

# The Evolution of Feminism in Japan: Issues of Gender and the Perception of Japanese Women

Lukyantseva Polina A.

Department of Letters, Kyoto University, Japan

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## ABSTRACT

The history and specifics of the feminist movement in Japan have been a topic of interest in the research world for many years. Asian and Western scholars also acknowledge that feminism has a long history in Japan. Although Japan has spent more than 150 years trying to address social issues, the problem of gender inequality remains unresolved. Therefore, this study primarily illustrates the evolution of the feminist movement in Japan, comparing two “waves” of the feminist movement. Furthermore, this paper examines the development of female and male roles as well as gender bias in modern patriarchal society. It provides examples of the most common ideologies, Japanese femininity and masculinity, and the system *Fu-you*. It also illustrates and explains how traditional roles, Japanese patriarchal ideology, and modern trends coexist in contemporary Japan. Moreover, this study proved that for a significant number of women (65%) in 2021, the so-called “escape route” (i.e., successful marriage) remains a solution to their financial stability. In this study, the following research methods were applied. A thorough historical context analysis (qualitative approach) was required to comprehend the dynamics and specifics of feminism and examine social issues. The principle of historicism (qualitative method) helped to illuminate and compare the impact of the feminist movement and analyze how feminism developed after the Second World War, in the 70-s, in the 90-s, and in contemporary Japan, investigating each period separately or comparing it. Finally, the data analysis and data interpretation research method helped to organize or categorize data.

## 1. Introduction

The history and specifics of the feminist movement in Japan have been a topic of interest in the research world for many years. Asian and Western scholars also acknowledge that feminism has a long history in Japan (Molony, 2000; Macie, 2003; Dales, 2009; Bullock, 2010; Tachibanaki, 2010). The women's suffrage movement began before the Second World War and reached its peak in the 1970s.

\*Corresponding author E-mail address: asahi.yann@gmail.com

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Even though the country has spent more than 150 years trying to address social issues (i.e., SDG 5)<sup>i</sup> the problem of gender inequality remains unresolved. For instance, goal number five in Japan, gender equality, is highlighted in red in the *Sustainable Development Report* for 2022 (“SDG Index,” 2022). It indicates that the country has had significant difficulties achieving gender equality. Moreover, Japan was ranked 120th out of 156 countries (“World Economic Forum,” 2021) in the *Global Gender Gap Report* (GGGR, 2021) or placed 120 (score 0.656) in the *Gender Gap Index* (GGI) submitted by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japan in 2022. In addition, Japan scored 0.12 in 2015 (0.16 in 2016) on the *Gender Inequality Index* (GII) in three categories: economic status, empowerment of women, and reproductive health. These numbers are better than in India or Africa (the rating varies from 0.53 to 0.66) but worse than in Canada or Europe (the rating tends from 0.1 to 0.7) (“Our World in Data,” 2019).

The fact that Japan is trying to solve this issue is apparent from present trends. At the UN General Assembly, former Prime Minister Abe emphasized Japan's intention to enhance its cooperation with the international community to support gender equality and women's empowerment (“MOFA,” 2021). On top of it, the Gender Equality Bureau at the World Economic Forum (2022), in a *Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator*, stated that there is a critical need to eliminate gender gaps, promote more women into management and leadership roles, and enable women's involvement in the labor sector (“Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office,” 2022).

However, although Japan's great intention is to increase the country's gender equality index, the topic of women's identity, sexuality, gender bias or gender inequality at work, and gender segregation in education is not adequately addressed or emphasized in contemporary Japanese society (Molony, 2000; Macie, 2003; Dales, 2009; Bullock, 2010; Tachibanaki, 2010). Hence, as a result, the primary goal of this study is to examine the particular process by which feminism emerged in Japan and to analyze both positive and negative tendencies regarding gender bias in the country.

## 2. Literature review

**The history of the feminist movement in Japan.** To study this topic, there is a need to pay attention to the following works. For example, in *Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925* (Molony, 2000), *Women's Activism and “Second Wave”: Feminism Transnational Histories* (Molony, 2017), *The Other Women's Lib* (Bullock, 2010), *Feminist Movement in Contemporary Japan* (Dales, 2009), *Evolution of the Feminism Movement in Japan* (Matsui, 1990) authors provide a basis for studying the history, the ideology of the movement, and its formation in modern society. *The Other Women's Lib* (Bullock, 2010) and *Feminist Movement in Contemporary Japan* (Dales, 2009) demonstrate how the “second wave” (the Liberation Movement) developed in a post-war society. It also illuminates the unique characteristics, formation, and influence of feminism on contemporary Japan.

On the other hand, *Evolution of the Feminism Movement in Japan* (Matsui, 1990) depicts and examines the development of the Japanese feminist movement and illustrates its main agenda. On the other hand, *The Space of Postwar History* (Isoda, 2000) displays the high economic growth after the Second World War and analyses how the post-war period transformed or changed people and their mindsets. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight that the examination of *Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925* (Molony, 2000), *Women's Activism and “Second Wave”: Feminism Transnational Histories* (Molony, 2017), *Feminism in Modern Japan* (Macie, 2003), *Feminist Movement in Contemporary Japan* (Dales, 2009), *The Other Women's Lib* (Bullock, 2010) where the history and critical steps of the development

of feminism in Japan are illustrated, helps to form the basis for studying the feminist movement, the suffrage movement, or gender inequality issues in the 20th century.

