Redefining the "Women's Movement" in Modern Japan

Allison Elizabeth Kennington

College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/620

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Redefining the "Women's Movement" in Modern Japan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in
History from the College of William and Mary in Virginia,

by

Allison Elizabeth Kennington

Accepted for High Honors

Eric Han Director

Joanna Schug

CHIRALEKA ZUTSHI

Kathrin Levitan

Williamsburg, Virginia
April 2013
April 25, 2013
Introduction

English-language scholarship on the Women's History of the Taisho Era (1912-1926) currently presents two different narratives of women at the time. The first is the picture presented of women in modern Japan, who are typically seen as oppressed by a state that strove to put them into the stifling model of “good wife, wise mother.” The second picture is of a few women who dared to stand up to this state: revolutionary and radical feminists, who were the first to strive for change and accomplished little despite their valiant efforts. The result is the impression that the Japanese women's movement was made up of a small group of visionaries, inspired by Western feminist ideas, attempting to free the rest of Japanese women from a plight that they failed to see or understand. In this way, the majority of Japanese women are presented as helpless and without agency at best, or brainwashed by the state into the ideology of “good wife, wise mother” at worst. The portrait of the state at this time is one that is either static in its view of women or increasingly oppressive as its militarism steadily increases as it nears the Second World War: eventually either destroying all women's groups, or turning them into instruments of the state by brute force. This creates an impression that the women's movement in Japan at this time was radical, unsuccessful and derived from Western ideas.

However, in reality, the official roles of women in the Taisho Era changed significantly from what they had been in the Meiji, and their interaction with the state is a complex and constantly changing relationship. The current narrative has little to no sense of the dialogue between women, the Japanese state, and Japanese society, instead showing only rebellion responded to by repression by the state, and apathy by the public.
Furthermore, despite the use of some Western terms by the Japanese women's movement, the ideas of the Japanese women's movement were not simply lifted from the West and transposed onto Japanese society: their goals arose directly from the unique needs of Japanese women, only some of which were shared by Western movements.

I propose that the problems in the historical narrative arise from the narrow definition of “Japanese women's movements” that exists in current scholarship. When this definition is broadened, the image of a radical, derivative and unsuccessful movement falls apart; showing instead a state and society in constant negotiation with large groups of activist women who sought to change their prescribed roles within society, and often succeeded in doing so.

**Defining Japanese “Women's Movements”**

In order to understand why it is necessary to broaden the current definition of what qualifies as a Japanese women's movement, it is first important to understand what that current definition is. This definition has two problematic pieces which must be dispensed with: first, the tendency of scholars to define women's movements as oppositional to the state, and second, their tendency to define them in terms of the battle for suffrage. Sheldon Garon articulates both problems in his article about Japanese women's groups:

> When it comes to the scholarship on women's movements and women in politics, the history of Japanese women has, for the most part, been written in terms of opposition to state power and ideology. Historians have generally focused on the careers of politically progressive women and literary feminists... To many historians of the 1920s and early 1930s, the 'women's movement' is nearly synonymous with the struggle to attain suffrage.¹

---

Constraining the definition of “feminism” to women who opposed the state worked in conjunction with the idea that all state-sponsored women's organizations were inherently oppressive and never served as a source of female empowerment. These two ideas resulting in casting all women who participated in state-sponsored women's groups as individuals who had betrayed the higher cause of feminism and women's rights for personal gain or out of fear of persecution.

Women's groups grew more polarized as the nation moved closer to the Second World War: some women were eventually jailed for their “subversive” thoughts, while others joined groups that were under direct state, even military control. The latter came to be viewed as “collaborators” with the wartime regime, and have been admonished by scholars for working with the militaristic state, and achievements they may have made have been minimized or completely ignored. More problematically, the idea of “collaboration” soon extended beyond wartime cooperation, and came to be used to discuss all women's groups that were ever connected to the state, even those that were subject to temporary or loose state-sponsorship before the rise of militarism.

The tendency to define “feminism” or “women's movements” as linked intrinsically to the suffrage movement, is not only a problem in Japanese history scholarship, but in all studies of feminist history. This has the tendency to minimize all women's activism unrelated to suffrage, while simultaneously taking all suffrage-related activity and overemphasizing its impact on a society. The idea that a feminist movement exists outside of a suffrage battle is something that seems secondary to Western feminist scholars. The study of Japanese feminism is no exception to this rule.

Even more recent scholarship on Japanese women's movements finds it difficult
to separate the idea of women's movements from the idea of suffrage. In 2003, Hiroko Tomida, the author of *Hiratsuka Raicho and Early Japanese Feminism*, makes the following statement in regards to the New Women's Association, which started to support suffrage in 1921:

It [The New Women's Association] changed its direction, to advocate female suffrage... making it the first organised women's suffrage campaign in Japan. This came about fifty-five years later than J.S. Mill's initiative in Britain, but in spite of this relative delay the suffrage petition demonstrated that the Association had come to realize how important it was for women to attain the vote. In its emphasis on this, the Association might be classified as the first women's movement in Japan in a Western political sense.²

Even the most critical of modern Western feminists who were exposed to Japanese feminism during the Meiji and Taisho Eras would have been hard pressed to make such a judgmental and frankly, inaccurate statement about women's groups in Japan. It seems to assume not only that all women's activist groups have the eventual goal of suffrage, but that the Japanese were somehow “late” or “delayed” in realizing their need for it. The statement smacks of a condescending sort of approval: as if Japanese women were stuck in an ignorant darkness, and finally managed to see a light that John Stuart Mills had been holding out to them for fifty-five years.

If only suffrage movements count as “women's movements,” as Tomida states, then what of the work women in England did in the eighteenth century to abolish the slave trade? Or the changes to women's education that were pushed for in England and the rest of Europe in the early nineteenth century? By this classification, none of those were “women's movements.” Tomida's work is possibly the longest book published in English on the subject of Taisho feminism, and sheds light on many important aspects of

---

the movement, yet for all it achieves, in some ways it epitomizes the flaws that exist within the current historical narrative, by adhering to an unhelpfully rigid definition of what constitutes a “women's movement.”

It is not enough, however, to simply point out the issues within the current scholarship, it is necessary to take this one step further, and prove how these narrow definitions have come to create the image of the Taisho women's movement that Western scholars hold today, and the ways in which a broadening of that definition will alter that understanding.

**Current Trends in Scholarship**

Due to the narrow definition of Japanese women's movements, the scholarship that pertains to women who were either ideologically radical or related in someway to the suffrage movement is prolific, whereas English sources on more moderate women's movement leaders and female educators is nearly non-existent. About socialist women alone, several full-length books have been written,\(^3\) despite the relatively small number of women involved in such organizations. There is an attractive quality to the dramatic end that these women faced at the hands of the militaristic state in the 1930s, but it does nothing to change the fact that their ideas had very little salience in women's circles. The *Seito* (Bluestockings), a literary group that was the first group of feminists to use the term “New Woman” for themselves, have also been greatly studied and emphasized. Often

---

3 The following books are about, either in part or in whole, socialist women in Japan:
these two groups are portrayed as voices of reason coming out of the darkness of an oppressive Japanese society in which most women were either unable or unwilling to do anything except adhere to the standard of “good wife, wise mother” set before them by the Japanese state.

Previous scholarship has tended to group female Japanese activists of the time into two categories, those working for the state-sponsored associations, and those working for independent organizations. These two groups are often seen as distinct from one another, one group being made up of feminist activists (independent organizations) and the other being comprised of conservative women who had no real interest in women's rights (state-sponsored organizations). The latter are not considered part of the “women's movement” by most historians, who have chosen instead to either chastise them for their cooperation with the state or to ignore them entirely. Garon describes the problem in the following terms, “Even as historians highlight the resistance of women's movements to the prewar state, they have had to grapple with the fact that most prominent female leaders collaborated with the authoritarian regime during Japan's wars with China and the Western powers.”

It seems that the reaction of Western scholars to this problem is to simply ignore these leaders that cooperated with the state during the war, regardless of what they may have accomplished before or after. The only exception to this rule is Ichikawa Fusae, the leader of the Japanese League for Women's Suffrage, and according to Garon:

No development seems to have divided these historians more than the Allied Occupation's purge of Ichikawa Fusae in 1947. Her postwar emergence as Japan's leading suffragist not withstanding, the purge temporarily removed Ichikawa from public life on the grounds that she had served as a director of the

---

wartime Patriotic Press Association.\(^5\)

Ichikawa seems to be an exception to this rule due to the fact that her work falls unavoidably into the definition of “women's movements” as the struggle for suffrage. Furthermore, Garon argues that Ichikawa is an exception because American scholars have been “attracted to her insistence on gender equality and her repeated criticism of the state's efforts to co-opt the women's movement” which enables them argue that she “collaborated only to advance the interests of women amidst material deprivation and authoritarian rule.”\(^6\) However, most work on Ichikawa specifically is more than thirty years old, and more recent scholarship tends to ignore the fact that she ever worked with the state, instead focusing on her prewar work with the New Women's Association and the League for Women's Suffrage.\(^7\)

This trend seems to come from the beginning of English language study of Japanese Taisho women's movements. Sharon Sievers's book, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan*, was a pioneer work on Japanese feminism. Written in 1983, the book choose consciously to focus on “The stories of many women who refused to be victimized by that [state] oppression,” in order to “trace the development of feminist consciousness during the Meiji Period.”\(^8\) Yet by Sievers's own admission, the book was not meant to be a comprehensive study of women's work at the time, “the women who were the community and institution builders of the period—

\(^7\) Two of the most recent scholarly works that detail Ichikawa Fusae's work are: Barbara Molony, “Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925,” in *Pacific Historical Review*, 69, No.4, (2000). And Hiroko Tomida's *Hiratsuka Raicho and Early Japanese Feminism*.
Tsuda Umeko, Hatoyama Haruko, Hani Motoko, Shimizu Toyoko, and Yoshioka Yayoi, the great educators of the Meiji and Taisho, are barely mentioned here.9

This admission, however, did not stop the scholars that followed from expanding almost exclusively on the work done in Flowers in Salt. The following figures and groups are covered in Flowers in Salt: The Early Meiji Debate on Women, Women in the Popular-Rights Movement, The Textile Workers, The Women's Reform Society, Socialist Women, Kanno Suga, and The Seito. Each of these topics is covered in at least one other full-length English book that has been published since Sievers's book was published, with the exception of the Women's Reform Society,10 and many women involved in these groups have full length biographies detailing their work in the women's movements.11

Of all the women mentioned in Sievers's list of the “great educators of the Meiji and Taisho Era” only one, Tsuda Umeko, has a full-length biography, although it is not considered a study in feminism, but instead a study in education. Shimizu Toyoko is acknowledged primarily as a writer, and there are no books detailing the work of Hatoyama Haruko, Hani Motoko or Yoshioka Yayoi in English that are currently in print, and the only article that focuses exclusively on Yoshioka's work is not available in online databases.12, 13

---

9 Sievers, Flowers in Salt, xiii.
11 Biographies on women of the Seito include: Tomoko Yamazaki's The Story of Yamada Waka: From Prostitute to Feminist Pioneer, and Hiroko Tomida's Hiratsuka Raicho and Early Japanese Feminism.
12 Yoshioka and Hani's out of print biographies:
These distinctions created a division between women activists in historical scholarship that did not exist during the time period: between “true feminists” and “state collaborators.” The reaction of recent scholars who have been confronted with the fact that many women activists at the time participated in state-sponsored organizations, has been to assume that this collaboration was a direct result of the rise of militarism in the 1930s and to take “leaders of the prewar women's movement to task for their often enthusiastic participation in wartime mobilization.”

