

STEFANI SILLI

Unveiling the New Era: the Transformation of Women's Roles and Status during the Meiji Japan

STEFANI SILLI

JURAJ DOBRILA UNIVERSITY OF PULA / UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

STEFANI.SILLI@UNIPU.HR

UDC 94(520):342.7-055.2"1870/1890"

<https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2025.7.4>

Original scientific paper

Unveiling the New Era: the Transformation of Women's Roles and Status during the Meiji Japan

In the second half of the 19th century Japan saw the end of the feudal political order with the Tokugawa shogunate in power (1603–1867) and the restoration of imperial rule under Emperor Meiji, ushering Japan into a new modern era. This paper aims to investigate and illuminate how the combined impact of modern education, legal forms, and economic opportunities influenced the transformation of women's status and roles in the Meiji period, using a comparative approach with the previous Edo (Tokugawa) period. This paper argues that traditional Confucian-based gender norms that had dominated during the Edo period were challenged and, in some cases, reshaped to fit the evolving socio-political landscape. The establishment of a modern educational system enabled girls and women to acquire new knowledge and skills outside the domestic sphere, laying the groundwork for women's increased participation in public, political and professional life. However, as the freedom and popular rights movement came to be perceived as a threat to state authority, by the late 1890s women were deliberately excluded from formal politics and redefined primarily as wives and mothers serving the state in the household, as women's activism challenged both political hierarchy and the family system *ie*.

75

KEYWORDS:

women's rights, Meiji Japan (1870s–1890s), women's political participation, ryōsai kenbo ideology, Japanese feminism, Fukuda Hideko, women's history

After the nearly three-hundred-year rule of the Tokugawa shogunate had come to an end, Japan underwent numerous political, social, economic and cultural reforms, which included the dismantling of the old four-class system, the abolition of feudal privileges and hereditary positions, the introduction of universal compulsory education and the promotion of industrialization. The reforms and changes implemented during the Meiji period greatly transformed Japanese society and culture, which was the result of the selective appropriation of contemporary Western political and cultural institutions and ideas. In the case of Meiji Japan, the state's efforts to modernize the country brought both advancements and setbacks for women, highlighting the complex interplay between progress and tradition. This paper aims to explore the changes in women's roles during the Meiji period, addressing the following research questions: How did women's roles and status change in the Meiji period when compared to the Edo period, and what were the main factors driving these changes? How did the socio-political, cultural and economic reforms of the Meiji period influence the change of roles and status of women in Japan?

While prior scholarship has examined women's education, labour, family roles, and political activism in the Meiji period, these areas are often analysed separately rather than as interconnected processes. This paper contributes to the existent literature by analysing how these changes were structurally interrelated and shaped by the Meiji state's broader project of nation-building. By bringing together gender ideology, legal reform, and women's political participation, this study argues that the expansion of women's roles and their subsequent restriction were not contradictory outcomes of modernization, but mutually constitutive processes within a model of controlled modernization. In doing so, this paper reframes the late Meiji restriction of women's rights not as a temporary interruption in progress, but as an intentional and structural outcome of the modern Japanese state.

By analysing secondary sources, alongside primary sources such as contemporary writings, government documents and personal accounts, this paper will try to explore and illuminate the multifaceted experiences of women during the Meiji period. For the purpose of this paper, the autobiography of the early Japanese feminist Fukuda Hideko was used as it provides a direct account into the thoughts, concerns, motivations, struggles and contentions on the topic of a woman's position, gender equality, modernity and democracy, which, as will be shown, influenced the social and legal changes concerning a woman's position in Meiji society. In addition, the Meiji Civil Code was also referred and examined on the grounds of gaining insight into how the state had institutionalized gender inequality and reinforced the primacy of male authority, and how this was reflected in the legal system. In regards to the analysis of the status and position of Edo women, excerpts from *Great Learning for Women (Onna Daigaku)*, a popular moral tract on the norms for women's behaviour and morality published in the Edo period, was studied in order to understand the moral and cultural expectations of Tokugawa and Neo-Confucianism ideology that was placed upon women concerning their behaviour, position in the household and education.

When approaching the analysis of subjectivity and experience of “women,” “Japanese women” or “Asian women,” we have to be cautious as they are not universal and unified categories, rather they are culturally created categories. Ueno Chizuko, a leading feminist scholar and sociologist, argues that Japanese feminism has historically been trapped within the frameworks that idealize and preserve traditional gender roles and resist social changes, instead of challenging the underlying patriarchal structures, thereby slowing down the progress of feminism in Japan. Drawing on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Ueno argues that Japan has been feminized within Western discourse as passive, exotic and submissive, equating it to Western ideas of femininity, as opposed to the rational, progressive and masculine West. This perception was then internalized and reproduced by Japanese intellectuals through the romanticization of pre-industrial traditional gender roles. As a result, Japanese women have been feminized twice, first through the Western representation of the Orient as feminine, and second through Japan’s own social and cultural discourses that reinforced traditional gender roles.¹ This perspective provides an important lens for present analysis in order to understand why the improvement of a woman’s status and expansion of a woman’s roles in the Meiji period did not translate into full political citizenship.

Social, Political and Economic Reforms in Meiji Period

In 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown and the emperor Meiji was declared as the head of state. A group of samurai from the Satsuma and Chōshū provinces (domains), along with a few imperial loyalists from other domains and several Kyoto aristocrats, formed an alliance to restore imperial power, which ended the nearly three hundred year rule of the shogunate.² In order to consolidate power, the new ruling elite sought to establish a centralized government, which included political, administrative, economic and social reforms. The popular slogan *wakon yōsai* (和魂洋才 Japanese spirit, Western skills), widespread in the Meiji period, was an adapted version of the slogan *wakon kansai* (和魂漢才 Japanese spirit, Chinese skills) and the phrase *tōyō dōtoku seiyō geijutsu* (東洋道德西洋节行得上海汉, eastern virtues, western skills) from the earlier Edo period.³ The term *wakon yōsai*, a political creed of the Meiji government at the time, expressed the desire to accept and appropriate technological and scientific achievements from the West, but at the same time to preserve their Japanese spirit, encapsulating the intricate duality of Japanese modernity, as Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes.⁴

The first step towards centralization was to abolish the domains, which meant convincing the daimyo, former feudal lords, to relinquish

¹ Chizuko Ueno, “In the Feminine Guise: A Trap of Reverse Orientalism,” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal, English Supplement*, no. 13 (1997): 5-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42772115>.

