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# Women and Political Life in Meiji Japan: The Case of the Okayama joshi konshinkai (Okayama Women's Friendship Society)

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# Women and Political Life in Early Meiji Japan: The Case of the Okayama Joshi Konshinkai (Okayama Women's Friendship Society)

## Marnie S. Anderson

### The Formation of Women's Groups in Meiji Japan

In 1882, one Murasame Nobu, a woman from Aichi prefecture, sent a letter to Itagaki Taisuke, the leader of the Liberal Party, and included 5 yen from her home employment (*naishoku*), which was making fireworks, to support the Party. Murasame would go on to become one of the founding members of a local women's organization, the Toyohashi Fujo Kyōkai (Toyohashi Women's Cooperative Association), about which most information has been lost. She later met famous liberal male activists and was even arrested for her involvement—along with her husband and other activists—in a failed uprising against the government (the Iida Incident), although she was eventually released due to a lack of evidence. Years later, she wrote a preface for the activist Ueki Emori's *Tōyō no fujo* (Women of the East), revealing her commitment to raising women's status, her high level of education, and her deep knowledge of famous women in Japanese history.[1]

What is surprising about Murasame's story is that it happened at all, for the links between politics and masculinity in Japan have deep roots, and women's political involvement has largely been cast as a twentieth-century tale focused on the quest for suffrage.[2] Even in contemporary Japan, women can and do play a political role, but as Robin LeBlanc has demonstrated, female politicians and activists tend to highlight their femininity and "mak[e] creative use of the widely accepted stereotype that women are closer to the home than men are."[3] Obscured in the emphasis on the masculinity of

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politics in Japan is the fact that Japanese women have demonstrated political engagement throughout the modern period.[4] While many scholars have examined the activities of women throughout the twentieth century, my own interest lies in the lives of women, such as Murasame, who formed local women's groups during the Meiji period (1868–1912). These groups drafted charters, sponsored debates and speeches, founded schools, and in some cases formed their own political parties.[5]

In thinking about women and political life, I have been inspired by the work of gender historians who have begun to call attention to some of the ways that women have engaged in politics both by drawing on a more expansive definition of the political and by exploring some of the ways in which women have engaged in political activities outside of voting.[6] I attempt such an analysis of Meiji women in this essay. Although historians have traditionally defined "politics" rather narrowly (and consequently ignored the role of women), a larger conception of the political permits an appreciation of various degrees within it, so that we can include examples of women engaging in social reform, including the founding of schools. In short, I wish to stress that women were acting politically and making political statements even when they were not entirely aware of it.[7]

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the shape of Japanese women's activism changed dramatically. Prior to and during the Meiji Restoration era of the late 1860s, female peasants joined in uprisings, and some women fought alongside men in the Restoration Wars.[8] Moreover, there are a few cases where loyalist women such as Matsuo Taseko worked alongside men in order to achieve the goal of restoring the emperor to what they saw as his rightful place at the center of the polity.[9] But such actions were part of larger, male-led movements, and the parameters of women's activities were circumscribed by their gender and other variables.[10] The situation changed dramatically with the advent of the Meiji period, when most examples of female activism occurred within the context of women-only organizations.[11] By the turn of the century, this burst of associational activity had led to the formation of women's groups of various persuasions, including patriotic associations, Christian groups (notably the Woman's Christian Temperance Union), Buddhist groups, and other charitable associations.[12]

The first women's groups appeared on the scene in the early 1880s, during the era when liberal activism was at its height in the form of the Freedom and People's Rights movements (*Jiyū minken undō*). Whereas men's involvement in these movements has long been known to scholars—particularly the activities of wealthy farmers, who formed organizations, read Western political theory, and drew up constitutions during

the heady period of the 1870s and 1880s—women's participation in people's rights activism has been left unexplored, with the exception of the few women who went on to become famous at the national level, such as the well-known speaker Kishida Toshiko (1861–1901).[13] In much of the existing scholarship, scholars proceed from the assumption that most women's activism was an extension of their wifely role. Women, in short, "assisted" men's activism.[14] Others briefly introduce women activists, especially female speakers, into histories of male-centered people's rights activity, but women's groups have not received sustained attention, with the exception of the scholarship produced by a group of amateur historians in Okayama prefecture, the Okayama Josei-shi Kenkyūkai (Okayama Women's History Association, hereafter OWHA) on a local women's association, the Okayama Joshi Konshinkai (Okayama Women's Friendship Society), which met in the early 1880s.[15]

This essay addresses the growth of women's organizations by focusing on the Okayama Women's Friendship Society (hereafter the Okayama Society) and what its history reveals about the shifting opportunities for Meiji women's participation and the form that that participation would take. Founded in 1882, the organization is relatively well documented in comparison with other women's societies and seems to have been the first of its kind in Japan. Still, the record of the Society is far from complete, a reminder of the challenges of writing the history of nondominant groups. Yet I am convinced that such an attempt is valuable, and aim here to reconstruct a partial history of the Society based on the extant records, relying heavily on newspaper accounts of women's political activities. I am interested in exploring just how the Okayama Society was unique, as well as what elements it may have shared with other late nineteenth-century women's societies about which we know even less or that have been lost to history.

This was, after all, the era during which many scholars have identified the "birth of feminism" in Japan, and yet we know very little about what women were doing, beyond a few individuals.[16] What did it mean for women to become involved in associational activity? What can we learn from the Okayama Society about women's political aware-ness and engagement at the local level?[17] By showing what the Society did and how it was received by the media and male activists, I demonstrate that women's involvement in local political life during the Meiji era was far more extensive than scholars have often appreciated.

In pursuing the voices of local women, I have been inspired by U.S. historian Lori Ginzberg's call to fuse social and intellectual history and to "put ideas back into the context

of people's lives where they originated." In doing so, Ginzberg contends, we may emerge with "a few tiny shards from the past that may shift our assumptions about women's sense of themselves . . . as full members of the nation," long before suffrage was enacted or perhaps even imagined.[18] We may also come away with an enhanced understanding of the range of ideas circulating at the local level, an appreciation of the sources that do remain concerning women's groups, and a sense of surprise about the extent to which women were active—especially those who did not go on to become famous.