Sharon Sievers is no exception to this rule; she has the following to say about the Women's Patriotic Association (often considered one of the largest “collaborator” groups):

The association's membership, aided by both wartime patriotism and direct government assistance, grew from 60,000 from shortly before the Russo-Japanese War, to over one million after the First World War. In terms of both its size and its influence on Japanese life, the organization was one of the most effective political organizations in Japanese history. It [The Women's Patriotic Association] was a 'women's organization' governed by men, an organization who's functions were shaped by the male definitions of women's political roles, and who's success was largely due to direct government support.

The Women's Patriotic Association was, in fact (as Sievers even discusses briefly) founded by a woman. Okumura Ioko, the daughter of a prominent Buddhist priest, founded the association to comfort families of the war dead, to educate Japanese women about society, and do works of charity for the state.

Contrary to Sievers's claims, however, the Patriotic Women's Association did not

---

seem to be under direct state control, as much as it occupied a space of state approval, at least during the Taisho Era. According to Garon:

The Patriotic Women's Association was more than a cozy alliance between the state and upper-class women... Among the original sponsors were several middle-class women educators who pressed for integrating woman into public life, and local branches included many schoolteachers, charity workers, farm wives, and even textile-mill workers.\(^\text{17}\)

Additionally, it seems that although the state helped to sponsor the Patriotic Women's Association at its foundation, it was not constantly supported by the state, and the membership was not constantly increasing. Membership, in fact, waned after the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, before picking back up again during the First World War.\(^\text{18}\)

This organization, regardless of how it has been viewed by recent scholarship, was one of the more active women's groups during the Late Meiji and Taisho Eras. However, to many current scholars of Japanese women's history, these its members, and other women in similar groups, weren't truly considered part of the women's movement, due to their involvement with the state. What makes this constraint on the definition of “women's movements” most problematic is that it was not a definition that existed during the Taisho Era, but is instead one that has been constructed by historians after the fact.

At a time when state involvement in daily life was constantly increasing in Japan, attempting to make a distinction between women who worked in state-sponsored organizations and those who worked in autonomous ones is not only difficult, but generally unhelpful to historical understanding. According to Sheldon Garon, “Recent scholarship has demonstrated that activist women [in Japan] often moved freely between

---

these 'officially created' associations, which worked closely with the state, and the 'autonomous' women's movement.”

Garon argues against the notion that the collaboration between the women's movement and the state was an anomaly of the 1930s and early 1940s, and instead argues that “this relationship first developed during the 1920s from the interplay between the government's new efforts to mobilize women for peacetime goals and the desire of most autonomous women's groups to become integrated to the political system.” Yet this view is still too narrow to understand the nature of the relationship of women's groups to the state, as organizations such as the Patriotic Women's Association were clearly involved with the state and started much earlier, in the case of the Patriotic Women's Association, in 1905.

The main problem with the notion of “collaboration,” however, has nothing to do with the uncomfortable undertones of the war, but instead with the subversion and, to some extent, removal of the agency of the women involved. Many women in modern Japan chose to work with the state, and within the frame-work of “good wife, wise mother,” and in doing so became central to state projects such as the Ministry of Education's “Daily Life Improvement Campaign” which it begun in 1920. As Garon explains,

The League [for Daily Life Improvement] included several prominent women educators... Together, the officials and educators aimed at improving people's diet, hygiene, work habits, housing, consumption patterns, and ritual life. The government sponsored several short-study courses that enrolled women teachers from higher girls' schools.

---

21 Sievers, Flowers in Salt, 115.
With government support, women such as Dr. Yoshioka Yayoi, Hatoyama Haruko and other female educators were able to impact the lives of women in positive and constructive ways. The minimization of the work of these women, and the results of their government-sponsored groups and programs, both removes these women from the historical narrative and paints an inaccurate picture of what was possible for women to achieve in Japan in the 1920s and 30s.

Beyond simply minimizing their work, there is a tendency for scholars to assume that women who worked with the state were not only “collaborators,” but puppets. To use Sievers as an example, by claiming that the Women’s Patriotic Association was a “women's organization' governed by men,” she does more than label it as a government conspiracy to control women, she devalues all of the work that women did to build, run and maintain it. She implies that Okumura was a hypocrite, using the Women’s Patriotic Association to speak publicly in ways that other women were not permitted to due to the restrictions of Article 5 of the Police Protection Act, which prevented women from forming political groups or joining political parties. She then juxtaposes this with the efforts of socialist women to revise Article 5 at the time (1907), and claims that:

> It [the effort to revise Article 5] may have enjoyed the tacit support of the genteel women in the Reform Society and the Women's Patriotic Association, but neither group worked actively for the change. It is a commentary on the state of the women's movement in Japan in 1907 that the petitions to revise Article 5 and proposals to end polygamy and prostitution had to compete for attention in the Diet, since there was no effort to present them as important and related women's issues.

It seems more likely, however that the Women's Patriotic Association and other groups were unwilling to work with these socialist women not only because they were openly

---

socialist, because they had, in the same year, publicly stated in their own journal, *Women of the World*, that the “success of the Women's Patriotic Association” was the “success of slaves,” indicating that they were uninterested in working with them.26

Yet, the current historical dialogue seems to agree with the assessment of the *Women of the World*. Many current scholars of Japanese feminism marginalize the success of these groups, because they worked within the constraints of “good wife, wise mother.” The fact that, from within that narrow framework, these women were able to be openly praised by the Japanese media for their work outside of the home,27 which, in many ways, did run counter to the state ideology that women's role was in the home, does not factor into their analysis.

**The “Roots” of Feminist Consciousness in Japan**

As much of the current scholarship seems to be intent on continuing Sievers's work on “tracing the roots of feminist consciousness”28 of the Taisho Era, they seem to have confined themselves to work within her definition of what that consciousness was, with the only real addition being an interest in the suffrage battle. Not only does this definition limit the scholarship of the Taisho to a relatively small group of female activists while ignoring the vast majority, it also centers the origin of Japanese feminist thought exclusively on the Taisho.

This definition ignores the work done by many female activists in the Early Meiji Period, who strove to secure women's rights during the establishment of the Meiji Government at the end of the 19th century. Before the enactment of the Peace

---

28 Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, xi-xiv. In her introduction, Sievers discusses her views on the Taisho Feminist Consciousness. Additionally, Garon discusses the problems with current scholarship's quest to trace this “feminist consciousness” in “Women's Groups and the State.”
Preservation Law in 1890, Article 5 of which banned women from political activity, many women gave political speeches and held rallies, advocating for the elevation of women within society.

In her most recent book, *Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan*, Mara Patessio makes the following statement about the view that most scholars of early Japanese women movements have of the Meiji as follows, “Meiji women tend to be represented as powerless, for they did not have nor did they attain the social and political rights enjoyed by some Meiji men.”

Women in the early Meiji were quite aware of their political situation, despite the fact that their education standards were lower than that of their male counterparts. Even before the Meiji Civil Code was enacted in 1889, women were beginning to make their opinions known. A petition with eight hundred signatures was submitted by a women’s group in the 1880s, demanding a change in the legal relationship between husband and wife to one based on equality. In this petition, women demanded the right to reject an adulterous husband, as well as to be freed from marriage, and be entitled to compensation in case of adultery. Although no provisions like this were included in the Meiji Civil Code, which was geared almost exclusively toward protecting the rights of men, it was a sign that women were already voicing their problems with the inequality in their society.

Women were active in many spheres of public life, not only in petitions, but in newspapers and more public forums as well. The early Meiji Feminist movement was not dissimilar to other movements throughout the world at the time, with women’s groups publishing magazines that discussed women’s interests. Public speaking was a major

facet of this early feminist movement. Women's public speeches on education and women's rights were so popular that publishers, seeking to capitalize on women's readership, began to transcribe and publish them for dissemination to women who were incapable of hearing them in person.

Several of these volumes of speeches were produced in the year between 1887 and 1888, such as the Jogaku enzetsushu (Collection of Public Speeches on Women's Education), which had been printed in the Jogaku zasshi (magazine), and was reprinted later that year in book format, due to demand. The amount of women giving these speeches grew so large, a book called Fujin enzetsu shinan (Instructions for Women Making Public Speeches) was published in 1887.31

The entrepreneurial nature of the Meiji print industry, ensured that women were equally targeted by print media as men were. This meant the creation of whole genres of literature geared toward, and produced by women. As Patessio explains, “The [Late Meiji] print market expanded to include not only numerous books for women written by men and novels written by women but also new 'genres' in which women were active as writers and speakers.”32 There were contemporary critics of these women, particularly in regards to their public speaking, but the fact that they attracted the attention not only of the print media, but also warranted intellectual criticism, in and of itself shows their effectiveness.33

Women in the Meiji Era often used women of the West as a rhetorical device, as Westernization was incredibly fashionable as an intellectual trend in Japan at the time. They stated that Western women were educated and empowered, and that this was the

---

31 Patessio, Women and Public Life, 121.
32 Patessio, Women and Public Life, 122.
33 Patessio, Women and Public Life, 122.
best way for the Japanese to become enlightened as well. Speeches on the advantages of women’s education, were given by many women, a particularly famous one being given by Fukuoka Teruko in 1888. The use of the West as a rhetorical device may be the reason that when Meiji feminism is acknowledged, it is seen as completely derivative of Western ideas. However, even in her speech, Fukuoka makes it clear that she does not have the “American fever” (*America netsu*), and that her reasons for showing the lifestyles of Western women is for the purpose of demonstrating that women's education is essential to the success of the Japanese nation, as it was to the success of England.34

Most scholars of the Taisho, when confronted with the work of Meiji activists usually describe them as unrelated to the later movement, and disconnected due to their status. Vera Mackie's *Feminism in Modern Japan*, claims “Most of the Early Meiji Feminists had been exceptional women -usually of samurai background, but occasionally of merchant stock – whose families had given them access to literacy and education.”35

The problem with Mackie's assertion about Early Meiji activists is not in the facts of who they were, as many of them did come from samurai families or wealthy merchant families, but instead the fact that their background is used as a justification for minimizing their impact on the movement that followed.

