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Nationalism, Gender Ideology, and Transnational Influences in *Josei Nihonjin*: 1920–1923

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Abstract

Josei Nihonjin (1920–1923), published by Seikyōsha, was a monthly female magazine that sought to educate women on the social, cultural, and political transformations shaping Japan and the world. Under the editorial guidance of Miyake Kaho and with contributors such as Hiratsuka Raichō and Yamakawa Kikue, the periodical became a vocal platform for women's rights and their societal involvement. While aligning with the national paradigm of *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 ("good wife, wise mother"), the magazine frequently engaged with Asian and Western concepts of female emancipation, reflecting on movements outside Japan. Through an approach that integrates studies on nationalism, gender ideology, and transnational perspectives, this study analyzes how *Josei Nihonjin* writers critically engaged with and reinterpreted global discourses on female emancipation, including Western feminist movements and Asian social reforms. By juxtaposing these ideas with Japan's *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, they highlighted convergences and tensions, ultimately crafting a unique perspective that sought to expand women's roles within the nationalist framework. By exploring the intersection of nation-building and global discourses on women's roles, this paper builds upon existing literature on Taishō-era female periodicals and contributes to ongoing debates on gender, modernity, and nationalism, offering fresh insights into these magazines' role in shaping Japanese women's societal positions.

Introduction

Miyake Kaho 三宅花圃 (1868–1943) is widely recognized as the author of the first female-written modern Japanese novel.[1] What she is less known for is her role as editor-in-chief of

[1] Miyake Kaho, born to a wealthy family of samurai origins, was a graduate of the prestigious Government Normal School for Women (present day Ochanomizu University). Introduced by the editor of *Jogaku Zasshi* 女学雑誌 to which she contributed, in 1892 she married Miyake Setsurei, editor-in-chief of the opinion magazine *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin* and founder of Seikyōsha (Ogino 1985). Kaho's work *Yabu no uguisu* (藪の鶯, "Warbler in the Grove") published in 1888, illustrates her engagement with the contemporary issues of modernization and civilization articulated in the intellectual discourse dominated by Seikyōsha in the late 1880s. The novel, partially set in the Western-style palace *Rokumeikan*, dialectically engages with the meaning of modernity vis-à-vis traditional Japanese values and customs. While there is no direct involvement of Miyake Kaho with Seikyōsha at that time, there is clear overlap between the group's ideas on Europeanization and

Josei Nihonjin 女性日本人, a female magazine published between 1920 and 1923, under the group of intellectuals and publishing house of Seikyōsha 政教社.

In the heart of what is frequently referred to as Taishō democracy (1912–1926), Japan was undergoing profound socio-political shifts—especially after the end of World War I—with the rise of a new wave of socialism and the (re)emergence of social groups calling for more freedom. The legacy of wartime ideological and socio-economical changes brought strength to the people's demands for universal suffrage and freedom of speech, meeting, and association. At the same time, the government's hold on the press tightened and censorship of journalists, academics, and intellectuals was aggressively enforced.[2] In this context, the presence of women in the social fabric was at its apex, as Vera Mackie reported, quoting Margit Nagy: middle-class women, who graduated from the educational institutions established in the Meiji years, were entering the workforce in large numbers, especially in the field of education (MACKIE 2003).

In the press, the publication of women's magazines had been on the rise since the Meiji period, but the 1910s brought a shift (see for example *Fujin Gahō* 婦人画報 (1905), founded by Kunikida Doppo, and *Seitō* 青踏 (1911), by Hiratsuka Raichō), and the 1920s saw a boom in publication, with a number of established publishing houses creating versions of their main periodicals for the female audience (SATO 2003)—see for example *Fujin Kōron* 婦人公論 (1916) and *Shufu no Tomo* 主婦の友 (1917)[3]—adding to the many new magazines making their first appearance in that period. Barbara H. Sato (2000) offered a comprehensive overview of interwar-era women's magazines, especially focusing on mass-oriented publications which appealed to the "new woman" through lifestyle articles. Sato argues that the number of advertisements and the variety of content characterized these magazines. This distinguished them from earlier publications which aimed more specifically at educating and informing the people, seen by many contemporary intellectuals as the mission of long-form press. While Sato briefly refers to *Fujin Kōron* as an example of a non-commercialized opinion magazine, her work focused largely on mass magazines and her position remained that the existing opinion magazines targeting women in those years were mostly written by

Kaho's commentary on the influences of rapid modernization on contemporary Japanese youth. For a close reading of the novel, see COPELAND (2006), ITAGAKI (1967).

[2] Fear of communism following the Soviet Revolution of 1917, and the strengthening of liberal and democratic currents as a consequence of the post-WWI settlement, pushed the government to enhance and further institutionalize its control of publications. One instance of censorship that became highly public was the 1919 case of Tokyo University professor Morito Tatsuo 森戸達夫 (1888–1984), who was jailed and fired from his position for publishing an analysis of Kropotkin's anarchist views on monarchy. On the Morito case, see SZPILMAN (1998). On media and state control, see KASE Kazutoshi (2011) and KASZA, Gregory (1987, 1995).

[3] *Fujin Kōron* (1916–present) was the women's version of *Chūō Kōron* 中央公論, and *Shufu no Tomo* (1917–2008) was the female counterpart of *Kokumin no Tomo* 国民の友. Similarly, *Josei Nihonjin* was considered *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin*'s sister publication targeted at women.

men. Maeshima Shiho (2016), in her analysis of magazines' roles in the diffusion of reading culture in interwar Japan, focuses on mass-circulation periodicals like *Shufu no Tomo* and *Fujin Kōron*, only mentioning the existence of less diffused, "serious" general magazines, and ascribing them to the male sphere. While her work aims at overcoming rigid gender-based division of readership, her analysis is limited to massified magazines and excludes opinion magazines targeting women. Ulrike Wöhr (2000), retracing the 1927 intellectual debate on the function of magazines, describes the publishing scene of 1920s Japan as ranging from elite publications, which upheld the mission of "elevating" women, to more "vulgar," commercialized magazines which—Wöhr argued quoting parts of the 1927 debate—adapted "to the supposedly vulgar tastes of the masses, in order to expand circulation" (WÖHR 2000).