² Patricia Buckley Ebrey et al., *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 337.

³ Dōshin Satō, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 176-177.

⁴ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan: Nation, Culture, Identity* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1998), 161-184.

their domains and land. In 1871 the government eliminated 270 domain administrations, centralized tax collection and established prefectures. Towns and villages were merged into larger administrative units, where a new household registration system was introduced.⁵ The abolition of the Tokugawa class system was considered one of the most revolutionary changes implemented shortly after the restoration of the imperial power.⁶ In 1871 the imperial government lifted the ban on marriages between the traditional classes of samurai, peasants, merchants and artisans, while in 1876 all classes were declared equal.⁷ In 1872 the Ministry of Education issued the *Gakusei*, the Fundamental Code of Education, implementing an elementary education for girls and boys across the country, which meant that subjects taught at the elementary level would no longer differ according to the regional and social class of students. Following middle school, the Ministry of Education established specialized higher schools in 1886.⁸

In February 1889 Emperor Meiji promulgated the First Japanese Constitution, which consisted of seven chapters and seventy-six articles. The emperor exercises legislative power with the permission of the Japanese parliament (Imperial Diet) and determines the organization of the government; the emperor is the supreme commander of the army and navy, and declares war and makes peace. The subjects had the rights and duties to employment in public affairs, they had obligation serving in the army or navy (men only), they were obligated to pay taxes; they had freedom of speech and assembly, and freedom of religious belief.⁹

78

Family, Marriage and Motherhood

In the process of constructing a modern nation-state in the Meiji period, under the slogan “wealthy country, strong army” (*fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵) and “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化), a significant emphasis was placed on creating an ideological gendered separation of roles for women and men as subjects and citizens (*kokumin* 国民) of the modern nation (*kokka* 国家) through institutional and legal structures, where women were expected to fulfil specific roles that were deeply intertwined with family dynamics, motherhood and societal expectations, while the construction of mature masculinity, fit to support, build and lead the nation, was embedded in a man’s role.

An influential intellectual society, *Meirokusha* (Meiji Six Society), founded in 1873 by Mori Arinori (1847–1889), the future first Minister of Education in the Meiji government, who, along with other influential members such as Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) advocated for equality between women and men, held a significant position in the early debates regarding

⁵ Ebrey et al., *East Asia*, 339.

⁶ Mikiso Hane and Louis Perez, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), 90.

⁷ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64.

⁸ Mara Patessio, *Women and public life in early Meiji Japan: the development of the feminist movement* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2011), 42.

⁹ Ebrey et al., *East Asia*, 344.

modernism and gender equality. It was Fukuzawa Yukichi who coined the phrase “civilization and enlightenment.”¹⁰ In their journal, *Meiroku zasshi* (The Meiji Six Journal) debated various issues, critiquing traditional the gender roles that confined women to the domestic sphere, arguing that these roles were outdated and impeded Japan’s progress and that women should have the opportunity to participate in public life and contribute to national development. They advocated for the necessity of the education of women, the idea of equality between husbands and wives in marriage (*fufu doken*), and the abolition of the legal recognition of concubinage.¹¹ Furthermore, they emphasized the role of education for both men and women in order to practice monogamy and refrain from infidelity, thus challenging Confucian values and the double standards which allowed the continuation of such practices.¹² Fukuzawa also advocated legal reforms to allow women more autonomy, such as the right to inherit property and enter into contracts, but such views were not reflected in the Meiji Civil Code.¹³ In other words, Meirokusha members called for social reforms that would improve the status of women, supporting changes in the legal and social systems to provide more rights and freedoms to women.

Mori and Fukuzawa, key figures in the group, were unexpectedly labelled as advocates for equal rights for men and women (*danjo doken* 男女同権). However, they primarily focused on promoting equality within the family (*fūfu dōken* 夫婦同権) and were not set to be seen as champions of broader gender equality. They struggled to separate discussions about women’s roles in the home from their potential roles in society, ultimately arguing that while Japanese women were not ready for significant social roles, they could assume greater power within the family to help educate future generations.¹⁴

In view of this, in the 1870s the phrase “wise mother” (*ryōsai* 良妻) defined a women’s role as a mother who can adequately raise children, thus emphasizing the need for educating all women, in order for them to be able to manage the household and better perform in the upbringing and education of their children, in accordance with “the latest scientific knowledge and practice.”¹⁵ This was supported by the introduction of a uniform national elementary educational system in 1872. For the first time female and male pupils would receive an elementary education.¹⁶ Whereas, during the Edo period, women were mostly homeschooled and female pupils could not enter schools for the samurai class such as *gakumonjo* and *hanko* (schools established by the shogunate as well as by many clans), and even the *terakoya*

¹⁰ Ibid, 347.

¹¹ Barbara Molony, “The Quest for Women’s Rights in Turn-of-the-Century Japan,” in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, eds. Barbara Molony and Katherine Uno (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard East Asia Center, 2005), 472-477.

¹² Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17-18.

¹³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁴ Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 23.

¹⁵ Gail Lee Bernstein, “Introduction,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7.

¹⁶ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 26.

(education facilities set up for commoners' children at which attendance was non-compulsory), which were mainly attended by boys.¹⁷

In the 1890s, however, the "wise mother" concept was reimagined in the phrase *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母, which can be translated as "good wife, wise mother." It was Nakamura Masanao (1832–1891), a Meiji intellectual and member of the Meirokusha society, who introduced the concept of "good wife, wise mother" in one of the final issues of the journal *Meiroku Zasshi*, proposing that women should provide the religious and moral backbone of the home, educate their children, and support their husbands.¹⁸ In other words, women should be seen as the primary educators and moral guides of their children.

