

**DEVELOPMENTS IN FEMALE EDUCATION OF MEIJI  
JAPAN AS SEEN FROM JOGAKU ZASSHI'S EDITORIALS  
BY IWAMOTO YOSHIHARU**

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**Abstract:** *The ideals about women's education are understood to have formed during the Meiji period, when the government introduced the public education system in Japan with the goal of creating ryōsai kenbo (good wives, wise mothers) to build a stronger/brighter Japanese nation. This paper, by providing a glimpse of Iwamoto Yoshiharu's (one of Meiji Era's opinion leaders and women educators) first-hand experiences while striving to educate women and society, gives a better idea about the processes involved in the development of these ideals.*

**Keywords:** *women's education in Meiji Japan; Iwamoto Yoshiharu; Jogaku Zasshi; ryōsai kenbo; nation-building.*

**The underlying issues in previous research**

After the Meiji Restoration, the general developments of modern female education and the image of the ideal woman in Japan often seem to be perceived as straightforward and absolute, leading to/being a part of nation-formation processes, and being somewhat unique to Japan. However, such understanding is greatly problematic.

Until Meiji, there was never any consensus on what women should be like and what role they should play in the society within Japan. In actuality, it is rather more likely that there were great variations on what roles (and thus skills and knowledge) were expected of women and what education was deemed suitable to them, which varied not only spatially or temporally, but also depending on their class. The opinionated literati had their own ideas regarding the greatly politicized and contested subject of modern womanhood, especially during the Meiji period, but before and after it as well (refer to Sugano; Tocco; 2003). Illustrating the fact that there were varied ideals and realities coexisting, the recent research (ex: Patessio, 2011) provides more examples of individuals who did not fit the set molds and successfully advocated/taught/studied what they believed was acceptable or necessary for women to know in order to function in the changing times. Therefore, it is safe to assume that when the time came to decide what the modern female education system should be, in the

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government's efforts to standardize it, various ideas clashed and competed. The result of this process materialized in the strict (and rigid) laws and guidelines that had to be enforced, and only later did they slowly become the norm in society (that is, they came to be contested on a lesser scale).

The other issue that naturally arises from the above argument is that of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideology. The term is confusing rather than explanatory, and has a long history of development that is relatively unknown. *Ryōsai kenbo* is seen as a term defining the ideal woman and her role in society, especially against the background of the nationalization and militarization of Japan. However, as mentioned above, we should reconsider whose ideals we are referring to, as they were varied and numerous.

In addition, there exist many ties between the developments regarding female education in Japan and abroad that still remain largely untouched in research, especially as far as imperialistic aspirations, social engineering, and nation building are concerned. The example of Japan is often treated together with the studies of Korea and China, especially in a way that portrays Japan as the one introducing the modern ideas regarding female education and *ryōsai kenbo* to other Asian countries; just the same way Japan is taken to have been influenced by the Western (mostly American) example. However, there is a need for comparative studies offering a different perspective, as it is not unlikely that modernization/industrialization, and the connected societal changes induced similar processes and phenomena within different societies, without much direct exchange of ideologies between them.

Lastly, the role of religion in the development of modern education is also rather hazy, the main reason behind this most likely being the fact that religion was also never a constant; as many had their own interpretations of religious ideals, it is challenging to use religious doctrines as a backdrop for the study of education or nation building. Thus, there remain some questions to be answered. For instance, Christianity is seen as one of the catalyzers in the process of popularization of female education. However, was it really the Christian ideals that were giving the impetus to the change in the society of Meiji Japan, or was Christianity a tool to validate the efforts to attain them? If the circumstances were different, could not the same impetus have been provided by Buddhists or Confucianists? Indeed, what views did those affiliated to Buddhism or Shinto hold, regarding the necessary qualities of the women of modern Japan? In this case too, rather than to generalize, it is important to provide concrete examples of individuals and their ideals/opinions in order to have a better understanding on what role

religion was playing in society and nation building.

It could be said that, in order to clarify the processes leading to the formation of modern female education and the ideal image of modern womanhood, it is important to address the above issues by carrying out more case and comparative studies regarding individual educators who were striving to bring about change in society, and by analyzing what means they were using to carry out their own policies while interacting with the state. By such analyses not only could we provide an insight into how these individuals perceived and experienced the process of modernization first-hand, but we could also fathom in what conditions these educators were operating – what they could and could not change, and what were the compromises they had to make – instead of perceiving their ideologies and practices as having had developed in a linear fashion, in a vacuum, or treating them as a constant.