Thus, while there was a general tendency for such publications to seek a larger readership—often through commercialization (SATO, B. H. 2000) and coverage of daily-life matters—a number of periodicals did maintain a more intellectual, elitist tone, closer to the opinion magazines (*sōgō zasshi* 総合雑誌) of the same period that were intended for a male audience.

Among such, *Josei Nihonjin* (1920–1923), published by Seikyōsha and defined as *fujin sōgō zasshi,* an opinion magazine for women (SATO and MIYAKE 1993), was a monthly magazine that aimed to inform and educate women on social, cultural, and political matters involving Japan and the world. With Miyake Kaho as editor-in-chief and contributions by women such as Hiratsuka Raichō 平塚らいてう (1886–1971; leader of the Seitō[4] movement in Japan), Oku Mumeo 奥むめお (1895–1997), Yamada Waka 山田わか (1879–1957) and Ichikawa Fusae 市川房枝 (1893–1981), the periodical was considerably vocal on women's rights and advocated for women's involvement in society and politics. The magazine's very first issue set the tone in such a direction, focusing on several aspects of female political participation. While it tacitly accepted the existence of *ryōsai kenbo* as national paradigm, *Josei Nihonjin* included several articles that engaged with Asian and Western concepts of female emancipation and observed the movements outside Japan (for example, "Female emancipation movement towards the Asian continent," *Josei Nihonjin*, vol. 2, no. 1).

Through an approach that integrates studies on nationalism, gender ideology, and transnational perspectives, this article explores how the writers of *Josei Nihonjin* represented foreign ideas on women's social roles and integrated them within the paradigm of *ryōsai kenbo*. The magazine sought to reflect the expansion of women's presence in society and

[4] Seitō was a pioneering group of Japanese women who spearheaded the women's emancipation movement in Japan. They published a monthly magazine of the same name (1911–1916), which was the translation of the English term "bluestocking." The reference to the British *suffragettes* was not limited to the name. The group was extremely progressive and radical for the period, advocating for political rights and individual freedom for women. For a detailed account, refer to Hiratsuka Raichō's autobiography, "In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun" (*Genshi, onna wa taiyō de atta*『元始、女は太陽であった』, 1992) and TOMIDA, H. (2004).

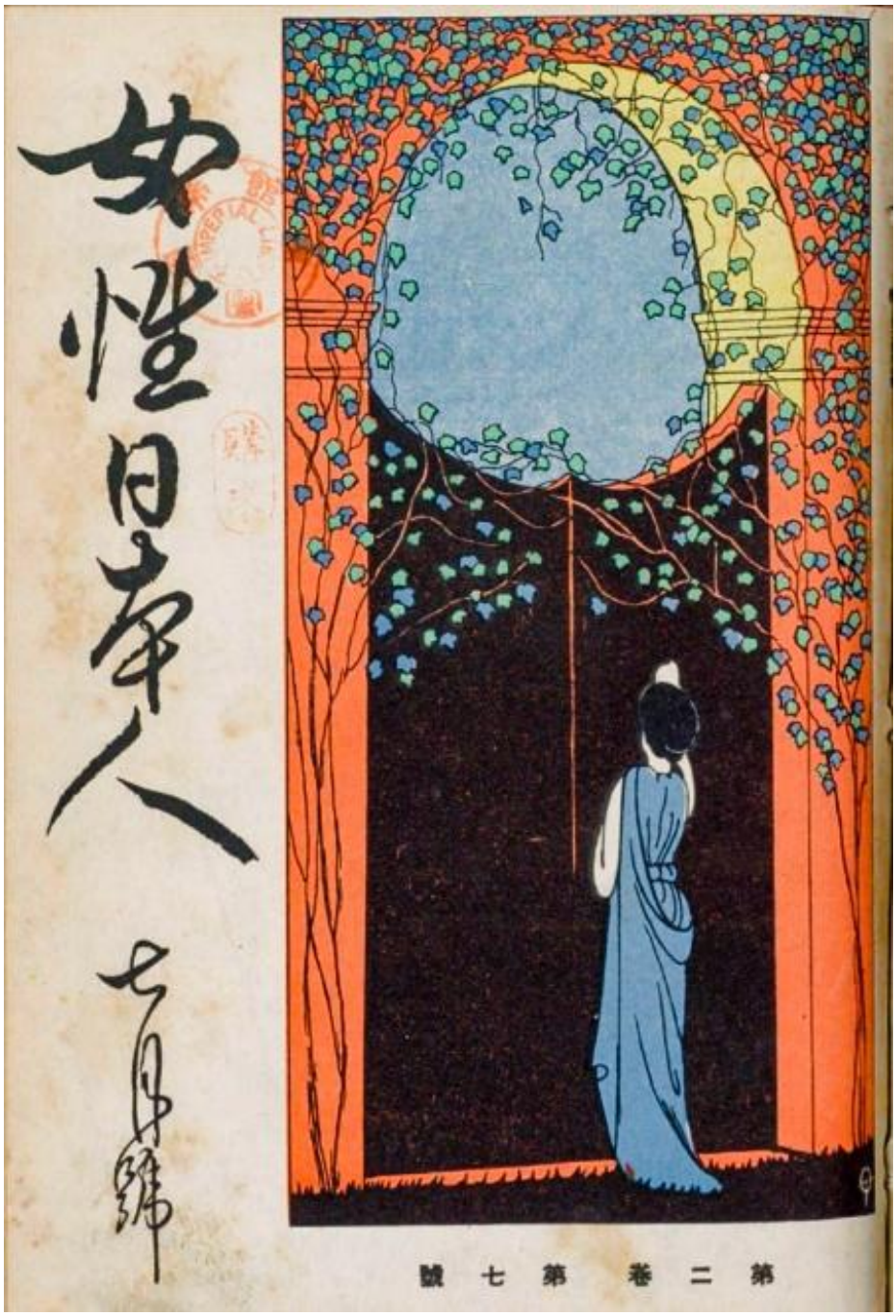
politics while still maintaining the overarching model defining women's position in Japan's nationalist agenda. Conducting a qualitative analysis grounded in gender history and discourse theory, particularly in the discourse-historical approach (WODAK *et al.* 2009), I argue that the interplay of nationalism and transnational feminist claims in the magazine constitutes a rare case in the publishing scene of the early 1920s, negotiating more radical stances and filtering them through the lens of nationalism. The peculiarity of the magazine lays in how it conceptualized the "new woman" in terms that still resonated with the political leadership, arguing for the expansion of female spaces of agency in the name of national progress. This form of gendered nationalism anticipated in many ways the strategies of high-profile feminists[5] who in the 1930s mitigated their radical activism to negotiate concrete change within the patriarchal system they failed to overthrow.