**Contemporary Japan.** In the following works such as *The New Paradox for Japanese Women: Greater Choice, Greater Inequality* (Tachibanaki, 2010), *How far have we come in gender equality?* (Yamashita, 2018), *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan* (Kingston, 2019), *Overview: Gender and Human Rights* (Tsujimura, 2021) authors try to apply qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate gender bias, gender inequality, gender-based violence, and other issues in contemporary Japan. Through various examples, such as the gender gap at work, gender segregation in education, bias in Japanese lifestyle, career tracing at Japanese companies, disparities in education, etc., scholars tried to show the actual situation in the country.

**Femininity and masculinity in Japanese society.** In *Japanese mothers and obentos: The lunch-box as ideological state apparatus* (Allison, 1991) and *Rethinking the Roles of Japanese Women* (Chuan, 1996), the roles of Japanese women in modern society as well as the traditional image of the Japanese family, are illustrated. Meanwhile, in *Japanese Femininities* (Charlebois, 2014) and *Feminist Movement in Contemporary Japan* (Dales, 2009) the core idea of Japanese sexuality, “housewife” femininity, “salaryman” masculinity, gender, and the ideology of Ryosaikenbo in contemporary society are illustrated and investigated.

**Online resources.** Finally, online resources such as the SGD Index, *Global Gender Gap Report*, *Economic inequality by gender* from “Our World in Data” or data submitted by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japan provided information, data, and statistics about the state of gender bias, inequality, and other issues in the world and the country.

In conclusion, it is crucial to emphasize that all of the scholars previously mentioned contributed significant knowledge about the paradigm of the feminist movement's development in Japan (for instance, Bullock described the first and second waves of feminism and with their main agendas); scholars also clarified the unique aspects of feminism that exist only in Japan (for instance, Isoda examined the impact of the Ryosai-kenbo (e.g., good wife and wise mother) on Japanese society). Additionally, these researchers describe the Japanese family in depth and clarify the roles of Japanese women.

In the end, the literary works, articles, online resources as well as scholars cited above (due to their specificity and rather late time of publishing) did not primarily focus on feminism's slow progress and its reason(s) in modern Japan. The dual nature of Japanese society was not examined too. Based on prior historical and sociological research, the primary goal of this study was to analyze the peculiarities of feminism and gender-related issues in modern Japan and try to illuminate the reasons for its slow development.

### **3. Materials and methods**

First, a thorough historical context analysis (qualitative research method) of B. Molony, V. Macie, J. Bullock, T. Tachibanaki, and J. Charlebois was required to comprehend the dynamics and specifics of gender equality, feminism, and social issues in pre-war society, post-war society, and modern Japanese society.

On the other hand, the principle of historicism (qualitative research method) helped to illuminate and compare the impact of the feminist movement from the first and second waves as well as underline and analyze how feminism developed after the Second World War, in the 70-s, in the 90-s, and in contemporary Japan, investigating each period separately or comparing it.

Finally, the data analysis and data interpretation research method from such resources as the SGD Index, *Global Gender Gap Report*, *Economic inequality by gender* from “Our World in Data,” or data submitted by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japan helped to organize or categorize data. It also was necessary to prove and validate the theories that have been outlined by B. Molony, V. Macie, J. Bullock, T. Tachibanaki, J. Charleboisn, and other scholars.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Feminism, Japanese femininity, and gender inequality in contemporary Japan**

#### **4.1.1. The development of the feminist movement in Japan**

First, there is a need to briefly outline the history of the development of feminism in Japan and highlight its crucial points. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Western ideas of human rights spread throughout Japan. An almost century later, in 1919, the New Women's Organization emerged. It was led by feminist and writer Hiratsuka Raicho (1886-1971), feminist Ichikawa Fusae (1893-1981), politician Oku Mumeo (1895-1997), and writer Yaeko Nogami (1885-1985). First time in Japanese history, these activists highlighted the importance of rethinking the position of women in Japanese society and their rights. It is necessary to underline that in Imperial Japan, women were not financially free, were isolated from society, and were prohibited from any political involvement or organization. They had to stay at *ie* (Eng. Japanese household; Jap. 家) and were required to obey the following ideologies such as *Ryosai Kenbo* (Eng. good wife and wise mother, Jap. 良妻賢母) before WWII, *Kyoiku-no-haha* (Eng. a wise mother who educates children; Jap. 教育の母) or *Sengyoshufu* (Eng. Full time housewife; Jap. 専業主婦) after WWII (Dales, 2009, pp. 14-15). Therefore, for first activists such as Hiratsuka or Yosano, there was a highly significant to highlight the need to achieve social reforms such as protection for the rights of mothers and maternity leave. Hiratsuka and other feminists promoted the necessity of economic independence for women. They also underlined the need for equal rights and voting rights. In addition, they began to fight against patriarchy and raised the issue of women's health and the complex economic and labor conditions for women (Dales, 2009, pp. 14-21; Lukyantseva, 2022, p.73). Hiratsuka and other feminists pointed out the need to legalize divorce for women whose husbands were infected with STDs. Although female and male activists supported this movement, their attempts to change Japanese patriarchal society failed because Japanese culture was not ready for changes at the time (Molony, 2000, pp.639-661).

A few years later, in 1923-24, another group of female activists emerged - the Tokyo Federation of Women's Organization. After the New Women's Organization failed, the Tokyo Federation of Women's Organization began to advocate for women's rights again. In 1925, because of their vigorous activities, the following topics were brought up for discussion in Parliament (but were not fully resolved until the 1960s) (Molony, 2000, pp.639-661):

1. Allowing women the right to join political parties and associations.
2. Access to higher education for women.
3. Allowing women to vote and become candidates for local office.

