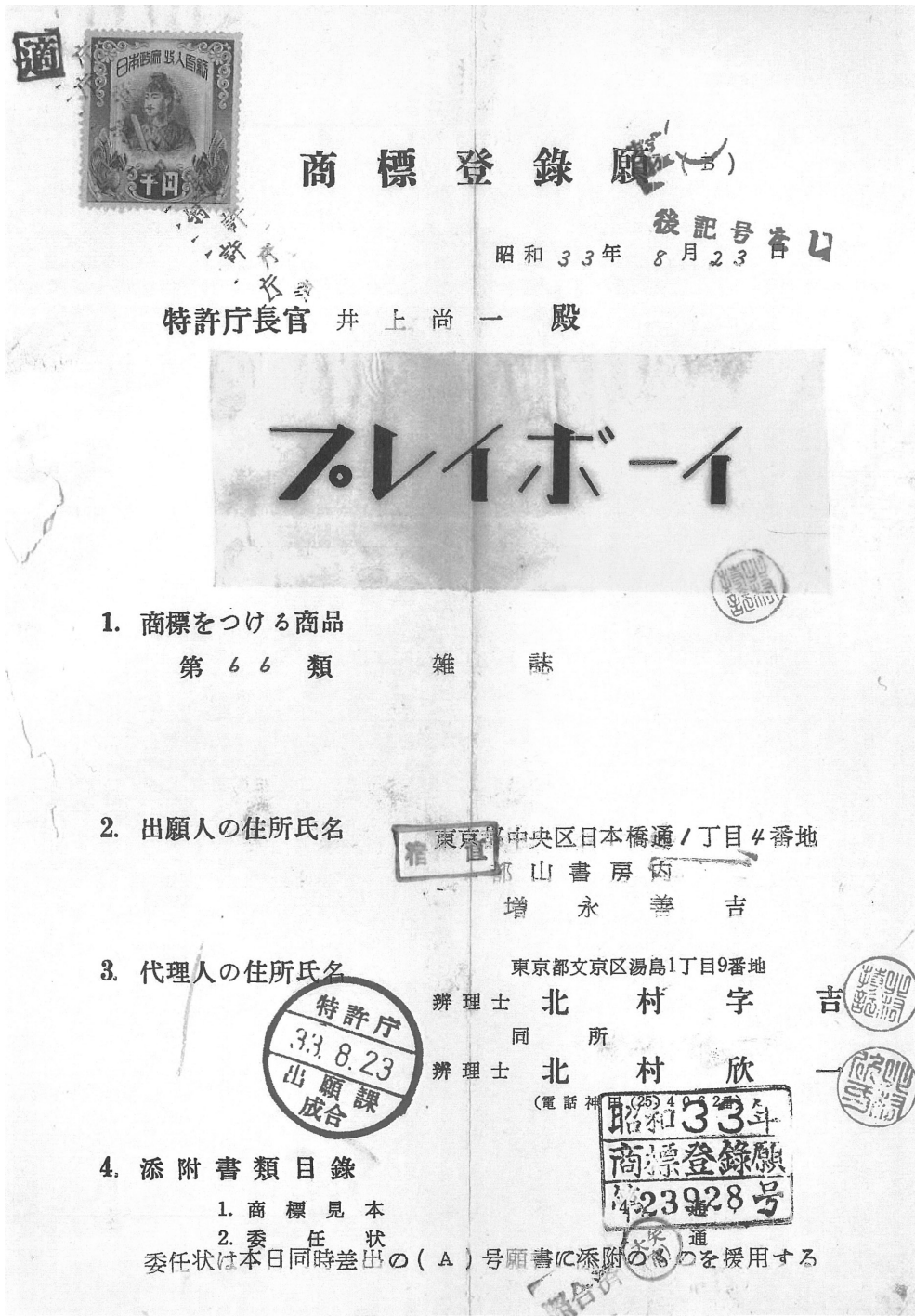


Figure 1. Masunaga's "playboy" trademark application, received August 23, 1958. Courtesy of the Japan Patent Office.

Ohga, however, faced a hostile reception in Chicago. Lee Boaz Hall, who ran the international publishing division at Playboy in the late 1970s, wrote of Ohga's encounter with an unnamed Playboy executive in his book on international magazine licensing, published in 1983. "It can be risky," he wrote, "for an American publisher not to treat licensing inquiries with respect and courtesy." Hall noted that Ohga inquired about licensing *Playboy* but "was bluntly informed by a Playboy executive that [Playboy Enterprises] neither knew anything about Japanese publishing nor cared to find out."⁴⁰ Hall admitted that at this point *Playboy* was still a "provincial American publication" and argued that this encounter compromised Playboy Enterprises' negotiating position when it decided to produce a Japanese-language edition of the flagship magazine. Once the company saw benefit to entering the Japanese marketplace in the 1970s, he argued, executives had little choice but to crawl back to the man they had so bluntly dismissed.