This paper, in hopes of providing a small stepping-stone in attaining the above-mentioned goal of addressing these issues, aims to offer a perspective on the ideals and actions of a prominent, yet largely unknown women's educator active during the Meiji period – Iwamoto Yoshiharu (1863-1942).

## **Introduction**

Japanese literacy rates were already high during the Tokugawa period, both among males and females. However, the exposure to Western thought brought in new notions about what the meaning of education is and what place it should take in the “New Japan.”<sup>2</sup>

Before Meiji, quite commonly women had to know how to read, write, be knowledgeable on the etiquette and know how to look after a household, weave, etc. What was expected of women differed depending on their rank in society (for example, counting was deemed to be a skill for the merchant classes), yet we can see girls and women of all ranks being able to share learning materials, as numerous articles were published for them, most being moral textbooks and primers<sup>3</sup>. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, educational texts<sup>4</sup> dealing with geography, etc. were sold in numbers twice as large as those of the “must-have” moral textbooks (Tocco, 2003, p. 200). Female education in Japan was transforming even before the entry of Perry's Black Ships in 1854, as women were being

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<sup>2</sup> Slogan coined in order to stress the contrast between the “enlightened” Meiji period and the “restricted and feudalistic” Tokugawa era.

<sup>3</sup> *Kyōkunsho*, etc.: texts for the moral education of girls and women.

<sup>4</sup> *Ōraimono*: from Heian to Meiji, this was a generic name for a type of rudimentary textbook. At first, it dealt with letter writing, but its contents became more varied with time, and in the modern period it was used in *terakoya*, thus playing an important role in the education of the masses.

increasingly expected to have more practical/ broader knowledge. Even though we have few resources from the earlier eras regarding female education, we can safely assume that it was never static, and the notions regarding what was suitable for women to know varied greatly in their families and among the educators. The same can be observed during the Meiji period. However, as the nation-building project gathered importance in the eyes of the politicians and intellectuals, the standardization of the ideal of education suitable for a modern Japanese female took place, and such diversity in opinion and practice regarding female education disappeared.

To throw more light into this process, this paper shall explain what elements of society influenced the ideology and practice of a women's educator that can be said to be representative of the mid-Meiji period – Iwamoto Yoshiharu. Iwamoto is rarely mentioned in English research, yet his opinions are representative of the community of native Protestant educators of the Meiji period, their activities exemplifying the fact that the process of nationalization of women's education was not a straightforward one, and it required discarding the ideas that were deemed unsuitable for the building of the modern Japanese nation.

### **Meiji period female education**

With the gradual introduction of Western norms and Christian ideals to Japan, some educators and opinion leaders (Fukuzawa Yukichi, Mori Arinori, Nakamura Masanao, etc.) noted how limited the education of women was, how quiet and hidden they were in their homes. This was deemed to be one of the reasons why Japan was “lagging behind” the Western nations and the issue was addressed by both foreign and native thinkers of the time.

The foreigners in question were mostly Christian missionaries. They took up the education of girls seriously<sup>5</sup> for numerous reasons: raising helpers for the missionaries – the so called “Bible women,” who could preach in the native tongue; raising girls with a set of Christian values that would later be passed on to their families or pupils; also, another goal was to improve the general situation and wellbeing of women and, through them, their families', by teaching them to create Christian homes<sup>6</sup>.

On the native side, the Japanese who went abroad, such as Mori Arinori, Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nakamura Masanao, Nishimura Shigeki, and

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<sup>5</sup> Ferris Jogakkō is known as a groundbreaker in the missionary schools for girls, after the establishment of which many others followed. The school planted its roots in 1862, Marry Kidder making it an institution exclusively for girls in 1871.