As a result, almost thirty years later, in 1947, mainly due to the American occupation of Japan rather than changes in traditional Japanese society, women over the age of twenty were allowed to vote in elections (Dales, 2009, pp. 16-17; Lukyantseva, 2022. p.73). However, on the contrary, the question of female labor, education, women`s reproductive freedom, and abortion

was still open and unresolved until the second half of the 1960s, when a women's movement called The Women's Liberation Movement followed the steps of the women's suffrage movement and made the core basis for Japanese feminism, etc. (Molony, 2000, pp.639-661; Tachibanaki, 2010, pp. 123).

#### **4.1.2. "Second wave": its connection with the present**

Japanese society hasn't transformed that much since the 60s-70s. One ideology (Ryosaikenbo) was replaced or altered by another (Sengyo shufu or full-time housewife that appeared in the 60s-70-s). However, the name has been replaced. The idea remains the same. Dales (2009) explains that the rapid economic growth was accompanied by a revolution in the family. The nuclear family model became dominant. Nevertheless, the patriarchal society has not changed at all. Society imposed two traditional roles on men and women: **the full-time housewife** called **Sengyoshufu** (before it was Kyoiku-no-haha or Ryosai kenbo) for women and the role of a **breadwinner** for men represented in the image of *Japanese salaried worker* (Jap. サラリーマン) (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 5-6; Lukyantseva, 2022. pp.73-74).

It is necessary to underline that the "second wave" of feminism was mainly revived by protests against the Vietnam War and US-Japan Security Treaty, not the gender-unequal society. Despite this, the Liberation movement influenced the formation of modern feminism. It is positively affected some protective law issuing (e.g., the Equal Employment Opportunity Act or the Parental Leave Act) and consequentially positively influenced the image and position of Japanese women in society (Molony, 2000, pp.639-661).

"Second wave", or so-called The Women's Liberation Movement, began in the 1960s. It was established by a small group of feminists and writers: Tanaka Mitsu (1945-), Chizuko Ueno (1948-), Minori Kitahara (1948-), and Hisako Matsui (1946-), but later they were initially supported by many female activists and writers all over the country. Interestingly, both the first wave and The Women's Liberation Movement had much in common. For example, the first wave as well as the Liberation Movement focused on denouncing discrimination against women in the family and society and fought for women's employment rights. As a result, in the late 80-s and the early 90-s, the two following laws that dramatically changed Japanese society<sup>ii</sup> were issued: "The Equal Employment Opportunity Act" was passed in 1985 and "The Parental Leave Act" - in 1992 (Mackie, 2009, pp.164-168).

On the other hand, as opposed to the "first wave," the main agenda of The Women's Liberation Movement was: a fight against sexism, rethinking female sexuality, and highlighting the importance of discussing women's right to control their bodies (sexuality, abortion, physical contact). On the contrary, the "first wave" of feminism focused on legal regulations such as electoral rights for women, improving labor conditions, and providing access to education for all women (Molony, 2000, pp.639-661).

Furthermore, The Women's Liberation Movement spread the idea that Japanese women should obtain reproductive freedom and the right to choose whether they want children or not (Bullock, 2010, p.21; Mackie, 2009, pp.164-168). They repeatedly highlighted the importance of legalizing abortions and tried to change the situation in the early 50-s. After 1948, the Japanese government frequently attempted to review the law and apply criminal offenses to women seeking abortions. For example, the prohibition of abortion has prevailed in the Penal Code in Japan. The other problem was the establishment of a counseling system. This system was supposed to indicate a proper age for marriage and having the first child for Japanese women. Therefore, first, activists illuminated the necessity for legalization and justification of abortion for economic reasons. Second, they supported "The Eugenic Protection Law (1948)". This law

permitted abortions in certain exceptional circumstances ("The Guardian," 2021). Finally, they opposed the establishment of a counseling system. Activists proved that the Japanese patriarchal society (i.e., the government) tried to increase the birth rate using women's bodies. Moreover, feminists helped to remove eugenics-related discriminatory clauses (Bullock, 2010, p.21; Mackie, 2009, pp.164-168).

In conclusion, it is necessary to illuminate that all actions mentioned above have changed Japanese society in many ways, giving women at least equal rights in education and partly at the workplace, voting rights, reproductive rights, and power to express and show their sexuality in society and family. Moreover, activists tried to change the traditional Japanese family structure, emphasizing that women may pursue careers and education equally with men.

#### 4.1.3. Modern Japan: workplace, education, and marriage

Now it is necessary to analyze the impact of feminism on contemporary society. However, feminists achieved various goals, and some significant and protective laws, such as "The Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOL)" and "The Parental Leave Act (PLA)," were issued. There is a discrepancy between theory and practice.

**First**, as it was mentioned above, the "second wave" initiated the issuance of "the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOL)" which theoretically controls discrimination against women, prohibits pay or promotion bias, regulates overtime work for women, and prohibits night work or heavy and dangerous physical labor (Tachibanaki, 2010, p. 26-27). On the other hand, Tachibanaki (2010) states that in Japan, laws might be strict, but implementation is lax (p.26). For instance, the data below shows that, in practice, EEOL does not necessarily can be implied. For example, according to *the Gender Wage Gap* for 2020, Japan has a gender gap in the pay of 22.5% (according to the index, these countries have a nearly optimal score: Belgium has 3.4% and Sweden has 7.4%) ("Statista Research Department," 2022) (Figure 1). Moreover, Tsujimura (2021) indicates that in 2021 the average wage for women is only 72% of what men earn (p.55). In addition, in Japan, only 14.7% of women hold leadership positions, and the average income of a Japanese woman is 43.7% lower than the average income of a Japanese man ("World Economic Forum," 2021; "OECD," 2020). Hence, it can be assumed that, although The Women's Liberation Movement provided the necessary tools (EEOL and PLA) to regulate gender segregation, gender dissemination, and gender bias at work, the reality differs greatly.

