

GENDER ROLE IN SCHOOL IN JAPAN

Abdiyokubov Husan

master's student of Chirchik state pedagogical university

Annotation:

This article discusses gender equality in Japanese schools and the role of women in secondary education.

Key words: school, college, middle school, high school, methodology, literature, women and girl, good wife, wise mother

Today, there is practically no gender gap in the opportunity for education in Japan. Even in the upper secondary education and higher education levels, difference of enrollment ratios between male and female students is scarcely present. Historically, however, especially in the early stage of building modern education system, educational opportunities for girls were considerably disadvantaged. Even in the compulsory elementary school, the attendance rate of girls was very low. Opportunities for accessing to secondary education for girls were limited. Japanese government has developed policies and efforts for promoting education for girls and young females. Conditions for women's education have been gradually improved. As a result, in elementary education, gender gap in schooling was dissolved until the first decade of the 20th century. In the secondary education level, until 1925, the number of students in the girls' middle schools had caught up with the students in the boys' middle schools. And even in the secondary vocational schools the enrollment of female students had been increasing gradually. In the article, we review the Japanese experience in equalizing opportunity for education in school from the point of gender equity.

Feudal ideal of women and education

Until the middle of the 19th century, in the feudal Japanese society dominated by male chauvinism, social roles of women were confined. Working places for women were rarely existed excepting the farmer's works and the family business. In the samurai class and upper commoner class, roles of women were restricted to the family works. They were expected to serve faithfully to her husband and parents-in-



law. Particular norms for women such as Three Obedience and Seven Divorces restrained their activities and attitude. Women undertook a task for their daughter's education and discipline. They were not responsible, however, to the education for their sons, especially for the eldest son who would succeed their patriarchal extended family. Mandatory abilities for respectable men such as training in classical Chinese letter and martial arts, manlike manner were different from that of for women. Mothers could not intervene to boy's education. It was alleged that a doting mother would spoil their sons. Such role was expected to their fathers or older mentors.

In Edo era (1603-1868), there was a relatively wide diffusion of educational institutions. There was a large number of popular learning houses called Terakoya, which concentrated on teaching the practical skills of reading, writing and arithmetic to the commoners. Some girls also attended to Terakoya. In the urban area, some female teachers were teaching. For the male samurai class, there were institutions for public education (fief schools) in which to learn classic Chinese literatures (Confucian Studies). On the other hand, private academies, equivalent to secondary schools, were open to all regardless of social classes. However, there were no advanced education institutions for women.

Modern education system and schooling of girls

In 1868, a political revolution took place in Japan, marked by the collapse of Tokugawa shogunate, and the birth of political authority with the Emperor at its head. The beginnings of the modernization of Japan can be seen in this revolution known as the Meiji Restoration. In 1871, the Ministry of Education was established and in the following year, the first education regulation, Education System Ordinance was promulgated. The school system followed the American model of the time, which consisted of three levels of schooling, elementary school, middle school and university. In principle, all children were required to attend to elementary school, regardless of sex, parental occupation, or social status. For the first time in Japanese educational history, Education for All was proclaimed. The government officials urged people attending to schools. But, schoolings were not smoothly extended. People felt discomfort in the contents of education in the new schools that was modeled on American public school. Considerable amount of school fees were levied. Many firming families relied upon the workings of their children. Especially, enrollment of girls was eminently low. In 1890, enrollment ratio of school age girls



was around 30 percent and was as barely half as of boys. Some parents did not feel necessity for their daughters to be educated. Many girls engaged in domestic works like as cooking, washing, cleaning, and taking care of younger sibling. Considerable amount of school-fee was also a hindering factor for girls' schooling. Between the final part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, however, there was a shift in those situations. In this period, Japan had experienced an international war, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). In the atmosphere of nationalistic fervor that followed the war, Japanese people willingly began to accept the nationalistic education that the government had promoted. There were rising popular demands for education. And the arguments for girls' education from the viewpoint of a nation-building were also heard not only from those involved in girls' education, but also those in charge of government policy. The government adopted active initiatives such as the heavy promotion of school attendance for girls, the improvement of sewing and needlework education, and the extensive training of female teachers. In several prefectures, some charitable persons and school teachers attempted to provide special schooling opportunities for girls who engaged in baby-sitting works. They organized "baby-sitters' class" or "baby sitters' school" in the form of simplified part-time schooling for those most disadvantaged girls. They to schools in the afternoon free-time bringing baby in their back Afterwards the government tested the learning result of the girls and approved it as formal schooling record. These efforts and their learning results had great advertising effects for promoting girls' education as a whole.