In the mid-1960s, Playboy Enterprises was still fiercely protective of its flagship magazine. Former Playboy Enterprises senior vice president Robert Gutwillig, who in the early 1970s led negotiations with Shūeisha to collaborate on a Japanese edition of *Playboy*, explained that management was "very resistant to internationalizing the magazine." He emphasized that Hefner's staff did not want publishing houses abroad either to understand how *Playboy* worked or to try to copy its editorial system. "They were afraid," recalled Gutwillig, "that the jewels were to be stolen and that everything would be bastardized, and that these people in other countries couldn't possibly understand how it worked in Chicago."⁴¹ Taking the magazine to foreign markets was thus something that came about over time, after much cajoling. Granted, Hefner was interested in expanding the Playboy empire abroad, but early efforts in the 1960s largely centered on the popular Playboy Clubs. Hefner sent Victor Lownes III to London in December 1963 to lay the groundwork for the first British Playboy Club, which opened its doors in London in July 1966. Owing to their gambling licenses, the Playboy Clubs became by the early 1970s one of the more lucrative aspects of the Playboy business.⁴² Thus the initial stage of international expansion focused more on selling the Playboy image through clubs, merchandise, and leisure entertainment. This no doubt was an easier sell to Hefner than a partnership with a foreign publisher that might publish an inferior magazine or leverage its position to learn *Playboy's* formula for success.

action if it released a magazine bearing the "playboy" name. Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, p. 99.

40. Hall, *International Magazine and Book Licensing*, p. 13.

41. Robert Gutwillig interview, October 19, 2017.

42. Robert Gutwillig interview, September 30, 2017.

Ohga's cool reception may also have been due in small part to the low regard Playboy Enterprises held for Japan. If anything, the company was conspicuous in how *little* it prepared to enter the Japanese market. Granted, in 1964 Playboy's first Japanese lawyers appear to have filed a complaint at the Japan Patent Office about Masunaga's *katakana* "playboy" trademark; and the company did register its first trademark in December 1965. But these moves were piecemeal in nature and do not suggest any overarching strategy for expansion. This is understandable. Japan in the mid-1960s may have been in the midst of an economic "miracle," but a general disdain for the Japanese marketplace still abounded. The "Made in Japan" label was seen, both in Japan and abroad, as synonymous with inexpensive, unreliable, and poorly crafted goods.⁴³ It was not a marker that inspired confidence and glamor.

Ohga's treatment by Playboy Enterprises, however, did not stop Shūeisha from publishing its new men's magazine. From early May 1966, Shūeisha president Suyama Iwao, who worked under Ohga, set in motion a concerted effort at trademark filings in preparation for the new "playboy" magazine. Japan Patent Office records show that on May 6, 1966, Suyama gave legal permission to his lawyer, Doi Hitoshi, to submit trademark applications on Shūeisha's behalf.⁴⁴ The following day, Doi registered magazine titles with the Japan Patent Office, beginning with "playboy" in English as well as "weekly playboy" in Japanese (*shūkan pureibōi*).⁴⁵ On October 8, Doi followed up by registering "playboy" in *katakana* in the font and style that would ultimately be used in *Weekly Playboy*.⁴⁶ This constituted the beginning of a broader effort by Shūeisha to submit as many "playboy" trademark applications as it could. It is uncertain how many total trademarks were registered, as the Japan Patent Office archive does not keep all expired patent or trademark applications. Nevertheless, extant sources show that Shūeisha applied for a wide range of magazine titles such as "playboy deluxe," "deluxe playboy," "playboy series," "playboy books," "boy play playboy," "playboy club," "star playboy," "playboy custom," "playboy graph," "manga playboy," "playboy comics," and "auto playboy." Most of these had duplicates and were registered in combinations of English and Japanese lettering,

43. Even Japanese businessmen felt that "Made in Japan" goods in 1967 were not as meticulously made as their U.S. and European competitors. See Akira Nagashima, "A Comparative 'Made In' Product Image Survey Among Japanese Businessmen," *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1977), pp. 98–99.

44. The letter appointing Doi as representative can be found in File S41-024985, JPO.

45. See trademark 1221860, Files S41-024985 and S41-024984, JPO. For the *Shūkan Pureibōi* trademark, see trademark 1221861, File S41-024985, JPO.

46. Trademark 1468748, File S41-058941, JPO. This second registry of a *katakana* trademark was likely an attempt to conform the trademark to the house style. This trademark was not approved until June 30, 1981.

in various font sizes and styles.⁴⁷ Former Playboy senior vice president of international publishing Lee Boaz Hall noted that this tactic of trademark registrations extended even to “books, records, and other kinds of communications media.”⁴⁸

On November 15, 1966, Shūeisha released the inaugural issue of *Weekly Playboy*. The title echoed what Shūeisha referred to as a shared mission with Hefner’s more famous magazine. That this may have been more than a mere shared mission was reflected in the *Weekly Playboy* inaugural issue’s focus on Marilyn Monroe. Just as the first edition of Hefner’s *Playboy* featured a nude centerfold of Monroe, the first edition of Shūeisha’s *Weekly Playboy* included a vivid description of Monroe’s sex appeal as well as an editorial hinting that she may have received a phone call from Robert Kennedy shortly before her death.