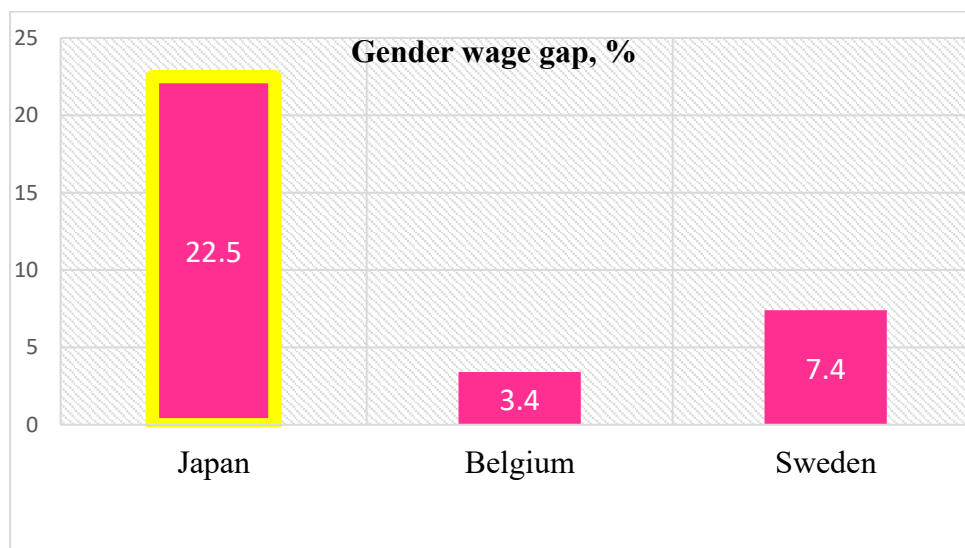


Figure 1. The gender wage gap

Source: Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office ("Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office," 2022)

The other significant problem in Japan is the combination of the old Japanese ideology, marginalization of women at work, general segregation at work, and the system *Fu-you* (Jap. 扶養). Tachibanaki (2010), analyzing the employment rate and the gender gap in the industry, explains that many women still work in the two sectors, such as services or wholesale. Moreover, the gender gap is evident in occupational choice. More female workers prefer or ought to choose clerical work (Figure 2). Meanwhile, the vast majority of men are represented in the occupational categories of professional/technical worker and manager/official (pp. 13-19). It can be assumed that this situation is caused both by women's choices and by the marginalization of female workers (Figure 2). For example, Tachibanaki (2010) explains that “both management and labor believe that men are focused more on career” because men usually support household and management-track positions are somewhat more suitable for men than clerical work. Moreover, Inagaki and Harding (2018) indicate that Japanese companies are way more reluctant to employ female workers because they are concerned that women might quit after giving birth.

On top of it, the idea that women should not work in male-dominated fields is still prevalent in Japanese businesses. For example, in 2003 and 2006 year from 52 to 64 percent of Japanese companies indicated that they hired only women for clerical work (Tachibanaki, 2010, p. 24). Moreover, some Japanese companies still think that various jobs are complicated and require sophisticated skills that women do not have (Tachibanaki, 2010, pp. 24-25) (Figure 2).

Finally, the correlation between higher education and the choice of a field of education, such as the humanities, affects the number of women in leadership positions and evokes gender apartheid (Tachibanaki, 2010, p. 61). Tachibanaki (2010) highlights that “the difference in the academic courses and majors” is the other significant factor that causes gender segregation in the workplace in Japan and causes the gender gap in occupational choices (pp.24-25).

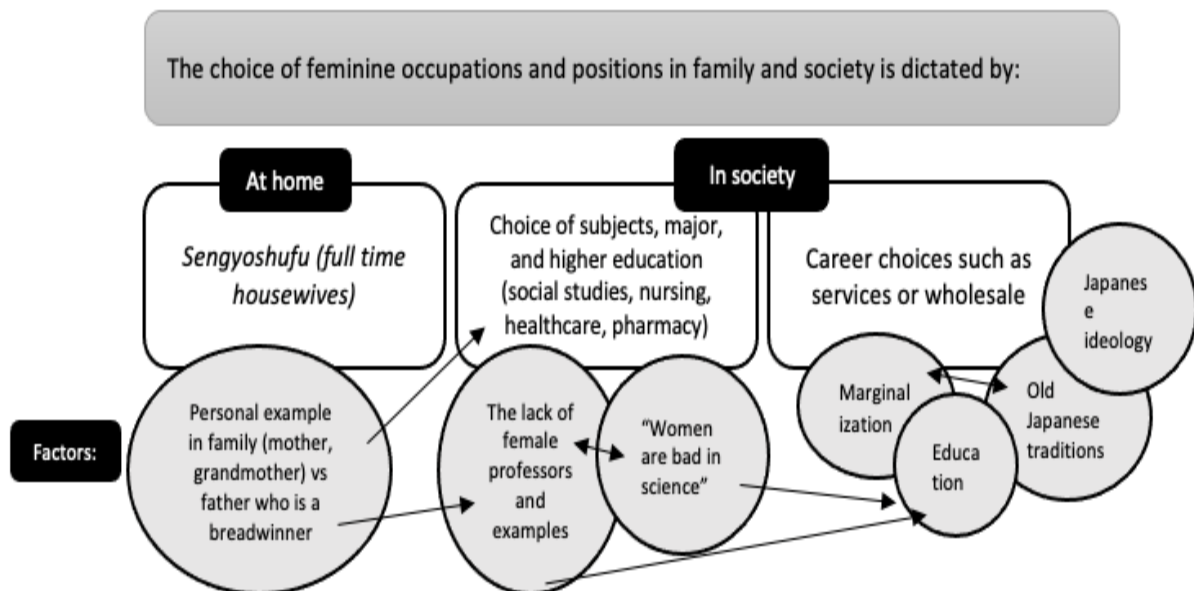


Figure 2. The choice of feminine occupations and positions in family and society is dictated by © author