Kathleen S. Uno argues that *ryōsai kenbo* ideology became the basis of women's education in 1899, with the establishment of a few higher schools for girls and the introduction of a coeducation curriculum in 1911.¹⁹ Uno also notes that the outdated modes of thinking and customs of the Edo period, which have been used to justify denying women social and familial responsibilities were gone, meaning that well-educated women could instill in their children loyalty, devotion and patriotism, thus making them good subjects for the emperor.²⁰ This implies that a woman's main role was now tied to the education and upbringing of children, strongly connecting her to the domestic sphere and management of the household, placing focus on women's competence and education, which was a significant shift from a woman's role and position in the Edo period, which was based on servility, filial piety and submission.

80

As opposed to these new expectations of women being wise mothers and good wives in the Meiji period, women in the Edo period were not expected to be the wise mother and be responsible for the education of their children. On the contrary, their main concern was that of being solely a good wife and daughter-in-law.

During the Edo (Tokugawa) period, the ideal woman and good wife was premised on obedience towards her husband and parents-in-law, which was instilled in young girls from an early age through upbringing and many moral textbooks and instruction books, known as *jōkunsho* 昌訓書 and *ōraimono* 往来物.

One of the most popular moral tracts in the Tokugawa period *The Great Learning for Women* (*Onna Daigaku* 女大学), heavily influenced by the Neo-Confucianism of the samurai elite that ruled, and the prevailing idea of *danson jōhi* 男尊女卑 ("respect men and denigrate women"), highlighted women's subservience to men, their obligation to submit to elders and their inherent inferiority.²¹

¹⁷ Shizuko Koyama, "Domestic roles and the incorporation of women into the nation-state: the emergence and development of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideology," in *Gender, Nation and State in Modern Japan*, eds. Andrea Germer et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 87.

¹⁸ Siever, *Flowers in Salt*, 23.

¹⁹ Kathleen S. Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ "The Great Learning for Women," in *Sources of Japanese Tradition: Volume 2, 1600 to 2000*,

The portrayal of an ideal woman in these instruction books was depicted as submissive, subordinate, less intelligent and inferior to her husband, who was her master, and as someone who fully committed herself to carrying out the filial duties owed to her husband's parents. One example of such a depiction can be found in representative Edo period textbook for girls entitled *The Great Treasury of Learning for Women (Onna daigaku takarabako, 1716)*: "since women are witless, they should humble themselves and obey their husbands in all matters."²² In addition, regarding the role of the childrearing and education of children, women were criticized in *Onna daigaku takarabako* as unfit to be a wise mother: "when bringing up their children, they dote on them and therefore cannot educate them well."²³ This shows that women were perceived as less intelligent and inferior to men, suggesting that they were not capable enough to educate their children.

In addition, as the male head of the family was responsible for managing the household *ie* 家, in which a strong focus was placed on family continuity and prosperity, as a result, the power and duty to educate the family's offspring was in fact on the household's head.²⁴ On the other hand, the authority, role and the status of women in the household could also be viewed from a different, alternative perspective. Uno claims that, although the househead had the greatest authority, depending on seniority and gender, women also had a fair share of authority and responsibility, whereas in the case of childrearing, this responsibility was shared between different members of the family.²⁵ Therefore, while marriage was expected of all women, and children were important for family continuity, motherhood was not necessarily a woman's primary duty.

Uno's analysis of the Edo period household *ie* 家 further complicates assumptions that women's domestic roles in the Meiji period represented continuity with earlier practices. Uno characterizes the stem-family household *ie* as a corporate entity in which productive and reproductive labour were closely intertwined, allowing men, women, and children to participate collectively in sustaining the household.²⁶ In addition, a woman could serve as househead in the absence of an appropriate male, where usually the housewife (*shufu* 主夫) had the most authority, although the sphere of her influence (housekeeping, laundry, provisions, meals, and some social relations) varied among the four classes.²⁷

Uno's analysis is significant as it demonstrates that the Meiji redefinition of women as primary caregivers and moral educators did not expand women's authority, but instead narrowed and restructured it, transforming previously shared household responsibilities into a gendered

eds. Theodore de Bary et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 262-266.

²² Matsutarō Ishikawa, ed., *女大学集. Onna daigakushū. Vol. 302 of Tōyō bunko* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977), quoted in Shizuko Koyama, "Domestic roles," 87.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Bernstein, "Introduction," 3; Koyama, "Domestic roles," 87.

²⁵ Uno, "Women and Changes," 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-26.

²⁷ Chizuko Ueno, "The Position of Japanese Women Reconsidered," *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (1987): 75-84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2743442>; Uno, "Women and Changes," 24-28.

