

# The Education of Japanese Women in the Meiji Era by An American Missionary —Mary E. Kidder—

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## I. Introduction

The education of women in modern Japan was mainly focused on nurturing *Ryosaikenbo*.<sup>1</sup> —“a good wife and a wise mother.” It was based on the idea that women should get married and have children and it was founded from the 1880's to the 1890's in Japan.

The first twenty years of the Meiji era was the time when the westernization of Japan, called *bunmeikai*, was eagerly done. For example, missionary schools, were usually started as a form of *shijuku* — private classes for Japanese students to learn western knowledge and skills under foreign teachers. In fact those missionary schools had played a leading role in the education of Japanese women until the national education system of Japanese women became the mainstream.<sup>2</sup>

I found it interesting to figure out what missionary schools brought for women of the Meiji era. I intend to see it through the eyes of Mary E. Kidder, the founder of the Ferris Seminary which is the first Christian school for female education in Japan. Here are some questions I have: “What was the difference between Kidder's ideal of Japanese female education and that of *Ryosaikenbo*?”, “What influence did Kidder make on Japanese female education?”

I chose one more person, Shizuko Wakamatsu, because I think Kidder's influence can be seen on her. Wakamatsu was one of Kidder's students and became a teacher of Ferris Seminary. She is considered a pioneer of the translation of English literature.

## II. Mary E. Kidder

### 1. The status of American Women in the 19th century

Mary Eddy Kidder was born in America in 1834 and she left for Japan in 1869. So Kidder grew up in America from the 1830's to the 1860's. At that time in America there were mainly two views of women.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, the generally accepted view of women in the American society was similar to the Victorian view. The Victorian view of women was the fixed ideal of a woman as "an angel of home." "Women were expected to make a comfortable home for their husband and children for their emotional stability,"<sup>4</sup> rather than just menial housework. Their playing this role was considered the best way to show their ability and the most profit that they could give for the society.<sup>5</sup> This view of women prevailed in 19th century-America, especially north-eastern America. It was just the time that the American industry had developed through the Industrial Revolution. As a result, it made a distinction between the role of the men and that of women. However, the 19th century was the time that the Civil War (1861-1865) broke out in America. Many women voluntarily worked as "angels of battlefield."<sup>6</sup> during the war. Those female volunteers were supported by church or charitable organizations led by women.

Secondly, the view of women peculiar to America was that every woman was so-called "a mother of the nation."<sup>7</sup> This means that any woman has a possibility to become a mother of the President of America. So education of women was considered very important in view of making women become smart and cultivated enough to raise a future President. This idea seems close to that of Ryosaikenbo in Japan. Both women in America and Japan were expected to be wise for the purpose of raising children who could benefit the nation, and for the purpose of doing the housework properly for a family which is the smallest unit of the whole nation.

Concerning the status of American women in the 19th century, there were three fields where women were socially accepted to get involved in.<sup>8</sup> They were home, church and school. As it was mentioned above, American women were responsible for housework. In return for that, they belonged to their homes.

As for churches, they were the places for women to be active. Those women who were pious and dedicated to church activities were praised and idealized in the society. For example, to be a missionary to foreign countries as a married or unmarried woman was not only socially accepted, but also was praised as if she were a heroine.<sup>9</sup> This could answer the question of why Kidder came to Japan. As for schools, they were the places for women to learn as students and to work as teachers. Teaching at school was a socially accepted job for women before they got married.

### 2. What motivated Kidder to go Japan

Mary Eddy Kidder was born at Wardsboro, Vermont in 1834. She had eleven

brothers and sisters. Kidder grew up in the family atmosphere where she could be familiar with the Christian religion. Her father was a leader of the church choir and some of her uncles were clergymen. Her mother was also a devoted Christian, and was a subscriber of *The Missionary Herald*. When Kidder was a child, she read her mother's journal, too. She liked reading and imagining foreign countries. What Kidder did not like so much was sewing and knitting quietly inside home. She preferred being active, for example exploring nature or taking care of wounded animals.

Kidder got an elementary education in her hometown, then she attended schools called academies for secondary education. Academy was also called seminary.<sup>10</sup> An important encounter for Kidder's life happened when she was in an academy. It was Samuel Robbins Brown that Kidder met there. Kidder and Brown were in the same denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church in America.<sup>12</sup> Kidder became a teacher of the school run by Brown. She was also teaching at Sunday school.