The first part of the article introduces the developments in the conceptualization of *ryōsai kenbo* and the role of women in the renewed post-World War I environment. The second part analyzes the main discourses that emerged from the magazine, with special attention to the editors' perception of the women's emancipation movement abroad and in the context of contemporary nationalist discourses.

Building upon the existing literature on Taishō-era Japanese female magazines, this research addresses a relevant case that contributes to a better understanding of the intersections between Japanese ideas of nation-building and global discourses on women's roles, in the context of such magazines.

[5] The most notable case is that of Ichikawa Fusae, a socialist feminist who collaborated with the government in the late 1930s. Her compromise was crucial in ensuring women's access to the political arena and arguably constituted a fundamental step towards female suffrage. For further reading, see MACKIE (2003), SHIBAHARA (2014), and BULLOCK *et al.* (2018), who also mention Hiratsuka Raichō as a feminist turned collaborator.

1 First issue of *Josei Nihonjin*. Cress Publishing. The magazine can be consulted at Waseda University Central Library.



2 *Josei Nihonjin*, vol. 2, n. 7. The covers were drawn by the artist Kato Masayo. Cress Publishing.

1 *Josei Nihonjin*

Josei Nihonjin's main editorial board was composed of Sugawara Kyōzō 菅原教造, Yanagi Yaeko 柳八童子, Yoshida Kiyoko 吉田清子, and Chiba Yasurako 千葉安良子. Sugawara was a philosopher and professor at the Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School (present-day Ochanomizu University), where Chiba also worked as an assistant (YANAGISAWA 1989). Yanagi Yaeko was one of the editors of her alma mater's bulletin, *Katei Shūhō* 家庭週報 (1904–1951), the alumni magazine of Japan Women's University. Yoshida Kiyoko was a council member of the Shin Fujin Kyōkai 新婦人協会 (1919–1922), the New Women's Association, where she worked alongside other contributors to *Josei Nihonjin* like Yamada Waka, Oku Mumeo, and Yamakawa Kikue (YAMANAKA 2023).

While aware that their effort was nothing but a small step towards emancipation—as the editors put it, "in front of an iron door, holding a small axe, there we stand" (1920, 3)—they declared that the magazine would provide women with the knowledge to pursue their political, social, and financial independence. In the first issue of 1922 one of the editors, signed with the pseudonym Keiko (ケイ子), wrote "we hope that this year the magazine shall grow even more through your [the readers'] support, and that we will be able to put enough effort to bring our nation's women one step closer to elevation" (1922, 258), implying *Josei Nihonjin*'s role in bringing about such elevation (*kōjō* 向上).

On the other side, Miyake Kaho had a more pragmatic objective in mind: the immediate function of the magazine was—according to both Ogino (1985) and Miyake and Sato (1993)—to provide a workplace for her graduating daughter. The fact that she and other contributors were tied to the Miyake family either by blood (as was the case of Miyake Tamiko 三宅多美子 and Miyake Tsunekata 三宅恒方) or through marriage (for example, Nakano Seigo 中野正剛 and Miyake Yasuko 三宅やす子) ignited critiques of amateurship, which gradually reached *Josei Nihonjin* especially towards its final issues. Another comment the editors reported in their column "Henshūshitsu yori" 編集室より (From the editorial room) was that the content of the magazine was not as easily digestible as other contemporary publications for the female readership: because of the quasi-aggressive calls to action and politically charged claims, "it [was] not a magazine you could read with your legs stretched out" (1921, 164). Such comments were in fact appreciated by the editors, who sought to produce a politically heavy magazine, "to be read standing on your feet" (1921, 164), rather than a tool for entertainment.

The publication of *Josei Nihonjin* also faced internal challenges. Not all of Seikyōsha's members were supportive of the project, and when financial hardship hit, the magazine was discontinued. When in 1923 the Great Kantō Earthquake hit Japan, Seikyōsha headquarters were destroyed by fires, with reconstruction efforts accelerating the already ongoing financial crisis and accruing discord among the leadership. To ease the financial burden, Miyake Setsurei 三宅雪嶺 (1860–1945) proposed to merge the periodical *Nihon Oyobi*

Nihonjin 日本及日本人 (1907–1945) with the paper *Tōhō Jiron* 東方時論—owned by his son-in-law Nakano Seigo—but faced the opposition of the rest of the board (SATO, Y. 1980). This and other ideological issues pushed Miyake to retire from the company after leading it for more than 35 years, founding a new publishing house with Nakano in September 1923, through which they published the monthly magazine *Gakan* 我観 (1923–1945).

Although *Josei Nihonjin* confronted obstacles since its beginning, its sudden interruption was ultimately brought about by the earthquake and subsequent fires. The September 1923 issue was even advertised on *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin*, and its table of content released, but the manuscript got lost in the fires, according to Seikyōsha editors (SATO and MIYAKE 1993).