On the other hand, the system *Fu-you* that discourages women from working full-time does not work well in improving the situation either. The system *Fu-you* which can be loosely translated into English as a “supporting system or economic support,” puts wives and children in a “dependable<sup>iii</sup>” position of their husbands/fathers. This system forces them to work only as part-timers (nonregular workers), so the “breadwinners” do not need to pay extra taxes

(“Kuruma Kyujin,” 2020). It was applied to assist households, which was primarily maintained by men who were in the position of a breadwinner in a period of high economic growth in Japan. At that time, postwar society, which mainly focused on supporting the country and developing its economy, did not consider female workers a significant part of a working society. The whole responsibility was put on the shoulders of the male population, while wives were required to help them at home. This system became a necessary attribute of Japanese culture in post-war Japan. Interestingly, it remains, and many families consider it the only way to hold a household.

However, examining the correlation between the system *Fu-you* and the development of feminism in progress, it can be shown that the number of employed women has increased by approximately 3.4 million in 9 years. On the other hand, yet more and more women tend to work as a part-timer (50.8% of women work as part-timers in 2022), assumingly following the system *Fu-you* (“Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office,” 2022).

**Second**, it is necessary to focus on gender segregation in education and women's participation in research. Globally the share of women in higher education and research is decreasing after graduate school, but what is most important is that the number drops off abruptly after a Ph.D. degree. It falls from 53% (“UNESCO,”2015) (undergraduate and graduate school) to 43% (“UNESCO,”2015) (female Ph.D. graduates) and falls off almost twice from 43% (“UNESCO,”2015) (a Ph.D.) to 28% (“UNESCO,”2015) (female researchers) after a Ph.D. level.

Specifically, in Japan, according to Tachibanaki (2010), a higher percentage of men than women attend universities (p.26). Moreover, Yamashita (2018) explains that **in Japan in 2016**, the proportion of women entering institutions (undergraduate school) was **48.2%**. The rate of women entering graduate school was way lower compared to undergraduate school. It was only **5.9%** (Figure 3) (2018, p.55). Looking at progress referring to the work of Tsujimura (2021) *Overview: Gender and Human Rights*, the number of girls and boys attending high school and universities **in 2020** was almost equal (95.7% and 95.3% for HS; 50.9% and 57.7% for universities). However, the number of students in graduate school dropped significantly to 5.6% of girls and 14.2% of boys. Tachibanaki (2010) attributes this drop to the following reasons: the high cost of tuition, the Japanese system of finding a job right after getting a bachelor's degree, gender bias in education/gender segregation, and the use of education services as an advantage in finding a marriage partner (pp.68-69).

Furthermore, Tsujimura (2021) indicates that Japan, following the global statistic, shows that the majority of girls preferred and prefer humanities, nursing science, pharmacy, and social studies over science (pp.284-285). For example, Yamashita (2018) explains that there is a significant gender difference in specialties. Among undergraduate female students, pharmaceuticals and nursing were chosen by 67.5% of women, 65.4% preferred literature and philology, while only 27% of female students chose science (pp.53-65). Moreover, according to the Gender Equality Bureau (“UNESCO,”2015), in May 2022, only 27.8% and 15.7% of female students majored in science and engineering, while almost 100% (91.3%) of women preferred healthcare (education was chosen by 59% of women). On the contrary, 72.2% and 84.3% of men majored in science and engineering, and only 8.7% preferred healthcare (41% - in education) (Figure 4) (“UNESCO,”2015).

The data above shows a remarkable gender-based division in Japanese education among students. Career choice is primarily dictated by gender. Japanese men and women tend to choose “feminine” and “masculine” fields. Therefore, a low proportion of female undergraduate students (compared to male undergraduate students) is observed in science (Tachibanaki, 2009, p.26; Yamashita, 2018, pp.53-65).

Moreover, it can be assumed that gender segregation in Japanese education can be dictated by Japanese ideologies (Ryosai-ken-bo or Sengyo-shufu) or the stereotype that girls are better at social science (Figure 2). Kumagi and Zang (2020), in the article *Women in the workplace: Insights from Japan*, highlight that “the gender stereotype is deeply rooted in Japanese society, and often this affects the choice of career of girls over their paths of growth and development” (p.7). Moreover, Tachibanaki (2010) pointed out that, for some reason, fields such as law, economics, and business management have not been popular among Japanese girls.

Finally, it is essential to illuminate the significant drop in higher education and women's choice of career can cause the lowest number of female researchers in Japan as a pharmacist or nurses. It can also be correlated with women's preferences in healthcare or education, which do not necessarily require women to accomplish a master's degree. Also, the drop in higher education might be driven by women's choice to focus on work rather than education or their wish to get married<sup>iv</sup> rather than focus on a career and education.