division of labour, which were now aligned with the state's nation-building agenda. It can be concluded that while childrearing was important, it was not necessarily the central focus of women's roles, with many delegating these tasks to others when possible. This shows that women were expected to bear children who would continue the family line, to be an obedient wife and daughter-in-law, but it was not required of them to raise and educate their children. Whereas in the Meiji period, women's roles regarding household work and the upbringing of children were reinterpreted according to the logic of the state, asserting the importance of their existence as wives and mothers for the nation. With the anchoring and reaffirming of a woman's position in the domestic sphere, followed by the separation of school and the workplace from the home, this gravely affected the gendered division of labour in the household of the Meiji period, compared to the responsibilities that were once all shared by women, men and children during the Edo period. Whereas now, with the men and children being outside of the home because of work and school, a woman's role as the manager of the household and educator of her children was redefined and reshaped. This was also legally supported in the Meiji Civil Code, promulgated in 1898, which brought significant changes to marriage and the legal rights of women in Japan. The Meiji Civil Code set the samurai ideal of the *ie* as national standard for the family, entrenched patriarchal norms, legally subordinating women to men and emphasizing their role in supporting the family and, by extension, the state.²⁸ This legal framework reinforced gender hierarchy, limiting women's rights and confining them to the domestic sphere while men engaged in public and political life. The Meiji Civil Code included no recognition of the diversity of marriage and inheritance practices which had existed in different regions and classes of the late Tokugawa society, and it imposed a version of the patriarchal samurai family on all sections of society.²⁹ Women were legally subordinated to men, and the household head's permission was required for many of their actions. Women needed their husband's consent to enter legal contracts, thus, men were given legal authority over their wives, reinforcing male dominance in marital relationships. In cases of divorce, custody of children was automatically granted to the husband. Adultery by a wife was grounds for legal divorce and criminal prosecution, but a husband's adultery was not treated with the same severity. Women had limited property rights and were often dependent on their husbands or male relatives. A wife's ability to own or manage property was restricted, and she required her husband's approval to undertake most legal and financial activities.³⁰ Taken together, these provisions of the Meiji Civil Code did more than regulate marriage and property relations, in fact they legally codified women's subordination within the household and institutionalized male authority as a principle of social order.

In view of this, women were recognised as members of the nation, which underlines the significance of the emergence of the *ryōsai kenbo* 良

²⁸ Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 111-113; Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 22-25.

²⁹ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 22-23.

³⁰ *The Civil Code of Japan*, trans. Ludwig Lönholm (Tokyo: Kokubunsha, 1898). <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924069576704#page/n9/mode/2up>.

妻賢母 “good wife, wise mother” ideology, as Koyama notes.³¹ Nevertheless, this ideology did not actually ensure real equality between men and women, rather, it can be argued that it acknowledged the existence of a rigid gender hierarchy. Men were seen as direct participants in the nation-state through their productive labour and military duties, contributing to the notion of a strong nation and military. Women, on the other hand, constructed their connection to the nation-state indirectly through domestic support for their husbands’ social activities and the nurturing of children who were seen as future citizens. The division of labour, with men primarily engaged in paid work and women in housework and childcare, resulted in men having financial superiority. Consequently, men were seen as the breadwinners and women as financially dependent in this gender dynamic. This paper argues that once women were positioned as moral and reproductive agents rather than autonomous citizens, their exclusion from formal political participation and legal authority was not an inconsistency, but a logical outcome of the ideological framework itself. *Ryōsai kenbo* thus provided an ideological foundation that legitimized both the legal subordination of women within the family and their political marginalization at the state level. However, this does not imply that a woman’s role was solely confined to the household and family, they were also involved in the work force, political movements and the public sphere.

Women in the Public Sphere: Political Activity and Associations

Sharon Sievers posits the beginning of a feminist consciousness in the late 19th century, with the formation of the political opposition named Movement for Freedom and Popular Rights (*Jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動), which gave women a platform to articulate and voice their opinions on issues that did not just include demands for certain political rights.³² However, the subsequent suppression of women’s political participation demonstrates that feminist consciousness alone was insufficient to overcome a state which was increasingly committed to political stability, imperial loyalty, and a gendered model of nation-building.

Some of the most prominent female voices were Kusunose Kita (1833–1920), Kishida Toshiko (1861–1901) and Fukuda Kageyama Hideko (1865–1927), taking the issues of women’s rights, education, monogamy, respect, and equality to the public in political speeches in the 1880s, while also advocating for women’s inclusion in the affairs of the state, as well as the public sphere.³³ Inspired by works of Western liberalism, including John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, the People’s Rights movement politicized many rural women, who at local assemblies heard women speakers criticize the patriarchal family as well as the authoritarian state.³⁴

³¹ Koyama, “Domestic roles,” 90.

³² Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 25.

³³ Molony, “Quest for Women Rights,” 473–475; Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 28–29.

³⁴ Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, “The Meiji State’s Policy Toward Women, 1890–1910,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 156.

Even though during the Edo period women were excluded from political participation and the affairs of the shogunate, especially samurai women, Anne Walthall's study of Edo peasant women reveals that in rural areas women were active in peasants riots and protests against oppressive taxes and policies.³⁵ While there were women in the Edo period who had an important public and political role, the social fabric of the world they inhabited was drastically different from Meiji women, as Edo women's activities did not criticize the inferior position and status of women within Edo society and its patriarchal institutions, as well as the fact they were active in a predominantly male world. On the other hand, Meiji women managed to establish a rich support system and networks of women with the same goals and agenda, constructing a public space specially designed for women, where they could debate social and political issues.

In the 1870s and 1880s, a woman's main goal was to obtain a political education, new employment possibilities, property rights and rights within the family. Young women started to voice their own claims and opinions giving public speeches in the early 1880s. In numerous speeches between 1882 and 1884, Kishida Toshiko advocated for equal rights for men and women, criticized the equating of personhood in the male gender alone.³⁶ She called for reform of the family system, and new forms of women's education which would enable women to take a politically responsible role in society. Kishida Toshiko would become a regular feature of public meetings in the 1880s, her words and her appearance in public providing inspiration for other women activists, focusing on the family as the site of women's oppression.³⁷ Mackie notes, how woman in public spaces was often sensationalised, and the press would often focus on reporting woman's appearance and the way she dressed, thus marking women as "different" in a public sphere which was already "being gendered as masculine space."³⁸ Hence, Kishida Toshiko's critique of the family as the site of oppression can be seen as a criticism against the structures of authority of the Meiji system. Feminist activism thus emerged not as a linear path toward emancipation, but as a contested process shaped and ultimately constrained by state power.

Kishida's political speeches had an immense influence on a young Fukuda Hideko, the daughter of a samurai in Okayama, who became a prominent activist, socialist and educator, actively involved in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the early 1880s. In her autobiography *My Half-Lived Life* (Warawa no Hanseigai 妾の半生涯) written in 1904, she reflects on her education and the opportunities and constraints faced by women in Meiji society. Kishida's three-day visit to her hometown and public lectures on women's rights inspired Fukuda to organize a women's association in her hometown: "...when she eloquently proclaimed the great cause of expanding women's rights with her fluent speech, I too could not restrain my ardent admiration. During her stay, I consulted with the wives and daughters of

³⁵ Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁶ Siever, *Flowers in Salt*, 28-29.