Stagnating secondary education for girls

Secondary education for girls was rather in the stagnation and confusion than in elementary education. In 1881, the ministry of education issued the General Guideline for the Middle Schools in which stipulated the purpose of the middle school as follows: "The middle school aims providing high-level general education for whom wishing to enter the advanced schools or whom proceeding to engage in the businesses for the middle class." In this document, there was no reference to the middle schools for girls. There lacked the concept of secondary education for girls. For at that time, working places for middle class women were rarely existed and there was no possibility for females accessing to higher education institutions at all. In the early period of Meiji era, a variety of advanced schools for girls came into



existence. One was the mission schools for girls that provided bible reading and western modern education including English education, English literature, instrumental music, singing and dancing. Mission schools for girls attracted a small number of students from the upper class families that oriented toward “civilization and enlightenment.” There were, however, bitter reputations toward female students of the mission schools such as “western culture freak” and “vain and flippant.” In 1872, the ministry of education established the first official girls’ middle school in Tokyo that was western-oriented school that putting stress on English language and modern education contents but without Christian elements. On the other hand, there was tradition-oriented school such as Atomi female school that taught Japanese culture for womenlike as Chinese classics, Japanese poetry, sewing, painting, koto music and flower arrangement. In 1888, another type of female school came into being, a female industrial arts school that provided mainly a handcraft and sewing education for improving living power and moral sense of women. The rise in elementary school attendance led to a growth in the number of girls wishing to gain a secondary education. But in general, apart from a few enthusiastic promoters, the secondary education for girls was slow in growth and was almost ignored in both public opinion and government policy. Because it was difficult to insist that girls’ secondary education would bring a lot of benefit to the society as a whole. The majority of the young ladies entered to married life immediately after her graduation from girls’ secondary schools. Some critics commented that the benefits of girls’ secondary schools would not extend beyond the individual girl receiving the education, and, at most, her family; it certainly would not benefit the people of the nation as a whole. Why should we waste the nation’s valuable resources on girls’ education? In fact, the first official girls’ middle school was abolished for a while by reason of financial difficulty.

Ideal of “Good Wife, Wise Mother” and development of girls’ middle schools

Stimulated by the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and World War I (1914-1918), Japanese society was making rapid progress. Japanese capitalism underwent rapid development. The paid workers who worked in factories and firms were increasing. In urban area, the so-called new middle class, sometime called “salary man” was rising. They were well-educated and engaged in office works. Family system was also changing. Instead of the traditional patriarchal extended family, the nuclear



family that was composed of the couple and their children was being increased. In the 1920 census, the proportion of the nuclear family was already exceeding 50%. The modern sexual division of labor that assigned “work to men, and the home work to women” was prevailing in Japanese families. It was in this atmosphere that a new and fresh ideal on the girls’ secondary education had been looking for. That was exactly the ideal of “Good Wife, Wise Mother.” This new thought supported the secondary education for women by providing it with a theoretical justification. “Good wife and Wise mother” ideal gave positive meanings for the first time to the role of women as a wife in managing household, and as a mother in raising and educating her children. It rationalized the contributions of women to the development of the society as whole through their roles such as assistance to her husband who engaged to the productive works and military service, and as raising the next generation of citizens. It nobly argued that education for women as wives and mothers was beneficial to the nation in the same way as education for men. This ideal became preponderant in Japanese society with advent of the 20th century and gained the position of officially recognized ideal of the education of women. In 1899, the Girls' Middle School Order was issued. With this order, girls' middle schools now enjoyed official legal status, along with boys' middle schools, as institutes of secondary education. Then the minister of education explained the intention of enacting the new regulation with following argument: “The cultivation of a healthy middle class society cannot be achieved solely through the education of males; the contribution of wise mothers and good wives is also needed to begin to put a society's households in good order and advance its well-being.The education provided in girls' middle schools is in preparing their students one day to marry into a distinguished household and become wise mothers and good wives. Consequently, this education must breed in its students a noble and elegant character, one of gentleness, modesty, and chastity, as well as conveying to them the knowledge and skills needed for life in a distinguished household. ”From this year onward, public girls' middle schools were founded one after another throughout Japan. 6 Concerning to the education contents, there was some difference between the middle schools for goys and girls’ middle schools. In comparison with middle schools, none of the following subjects was offered at girls' middle schools: classical Chinese, natural history, physics and chemistry and law and economics. Foreign languages were offered only as an elective subject. Furthermore, girls' middle