While it was relatively short-lived, *Josei Nihonjin* accurately represents the multifaceted reality of the Japanese women's movement in its initial phases, where ideas of liberalism were still fresh in the minds of the people and concepts of nation and citizenship were starting to intersect with calls for freedom and individual expression. The editors thus located Japanese feminist discourse within nationalist and internationalist frameworks, negotiating a new identity for Japanese women that was in dialectic conversation with the contemporary domestic and global situation. The magazine, in its four years of existence, reflected the social and political atmosphere of the period, while at the same time offering the opportunity to peek into the editorial intricacies that characterized the publication of women's opinion magazines in those years.

2 Women and the State: Between Moral Guardianship and National Service

The national paradigm of *ryōsai kenbo* emerged in the latter years of the Meiji period (1868–1912) as an attempt to redefine women's roles in the renewed modern nation-state (KOYAMA 2013). Departing from the Confucian-based ideological system that defined the position of women in the Tokugawa regime (1603–1867), the principle of *ryōsai kenbo* was inspired by Meiji intellectuals' interpretation of women's social roles in the West. While this ideology constituted the basis of the gendered division of labor in Japan, it motivated progress in female education and legitimized women's role as moral and cultural guardians of the nation (KOYAMA and GABRIEL 1994).

As Japan entered the Taishō era, new challenges arose that put pressure on traditional gender norms. The socio-political shifts [6] following World War I and Japan's growing

[6] As World War I pushed women of warring countries past their traditional spheres of agency, Japanese women also came to the realization that it was in their ability to fully contribute to the nation, beyond their roles of mothers and wives. As Andrea Germer (2013) argues, in this period the women's movement moved past the call for civic rights to revindications of political rights and representativeness. Germer offers a comprehensive analysis of the political aspects of 1920s Japanese feminisms, providing an overview of the domestic and international context which stimulated their development. See also MOLONY (2010) on feminist political activism until 1925.

participation in international diplomacy—particularly its engagement with the League of Nations—brought increased attention to global discussions on women's rights. The emergence of mass media, coupled with greater access to education for middle-class women, also led to an increased awareness of feminist movements abroad. Against this backdrop, *Josei Nihonjin* emerged as a platform for intellectual women who sought to redefine the boundaries of *ryōsai kenbo*, positioning themselves within a broader national and transnational discourse on women's roles.

The rise of social activism, universal suffrage movements, and debates on labor rights in the 1920s contributed to an expanding awareness of women's roles as active members of the state. As *Josei Nihonjin* illustrates, many of its contributors sought to navigate these tensions, balancing advocacy for women's expanded participation with the continued affirmation of national service through their traditional roles.

Despite its reformist stance, *Josei Nihonjin* did not explicitly reject *ryōsai kenbo*. Instead, its contributors sought to expand its definition, advocating for a model of womanhood that encompassed not just domestic roles but also civic engagement, professional development, and political awareness. For example, in an article from 1922 ("Fujin no kōjō suru no saiyōken" [The most important matter in female elevation] 婦人の向上するの最要件), the editors acknowledged the ideological hold of *ryōsai kenbo* but proposed a reinterpretation of women's roles beyond the confines of motherhood and wifehood. In a play on words, they even subverted the term by referencing *akuzai gubo* 悪妻愚母 ("bad wife, foolish mother," p. 12), arguing that, while it was desirable for a woman to fit the definition of a good wife and wise mother, such rigid expectations failed to reflect the changing realities of women's lives. The editors further challenged the outdated model of womanhood comparing it to the archaic Confucian principle of *fujin sanjū shugi* (婦人三従主義)[7], strongly advocating instead for a woman's right to be recognized as an individual beyond her familial obligations.

Despite these critiques, *Josei Nihonjin* often framed women's societal contributions in terms of national service. In an article from the magazine's inaugural issue (September 1920), Yamada Waka[8]—a key figure in the New Women's Association—outlined women's duties to the state in terms of *shakai hōshi* (社会奉仕, "social service," p. 47). She argued that motherhood itself was a form of social labor, contributing to the stability and progress of the nation. The term *shakai hōshi* frequently appeared in the magazine, often contrasted with *dorei* (奴隷, "forced labor"), emphasizing that women's engagement in society should be voluntary and valued rather than a burden imposed upon them.

[7] The Confucian principle dictated that a woman must obey her father in youth, her husband in marriage, and her son in widowhood.

[8] Yamada Waka was a journalist and women's movement activist. She contributed to several women's periodicals, proactively participating in the debates over the protection of motherhood and for the rehabilitation of prostitutes.

This rhetoric of women as contributors to national progress provided *Josei Nihonjin* with a strategic means to advocate for political rights and greater social participation without directly confronting state ideologies, positioning the magazine between reformist advocacy and nationalistic loyalty. While promoting greater political participation for women, the magazine framed these demands in terms of national progress rather than individual liberation. Yamada and other contributors frequently highlighted how female education and participation in the workforce were not solely personal rights but essential components of Japan's modernization, framing these demands as essential to the advancement of Japan as a "civilized nation" (*bunmeikoku* 文明国) on the world's stage. By adopting such rhetorics, they were able to demand broader rights for women—including suffrage and educational reform—while mitigating the backlash from conservative factions.

However, *Josei Nihonjin*'s stance was not without contradictions. While it frequently called for women's greater presence in society, it still maintained a rather conservative view on the family system. Advertisements for home-based education services and articles on household management, which gradually appeared throughout the magazine, suggest that despite their engagement with feminist discourse, the editors still proposed a model in which women balanced public engagement with their domestic responsibilities. Some articles, particularly those advocating for women's employment, still framed female professional occupations as extensions of their roles as caregivers rather than as independent professions. This dual positioning—advocating for progress while reaffirming traditional structures—demonstrates the complex and often paradoxical nature of *Josei Nihonjin*'s feminist nationalism.