The similarities did not stop with either the name or the allusion to Marilyn Monroe. Early editions of *Weekly Playboy* also included a “Playboy Philosophy” (*pureibōi tetsugaku*) column written by popular decadent writer and later notorious politician, novelist, and right-wing provocateur Ishihara Shintarō. This column was an obvious reference to Hefner’s “The Playboy Philosophy,” a series of editorials that ran from 1962 to 1965 to expound on *Playboy*’s worldview.⁴⁹ Another conspicuous resemblance came with *Weekly Playboy*’s popular “Playboy Life Advice” (*pureibōi jinsei sōdan*) column that was first written by famous novelist Shibata Renzaburō, or Shibaren-*sensei*, as he was affectionately called. As former *Weekly Playboy* editor-in-chief Shimaji Katsuhiko noted, the magazine “took a hint from the American *Playboy*’s popular column ‘The Playboy Advisor,’ and serialized Shibaren-*sensei*’s life advice [column].”⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Japanese weekly reproduced *Playboy*’s iconic terminology, from “playmate” to “playgirl,” and during its first few years used American women such as Bettina Brenna as centerfold models, dubbing these women “weekly playmates.” Shūeisha’s magazines even included advertisements that made use of *Playboy*’s iconic rabbit logo.⁵¹

47. See, for instance, the following trademarks at the JPO: 1221862, 1494547, 1494546, 1510776, 1510777, 1517002, 1468747, 1482614, 1376823, 1494544, 1517003, and 1494549.

48. Hall, *International Magazine and Book Licensing*, p. 13.

49. Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, p. 100. Ishihara’s first columns appear in *Shūkan pureibōi*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 15, 1966), and *Shūkan pureibōi*, Vol. 3, No. 17 (April 30, 1968).

50. Shimaji Katsuhiko, “Maegaki,” in Shūkan Pureibōi Henshūbu, ed., *Pureibōi no jinsei sōdan: 1966–2006: 40th Anniversary Lifestyle Advice* (Shūeisha, 2006), p. 2. The column later featured well-known authors such as Endō Shūsaku, Nosaka Akiyuki, and Okamoto Tarō. Nosaka started publishing books in Japan about the *Playboy* lifestyle in the early 1960s and wrote for both *Heibon Punch* and *Weekly Playboy*.

51. Incidentally, Bettina Brenna would appear in Hefner’s *Playboy* in September 1968 and again with Woody Allen in February 1969, only after she had appeared in *Weekly Play-*

This is not to state that *Weekly Playboy* was a carbon copy of its U.S. counterpart. Far from it. Even a quick glance at the layout, the smaller size, the choices of articles and topics covered, the lower quality of production, and the focus on the weekly market highlights the fact that *Weekly Playboy*'s editorial staff sought to create a different kind of magazine. Nonetheless, the strong similarities in tone, structure, and content suggest that Shūeisha borrowed from Hefner's iconic magazine to appeal to the desires of young men in Japan's vibrant middle class. The similarities also implied a connection between *Playboy* and *Weekly Playboy*, and Shūeisha no doubt benefited from this ambiguity.

The Conflict over the "Playboy" Name

It was at this point that the conflict between Playboy Enterprises and Shūeisha deepened. Lawyers for Playboy Enterprises filed a motion at the Japan Patent Office to nullify the validity of Shūeisha's use of the "playboy" name. To this end, Playboy Enterprises even switched legal counsel, hiring a seven-member team of prominent trademark lawyers led by Nakamura Junnosuke, one of Japan's most formidable intellectual property rights attorneys. Nakamura's team battled for control over the "playboy" name in the Japan Patent Office administrative court, and the case went to the Tokyo High Court. Yet this legal challenge ultimately strengthened Shūeisha's claim over the "playboy" trademarks.

There are only a few extant public documents that outline the conflict. The Japan Patent Office retains a record of a summons, dated January 17, 1970, for Nakamura to conduct preliminary oral arguments on behalf of Playboy Enterprises.⁵² The Japan Patent Office also has in its archives the original final ruling drafted by its three presiding judges, Niki Tatsuya, Watanabe Kiyohide, and Tobiki Masao.⁵³ It is this official ruling, in particular, that allows us to paint a rough narrative of the proceedings.

The summons for oral arguments contained a bombshell. The Japan Patent Office judges decided to hear the preliminary claims against the original *katakana* "pureibōi" trademark (4590) and listed the *katakana* trademark and the English "playboy" trademark (6838) as "conjoined cases." In doing so, they tied the trademark registered by Masunaga Zenkichi in 1958 to the English one filed by Shūeisha in 1966. The Japan Patent Office judges decided only to hear the case against the 1958 trademark, because both service marks were held by Shūeisha and because their difference was only in syllabic rendering. It is unclear why the judges made this decision. Although

boy. She is perhaps the only case of a model appearing in both *Playboy* and *Weekly Playboy*, since Shūeisha switched to Japanese models in the late 1960s.

52. See the paperwork associated with trademark 1221860, File S41-024985, JPO.

53. See "Shōwa 39-nen shinpan dai 4590 gō shinketsu," File T11.27-Y(66).25, JPO.

one could attribute the decision to a blatant attempt to protect Japanese businesses, the more likely reason of tying the cases together is that the judges sought to avoid creating a linguistic precedent in which different companies could trademark the same brand name in different syllabaries. Making matters more difficult for Playboy Enterprises, its legal representatives appear to have been unaware that Shūeisha had not originally filed the 1958 trademark and had only secured ownership of it in April 1966.⁵⁴ Had those lawyers known about Masunaga's original ownership of the trademark and of his transfer of its rights to Shūeisha in 1966, they may have made a stronger case for invalidating Shūeisha's "playboy" trademarks. Playboy Enterprises was thus forced into a disadvantageous position. Not knowing about the original Masunaga trademark had lasting consequences that impinged on the company's ability to argue the case.