<sup>6</sup> A term often used by both foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians who strove to educate girls and women.

many others, were exposed to the Western culture and the argument of the importance of the role played by women in the formation of a strong nation and healthy society<sup>7</sup>. They were also exposed to a reasonably new notion in the West, i.e., that the level of the development of its women can help define how advanced a nation is. They brought this message to Japan, among many others, inspiring the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*Jiyū minken undō*) with their writings. A new generation of Japanese Christians was raised encouraged by these writings and the teachings of the missionaries: they had their own perception of Christianity, and their beliefs can be said to be a compromise of the foreign Christian and the local system of values, most clearly those of Confucianism, as it was used to educate the nation since the Tokugawa era. Iwamoto Yoshiharu is one of these native Christians<sup>8</sup>, and a very colorful figure among them – a teacher/schoolmaster at a girls' school (*Meiji Jogakkō*), an editor of the women's magazine *Jogaku Zasshi*, and a great supporter of numerous key social activists of the period (*Kirisutokuyō Fujin Kyōfūkai* among others).

### **The main features of Iwamoto's ideology regarding the education for women**

Iwamoto began his career as an educator in Meiji Jogakkō (1885-1909) and as a journalist/editor of his and Kondō Kenzo's own magazine, *Jogaku Zasshi* (1885-1904) in the mid-1880s. He was influenced by the ideas of Fukuzawa, Mori, and Nakamura, yet he did not agree with them on all aspects, and developed his own ideas and methods of teaching girls. He had his own interpretation on how Christian values should be applied to meet the needs of Japanese society, and his own interpretation of what the term *ryōsai kenbo* meant. His ideas were based on not hampering the development of women as individuals, on protecting their rights, and allowing them to play an important role in society and at home. At the same time, the reactionary movement was beginning to form in Japan at about the same time he had started his career, and the lofty ideals based on Western ideas were losing the general support. Due to this, or due to his various experiences while managing the school, Iwamoto's ideas adapted to the demands of the times, yet there were certain grounding aspects that Iwamoto held to throughout the twenty years of his extensive activities.

Firstly, he publicly pushed forward the idea of the importance of high-quality higher education for women (in times when there were barely any

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<sup>7</sup> Such ideas were especially present in the US, where female education was already developed to a certain extent.

<sup>8</sup> Others: Tsuda Sen, Nakamura Masanao, Kimura Kumaji, Kondō Kenzo, Niijima Jō, Uchimura Kanzō, Tokutomi Sohō, Naruse Jinzō, etc.

institutions providing post-elementary education to girls that would be on par to the education provided for boys).

「吾人は（中略）男女の天職に不同あることを確信するもの也、然れども或る限りに至る迄は男女固より同一に亦た固より同一の職を執らざる可らず、此に対して教育する之を男女に普通なる高等教育と云ひ、之より以上を男女それぞれの専門教育を云ふ、苟くも男女をしてそれぞれに十分なる人間たらしめんと欲せば、先づ共に如此き高等教育を受けしめざる可らず、此の専攻教育を受け了したるの女子こそ即ち最賢最良の妻たり母たるものなり」。（「何をか中正の主義を云ふ、女子教育に関する幾多の謬見」『女学雑誌』157号）

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I [...] believe that men and women have different missions to fulfill in life<sup>9</sup>. However, there of course are jobs that, to a certain extent, must be performed equally by and taken up by both men and women. Education for this purpose would be the general higher education. The next step would be the professional education for men and women. In order to raise complete individuals, it is essential to provide both men and women with both such general higher education and professional education; only then, women will be able to become the best wives and the wisest mothers. (“What is Meant by the Right Principle. Mistakes in Regard to Women’s Education,” *Jz* No. 157, April 13, 1889)<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, unlike his predecessors (Mori, Fukuzawa, etc.), Iwamoto argued that education should help to develop the personalities and the innate talents of the students; he encouraged the women to strive for their rights<sup>11</sup>, including that of being able to receive good quality higher education. He wished them to actively participate in the improvement of society and the elevation of the position of women.

「女子教育及び女権拡張の正当なる希望は、敢て女子を

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<sup>9</sup> Iwamoto believed that women and men are different in nature and physicality, and thus the special needs/rights of women should be taken into account. He meant it as a liberating/protecting stance rather than one imposing limitations on women.

<sup>10</sup> Here and below translations are provided by the author of this paper.

<sup>11</sup> However, as it was common among the educators of the time with a few exceptions, he seems to have been unsupportive of the idea of women suffrage.