In *The Bluestockings of Japan*, Jan Bardsley briefly mentions the Meiji activists as well, but only to disconnect them from the Taisho movement, claiming that:

All of this [women's public speaking in the 1870s and 1880s] they [the women of the *Seito*] could have drawn on in their own formulations of the Woman Question, but it was not an association they wished, or perhaps even considered.36

---

As the women of the Seito have been, perhaps, the most studied group in the Taisho movement, the fact the Meiji activists are not associated with them, may help to account for their work typically not being seen as the beginnings of Japanese feminist consciousness.

In her book, *The New Japanese Woman*, Barbara Sato's first chapter is called “The Emergence of Agency,” in which she discusses the the 1910s as the era in which Japanese women began to assert their agency, in the form of the “New Woman:”

> It was at this time [1910s] that the notorious “new woman” (atarashi onna), a woman who transgressed social boundaries and questioned her dependence on men, started to pose a threat to gender relations... The liberation that these women sought, which included a demand for social equality, overturned the common notion of femininity.37

By referring to the creation of the “New Woman” as the “Emergence of Agency,” Sato paints a portrait of women who were the first to assert agency in Japan, not women who were drawing off of a tradition of activism and existing feminist consciousness.

Sato argues that the origins of the New Woman emerged primarily from the combination of the increase in women's education, and the emergence of the culture of consumerism, which she argues was key to empowering women and giving them the agency:

> Whether or not women had the wherewithal to purchase new products is of secondary importance. More significant was the empowerment that consumerism, as an expression of decision making, offered to them. Women figured as active role players, weighing the positive and negative consequences of the commodification of the everyday.38

She argues the agency gained through consumerism and education was necessary to

receive feminist ideas such as those put forward by the *Seito*, implying that previously Japanese women could not develop a feminist consciousness.\(^{39}\)

This is not a problem that is unique to scholars of the Taisho Era. Works that more broadly study Japanese feminism are also quick to dismiss the events of the Meiji Period as relevant to the broader women's movement. According to Akiko Tokuza, “The Meiji period thus altered, reinforced and exploited the continued subjugation of women: the Japanese women's movement began in earnest only after that period ended.”\(^{40}\)

It could be argued, that the activities of Meiji women qualify as the “roots” of Japanese feminist consciousness due to predating the Taisho movements chronologically, regardless of the existence of ideological links between the two. However, by broadening the definition of what qualifies as the Taisho “women's movement,” links between Meiji activists and Taisho ones become more obvious.

Dr. Yoshioka Yayoi was one of the most prominent women in Japan during the Taisho Era. She was the 27\(^{th}\) woman to be granted a medical license, and due to the difficulties she faced in doing so, she opened an exclusively female medical college.\(^{41,42}\) She worked with many state-sponsored groups, as well as being active in the women's suffrage movement. Despite a lack of English scholarship on her life, she is celebrated in Japan due to her many achievements and the contributions she made to medicine, women's education and public life. Actively left out of Sievers's *Flowers in Salt*, and considered a “collaborator” due to her work with state during the Second World War, Yoshioka is barely acknowledged by English speaking historians.

---

41 Mara Patessio and Mariko Ogawa, “To Become a Woman Doctor,” 169.
42 Patessio and Ogawa, “To Become a Woman Doctor,” 170-171.
Yoshioka, however, provides an example of the direct links between the Meiji activists and the later achievements of women in the Taisho. Mara Patessio describes the influence that Meiji speakers had on a young Yoshioka:

In 1882 and 1883 Kishida Toshiko toured Japan to deliver a series of public speeches. Her movements were reported in the papers and women read about her. Yoshioka Yayoi was one of Kishida's admirers. She enjoyed reading the newspapers her father bought when she was living in a small town in Shizuoka prefecture, but she was particularly interested in the reports on political speech meetings, feelings inspired by Kishida Toshiko and Fukuda Hideko and discussing the news with other female friends.43

Even though Yoshioka was living in a small town, and never got to see any of the speeches in person, she was inspired by the idea of empowerment through education, a theme that would shape her entire life's work, and through her efforts, change the lives of thousands if not millions of women.

Yet, in this we can see more than a link between Kishida and Yoshioka based on ideas. Yoshioka specifically remembers discussing the speeches and their impact with her female friends. These speeches did more than inspire individual women to action, they also prompted women to spread their ideas to other women, to discuss them, and to truly engage with the opportunities that Japan's modernization offered them.

Another link way that we can see inherited ideas and methods between the Meiji and the Taisho is in the print culture that develops, targeting women during the Meiji. Barbara Sato and others discuss how it was not possible for women to truly engage in a print culture until the literacy rate had been increased by the Taisho period. This, however, is not entirely true. At the beginning of the Meiji Period, the literacy rate amongst women was approximately 10%, rather high for an unindustrialized culture, and

Japan already had a thriving print industry, which women were active consumers of. Women's journals sprung up starting in the early Meiji, and women participated actively in them. “Women [in Modern Japan] also contributed to this process from their fujinkai (women's journals), which had been founded all over the country, by taking an interest in public questions and allowing for a sociability between men and women that had not previously existed.” This is a tradition that would continue into the Taisho, when the primary dialogue on women's issues would be through the use of fujinkai as well.

Through these examples, we can see the birth of the active print and intellectual culture that would define the Taisho women's movement in the activism of Meiji women. Therefore, if it is possible to claim that there is a definite “root” to feminist consciousness in Japan, we should view that as activism and ideas that existed in the Early Meiji, as opposed to the feminism of the Taisho.

The “New Woman” and Her Implications

The Japanese New Woman is currently seen by most scholars as synonymous with Japanese Feminism, particularly the feminism of the Taisho Era. There is an abundance of literature that examines the Japanese New Woman and she is the undeniable focus of prewar Japanese feminist studies. Barbara Sato's The New Japanese Woman, Dina Lowy's The Japanese “New Woman” and Jan Bardsley's The Bluestockings of Japan all focus exclusively on the idea of the New Woman, specifically as it links into the literary magazine the Seito. Additionally, Vera Mackie's Feminism in Modern Japan, also deals primarily with the New Woman.

---

45 Patessio, Women and Public Life, 135.
As the term “New Woman” is Western in origin, much of the tendency to see the Japanese women’s movement as derivative of Western ideas comes from the importance of the term “New Woman” in their feminism discourse. From the women of the influential magazine, the Seito to the New Woman’s Association (famous for fighting for the revision of the Peace Preservation Law, which prevented women from being involved in political groups), the term has come to be synonymous with the Japanese women’s movement and Japanese feminism.

It is important to understand the exact meaning of the term in the Japanese context in order to understand who it encompasses, as well as to understand to what extent it can be considered derivative. Emerging in the 1910s, the predominant image of the “New Woman” (atarashi onna), is of a radical, sometimes socialist, intellectual woman, who sought to find her place in a changing Japanese society. These women are represented by the Seito, a Japanese literary magazine completely written and edited by women, and aimed exclusively at women, containing many debates on issues such as the “woman question” and female sexuality.

The term “New Woman” came to Japan from the West. When the term was coined in England for the first time in 1894, it was greeted with as much, if not more animosity than it would be in Japan. Sarah Grand, used the term to describe the woman who had “solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with the Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy.”

Despite the original intentions, the image of the “New Woman” was quickly stereotyped, either viewed as a woman who was masculine and therefore unappealing to
men, or a hypocrite who wished for male privileges (such as enfranchisement) but also still desired the protection of men when she was out in society.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{A New Woman Reader}. Ouida. "The New Woman." 153-170.} As a result, many forms of British media, such as \textit{Punch} magazine satirized the “New Woman,” turning the term into an insult, even in the eyes of other members of the British women's movement.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{A New Woman Reader}. \textit{Punch} 106. "The New Woman." 153.} “The 'New Woman' was the target — if not the creation — of cartoons and satire, particularly in \textit{Punch}, which siezed upon the 'mannish woman.'”\footnote{Juliet Gardener, \textit{Women's Voices 1880-1918: The New Woman}, (London: Collins and Brown, Ltd., 1993), 7.} The term soon came to the center of the debate over the “Woman Question” in Europe, and the term “New Woman” came to apply to women who chose to leave the home and go into the world for any reason.

It was in this form that the term “New Woman” made its way to Japan. The idea of the “New Woman” was a source of fear in Japan, a lurking threat, already attempting to destabilize British society, that could soon appear on the streets of Tokyo. The term was not meant as a source of self-identification, but instead was viewed as an alien “other,” represented by characters in foreign plays such as Nora, from Ibsen's \textit{A Doll's House}.\footnote{Mackie. \textit{Feminism in Modern Japan}. 45.} Japanese intellectuals were well aware of debates on the “Woman Question” and the advent of the “New Woman” that were taking place in Europe, and they only added to their own emerging anxieties about women's activities in industrializing Japan. Dina Lowy summarizes the emergence of the term “New Woman:”

Whether attacking the New Woman directly or debating her worth in abstract, reporters, scholars, writers and government officials actively discussed this new Japanese phenomenon. By the end of 1912 certain characteristics were clearly delineated: the New Woman from others of her sex by her unconventional behavior, her unabashed sexuality and her repudiation of 'good wife, wise
mother' ideology.\textsuperscript{52} This definition clearly came from Western ideas of the New Woman, put into the Japanese context of the “good wife, wise mother” framework. This definition is embraced by many Western scholars when they refer to the women of the movement. In reference to Hiratsuka’s self-identification in the Seito as a New Woman, Bradsley states:

When reports of the Bluestockings' eventful love lives and entertaining social lives became public. . . the public believed that its worst fears about educated young women had been realized. Up until then, this troublesome New Woman, as she came to be called, had seemed like one more curiosity of the West, a phantom of the large suffrage marches, radical protests and the strange heroines of plays such as Ibsen's A Doll's House. . . With the debut of the Bluestockings, the New Woman had at last been born in Japan.\textsuperscript{53}

Yet, when Hiratsuka Raicho made her own definition of the “New Woman” in 1913 she did so in a distinctly Japanese way, completely avoiding discussion of what were considered the “defining” elements of the “New Woman” such as her sexuality and her political involvement.

