LİSANİYAT
ULUSLARARASI FİLOLOJİ ARAŞTIRMALARI DERGİSİ
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES
studies

Ekim - October 2024
IV Sayı-Issue

MEIJI VE TAISHO DÖNEMLERİNDE KADIN ÖĞRENCİLER: CİNSİYET SINIRLARINI ZORLAYAN KADINLAR

FEMALE STUDENTS IN THE MEIJI AND TAISHO PERIODS: WOMEN CHALLENGING GENDER BOUNDARIES

MASUMI KAGAYA

Sayı 4, ss. 26-36
Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi
Geliş Tarihi: 31.03.2024
Kabul Tarihi: 31.10.2024
Değerlendirme: Çift Taraflı Kör Hakemlik
Etik Bildirim: lisaniyatstudies@gmail.com
İntihal Denetimi: Yapıldı. (İntihalnet)
Etik Beyan: Bu çalışma, etik kurul izni gerektirmeyen nitelikte olup kullanılan veriler literatür taraması/yayınlanmış kaynaklar üzerinden elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

Issue 4, pp. 26-36
Article Type: Research Article
Submitted: 31.03.2024
Accepted: 31.10.2024
Evaluation: Double-Blind Review
Ethics Declaration: lisaniyatstudies@gmail.com
Plagiarism Check: Done. (Intihalnet)
Ethics Statement: This study does not require ethics committee approval, and the data used was obtained through a literature review/published sources. It is hereby declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to throughout the preparation, and all references are cited in the bibliography.

Atıf Bilgisi / Reference Information:
KAGAYA, M. (2024). Female Students In The Meiji And Taisho Periods: Women Challenging Gender Boundaries, *Lisaniyat Studies Uluslararası Filoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4, 26-36

Masumi Kagaya
Simmons University
sasakim@simmons.edu
ORCID: 0009-0004-9519-9944

Abstract

The development of Japan's modern educational system formally began with the 1872 enactment of the *Gakusei*(Education System Order), which established a legal framework extending from primary to higher education. For women, new institutions, such as girls' high schools and women's specialized schools, were established, with enrollment in secondary institutions for girls rising significantly by the Taisho period (1912–1926). However, despite these advancements, women were still barred from attending universities, and efforts to establish women's universities were rejected. This resistance stemmed from entrenched gender norms that advocated a separate and distinct path for women's education. Although many female students possessed a strong desire to pursue knowledge on par with their male counterparts, their aspirations were obstructed. Nevertheless, some women persisted in overcoming these social constraints, even in the face of social criticism, remaining steadfast in their pursuit of education.

Previous studies on women's education in the Meiji and Taisho periods have largely focused on the ideological basis for institutional inequality and on the debates surrounding women's educational systems. Important works, such as Harrington (1987), [1] who explored how discontent with gendered inequalities fueled the push for women's universities; Copeland (2006), [2] who examined the idealized image of female students at the time; and Saitō (2003), [3] who analyzed the lives of these students through a lens of social class, provide a broad understanding of the society in which these students lived. However, little is known about the women who directly challenged institutional barriers by seeking entry into universities. This study illuminates the aspirations and motivations of women who pursued higher education from the Meiji through Taisho periods, examining their challenges as a struggle on the boundary of gender norms, revealing their endeavors as revolutionary confrontations with these norms.

This paper first examines the institutional framework and the debates surrounding women's education in this period to identify the ideals shaping this system. It then investigates how women attending higher institutions faced and responded to social criticism as they transgressed prescribed gender roles. Finally, it identifies factors contributing to the success of female students who achieved their goals, focusing on family backgrounds and educational environments. This study aims to analyze the challenges these female students faced through a gendered perspective, offering new insights into the strategies they employed to overcome social restrictions and their significance within this historical context.

Keywords: women's education, Meiji and Taisho Periods, gender norms, higher ecudation, Japanese female students

Özet

Japonya'nın modern eğitim sisteminin gelişimi, 1872'de Gakusei (Eğitim Sistemi Emri) ile başlayarak, ilköğretimden yükseköğretime kadar uzanan bir yasal çerçevenin oluşturulmasıyla resmi olarak başlamıştır. Kadınlar için kız liseleri ve kadınlara yönelik özel okullar gibi yeni kurumlar kurulmuş, kızlar için ortaöğretim kurumlarına kayıt, Taisho döneminde (1912–1926) önemli ölçüde artmıştır. Ancak, bu ilerlemelere rağmen, kadınların üniversitelere girmesi engellenmiş ve kadın üniversiteleri kurulması yönündeki çabalar reddedilmiştir. Bu direniş, kadınlar için ayrı ve farklı bir eğitim yolu öngören köklü toplumsal cinsiyet normlarından kaynaklanmıştır. Birçok kadın öğrenci erkeklerle eşit

seviyede bilgi edinme arzusuna sahip olmasına rağmen, bu istekleri engellenmiştir. Buna karşın, bazı kadınlar toplumsal eleştirilere rağmen bu sosyal kısıtlamaları aşma konusunda ısrarcı olmuş ve eğitim yolundaki kararlılıklarını sürdürmüşlerdir.

