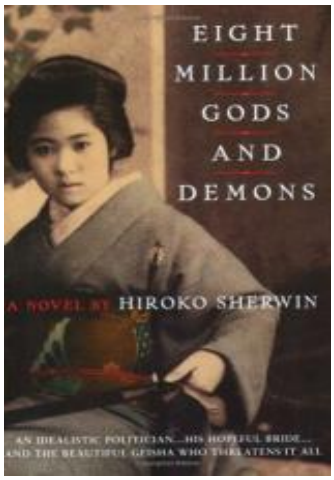
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# Eight Million Gods and Demons

by Hiroko Sherwin




## About the Book

In Meiji era Japan, Taku, an idealistic activist politician and visionary entrepreneur, takes Emi, a 14-year-old gifted *koto* player, as his child bride. Their marriage is troubled by Taku's imprisonment, the onset of Emi's epilepsy, and the deaths of their babies. Emi, after finally having a healthy son, Jun, discovers that Taku is living a double life. He spends half his time living with Hana, the devastatingly beautiful, villainous ex-geisha and their four children. Emi's dream of a happy life and marriage is destroyed and her health declines with her spirit.

As Japan marches onward in its ill-conceived and ill-dated quest for supremacy in Asia, Emi Imura must embark on a poignant journey of self-definition that will change her life and that of a generation to follow.

**Eight Million Gods and Demons**, named after the number of deities in the Japanese pantheon, is the saga of the Imura family from the 1890s to the end of World War II. Exploring the complexities of marriage and family, the relationships between siblings, and the effect of war on life, it is a tale of love and loss as well as a history of modern Japan with its ambitions, demons, and downfall.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Compare and contrast Emi and Hana. What was your reaction to Taku's double life? How do you feel about Hana when she visits Emi on her birthday? What was her true reason for visiting?

**2.** How does Chiyo try to rekindle Emi and Taku's relationship? Why doesn't she tell Emi about what she is doing? Do you think Emi would approve?

**3.** Why is Taku imprisoned? What catastrophes does Emi suffer during this period besides her new husband's absence? Does Emi seem her age?

**4.** Do Jun and Yumi ever make their feelings for each other clear to one another? Why or why not? Is the rest of the family aware? What are their reactions?

**5.** Why does Yumi stop writing her fairy tales and telling stories? How does her marriage to Hisao change her? What are her reasons for marrying him?

**6.** What is Taku's relationship like with Jun at the time of Emi's death? Does Jun want to move in with the 'second family'? How is he received? What are his feelings toward Hana in comparison with his feelings for Emi?

**7.** Why does Hana starve herself to death? Why was no one in the family able to prevent her death? How does Jun attempt to prolong her life?

**8.** How does the war affect Isamu and Kana's marriage? What psychological downfalls does Kana experience because of Isamu's illness? What is your opinion of Isamu's father?

**9.** Is Jun in love with Sayo when he asks her to marry him? How does Sayo differ from Yumi? Does Sayo know that Jun loves Yumi? How does she treat Yumi?

**10.** How does the war affect Taku and Hana's marriage?

**11.** Isamu compares the mass killings of civilians by American pilots dropping bombs on Tokyo with his killing of an innocent boy in China. Obviously torture and atrocities should not be allowed at any time, but are there circumstances where mass civilian bombings are justified in war? What about the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki which caused a great deal of suffering to two generations? Was mass killing justified in order to end the war? If it was, were two bombs necessary?

## Author Bio

Hiroko Sherwin was born in Nagoya, Japan and was evacuated to the countryside when the city was bombed during the Second World War. She later moved to Princeton, New Jersey where her three daughters were born. She served as a special correspondent for the Japanese newspaper *Yomuiri USA* and wrote four books in Japanese about American women and society. She now lives near Bath, England with her husband, three cats, and four alpacas.

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