By navigating between modernity and tradition, *Josei Nihonjin* created a discourse that sought to reconcile women's rights with nationalistic imperatives. Its writers understood that outright rejection of *ryōsai kenbo* would alienate mainstream audiences and invite censorship, so they instead sought to stretch its boundaries, arguing that women's contributions to education, the workforce, and even politics were not departures from national ideals but necessary adaptations to a changing society. This negotiation between state-defined womanhood and self-advocacy illustrates how *Josei Nihonjin*—contrary to other women's periodicals of the Taishō era—functioned as sites of both compliance and resistance, simultaneously reinforcing and challenging Japan's evolving gender norms.

3 Nationalism and Women's Role in Nation-building

While *Josei Nihonjin* writers sought to reinterpret *ryōsai kenbo* to accommodate changing social realities, their arguments did not exist in isolation from broader nationalist discourse. Rather than advocating for individualistic feminism, the magazine framed female emancipation as integral to Japan's development as a modern state. This positioning was shaped by Japan's ambitions to assert itself on the global arena and to modernize while still

maintaining its cultural distinctiveness. In this context, women were portrayed as central to nation-building, as agents of progress within the national framework. Therefore, if women's social contributions were framed as a service to the nation, the next logical step was their increased participation in the public sphere. However, this participation had to be carefully narrated to align with nationalist goals rather than radical feminist demands.

In her article "Haha to shakai hōshi" (1920), Yamada Waka asserts that women's primary contribution to the nation is through their role as moral and educational figures within the family, defining motherhood itself as a form of "social service" (*shakai hōshi*). She asserted that the "direct responsibility of creating the people was on women" and that the contemporary female emancipation arguments were based on the "misleading theory that historically, men and women worked in the same manner" (p. 38). She therefore accused the movement of blindly chasing a form of equality that was extremely superficial and that did not consider that "to take back[9] women's rights" (*onna no kenri o torikaesu* 女の権利を取り返す, p. 42) truly meant giving them back their power to create the people (*kokumin* 国民) and removing any obstacle that would impede them to perform such "work of love" (*ai no shigoto* 愛の仕事) (YAMADA 1920). Yamada's conception of motherhood as a form of social service bears notable parallels to American Progressive Era maternalism, where activists like Jane Addams defined motherhood as civic responsibility. Scholars such as Michel (1999) and Valverde (1992) demonstrated how 20th century American reformers expanded the private duties of motherhood into a public service ethos, similarly to the discourse Yamada Waka—who had encountered American feminism during her prolonged stay in the United States—and other Japanese feminists pushed forward in the debate over the protection of motherhood.

Women's Self-elevation

To perform such social duties—*Josei Nihonjin* editors argued—it was necessary for women to elevate themselves and seek a general improvement of their social and economic position. Reinforcing such idea, in 1923 Uehara Etsujirō 植原悦二郎 laid down a provoking interpretation of the condition of contemporary women in Japan, highlighting how they were still considered an object at the mercy of their husbands and engendering a critique to the status of female education at that time, which—he argued—was merely an institutionalized tool to subjugate and control women, to make them "useful to their husbands" (*otto ni*

[9] Yamada Waka argued that in ancient times, when people were nomadic, men and women equally shared responsibilities and duties to provide food and shelter. When people became sedentary, women could focalize their efforts in protecting and teaching the young. She argued that a return to the ancient times—a claim she attributes to contemporary female activists—did not constitute a win for female emancipation, rather, it diminished the importance of her familial role of provider of "love and education" (*aijō to kyōiku,* p. 42-43).

tsukawareru mono 夫に使われるもの, p. 77). Therefore, education based on *ryōsai kenbo,* by constricting women's elevation, posed an obstacle to the development of society (*shakai hattatsu* 社会発達), because—as the editors argued—only well-educated women could raise educated and responsible citizens.

The article, like many others throughout the periodical, concluded that the most important matter to initiate women's emancipation was for women themselves to become aware of their inferior education and their disadvantaged financial and social position, and to act to reverse such condition by educating themselves and rejecting the "idea of inferiority" (*sonshoku* 遜色) that was historically enforced by the family system, society, and educational institutions (Uehara 1923, p. 76). Uehara claimed that women were as responsible as men in perpetrating inequality, and encouraged them to expand their awareness and experiences, to reach a position of economic independence—the second step towards emancipation. He pursued the argument of political equality between men and women in a logical, structured way, including actionable steps for women to take to achieve political rights, starting from their local governmental institutions (p. 83).

The Family System and Financial Independence

In Uehara's understanding, the women's condition was the result of societal and institutional forces acting against modernization: his argument that the education system and family-based society were most responsible for limiting women's agency was proposed by other contemporary intellectuals in an analogous manner. Mori Tomiko 森登美子 (n.d.) also pointed out that discrimination was institutionalized through education which, as it was then, constituted the ultimate obstacle to the emancipation of women and failed to equip them with a skillset that would enable them to contribute to the nation on equal footing with men and with equal opportunities (Mori 1921).

Furthermore, Hasegawa Nyozekan 長谷川如是閑 (1875–1969)[10] argued that women's roles in relation to the family system (*kazoku seido* 家族制度) necessarily had to change in face of its renewed foundations: he claimed that the financial bases on which such a system rested were falling apart (he also stated that this had already happened in the Western enlightened countries), thus it was not possible to maintain the old patriarchal structure in which wives and daughters lived off of the male head of the household (Hasegawa 1923). Similarly, Ōkuma Shigenobu 大隈重信 (1838–1922), prominent intellectual and former prime minister, argued that the times had undeniably changed and remaining fixed on the old ways posed the risk of Japan being swept away (Ōkuma 1920). Pointing out that there is no certainty that the contemporary societal norms pushed upon women represented the

[10] Hasegawa Nyozekan was a liberal journalist and critic. He was highly active in the 1920s–1930s against Japanese increased militarism and advocated freedom of expression in press and politics.

ultimate truth, he stated that the excessive rigidity that characterized such moral and societal impositions made them more susceptible to the waves of change that had started from the West and were encompassing Japan in the post-WWI world.