Meiji ve Taisho dönemlerinde kadın eğitimi üzerine yapılan önceki çalışmalar büyük ölçüde kurumsal eşitsizliğin ideolojik temellerine ve kadınların eğitim sistemine dair tartışmalara odaklanmıştır. Harrington (1987) 1, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı eşitsizliklere duyulan hoşnutsuzluğun kadın üniversitelerinin kurulmasını nasıl teşvik ettiğini araştırırken; Copeland (2006) 2, o dönemdeki idealize edilmiş kadın öğrenci imajını incelemiş ve Saitō (2003) 3, bu öğrencilerin yaşamlarını toplumsal sınıf açısından analiz etmiştir. Ancak, üniversitelere girmek için doğrudan kurumsal engellerle mücadele eden kadınlar hakkında pek bir şey bilinmemektedir. Bu çalışma, Meiji'den Taisho dönemine kadar yükseköğretime yönelen kadınların özlemlerini ve motivasyonlarını aydınlatarak, toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının sınırlarında verdikleri mücadeleyi incelemekte, bu çabalarını bu normlara yönelik devrimci karşı koyuşlar olarak gözler önüne sermektedir.
Bu makale, öncelikle bu dönemdeki kadın eğitiminin kurumsal çerçevesini ve bu sistemi şekillendiren idealleri belirlemek amacıyla bu konudaki tartışmaları ele almaktadır. Ardından, yükseköğretime devam eden kadınların belirlenen toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini ihlal ettikleri için karşılaştıkları toplumsal eleştirilere nasıl tepki verdiklerini incelemektedir. Son olarak, hedeflerine ulaşan kadın öğrencilerin başarılarına katkıda bulunan etmenleri, özellikle aile geçmişleri ve eğitim ortamları üzerinde odaklanarak tespit etmektedir. Bu çalışma, kadın öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları zorlukları toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinden analiz ederek, toplumsal kısıtlamaları aşmak için kullandıkları stratejilere ve bu bağlamdaki tarihsel önemlerine dair yeni içgörüler sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kadın eğitimi, Meiji ve Taisho Dönemleri, toplumsal cinsiyet normları, yükseköğretim, Japon kadın öğrenciler.

Introduction

In Japan, the appearance of Taisho-era female students is reenacted annually in March across various universities, where students don kimonos and *hakama*, replicating the formal attire of academic settings from over a century ago. This tradition suggests that such attire embodies a deeper significance beyond fashion, as an emblem of the academic setting. Similarly, popular manga often depict female students in the Taisho period as protagonists who strive to lead independent lives. For modern readers, the image of female students from the Meiji and Taisho eras evokes the courage to confront social constraints or reflects an elite image of beautiful, affluent intellectual women. Many find enjoyment in these representations, symbolically recreating this past through attire or narratives. But how much do we truly know about these historical female students? How far were they able to pursue intellectual inquiry during the Meiji and Taisho eras? Could they forge a future through education? Reflecting on the cultural and social contexts of the time raises many questions, which form the foundation for this paper.

In 1872, Japan's first formal law for modern education, the *Gakusei* (Education System Order), was issued, marking a step towards adopting a Western-style education system under the Meiji government. This reform established an organized school system ranging from elementary to university levels, laying the foundation for modern education through successive amendments to curriculum, school term length, and regulations. For girls, the 1899 *Kōtō Jogakkōrei* (Girls' High School Order) directed the promotion of secondary education, creating separate curricula for boys and girls beyond elementary school. Female students in higher institutions were required to study domestic science subjects such as "household management" and "sewing," [4] which were not included in male curricula, and these subjects occupied a considerable portion of class hours. Moreover, gender-based distinctions existed among educational institutions. While both boys and girls could attend elementary school, boys' options later expanded to include middle school, high school, technical schools, and universities, whereas girls' options were limited to girls' high schools, teacher training schools, and other specialized institutions, excluding universities. Although some girls aspired to attend university, regulations barred their entry.