Playboy's legal team made a two-pronged argument to nullify Shūeisha's trademark. First, they pointed to the overwhelming global notoriety of the flagship *Playboy* magazine and of the network of resort hotels, clubs, and the 85 types of products Playboy Enterprises sold, from personal accessories and printed goods to stationery, clothing, dishes, and smoking products. Moreover, they contended that *Playboy* had penetrated the Japanese publishing market by the mid-1950s and that Japanese general vendors had imported it since 1956. The Playboy lawyers even highlighted circulation figures, noting that in 1959, *Playboy's* circulation in Japan was 54,000 copies (comprising mail-order subscriptions, newsstand sales, and import circulation).⁵⁵ The very fact that there were direct subscriptions in Japan led Playboy's legal team to contend that the magazine "had gained notoriety even within Japan." In fact, they argued *Playboy* was so popular that its meteoric rise had been widely analyzed and introduced in newspapers, weekly magazines, and television. Second, the Playboy legal team suggested that Shūeisha was engaged in an underhanded attempt to make its weekly magazine appear to be a Japanese version of *Playboy* or to create

54. We are relying here on interviews and email exchanges with former executives and legal counsel for Playboy Enterprises. Matsuo Kazuko, a Japanese attorney who worked for Playboy Enterprises on the original case, told us that she "has absolutely no clue who [Masunaga Zenkichi] is." Email correspondence with authors, August 8, 2016. Former Playboy Enterprises legal counsel Howard Shapiro, who helped draft the regularly renegotiated Shūeisha contracts, also noted his ignorance that anyone aside from Shūeisha had ever held the trademark. Howard Shapiro, interview with authors, October 29, 2016. Playboy's long-time executive vice president Richard Rosenzweig and former international publishing executive Haresh Shah were also unaware of the original trademark.

55. It appears that Playboy Enterprises provided the data for total foreign subscriptions and sales (excluding military and civilian personnel overseas), not simply those in Japan. Based on Playboy's 1959 audited publisher's statement, for circulation of the March 1959 issue, the combined sale of overseas foreign and miscellaneous purchases was 56,243. See Audit Bureau of Circulations Japan, "Playboy's Data: For the Period Ending June 30, 1959."

the mistaken impression that Shūeisha had some relationship with Playboy Enterprises. Thus, they argued that the service mark—specifically the one written in *katakana*—should be deemed invalid in accordance with Japan's old trademark law.⁵⁶

Conversely, Shūeisha's attorney, Doi Hitoshi, cast doubt on the evidence provided against his client and highlighted the overall weakness of the claimant's case. Doi argued that *Playboy* had not gained notoriety in Japan, at least by 1958. He contended that by the time of the original trademark application in August 1958, only a grand total of 10,360 *Playboy* magazines had been sold in Japan. This came out to an "extremely insignificant" average monthly circulation of 545 magazines. Doi also urged the judges to dismiss the other evidence supplied by Playboy Enterprises lawyers, as it came from the period after 1958 and thus had no relevance to the case.⁵⁷

On August 3, 1971, Japan Patent Office judges Niki, Watanabe, and Tobiki decided in favor of Shūeisha. Since *Playboy* had only been imported into Japan from 1956, the judges found no reason to believe that it had drawn enough attention or notoriety to invalidate the Shūeisha trademark. "In this short time period," the decision noted, "with this level of circulation and advertising, we cannot accept that the claimant's trademark was widely recognized either by general dealers or by users and that it had gained their trust. We cannot accept that it had become a well-known or prominent trademark." The Japan Patent Office judges thus decided that the existing Japanese trademark was to remain valid.⁵⁸

This ruling reflected a general ignorance about Masunaga's original trademark application. Owing to his experiences with *kasutori* publishing and importing foreign merchandise, it is reasonable to assume that Masunaga understood the explosive potential of *Playboy* when he filed the initial trademark application in 1958. More pointedly, it is clear that by the time Shūeisha acquired the Masunaga trademark in 1966 and began expanding its own portfolio, *Playboy* was already well known within the Japanese publishing world. This was four years after the Japan Productivity Center's Magazine Research Group visited Playboy Enterprises in Chicago, and three years after its findings had been published and disseminated throughout the publishing world. Magazine House vice president Shimizu noted in 1963 that "Japan's television and weekly magazines are extensively covering discussions of *Playboy*."⁵⁹ The influence of the U.S. magazine had become so profound by 1965 that author and literary critic Maruya Saiichi confidently

56. "Shōwa 39-nen shinpan dai 4590 gō shinketsu," pp. 27–28.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 28. Other evidence Shūeisha presented listed only 4,440 *Playboy* magazines having been sold in Japan.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29. This ruling meant the complaint against the 1966 English trademark would be rejected as well.