His contribution underscored how the women's movement in Japan was at a different stage compared those of the Western worlds, warning the leaders of the movement to be aware of such differences and of the peculiarities of the Japanese social context, urging them to adapt their actions to it. Ōyama Ikuo 大山郁夫 (1880–1955)[11] also stressed the importance of adjusting the movement to the Japanese context and not to rush to catch up with the West where the movement had started much earlier: referring to Great Britain as the model of constitutional governments, he mentioned that even there the British suffragettes had worked for decades, under the guide of pioneer activist Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) and others, before they could achieve the right for women to participate in politics (ŌYAMA 1921).

Unlike Uehara, Ōkuma did not entirely discredit the family system but instead proclaimed the obsolescence of the traditional patriarchal hierarchy and advocated for equality in the management of the family (*fūfu tomokasegi shugi* [Principle of dual income household] 夫婦共稼主義). Chiba Yasurako 千葉安良子 (n.d.) also supported these attempts to expand women's status without necessarily destroying the family system. In a contribution to *Josei Nihonjin* (CHIBA 1921), she articulated her argument basing it on historical foundations, claiming that primitive men naturally drifted towards familial structures, first organizing in larger blood-related groups and ultimately settling, in the contemporary period, into the nuclear family system (*shōkazoku seido* 小家族制度, p. 52-53), which was thus framed as the natural result of evolution. Claiming that women's empowerment was not opposed to the familial structure so tightly woven into Japanese society, she resonated with the more moderate fringe of the women's emancipation movement, which in that same period was split.[12] It also reflected more realistically how contemporary women[13] felt about their

[11] Ōyama Ikuo was a Japanese journalist, professor, and political figure. In 1919 he founded the socialist magazine *Warera* (我等) with Hasegawa Nyozekan and Kawakami Hajime. For further details, refer to *Waseda University collection of materials related to Ōyama Ikuo* (2000).

[12] The women's emancipation movement in the early 1920s was split between radical positions who called for the complete rejection of the patriarchy, and a more moderate stance which focused on social welfare rather than political revolution. This polarization happened around the debate over the "protection of motherhood," emerging in 1917, in which the role of the state in ensuring the welfare of mothers and children was called into question. It involved the opposing views of Yosano Akiko and Hiratsuka Raichō, then expanded in the larger debate over the women's movement and radicalization. For a detailed account, see TOMIDA, H. (2004).

[13] In an editorial, *Josei Nihonjin* presented an interview with notable women, among whom appeared, for example, Hiratsuka Raichō, the pianist Kuno Hisashiko 久野久子, and journalist Takenaka Shigeko 竹中繁子. They were asked to give their personal views as women living in that historical period, from the point of view of their domestic life, and as part of the workforce. The comments of the interviewees accurately illustrated the variety in how women both within and outside the movement

position within the family and society, many of them claiming that being part of the workforce did not lessen their responsibilities towards their children and husbands (JOSEI NIHONJIN 1921).

While participation in society and contributing to household income were positions shared also by Hasegawa Nyozekan, his view of the family system differed profoundly from that of Uehara, Yamada, and Ōkuma. He voiced a strong critique against the idea that the family system constituted the moral unit of society—he called it "laughable and ridiculous" (p. 54)—and argued for the need to acknowledge that what defined a virtuous woman was not her dedication to the home under her husband's support (in exchange of which she had to show full obedience), but her contribution to society through financial emancipation. Thus, the working woman (*shokugyō fujin* 職業婦人) constituted the new model for the "virtuous woman of this era" (p. 55). This concept was further explored in the issue *Shokugyōkan* (職業観, "Views on work," vol. 2, n. 3) printed in February 1921 and entirely dedicated to the newly opened opportunities for women in the workforce in the context of post-World War I Japan.

4 Engagement with Transnational Feminism and Global Modernity

As Japan entered the 1920s, increasing exposure to global feminist movements and international political shifts influenced domestic discourses on gender and national identity. *Josei Nihonjin* actively engaged with foreign ideas—if in a selective way—embracing elements that aligned with the nation's modernization goals while rejecting those perceived as disruptive to its social and cultural foundations. The magazine negotiated these global influences, borrowing from Western feminism while maintaining a nationalist framework, positioning Japanese women as leaders in Asia, and responding to global events with a mix of admiration and resistance.

Selective Borrowing from Western Feminist Movements

The periodical's engagement with Western feminist ideas was highly strategic. It emphasized education, women's social responsibility, and motherhood, while distancing itself from more radical calls for gender equality. One of the most explicit references to Western feminism was the serialized translation of Margaret Sanger's *What Every Mother Should Know* (1914), by Yamakawa Kikue 山川菊枝[14] (1890–1980). While Sanger's work in the United States was

perceived their position and their status in the household and in society, which rarely aligned with the radical claims advanced by anarcho-socialist parts of the women's movement.

[14] Yamakawa Kikue was a socialist activist part of the women's emancipation movement. She was a member of Seitō and later in 1921 joined the short-lived socialist organization Sekirankai 関蘭会. She was also involved in the debate over the protection of motherhood.

profoundly radical in that context—advocating birth control as a means of female autonomy and sexual freedom—*Josei Nihonjin* framed it within the discourse of maternal responsibility rather than reproductive rights. Placing the focus on women's duty to raise strong, healthy citizens, the editors aligned once again with nationalist ideas rather than feminist individualism.

Legal rights were another contested area. In Terada Hatsuyo's 寺田初代 (n.d.) article on British women's protection laws (TERADA 1921), the author criticized how British women were perceived by the legal structure at the end of the 20th century, drawing on judge Edward Abbott Parry's (1863–1943) book "The Law and the Woman" (1916). Parry's activism emphasized the protection of "young and ignorant" women from predatory seducers who aimed at their possessions, and he considered the illicit act of luring women as a "barbaric act not suited for enlightened countries" (TERADA 1921, p. 31). Terada, however, repeatedly stressed that such laws originated from the intent to defend paternal property rights rather than women's rights themselves: in case of ill-intentioned seduction, it was only the woman's father who could sue the offender and obtain compensation for his own economic loss. Terada's critique did not advocate for absolute gender equality; rather, she used this example as a cautionary tale for Japan, arguing that while legislation constituted an invaluable means for progress, true improvement required strengthening women's education and their economic position.