The percentage of girls attending secondary institutions continued to increase throughout the Meiji era, with elementary school enrollment reaching 100% in the Taisho period. Secondary enrollment rose from approximately 1% at the outset to nearly 15% by 1925. For higher education, national institutions such as Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School (1890) and Nara Women's Higher Normal School (1908) were established, though admission rates remained around 1%. [5] These schools, however, were primarily designed to train female teachers rather than to provide a university education. Despite the establishment of several

private institutions, none were officially recognized as universities. Dissatisfied with this disparity, intellectuals criticized educational policy, and some female students adopted less traditional appearances to fit in at institutions where men studied. Despite dominant opinions that women should be educated according to traditional gender norms, which deemed those pursuing education on par with men as deviating from their prescribed roles, several women persisted in their educational pursuits.

Existing scholarship on female education from the Meiji through Taisho periods has largely focused on the ideological foundations of educational inequality and the societal constraints imposed on women. This study draws inspiration from significant works, including Harrington (1987), who detailed the intellectuals' petitions for women's universities; Copeland (2006), who explored the tensions between idealized and actual images of female students; and Minako Saitō (2003), who examined the new paths sought by female students through the lens of social class. These studies reveal that while female students' educational opportunities were limited by gender norms, there were also supportive advocates who strove to address these inequalities. Yet, little is known about the female students who directly confronted these institutional limitations. How did they envision their futures, and what strategies did they employ when faced with obstacles? This paper focuses on those women who defied the restrictions on academic pursuits, analyzing the factors that enabled them to fulfill their ambitions.

This paper first examines the institutional framework and associated debates on women's education during this era. Next, it considers the criticism directed at female students who transgressed prescribed gender norms, exploring the nature of the opposition and whether the women were able to counteract it. Finally, it identifies the factors contributing to the achievements of female students who overcame various obstacles, analyzing family backgrounds and educational environments. This study reconsiders the lives of female students in the Meiji and Taisho periods through a gendered lens, reframing them as courageous challengers against oppression and aiming to provide new insights into their actions and significance.

The Beginnings Of Women's Education

The direction of women's education in Japan was first formally established in 1899 through the *Kōtō Jogakkōrei* (Girls' High School Order), which detailed the guidelines for secondary education for girls and laid the foundation for an educational system extending to higher education. This marked a delayed start compared to the foundation laid for boys' education through the *Gakusei* (Education System Order) of 1872 and the *Kyōikurei* (Education Order) of 1879, and the curriculum differed significantly between the two. This section examines the ideologies underpinning the differences between male and female education.

The Edo Shogunate's isolationist policies (1639–1853) ended with the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), when the new government began consolidating a centralized authority under the emperor. To bring Japan on par with Western powers, the government enacted large-scale reforms in politics, economics, and the military, with education being among the most significant of these reforms. Under the new government, the *Gakusei* (Education System Order) and later the the *Kyōikurei* (Education Order) (1879) were issued, standardizing the content taught in elementary schools nationwide. This marked the beginning of universal education, enabling both boys and girls to receive education without regard to class or gender. Encouraged by compulsory education, the primary school enrollment rate reached 35.4% by 1875, and, by the Taisho period (1912–1925), it had risen to 100%.[6] Additionally, the length of elementary education was extended from the original four years to six. Upon graduation, students could proceed to advanced elementary school (two years), with boys continuing to middle school, high school, and university. However, the design of girls' education lagged behind that of boys, and it was not until 1899 that the *Kōtō Jogakkōrei* (Girls' Higher School Order) was issued, setting out a policy for girls' secondary education. Subsequently, secondary and higher institutions for girls were developed, though they were consistently designated a level below those for boys. What, then, were the contents of the *Kōtō Jogakkōrei* (Girls' Higher School Order), which established the course of female students' education? Examining several key articles sheds light on this:

1. Article 1: “The purpose of girls' high schools shall be to provide the advanced general education required for girls.”
2. Article 9: “The length of study at girls' high schools shall be four years, though it may be extended or shortened by one year depending on regional conditions; supplementary courses of up to two years may be offered at girls’ high schools.”
3. Article 10: “Admission to girls' high schools is open to those 12 years of age or older who have completed the second year of advanced elementary school or possess equivalent academic ability.”
4. Article 11: “A technical arts course may be established at girls' high schools for students specializing in arts and crafts necessary for girls; a special course may also be provided for graduates who wish to specialize in a particular field.”

The articles reveal that girls' high schools were educational institutions targeting girls aged 12 to 16, with a four-year course (extendable to five in some regions). In addition to the standard curriculum, girls' high schools sometimes offered a Technical Arts Course, which focused on sewing and handicrafts, and a Special Course, available to students who completed the main course of study. In contrast, the term length for boys’ middle schools was five years, targeting ages 12 to 17,[7] reflecting the lower status assigned to girls’ high schools as compared to boys’ middle schools. This difference is also evident in the curricula. The *Implementation Rules for Girls' High Schools* (1901), based on the *Kōtō Jogakkōrei* (Girls' Higher School Order), emphasized household management within the curriculum, stating that “household management shall develop knowledge essential for household organization, as well as instill values of diligence, thrift, order, thoroughness, and cleanliness. It shall include instruction on clothing, food, shelter, nursing, child-rearing, household accounting, and other topics related to family management and economy.”[8] Boys’ middle schools, in contrast, focused more heavily on mathematics, science, and foreign languages, providing preparatory education for university and technical institutions. Thus, girls’ education was centered on domestic skills, aiming to produce ideal wives and mothers.

The ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) became central to women’s education from the early Meiji period.[9] This ideal evolved from Edo-period norms that emphasized obedience to husbands and in-laws, and it became entwined with nationalism. The first Minister of Education, Mori Arinori (1885–1889), argued that “the foundation of nationhood lies in the family, and the foundation of the family lies in the education of women. If the education of women is inadequate, the foundation of the entire educational structure will be unstable. The root of national prosperity lies in education, the root of education lies in women, and without progress in women’s education, the nation’s security cannot be ensured.”[10]

Successive Ministers of Education, such as Kabayama Sukenori and Kikuchi Dairoku, also positioned *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) as a national policy for girls’ secondary education.[11] Thus, the ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) became a core concept in women’s education, aligning with the nation’s goal of modern state-building. Consequently, higher-level education and female independence were not considered; eligibility for admission to the Imperial Universities was restricted to male students, and no universities were available for women. Tokyo Women’s Higher Normal School (1890) and Nara Women’s Higher Normal School (1908) were the highest institutions available to women, but these were designed to train teachers, not to provide a university-level education.

Despite these limitations, female students strove to acquire new knowledge and sought a new way of life within the framework defined by the government. This period of rapid change saw the emergence of a liberal intellectual class, though attitudes towards education remained conservative. The following quote captures the disillusionment of Kikue Yamakawa (1890–1980), a pioneering advocate for women’s rights, as she recalled her years attending *Tokyo Huritsu Daini Kōtō Jogakkō* (Tokyo Second Girls’ High School,) expressing frustration with the education that emphasized *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) values.

The principal, fully committed to the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal, discouraged us from attending higher schools, saying it was reserved only for exceptional people. However, she believed that all women should have the basic skills for self-sufficiency in case of an emergency, so she recommended staying an extra year in the supplemental course to obtain qualifications as elementary school teachers. Ten out of over forty classmates followed this advice, all of whom later worked as elementary school teachers for a time. … At that time, women could only attend Tsuda, Japan Women's University, or the Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School, and I found none of these schools appealing … Especially, the *ryōsai kenbo* philosophy, which was so deeply instilled in us during our time at the girls' high school, repelled me, and I couldn't bear the idea of enrolling in a university that promoted the same ideal.[12]

This reflection by Yamakawa recalls her feelings at age 16 in 1906. The institutions she mentions, "Tsuda," "Japan Women's University," and "Women's Higher Normal School," refer to *Joshi Eigaku Juku* (the English Academy for Women) (1900), Japan Women's University (1901), and the Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School (1890), respectively. None of these were universities in the formal sense, as university status had not yet been granted. Under the educational system of the time, the first two were classified as private specialized schools, while the latter was a normal school. Yamakawa eventually went on to study at *Joshi Eigaku Juku* (the English Academy for Women), but she did not conceal her disappointment in women's education. She recalled that the teachers "were pure idealists, like saints or young maidens in heaven, so innocent and detached from reality, uninterested in what modern students sought or considered."[13] Yamakawa's account illustrates the limited opportunities and discontent experienced by female students in their pursuit of knowledge and new ways of life within the confines of the educational and societal systems of the time.

Criticism Directed At Female Students

Through several revisions to the educational system, Japan's educational framework for girls was progressively refined throughout the Meiji and Taisho periods. However, as discussed previously, the curriculum and system for girls differed markedly from that for boys. Women were barred from entry into universities designated for men, and the establishment of women's universities remained unapproved. Despite this, the number of female students attending girls' high schools continued to grow, reaching nearly a 15% enrollment rate by 1925.[13] The limited number of institutions designated for higher education, such as Women's Higher Normal Schools and Women's Specialized Schools, had an enrollment rate of less than 1%, making the girls' high school the ultimate institution in the educational trajectory for most girls.[14]

As economic growth after the Russo-Japanese War accelerated, the middle class rapidly expanded, contributing significantly to the rise in girls' high schools. By 1912, the number of girls' high schools had increased to 207 from only 37 in 1895. This growing affluence among the middle class changed the attitude toward women's education, with secondary education for daughters becoming a symbol of family status.[15] By the Taisho period, the educational system designed for women had gained broad acceptance, with female students becoming icons of prosperity and modernity and figures to aspire toward. However, these students were also often criticized for deviating from accepted gender norms. This section examines the criticisms directed at these female students, exploring their implications.