**The Okayama Society and Other Early Women's Groups**

For years, scholars have been calling attention to the need to study local women's groups.[19] These include the Okayama Society, the group in Aichi prefecture that Murasame Nobu belonged to (the "Toyohashi Women's Cooperative Association"), and a group in Kanagawa prefecture (the Aikō Fujinkai, or "Aikō Women's Association"). As already mentioned, we know the most about the Okayama Society, in part due to the richer documentary record, but also owing to the efforts of the OWHA.

The Okayama Society coalesced around the visit of the famous female speaker Kishida Toshiko in 1882 (incidentally the same year Murasame wrote to Itagaki). Kishida, with her elite credentials and impeccable style, had already established a presence on the national stage, and her visit seems to have rallied the Okayama women. Consisting of between thirty to forty members, the Okayama group met for about two years to discuss political ideas and to promote education for underprivileged girls and boys as well as other forms of social improvement. Suffrage, not surprisingly, was not on their radar. This was the case for many nineteenth-century women's groups around the world, for whom suffrage rights were rarely an issue and never a top priority; at a time when most men did not have the vote, many women were more interested in expanding their access to public space and their right to political knowledge. In her 1904 autobiography, the famous activist Fukuda (Kageyama) Hideko (1865–1927) reflected on the formation of the Okayama Society:

> We were the first in Japan to organize such a club. We invited speakers and champions of natural rights, freedom, and equality to come and speak to us. Our aim was to work for the abolition of backward customs from the past, which had kept women in a state of oppression. The times were propitious, and applications for membership kept pouring in, and our organization continued to flourish.[20]

Members of the Okayama organization ranged in age from their late teens to early fifties and included women who were highly skilled in Chinese-style discourse (*kanbun*). A few were wives or sisters of people's rights activists. Some were of *shizoku* (former samurai) status, and thus constituted a kind of residual elite, although during this period, class and status were very much in flux. As with so many of these organizations, the group seems to have disbanded in 1884, almost certainly the consequence of widespread government repression of people's rights activities.

The secondary literature on the Okayama Society composed by the OWHA is suffused with a sense of local pride. Highlighting the society's progressive and pioneering character, the OWHA emphasizes that the Okayama Society was the first women's group to appear in Japan, and suggests that members were more independent and progressive than other local women's groups that emerged later, by which they mean the Aichi and Kanagawa associations.[21] But such comparisons are difficult, given how little we know about these other associations. I am more interested in analyzing the worldview of the Okayama Society in order to try to understand the members' goals and self-perception. How exactly did they define their roles and social position? Contemporary records reveal that a number of women around the country provided services for male people's rights activists—housing and feeding them, and doing their laundry.[22] Such roles fell within the bounds of acceptable gender behavior and did not require assuming an explicit "political identity." Others, including members of the Okayama Society, went beyond this role. What may have compelled them to deliver and attend political speeches, found schools, and debate political ideas?

**Origin Stories**

It is commonplace to describe the Okayama Society as coming together after (or during) the visit of speaker Kishida Toshiko to Okayama in 1882.[23] According to this understanding, Kishida was the primary catalyst in the formation of the group. I do not deny that she had a galvanizing effect; nevertheless, it appears that the history of the society is a bit more complicated. Two women in particular bear responsibility for bringing the group together: Takeuchi Hisa (age 53) and Tsuge Kume (age 48), both women of *shizoku* background. They were probably introduced to people's rights activities through their male relatives, since Tsuge's husband was a people's rights activist and Takeuchi's son was a member of the Liberal Party. According to reports in newspapers affiliated with the people's rights movement, the two women had long believed that "even women can have political thought

and work for the state." For years, they had been working "to gain the momentum to form a women's group."[24] In the spring of 1882, they traveled to Osaka to visit Liberal Party leader Itagaki Taisuke after he had been stabbed by a political opponent, a rather unusual step to take for two women who did not know Itagaki personally. Shortly thereafter, they visited Kishida and her mother, who were in Osaka at the time, and invited them to come to Okayama.

In short, Takeuchi and Tsuge played an active role in arranging Kishida's visit to Okayama at a time when the "spirits of Okayama women were motivated."[25] The newspaper description of these women's activities—they are referred to as "educated and accomplished women" (*keishū kunsai no mi*)—includes no hint that they were in any way stepping out of place.[26] There is no suggestion that women's political engagement, in the form of visiting a bedridden politician, nurturing political thought, or forming a local society, was unthinkable: rather, the writer considered their activities admirable and eminently appropriate.[27] It is true that this paper was affiliated with people's rights activism and more sympathetic to female activists than the conservative, pro-government publications of the era. However, male people's rights activists were generally not open to female participation, making such avowals of support for women all the more remarkable.[28]

**Meetings: Speeches, Goals, and Reframing the Past**

The Okayama Society's first meeting took place on May 11, 1882, and contemporary newspaper accounts allow us to reconstruct the event. Participants met at one member's house (a certain Ms. Mizuno—newspapers mention that the house belonged to one Mizuno Saikichi, presumably her father or husband), in central Ishizeki-chō in central Okayama City; the meeting commenced at 7 p.m. and lasted over five hours, concluding soon after midnight. The reporter outlined the background: "The meeting was intended to be carried out in a graceful and ladylike way. But rather than discussing haircuts or the luster of various cosmetics, members discussed politics and world affairs in a refined way."[29] Takeuchi began by announcing that Kishida had come to speak. She continued on, stating that "In the past, Eastern women have been oppressed by men and became accustomed to this. As a result, women do not understand anything about politics. It is time to abolish this practice, but to nurture [political] thought and eliminate this custom is no easy matter."[30]

Tsuge followed up by commenting on how "in our country, men have been free to serve [the country], but in the same way, women should be able to work together with

men to assist [the national cause]." She invoked the brave and courageous women in the national past (we are left to wonder who exactly) in order to legitimize an active role for women in the present, a strategy that, as we shall see, was deployed on more than one occasion. Kishida followed the two organizers with a speech about which we know little, though we can assume that it included claims for women's right to possess political knowledge and to act in the national interest.