In another article, discussions on female criminality in Japan and the United States (HASEGAWA 1923) were used to demonstrate the existence of a connection between female occupation and tendency to commit crimes. Focusing on the context of the United States, the author reported that in New York, among women only dedicated to the household and women holding domestic occupations, the criminality rates were significantly higher than among women working outside. By situating the discussion in the American context rather than Japan, the author could address the link between domesticity and criminality without directly targeting Japanese women, yet he nonetheless underscored the obsolescence of the causal relation that traditionally linked morality to the household.

Such careful choice of foreign feminist ideas reflects *Josei Nihonjin*'s broader approach of using Western examples to justify reform, while maintaining a path for women's emancipation suited to the political and social situation in Japan.

Japan's Role in Asia: A "Civilizing Mission" for Women's Rights

While *Josei Nihonjin* borrowed selectively from the West, its discourse on Asia took a markedly different tone. The magazine often positioned Japanese women as more advanced than their Asian counterparts, reinforcing Japan's self-perceived role as a leader in regional modernization.

The 1921 article "Ajia tairiku e fujin undō" [Women's movement towards the Asian Continent] is a crucial example. While it criticized infidelity and extramarital relations in Japanese men,[15] the piece framed issues such as institutionalized polygamy in Turkey, child marriage in India, and painful beauty practices in China as markers of civilizational "backwardness," suggesting that Japan had a duty to assist other Asian nations in their progress. The editors wrote:

> The Asian continent, except from Korea and other parts, is entirely territory of other countries, and our nation should not be involved or take custody of it. However, without interfering with other nations' sovereignty, from the perspective of humanity and culture, it is the duty of Asians to correct significant harm of customs and practices, in order to reap the benefits of future development. […] To be content with the current state of the Asian continent would be an excessively heartless act. Matters like the suffrage movement are not easy even within Japan's borders, so it is even more difficult to extend such movements to the continent. […] Japanese women have a responsibility to worry about not only the situation within Japan, but from China to India and as far as the distant Turkey (1921, 14-15).

This rhetoric echoed Japan's broader imperial ambitions in the early 20th century, where modernization efforts were often justified as benevolent interventions. *Josei Nihonjin* effectively applied this nationalistic logic to gender discourse: just as Japan was seen as a political leader in Asia, Japanese women were framed as the moral leaders, guiding the region's progress in female emancipation.

Westernization and Nationalism

Throughout the magazine, an ambivalence toward the West shaped its engagement with foreign ideas. Western feminism was both a model and a threat, a source of progressive ideas but also a cautionary example of excessive radicalism.

An editorial from 1921, "Takokujin furi o mite" [Observing foreigners' behavior], encapsulates such tension. Initially, the article praised Japan's ability to learn from Western models, citing victories against Russia (1904–1905) and Germany (1914–1918) as evidence of its capacity to "surpass its teacher" (p. 16). However, it also warned against blind imitation, arguing that anti-Japanese sentiment abroad (such as the anti-immigration laws in the United States[16]) revealed the dangers of over-relying on Western ideals. Women, being half

[15] The implicit normalization within society of extramarital relations for men was defined not only in terms of its negative impact on women's status and respect, but also in regard to its alleged deleterious effects on society and on the balance in the Japanese population between men and women.

[16] Japanese immigration to the United States had been in the public debate since the turn of the 20th century. While there were many attempts to settle the matter diplomatically, the 1921

of the population, were subtly encouraged to adopt modern behaviors only insofar as they contributed to Japan's strength. This oscillation between admiration and skepticism reflected larger nationalist concerns. Western feminist achievements were acknowledged, but their relevance to Japan was always filtered through the lens of national interest.

Beyond feminist debates, *Josei Nihonjin* was responsive to international political shifts, particularly those affecting Japan's global standing. For example, in 1921–1922, the Washington Naval Conference, which imposed limitations on Japan's military forces, coincided with a noticeable shift in the magazine's rhetoric. Articles published during this period adopted a more defensive stance, emphasizing Japan's need to strengthen itself domestically—including through women's education and civic participation—to counteract such perceived foreign hostility. Similarly, anti-Japanese immigration policies in the United States were cited as evidence that Japanese national unity, including gender harmony, was crucial for maintaining international respect. This integration of global events into gender discourse demonstrated how the magazine linked women's progress with Japan's national resilience, through an approach to gender that reinforced both progressive change and ideological continuity, reclaiming its overarching narrative that female empowerment must serve national strength. These tensions between nationalism and global influences, between admiration and resistance, were at the heart of *Josei Nihonjin*'s vision for women's roles. As the following section will explore, these contradictions ultimately defined the gendered construction of national identity in Taishō-era Japan.

5 The Gendered Construction of National Identity

Josei Nihonjin positioned women as central to Japan's national modernization but within a controlled, state-serving framework. The periodical's engagement with Western feminism and Asian regionalism reflects Japan's broader struggle to define modernity on its own terms, producing contradictions in how the "ideal woman" was portrayed.

developments of the immigration problem in California saw the passage of a bill nullifying all previous bilateral agreements and further limiting land acquisition by Japanese nationals. See *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921, Volume II* (FULLER 1936).

Women's education, participation in the workforce, and political involvement were encouraged, yet always as national duties rather than as individual rights. The magazine's articles on economic independence advocated financial stability but continued to uphold the family as society's foundation. While promoting the new model of the "working woman" (*shokugyō josei* 職業女性), *Josei Nihonjin* never fully rejected *ryōsai kenbo* ideals prioritizing the women's role as moral educators of the family. Uehara Etsujirō's (1877–1962) 1923 article "Fujin to seijiteki jinken no jikaku" [Women and their view of civil political rights], for example, criticized women's lack of political awareness but, rather than constructing a critique of systemic exclusion, he laid the blame on the shortcomings of women's education. Yet, the encouragement of self-education only reaffirmed how the magazine walked a fine line between progress and tradition. For example, one recurring advertisement promoted a homeschooling service that would allow women to continue their housework and get educated from home (fig. 3). Although it provided an opportunity for women who did not have access to educational institutions, it indicates the persistence of traditional norms that bound a woman first and foremost to her maternal/marital role.