In the early Meiji period, before the *Kōtō Jogakkōrei* (Girls' Higher School Order) was enacted, a small number of female students had enrolled in institutions traditionally reserved for men. At that time, no laws restricted female students' entry into boys' schools, so if a school permitted it, girls could attend boys' educational institutions. These female students, however, often drew significant public attention and were frequently criticized. Copeland notes that "early in the 1870s, in the brief period before the government codified education for women under the demands of *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother), women were met with a surprising variety of new educational options. Those who wanted to continue beyond the newly mandated

compulsory education entered government-sponsored secondary schools alongside their male classmates."[16] In this nascent period of the educational system, not only had an institutional structure for female students yet to be established, but the system for boys was still in its early stages before the founding of the Imperial Universities. Consequently, a few girls attended private schools and educational institutions that continued from the Edo period. Nagasaki observes that many articles concerning female students in the Meiji period were critical of their manner and appearance, such as a series published in *Yomiuri Shimbun* between 1890 and 1891 entitled "Scandals of Female Students" and "The Ill Effects of Female Students," reflecting society's intense scrutiny of these young women.[17] For example, the following excerpt from a reader's letter in a newspaper reflects common criticism of female students at the time:

Recently, a peculiar thing has been happening. There are young women who wear men's *hakama* (trousers), and one wonders if this should be considered acceptable. … It is strange that women in our country now wear men's trousers with confidence, without any sense of shame, which is an embarrassment to the nation. … If women continue wearing men's *hakama*, they might start standing to urinate like men, so parents must be cautious. (*Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun*, January 15, 1874, Letters to the Editor)

Hakama are traditional Japanese garments worn over a kimono, often resembling wide-legged pants or a divided skirt. Traditionally, they were worn by men, and male students in the Meiji and Taisho periods adopted them as part of their regular school attire. In this formative period of the educational system, there was no standardized attire for female students, who thus adopted the *hakama*, the standard male student uniform. Kikue Yamakawa describes her mother's attire when she attended the inauguration of Tokyo Women's Normal School in 1875, an event attended by the Empress. According to Yamakawa, the *Kokura hakama* was simply shortened and otherwise "the same as men's."[18] The sight of a female student wearing a *hakama* immediately identified her as pursuing an education similar to that of male students, which attracted criticism.

The following is a recollection by Kakei Atomi (1840–1926),[19] the founder of girl's higher educational institution, *Atomi Gakuen* (1875), who expressed concern over the perceived disorder in female students' appearance in the early 1870s:

Early in the Meiji period, Tokyo was truly surprising. Among the young girls, some would shave their eyebrows completely and frame their foreheads squarely, and they wore simple attire with thin black sashes tied at the waist. Other young ladies had cropped hair and wore *heko obi* sloppily tied around their waists, carrying foreign books openly in one hand with a pencil tucked behind an ear; it was hard to tell if they were men or women. I found this to be a serious issue. At Takebashi Girls' School, the students even wore vertically striped horse-riding *hakama*. Her Majesty, upon seeing this, commented on its violent appearance and stated that students should wear crimson *hakama*, the traditional attire for women in the palace, or purple if that was the best option for the school. I followed Her Majesty's advice, and we adopted purple *hakama* in 1875."[20]

Atomi Gakuen was among the earliest private girls' schools. Atomi, born into a family of educators, seems to have been motivated by her concerns about the state of women's education in establishing her school. Typically, cropped hair, a *heko obi*(wide sash) and vertically striped horse-riding *hakama* were male attire. Additionally, carrying foreign books openly and tucking a pencil behind the ear was a student-like appearance but perhaps unbecoming for female students, who appeared to be imitating their male counterparts in a way Atomi found unseemly. Criticism of female students' appearance and behavior, particularly when they adopted male attire, was common in newspapers and magazines. Later, however, an opinion from the Empress led Atomi Gakuen to adopt purple *hakama*, similar to the traditional crimson worn by women in the palace, as the school's official attire for female students. This style eventually spread and became widely established as the uniform for female students across Japan. Simply emulating male styles led to these young women being seen as transgressing female norms.