して其固有の本質よりも立ち越しめんとするにあらず、只人為の压制によりて不自然に製造したる部分を打破徹去せんとするに也」（「婦女子修身の覚悟」『女学雑誌』133号）

The real/legit aim of female education and women's rights movement is not asking of women more than their natural talents/capabilities are, it is only getting rid of all the unnaturally created boundaries. ("Woman's Resolutions in Life," *Jz* No. 133, October 27, 1888)

Particularly, he argued that nobody could tell the women what the limits of their talents and possibilities in life are, and encouraged them to strive to succeed in studies and various occupations, and also to become knowledgeable and wise mothers.

「天性の案内は今の日本教育家よりも利巧なるものにて、之に放任するとも決して心配の入らぬ者なり（中略）女子の優美内環なること、其天性ならんか、然らば其天性の儘に放任するときは即ち其天性の如くに発達すべし」（「目下の女子教育法」『女学雑誌』207号）。

The directions given by the innate qualities are more advantageous than those of the educators of contemporary Japan: if these qualities were left to lead [the development of the education], we would have nothing to worry about [...] Is not the beauty of the demeanor of women found in their inner qualities? That is why not impeding these innate qualities means that [the individual] will grow according to them. ("The Present Educational System," *Jz* No.207, April 5, 1890.)

His understanding of the meaning of *ryōsai kenbo* was that it was not a compulsory ideal. In his view, education for women gave them two major options to improve their position and the society at large: the first was for women who were most talented, and meant pursuing careers and contributing to the society by bringing it into a more harmonious/balanced state from the surface (面 – *omote*); such women may not wish to marry; for those who created families, though, he saw many possibilities to use their extensive knowledge in raising children who would be conscious of the needs of women, and in being active supporters of their husbands and bringing about political change through them –working, as it were, from the inside (裏 – *ura*). According to him:

「女権伸張の二途其の一を廃すべからず」 「女権伸張に表裏の二途あり」 (『女学雑誌』71号)

Neither of the ways of extending women's rights should be disposed of. ("The Two Ways of Extending Women's Rights: No. II." August 13, 1887)

Thirdly, he looked to the West for an example, but was strictly against blind Westernization – he wished women to be knowledgeable in the Western ways, but also to be able to function according to the needs of Japanese society, thus coming up with the curricula he deemed most suitable for the educated Japanese women during the years he was active. At the same time, he was against the conservatives who wished to raise a *ryōsai kenbo* that had no say in the society and possessed no rights.

「今の日本の良妻賢母たることを大切となす。故に全く西洋婦人の如くなりとも、今の日本の良妻賢母たること能はず、昔の日本婦人の如くなりとも、今の日本の良妻賢母たること能はず、今の日本婦人は、今の良妻賢母たらずんばある可からず」(「各女学校の校長。並に、各女学校生の父兄に告げ参らす」『女学雑誌』259号)

What is important is to become a contemporary *ryōsai kenbo*. Thus, one cannot become the *ryōsai kenbo* of today by imitating the Western ladies, or the ladies of the previous eras. The Japanese ladies of today must strive to become the *ryōsai kenbo* necessary for Japan at present. (To the Presidents of the Girls Schools and to the Parents of the Female Students, *Jz* No. 259, April 4, 1891)

Finally, he taught the girls Christian values and morals, yet he never proselytized, nor had mass or Bible study in his school. He introduced Christianity to his students, but showed consideration towards their beliefs students and those of their families. Not wishing to depend on foreign missionaries (and avoiding their interference), he strove to educate the girls rather than to convert them.

### **Developments in Iwamoto's ideology regarding the education for women**

The numerous editorials Iwamoto published about twice a month in

the *Jogaku Zasshi* display the development of his ideology regarding female education, and possibly a reflection of the changing climate in which the educators had to operate. The period of twenty years (1885-1905) during which he was an active educator and opinion leader could be split into three different stages, as below<sup>12</sup>.