3 Homeschooling advertisement claiming that "it is possible to graduate from the women's school while doing housework at home." *Josei Nihonjin*, vol. 2, n. 3. Cress Publishing.

Another element *Josei Nihonjin* advocated for the "new woman" was political participation. The editors' attitude visibly shifted after the revision of article 5 of the Public Peace Police Law, as they argued that little had changed in women's active engagement in politics. The law, established in 1900, regulated political activities and limited the rights to speech, meeting, and association. Only associations sanctioned by the police were allowed to participate in politics, and women were excluded from joining until 1922.[17] *Josei Nihonjin's* aggressive call to "open their eyes" emphasized that the distance between the movement's leaders and the ordinary women was dangerously expanding, underlining the risk that excessive radicalization would alienate the general public and pose a threat on national harmony (Oku 1923, p. 70). Therefore, unlike radical feminists who sought complete liberation from the family system, *Josei Nihonjin* promoted a model of female citizenship rooted in moral integrity, education, and national service. This "new woman" was politically aware yet devoted to preserving societal stability. Similarly, the issue of political participation was placed within the discourse of gender equality and universal suffrage. While many authors argued that it was far too early for Japan to undertake this step—voting rights for men were still quite restrictive—*Josei Nihonjin* took the occasion to reaffirm that women, as Japanese nationals and as a legitimate part of the people (*minshu*), were legally and politically equal to men.[18]

Conclusion

The trajectory of *Josei Nihonjin* between 1920 and 1923 reflects how the negotiation between nationalism and feminism in Taishō Japan was not only a matter of reconciling two opposing discourses but resulted in the construction of a framework in which women's advancement was made inseparable from national strengthening and progress. This study, based on a close reading of selected editorials, thematic essays, and contributions from leading and lesser-known female intellectuals, demonstrates that the magazine's advocacy of women's education, public participation, and moral responsibility was consistently elaborated in relation to Japan's positioning in a competitive international order. The connection between gender reform and national strength was presented as mutually reinforcing, in a perspective that viewed women's progress as both means and measure of Japan's modernity.

[17] Article 5 of the Public Peace Police Law prohibited women to form or join political parties and to participate in political meetings. Its revision in 1922 allowed women some freedom in organizing politically and participating in political meetings.

[18] The magazine often framed the continued existence of gender-based discrimination in Japan as shameful, and the cause of this was traced back to Japan's embracement of militarism (*gunkokushugi* 軍国主義), in which men's direct military involvement inherently made their contribution to the nation immediate and explicit.

Contributors redefined the "good wife, wise mother" paradigm as the model for a woman capable of navigating demands of domestic life and opportunities of the public dimension, including elements drawn from transnational concepts of womanhood. Such ideas were not simply imported, rather, they were negotiated and selectively reinterpreted through the lens of Japanese cultural priorities and nationalist thought.

The heterogeneity of the contributors' political orientation—ranging from conservative maternalism to more progressive feminism—indicates that *Josei Nihonjin* constituted a space of dialectic negotiation where debates over the nature of womanhood, the ideal family structure and Japan's role in the international order were developed. Such diversity of viewpoints complicates any attempt to categorize early 1920s women's magazines as either instruments of state ideology or mouthpieces for feminist advocacy. It also reconnects the magazine with the ideological framework of Seikyōsha—*kokusuishugi* 国粋主義—where tensions between internationalist ideas and the safeguard of cultural unity were played out, reflecting the broader complexity of Japan's modernization process in the interwar years, balanced between incorporating Western ideas and maintaining a cultural nationalist perspective.

While the present study has focused on thematic and discursive analysis, further research on the magazine's readership and circulation figures would offer additional insight into its reach and influence. Archival evidence on these aspects is currently unavailable and can only be inferred from the contrasting comments reported in the column "Henshūshitsu yori" by the editors, where praise of high numbers of readers colludes with financial difficulties and calls for readers' support.

At the intersection of gender, nationalism, and modernity, *Josei Nihonjin* complicates the relation between feminist discourse and nationalism in interwar Japan. Advocating for increased education, political participation, and economic independence while reinforcing cultural traditions, the magazine operated as a dynamic space where competing visions of gender, national identity, and modernity converged and clashed. Analyzing *Josei Nihonjin*'s engagement with global feminist discourses and nationalism, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interaction of gender ideology and nationalism in the interwar years, reaffirming the necessity to move beyond the dominance of narratives centered only on mass-circulation magazines and reassess the diverse voices that shaped these debates.

The inability of *Josei Nihonjin* to sustain its mission—to educate women on their political and civic rights and to promote their attainment of a higher social position—ultimately demonstrates the limits of public receptivity to the ideas championed by the magazine, which would constitute a more prominent strand of the women's movement a decade later. The decreasing readership was becoming less responsive to *Josei Nihonjin's* call to action, contributing to the financial difficulties the magazine faced months before its demise (Sato and Miyake 1993). In the final issues—in an attempt to broaden its appeal—the editorial team

experimented with popularizing content, including more articles on domestic life and household matters, drawing closer to the style of commercial women's magazines. As revealed in the column "Henshūshitsu yori," the editors were conscious that this maneuver was a strategic compromise, yet it did not mitigate the resistance they faced. The magazine's fate was determined by two major setbacks that occurred almost simultaneously: the Great Kantō Earthquake of August 1923 disrupted publication, and the withdrawal of Miyake Setsurei—whose presence had been central to the part of the Seikyōsha network who supported the venture—from involvement in the company in September of the same year. These events brought an end to the short-lived but significant attempt to connect Japan's male-dominated intellectual sphere with women's emancipation.

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