Even by the Taisho period, the ideals underlying girls' education had not significantly changed. An article titled “Flaws in Girls' High School Education from a Mother's Perspective” by educator Tsuruko Matsuda was

published in the popular women’s magazine *Shufu no Tomo*, where she described her disappointment with her daughter’s private girls’ school.[21] “Instead of her (daughter’s) positive changes, however, she reacted to them negatively, revealing her contradictory state of mind. She disliked her daughter’s critical thinking and individuality.”[22]

Many intellectuals of the time acknowledged the virtues of *ryōsai kenbo (good wife, wise mother)*, viewing it as a form of training that would cultivate women with Confucian-based feminine virtues. Girls who developed critical thinking skills and could voice their opinions found themselves constrained by such societal values. These discussions restricted female students, but they also produced secondary effects. Criticism of the lack of discipline among female students contributed to debates on curriculum design and institutional frameworks, leading to the establishment of private schools and expanding educational choices. While *ryōsai kenbo (good wife, wise mother)* was largely accepted in the Taisho era, progressive ideas were also featured in popular magazines for young women, allowing readers to compare traditional and forward-thinking values. However, these were all developments outside the female students' immediate experience. What were the feelings of the young women who faced such criticism?

We cannot directly know the feelings of these students, who bore the brunt of such criticisms. Yet even if their voices remain unheard, their adoption of male clothing and behavior interpreted as rebellious hint at their true intentions. These women were not weak figures resigned to patriarchal values; rather, they were passionate about their studies and sought to overcome gender barriers with intelligence and courage. Their adoption of male clothing was a form of armor to enter male-dominated domains, and what was perceived as rebellious language was, in fact, resistance to forces seeking to curtail their ambitions. These young women were engaged in a battle at the boundary of gender norms.

Beyond Girls’ Schools: Women Who Pursued Higher Learning

As noted previously, as the middle class expanded, more girls entered secondary education, and educational institutions for women grew in number. However, these women had few opportunities to pursue suitable careers upon graduation. Having received an education focused on preparing them as “good wives and wise mothers,” they had no clear paths to further advancement. Nevertheless, some women, driven by a strong desire to study, bravely pursued higher levels of education. This section will discuss women who managed to enter educational institutions designated for men and those who pursued studies abroad, examining the societal and historical factors that enabled them to break through these gender barriers.

One prominent example is Ginko Ogino (1851–1913), recognized as the first licensed female physician in modern Japan. Ogino is widely respected as a pioneering figure who, despite living in an era when patriarchal norms dictated the course of women’s lives, overcame significant adversity to achieve her goals.

Her life story has been adapted into novels, television dramas, and plays, inspiring generations of women. Ogino’s journey began with her marriage at age 17 in 1868, which soon ended in divorce. She subsequently suffered health issues requiring hospitalization, during which she felt humiliation and shame from being examined by a male doctor. This experience motivated her to pursue a career as a physician herself.[23] Ogino entered Tokyo Women’s Higher Normal School, where she excelled academically. Upon her graduation in 1879, she sought her professor’s guidance on becoming a physician, which led her to develop connections in the medical field. She was admitted to *Kōjuin*, a medical school that had been training doctors since the Edo period. At that time, “five or six women were enrolled at the school, but only Ginko persisted.”[24] Since there were no other women in attendance, Ogino dressed as a man, cutting her hair short, wearing a *hakama*, and high *geta* sandals to avoid being treated differently. She endured ridicule and bullying from male students.[26]

This account parallels the experiences of other female students who dressed as men to study in male-dominated institutions, as discussed in the previous section. For these women, adopting male attire was a strategy to secure their right to education.

Ogino excelled in medical school, eventually gaining the respect of her male classmates, and the bullying subsided. However, the next hurdle was passing the state examination required for medical licensure, a process for which applications from women were typically rejected. Ogino turned again to her connections, particularly Tadanori Ishiguro,[27] a high-ranking figure in the army, who had previously assisted her in gaining admission to medical school. Ishiguro advocated strongly on her behalf with the Director of the Health Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and after repeated petitions by Ogino and her supporters, she was finally allowed to take the state examination in 1884. While three other women took the exam that year, Ogino was the only one to pass. Breaking the tradition that barred women from even applying for medical licenses and opening private practices, Ogino's success owed significantly to the support of socially influential men. This support was not solely due to her outstanding abilities and the high regard in which she was held. Rather, her advocates likely understood the importance of education, having themselves experienced Western culture and served as educators.

Ishiguro, for example, was the son of an Edo-period official, initially studying classical Chinese and opening a private school at age 17, early on gaining experience as an educator. He later studied Western medicine, became a physician, and was dispatched to the United States to investigate medical practices during the Civil War.[28] Ishiguro's time in the U.S. and his subsequent career as the Surgeon General of the Japanese Army may have shaped his progressive views on women's education. Ogino's experience illustrates how women needed the support of men in high social positions who understood and sympathized with their circumstances in order to overcome gender barriers.

Another noteworthy figure is Chieko Hirano (1878–1939), who, after completing her education in Japan, studied abroad and later became a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Hirano is best known for her extensive research on the ukiyo-e artist Torii Kiyonaga, which she published in both the United States and Japan. Although little research has been conducted on her, Hirano is an example of a woman who received a top-tier education in Japan during the Meiji and Taisho periods, furthered her studies in the U.S., and achieved an independent life. How did Hirano reach her goals?