I think it is important to notice that Kidder was an active woman within the socially accepted fields at that time of America. She was involved in church and school. As for the third field, home, she had been single while in America. I suppose there was a reason for that. If she had been married, she could not have kept giving priority to her career according to the 19th century-American social standard. So going abroad as a missionary was the best way for Kidder to keep active in socially accepted way.

In 1869 Kidder joined the Brown's second voyage to Japan. Brown sent a letter of recommendation of Kidder to the Board of Foreign Missions. The letter says as follows: "I have known Miss Kidder for more than fifteen years, ... she is respected by her students ... she is a talented teacher ... she is the very right woman for the foreign mission...."<sup>13</sup>

### 3. The foundation of Ferris Seminary

Kidder came to Japan as the first unmarried female missionary with Mr. and Mrs. Brown. They arrived at Yokohama in 1869. Having been hired by the Japanese government to teach English at Niigata Ei Gakko (Niigata English School), they went to Niigata.<sup>14</sup>

The reason why they did not come to Japan as missionaries was due to Japanese history. In 1868 the Meiji-Japanese government issued *Goboh-no-Kaisei* which regulated the rules for the people to follow until 1873. It included a strict prohibition of Christianity. So any foreigners who lived in Japan had to have a job approved by the government.<sup>15</sup>

After having taught at Niigata Ei Gakko from 1869 to 1870, Brown lost his job. So they got back to Yokohama in less than a year. Although the official reason notified by the government was because of financial problems, the true reason was that Brown taught Japanese students Christian religion.<sup>16</sup> According to a letter

written by Kidder, Mr. and Mrs. Brown were disappointed at the setback, but Kidder was delighted.

It was remarkable that Kidder founded Ferris Seminary at Yokohama in 1870, only the third year of the Meiji era, under the circumstances when foreign people were still new to most Japanese and education for females was not paid as much attention as education for men in Japan. Why did Kidder specially pay attention to education of Japanese women?

We can find a clue to the reason in Kidder's remark that was made at the meeting of Protestant missionaries held at Osaka in 1883.<sup>17</sup> In her speech on "Education of Women", she criticized the conventional position of Japanese women: Japanese women must obey their husbands and mothers-in-law after marriage. If the husbands' side of the family did not like the wife, the woman who joined the family by marriage, she could be divorced. And such a woman who was divorced was looked down on by the society. Obviously Kidder felt sorry for Japanese women, and she felt it was her mission to make their situation better. Then Kidder emphasized the importance of Japanese female education based on Christianity. It supports the idea that the bond of affection between a man and a woman is most important in marriage. Kidder thought this idea on marriage had not been understood in Japan.

It is not hard to imagine that Kidder's school was based on the Christian spirit and western modernization. However, she did not try to make Japanese girls be just like westerners. She says in her letter to the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions that "It is not wise to educate Japanese girls as they cannot live at their homes, and it looks a little dangerous to make them so."<sup>18</sup> Hence Kidder did not necessarily think women should work outside home as equally as men. She knew if Japanese women were disconnected from their homes in their society, it would make them feel like outsiders. I think it is important that Kidder took Japanese culture into consideration when she taught Japanese girls.

At Ferris Seminary in 1872, the following subjects were taught with the help of American and Japanese Christians.<sup>19</sup> The English course was divided into spelling, reading, writing, composition, and conversation. History, geography, and mathematics were also taught. Religious instruction was composed of Bible reading, question and answers of Christian doctrine, and reading of "The Peep' of Day". Singing class was mainly hymns. In addition, dressmaking, knitting, embroidery were taught twice a week. For teaching these subjects American textbooks were used. Of all the subjects English was considered the most necessary. Kidder said that "learning English was a shortcut to reach almost all the knowledge in the world that is worth acquiring."<sup>20</sup>

The school curriculum was revised and more organized as a school for Japanese students in 1875. For example the Japanese and Chinese classics were added as

subjects in the curriculum. From nine to ten o'clock in the morning, western knowledge which covered the liberal arts to science was taught. From one to four in the afternoon, Japanese subjects such as calligraphy, history of emperors, and moral philosophy of a virtuous woman were taught. They were for the secondary education of female students.