³⁷ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 20-21.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

respected local members to organize a women's association. We aimed to take the lead nationwide in fostering unity among women. We frequently invited political activists and intellectuals to hear their arguments on the natural rights, human rights, liberty, and equality, and we devoted ourselves to shatter the long-standing, backward customs imposed upon women. As the prevailing wind blew in this direction, new members joined without end, and the association grew ever more magnificent."³⁹ The explicit aim "to shatter long-standing, backward customs imposed upon women" shows that Fukuda framed women's oppression as structural and cultural rather than individual. Her contribution lies in redefining women's issues as a shared social problem requiring organized resistance, while her activities demonstrate that women were not simply objects of modernization policies but active participants in shaping modern political consciousness, particularly regarding rights and citizenship. Women's rights activism was a dynamic and socially embedded force in Japan's modernizing society, not just a peripheral or purely rhetorical movement. Fukuda's life and writing exemplify the emergence of feminist consciousness, while simultaneously foreshadowing the later limitations imposed on women's public and political participation.

In 1882 Fukuda founded a private school for girls, Jokōgakusha, but the school was shut down by government order in 1884, prompting Fukuda to move to Tokyo, where her political activities intensified. In 1885 she was arrested and imprisoned during the Osaka Incident, in which liberal activists attempted to support reform movements in Korea, which marked a turning point in the state's suppression of radical political activism. In her writing she often reflected on the repressive and arbitrary authority of the Meiji state, which she experienced firsthand. In the context of her release from prison under amnesty, she comments in detail on this power: "Escorted to the office, I found the prison director and other officials seated in solemn assembly. They respectfully read aloud the imperial pardon. The director then addressed me with grave dignity: 'By imperial pardon, your crime has been wholly espunged. From this day, you are a free woman. Henceforth, strive diligently for the greater good of the nation.' As soon I heard these words, a strange sensation suddenly welled up within me. That a person who, until yesterday and even earlier today, forced into labour as a traitor to the state, should within a single hour become a loyal subject devoted to the emperor and the nation, and bathe in the grace of the amnesty decree, how utterly wondrous a state of affairs! That life is like an illusion, who could have imagined it? For a moment, I stood utterly dazed."⁴⁰ Thus, Fukuda viewed the authority of the Meiji state as deeply arbitrary and performative, rather than morally absolute, recognizing how imperial power could in an instant redefine an individual from "traitor" to "loyal subject", a realization that fostered her critical, ironic distance from state authority rather than genuine reverence for it. Fukuda's experience was not an isolated one, but rather, it reflected broader patterns of women's political engagement and constraint in the

³⁹ Fukuda Hideko 福田英子, "Kishida joshi kitaru," 岸田女史来きたる, *Warawa no Hanseigai* 妾の半生涯, Aozora Bunko. https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000057/files/43276_18829.html#midashi90.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, "Kenpō happu to taisha," 憲法発布と大赦.

1880s. Alongside individual activists such as Fukuda, women across Japan organized collectively in new forms that blurred the boundaries between the domestic and the political, creating spaces for discussion, education, and activism within the expanding public sphere.

Various women's groups were organized in cities and towns, and Molony mentions women's friendly societies (*joshi konshinkai*), women's freedom parties (*fujin jiyūtō*), women's rights associations (*jokenkai*), women's societies (*fujin kyōkai*), and at least one women's freedom hall (*joshi jiyūkan*), where women participated in discussions about improving women's status by "politicizing the private sphere by means of education and marital respect as well as the relationship of education and marital respect to women's public voice and self-cultivation."⁴¹ Patessio argues that the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology was used as a platform for women to organize and engage in public activities during the 1880s, which was supported by women's participation in ladies' *fujinkai* associations. Their main purpose was educating their members on the new possibilities for women's education and roles, to learn new and "modern" methods of fulfilling their duties and caring for their families. Membership in these associations was inclusive, not limited to married women, as men and unmarried young women also participated in their activities or became members.⁴² In other words, by participating in *fujinkai*, women created new possibilities for themselves and others outside the domestic sphere, working together and campaigning, addressing various issues, such as the abolition of concubinage and prostitution, restructuring of the family system and relations in society.

86

Besides participating, learning and networking in *fujinkai*, taking care of their own funds and agendas, women also participated in electing and voting for their group's committee members, in other words, women were learning to be actively involved citizens through their involvement in the *fujinkai*.⁴³ Although the government had not yet established a national policy on local voting rights, some women voted in local assemblies before this being explicitly prohibited in the 1880s.⁴⁴ Male citizenship was also limited, given the fact that to assume an active political role, men had to be the head of the household and have a certain amount of wealth and property. Furthermore, only men who paid a certain amount of taxes were able to vote in local elections.⁴⁵

Under the Electoral Law in 1889 only Japanese men who met special property requirements were granted the rights to vote and act as candidates in national elections. In other words, the Japanese government decided to restrict women's political participation. Under the Imperial Constitution of 1899 women were not given the right to vote, but moreover, women were not

⁴¹ Barbara Molony, "Women's Rights and the Japanese State, 1880-1925," in *Public Spheres, Private Lives in Modern Japan, 1600-1950: Essays in Honor of Albert Craig*, eds. Gail Lee Bernstein et. al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 233.

⁴² Patessio, *Women and public life*, 109-111.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 136.

⁴⁴ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 19-20.