Not surprisingly, it seems that Kishida's speech was the highlight of the event. Together with her other appearances in Okayama, Kishida's oratory at the meeting attracted publicity for the group and seems to have motivated the members to agree to meet every month. As activist Fukuda Hideko wrote in her autobiography many years later, "I was beside myself with excitement when I heard her [Kishida] speak so eloquently on the principle of women's rights."[31] However, we should note that Fukuda did not attend the first meeting of the Okayama Society and thus could not have heard Kishida's speech there. It seems likely that this famous account is based on Fukuda's attendance at one or both of two other occasions on which Kishida spoke publicly in Okayama, alongside a lineup of male activists on May 13 or May 14; and since Fukuda wrote her memoir some two decades after these events took place, it is possible that the newspaper accounts are a more reliable source.[32]

The newspaper concluded its description of the first meeting by proclaiming that for women to gather together in this fashion shows that "women can be applauded as the progressive light of the East."[33] As in previous articles, there is no hint that the women were in any way behaving in a fashion that challenged gender norms. It is certainly possible that the reporter viewed the women's activism with an element of polite condescension. Still, the positive way the paper portrayed the women stands out when we consider that a few years later women's political activity would be formally outlawed with the enactment of the Association and Political Meetings Law of 1890 (Shūkai Oyobi Seisha Hō).[34]

The second Okayama Society meeting took place less than two weeks later, on May 23, and featured speeches as well as the public reading of a letter that had been drafted to thank Kishida for her visit to Okayama. Uemori Misao, who had not spoken at the May 11 gathering but who played a central role as the group's secretary, delivered a speech on the ancient past in Japan, a time when "women had been respected," a point that echoed Tsuge's speech at the previous meeting. Perhaps Uemori took inspiration from contemporary British women activists, who saw the ancient past as a time of equality

for women (some Meiji men also seem to have shared this understanding).[35] Organizer Takeuchi Hisa followed up with a speech comparing their organization to snow. Although snow did not seem to be a powerful force when it was falling from the sky, a large ball of snow could "knock over a fortress." She discussed the need for the women to come together like a great ball of snow and "spread" throughout the country.

Fellow organizer Tsuge Kume invoked the Charter Oath of 1868, which had declared that "matters will be decided based on public discussion," and the promise of constitutional government.[36] She argued for women's right to act in the national interest. Although men had been working for the country thus far, there was nothing to prevent women from serving the country as well. In short, women had "no reason to leave it up to men." This principle of women serving the country was based on the "just laws of the polity" (*tenka no kōdō*), she stated, paraphrasing the Charter Oath and offering an interpretation that included women.[37]

When the speeches had finished, the members decided to draft a set of "guidelines" (*kiyaku*). The newspaper concluded its description of the second meeting by declaring, "In our country with so much weakness and powerlessness, men can look at these lively women and have nothing to be ashamed of."[38] Women's dedication to the nation was admirable and worthy of men's support, a sentiment reflecting the common nineteenth-century notion that women's status was a barometer of "civilization." The article also suggests that men accepted women's involvement in the public arena.

Overall, the speeches at both meetings drew attention to women's right to play an active role, and to the power that women possessed when they banded together.[39] The speeches served both to motivate women and to justify a more capacious role for them, and they attest to the speakers' engagement with current political issues. We might also note that they do not directly comment on women's contemporary status; the language of oppression that Fukuda would use some twenty years later makes no appearance here. Speakers aimed to justify their cause by appealing both to examples of illustrious women in the past and also to the logic of historical progress. When examined together, these two rhetorics—one focused on the past and the other on the future—may have jostled uneasily. Yet contemporaries seem to have felt no qualms about using both concepts simultaneously, and both were effective in securing a role for women. Public speaking, incidentally, was not limited to Okayama Society meetings. Some members were active in giving speeches outside of the group at "lecture meetings" for women.[40]

**Drafting Guidelines**

At the end of the second meeting, members agreed to draft a set of membership guidelines. Nearly all Meiji-era groups, whether male or female, seem to have adopted guidelines or statutes (*kiyaku*).[41] These texts, which emphasize service to the nation—a common feature in the charters of men's groups as well—shed light on how the women understood their political identities.[42]

The drafting committee appears to have generated the guidelines over the summer of 1882, for they appeared in print in newspapers in August of that year. The document commences by vowing that members will practice chaste behavior: "We will follow the just laws of nature and preserve women's chastity (*sessō o mamoru*)."[43] As a follow-up, Article 10 announces that those who fail to follow the guidelines or who commit "shameless and indecent behavior" (*harenchi waisetsu*) will have their names expunged from the society's roster. But the emphasis on chastity and appropriate behavior—which may have served to quell the fears of men and affirm the group's respectability—were not central elements in the society's mission. The charter goes on to elaborate, "Our goals are to do away with the evil customs of the past and to clarify the principles of children's education."[44]

The charter's references to the 1868 Charter Oath, which Tsuge had already referred to in a speech at the second meeting—"to follow the just laws of nature"—attest to the members' knowledge of important events and suggest how they attempted to position their goals within the larger context of a new direction for the country. Interestingly, eight of the eleven articles of the guidelines deal primarily with procedural matters for membership, elections, and payment of dues. Meetings were to be held twice a month and last for three hours, from 7–10 p.m. That gender is not highlighted consistently throughout makes the Okayama Society charter unique among the extant documents by women's groups. Perhaps this was because the charter was the first to be written by women and borrowed from male models; alternately, perhaps the members felt no need to be so specific about women's roles.

In any case, subsequent charters by the women's groups in Aichi and Kanagawa are shorter and less focused on procedures; they also highlight women's specific duties in each article and use a more feminine prose style, whereas the Okayama charter is written in *kanbun* (Chinese-style prose), a form usually associated with masculinity.[45] Nevertheless, all three extant charters by women's groups stress femininity, albeit less consistently in the Okayama case. The crucial difference is that whereas the Aichi and

Kanagawa groups positioned themselves primarily as wives and mothers, the Okayama group focused on the specific goals members hoped to achieve *as women*.