### **Stage one, formative years: 1884–1889**

Iwamoto is said to have formed his ideologies during this period. Indeed, at the beginning of the period, Iwamoto appears to have inherited the ideas of Fukuzawa and Mori, yet soon, by the 11<sup>th</sup> publication of *Jogaku Zasshi*, we can see how he finds disagreements with Fukuzawa and feels the need to change the common opinion regarding the role/position of women in society. From this point onwards, Iwamoto introduces various ideas and useful sources regarding female education in his magazine, while also developing his own stance and opinion in the field. In the times when education was primarily for boys, there were few institutions for girls to study at, and parents and the society at large were suspicious about the Western-style education and how it would affect the girls, Iwamoto concentrated his efforts on defining the purpose of female education and on arguing its necessity. He was among those who spoke about the need of educated mothers that could become the main teachers to their own children – a concept that was rather novel in Japan, as most of the family members would educate the children, women usually supervising only the girls. He believed that families with mothers as educators could help improve/ modernize Japan more efficiently than anything else. What was special in his case was that he argued that to fulfill this purpose, women needed knowledge about physics and other sciences. By the end of the period, he started to argue that women needed not only practical knowledge and skills, but that female education should involve literature and arts, as, according to him, women tend to excel in these areas due to their sensitive nature.

### **Stage two, the turning point: 1889–1891**

The second period is defined by rapid political changes. The Meiji Constitution (1889, the first modern constitution in Japan), the Parliament (1890), the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) all appear in this period, restricting the freedom of educators and the educated.

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<sup>12</sup> Inoue (1968) and Wellhäusser (2004) suggest their own chronologies of the development of Iwamoto's ideals and policies, yet the first one deals with the development of the *Jogaku* ideology, while the other concentrates on the developmental changes in the *Jogaku Zasshi*. As I am treating the developments in Iwamoto's educational strategies, I use my own chronology and do not refer to theirs.

During the Freedom and People's Rights movement, the government was challenged and threatened by the Western ideas. Thus, a need was felt to centralize the education and to strictly control what and how was being taught. The system of public education, based on the Prussian model and supervised by the emperor, was enforced, leaving such schools as Iwamoto's mostly unacknowledged and with few possibilities to develop. Trying to circumvent such restrictions, he searched for new ways to educate the society. For one thing, he spoke about the necessity of women to have an interest in the field of politics, so that they could affect the choices made by the government – he wanted women to be knowledgeable about how the state was running and where it was going. He also argued for a more varied education for women – to suit their needs, interests, and all the roles they were discovering they could perform in the modern society.

### **Stage three, the branching-off: 1891-1905**

During the last period, as the education for women was more and more established and legally defined, Iwamoto expanded his ideology on female education in order to escape the rigid boundaries set for women educators and to find new/undeveloped niches. He was urging his students and readers to discover practical ways they could contribute to the society that was experiencing economical hardships, natural disasters, and war. He spoke about the rights (including education) of children and the need of orphanages and the education of girls from countries under Japan's influence (Taiwan and Korea), and welcomed exchange students from Taiwan each year. At the same time, he was planning to establish a university for women, where the truly gifted could conduct high quality research and become specialists in various fields. Even though his plan for a university was left unfulfilled, his school is said to have been providing an extremely high quality education for girls and women, even if mostly unacknowledged by the state.

Iwamoto discontinued his career as an educator and journalist in 1905, giving up his efforts due to numerous reasons, but most likely because of the lack of support and acknowledgement of his efforts as the country was concentrating on winning yet another war, while the ideal female education increasingly meant simply nurturing women for housework and childrearing.

### **Factors that shaped his ideas over the years**

The changes in Iwamoto's ideology on female education were most likely shaped by the following social dynamics.

First of all, the number of girls who were allowed to attend schools was

limited and would fluctuate depending on the mindset/economical situation of their families. The girls had to support their families by looking after younger siblings or helping in the fields, etc. Iwamoto had to adjust to fit the requirements of those families and to teach the girls useful and practical knowledge that would allow them to work or to find a respectable spouse – for that was what society expected from educated women.

Secondly, he struggled for funds. Due to his unique perspective on what education for women and society must be, he (purposefully) received little to no funds from the missions, government, or any other substantial sponsors. He survived by charging the girls a small fee that was set by the government, and paying little to nothing to the teachers. Nevertheless, he still managed to arrange free tuition for the girls who would in turn teach the younger students. Due to this shortage of funds, he also came up with many interesting ways to involve girls in the running of the school, also keeping it closely connected with the *Jogaku Zasshi*.