⁴⁵ Patessio, *Women and public life*, 145.

allowed to be present at the first assembly of the Diet in 1890.⁴⁶ This decision was enacted based on the revised regulations on public meetings, which was one of the outgoing cabinet's last acts, named the Law on Associations and Meetings (*Shūkai Oyobi Kessha Hō*), which added women to the list of those denied the right to participate in politics, together with other social categories such as military men, policemen, teachers and students, barring them from attending political meetings, organizing political associations, joining political groups, and thus being subjected to fines or imprisonment. In 1900 these bans were redrafted in Article 5 of the Police Security Regulations (*Chian Keisatsu Hō*), which also included a rule forbidding women from attending and observing future legislative sessions in the Diet.⁴⁷ Thus, women were excluded from politics exclusively on the grounds of their gender.

Following the barring of women from attending political meetings, there was a surge of petitions to the Diet to eliminate those restrictions and articles condemning and criticizing the new legislation.⁴⁸ The advocates for women's rights shifted their attention to issues of sexuality, which was redefined in connection to social issues, in order to avoid the prohibition on women's political activities. Nolte and Hastings argue that "the laws forbidding women's political participation reinforced and legitimized the family duties, social values, and poverty that kept most women out of the political arena, and also absorbed much of the energy of the activist minority."⁴⁹ Their analysis highlights how legal exclusion functioned to redirect women's activities away from overt political engagement and back toward the family and social morality. Based on this insight, I argue that these restrictions should be understood not merely as responsive measures against women's activism, but as a part of a broader strategy through which the Meiji state sought to stabilize the modern nation by consolidating a gendered model of citizenship, one that excluded women from formal politics while binding them more tightly to the household. From this we can conclude that despite various endeavours and ideas, on the legal level women were denied political and social rights. The government and the state prescribed specific roles, duties and behaviours to all women, proving once again that the state wanted to limit women to family affairs, in order to benefit the state.

87

Women and Education

Discussions surrounding a woman's status, role and rights were closely related to debates regarding women's education in Meiji intellectual circles, who saw female education as a means of achieving equality between men and women, or rather, husband and wife, denouncing the inferior and subjugated position of women during Edo period.

In 1872 the Ministry of Education issued the *Gakusei*, the Fundamental Code of Education, implementing an elementary education for girls and boys

⁴⁶ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 19-20.

⁴⁷ Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 52; Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 4-5; Nolte and Hastings, "Meiji State's Policy," 155.

⁴⁸ Molony, "Women's Rights," 238.

⁴⁹ Nolte and Hastings, "Meiji State's Policy," 156.

across the country, which meant that subjects taught at the elementary level would no longer differ according to the regional and social class of students.⁵⁰ Thus, the state enabled young girls with the education they required for bearing future responsibilities as wives and mothers through the establishment of the modern education system, which mandated elementary education for both boys and girls. This had a profound impact on the lives of people, as it signified a clear break from the practice of female and male education in the Edo period, as there were no institutionalized and formalized educational practices for women prior to the Meiji period. Regarding the state of women's education in the Edo period, there is a wide range of Tokugawa materials, which contain substantial evidence of women's education, including the widespread use of moral guides for girls (*jokun*) from the middle of the eighteenth century, the rise in the numbers of educational texts (*ōraimono*) written specifically for women, and women's autobiographies that speak of the level of their education.

88

Many Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Edo period authored works on the value of women's education and advised parents to encourage their daughters' education. Among them, Kaibara Ekiken and Matsudaira Sadanobu are frequently cited as examples of how Japan's interpretation of Neo-Confucian philosophy oppressed Tokugawa women's education. However, as Tocco points out, Kaibara and Matsudaira actually strongly advocated for women to pursue education.⁵¹ Furthermore, Neo-Confucian thought regarding women's education was quite diverse, extending from cautions that women with high levels of education were a threat to the state, to warnings that, as mothers, women with low levels of education jeopardized the stability of the family and, consequently, the stability of the state. The content of women's moral guides constructed a negative image of the status of Tokugawa women and their education, but, as Tocco asserts, these guides were only one of several categories of books published for a female audience.⁵² Another category were *joshi ōraimono* (女子往来物), educational texts written specifically for women. These texts provided instruction in basic writing and general knowledge useful in the everyday life of ordinary people, whose number, variety and range increased throughout the Edo period.⁵³

Therefore, even though women's education was not formalized, the wide dissemination of moral guides and educational textbooks gave a common aspect to women's education, regardless of the social class the women belonged to.

Regarding the education of samurai girls, the evidence from the Tokugawa period suggests that almost all samurai women were literate.

⁵⁰ Patessio, *Women and public life*, 42.

⁵¹ Marta Tocco, "Norms and Texts for Women's Education in Tokugawa Japan," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, eds. Dorothy Ko et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 194.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵³ Peter Kornicki, "Women, Education, and Literacy," in *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan*, eds. Peter Kornicki et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 7-38.

Samurai women who lived in the major cities and castle towns and its vicinity, had wider educational possibilities, as there was a larger number of local schools, some administrated by women, with a higher number of women teachers.⁵⁴ Girls from lower-ranking samurai families had more freedom to move about and could attend *terakoya*, local schools teaching basic reading and writing; *ohariya*, schools teaching needlework and other female chores; and occasionally *shijuku*, private schools or classes teaching subjects like Japanese, Chinese, and Western studies to students who already had a certain level of education.⁵⁵

Urban and rural middle-class women also had access to education that went beyond basic literacy, as did suburban commoner women as well, as it would prepare them for managing the household after they were married. Women from samurai and commoner classes established and managed public and private academies, hiring other women as teachers. Whether they worked in neighbouring cities or in castle towns, these women were able to find students.⁵⁶ Regarding the education of women from peasant families, Walthall notes that most of the girls who attended schools were from middle-level families and above, as schooling was expensive and children were also considered an important labour source in the household and farm, concluding that they were in school long enough to absorb moral instructions.⁵⁷ From this we can conclude that a woman's access to education differed depending on her social class and area of residence, but regardless of class, most women did receive a basic education on ethical and moral conduct. Therefore, although education available for men and women was not identical, it is safe to presume that women in different classes in Edo Japan had access to education, whether at home, in a private or village school.