59. Shimizu, "Kaigai no zasshisha o tazunete," p. 83.

claimed in the *Yomiuri shinbun* that “all Japanese men’s magazines are influenced by” *Playboy*’s use of nude centerfolds.⁶⁰ Had the Playboy Enterprises legal team learned of the original trademark and emphasized (1) that Masunaga’s position as a *kasutori* distributor and importer allowed him to see *Playboy*’s potential well before its importation into Japan had become widespread, and (2) that it was transferred to Shūeisha only after *Playboy* had become a unique and powerful global brand (and that the trademark’s purchase coincided with Ohga’s visit to the Chicago headquarters), it is possible that the court case would have had a very different outcome.⁶¹ Moreover, since most subsequent “playboy” trademarks in Japan were tethered to the original Masunaga service mark, Playboy’s victory in the case would almost certainly have invalidated *de jure* all the other trademarks for which Shūeisha applied.

Be that as it may, a general protectionist sentiment common in Japan at the time meant that foreign firms rarely won trademark-infringement cases. Although nothing has been written about the specifics of the Playboy-Shūeisha case and its ruling, this was perhaps one of the earliest trademark disputes in Japan whose chief sticking point was syllabary: Japanese *katakana* versus English roman letters. Such disputes, however, became increasingly common and contentious thereafter, and increasing foreign pressure led Japan to ratify the Nice Agreement in 1990.⁶² Under the Nice Agreement, Japan adhered to an international trademark and patent system, making Japanese companies less able to infringe on foreign trademarks.

Playboy Enterprises did not give up after this defeat in the Japan Patent Office courts. It appealed the ruling to the Tokyo High Court, where the case dragged on until April 10, 1973. Contrary to the boasts in its company history, Shūeisha did not prevail in the Tokyo High Court.⁶³ Playboy Enterprises simply gave up: its lawyer Matsuo Kazuko submitted a request to the courthouse and paid the required fees to rescind the appeal.⁶⁴ The Playboy Enterprises legal team subsequently requested on June 13, 1983, that the

60. Maruya Saiichi, “Yume miru shinri o kakudai,” *Yomiuri shinbun*, September 18, 1965.

61. Alternatively, had they known about Masunaga, Playboy’s lawyers might have questioned his intentions in registering the trademark. Had the Playboy lawyers secured an affidavit from Masunaga’s family (he died in 1967) and presented it as evidence, it is possible the judges would not have ruled in favor of Shūeisha. Masunaga’s intention in registering the trademark was the key, unasked question in the court proceedings.

62. Hiroko Onishi, *Well-Known Trade Marks: A Comparative Study of Japan and the EU* (Routledge, 2015), p. 139.

63. Shūeisha’s company history erroneously notes, “Our case, after starting in the Tokyo District Court, wound up in the Tokyo High Court, where we won.” See Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, pp. 98–99.

64. The document, “Shōwa 47-nen (gyō ke) minji-gyōsei dai issuin jikenbo,” was received by postal mail from the Tokyo High Court.

Tokyo High Court delete from its archives all documents related to the legal dispute. Thus, no documentation remains to corroborate what happened after the dispute left the Japan Patent Office administrative court. Records obtained from a request-for-information application only reveal the relevant dates and fees paid.

Cooperation amid Conflict

Playboy Enterprises' decision to end the legal dispute no doubt stemmed from a problem of opportunity cost. By the early 1970s, Hefner had become convinced of the potential profitability of establishing foreign editions of *Playboy*. He began with the release of German, Italian, and French editions in 1972 and 1973, and followed up with releases in numerous other languages. According to market researcher Susan Gunelius, this emphasis on global expansion was due in part to a 20 per cent drop in U.S. circulation figures, from a peak circulation of 7.2 million in 1972 to 5.8 million in 1975.⁶⁵ This drop in sales posed a major revenue problem because Playboy Enterprises suffered from a drug scandal and corporate mismanagement in the early 1970s and was hemorrhaging money from poor investments.⁶⁶ Hefner thus looked to foreign editions of *Playboy* to build the brand abroad and find new sources of revenue.

In this context, Playboy Enterprises turned a more amicable set of eyes toward Japan. Despite their earlier dismissive attitude, by the 1970s executives recognized that Japan offered great potential for a magazine partnership owing to its highly literate population, thriving middle class, and flourishing publishing industry. But every year Playboy Enterprises fought Shūeisha in court constituted yet another year of lost potential profits. Furthermore, expanding the flagship magazine into the Japanese market was doubly important as part of a strategy of pairing magazine sales with Playboy Clubs and merchandise. One company executive referred to this strategy as "blitzing Japan with Playboy."⁶⁷ Hefner was thus stuck with an unenviable choice: offer to purchase the trademark or throw in the towel and negotiate a licensing agreement for a Japanese edition of *Playboy*. Yet owing to the dramatic success of *Weekly Playboy*, Shūeisha had little incen-

65. Susan Gunelius, *Building Brand Value the Playboy Way* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 72. Playboy Enterprises' annual report from 1975, however, noted that *Playboy's* circulation averaged closer to 5.97 million. See *Playboy 1975 Annual Report* (Playboy Enterprises, Inc., 1975).

66. Thomas Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America* (Times Books, 1978), pp. 248–85. See also Bryce Nelson, "Playboy Faces Naked Truth on Revenues," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1975.

67. Anthony Lukas, "The 'Alternative Life-Style' of Playboys and Playmates," *The New York Times*, June 11, 1972. The opening of Playboy Clubs coincided with the release of *Playboy Japan* in 1975.

tive to sell its “playboy” trademarks. Hefner thus was drawn into licensing negotiations well before his company withdrew its lawsuit from the Tokyo High Court.