Lastly, opinions regarding the Christian thought in Japan fluctuated greatly affecting those in the Christian communities. Iwamoto himself, even though never renouncing his faith, showed some change in his stance towards the missionary schools. At first he was indifferent/supportive, for these schools were basically the only institutions that would provide girls with high quality education; however, as he developed his theories on what kind of education for women was that Japan needed, he started to criticize missionary schools (together with other peers, yet in his own way) by stressing that education in the English language only, with no reference to the Japanese customs and skills necessary to survive in the society/traditional household was definitely detrimental. These comments may have also arisen from the competition between his school and missionary schools. Due to his teaching methods (no Bible study, etc.) and a unique interpretation of Christianity (as in harmony with the imperial system) he was questioned and criticized, and it made his position volatile.

Iwamoto was a creative rather than an opportunistic educator adjusting himself to the needs of society. However, there were factors that made him scale-down his theories and goals.

First, there was the censorship. Due to the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, the government was sensitive towards any political remarks. Teachers, women, army men, etc., had no access to the political world, and no right to comment on it. Iwamoto was prosecuted at least two times for publishing articles that were against the endeavors of the government. Both times, the impact on him was great. The first time he was reproached in 1887 due to his editorial "Adultery of the Nation"; this made him abandon the direct call for citizens to unite and make a change

in society, instead choosing to concentrate his efforts on influencing the society through female education. After he was reproved a second time, in 1900, due to the publication of texts regarding the mineral pollution in Watarasegawa, he started withdrawing from his public activities more and more. At the same time, while there seems to be no evidence of his teaching methods receiving any official criticism, the fact that only the graduates from his school that were specialists in very practical fields (such as shorthand, and not the teacher course graduates) received licenses to practice was a way of censorship in itself.

Secondly, the establishment of the public education for women influenced Iwamoto to a great extent. With the government determining its position and setting up laws controlling primary to high education for women, Iwamoto was left without a proper niche to operate in. Even though more and more women were attending schools during the Meiji period, Iwamoto's ideas were against the mainstream – thus most likely deemed unneeded and undermined.

Lastly, the change in the public discourse and opinion on the education of women had also influenced the way Iwamoto developed his ideas, and the way he expressed himself in order to be understood in the new cultural and social contexts. He had to adapt his lexicon to the one being used during the times, in order to get his ideas across and be understood.

### **Iwamoto's contribution to the development of modern female education**

Iwamoto is said to have failed to fit in/adapt to the rapidly changing Meiji society, yet he played an immensely important role – that of a protector, a gently leading supporter, who provided women with a chance to gather, to exchange information, and to empower themselves. In addition, Meiji Jogakkō, *Jogaku Zasshi*, etc., to which he devoted his energies for twenty years, became beacons of knowledge and their success served as examples for the following generation of educators, social activists, as well as academic institutions, magazines, and other groups.

Iwamoto can be said to have served as a link between the early Meiji and late Meiji/Taisho educators. In addition, the efforts of Iwamoto and his community network facilitated the passing of the baton from male education opinion leaders such as Fukuzawa Yukichi to such female educators as Tsuda Umeko and her students. Lastly, he represents the generation of educators who, in the rapidly changing setting, tried to adapt to the needs of the members of the society and their families while also trying to adapt to the needs of the nation.

## Conclusions

Iwamoto is a creature of his own time and of the atmosphere of the Meiji period, when the liberation and development of one's talents, and putting them to use for the betterment of society were seen as absolutely necessary. He was an individual with high ideals and no wish to compromise them or to be controlled. As a result, he has received negative criticism since the beginning of his career. His example illustrates one prominent aspect of the development of Meiji education – the activities and influence of the Japanese Protestant community. Their efforts influenced female education for the years to come, even if seemingly unsuccessful or nonmainstream, and thus should not be overlooked.

While reconsidering such intellectuals and educators of the Meiji period, we should definitely pay more attention to the forces that were stirring society and the world of education. Once we do, we realize that there were choices that must have felt natural/unavoidable in the setting of the times. Also, we can see more clearly why the shape education gained in Meiji stayed mostly unchallenged up until the Second World War.

During the Meiji period, the government took many ideas into consideration, both novel and conservative, eventually deciding on a compromise between them, and leaving little space for ideas that would not fit in the framework that had taken so long to establish.

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