The level of the curriculum was high enough to have the value of higher education, so that Ferris Seminary was adored nationwide by Japanese girls with a desire to learn. For example, Sueno Yamauchi (1858-1930), who was from Wakayama Prefecture, entered Ferris seminary in 1875. She was known for her brilliance in Wakayama, and she came to Ferris seminary in Yokohama to get the best female education at that time. Sueno Yamauchi had studied at Ferris Seminary, while teaching the Chinese classics there, until she got married to Masahisa Uemura (1857-1925).<sup>21</sup> in 1882.

### III. Shizuko Wakamatsu

Shizuko Wakamatsu (1864-1896) is a pen name of Kashiko Shimada. The influence of Kidder can be seen on Wakamatsu in the following two points; The first one is in her view and attitude toward marriage, and the second one is in her translation, especially her masterpiece, *Shokoshi*.

As for marriage, Kidder got married in Japan in 1873 to a Presbyterian, Edward Rothesay Miller. In their marriage, he converted to his wife's denomination, Dutch Reformed Church in order to let Kidder continue her job for her church, which was an unusual case. However, I can see the equality of a man and a woman in their marriage.

Wakamatsu's husband was Yoshiharu Iwamoto, the publisher of *Jogakuzasshi*. The first issue of the magazine was published in 1885, and it continued until the 526th issue in 1904. It specifically criticized conventional ideas of women and emphasized the importance of education for women based on the Christian spirit in order to improve the status of women. *Jogakuzasshi* covered a variety of subjects such as politics, literature, sociology, and female education. It was widely read among the Japanese including young Japanese men.

Iwamoto was also the principal of *Maiji-jogakko* (1868-1909). It was based on Christianity, and supported the idea that women should be respected as humans equal to men. *Meiji-jogakko* provided higher education for female students, which was rare at that time. It intended to nurture the female leaders of the society.

It was in 1889, the 22nd year of Meiji, that Wakamatsu and Iwamoto got married and it was still in the time that a unity of two families made a marriage, rather than two individuals. However, Wakamatsu made a decision to marry him. She even broke off her engagement to a naval officer, Ryo Serada, who was recommended by Kidder.<sup>22</sup>

Another point is in her translation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Shokoshi) by Frances H. Burnet. It was first published in the 227th issue of *Jogakuzasshi*. Wakamatsu translated it in colloquial style, which was an innovation in Japanese literature at that time.<sup>23</sup> The heroine of this story, an American woman, Mrs. Errol is the key to finding out about Wakamatsu's ideal view of women.

Mrs. Errol is described as a woman "purifying the air of the society."<sup>24</sup> She is pure in heart, obedient, considerate, and self-sacrificing. Above all, she is described as a lady who loves her husband deeply and gives a good spiritual influence on her son. The place Mrs. Errol belongs to is home. This is the typical view of women in the 19th century-America, a Victorian view of women. And it is not far from the ideal of *Ryosaikenbo* in Japan, except it is based on Puritan Christian belief. So by translating the story, Wakamatsu showed her own belief in Christianity. Besides, Mrs. Errol's marriage did not get approval from her husband's family, but she married her husband for the mutual love and trust between the couple. This was the part that a marriage by the idea of *Ryosaikenbo* was missing. Wakamatsu gave a list of books that she would recommend in *Jogakuzasshi*,<sup>25</sup> and among those books the similar characters to Mrs. Errol always appeared. So Wakamatsu's ideal view of women is represented by Mrs. Errol.

Wakamatsu's view of women was formed under the great influence of Kidder and Ferris Seminary. One of the reasons for that is in Wakamatsu's background in her childhood; her family members, the samurai-clan of Aizu (Fukushima Prefecture), were dispersed when she was six years old. Then she was adopted by a merchant-family in Yokohama. She lived in the dormitory of Ferris Seminary as a student for fourteen years. Since her graduation from Ferris Seminary, she taught there for seven years. Wakamatsu says in her letter "I know no other home but Ferris Seminary." or "I see Kidder as my mother, and I tell her even the things that I do not tell anyone else."<sup>26</sup>

When Wakamatsu published *Shokoshi*, in 1890, Meiji 23, many people praised her translation work. Ohgai Mori made a comment about it in a magazine that Wakamatsu's merit in her translation came from her profound understanding of English. She translated by making good use of the nuance of words.<sup>27</sup> Ichiyo Higuchi, the famous woman of the Meiji Era for writing *Takekurabe* was affected by Wakamatsu's translation.<sup>28</sup> It is remarkable that Wakamatsu introduced the American best-seller book, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, to the Japanese with the innovative translation in its colloquial style and its Christian ideal view of women.