Despite beginning negotiations from a position of strength, Shūeisha’s company history notes that its licensing negotiations were “hard fought.” To Shūeisha, the difficulties were caused by differing visions for the product and its overall aesthetic. Shūeisha had a deeper understanding of the publishing market in Japan and wanted to retain control over the layout, the binding (to open from left to right), and the direction of the text (top-down, not left to right). Shūeisha further noted that Playboy Enterprises opposed each of these modifications, as it did not conform to the general *Playboy* style. In fact, Hugh Hefner, the so-called “magazine demon,” held an unyielding attitude toward even minor layout and editorial issues—this no doubt played a critical role in *Playboy*’s global success, but to Shūeisha it constituted a potential headache. Shūeisha further claimed that Playboy Enterprises was adamant on placing, at Shūeisha’s expense, an editorial inspector who would have the final say over content. The Japanese side viewed this as simply “out of the question.”⁶⁸

Playboy executives found the negotiations equally slow. Robert Gutwillig, who was charged with the responsibility for starting international editions of *Playboy*, emphasized that Shūeisha at first dragged its feet in the negotiations. This, he surmised, was partly due to a lingering resentment over “being treated badly by their likes when they visited Chicago. They wanted the whole thing to go away.” More important, Gutwillig argued that Shūeisha’s publishing department and executives were divided over whether to cooperate with Playboy Enterprises. “There were two groups inside Shūeisha,” he recalled. “One that wanted us to just go away—and the other, which saw the advantages of being the publisher of the international *Playboy*.”⁶⁹ Initially, the opposition held sway, showing great “hostility” toward Gutwillig and continually refusing to meet. Thawing these frosty relations took great patience and effort, with Gutwillig traveling to Japan “six or eight times a year” to discuss the possibility of a licensing partnership. During one such meeting at an upper-floor suite in the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, the natural world intervened in the negotiations. An earthquake struck. “The room was swaying back and forth,” Gutwillig said. “The woman interpreter screamed and took a dive under some furniture. This literally broke the log jam. Everyone collapsed in laughter, the Japanese, myself, and Mr. [Raymond] Falk. Things were much easier after that.”

68. See Shashi Hensanhitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, pp. 129–30; and Hall, *International Magazine and Book Licensing*, pp. 64–65.

69. Robert Gutwillig interviews, September 28 and September 30, 2017.

Gutwillig would later joke with Hefner that the earthquake had saved his magazine in Japan.⁷⁰

The earthquake, nonetheless, only signaled the beginning of a drawn-out process. Gutwillig's protégé, Lee Boaz Hall, who was hired in 1972 to help establish *Playboy's* international editions, also complained of structural issues that prolonged the talks. He protested that the Japanese interlocutors were prone to change almost daily so that they could gain experience doing business and conducting negotiations with their U.S. counterparts. Hall also grumbled about the time-consuming nature of the "ringi system" (*ringi seido*) in Japanese corporate culture, wherein formal approval of proposals and addendums are made with great involvement by employees at all levels. Once the arrangements were finalized, a copy of the licensing agreement for the Japanese edition of *Playboy* was sent to the Bank of Japan for official approval.⁷¹

The agreement was celebrated in grand fashion. On March 4, 1975, Shūeisha and Playboy Enterprises held a lavish license-signing ceremony at the Imperial Hotel, attended by over one thousand people. Playboy Enterprises flew in four Playboy Bunnies, including a 20-year-old playmate, Nancy Cameron.⁷² Hall, who by then had replaced Gutwillig as head of Playboy's international licensing, saw the event as "the most impressive" of his long career. Representatives from both companies—vice president Richard M. Koff for Playboy Enterprises and president Suyama Iwao for Shūeisha—signed the agreement on a "green-baize table complete with flags of both nations."⁷³ From there, the celebrations became even more resplendent.

[We] then trooped out into Tokyo's largest ballroom, wearing large paper carnations to which were attached our names and titles. There, we stood in a reception line as 1,000 members of Japan's publishing community filed by, the president of each company making a slight bow to his near-equals,

70. Ibid. Raymond Falk was Playboy's on-the-ground consultant in Japan. His close relations with top Shūeisha employees like Wakana Tadashi helped Gutwillig broker the deal.

71. A copy of the contract is no longer held in the Bank of Japan archives. The Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law required that notifications of licensing agreements be sent to the Bank of Japan's Foreign Affairs Bureau. The Bank of Japan would then notify other relevant ministries of the agreement. According to Lee Boaz Hall, this was not done only by Japan. Central banks of many countries registered license agreements before they permitted the transfer abroad of royalty payments. See Roger D. Taylor, C. Larry O'Rourke, and Chris Marchese, "A Comparison of International Intellectual Property Licensing Guidelines in the United States and Japan," *Pacific Basin Law Journal*, Vol. 9, Iss. 1–2 (1991), pp. 122–23; and Hall, *International Magazine and Book Licensing*, pp. 38 and 68.

72. "Honmono banī jōriku," *Yūkan Fuji* (Tokyo), March 6, 1975.