We should bear in mind that the embrace of a feminine role does not correspond to a lack of agency. Rather, this way of carving out a space in public as women was effective and consistent with how subsequent female activists in Japan and elsewhere secured a public role for themselves.[46] In addition, it is worth mentioning that none of the women's groups explicitly expressed overtly political goals such as acquiring the vote or the right to stand for office. This is hardly surprising, given the context. As I have already suggested, the vote was not yet a major issue for women's groups around the world. At the same time, male societies were also loath to be too explicit about political goals lest they face government censure, especially after 1882.[47]

**Activities: Founding a School**

As one of its principal activities, the society sponsored the founding of a school, the Jōkō Gakusha. The school was run by Kageyama Ume, an educated woman of *shizoku* status who had run another school with her husband for quite some time. Ume managed the school with help of her daughter, Kageyama Hideko (better known as Fukuda Hideko, age 18 at this time; I refer to her above and below as Fukuda).[48] Apparently, Kageyama Ume had been deeply influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi's famous tract *Gakumon no susume* (An encouragement of learning).[49] Although materials about the Jōkō Gakusha school are limited, we know that it was founded in 1883, a year after the Okayama Society began meeting. At the time, elementary education was compulsory for both boys and girls, but education attendance rates for girls lagged significantly behind those of boys until the turn of the century.[50] The school was open to boys age six to ten and to girls and women age six to sixty, and cost significantly less than public schools.[51] It offered evening classes to accommodate the schedules of women who might be working during the daytime, possibly in one of the many spinning mills located in the area.[52] Like the curricula of the temple schools (*terakoya*) of the Tokugawa period, the curriculum of the Jōkō Gakusha was designed so that students advanced at their own pace. It was even open on Saturdays so that students could participate in debates (*tōronkai*) to hone their rhetorical skills. By 1884, there were some one hundred students, and the school enjoyed widespread community support.[53]

Fukuda drafted the school's "statement of intention" (*shuisho*) in 1883.[54] Such documents are invariably formal, but they can offer insight into the central goals and

principles that guided the school. Although Fukuda drafted the text, it is reasonable to assume that other members of the Society agreed to its content. The statement begins with a summary of women's education throughout Japanese history; women's education had until then centered on "managing the household," with the addition of a few minor arts and skills. Fukuda drew on the language of progress to point out that the world had changed dramatically in recent years, making a new kind of education for women not only desirable but necessary. Otherwise, women and their children would be looked down upon. What is striking about the school is that Fukuda and the Okayama Society members not only had the education of children in mind but also hoped to make it possible for adult women to attend. Indeed, the statement reveals an understanding of how busy adult women were with household chores and children: "At night when they have a bit of time, even if they want to study, there is no school for them."[55]

The statement emphasizes that women have a right to education both for their children and also for themselves. Enabling women to exercise this right was the central goal of the school. Interestingly, Fukuda treated the right to education as self-evident and yet felt compelled to justify it throughout the document. She points out that efforts to educate children fall short if parents are not themselves educated. Even if children attend school, "their parents do not know how to encourage them. The children just lose themselves in play. They forget what the teacher said. When they take tests and do not perform well, they feel ashamed. How sad this is!" Lamenting the current situation, she announces the founding of the Jōkō Gakusha: "What we want is to improve the rotten customs of the past, to enhance women's knowledge and develop their intelligence. By doing so, in the future, mothers will have a valued place."[56]

What is notable here is that education for women and children is the focus—with an emphasis on women as mothers—even though the range of students' ages suggests that older women also attended. Later arguments by women (and men) for various kinds of rights, however, tended to be framed primarily in terms of the national interest.[57] While other statements by Okayama Society members invoked the national interest as the ultimate goal, it is only implicit here. As an aside, we might note that although we find no explicit references in the statement of intention, it seems that the school also served geisha, prostitutes, and factory workers, in accordance with the wishes of Fukuda's mother Kageyama Ume.[58] The school was devoted to education not for the emerging elite but primarily for the working class. The efforts of the Okayama Society, then, anticipated a trend where relatively privileged women entered public space in the name of helping

those who were less well off.[59] Their actions should also be seen as a response to local conditions, for Okayama was becoming a center of the textile industry.

**Encounters with the Police and Government: The "Taking the Breezes Gathering"**
In August of 1884, members of the Okayama Society joined male members of the local Liberal Party for a social outing, a "Taking the Breezes Gathering" (*noryūkai*) on the Asahi River. The joint celebration highlights the connections between the male and female societies. Not only did both groups share a broader commitment to enhancing "people's rights," but there were many personal relationships between them. As mentioned above, some of the Liberal Party members were the sons, husbands, and brothers of the Okayama Society members.

The event, attended by some one hundred people, featured a party of riverboats festooned with lanterns. Red and white flags flew in the breeze, and one of the lanterns was emblazoned with the characters for "freedom" (*jiyū)*.[60] One boat included some twenty-seven members of the Okayama Society and students from the Jōkō Gakusha. They entertained the crowd by singing "people's rights" ballads set to lute music.[61] Later, some individuals began giving speeches. Although the first speech was by a young man, it does not seem to have left a significant impression on the crowd or the media. In contrast, speeches by women and girls stood out. Fukuda Hideko delivered a talk on how men should not be left alone to work for important matters of state. One of her students at the school, eleven-year-old Kawata Ume, followed with a speech about her desire to work for the country, fulfilling her duty "as an Okayama woman." The press reported that her speech moved the crowd and was greeted with considerable applause; some people hit the sides of the boats to demonstrate support.[62] Kawata's word choice suggests the ways local identities coexisted and even took precedence over the new national identity.

Accounts of what happened next vary widely. Some scholars rely on Fukuda Hideko's 1904 description, which explains that the police intervened to shut down the gathering. Upon the appearance of a policeman, "There was a kind of furious excitement, but at the words of elderly persons in the crowd, everyone dispersed in an orderly fashion."[63] The next day, Fukuda tells us, the prefectural governor issued an order closing down the school. Curiously, however, newspaper reports of the time make no mention of the party being shut down by police. One paper attributed the end of the celebration in part to the actions of members of a rival political party, who, in a fit of jealousy, were hurling stones and other objects at the boaters.[64] Another article

concluded with a description of the female speakers and made no mention of a dramatic ending to the evening.[65]

Regardless of how the gathering actually ended, it is clear that the police did observe the events and that they punished some of the participants by closing the school. (However, the newspaper accounts of the school closure, published more than a month after the boating party, suggest that it took time for the order to take effect.)[66] The order apparently did not clarify why the school was being shut down, but Fukuda's brother-in-law approached prefectural assembly members, who explained that it was because of Fukuda's (and presumably the students') participation in the boating party.[67] We find a more clear-cut reason for the closure in the work of historian Murata Shizuko, who points out that the presence of Jōkō Gakusha students and teachers at a political gathering violated the conditions of the 1882 Associations Law (Shūkai Jōrei).[68] Obviously, the event was understood by the government as political; it is nevertheless important to note that women *as a group* were not banned from political activity until 1890. We are left to wonder what sort of dampening effect the closure had on the Okayama Society. It certainly had a profound effect on Fukuda, who departed for Tokyo to continue her studies shortly thereafter.