Raicho did not define herself in the same way that Sarah Grand had, as a woman who had found the solution to the woman question, and whose job it was to morally instruct men.\textsuperscript{54} Instead, she defined herself by what she saw as her (and every other Japanese woman's) natural strength. Instead of discussing moral superiority in terms of a need to instruct men, she instead called women to find a new realm, or sphere, and framed her entire argument in terms of Shinto ideas of the Sun goddess Ameterasu.

With the bright virtue of the sun that renews itself each day, the New Woman is trying to build a new realm of the spirit, a realm endowed with a new religion, new morality, and new laws. Indeed, the mission of the New Woman lies in creating this new sphere. If this is so, where is this new realm? What is the new

\textsuperscript{53} Bardsley, \textit{The Bluestockings of Japan}. 12.
\textsuperscript{54} Nelson, \textit{A New Woman Reader}. ix.
religion? The new morality? The new laws? The New Woman herself does not
know.\textsuperscript{55}

In contrast to Sarah Grand's “New Woman” who had to go out into the same realm that
corrupted men, Raicho instead suggested that such considerations (whether to live in the
sphere of the home or the wider world) was irrelevant. The New Woman had a higher
mission. Hers was one of self-reflection and self-knowledge. She was meant to create a
realm all her own, internal, and to discover the perfect laws and morality (a task only a
woman, with the power and virtue of the sun) could do. This idea of feminism was more
internal than the ideas that had birthed the “New Woman,” in England and was a
complete redefinition of the term. Raicho had taken a term meant to apply as an insult,
and turned it into an affirmation of her intellectualism.

Sarah Grand's definition of the “New Woman” was dependent upon men, whereas
Raicho mentions men only in passing. To Raicho, the movement is about women. The
Japanese New Woman has no responsibility to men: unlike her British counterpart, she
only has a responsibility to understand and educate herself. Her education does not exist
for the benefit of the “child-man” but instead exists for her own enlightenment, and
perhaps, eventually, the betterment of the world. Men are not the focus of this idea or
movement, but instead the focus is the self.

In Japan and Europe, Henrik Ibsen's Nora, from his play \textit{A Doll’s House}, came to
epitomize the “New Woman.” As a middle-class wife and mother who left her husband
and children to pursue her own life, she was a symbol of defiance and rebellion against
the conventional social order, in which women existed only to be wives and mothers.
Nora became central to the “New Woman” debate in Japan, where the first performance

\textsuperscript{55} Bardsley, \textit{The Bluestockings of Japan}. 87.
of *A Doll's House* was reviewed in the first edition of the *Seito*. However, most women of the *Seito* did not agree that Nora was truly a “New Woman,” a view that contrasted with those of Western feminists. Raicho, for example, thought that Nora was still naïve and unawakened at the end of the play, and blamed her for not having any common sense, and criticized her for abandoning her children. “We Japanese women would be able to understand if such an instinctive and thoughtless woman like you [Nora] were only a 14 or 15 year-old girl, but we find it extremely hard to believe that you are a married woman with three children.” Here, Raicho phrases her problems with Nora in terms of a difference between Western and Japanese views of women. Nora, who was the epitome of the “New Woman” to both the West and the larger Japanese media, was not a “New Woman” at all to Japanese feminists, who viewed her as still unawakened, even at the end of the play. This serves to illustrate the one of the many differences that existed between the Japanese feminist ideas and Western ones, as well as demonstrate the complex idea expressed by the Japanese feminist's concept of the “New Woman.”

The view that most of the public held of the *Seito*'s “New Women,” however, was closer to the popular definition of the term than the one Raicho herself had put forward, even amongst their own readers. In spite of Raicho and other contributors' academic intentions, most of the *Seito*'s readers didn't buy the magazine for its intellectual ideas, or even its stories or practical articles. They bought it because they were addicted to learning about the private social lives of the magazine's contributors.

The *Seito*, despite its revolutionary ideas and controversial nature, was mainly a magazine of entertainment. The women's personal lives were of primary interest to the

---

56 Tomida, *Hiratsuka Raicho*, 166.
readers. Bardsley explains, “Although the Bluestockings took themselves seriously as intellectuals and as writers, they became best known for the choices they made in their personal lives, especially their love lives.” Bardsley also discusses how many of the letters written into the writers of the *Seito* had nothing to do with issues such as their discussion of the Woman Question, but instead were personal requests for advice, or letters of admiration, and occasionally, letters from men who had fallen in love with the women through their writing.

Their writings had a surprisingly narrow focus, the magazine failed to comment on two very widely publicized deaths of women, the trial and execution of Kanno Suga in 1911, or the suicide of Nogi Shizuko in 1912. Furthermore, they do not discuss the many reports of the British suffrage movements (both for universal male suffrage and women's suffrage) which were in Japanese newspapers at the time. “That the Bluestockings ignored momentous current events shows how intensely focused they were, especially in the magazine's early years, on their personal quests to achieve self-discovery.” This was probably aggravated by the fact that their readers also seemed more interested in their personal lives than their ideas.

The general reaction to the *Seito* seems to have been overwhelmingly positive. In response to the one thousand copies of the first volume that was published, the editors received over three thousand letters from readers. This was proof that the many educated women created by the Meiji reforms to education were looking for a creative outlet that was specifically female. There were hundreds of literary magazines, and many

---

58 Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan*, 4-6.
of them published stories written by women, but the response to the Seito shows that there was a demand for something that was created for and by women.

In spite of the magazine's popularity, the press reaction to the women of the Seito was “largely negative” according to Lowy.\textsuperscript{61} The sensationalist Japanese press at the time was quick to capitalize on buzz words such as “New Woman,” and latched onto events in the lives of the Seito women that were seen as scandalous. According to Laural Rasplica Rodd, a writer in Gail Bernstein's seminal text, \textit{Recreating Japanese Women 1600-1945}:

\begin{quote}
Fanned by inflammatory headlines such as 'Seito New Women, Seeking Equal Rights with Men, Spend Night of Pleasure with Yoshiwara Postitute,' opposition to the 'new woman' intensified. Raicho's house was stoned, she received death threats and many young women were pressured to resign from the group.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

Some women did resign as a result of the “Yoshiwara Incident,” which was the result of Hiratsuka Raicho going with her uncle to the infamous Yoshiwara prostitution district of Tokyo in an effort to gain insight into the lives of prostitutes there.\textsuperscript{63} This was perhaps the most famous of the scandals caused by the Seito women, but it was certainly not the only one. As such, although women were eager to read about the exciting events of their private lives, how much their ideas were taken seriously is difficult to determine.

As the women of the Seito were defining themselves as New Women, another journal emerged that took on the mantle of “New Woman,” but instead chose to do so while following the model of “good wife, wise mother.” The \textit{Shinshinfujinkai} (True New Woman) made its debut in Tokyo in early 1913, a few months after Raicho had put forward her definition of the “New Woman.”

Seeing that the media was quick to attack the women of the Seito, the women of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[61] Lowy, \textit{The Japanese “New Woman,”} 98.
\item[63] Tomida, \textit{Hiratsuka Raicho}, 171-177.
\end{footnotes}
the *Shinshinfujinkai* realized they had to stay on the good side of the sensationalist Japanese media. First, the founders of the *Shinshinfujinkai* were wives and mothers, although many of them came from moderately controversial backgrounds. Instead of having their backgrounds used against them by reporters these women found a way to use the media to their advantage. In some ways, they played off of the fact that they would automatically be compared to the *Seito* women, to make sure that they were viewed more respectably.

They used the media's interest in their group (and interest in the rivalry between themselves and the *Seito*) to turn public opinion in their favor. A reporter at the time, discussing the differences between the two groups stated, “In short, the Shinshinfujinkai's originators all value women's essential qualities and are quite proud to be mothers and wives.” According to Lowy, the tactic of contrasting themselves with the women of the *Seito* worked, gaining the women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* a level of credibility that the *Seitosha* would never have:

The True New Woman could be praised for being a womanly women, while the New Women of *Seito* were vilified for rejecting Japan's existing—yet stifling—marriage and family systems. *Seito* women rejected the government endorsed roles of 'good wife, wise mother,' while the True New Women embraced those roles as the source of women's power.

This difference in itself was enough to make the Shinshinfujinkai’s New Women less threatening and seemingly more deserving of public support than the new women of the *Seitosha*.

The founders of the *Shinshinfujinkai*, Miyazaki Mitsuko, Nishikawa Fumiko, and Kimura Komako all came from backgrounds that were in some ways more eyebrow raising than the “scandalous” personal lives of the *Seito* women. Miyazaki ran away from her family

---

to marry a leader of a cult that merged Buddhist ideas with Christian ones. Nishikawa and her husband had been involved in the socialist movement in 1910, but had later distanced themselves from it.\(^\text{66}\) Finally, Kimura was an actor, who had run away from her arranged marriage for a “free-love” relationship, and had only been able to officially marry her partner after having a child.\(^\text{67}\) Still, these women were not portrayed by the media as rebellious or radical in anyway.

By the point they were starting the *Shinshinfujinkai*, they were all wives and mothers, and had put that responsibility as first, above other concerns, which was used to downplay their rebellious youths. According to Lowy, turning away from their pasts showed that they had fully embraced the idea of being “good wives” and “wise mothers” over the “promiscuous” lifestyle that the “New Woman” was famous for, and lent them credibility:

Did they compare favorably with the other New Women because they pulled themselves up from questionable circumstances to become respectable women, while Seito women had respectable backgrounds but lived disreputable adult lives? Was the Shinshinfujinkai woman's way the 'true' path to women's awakening? Both the press and the True New Woman seemed to answer in the affirmative.\(^\text{68}\)

They portrayed themselves in stark contrast to the women of the *Seito*, whose concerns were regarded as more selfish or immature.

