

Documents on Women in Modern Japan

Document A: Manifesto of the League for the Realization of Women's Suffrage

In 1923, 43 women's organizations came together to form the Tokyo Federation of Women's Organizations. The Federation created five groups to focus on specific issues: society, government, education, labor, and employment. The government group gave rise to the League for the Realization of Women's Suffrage. At its founding, that group issued a manifesto listing the abuses Japanese women suffered, along with proposals for ending those abuses.

The manifesto included the following points:

1. It is our responsibility to destroy customs that have existed in this country for the past twenty-six hundred years and to construct a new Japan that promotes the natural rights of men and women;
2. As women have been attending public school with men for half a century since the beginning of the Meiji period and our opportunities in higher education have continued to expand, it is unjust to exclude women from universal suffrage;
3. Political rights are necessary for the protection of nearly four million working women in this country;
4. Women who work in the household must be recognized before the law to realize their full human potential;
5. Without political rights we cannot achieve public recognition at either the national or local level of government;
6. It is both necessary and possible to bring together women of different religions and occupations in a movement for women's suffrage.

Source: Cited in Barbara Molony, "Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 4 (November 2000), 639-661.

Document B: “Maidens in Boxes”

Kishida Toshiko took advantage of a narrow window of opportunity created when Japanese male nationalists called for an improved status for women. These calls were made to convince the Western countries to recognize and accept Japan as an equal in the international community. Toshiko used this opening to call for greater opportunities for women, saying that the “only appropriate ‘box’ for daughters should be one ‘as large and free as the world itself.’” This excerpt is from one of Toshiko’s speeches on a tour around Japan. While she was followed and at times harassed by the police, she was also heard by thousands of Japanese women.

In ancient times there were various evil teachings and customs in our country, things that would make the people of any free, civilized nation be terribly ashamed. Of these, the most reprehensible was the practice of “respecting men and despising women.” . . . We are trying, through a cooperative effort, to build a new society. That is why I speak of equality and equal rights. Yet in this country, as in the past, men continue to be respected as masters and husbands while women are held in contempt as maids or serving women. There can be no equality in such an environment . . .

Equality, independence, respect, and a monogamous relationship are the hall marks of relationships between men and women in a civilized society . . . Ah, you men of the world, you talk of reform, but not of revolution. When it comes to equality, you yearn for the old ways, and follow, unchanged, the customs of the past . . .

Source: Kishida Toshiko, “Maidens in Boxes,” *Women in World History Curriculum*, <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/WR-04.html>.

Document C: Poems of Hiratsuka Raichō

In 1911, Hiratsuka Raichō, along with some other women, started the literary magazine *Bluestocking (Seito)*, which focused on works that challenged women's roles as only wife and mother. Due to increasing pressure from conservative elements in society and censorship, the magazine closed in 1916. The first poem was from the first issue of *Bluestocking*.

In the beginning, woman was the sun.
 an authentic person.
 Today, she is the moon.
 Living through others.
 Reflecting the brilliance of others. . . .
 And now, *Bluestocking*, a journal created for
 the first time with the brains and hands
 of today's Japanese women, raises its
 voice.

The new woman; I am a new woman.
 I seek, I strive each day to be that truly new woman I want to be.
 In truth, that eternally new being is the sun.
 I am the sun.
 I seek; I strive each day to be the sun I want to be.

* * * * *

The new woman curses yesterday. . . .
 The new woman is not satisfied with the life of the kind of woman who is made ignorant, made a slave, made a piece of meat by male selfishness.
 The new woman seeks to destroy the old morality and laws created for male advantage. . . .
 The new woman does not merely destroy the old morality and laws constructed out of male selfishness, but day by day attempts to create a new kingdom, where a new religion, a new morality, and new laws are carried out, based on the spiritual values and surpassing brilliance of the sun.
 Truly, the creation of this new kingdom is the mission of women. . . .
 The new woman is not simply covetous of power for its own sake. She seeks power to complete her mission, to be able to endure the exertion and agony of learning about and cultivating issues now unknown to her. . . .
 The new woman today seeks neither beauty nor virtue. She is simply crying out for strength, the strength to create this still unknown kingdom, the strength to fulfill her own hallowed mission.

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Document D: Statistics on Women in the Factory Labor Force of Japan, 1894-1911

Data for factories with 10 or more workers

Year	Factories	Women Workers	Total Workers	Percent Women
1894	5,985	239,000	381,000	62.7%
1898	--	235,000	412,000	57.0
1899	6,699	264,378	423,171	62.5
1903	8,274	301,435	483,839	62.3
1905	10,361	369,233	612,177	60.3
1907	11,390	400,925	649,676	61.7
1911	--	476,497	793,885	60.0

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Document E: Account of Life in a Japanese Village

From 1935 to 1936, Ella Lury Wiswell spent a year in the village of Suye Mura with her husband Robert Embree. The couple spent the year conducting an ethnographic study of the village. Wiswell's work focused on the women of the village.

. . . Shiraki was heavily in debt to a *kō* to which he belonged, owing ten-yen payments to many of its members. He sold his first daughter permanently to a house of prostitution for 800 yen. He then settled with his creditors at five yen each, half of what he owed them. Then he sold his second daughter on the same terms and with the proceeds bought some paddy fields and made improvements on his house. Seeing this, the creditors raised a fuss, but could do nothing about it. This is all regarded as a sacrifice the girl makes for her family, but in this case (as in others) the cause was not dire poverty at all, so much as the selfishness of the father.