**Conclusion**

I have not been able to locate records later than 1884 concerning the Okayama Society, although there is information about individual members. We do not possess personal accounts of the Society's impact except in the case of Fukuda. Nevertheless, it seems clear that participation in the Society spurred women to pursue other forms of activism centered on education and often related to Christianity.[69] Sumiya Koume, a former geisha and concubine, opened a school for girls in 1886, and went on to help Ishii Jūji with the formation of the Okayama Orphanage in 1888. She also wrote for the well-known journal *Jogaku zasshi* (Women's education magazine), where she decried the practice of concubinage.[70] Another member, Ishiguro Orio, helped found the Okayama branch of the Women's Reform Society, the precursor of the Japanese Woman's Christian Temperance Union.[71] Uemori Misao and Yamamoto Ushi both opened schools for women in Okayama.[72] By this point, as mentioned above, Fukuda Hideko was in Tokyo, where she continued her education and activism. She would soon be arrested and imprisoned for her role in the Osaka Incident, an attempt to foment revolution in Korea. Although Fukuda did not act alone, she was the only woman involved, and the media coverage of the event vaulted her into the national consciousness.

Perhaps the Okayama Society ceased to meet following the waves of repression by the government against people's rights activism in general. Or perhaps its members did continue to meet and engage in less conspicuous activities, and the records simply have not come down to us.[73] The group was clearly unique for the ways it managed to attract publicity in the local papers and for the connections its founders forged with famous activists such as Kishida Toshiko and Itagaki Taisuke. Moreover, the Okayama Society stands out for its role in nurturing Fukuda Hideko—for we can see retrospectively that the Society was where she began her career as an activist. What are some of the larger lessons we can draw from the history of this group, whose record extends for some two years (1882–84)?

First, the Okayama Society's activities demonstrate that the growth of political activity at the local level in Meiji Japan, so vividly depicted in the work of historian Irokawa Daikichi and others, was not limited to men or to a few famous women.[74] Women were involved in this upsurge of activity, although their contributions have not been emphasized in most of the scholarly literature. Perhaps this is because fewer women participated than men, and historically women's activities have been viewed as an extension of their role within the household rather than as political acts that were significant in their own right. When we examine the historical record, however, it is clear that the Okayama Society members saw themselves as agents who had an important role to play in society, rather than as adjuncts to men. Moreover, their activities were approved of and even supported by some journalists and members of the local Liberal Party. For women to play a limited political role was not so unthinkable in the early Meiji period, a point that has gone largely unappreciated in the scholarly literature. This is true even though most male activists ignored women at the time.[75]

Second, the example of the Okayama Society complicates our assumptions about women's involvement in local political life—specifically, the notion that they were not involved or that their involvement was limited to assisting men—and demonstrates women's agency.[76] These women saw themselves as entitled to a role that included political knowledge, the right to assemble as a group, and the right to further their goals through social outreach, primarily in the form of speech-making and educating the underprivileged, especially working-class women. Indeed, looking at the records, I am struck by the number of schools that women in this group went on to found or support (at least four schools within five years). Perhaps this was the most straightforward and socially acceptable way to help other women without somehow violating gender norms.

Third, while the languages of citizenship and belonging would not become developed for another few years, in the early 1880s, the Okayama Society activists were already making claims for inclusion as valuable members of society—at both the local and the national level—within the parameters of accepted gender roles. These women were not challenging the gender order so much as redefining the boundaries of their roles.[77] In short, they were creating a legitimate place for themselves to act in public.[78] In this sense, they shared more in common with the "woman" movement of the late nineteenth century in the United States than with the twentieth-century feminist movement as described by U.S. historian Nancy Cott.[79] But regardless of the framework we use to understand them, the Okayama Society was probably the first in Japan to take up issues concerning women's roles and rights and explore them in the context *of a group*. The issues and skills the Okayama Society members championed would prove useful for later generations of women's organizations.[80]

Finally, the Okayama Society was likely a model for the other female societies that sprang up in subsequent years; their activities were recorded in newspapers and thus available as a model for other women. The limited documentary record makes it difficult to draw comparisons with other early women's societies, although it seems that the Okayama group was unique in that members cast themselves primarily as women, whereas the Toyohashi and Aichi women focused on their roles as wives and mothers. An analysis of the Okayama Society also reveals elements that were probably common to other women's societies. Women who became activists seem to have had in common a certain level of education and the ability to devote at least some time to activities beyond household duties (at a time when households were still productive units), whether to attend meetings or speeches or to read up on current issues that would enable them to contribute to group discussions. As we have seen, some, though not all, had connections with male people's rights activists who probably exposed them to people's rights thought. Members seem to have been either young and unmarried or past child-rearing age, suggesting that it may have been difficult for women with children at home to find the time to join.

Of course, the class element is decisive here as well, allowing relatively privileged women the opportunity to engage in activities that women of lower classes would not have had access to. They did not represent all women, even though they acted in the name of "women." Like their male counterparts, they were behaving as members of a particular class and status position, even as these categories were themselves undergoing rapid changes with the dismantling of ascriptive status and the advent of industrial capitalism.

Notably, the women of the Okayama Society did not characterize themselves primarily as mothers, for they had been born in the late Edo period, when motherhood was not highly valued. At the same time, modern discourses that characterized middle-class women primarily as mothers (*ryōsai kenbo*) had not yet crystallized.[81]

One remaining question concerns how the women were able to organize so quickly. What networks may already have been in place? This kind of questioning leads us into the realm of speculation. However, it is possible that these women knew each other not just from their husbands' or male family members' involvement in people's rights activity, but also from associations like *kō,* early modern credit cooperatives that may well have continued to exist in the modern period. A shared experience at school in the late Edo or early Meiji period may also have provided an occasion for women to form networks that led to the founding of the Society. Okayama had a rich tradition of commoner schooling in the Edo period, and the prefecture promoted vocational training for women early in the Meiji period.[82] I also speculate that schools may have served a pivotal role in helping people form networks because Tsuge Kume, one of the founders of the Society, had studied Chinese learning with member Uemori Misao's father, who apparently operated the largest private academy in Okayama prefecture.[83] In sum, the Okayama Society may be viewed not as a short-lived organization, but rather as one that stretched and evolved across time, even if the sources only shed light on a short period of its existence.