While the *Seito* appealed to younger women, and had an element of scandal, the *Shinshinfujinkai* was meant to draw in older, married women, giving them an opportunity to reflect on the “Woman Question” and other feminist concerns through the lens of a mother or wife, which to many woman seemed more realistic and understandable than the

---

glamorous lives of the *Seito* women. Both the *Seito* and *Shinshinfujinkai* held public forums for discussion of women's issues, and while the *Seito* drew a larger crowd for their meeting, the *Shinshinfujinkai* was able to attract a different audience. People assembling for the *Seito* meeting were the typical sort of progressive intellectuals of the time: young students, actors and aspiring writers. Those who attended the *Shinshinfujinkai’s* meeting, however, were a more traditional set: housewives, mothers and middle-aged men.\(^69\)

Every aspect of this first meeting was carefully planned to craft the image of the *Shinshinfujinkai* as both maternalistic and Japanese. While introducing each speaker, Miyazaki Mitsuko held her daughter in her arms, both to signify that she took pride in being a mother; and to show that, as a good mother, she was making her daughter part of the “New Woman” experience, and intended to pass on her activism and awakening as a woman to her daughter. Furthermore, they used a *biwa* (a traditional Japanese lute) for musical interludes, as opposed to the piano used by the *Seito* meeting.\(^70\)

Despite their more traditional grounding, the women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* still expressed dissatisfaction with the position of women in Japanese society. They were not advocating the complete acceptance of tradition, just the embracing of traditional roles, which they truly believed could be liberating and empowering. Like the women of the *Seito* they emphasized an internal strength and spirit that resided in women, and, much like the *Seito* (and in contrast to Western definitions) did not define the idea of the “New Woman” in relation to men, stating in their first issue, “In the depths of each of our hearts there is a noble, true, living being. Striving to display thoroughly display this infinite

latent power is the lifestyle of the true, new woman.”71 They also sought to “broaden the narrow range of women's activities,”72 often advocating for progressive changes to women's lifestyles. According to Lowy:

They advocated modern practices such as marriages based on love, monogamy and birth control. They wanted to create less confining, more public roles for women. They encouraged women to express themselves openly, and they wanted both men and women to be receptive to new ideas. True New Women were to serve as leaders and help Japan progress into the modern world.73

Through the efforts of the Shinshinfujinkai, the idea of the “New Woman” was made palatable to the Japanese public, and while many intellectual women were uninterested in taking the title, it seems that most intellectual women came to respect the New Woman, even if they did not agree with her.

By the 1920s, an interesting change had taken place in the view of the New Woman. As the “Modern Girl” (*modan garu*, sometimes abbreviated “*moga*”) appeared in the same way that the New Woman had in the 1910s, women began to discuss the two of them in the context of one another, which made this change in opinion clear. The “Modern Girl” was the Japanese idea of the rebellious woman of the 1920s and 1930s, she wore Western clothing (usually flapper-type dresses). According to Sato:

The first image of her [the Modern Girl] to capture the public eye, was fraught with anxiety. It featured a vapid young woman clad in a brightly colored one-piece dress reaching only to her knees or a little below, favoring high-heeled shoes and sheer stockings that showed off her legs... This mindless, fashion addicted young woman certainly did not denotate the evolution of a new political force. Rather, she represented the object of male desire.74

When the “Modern Girl” became a conversation topic, the “New Woman” was also

---

brought back to the forefront of women's discussions and debates. Yet, the view of the New Woman had changed. This change can be seen in a 1927 edition of a woman's magazine, the *Fujin Kōron* (Women's Public Opinion):

> I think it is interesting to compare today's *modern girl* with the so called new woman who appeared more than ten years ago. The *new woman* was an enlightened woman. Her way of thinking was intellectually sound, and she was able to understand innermost problems.

This change in opinion that occurred amongst intellectual women about the “New Woman” has not been focused on; however, it seems plausible that the work of the *Shinshinfujinkai* is at least partially responsible for the warming of other educated women to the idea of “New Woman.”

The women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* are not normally considered part of the discussion on the Japanese “New Woman.” In all of the literature that focuses on this figure, only Lowy's book, *The Japanese “New Woman,”* gives them any attention. This is presumably due to their embracing of traditional roles in Japanese society. However, by broadening the definition of “New Woman” to include the women of the *Shinshinfujinkai*, we are able to see two important aspects of the “New Woman” issue in the Taisho Era.

First, we can see more clearly the very uniquely Japanese character of the definition of “New Woman,” at least within the context of how Japanese feminists defined themselves, and how other contemporary intellectual women viewed them (even if the press, for the most part, continued to use the term in the more Western-derived context). Second, we can see the negotiation that took place between Japanese society and the idea of the “New Woman,” which went from threatening and frivolous, to respectable and intellectually sound.

---

The portrait painted by most scholars of Taisho women's movements is one of an oppressive and statically conservative state, opposing women's groups at every possible turn. The view is one of an increasingly illiberal and militaristic state, starting usually from the writing of the Seito to the eventual descent into the authoritarian regime of the late 1930s. In attempting to trace the evolution of the concept of “good wife, wise mother,” Kathleen Uno discusses the problem as follows:

In general, Western studies of Japanese women, gender and society have taken for granted the existence of strong or state-prescribed norms of womanhood with ryosai kenbo (“good wife, wise mother”) most commonly described as an unchanging, oppressive ideology.76

Kathleen Uno then goes in depth to examine the changes that occurred to the Japanese idea of “good wife, wise mother” and the impact that these changes had on Japanese women. However, she describes these changes as being specifically motivated by the drive towards the Pacific War, in an effort to mobilize women for the war.77

Within the scholarship on Japanese women during the Taisho, there seems to be the idea that the Japanese state was constantly heading on an increasingly conservative trajectory toward war with China and the West. Yet, this is not the Taisho Era state that is familiar to most Japanese historians. The Taisho Era was one of increasingly liberal and progressive reforms, especially on the part of the House of Representatives and the Bureaucracy. According to Hane and Perez, “The Taisho Era was a period during which

---

such concepts as individual rights, freedom and democracy flourished.” During this period, the franchise was extended multiple times, with universal male suffrage being granted in 1925. Additionally, this was an era of great self-expression and freedom of opinion expressed through magazines and other print media.

There seems to be a strange disconnect between the ideas of feminist historians and the rest of the historical community on the nature of the Taisho State, and little has been done to examine the interaction between the state and women’s movements in terms of the complex nature of political opinions that existed within the Taisho State. The narrow definition of Japanese “women's movements” is also responsible for this disconnect. Defining “women's movements” as opposed to the state necessitates that the state be cast as a monolithic entity. Yet the Taisho State was anything but monolithic, as many examples of their policies prove.

Furthermore, the eventual slide into militarism, and the mobilization of women for the war effort is often used as the justification for any expansion on women's roles that was made by the state, as if every new freedom and change made was only in preparation for their eventual plan to use women in the Second World War. Kathleen Uno states:

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, overseas expansion in times of war and peace was a crucial engine of growth, and Japan's participation in three successive wars sparked fresh consideration of women's responsibilities toward state and society. Between the first Sino-Japanese War and the 1931 Manchurian Incident, prewar nationalism, the guiding star of the quest for empire and power, influenced the reconceptualization of *ryosai kenbo* (“good wife, wise mother”).

---

79 Hane and Perez, *Modern Japan*, 231-255.
80 Uno, “Womanhood, War and Empire,” 495.
I take no issue with the current discussion of women's mobilization for the war effort, and I understand the moral dilemmas felt by many feminist historians about the nature of women's work during the war. However, our definition of the women's movement cannot be constrained to only activities that we view as morally acceptable by our current sensibilities.

I am also not attempting to argue that the Taisho State had no interest in women's wartime mobilization: it most certainly did. In 1917, the Provisional Military Investigative Commission wrote a report entitled “The European War and Women in the Belligerent Nations.” The contents of the report discussed the necessity of mobilizing an entire nation for the purpose of modern warfare. Doing this minimizes the diverse array of opinions about women's place in society that existed at the time. Indeed, even more conservative members of the state, such as Baron Fujimura, believed that women's role in society needed to be revised.

Furthermore, many within the government wished to give women the ability to participate in local governance and vote in local elections. Not all of them were doing this out of liberal or progressive mindsets, either. In 1931, the Home Minister, Adachi Kenzo, stated that, “women think conservatively... Thus it will be enormously beneficial for women to take part in local government to maintain the order of State and Society by blocking radical change.” A politician of the House of Representatives supporting women voting in local elections indicated that the problem in getting such measures through the House of Peers was a class issue:

82 See the example that follows for more detail on Baron Fujimura's rather complicated opinion on women.
The nobles of the House of Peers have numerous secretaries, clerks, butlers and stewards, and they usually rely on these people to negotiate with schools about their children's education. In our families, the housewife herself goes to the school, and the housewife herself goes to the village hall to discuss these matters. From the perspective of the families of the nobles in the House of Peers [civic rights for women] may be unnecessary. But to our families... if [women] do not have the vote and cannot be elected to local government, they cannot truly supervise [these matters].

Indeed, the Civic Rights Bill of 1931, which would have permitted the women to run and vote in local elections, made it through the House of Representatives and had the endorsement of the Home Ministery and other government Bureaus, failing in the House of Peers. This shows us that there was much more to the Taisho State's opinion on women than a simple desire to mobilize them for war.

The truth of the matter is that every nation that participated in the First or Second World War mobilized women for wartime service. However, that does not mean that every change to women's roles and policies made by any state during the early twentieth century was due to that desire. If women's increased participation in political spheres in Japan was due only to the desire of the state to mobilize women for war, then presumably the same is true in all other nations that engaged in wars at the time.