Source: Robert J. Smith, Robert and Ella Lury Wiswell, *The Women of Suye Mura* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 139.

Document F: Women in Political and Social Movements

These accounts show some of the tensions that women faced as they worked for various political and social movements in the early 20th century.

Kutsumi Fusako had a relationship with Mitamura Shirō and worked with him to organize labor unions and workers' strikes. The first excerpt below was written by Kutsumi's daughter, Kutsumi Hitoko, the second by Kutsumi Fusako herself. Both describe how women's work to advance "modern" interests intersected with older standards of behavior.

Mother did not take care of us at all, she just let us shift for ourselves. When it was convenient for her, she would let us stay with her. Otherwise she would leave us here and there. . . . She did not care whether the people she left us with took good care of us or not. . . . For Mother, her work and her man came first. . . . She retained the old-fashioned ways of the Meiji woman. She always insisted that we obey her, and she would not allow us to assert ourselves at all. — Kutsumi Hitoko, daughter of Kutsumi Fusako

Then Takada came back from his travels. He scolded me, saying I had rebelled against him, the husband . . . The husband must be revered as much as one reveres Heaven. Women must not take any independent action, he told me. . . . He argued, "You are essentially a socialist. . . . If you aren't being paid enough to feed the family, why don't you fight and demand a pay raise, enough to sustain the family?" I decided he was right. — Kutsumi Fusako

The third excerpt is by Yamakawa Kikue. She was a socialist who believed that the only way for women to advance themselves was through socialism. She was also a realist about the lives of most lower class women.

. . . under current social conditions, it is impossible for women to devote all their energies to becoming totally free, autonomous personalities. Does [Hiratsuka] Raichō believe that those who are frustrated by this dilemma are only those women who are self-aware and cultured . . . that they are distinct from lower-class working women . . . ? Does she believe that lower-class, working women deliberately give their lives over to the single task of finding enough food to stay alive? — Yamakawa Kikue

Source: Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 139-140, 146, 168-169. Used with permission.

Document G: Poems by Yosano Akiko

Yosano Akiko was a prolific and well-known poet of the early 20th century. Her poems and other writings focused on women's lives and issues. These two poems have become modern classics in Japanese literature.

The Day the Mountains Move Has Come
(*Yama no ugoku hi kitaru*)

The day the mountains move has come.
I speak, but no one believes me.
For a time the mountains have been asleep,
but long ago they all danced with fire.
It doesn't matter if you believe this,
My friends, as long as you believe;
All the sleeping women
Are now awake and moving.

My Brother, You Must Not Die
(*Kimi shinitamo koto nakare*)

My young brother, I weep for you.
My brother, you must not die.
You, the last born,
Apple of our parents' eyes.
Did they teach you to hold a sword,
Teach you to die?
Did they nurture you for twenty-four years
And send you to kill and die?
You are to carry on the name
Of a proud old house,
Merchants of Sakai.
My brother, you must not die.
Whether the fortress at Port Arthur falls
Or not - what does it matter?
Should it concern you? War is not
The tradition of a merchant house.

My brother, you must not die.
Let the Emperor himself go
Off to war.
"Die like beasts,
Leaving pools of human blood.
In death is your glory."
If that majestic heart is truly wise,
He cannot have such thoughts.

Ah, my young brother,
You must not die in battle.
Since this past autumn, your aged mother,
Widowed,
Has been pathetic in her grief.
Now she's sent her son away and keeps the house alone.
Even in this "secure and joyful" reign
Her white hairs increase.

Weeping in the shadow of the shop curtain,
Your young bride
Of but ten months-
Have you forgotten her? Do you not yearn for her?
Imagine her misery
If you to whom she would turn in sorrow
Were gone.
Oh no, my brother, you must not die.

Source: Laurel Rasplica Rodd, trans. "Meiji Women's Poetry," in *The Modern Murasaki*,
Rebecca Copeland and Melek Ortobasi, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 42-
43. Used by permission of Laurel Rasplica Rodd.

Document H: Songs of Female Textile Factory Workers

The following are some examples of songs that female textile factory workers sang. Working in the silk factories was promoted as a service to the nation since the profits were a major source of revenue that financed industrialization and modernization in Japan during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The working conditions and pay for the young women who worked in the mills, however, were poor. The first song below is a song that the factory provided to inspire the workers. The next two songs were written by the women in the factories about their lives.

1.
Raw silk,
Reel, reel the thread.
Thread is the treasure of the empire!
More than a hundred million yen worth of exports,
What can be better than silk thread?

Factory girls,
We are soldiers of peace.
The service of women is a credit
To the empire and to yourselves.
There are trials and hardships, yes,
But what do they matter?*

*These are the first two of fourteen stanzas.

2.
If a woman working in an office is a willow,
A poetess is a violet,
And a female teacher is an orchid,
Then a factory woman is a vegetable gourd.

3. My Factory
At other companies there are Buddhas and gods.
At mine only demons and serpents.
When I hear the manager talking,
His words say only "money, money, and time."
The demon overseer, the devil accountant,
The good-for-nothing chrysalis.
If you look through the factory's regulations,
You see that not one in a thousand lies unused.
We must follow the regulations;
We must look at the foreman's nasty face.

Source: Patricia E. Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 92-102. Reproduced by permission of Princeton University Press.