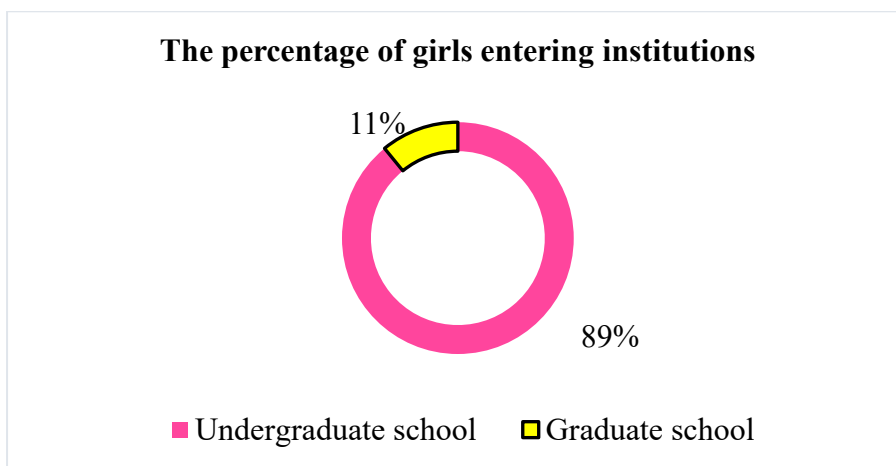


Figure 3. The percentage of girls entering institutions  
Source: Yamashita, 2018

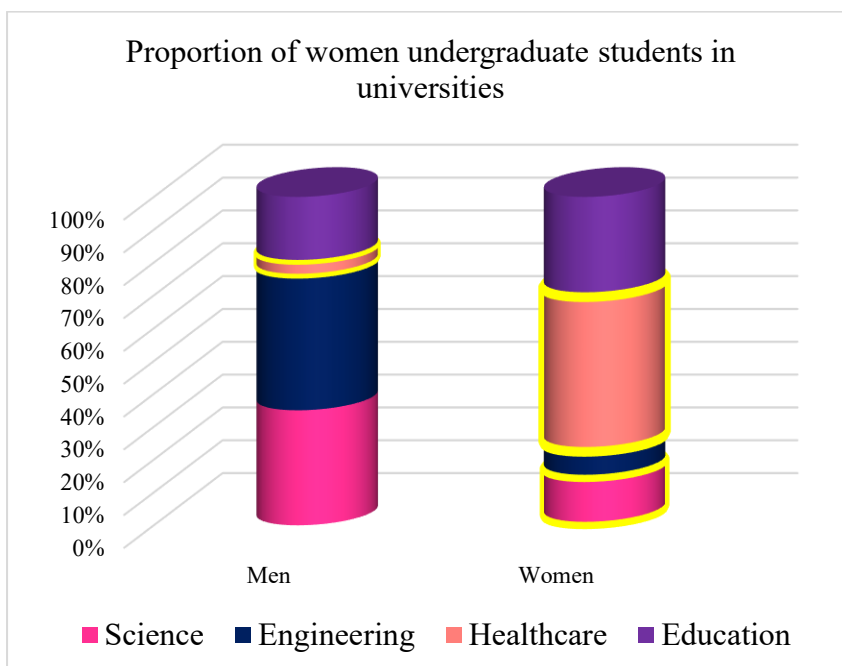


Figure 4. Proportion of women undergraduate students in universities  
Source: Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (“Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office,”2022)

#### 4.1.4. Feminism in contemporary Japan: the perception of women's role throughout history

First, there is a significant need to understand how the image of Japanese women has been transformed through time. Therefore, it is essential to start the analysis from the 40-s when women became engaged in the social life of Japan. During the Second World War, some women used to work at factories and mines. However, unlike Russia, the United States, and other countries, Japan was reluctant to employ married women (Isoda, 2000).

Later, in the 1950s, almost immediately after the end of the Second World War, the ideology of the *Mother*<sup>v</sup> raising the nation became predominant (Figure 5). Mainly due to this ideology and the American occupation of Japan, the role of Japanese women changed. Women were not isolated from society anymore. However, it can also be assumed that the dominant post-war gender paradigm, which required, first, women to stay at home and take care of the family and, second, men to work, has persisted.

Interestingly, two post-war ideologies (① men should be at work, and women as *Sengyoshufu* should be at home ② women who are raising and educating the nation, e.g., *Kyoiku-no-haha*, *Ryosaikenbo* or *Sengyoshufu*) were mainly dictated by the need for men to work to support the country and for women to provide a healthy environment at home and raise children, in various forms still exists in Japan nowadays. For example, Charlebois (2014) indicates that the model *Kyoiku-no-haha* (Jap. 教育の母) was influential in modern Japan too. (pp. 5-6). Other scholars such as Lebra, Holloway, and Dales (writing about contemporary Japan) mentioned similar models and identical ideas in their works as well (Lebra, 1974; Holloway, 2000; Dales, 2009; Charlebois, 2014). Another traditional Japanese ideology that scholars alluded to was the belief that a woman should be, first of all, a *good wife and a wise mother* (Jap. 良妻賢母 or *Ryosaikenbo*). This ideology later transformed into the concept of *Sengyoshufu* – a full-time housewife. *Sengyoshufu* remains dominant in Japan along with *Ryosaikenbo* (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 5-15) and is deeply ingrained into society as a traditional image of decent Japanese women.

To conclude what was said above, it can be presumed that Japanese women, either in postwar or contemporary Japanese society, were valued primarily as good wives and wise mothers (feminine roles) whose essential tasks were to educate and raise children or/and take care of husbands and households (Figure 5).