While serving at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1939, Hirano published a study on Kiyonaga in the U.S. and was preparing a Japanese edition upon her return to Japan when she passed away. Her Japanese edition was ultimately published with the help of her younger brothers and friends. In the book's afterword, her brother recounts her life. Hirano's father had pursued a career in the navy, spending nine years abroad before returning to Japan in 1868, the early Meiji period. After marrying, he had four children, with Chieko being the eldest. Recalling Chieko's early years, her brother notes that her exceptional talent was evident even when she was five years old.

There was an old-style private temple school called Bun'yū Gijuku in our neighborhood, so my sister immediately enrolled there, attending daily with our cousins and receiving a highly unconventional education. In retrospect, it could be seen as a form of 'genius education.' Later, when she was about nine, our family moved to Azabu Roppongi, where she first received a standard education. Upon entering Azabu Elementary School, she was immediately placed in the advanced courses, completing the entire curriculum by the age of thirteen in 1890.[28]

This passage reveals several instances indicating that Hirano was an exceptional individual. First, at the age of five, Hirano began studying in a private academy that offered an "unconventional" curriculum distinct from public education. By 1881, the elementary education system had been standardized to start at age six with a six-year curriculum. However, Hirano started her studies at age nine and was directly admitted to the

"advanced class," which typically referred to the two-year higher elementary school intended for students aged twelve to fourteen who had completed the standard six-year elementary school. This means that Hirano skipped three academic years. While this suggests that she was an exceptionally talented student, she later attended several women's institutions, including a girls' high school, the Women's Higher Normal School, and *Joshi Eigaku Juku* (the English Academy for Women).

Afterward, she took up a teaching position to support her family, yet in 1914, she left Japan for Boston, where she studied library science at Simmons University on the recommendation of Umeko Tsuda, founder of *Joshi Eigaku Juku* (the English Academy for Women). Upon graduating, Hirano took on the role of assistant in the East Asian Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It was there that she encountered the ukiyo-e painter Torii Kiyonaga, whose work would become a lifelong focus of her passion. To Hirano, Japan, with its restrictions on women, was not a place where her talent could flourish. Leaving Japan allowed her to pursue a career and publish scholarly work in America. Although her career might not have fully satisfied her aspirations given her capabilities, it is undeniable that she challenged herself to the fullest extent possible within her time.

Ginko Ogino and Hirano Chieko achieved goals far beyond the reach of their contemporaries. What enabled them to reach such heights? Their talent and dedication were, of course, instrumental, but the historical context suggests that talent alone does not fully explain their success. Three primary factors contributed to their achievements. First was their family environment. Both came from middle-class backgrounds where their families supported them in pursuing secondary education and beyond. In Ogino's case, although her father initially arranged a marriage for her, she was not forced into remarriage after her divorce. Hirano's father, having studied in England at an early stage, likely envisioned an international future for his children. In fact, Hirano's two brothers also studied abroad.

Second was the presence of mentors who guided them toward further aspirations. As previously mentioned, Ishiguro, who supported Ogino's entry into medical school and her application for medical certification, was not only the chief medical officer of the army but had also studied in the United States, where he researched the Civil War. His exposure to the Western world may have influenced his support for women students. For Hirano, the leadership of her alma mater was critical. Her school's director, Umeko Tsuda, was the first Japanese woman to study abroad, and her own experience likely played a decisive role in Hirano's career path. When Hirano considered her next steps, Tsuda, who had herself studied overseas, naturally encouraged her to follow a similar path. The support of these mentors sustained their high aspirations.

Finally, social change played a part. The so-called "Taisho Democracy" era from the early 1910s to the 1920s brought about an increase in popular participation across political, social, and cultural spheres, along with a liberal atmosphere. Movements advocating for female suffrage gained momentum, and the demand for female labor grew during World War I. While these social changes did not alter the educational system for women, they did begin to shift conventional views of women, albeit slightly. Ogino and Hirano were women who navigated the patriarchal norms and democratic values of their time, experiencing both constraints and emerging freedoms, and forging their paths forward.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the framework of women's education in Japan during the Meiji and Taisho periods and has highlighted female students who pursued scholarly paths that defied gender norms. Restricted by the traditional ideal of the "good wife, wise mother," these women nevertheless carved out educational opportunities through their own determination and efforts. Figures like Ginko Ogino and Chieko Hirano, who sought educational avenues abroad upon recognizing the limitations within Japan, embodied a spirit of defiance against the patriarchal and societal restraints of their time.