73. Koff's role as signatory is surprising because he had no role in the negotiations. Robert Gutwillig interview, September 28, 2017.

the most junior member, bringing up the rear, scraping the floor with his head. As the reception line broke up, spotlights in the ballroom went on, illuminating a nine-foot-high statue of the Playboy Rabbit Head, carved in ice and revolving slowly in the center of the room.⁷⁴

With this, Shūeisha and Playboy Enterprises had become partners for the Japanese edition of *Playboy*. The first issue went on sale in May 1975.

Although both sides benefited from the partnership, this outcome was an unconditional victory for Shūeisha. The partnership with Playboy Enterprises further secured Shūeisha's right to use the "pureibōi" name in a wide variety of magazines, from *Weekly Playboy* to *Pureibōi comics* (Playboy comics, 1968), *Pureibōi custom* (Playboy custom, 1969), *Art Pureibōi* (Art Playboy, 1969), *Pureigāru* (Playgirl, 1973), *Deluxe Pureibōi* (Deluxe Playboy, 1978), and *Pureibōi aizu* (Playboy eyes, 1982), many of which became best-selling magazines in their own right. Since Playboy Enterprises did not hold complete ownership over its name in Japan, the company experienced difficulties expanding in other areas as well.⁷⁵ Longtime *Playboy* editor Leopold Froehlich thus noted the "complicated" relationship with Shūeisha and said that Playboy Enterprises "could not sell Playboy books there without the permission of the [trademark] holder."⁷⁶ More strikingly, in the aftermath of the release of the Japanese edition of *Playboy*, *Weekly Playboy*'s sales boomed. This was surely due to the notoriety of partnering with the U.S. publishing giant. Shūeisha claims that *Weekly Playboy* sold an average of over one million copies of each issue in the late 1970s. Other sources confirm these statistics and note that *Weekly Playboy* climbed from a circulation of 700,000 in 1975 to 900,300 in 1977 and reached a peak of 1,132,200 in 1980, making it one of the few weekly magazines to hit a circulation of over one million, far eclipsing *Heibon Punch*.⁷⁷ This is not a coincidence. The partnership with Playboy Enterprises to produce *Playboy Japan* fed into sales of Shūeisha's weekly magazine and helped make *Weekly Playboy* perhaps the best-selling Japanese men's magazine of all time. Thus Shūeisha ended up with two hit magazines: *Weekly Playboy* and the high-brow Japanese monthly, *Playboy Japan*, whose circulation appears

74. Hall, *International Magazine and Book Licensing*, p. 67. A Japanese report stated that 1,300 people attended. See "Honmono banī jōriku."

75. In fact, Playboy Enterprises was forced to "buy back" many "playboy" trademarks from independent owners at great cost. Robert Gutwillig interview, October 19, 2017.

76. Leopold Froehlich (former managing editor of *Playboy*), email correspondence, September 21, 2016. Incidentally, the owner of the "Playboy books" trademark was none other than Shūeisha. See trademark 1510777, JPO.

77. See Sunayama Sanae, "Watashi no kakedashi jidai (6): Shūeisha Intānashonaru daihyō torishimariyaku Shimaji Katsuhiko," *Henshū kaigi*, No. 27 (June 2003), p. 148; and Wakui, Handō, and Amakasu, "Zadankai: shūkanshi yo, doko e iku," pp. 40–41.

to have peaked at around 900,000, making it one of *Playboy's* best-selling foreign-language editions.⁷⁸

Shūeisha had achieved what it had set out to do nearly a decade earlier, when Ohga visited Playboy Enterprises' Chicago offices: a collaboration with Hefner to make a best-selling "playboy" magazine. Even more strikingly, by the late 1970s Shūeisha dominated the weekly and monthly men's popular magazine markets with its flagship "playboy" magazines as well as pictorial one-offs, seasonal printings, and other magazines bearing the trademarked "playboy" name. There can be little doubt that this brought a financial windfall to Shūeisha.

But the partnership with Playboy Enterprises brought another, more important boon to Shūeisha: prestige. Previously, Shūeisha had been known as a purveyor of children's books and "visual magazines" like *Myōjō*. In fact, from the 1950s *Myōjō* defined Shūeisha to such an extent that the company was known widely as "*Myōjō Shūeisha*" (*Myōjō no Shūeisha*). Creating a Japanese edition of *Playboy* helped Shūeisha break out of its shell and become a respected, major publishing house. Its company history even emphasizes this point. "Through this '*Playboy Japan* edition,' Shūeisha completely outgrew being '*Myōjō Shūeisha*.' Was it not truly from this year [1975] that the world recognized Shūeisha as a general publisher?"⁷⁹

Conclusion

The birth of popular men's magazines in Japan was not a purely local process. Although magazine readership and publishing had deep roots in publishing trends reaching back to the prewar era, the emergence of men's magazines in 1960s Japan must also be seen as a *transnational* story. Hugh Hefner's iconic magazine *Playboy* played a central role, serving as inspiration for would-be men's magazines publishers like Magazine House and