Historian Mara Patessio has pointed out that many Meiji-era women's groups (*fujinkai*) from the mid-1880s grew out of a shared experience together at girls' school, since graduates formed associations to continue socializing and learning.[84] The Okayama group does not fit this pattern because it was founded a bit earlier, in 1882, and its members were not graduates of one all-women's institution.[85] Instead, Okayama Society members came together during an unsettled moment, when older methods of schooling were going away and girls' schools were just beginning to be founded (often by Western missionaries). The Okayama Society members went on to found girls' schools, and in the process perhaps provided a place for other women to bond and form associations of the sort Patessio discusses.

By 1890, women were no longer able to carry out explicitly political activities—that is, activities the state deemed political.[86] Yet the story of the Okayama Society throws a wrench into the assumption of women's automatic exclusion from politics as a natural outgrowth of Japanese history, or as somehow rooted in Japanese tradition. Women's

complete separation from politics was not a foregone conclusion, nor was the political culture of Meiji Japan completely masculine. The activities of the Okayama Society in the early 1880s remind us of the richness of possibilities that existed on the political landscape of late nineteenth-century Japan. They also provide insight into the "ingredients" that were necessary to form women's groups—groups whose antecedents may well stretch farther back in time than we have imagined, and whose descendants would go on to participate in various forms of gendered activism in the twentieth century.[87]

### Acknowledgments

### Notes

1. Sotozaki Mitsuhiro, *Ueki Emori to onnatachi* (Ueki Emori and women), (Tokyo: Domesu shuppan, 1976), 92–93. For the text, see Ienaga Saburō, ed., *Ueki Emori shū* (Collected works of Ueki Emori), (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1990), vol. 2: 189–289. Murasame's preface can be found in ibid., 208–10.

2. Women activists in Japan struggled to win the vote in the 1920s and 1930s but did not gain suffrage rights until 1946. Recent scholarship shows the ways women were active before they got the vote. On women's nineteenth-century involvement, see Marnie S. Anderson, *A Place in Public: Women's Rights in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010); Elizabeth Dorn Lublin, *Reforming Japan: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the Meiji Period* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010); Mara Patessio, *Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan: The Development of the Feminist Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2011).

3. Robin M. LeBlanc, *The Art of the Gut: Manhood, Power, and Ethics in Japanese Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 41. See also idem, *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

4. I am aware that this is a generalization and that it depends on how "political engagement" is defined. Certainly, one can trace women's involvement in politics throughout Japanese history.

5. See the documents in Suzuki Yūko, *Nihon josei undō shiryō shūsei* (Collected materials on the history of Japanese women's activism), (Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 1996), vol. 1: 71–73 (hereafter abbreviated as *Shiryō*).

6. Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a* Government (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Anna Clark,

"Gender, Class, and the Nation: Franchise Reform in England, 1832–1928," in James Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the Constitution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 570–86; Anderson, *A Place in Public*, 148.

7. In framing this issue, I have been inspired by Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (New York: Random House, 1999), 283, 372–85.

8. Anne Walthall, "Devoted Wives/Unruly Women: Invisible Presence in the History of Japanese Social Protest," *Signs* 20, no. 1 (1994): 106–36; Diana Wright, "Female Combatants and Japan's Meiji Restoration: The Case of Aizu," *War in History* 8, no. 4 (2001): 396–417.

9. Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 357, n. 34.

10. Other relevant factors include social status and age. For example, Matsuo Taseko's social position enabled her to serve as a go-between in the politics surrounding the Meiji Restoration. Walthall, *The Weak Body.*

11. Many of these groups had ties with men, an example being the Tokyo Women's Reform Society; which later became the Japanese chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. See Rumi Yasutake, *Transnational Women's Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), chapter 2. See also Marnie S. Anderson, "Women's Agency and the Historical Record: Reflections on Female Activists in Nineteenth-Century Japan," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 1 (March 2011): 38–55.

12. For a list of some of these groups, see Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29–32.

13. For more on Kishida, see Marnie S. Anderson, "Kishida Toshiko and the Rise of the Female Speaker in Meiji Japan," *U.S.–Japan Women's Journal*, no. 30–31 (2006): 36–59.

14. For examples of this perspective, see Suzuki Shizuko, *"Danjo dōkenron" no otoko: Fukamauchi Motoi to jiyū minken no jidai* (The man who promoted equal rights for men and women: Fukamauchi Motoi and the age of the People's Rights movement), (Tokyo: Nihon keizai hyōronsha, 2007), 192; and Miyagi Kenshi Kankōkai ed., *Miyagi kenshi* (Miyagi prefectural history), (Sendai: Miyagi kenshi kankōkai, 1982)*, vol. 4: 59. Suzuki Yūko distinguishes between two types of women's groups, the "independent model" (*jiritsukei*) and the "inner assistance model" (*naijokei*), even as she emphasizes that local women's groups represent "an undeveloped area of study." See Suzuki Yūko, "Kaisetsu" (Commentary), in *Shiryō* 1: 23.

15. For scholarship that mentions but does not focus on women, see Makihara Norio, *Minken to kenpō* (People's rights and the Constitution), (Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho, 2006), 149–50; Kyu Hyun Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2007), 251. For an excellent study that focuses primarily on individual women, see Ōki Motoko, *Jiyū minken undō to josei* (The People's Rights movement and women), (Tokyo: Domesu shuppan, 2003). In English, see Patessio, *Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan*, 150–54.

16. On some of these individuals, see Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983); Patessio, *Women and Public Life*; and Ōki Motoko, *Jiyū minken undō to josei.* Barbara Molony addresses

Meiji-era discussions about rights in "The Quest for Women's Rights in Turn-of-the-Century Japan," in Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno, eds., *Gendering Modern Japanese History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 463–92.

17. There is impressive literature on men's activities written in Japanese. In English, see Irokawa Daikichi, *The Culture of the Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments.* For some discussion of women who were connected to the movement, see Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, and Ōki, *Jiyū minken undō to josei.*

18. Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Women's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6.

19. Suzuki Yūko, "Kaisetsu" (Commentary), in Suzuki Yūko, ed., *Kishida Toshiko hyōronshū* (Collected critical works of Kishida Toshiko), (Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 1986), 13; Kano Masanao, "Kindai onna tachi no kiseki"(Traces of modern women), in Koshō Yukiko, ed., *Shiryō joseishi ronsō* (Materials on controversies in women's history), (Tokyo: Domesu shuppan, 1987), 52. For more scholarship on women's activism at the local level during a later period, see Gregory M. Phlugfelder, *Seiji to daidokoro* (Politics and the kitchen), (Tokyo: Domesu shuppan, 1986).