In 1879 a new educational policy required that the girls were to be segregated from boys after the first four years of elementary school, attending only girls' middle schools.⁵⁸ The movement for women's education gained strength to the extent that the "girl student" or *jogakusei* 女学生 became an emblematic figure in popular literature, magazines and the press.⁵⁹ Thus, for the first time a relatively large number of girls coming from various regions studied together, enabling them to establish connections and networks, a space where girls and women could relate to each other outside the household, thus forming a separate group within society, not possible until then. In 1900 the first tertiary institution for women was

⁵⁴ Tocco, "Norms and Texts," 203.

⁵⁵ Anne Walthall, "Women and Literacy from Edo to Meiji," in *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan*, eds. Peter Kornicki et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 215-235.

⁵⁶ Tocco, "Norms and Texts," 194.

⁵⁷ Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 46-47.

⁵⁸ Patricia E. Tsurumi, "The State, Education, and Two Generations of Women in Meiji Japan, 1868-1912," in *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 18 (2000): 16-17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42772154>.

⁵⁹ Patessio, *Women and Public Spaces*, 48.

established, Joshi Eigaku Juku (Women's English College, now known as Tsuda Juku Daigaku or Tsuda College), followed by Tōkyō Joshi Daigakkō (Tokyo Women's University) in 1901. In 1903, an Act was passed which enabled the establishment of vocational colleges for women, and Joshi Eigaku Juku was provided the status of a vocational college, allowing its students to be accredited as teachers.⁶⁰ From this we could conclude that education had the power to improve a woman's circumstances and give them the means to support themselves, which in turn fuelled the movement for women's education.

Women, Labour and Employment

The promotion of industry and commerce, as well as the establishment of a compulsory educational system had a transformative effect on the opportunities, roles and labour patterns of women. In contrast, during the Edo period, women from all classes were involved in productive and reproductive work within the household. In an average or poor household, a young married woman did various household tasks, contributing to the household economy, while women in wealthy households of all classes, in the city and countryside, avoided the heavy load of productive and reproductive work.⁶¹ However, women's productive work in the home did not imply economic and financial independence as their work was necessary for the survival and sustainment of the household.

On the other hand, in some cases, daughters of peasant families were sent away to labour as temporary *dekasegi* 出稼ぎ ("working or earning money away from home") workers, usually in a local village or town, which reduced the number of mouths to be fed, but, at the same time also provided girls an opportunity to gain valuable skills and experience, enabling them to earn some money.⁶² In more economically advanced areas, farm women also cultivated cash crops such as tobacco and vegetables, spun thread, raised silkworms and wove cloth for the market. In contrast, samurai women were not allowed regular stipend posts, although some had positions as ladies-in-waiting, maids, wet nurses, or governesses in the homes of feudal lords.⁶³

As regards merchant women, in merchant houses where enterprise and the house were seen as one entity, as was the case during the Edo and early Meiji periods, women could participate in the management of the family business, could own property in their name, choose apprentices and oversee the adoption of a son-in-law, carry the keys to the warehouse and maintain the workers that lived with them.⁶⁴ However, with modernization and restructuration, the house and the enterprise were separated both physically and financially, thus effecting a wife's position, which meant losing

90

⁶⁰ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 26-27.

⁶¹ Uno, "Women and Changes," 26-27.

⁶² Patricia E. Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 12.

⁶³ Uno, "Women and Changes," 27.

⁶⁴ Joyce Chapman Lebra, "Women in an All-Male Industry: The Case of Sake Brewer Tatsuma Kiyo," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 136-137.

her hold on the family business.⁶⁵ In conclusion, the participation of women in the economic life of their households was sanctioned by ideology. As was elaborated earlier in the text, a woman's responsibility was to the *ie* 家, also evident from the proliferation of moral tracts, such as the widespread *Onna Daigaku*, which placed focus on a woman's duty to her husbands and family.

Returning to the subject of Meiji women, it is important to note that, as opposed to the situation of women in the Edo period, many women were engaged in waged work, despite the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology that wanted to limit and confine women to the domestic sphere. Women constituted the majority of the workforce in the textile industry, especially in silk and cotton mills. Gordon details the harsh working conditions women in factories faced, including long hours, living in dormitories, low wages, and poor working environments. Government statistics reported in 1911 that 475,000 people worked in textile mills, either cotton or silk spinning or weaving, where four out of five textile workers were women, whose wages were 50 to 70 percent of those paid to men in the same industry, and 30 to 50 percent of the average male wages in heavy industries.⁶⁶ The majority of silk-reeling and cotton-spinning workers were women and girls from a rural background, although there were some from urban homes and samurai families.⁶⁷ This reveals the significance of women's and girls' work in silk and cotton factories, as these factories generated so much profit that helped build the strong and wealthy Meiji state.

Following the textile industry, the sex industry was the second largest employer of women in the late nineteenth century. Prostitution was legalized, brothels were licensed and regulated by the state, although there were many unlicensed practitioners. Between 1884 and 1916 the number of registered brothel prostitutes nearly doubled from 28,432 to 54,049.⁶⁸

Despite the fact that relatively few women were qualified to enter the predominantly male profession of medicine, midwifery and nursing were new professions limited to women, and the number of nurses in Japan increased from 13,000 in 1911 to 57,000 by 1926.⁶⁹ In addition, with the establishment of vocational colleges for women, as well as granting some higher schools the status of vocational colleges, such as Joshi Eigaku Juku, this allowed its students to be accredited as teachers.⁷⁰ Thus, the number of young women who became teachers increased over time.

By 1900 women were barred from politics, without property rights and the rights to be head of the household. In addition, women were excluded from higher education (university) until 1913, which affected and limited their job opportunities, as men who finished university could apply for positions

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Gordon, *Modern History of Japan*, 100.

⁶⁷ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 4.

⁶⁸ Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 193.

⁶⁹ Margit Nagy, "Middle-Class Working Women During the Interwar Years," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 204.