78. See Yūki Saburō, "Kaigai nidai teikeishi *Pureibōi* to *Kosumoporitan* no jitsuryoku," *Tsukuru*, July 1982, p. 121. For a circulation figure as high as 900,000, see Shiozawa Minobu, *Sengo shuppanshi: Shōwa no zasshi, sakka, henshūsha: sengo shuppankai 40-nen no kōbōshi*, ed. Oda Mitsuo (Ronsōsha, 2010), p. 108. The figure of 900,000 is likely the highest circulation for *Playboy Japan*, and Shiozawa notes that this was for the February 1976 issue. Another article noted that *Playboy Japan's* average circulation in the early 1980s was 700,000 and that "it took *Playboy [Japan]* less than a day to sell its first issue of 450,000 copies." See Jack Burton, "'Penthouse' Takes on 'Playboy' in Japan," *Advertising Age*, June 27, 1983, p. 10. According to the Shūeisha company history, the first printing was 458,000 copies, and an extra 22,000 copies were hurriedly printed to meet special orders. See Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, p. 131. Finally, *Playboy* executive Haresh Shah stated that *Playboy Japan* during its first three years "averaged between 650,000 to 750,000 paid circulation—at times spiking to as many as 900,000-plus copies." Haresh Shah, email to authors, June 11, 2018.

79. Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Shūeisha 70-nen no rekishi*, p. 132.

Shūeisha. The meteoric rise of *Heibon Punch* and *Weekly Playboy*, in turn, showed the vast potential and profitability of marketing magazines toward young men. Whereas *Heibon Punch* and *Weekly Playboy* represented the rise in the 1960s of a market for popular men's magazines, the high-brow *Playboy Japan* and the partnership with Playboy Enterprises epitomized the vitality of men's publishing by the 1970s. *Playboy Japan* also exemplified the fact that even direct collaborations with U.S. producers needed to be "tailored and arranged in some measure for the Japanese reading public."⁸⁰ *Playboy Japan*, like *Weekly Playboy* and *Heibon Punch*, highlighted the importance of iconic U.S. influences in the culture of men's magazines in Japan.

The trend of localizing global influences continued as men's publishing diversified in the 1970s. No longer content to produce simple "men's general-interest magazines," publishers scrambled to create niche markets, peddling a broad range of interests including city life (*Brutus*, 1980) and fashion and lifestyle magazines (*Men's Non-no*, 1986). Yet many magazines in these new niche markets also reflected this increasingly global turn. New magazines such as *GORO* (1974), *Popeye* (1976), *Hot-Dog Press* (1979), *Bigman* (1981), *Sukora* (1982), *Penthouse Japan* (1983), *Esquire* (1987), and *GQ Japan* (1993) continued to localize global influences to produce magazines for Japanese men. In this context, *Playboy* was part of a broader phenomenon in which global brands and tastes, particularly U.S., British, and French, were localized to fit Japanese sensibilities.

This process was not without conflict, nor was it a straightforward story of adaptation. In fact, Playboy Enterprises and Shūeisha continually found themselves at odds concerning Shūeisha's control over "playboy" trademarks. The squabbles continued until the early 2000s. Playboy Enterprises filed a claim against a trademark for "playboy magazine online" (4512239), which Shūeisha registered in both English and *katakana* with the Japan Patent Office on October 5, 2001. Playboy Enterprises ultimately secured control over this trademark.⁸¹ Nonetheless, despite these disputes, both sides profited handsomely from the overall arrangement. Playboy Enterprises expanded into Asia and, in the process, "blitzed Japan with Playboy" Clubs, merchandising deals, and *Playboy Japan*, which circulated until 2009. Former company executives, who remained unaware of the history behind Shūeisha's securing of the "playboy" name, thus spoke effusively about their partnership with the Japanese publisher, praising not only its high-quality production but its firm grasp of the Japanese marketplace. This

80. "Honmono banī jōriku."

81. "Playboy magazine online" (category 38: electronic devices), June 5, 2000. Validated: October 5, 2001. Trademark 4512239, JPO. Court records indicate Playboy Enterprises purchased this trademark from Shūeisha.

is understandable. As Gutwillig recalls, the primary source of revenue for Playboy Enterprises was merchandising, which “was much, much bigger than the magazine.”⁸² Shūeisha profited even more from the arrangement. The collaboration with Playboy Enterprises allowed Shūeisha to take the next step toward becoming a publishing giant.

Perhaps the person who benefited the most from this broader transnational story, however, was none other than Masunaga Zenkichi. Masunaga proved to be something of a visionary. Due to his unique position as a small-time hustler of profitable pornographic *kasutori* magazines during the occupation era, he likely understood the vast marketability that *Playboy* magazine offered the Japanese publishing world. Masunaga’s “playboy” trademark allowed him to make an indelible, if still unknown, mark on Japan’s magazine world: it helped ensure the legality of what became perhaps the best-selling Japanese men’s magazine of all time. And it made him a small fortune in the process. Those who knew him well speculated that he used the sale of his “playboy” trademark to fund his frequent overseas travels in the final year of his life.⁸³ Masunaga died on September 13, 1967, before the Shūeisha-Playboy conflict heated up and after enjoying the fruits of his behind-the-scenes role in the birth of men’s magazines in 1960s Japan.

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82. Robert Gutwillig interview, October 30, 2017.

83. Furuta Shūgo, “Shuppanjin no ryōshin: chū 30-ki Masunaga Zenkichi no koto,” *Tōkyō rikka dōsōkai kaihō*, August 20, 1988, p. 15.