20. For the original, see Fukuda, *Warawa no hanseigai* (Half of my life), in Murata Shizuko and Ōki Motoko, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū* (Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 1998), 16–17. I follow Ōki in rendering the title as "*hanseigai*" rather than the more common "*hanshōgai.*" See her entry for Fukuda in Kaneko Sachiko et al., eds., *Nihon joseishi daijiten* (Dictionary of Japanese women's history), (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2008), 617. For a translation, see Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Woman in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 37. I have followed Hane's translation here.

21. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai (Okayama Women's History Association), *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi* (Women of modern Okayama), (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1987), 29–30.

22. Suzuki Shizuko, *Danjo dōkenron no otoko*, 192.

23. For example, see Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 36; Patessio, *Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan*, 151. This understanding is probably rooted in Kishida's fame, as well as an article that appeared in the *Nihon rikken seitō shinbun* (Japanese Constitutional Party newspaper), 9 May 1882. See Sugano Noriko, "Kishida Toshiko and the Career of a Public-Speaking Woman in Meiji Japan," in P. F. Kornicki, Mara Patessio, and G. G. Rowley, eds., *The Female as Subject* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2010), 174.

24. *Nihon rikken seitō shinbun*, 16 May 1882. Reprinted in Obata Takayoshi et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi kankei shiryōshū* (Collected materials on the history of the People's Rights movement in Okayama), (Okayama City: Okayama minken undō hyakunenshi kinen gyōji jikkō iinkai, 1982), vol. 4: 30.

25. *Nihon rikken seitō shinbun*, 16 May 1882. Reprinted in Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 30–31.

26. *Nihon rikken seitō shinbun*, 16 May 1882. On the term "*keishū*," see Rebecca Copeland, *Lost Leaves: Women Writers of Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 37.

27. This point was inspired by my reading of Ginzberg *Untidy Origins*, 158–59.

28. Ōki Motoko, *Jiyū minken undō*, 44–64. See also Yoneda Sayoko, "Jiyū minken to fujin mondai" (The People's Rights movement and the woman question), in Jiyū Minken Hyakunen Zenkoku Jikkō Iinkai (National Organizing Committee for the One Hundredth Anniversary of the People's Rights Movement), ed., *Jiyū minken hyakunen no kiroku* (A Record of the hundredth anniversary of the People's Rights movement), (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1982): 80–88.

29. The account here is based on *Nihon rikken seitō shinbun*, 16 May 1882. Reprinted in Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4, 30–31.

30. The concept of "Eastern women" was common in Meiji-era discourse, as we can see for instance in Ueki Emori's *Women of the East*.

31. Fukuda, *Warawa no hanseigai*, in Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 16–17. For a translation, Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows*, 37. For a description of Kishida's other speeches in Okayama, see *Sanyō shinpō* (The Sanyō news), 16 May 1882, reprinted in Suzuki Yūko, *Shiryō*, vol. 1: 57.

32. Mikiso Hane's popular translation of Fukuda's text about Kishida's visit contains an error: "[Kishida] stayed at our house for three days and delivered public lectures." See Hane, *Reflections*, 36. There is nothing in the original text about staying at Fukuda's house; it simply mentions that Kishida stayed in Okayama for three days. For the original, see Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 16.

33. *Nihon rikken seitō shinbun*, 16 May 1882. Reprinted in Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 30–31.

34. Article 4 of the law barred women from attending political meetings (*seidan shūkai ni kaidō suru*), although the law contained two other articles that specifically denied political rights to women (Articles 3 and 25).

35. This account comes from the *Asahi shinbun*, 31 May 1882. Reprinted in Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 31–32. On British feminists, see Jane Rendall, "Citizenship, Culture, and Civilization: The Languages of British Suffragists, 1866–1874," in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds., *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 140–41. Chinese women drew on a similar strategy. See Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 36. For an instance where Meiji men drew on similar discourses, see Anderson, *A Place in Public,* 45.

36. The Charter Oath was frequently invoked by subsequent women activists. Anderson, *A Place in Public*, 162, n. 51, and 193, n. 127.

37. Tsuge used slightly differently language from the Charter Oath here. The original phrasing is "*tenchi no kōdō*," or "just laws of nature."

38. *Asahi shinbun*, 31 May 1882, reprinted in Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 31–32.

39. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 28.

40. For newspaper articles covering these speeches, see Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 493.

41. For other women's groups, see Suzuki Yūko, *Shiryō*, vol. 1: 72–73.

42. "Political identities" is not a concept that would have been familiar to the women, but I have found it helpful as an analytical tool after reading Ginzberg's work on how nineteenth-century American women crafted their own political identities. See Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins.*

43. The Okayama charter can be found in Suzuki Yūko, *Shiryō*, vol. 1: 71, and Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 32–33. The term "*sessō* " also connotes fidelity. This concept should be interpreted as including both Western and Confucian notions. I thank Sumiko Sekiguchi for her helpful advice.

44. Ibid.

45. Suzuki Yūko, *Shiryō*, vol. 1: 72–74. On the style of the charters, see Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, ed., "Okayama joshi konshinkai ni tsuite" (On the Okayama Women's Friendship Society), *Rekishi hyōron* (Historical review) 204, no. 10 (1983): 9.

46. For examples, see Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006)*,* 277; Felicia Gordon, "Filles Publiques or Public Women," in Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott, eds., *Women*, *Gender, and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 610–29.

47. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, "Okayama joshi konshinkai ni tsuite" (On the Okayama Women's Friendship Society), *Rekishi hyōron* 204, no. 10 (1983): 10. On repression through a series of laws that cracked down on political speech, see Inada Masahiro, "Jiyū minken undō" (The Freedom and People's Rights Movement), in Asao Naohiro, ed., *Iwanami kōza Nihon tsūshi* (Iwanami history of Japan), (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1994), vol. 17: 102.

48. In her autobiography from two decades later, Fukuda writes that she ran the school with her family's help and does not discuss involvement from Okayama Society members. Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 16. For an English translation, see Hane, *Reflections*, 35–36.

49. Fukuda, "Bōbo no kinen" (Remembering my deceased mother), *Sekai fujin* (Women of the world), no. 34 (5 March 1909); Mara Patessio, "Women's Participation in the Popular Rights Movement during the Early Meiji Period," *U.S.–Japan Women's Journal* 27 (2004): 10.