It is generally accepted that the efforts of women during the First World War in Britain are responsible, in part, for the extension of franchise, but that is not viewed as the only reason for women gaining the vote. The “struggle for suffrage” in Britain is viewed as a negotiation between the suffrage movement and the British state. Three days after the First World War began, the British government released all suffragettes that gave an undertaking to refrain from illegal activities, and eventually even waiving that

---

84 Garon, “Women's Groups and the State,” 35.
condition.\textsuperscript{86} As a result of this overture of cooperation from the government, Christabel Pankhurst returned to England from Paris and announced an armistice with the government, due to the need to support Great Britain in the war.\textsuperscript{87} This cooperation, and the participation of women in wartime efforts such as factory work and nursing was a major factor in women receiving the vote in 1918. According to Liddington and Norris:

> It is difficult to assess exactly why women over thirty finally got the vote in 1918. The long years of agitation by suffragists and suffragettes certainly pushed the question to the forefront. But the changed conditions during the war years undoubtedly shook up old ideas and prejudices, about women's position, as about so much else, and made it easier for the Coalition Government to accept a measure that had divided the Liberal Cabinet before 1914 [women's suffrage.].\textsuperscript{88}

Certainly, many women at the time acknowledged that the war was critical to the gains they made after it, despite the fact that they had to suspend their suffrage activities in order to participate fully in the war effort.

> Millicent Fawcett summarized the seemingly contradictory idea that suspending suffrage activities in favor of wartime mobilization was actually helpful to the cause, “Many of us believed that the great catastrophe of the world war would greatly hamper and retard the movement to which we had dedicated our lives. It only very gradually dawned on us that the first results of the war would be the emancipation of women in our own and many other countries.”\textsuperscript{89} Fawcett's attitude shows an initial skepticism about cooperation with the government, but an eventual acceptance of the fact that this cooperation was essential to women getting the vote in England. The interaction between women's groups and the state shows us a negotiation in which women, due to their


\textsuperscript{87} Liddington and Norris, \textit{One Hand Tied Behind Us}, 264-265.

\textsuperscript{88} Liddington and Norris, \textit{One Hand Tied Behind Us}, 268.

\textsuperscript{89} Liddington and Norris, \textit{One Hand Tied Behind Us}, 265.
willingness to suspend their suffrage activities in the interest of the war, were eventually
granted emancipation for their efforts.

Yet, the Japanese case is not viewed as an ongoing negotiation about rights
between women's groups and the state, but instead a defiant resistance made by feminists
against an authoritarian regime unsympathetic to their plight. Here we can, again, see the
problematic definition of Japanese “women's movements” and its impact on the
scholarship. By defining “women's movement” as the “struggle for suffrage,” we see only
the fact that Japanese women failed to achieve suffrage, and, at that point, determine that
the Japanese state was unwilling to compromise. However, even if we were to define the
movement in terms of suffrage alone, we would still be dealing with a severe problem on
the part of scholarship; namely, that a lack of success does not mean a lack of negotiation.

Furthermore, the narrow definition of “women's movements” as we know it, by
eliminating women in more conservative movements from the dialogue, enables this idea
that these new definitions of “good wife, wise mother” and other expansions to women's
roles came only as a result of the state's determination to use women for their own
purposes. The trade-off for retaining the moral high ground of the women's movement, is
the forfeiting of agency on the part of women who made genuine efforts towards the
expansion of these traditional women's roles. Kathleen Uno's article “Womanhood, War,
and Empire” is a good example of scholarship's tendency to do just this.

She states on multiple occasions how the state was moved to a reevaluation of
women's roles due to the “social problem supporting widows and children of dead and
disabled soldiers.”\(^90\) She gives the situation of these women the responsibility for some of

\(^{90}\) Kathleen Uno, “Womanhood, War and Empire,” 503.
the expansion of women's roles explaining that:

The plight of war widows in financial distress... was not an issue that
nationalistic educators, policymakers, and intellectuals could not easily sweep
under the rug. Thus in a handful of lessons, references to women's wage work and
vocational training appeared. In permitting women to venture from the confines of
domicity, the watchword in these texts was, “if need be.”


There is, however, a missing piece to this equation. Uno uses the plight of war widows as
the reason for the need for educational changes and expansions to mothers’ roles, but she
does not give us a real explanation for why this is the case.

The answer is that at this time (in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War), war
widows were an organized movement. The Women's Patriotic Association had been
founded specifically to “comfort wounded soldiers and those who fell in battle,” with a
stated goal to “educate Japanese women about society.” Uno does not discuss the efforts
of the Women's Patriotic Association in relation to the policy changes, but it seems quite
likely that the Women's Patriotic Association was directly responsible for state
concessions to war widows, as the group was praised openly in the media on many
occasions for their work, which drew attention to their cause. This seems even more
likely given the implication that the issue could not be “easily swept under the rug,”
which presumably meant there was media attention focused on it.

Assuming that this is the case, then not only does this incident allow us to
understand fully the impact that women's activism had on the changes made to state
policy, it also completely reverses the current view scholarship has on the Women's
Patriotic Association. It would seem that, contrary to Sievers’s view that the Women's

---

91 Kathleen Uno, “Womanhood, War and Empire,” 505.
94 Sievers, Flowers in Salt, 114.
Patriotic Association was “an organization who's functions were shaped by the male definitions of women's political roles,”\(^{95}\) in fact, the opposite was true: by calling attention to the distress of war widows, the Women's Patriotic Association managed to shape the state's definition of women's political roles, expanding them to ones that existed outside of the home. This shows us a picture of the state engaged in a dialogue with the women's movement, and making changes to their policies in response to a successful campaign of the movement.

A less studied, but still relevant, example of changing Taisho Policies that advantaged women is the changing of the laws surrounding the ability of women to sit for the National Medical Examination. In 1900, when Dr. Yoshioka Yayoi opened a medical school to train women to become doctors, the women she trained were not able to practice in Japan, because women were not permitted to sit for the National Medical Examination.\(^{96}\) In 1912, however, this law was changed, and Dr. Yoshioka's students, as well as women who attended other medical schools were permitted to sit for the exam, and practice as doctors in Japan.\(^{97}\) Whether or not this was achieved through the activism of women, or if it was a change made by the Taisho government independently is unclear. Either way, however, it is a definite example of the Taisho State renegotiating and reevaluating their defined roles for women.

Another instance of the Taisho State in negotiation with women's movements can be seen in what is often considered the greatest success of the Japanese women's movement: the revision of Article 5 of the Peace Preservation Law, allowing women to participate in political groups and organizations. The revision of the Police Law shows

\(^{95}\) Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 115.
\(^{96}\) Patessio and Ogawa, “To Become a Woman Doctor,” 171.
\(^{97}\) Patessio and Ogawa, “To Become a Woman Doctor,” 172.
the many complex sides to the Taisho State, and the negotiation it engaged in with various women’s groups.

The role of the New Woman's Association as being responsible for the efforts and campaign to revise the Police Law have already been well documented, therefore, I will instead concentrate on the other groups that are relevant to this debate.

State-sponsored and conservative groups, such as the Women's Patriotic Association and the Committee for the Improvement of Daily Life had been working to change the roles of women, expanding their roles in society by education and turning them into informed members of a modern empire since the turn of the century. By 1922, this view of women was so dominant, that the Diet revised Article 5 of the Police Law, using the fact that women were clearly valuable assets to the Empire as their official state justification. The state had been forced to abandon its previous ideology that women could not participate in politics due to inherent gender differences.

Indeed, 1920, Kawamura Takeji, the chief of the Home Ministry's Police Bureau informed the Lower House of the Diet that the Home Ministry wanted Article 5 revised, using that as the justification for the request for revision. He admitted that the Home Ministry was no longer rigorously enforcing the Article, and claimed that “we have witnessed a tremendous development in [women's] political knowledge,” as the reason that the Home Ministry supported the revision of the Police Law.

Garon's work into uncovering the precise mechanism behind the revisions to Article 5, also gives us a more complex picture into the exact relationship between women and the state in the 1920s. The “Hiroshima Incident,” in which officials in the

---

98 See Tomida's Hiratsuka Raicho.
Hiroshima Prefecture used Article 5 as a justification to harass the local chapter of the New Woman's Association to the extent that it shut down.\textsuperscript{100} is portrayed in Hiroko Tomida's biography of Hiratsuka Raicho as a uniform effort by government officials to bring the New Woman's Association in line with their ideology. However, according to Garon, the Home Ministry's support for these prefecture officials was “half-hearted,”\textsuperscript{101} and Tomida states that the “wide newspaper publicity helped to recruit new members.”\textsuperscript{102}

The combination of sympathetic media coverage for the New Woman Association's efforts (in contrast to the media's view of the Seito women a decade previous) and the realization that the Home Ministry was changing its views and policies on women shows that the Japanese state and society were hardly monolithic entities that women were unable to impact, but instead entities had to negotiate with the changing image that women were putting forward. Conservative women's groups had found a way to give women roles outside the home, primarily through charity work and the spreading of education to other women, that the state could not object to, and instead had to integrate into its model of womanhood. By working within the framework of “good wife, wise mother,” women were able to change the definition of what a “good wife” and “wise mother” were, in hopes of improving women's lives.

Women who took part in state-sponsored organizations were not necessarily in agreement with state policies. Many female educators, such as Dr. Yoshioka Yayoi, were active in both state-sponsored groups, such as the League for Daily Life Improvement, and women’s suffrage groups, which worked to change state policies.\textsuperscript{103} She also

\textsuperscript{100} Tomida, \textit{Hiratsuka Raicho}, 300-301.
\textsuperscript{101} Garon, “Women's Groups and the State,” 19.
\textsuperscript{102} Tomida, \textit{Hiratsuka Raicho}, 301.
\textsuperscript{103} Garon, “Women's Groups and the State,” 21.
supported Sex Education for women, and other progressive educational policies that were not endorsed by the state. Ichikawa Fusae herself worked for state organizations, to the extent that she was purged from public service by the American Occupation government after the Second World War. There is an idea that these women joined state-sponsored groups after they had exhausted all autonomous options, in a last-ditch effort to help women as state militarism increased. But for many women, such as Ichikawa, Okumura and Yoshioka, state cooperation was seen as the only method for achieving their goals.

The dichotomy between the views of scholars of feminist history, and the views of modern feminists is hardly unique to the Japanese case. The idea that a woman is not a feminist unless she is chaining herself to a building in the name of women's suffrage exists in studies of British feminism as well. Although many examinations of the Victorian and Edwardian women's movements have truly sought to uncover the success and contributions of moderate women's groups, the view of radical feminism as the most successful kind of feminism is still predominant. This view can be seen in Tomida’s description of the events following Baron Fujimura's speech against women's political activism:

Ichikawa Fusae stated that if Japan had had militant suffragettes, they would have taken physical action against Fujimura. Ichikawa's comment demonstrated that the Association was aware of militant suffragists in Britain and the progress which they were making through direct, aggressive action.