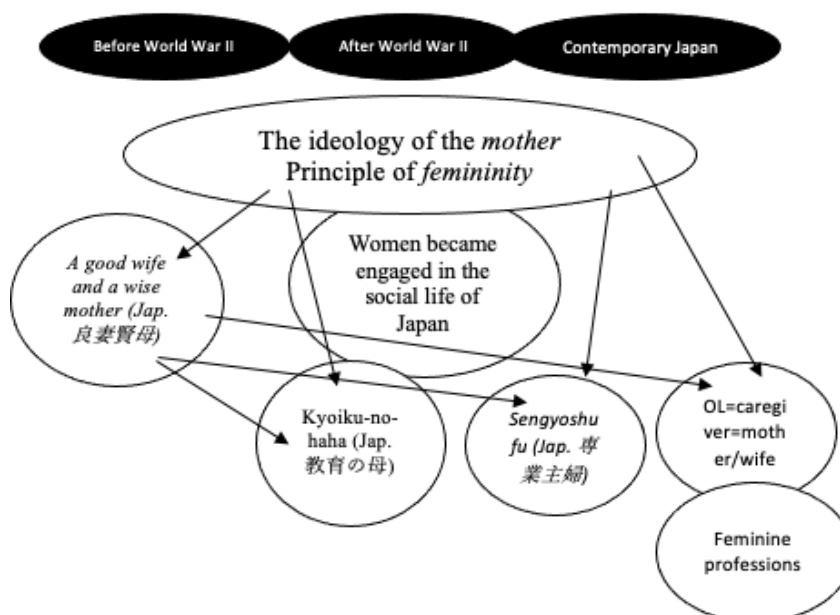


Figure 5. Roles of Japanese women from post-war till nowadays © author

Secondly, discussing the major trends in the 50-70-s as well as in contemporary Japan, it is necessary to illuminate that Japanese society has constantly been implying severe gender stereotypes of men's and women's roles. For example, Bullock and Charlebois pointed out the need for women to engage in housework rather than social work (e.g., as full-time regular workers). Bullock explained it by providing an example from Japanese history. The high economic growth from 1955 to 1973 forced women to take full responsibility for domestic life (2010, pp.14-18). Moreover, the other scholar, Charlebois (2014), also discussed the same social issue in his work (pp. 5-15). Addressing the ideology of the wise mother and good wife, he highlighted the necessity for women to focus on household duties rather than careers. On top of it, he explained the problem of gender roles' separation in Japanese society and the ideology of masculinity and femininity. For example, he clarified that the word **salaryman** (Jap. サラリーマン) implies **masculinity** in Japanese culture (Charlebois, 2014, pp.1-5).

On the other hand, according to Charlebois, **femininity** is mainly associated with the term "**caregiver**." It describes both a role in the family (predominant) and a role as an OL (office lady = secretary) at work (Charlebois, 2014, pp.8-12). The OL work requires women to focus on sorting mail, planning transportation costs for male colleagues, or serving coffee. Many Japanese women drew a parallel between OL (office ladies) and housewives, naming OL office wives. This phenomenon clearly indicates the gendered aspects of this profession (Charlebois, 2014, pp.8-12).

Finally, it can be said that since the words "salaryman" and "caregiver" are used to define how women's and men's roles should be seen in the Japanese heterosexual society, women and men automatically choose these roles and behave accordingly. Objectively, this ideology was dictated by the need for men to focus entirely on work rather than household chores. However, when we speak about contemporary Japan, such doctrines (precisely, among the middle class, upper-middle-class, and upper class) highlight an inability to adapt to modern European trends.

Furthermore, Charlebois pointed out that women from lower classes (even though, in many cases, they would love to become *Sengyoshufu*) in modern Japan are/were forced to work. However, they are/were likelier to earn less than men (2014, pp.8-12). Kingston, in his book *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan*, alluding to the same topic, explained that in contemporary Japan, both partners tend to work because they need income. However, women are forced to work in relatively poorly paid conditions as non-regular employment because they recurrently need to stay at the system *Fu-you* (this system forces women to work as part-timers in order not to exceed the required amount of money per year (Charlebois, 2014, pp.8-15).

Third, speaking of education, higher education, and its connection with employment in the 50-70-s and contemporary Japan, it is necessary to underline two controversial trends. First, it can be assumed that there is a positive trend in getting a higher education (especially among middle-class women). For example, the percentage of girls attending high school increased rapidly from 3.0% (1960) to 11.2% (1970). It can be interpreted as Japanese women seeking (high) education. However, on the other hand, the ideology of being economically dependent on their husband remains dominant (Matsui, 1990; Hsiao Chuan, 1996; Bullock, 2010). Women most likely see marriage as an "escape route"<sup>vi</sup> in contemporary Japan," which does not mean working as a full-time worker or focusing on high education such as a master's degree (Charlebois, 2014, pp.2-15).

Alluding to the willingness or unwillingness of Japanese people to change this ideology, it is necessary to point out that society assumes that women should primarily take care of family and husbands (Allison, 1991; Kim, 2007; Suzuki, 2007; Holloway, 2010). For example, it is essential to take into account the existence of the system *Fu-you* (financially being dependent on the husband and being "included" in his insurance<sup>vii</sup>) obliges women not to earn more than

a certain amount per year, which implies that Japanese women will not work in a firm, but will only work as part-timer (Kingston, 2019). This system prevents women from focusing on their careers and allows them to be entirely financially dependent on their husbands. On the other hand, the long waiting list for childcare, inadequate support, and inflexible employment policies make women derail their careers too (Kingston, 2019). On top of it, according to statistics in *Current Status and Challenges of Gender Equality in Japan*, in 2021, only 13% of men took childcare leave. It shows that even if two spouses want to pursue careers, women must give it up in most cases ("Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office," 2022).