schools allotted fewer than half the hours to mathematics and foreign languages as boys' middle schools, with the difference made up by morals (shûshin), housekeeping, sewing, and music. In 1910, a new type of girls' middle school that was called the girls' practical middle school was introduced. In this case, "practical" means home economics. In girls' practical middle schools, more than half of the teaching hour was devoted to the home economics education such as housekeeping and sewing. Girls' practical middle schools were in many cases set up as an annex to the local higher elementary schools. This type school contributed to popularize the girls' middle schools up to the local towns. After 1900, the number of students in the middle schools for boys increased rapidly. Also in 1899, the government issued the Vocational School Order, covering advanced schools for industry, agriculture, commerce, mercantile ship, and practical vocational skills. Through these measures, secondary education was established as a tripartite system, consisting of middle schools, girls' middle schools and vocational schools. In the early period of development of vocational schools, enrollment of female students was scarcely assumed. With a progress of industrial revolution after Russo-Japanese War, the number of "career women" increased. They entered into the jobs that was not the usual forms of labor for women, i.e. factory workers and maids, but jobs with a more businesslike and specialized character like as nurse, telephone operator, typist, designer, office lady and saleslady and spinning-mill supervisor. On a parallel with these trends, the number of female students who enrolled in the vocational schools was gradually increased. It became to be acceptable to work in such jobs between leaving school and marrying as a new way of life for women. Meanwhile, the proportion of graduates of girls' middle schools who wanted going on to further schooling was also increased. But, in the Japanese educational system prior to World War II, single-sex education was the norm from the secondary level and opportunities for women to enter higher education were extremely limited. At the beginning of the Taisho era (1912-1926), apart from the national women's higher normal schools in Tokyo and Nara, the only higher educational institutions for women were a few private professional colleges like the Tsuda English College and the Tokyo Women's School of Medicine, both established in 1900, and the Japan Women's College, established the next year. There were no publicly-established professional colleges for women. As a rule, women were not permitted to enter to the institutions of higher education for men. There were increasing calls for



rethinking on “Good Wife, Wise Mother” thought and establishing higher education for women.

Changing Policy for women’s education after the World War II

After its 1945 defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by the Allied Forces. From that time to 1951, Japan was placed under the control of the General Headquarters(GHQ) of the Allied Forces. Under this system, de-militarization, democratization, and the rebuilding of the country were all taken forward. GHQ requested the U.S. to dispatch a “United States Education Mission to Japan” to examine the country’s postwar education reforms. The large-scale postwar reform of the Japanese education system was carried out on the basis of the recommendations of this mission. It is noteworthy that the revision of the secondary education for women had already started even before the report of the mission. On October 15, 1945, immediately after the formation of the new Cabinet, GHQ made pointed reference to the need for women's suffrage and the attainment of equality between the sexes. A cabinet decision of that same month paved the way for the extension of universal suffrage to all citizens from twenty years of age. The educational counterpart of this move was the Guideline for the Renovation of Women's Education (Joshikyōiku sasshin yōkō), agreed upon by Cabinet on December 4, which stated that there should be equal opportunity in education for both sexes. It called for equality in the content of education given to men and women and for mutual respect between the two sexes. The long-cherished wish of the proponents of women’s education was granted by the government only after four months the defeat in the atmosphere of democratization of Japan. U. S. Education mission to Japan approved such policies. In order that equality may be generally true in fact, steps are necessary to insure to girls in the earlier years an education as sound and thorough as that of boys. Then a good foundation for training in preparatory schools will place them on really equal terms with men for admission to the best universities.

Development of women’s education

The basic framework of the new education system was as follows: (1) a shift from the prewar, dual school system to a single track system, known as the 6-3-3-4 system; (2) the extension of compulsory education to 9 years, including primary



school and lower secondary school; (3) the 10 adoption in principle of co-education in all school levels. In the compulsory lower secondary schools, attendance of girls went smoothly. Although there remained some gap in the enrollment of both sexes in the transiting process from old system to new one, difference became indistinguishable soon until in 1949. In the upper secondary level, in the starting year 1950, the percentage of students who advanced to the new high schools was different for both sexes that were to say, 48.0% for boys and 36.7% for girls. In 1958, more than half of the students entered to the high schools and gender gap was reduced to lesser extent that was 56.2% for boys and 51.1% for girls. And in 1969, the advancement rate of girls to the high schools exceeded that of the boys, 79.2% for boys and 79.5% for girls.

CANCLUSION

Although the right of women in Japan were really limited in the early days, that is, in the field of education, later on, as time passed , they began to have their own rights in the field of education. However, it took a lot of work and time to achieve this. Namely, they have suffered a lot on their way and Nowadays, their rights are almost indistinguishable from those of men.

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