⁷⁰ Mackie, *Feminism in Japan*, 26-27.

in government offices and corporations.⁷¹ This demonstrates that gendered division of labour was prevalent, and that women were socially and legally restricted in pursuing the same careers as men.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the advances made in women's education, labour participation, and public engagement during the early Meiji period were never intended to lead to full political or legal equality, but were instead shaped and ultimately limited by the state's larger project of controlled modernization and nation-building priorities. Educational reform in the 1870s laid the groundwork for women's increased participation in public and professional life, as this provided an opportunity to establish connections and networks: a space where girls and women could relate to each other outside the household, forming a separate group within society, as well as being offered new vocational opportunities, which included teaching, midwifery and nursing. In the 1890s, women's roles regarding household work and the upbringing of children were reinterpreted according to the logic of the state, asserting the importance of their existence as wives and mothers for the nation. The emergence of the *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 "good wife, wise mother" ideology defined a woman's main role in the reproduction, education and upbringing of children, strongly connecting women to the domestic sphere and the management of the household, while men were engaged in work outside the household. In the 1870s and 1880s women began involvement in public and political activities, attending political meetings, organizing political associations, joining political groups, advocating for the improvement of women's status in family and civil society, which was a significant change in comparison to the Edo period's proscription of women's involvement in political affairs. However, by 1890, the government restricted women's political participation, barring them from attending political meetings and joining political groups, and in 1900 they were barred from attending and observing future legislative sessions in the Parliament (Diet), thus, women were excluded from politics exclusively on the grounds of their gender. Consequently, this signified a tremendous setback in the light of the great strides that had been made regarding women's political involvement, activities and rights in the 1880s. I argue that this setback occurred because, by the late 1890s, the Meiji government increasingly prioritized political stability, loyalty to the emperor, and a strict division of gender roles, as prerequisites for nation-building. This in turn led to the suppression of women's political activism and the legal consolidation of patriarchal family structures as the core of the modern nation-state. In this sense, the developments in the Meiji period illustrate what later feminist scholars such as Ueno Chizuko have identified as a pattern in which women are incorporated into the nation symbolically and functionally, while remaining excluded from full political citizenship. At the same time, the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 brought significant changes to marriage and the legal rights of women in Japan, which set the samurai ideal of the *ie* as the national standard for the

⁷¹ Ibid.

family, entrenching patriarchal norms, legally subordinating women to men and emphasizing their role in supporting the family and, by extension, the state. The path towards gender equality was far from complete by the end of the Meiji period, but the foundations laid during this era were instrumental in driving the ongoing transformation of women's roles in Japan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bernstein, Gail Lee. "Introduction." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, 1–14. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.
2. Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, Anne Walthall, and James B. Palais. *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2015.
3. Fukuda Hideko 福田英子, *Warawa no Hanseigai 妾の半生涯*. Aozora Bunko. Accessed: 12th December 2025. https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000057/files/43276_18829.html#midashi90.
4. Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
5. Hane, Mikiso and Perez, Louis G. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013.
6. Ishikawa, Matsutarō, ed. *女大学集. Onna daigakushū. Vol. 302 of Tōyō bunko*. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977.
7. Kornicki, Peter. "Women, Education, and Literacy." In *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan*, edited by Peter Kornicki, Mara Patessio, and Gaye Rowley, 7–38. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
8. Koyama, Shizuko. "Domestic roles and the incorporation of women into the nation-state: the emergence and development of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideology." In *Gender, Nation and State in Modern Japan*, edited by Andrea Germer, Vera Mackie, and Ulriche Wöhr, 85–100. New York: Routledge, 2014.
9. Lebra, Joyce Chapman. "Women in an All-Male Industry: The Case of Sake Brewer Tatsuma Kiyo." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, 131–148. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.
10. Mackie, Vera. *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
11. Molony, Barbara. "The Quest for Women's Rights in Turn-of-the-Century Japan." In *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, edited by Barbara Molony and Katherine Uno, 463–492. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard East Asia Center, 2005.
12. Molony, Barbara. "Women's Rights and the Japanese State, 1880–1925." In *Public Spheres, Private Lives in Modern Japan, 1600–1950: Essays in Honor of Albert Craig*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, Andrew Gordon, and Kate Wildman Nakai, 221–58. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005.
13. Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. *Re-inventing Japan: Nation, Culture, Identity*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1998.
14. Nagy, Margit. "Middle-Class Working Women During the Interwar Years." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, 199–216. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.
15. Nolte, Sharon H. and Sally Ann Hastings. "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890–1910." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, 151–174. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.

16. Patessio, Mara. *Women and public life in early Meiji Japan: the development of the feminist movement*. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2011.
17. Satō, Dōshin. *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011.
18. Sievers, Sharon. *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983.
19. Stanley, Amy. *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
20. "The Civil Code of Japan." Translated by Ludwig Lönholm. Tokyo: Kokubunsha, 1898. Accessed: 12th April 2024. <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924069576704#page/n9/mode/2up>.
21. "The Great Learning for Women." In *Sources of Japanese Tradition: Volume 2, 1600 to 2000*, edited by Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann, 262-266. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
22. Tocco, Martha C. "Norms and Texts for Women's Education in Tokugawa Japan." In *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, edited by Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott, 193-218. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
23. Tsurumi, E. Patricia. *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
24. Tsurumi, E. Patricia. "The State, Education, and Two Generations of Women in Meiji Japan, 1868-1912." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 18 (2000): 3-26. Accessed: 16th April 2024. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42772154>.
25. Ueno, Chizuko. "The Position of Japanese Women Reconsidered." *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (1987): 75-84. Accessed: 20th April 2024. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2743442>.
26. Ueno, Chizuko. "In the Feminine Guise: A Trap of Reverse Orientalism." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 13 (1997): 3-25. Accessed: 20th April 2024. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42772115>.
27. Uno, Kathleen S. "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, 17-41. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
28. Walthall, Anne. "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, 42-70. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
29. Walthall, Anne. *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.