In the end, it is necessary to highlight a slight shift toward gender equality in contemporary Japan. However, it is also evident that old patriarchal traditions are firmly entrenched in society. For example, the marginalization of women in the workplace, a significantly low percentage of (full-time) working women, the rate of childcare leave, or the existence of the system *Fu-you* do not improve the situation. Therefore, it can be concluded that Japan needs to follow western trends to empower and support women and men in their career choices, education choices, and roles in society and family.

## **5. Results**

The following results were found during this study:

It was concluded that, since 1947, women over the age of twenty had been given the right to vote in elections, primarily due to the American occupation of Japan rather than improvements and changes in traditional society (Dales, 2009, pp. 16-17; Lukyantseva, 2022. p.73). However, until the second half of the 1960s, when The Women's Liberation Movement followed the lead of the women's suffrage movement and established the core aspects of Japanese feminism, the issues of female labor, education, women's reproductive freedom, and abortion remained open and unresolved (Molony, 2000, pp.639-661; Tachibanaki, 2010, pp. 123).

1. It was shown that although The Women's Liberation Movement gave essential tools (EEOL and PLA) to manage gender segregation and gender bias at work, the reality differs significantly. For example, the system *Fu-you* as well as traditional ideas that women cannot perform sophisticated work or women's marginalization, are one of the main causes of companies' reluctance to hire female employees. It can also be considered the main reason for the gender pay gap and occupational gender segregation in modern Japan.
2. The research highlighted a direct parallel between the old post-war system *Fu-you* (which remains dominant in contemporary Japan) and the increase in the number of women who tend to work as part-timers.
3. The research showed that even though almost equal numbers of men and women enroll in undergraduate programs, the proportion of female students who go on to higher education declines dramatically. It has a direct connection to the problem of gender bias in Japanese education. Additionally, women's choices to prioritize their careers over their education or their desire to get married over pursuing their careers and education affect the situation too.
4. It was concluded that, although feminism emerged and spread in Japan simultaneously with feminism in Russia, the US, and Europe, Japanese women did not fully support it (and still do not). For the majority of the female population (around 64.8% of women) (Sato, 2021), neither career nor further education, but a household, i.e., the opportunity to implement themselves in the family, not in society, remains dominant. This phenomenon has a close connection to Japanese customs. For many women, it was not feminism that provided the chance to live, work, and study, but a successful marriage and complete or partial economic

dependence on a husband (reminded and) remains a solution (Lebra, 1974; Molony, 2000; Holloway, 2000; Dales 2009; Charlebois, 2014).

5. It was concluded that in the post-war society, Japanese women were primarily valued as good wives and wise mothers (feminine roles) whose primary responsibilities were to educate and raise children or/and take care of husbands and houses. However, this model still exists and, to some extent, is dominant in contemporary Japan (Figure 5).
6. It was illustrated that the system *Fu-you* which was aimed to support the post-war developing economy and Japanese families, exists nowadays too. It dominates among the middle class, upper-middle-class, and upper class. Due to the difficult economic situation, women and men from the middle and low classes ought to work together. However, a significant number of families chose the system *Fu-you* and the Japanese traditional practical model over the Western one.

For example, according to a *Gender-equal society: compilation of the data* (2021), **64.8%** of women and **63%** of men agree with the following statement “husbands at work, women at home”(Sato, 2021; “Gender Equality Bureau,” 2022). From the data above, it can be concluded that modern Japanese society is experiencing gender inequality and facing an urgent need for a solution. However, it can also be assumed that more than half of Japanese men and women agree with patriarchal roles, which makes the whole situation regarding gender equality dual and challenging.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Japanese women have primarily succeeded in promoting feminism: they have access to education despite facing several problems in achieving their goals. Moreover, there are strong and exceptional women in business and culture. In addition, it should be emphasized that part of Japanese society is aware of the need for women to pursue their careers. For example, there is the idea, “Can women save Japan?”. It illuminates the importance of women working to support the family and the country (through paying taxes).

Moreover, some organizations assist with new entrepreneurship projects for female CEOs. For instance, *Startup Lady Japan* encourages women to start their businesses and highlights the problem of gender inequality in Japan. It is reasonable to assume that after a few years, society will experience a series of changes and progress toward gender equality (Lukyantseva, 2022, p. 74).

Finally, it is necessary to highlight a slight shift toward gender equality in contemporary Japan. However, it is also evident that old patriarchal traditions are firmly entrenched in society. For example, the marginalization of women in the workplace, the disproportionately represented percentage of working women, the rate of childcare leave, or the existence of the system *Fu-you* do not improve the situation. Therefore, it is necessary to follow Western trends to empower and support women and men in their career choices, education choices, and roles in society and family.

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<sup>i</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – the Gender Equality

<sup>ii</sup> These two laws gave Japanese women the opportunity to work, get promotions and have the same wage as their male colleagues. Moreover, women had a right to take up some time of maternity leave.

<sup>iii</sup> Article 1 of the Health Insurance Law

<sup>iv</sup> For example, according to sociological studies, in 1983, almost half of Japanese men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four agreed with the statement that men should work and women should do the housework (Bullock, 2010).

<sup>v</sup> It is a collective image

<sup>vi</sup> For example, according to sociological studies, in 1983 almost half of Japanese men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four agreed with the statement that men should work and women should do the housework (Bullock, 2010).

<sup>vii</sup> According to this system, wives and children are becoming “dependents” on the husband's or father's insurance and live off him