I take two issues with Tomida's analysis here. First, that she automatically assumes that Ichikawa's comment was meant to be supportive of the British movement, and to imply

106 Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 309.
that the Japanese movement would be more effective if it had a militant aspect. Ichikawa was not a militant feminist. Indeed, she was often criticized by members of the Federation of Women's Associations of Western Japan for not being aggressive enough in her suffrage campaign. These leaders saw her league as “Tokyo based 'intellectuals' who were 'content just to put up golden signs' and visit Diet members.”

If anything, Ichikawa was considered too close to the government, even by women who were part of groups that were normally considered more conservative than the League for Women's Suffrage. The idea that she was advocating a militant, anti-state feminism seems almost laughable, especially in the context of her work during the war. Her comment was, more than likely, a half-hearted joke, in response to the anger that the other women expressed in the aftermath of the speech.

The second issue is with the idea that militant British feminism was considered successful at the time. Whether or not militant feminism was successful is an ongoing debate within the study of British feminist history; however, the public perception of it is a bit clearer. The W.S.P.U (Women's Social and Political Union), the organization discussed by Tomida, was all but torn apart by its militancy. As its militant tactics became more extreme, the W.S.P.U. lost the support of its allies, such as the Women's Co- Operative Guild Congress, who claimed they could not support the “appeal to brute force,” which the W.S.P.U. was making. Furthermore, the press, while they publicized their actions, did not condone them. By the time they were committing the acts discussed by Tomida, such as window breaking and arson, they were no longer truly considered part of the suffrage movement; not by the press, and certainly not by other suffragists.

---

108 Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 310.
109 Liddington and Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, 208.
such as Millicent Fawcett and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, who condemned their violent actions.\textsuperscript{110, 111}

Tomida's argument shows the mindset of many scholars of feminism. She argues that Japanese women might have achieved more success if they had added a more radical, militant element to their campaigns. There is no real factual basis for this claim, as the success of militant feminism even in Britain is dubious at best, and the more radical elements of Japanese feminism, such as socialists, had virtually no public support; yet the idea remains salient amongst even recent scholars of Japanese feminism.

Ironically, closer examination of the situation involving the defeat of the attempt to revise Article 5 of the Police Law in 1921, indicates that the last tactic that would have been effective in achieving women's goals would have been militarism. Sheldon Garon suggests that the conventional claim that the New Woman's Association was responsible for the revision of the Police Law is incorrect.\textsuperscript{112}

However, the events surrounding the revision of Article 5 and the New Women's Association are, in fact, rather complicated. Tomida's work suggests, rather conclusively, that the women of the New Women's Association were responsible for the revision of Article 5. Garon's confusion seems to come from the change in the association's leadership that occurred between the 44\textsuperscript{th} Diet Session and the 45\textsuperscript{th} (when the revision was passed). In this way, it seems that both Garon and Tomida are correct. While the New Women's Association was responsible for the revision of the Police Law, Hiratsuka Raicho and Ichikawa Fusae, who were no longer involved in the organization, were not.

Indeed, upon review it seems possible that Raicho and Ichikawa, through their

\textsuperscript{110} Tomida, \textit{Hiratsuka Raicho}, 310.
\textsuperscript{111} Liddington and Norris, \textit{One Hand Tied Behind Us}, 215.
\textsuperscript{112} Garon, “Women's Groups and the State,” 17.
actions or personalities, actually had the opposite of the intended effect, and their presence at the Diet Session may have been responsible for the defeat of the bill in 1921. Baron Fujimura Yoshiro gave the speech that defeated the petition to revise the Police Law at the 44th Diet session in 1921, stating specifically that:

Recently, a strange organisation [i.e. Association of New Women], who's (sic) members call themselves 'atarashi onna' (new women), has been attempting various political activities. I personally find this organization most unpleasant... I am emphatically opposed to women's political campaigns.¹¹³

It was his speech that concluded the Diet meeting, as he made it clear he would do whatever was necessary to stop the bill from passing. Later, when asked about why he had stood in opposition to revisions that had been supported by both the House of Representatives and recommended by the Home Ministry, Baron Fujimura said the following:

I agree with the Association's fundamental view that the existing Peace Protection Law, which treats women just like children is unfair. I also think that we must give wider and fairer recognition to women's status. On the other hand, I have mixed feelings about giving political power to Japanese women. This is mainly because of the appalling, shocking and outrageous scenes I once witnessed in London... During my stay in London, I had the opportunity to see many militant women's suffrage campaigns organized by the notorious British suffragettes... Their actions went to extremes, they began to throw fire into post-boxes and to smash the windows of government offices. They became utterly out of control.¹¹⁴

The implication is that Fujimura saw a risk that the New Woman Association, whose actions he so disapproved of, could get out of control, and turn into a militant movement. Given Ichikawa's (surprisingly ironic) comments about how militant feminists would have reacted to his speech, his actions almost seem motivated by self-preservation. It is difficult to know exactly why he saw the New Women's Association in this way, although

¹¹³ Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 308.
¹¹⁴ Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 311.
its name, and all it implied, was probably part of it. Additionally, although Raicho's reputation had improved, Fujimura might have remembered her as one of the more scandalous of the Seito women during its publication, and distrusted her and her organization because of that.

In light of the reasoning behind his disapproval, militarism seems like it would have been the worst possible course for the feminist movement to take. Fujimura seems to have been greatly influenced by his experience with the suffragettes in Britain, and was afraid of the damage that such women could cause to Japanese society. In this way, it would seem that the W.S.P.U.'s militant tactics had, regardless of what they may have achieved in England, impeded the efforts of women in Japan to gain political rights.

What is most interesting to examine is why the House of Peers had such a sudden reversal over the revision to Article 5, from rejecting the proposal in 1921 and accepting it in 1922, and even he can only offer guesses. Garon discusses the Japanese government's interest in mobilizing women for war efforts, as Britain had done during the First World War, but such ideas had been floating around in the government for years before the 1921 rejection. In 1917, the Provisional Military Investigative Commission published a report about the efforts of women during the First World War, which recommended that the official role of women be expanded to include these new duties. The Home Ministry's recommendation to change the Police Law came in 1920, before the rejection; and Baron Fujimura was still a member of the House of Peers.

There was no factor that changed between the rejection of the proposal and the acceptance a year later, except for a personal appeal by the new leader of the New

---

115 Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 311.
Women's Association, Oku Mumeo. Given that Fujimura's speech in 1921 seemed provoked by the presence of the New Woman's Association more than it was actually informed by his personal opinion on the matter, Oku realized that the only way to win him over was to change his opinion of the association. She did not attempt to convince him of the inherent gender equality between men and women, but instead used the ideology of “good wife, wise mother” to her advantage:

He [Fujimura] was very surprised to meet Oku carrying her baby on her back, and changing her baby's nappy in front of him and his wife. . . Oku, who was a caring and devoted mother, was completely different from the stereotype he had about feminists. Behaving in this way, Oku won him over. He became convinced that the Association's campaign would be safe as long as it was conducted by mothers like Oku. He withdrew his opposition to the revising bill, and promised to persuade other members of the House of Peers to let the bill through.  

Fujimura kept his word and the bill passed in the House of Peers.

Scholars have presented two incomplete pictures of the events surrounding the revision of the Police Law, which intrinsically changed the nature of women's groups in modern Japan. More conventional scholars of Japanese feminism paint a portrait like Tomida's, showing us a women's movement that fought against an oppressive state, with everything they won being a result of ingenuity and hard work. Scholars like Garon, on the other hand, show us how larger, more conservative groups managed to work within the framework of “good wife, wise mother” slowly expanding its definition from the inside.

In an interaction like the one between Oku and Fujimura, however, we see the intersection of the efforts of two different sorts of women's groups, and the changing state policy and perspective on women. As groups like the Patriotic Women's Association

117 Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 317.
attempted to educate women as citizens, and groups like the League for Daily Life Improvement implemented programs to increase the quality of women's lives, Japanese women became increasingly involved in society outside of the home. Slowly the idea of what a “good wife” and “wise mother” was began to shift. Instead of a woman whose place was exclusively in the home, these women needed to be part of the nation.

Even conservatives such as Baron Fujimura did not believe that women were incapable of being involved in politics. On the contrary, his fears stemmed from what he saw as the ability of women to become radical and dangerous, not due to weakness of disposition. And certainly, if the women of the Patriotic Women's Association did anything, it was endeavor to show a strength of spirit in Japanese women. It is difficult to imagine a woman who had to endure the loss of her son or husband to a war, and then devoted her life to working for the public good, fainting over a political speech.118 More conservative feminist thoughts, such as ideas centered around maternalism, created a respect for the idea of motherhood, elevating it to a nearly sacred level. It is easy to see this idea as a constraint, but in many ways it was liberating: as long as a woman was a good mother, she was a good person, and was a trustworthy and valuable member of a society.

By presenting herself as a mother, Oku was able to convince Fujimura that a woman could be both a feminist and feminine. This presentation, however, was a genuine expression of who Oku really was. She was known as a caring and loving mother, and that fact alone was enough to persuade Fujimura that any organization of women under her command would not be harmful to Japanese society. In a single evening, Oku was

able to destroy prejudices against feminists that Fujimura had presumably held since witnessing radical suffragettes more than five years before, all by presenting herself as a source of moral order and motherly virtue. The revision of the Police Law was the result of nothing less than the complimentary efforts of the two different factions of the women's movements, and a Taisho state engaged actively in negotiation with that movement about the roles of women and their place in society.

After the revision of Article 5, the women's movement was fundamentally changed. The article was revised in 1922, and by the time of the Great Kanto Earthquake in September of 1923, when women's groups joined into federations, such as the Women's Federation of Western Japan, those federations contained millions of members.¹¹⁹ Women's groups, which had, due to Article 5, previously been small, local groups without political agendas, were now able to discuss and confront a larger range of issues facing women without fear of legal repercussions.

**What Makes a Woman's Movement “Successful?”**

The consensus that scholars seem to have come to in regards to the Japanese women's movement in the Taisho Era is that it was unsuccessful. As Sievers notes in her conclusion, “Though Japanese feminists were unable to achieve their goals until after the Pacific War, their struggle to improve women's status was an important and continuing one.”¹²⁰ From this, we can infer that by “their goals” she is talking specifically about suffrage (seeing as suffrage was achieved after the Pacific War due to the new constitution written by the Allied Occupation government).