Their success can be attributed to various factors, including their family backgrounds, mentors, and the liberalizing influence of the Taisho Democracy. Even within constrained social environments, these women expressed their will through their dress and conduct, pursuing new ways of life through education. This was not merely an adherence to the ideal of the "good wife, wise mother," but rather an assertion of independence and an eagerness to participate in society—a pioneering challenge that continues to impact the status of women in Japanese society today.

The struggles and achievements of female students during the Meiji and Taisho periods laid a crucial foundation for the development of women's education in Japan. It is hoped that this paper contributes to a reevaluation of their historical significance and the fervor with which they crossed educational gender boundaries.

Fund

This research was supported by The McGrath Global & Intercultural Research Grant.

Notes

1 Ann M. Harrington, 'Women and Higher Education in the Japanese Empire (1895—1945).' *Journal of Asian History*, 1987, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1987), pp. 169-186.
2 Rebecca Copeland, 'Images of the Modern Girls Student in Meiji Japan.' *U.S. – Japan Women's Journal,* 2006, No. 30/31 (2006), pp. 13-35.
3 Minako Saitō, *Modan Gāru Ron* (*Modern Girl Theory*) (Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 2003).
4 Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 'Good Wife, Wise Mother Education in Girls' High Schools,' accessed October 1, 2024.
https://www.gender.go.jp/about_danjo/whitepaper/r01/zentai/html/column/clm_03.html 5 Ibid.
6 National Institute for Educational Policy Research, 'History of Japan's School Education System,' accessed October 1, 2024.https://www.nier.go.jp/04_kenkyu_annai/pdf/kenkyu_01.pdf
7 Ministry of Ecucation, Culture, Sports, Government of Japan, 'Women's Education in the Early Meiji Period,' accessed October 1, 2024. https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317595.htm
8 Ministry of Ecucation, Culture, Sports, Government of Japan, 'Curriculum of Middle Schools and Higher Girls' Schools,'accessed October 1, 2024.
https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317630.htm
9 Inoue Kowashi Biography Compilation Committee, ed., *Inoue Kowashi Den* (Biography of Inoue Kowashi), Historical Documents, Vol. 4 (Kokugakuin University Library, 1966), pp. 99–100.
10 Ka Kyo, 'Good Wife, Wise Mother Education in Girls' High School Textbooks from the Mid-Meiji Period Onwards: Focusing on the Analysis of Japanese Language Readers.' *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Education, Waseda University*, Special Issue 19-2 (March 2012), p. 95.
11 Kikuye Yamakawa, *Onna Nidai no Ki* (A Record of Two Generations of Women) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), p. 162.
12 Ibid, p.173
13 See note 1.
14 Ibid.
15 Mariko Inoue, 'Kiyokata's Asasuzu: The Emergence of the Jogakusei Image.' *Monumenta Nipponia,* Winter, 1996, Vol. 51, No.4 (Winter, 1996); p. 434
16 Copeland, Rebecca. 'Images of the Modern Girls Student in Meiji Japan.' *U.S. – Japan Women's Journal,* 2006, No. 30/31 (2006), p.14
17 Yasuko Nagasaki, "The Change of Social Consciousness with Female Students' Language," *Bulletin of Kawamura Gakuen Woman's University* 22, no. 2 (2011): p.240.
18 See note 8, p.
19 Atomi Kakei (1840–1926) was born into a family that had operated an elementary educational institution (terakoya) and later a private school, *Atomi Juku*, since the Edo period. Although a woman, she excelled academically from a young age and succeeded her father. She later founded the *Atomi Private School*, where she educated girls from good families, aged 4 to 18.
20 Kakei Atomi, *Oriori-gusa* (Tokyo: Jitsugyo no Nihonsha, 1915), p. 65.
21 Matsida Tsuruko, '*Haha no Me Kara Mota Jogakko Kyoiku no Ketten*' , in *Shufu no Tomo,* March 1922, p. 51.
22 See note 12, p. 439.
23 Kumagaya City Board of Education, 'Japan's First Female Doctor, Ginko Ogino,' accessed October 25, 2024, https://www.pref.saitama.lg.jp/documents/190553/ginkopunf.pdf.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 A military physician of the Japanese Army during the Meiji era and President of the Japanese Red Cross Society. In the late Edo period, he taught at a private school and later studied Western medicine. After the Meiji Restoration, he was sent to the United States to study the medical system during the Civil War and subsequently helped establish the medical framework for the Japanese Army.
27 See note 20.
28 Chieko Hirano, *Torii Kiyomasa no Shōgai* (*The Life of Torii Kiyomasa*), postscript, 'Ane Hirano Chieko no Shōgai' (*The Life of My Sister Hirano Chieko*), (Tokyo: Mito Shoya, 1934), p. 1