50. Oku Takenori, "'Kokumin kokka' no naka no josei" (Women in the nation-state), in Tsurumi Kazuko and Kōno Nobuko, eds., *Onna to otoko no jikū: Nihon joseishi saikō* (The time and space of women and men: Rethinking Japanese women's history), (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 1995), vol. 5: 437.

51. Murata Shizuko, "Hyōden" (Critical biography), in Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 631. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, ed., "Okayama joshi konshinkai ni tsuite," 11. On the school, see Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 44–45.

52. On factories in Okayama, see Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 34–35. Okayama became a major textile center in the later half of 1880s. See E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 32–39. I thank an anonymous reader for pointing this out.

53. *Jiyū no tomoshibi* (Lamp of freedom), 20 September 1884, reprinted in Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 495. See also *Jiyū shinbun* (Freedom newspaper), 20 September 1884, reprinted in ibid., 495.

54. "Jōkō Gakusha setsuritsu no shuisho" (A statement of intention—On the creation of the Jōkō Gakusha), dated December 1883, reprinted in Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 405–6.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. See Anderson, *A Place in Public*, chapter 4.

58. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 45.

59. I have in mind the activities of groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and other charitable societies. See Alice Mabel Bacon's observations in *Japanese Girls and Women* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1902), 391–92.

60. *Jiyū shinbun*, 13 August 1884. Reprinted in Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 493–94.

61. This description is based on *Jiyū no tomoshibi*, 14 August 1884. Reprinted in Obata et al., eds., *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 33, and Murata and Ōki, eds., *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 494. See also *Jiyū shinbun*, 13 August 1884.

62. Ibid. The journalist of *Jiyū no tomoshibi* concluded, "How promising are the young women of the San'yō region; how regrettable that the women of Tokyo are [comparatively] ill at ease."

63. See Fukuda, *Warawa no hanseigai*, in Murata and Ōki, *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 17. For the translation of Fukuda's description, Sievers, *Flowers in Salt,* 26.

64. *Jiyū shinbun*, 13 August 1884, reprinted in Murata and Ōki, *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 493–94.

65. *Jiyū no tomoshibi*, 14 August 1884, reprinted in Obata, *Okayama minken undōshi*, vol. 4: 33 and Murata and Ōki, *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 494.

66. *Jiyū no tomoshibi*, 20 September 1884, reprinted in Murata and Ōki, *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 495. See also *Jiyū shinbun*, 20 September 1884, reprinted in ibid., 495.

67. Fukuda, *Warawa no hanseigai* in Murata and Ōki, *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 17.

68. Murata, "Hyōden," in Murata and Ōki, *Fukuda Hideko shū*, 629.

69. Christian organizations experienced rapid growth in the period from 1882–88. See Lublin, *Reforming Japan*, 44.

70. On Sumiya, see Yoshizaki Shioko, "Sumiya Koume to Kageyama (Fukuda) Hideko" (Sumiya Koume and Kageyama [Fukuda] Hideko), in Toyama Shigeki et al., eds., *Jiyū minken undō to gendai* (The People's Rights movement and the Present), (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1985), 367–71.

71. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 27, 35.

72. Ibid., 25–26. Yamamoto's school closed when she left Okayama in 1883. It is not clear when the school opened.

73. Based on newspaper accounts, we can confirm nine meetings of the Okayama Society, but the OWHA speculates that the group met far more often. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, ed., "Okayama joshi konshinkai ni tsuite," 12.

74. Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*.

75. For critiques of Meiji-era male activists, see Yoneda, "Jiyū minken to fujin mondai," esp. 82; Ōki Motoko, "Kishida Toshiko: 'Yo no fujo ni satosu'" (I Admonish the women of the world), *Shakaigaku ronshū* (Essays in sociology) 77 (2000): 211.

76. In formulating this point, I am indebted to Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins,* chapter 1.

77. Participation in women-only groups could have what American historian Anne Boylan calls a "dual potential." She references Nancy Cott's work on "white women's church groups in New England." Such groups could help women become more independent or, alternately, prevent them "from disputing their subordinate status within the existing gender system by fortifying their sense of value and self-worth." Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*: *New York and Boston, 1797–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 3.

78. For this understanding, see Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 32.

79. In her study of the emergence of feminism in the United States, Nancy Cott highlights the distinctions between the nineteenth-century "woman" movement and the emergence of twentieth-century feminism. Without denying the links between the two, she notes that "the vocabulary of feminism has been grafted onto the history of women's rights," in effect conflating several distinct but related movements. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 3.

80. In contrast, the speeches of Kishida Toshiko and other female orators surely fostered discussion but were one-sided in their format and did not necessarily contribute to the organization-building that was so necessary for securing women's access to public space.

81. Kathleen Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 293–324; Sumiko Sekiguchi, "Confucian Morals and the Making of a 'Good Wife and Wise Mother,'" *Social Science Japan Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 95–113.

82. Peter Kornicki, "Women, Education, and Literacy," in Kornicki, Patessio, and Rowley, eds., *The Female as Subject*, 9; Richard Rubinger, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 38–40; Patessio, *Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan*, 38;

83. Sanyō Shinbunsha, ed., *Okayama ken rekishi jinbutsu jiten* (Dictionary of historical figures in Okayama prefectural history), (Okayama City: Sanyō shinbunsha, 1994), 641. Okayama Joseishi Kenkyūkai, *Kindai Okayama no onna tachi*, 26.

84. Patessio, *Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan*, 108–9.

85. Kornicki, "Women, Education, and Literacy," 15. Temple schools and academies, such as the one Uemori Misao's father operated, were usually either mixed-sex or for boys only, although there were a few schools just for girls.

86. For the first time in history, women were prohibited from ascending the imperial throne by means of the Imperial Household Law of 1889. Hitomi Tonomura, "Royal Roles, Wider Changes: Understanding Japan's Gender Relations from a Historical Perspective," in Amy McCreedy Thernstrom, ed., *Japanese Women: Lineage and Legacies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 13–26.

87. I highlight the range of women's groups across the political spectrum since one of the points I wish to make is that not all women's groups are feminist. Future scholarship will help illuminate the connections between this group and later women's groups, as well as the ways

they were distinct. For various aspects of the twentieth-century women's movement, see Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, and Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Women Essays and Fiction from Seitō* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2007).