---

The root cause of this “lack of success” is usually placed upon either the rise of militarism, or a lack of cooperation within the women's movement. While the former certainly had merit, the latter is more difficult to prove definitively. Tomida states that Raicho was deeply disappointed with the women's movement at the time of her withdrawal from it as evidence of the problems within the larger movement. “She was also dissatisfied in ways in which other women's organisations [besides the New Women Association] were operating then. They lacked unity, had many internal factions and were mutually isolated from each other.” Hiratsuka herself in 1925 even stated, “Nowadays the mere thought of the so-called women's movement gives me the shivers. I have grown to dislike the women's movement so much that there is no way for me to return to it.”

What it was, however, that struck her as so problematic about the women's movement at the time is unclear. The period right after the Great Kanto Earthquake (in September 1923) was probably the most unified that the Japanese women's movement ever was.

The Great Kanto Earthquake was one of the most powerful and destructive earthquakes that Japan had ever experienced. Measuring a 8.2 on the Richter Scale, and hitting both Yokohama and Tokyo, the quake was a true national disaster. Approximately 140,000 people lost their lives during the earthquake itself and in the fires that followed.

In response to this tragedy, the women who had just won the right to form political associations banded those new groups together in hopes of providing relief to

---

121 Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 332-333.
122 Tomida, Hiratsuka Raicho, 333.
those in need. The newly empowered women's groups sprang into action immediately, organizing autonomously, attempting to cater to the needs they were confronted with. Many of these women met while working on the streets of Tokyo, creating an environment of cooperation. By September 28, leaders of forty-three different organizations formalized their cooperative efforts to create the Federation of the Women's Associations of Tokyo. According to Dorothy Robins-Mowry's The Hidden Sun: Women of Modern Japan:

For the women, the earthquake's destruction became a challenge to their ability to restore order...Without waiting for men or the imperial call to action, women assumed responsibilities that presaged roles for them in social reconstruction in the years ahead... Familiar figures such as Kawai Michi and Dr. Yoshioka Yayoi gave leadership.

In the wake of the Great Kanto Earthquake, over forty different women's organizations united under the umbrella of the Tokyo Federation of Women's Associations, in order to combine their efforts at disaster relief. According to Barbara Molony, “Socialists like Yamakawa worked side by side with middle-class Christians and housewives.” Other groups throughout Japan organized in a similar fashion, creating large umbrella organizations to pursue common goals. These federations were massive, the largest, the Western Japanese Women's Federation, containing over three million members by 1927.

The Tokyo Federation remained intact even after the initial disaster relief was complete. This Federation soon subdivided into five sections: society, employment, labor,

---

education and government, allowing women to concentrate on tasks that they had an interest or experience in. According to Barbara Molony, these groups all “sought to promote women’s issues that had already been at the heart of the pre-earthquake feminist movements.” These issues included, but were not limited to, licensed prostitution, the problems of working women, protection of motherhood and political rights.

It was from the government division of this organization that the famous League for Women's Suffrage, led by Ichikawa Fusae was formed. While it is true that women in the Federation of Women's Associations of Western Japan sometimes criticized Ichikawa for her tactics (specifically that she relied too much on lobbying Diet members). She was still widely respected by women for her efforts, as indicated by the fact that they still remembered and supported her services after the war.

The spirit of cooperation, however, did not begin with the Great Kanto Earthquake. Women within the Japanese movement had always displayed a spirit of unity and mutual respect, even when groups had very different views or were in competition with one another. These women were able to set aside personal differences, and pursue the enlightenment of women as a collective goal. In contrast, many women in the British movement were openly hostile to one another over small differences in opinions, expressing public disrespect for other women in journals that were designed to elevate women's views.

In both England and Japan there was an internal women’s debate over the idea of

134 See the anecdote at the beginning of my thesis to see the memory of Ichikawa amongst Japanese women directly after the Second World War.
the “New Woman.” In England, many women were quick to attack Sarah Grand's declaration of the “New Woman” as extreme, or even counterproductive to the advancement of women. Those who disagreed were hardly respectful in their language. Ouida (the pen name of novelist Marie Louise de Ramée) stated in a direct response to Sarah Grand's article, “The 'Scum-woman' and the 'Cow-woman'... are both of them less of a menace to humankind than the New Woman with her fierce vanity, her undigested knowledge, her over-weening estimate of her own value and her fatal want of all sense of the ridiculous.”

More attacks against Sarah Grand's definition of the New Woman were also forthcoming, such as another female writer, Ella W. Winston, who stated in her article “Foibles of the New Woman:”

She [the New Woman] is a stranger to logic, and when consistency was given to mortals the New Woman was conspicuously absent. Her egotism is boundless. She boasts that she has discovered herself, and says it is the greatest discovery of the century. She has christened herself with the 'new,' but when her opponent speaks of her by that name, she replies with the characteristic contrariety that the New Woman, like the serpent, is largely an imaginary creature.

These female activists were so eager to disassociate with the “New Woman” image, that they were willing to denigrate other women to do so. In the British movement there was little to no feeling of camaraderie in spite of a difference of ideas. These women were not comrades who were finding different solutions to the “Woman Question,” instead they were adversaries, fighting amongst one another over those differences. There was no sign of reconciliation either; these women, despite writing directly in response to one another, seem overtly hostile toward other viewpoints, without any signs of respect.

The rivalry between the *Shinshinfujinkai* and the *Seito*, at least seems to have been more respectful. That is not to say that the women did not have any differences. In fact, the women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* founded their own magazine in an effort to provide an alternative to the *Seito*. *Shinshinfujinkai* founder Miyazaki Mitsuko, in July of 1913, went as far as to say that “the 'theory of fleshly emancipation' and other such topics advocated at the Seitōsha's meeting prompted the immediate formation of the Shinshinfujinkai” because they thought it “terrible that female students and young women should be poisoned by such thought.”

In spite of these comments, Miyazaki also made it clear that she was not trying to destroy the *Seito*, and acknowledged that she and the *Seitosha* were both working toward the same goal of awakening women. She and the other women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* thought there should be more women's organizations, not less.

Although journalists at the time attempted to pit the two groups against one another for sensationalist reasons, the women involved didn't think that their difference in viewpoints necessitated that one of their groups be eliminated. Other papers, wanting to play up this alleged rivalry, wrote headlines such as “The New Woman's New Foe” or “An All Out Attack on the Seitōsha,” in reference to the starting of the *Shinshinfujinkai* and their announcement of their own oratory meeting, respectively. The newspaper *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* went so far as to make “The New Woman's New Foe” into a thirteen article series on the “rivalry” between the two papers, which it began literally upon the announcement of the *Shinshinfujinkai*, promising the “spectacle of female

---

Yet, it seems that the women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* did what they could to minimize the alienation of the *Seitōsha*. Miyazaki, realizing what the press was up to, made the following statement in response to the various media exaggerations of the rivalry, “It is thought that the Shinshinfujinkai set itself up in opposition to the Seitōsha, but that is not the case.”\(^{142}\) Later, they would also make it clear that they encouraged all other women's groups, including the *Seitōsha*, claiming that, “Having various women's groups is very necessary for a future large women's movement.”\(^{143}\) Nishikawa even went so far as to defend some of the *Seitōsha* women's more scandalous behavior, saying, “Although it is true that some [New Women] visited brothels and drank five-colored liquor, they were only trying to take the first step toward destroying perverse, old customs.”

While the women of the *Shinshinfujinkai* represented themselves and their magazine as a more mature and enlightened alternative to the rebellious *Seito*, they were not openly hostile, and admitted that both groups were necessary for the advancement of women. This view can be seen in stark contrast to women of the British movement, who were ready to levy insults at one another over the concept of the “New Woman,” due to their different viewpoints.

It seems that much of the belief that there was division and factionalism comes specifically from the fact that there was not a lot of unity over the suffrage movement, regardless of the unity with which the women's movement functioned otherwise.

In examining the attitude between the *Shinshinfujinkai* and the *Seito* during their
“rivalry,” we can get the idea of the mutual respect and sense of shared purpose that permeated the Japanese women's movement. Therefore, by including the *Shinshinfujinkai* and groups like the Women's Federations into our definition of the “women's movement” we can see that the movement was more cooperative and respectful than factionalized and divided.

While it is true that the suffrage movement may not have won women's suffrage, to condemn the whole women's movement as something that was unsuccessful for this reason is inaccurate, and devalues the work done by groups such as the Women's Federations. If we look beyond suffrage, however, we get a picture of a women's movement that was able to mobilize women when needed. By looking at the sheer size of the cooperative efforts of the women's federations after the Great Kanto Earthquake, and the way in which they mobilized and organized without any sort of centralized orders, we see the effectiveness and organization of these women's groups, making it clear they were hardly uniformly “unsuccessful.”

**Conclusion**

More research must be done in order to fully understand the impact that these previously marginalized parts of the women's movement had on women's lives in Modern Japan. However, by simply redefining our idea of the Japanese “women's movement” we begin to see a picture of a large, functioning movement that interacted with its society and government, negotiating for change. There were more radical groups, such as socialist movements and the *Seito's “New Women”* as well as conservative groups, such as the Women's Patriotic Association, and there were groups that attempted to bridge the gaps between these groups, such as the *Shinshinfujinkai*. We can see from
their interactions (both intentional and unintentional) that these groups were all necessary for the changing roles of women within Japanese society, and within the eyes of the Japanese government.

By broadening our definition of “women's movements” to include women of the Meiji Period as well, we are able to see a clear path of the evolution of feminist ideas in Japan, as opposed to a sudden emergence of feminism in the Taisho Era, which helps to paint the movement as less derivative. Including the women of the Shinshinfujinkai and Women's Patriotic Association, as well as female educators such as Dr. Yoshioka, allows us to see a movement that was more moderate, and less radical. Finally, by broadening the idea of the “women's movement” beyond the campaign for suffrage, we can see clear major successes of the women's movement, such as the changing of the Peace Preservation Law and the relief work coordinated after the Great Kanto Earthquake.

Most importantly, the broadened definition allows us to see beyond the idea of state oppression and societal apathy or intolerance, and instead see a state and society that were in constant negotiation with various women's groups. Groups such as the Women's Patriotic Association were able to negotiate new, official roles for women that the state had not previously considered, but soon found it could not refute (such as war widows working outside the home). While groups such as the Seito and Shinshinfujinkai were able to engage in dialogues with the rest of society through their magazines and writings, and managed to change that society’s ideas about women's roles and capabilities.
Bibliography


http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/most_destructive.php