#### IV. Conclusion

I mentioned before that Kidder's ideal of Japanese female education was not far from the idea of *Ryosaikenbo*. Both were the same in the way that home was the place for women to play an important role. However, they were different in the way

that the former was based on Christianity, while the latter, based on Confucianism, came to support nationalism. They had different ideas of home. According to Kidder's idea of home, a couple, whose bond was given by God, is the center of a family. They make a family by thinking and making decisions. However, in the *Ryosaikenbo* idea of home, a patriarch, who was always a man, was the center of a family. In Japanese homes women were not expected to think and have their own opinions. It was considered even harmful for women to do that. Besides, women were so stuck to home that they hardly ever had any free time. According to Kidder, women should have some time to get out of home and do volunteer work for others.<sup>29</sup> It was seen as church activity or other charitable activities among American women.

I think the biggest achievement that Kidder made for Japanese women in the Meiji Era was that she gave them an enlightened idea that they must recognize their possibilities through education. The possibilities here mean that women should not live merely conventionally but should live their lives by thinking and making choices of their own. This can be seen on Wakamatsu's marriage of her own will, and in her career as a translator.

Kidder came to Japan when it was considered natural that women should be subjected to men from the cradle to the grave: "When women are children, they should follow their fathers. When they are married, they should follow their husbands. When they become widows, they should follow their sons."<sup>30</sup> Under such a circumstance, such possibilities as Wakamatsu could get were never dreamed of. So I would like to conclude that Kidder was a significant person in the way that she led Japanese women to recognize and nurture their possibilities through education.

## Notes

1. Masashi Fukaya, *Education by the System of Ryosaikenbo*, (Nagoya, Reimei Syobo, 1990), pp.156-157.  
*Ryosaikenbo* was consciously used in the magazine, *Jokan* in 1891. *Ryosaikenbo* was used as *Kenboryosai* by Masanao Nakamura (1832-1891) in the magazine, *Rokumei-zasshi*. Arinori Mori (1847-1889) also used *Kenboryosai* for the female education from his natinalistic point of view. Since Dairoku Kikuchi (1855-1917) became the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in 1901, it became to use *Ryosaikenbo* for the ideology of nationalistic female education.
2. Fukaya, p.190  
 "Until the regulation on higher education of female students was promulgated, female education in Japan was led by Christian schools."
3. Rui Kohiyama, *The View of Women by an American Missionary and its development in Japan - Mary E. Kidder and Shizuko Wakamatsu*, (The Department of Economics, Kanto Gakuin University, A Collection of Theses on the General Education, Nature, Human, Society, No.8, 1987), pp.50-51.
4. J.A. and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*, (Liverpool University, 1964 / New York, Schocken Books, 1964), Translated by Sadae Kawamura, (Tokyo, Soubunsha, 1980), p.79.
5. Mrs. J. Sandford, *Woman in her Social and Domestic Character*, sixth edition, (London, 1839), p.2.
6. Rui Kohiyama, *American Female Missionaries*, (Tokyo, Tokyo shuppan, 1992), p.39.
7. Kohiyama 1987, p.51.
8. Ibid., p.51
9. Kohiyama, 1992, p.119.
10. Ibid., p.30  
 "Private schools called Academy or Seminary were founded for the secondary education of female students in America, and they were at their peak from 1830's to 1860's."
11. The Educational Alliance of Christian Schools, *A history of Japanese Christian Education*. (Tokyo, Soubunsha, 1977), pp.97-99.  
 S.R. Brown (1810-1880) is an American missionary, born in Connecticut. He entered Amherst College, but dropped out. He graduated from Yale University. At the age of fifty-nine, he came to Japan with Kidder. He worked for establishing the Joint Japanese Christian Association, and nurtured Japanese christian leaders, such as Masahisa Uemura, at Brown-juku. He edited Japanese-English conversation volume, and translated Bible into Japanese.
12. Ferris Jogakuin, *A short history of Ferris Jogakuin for 110 years*. (Yokohama, Ferris Jogakuin, 1982), p.4.  
 The Dutch Reformed Church in America was originally formed by immigrants from Holland, but later it became called by the Reformed Church in America. Although it was not a major denomination, it was eager to send missionaries abroad, especially to Japan. Since Japan had been open to Holland, while she had been closed to other countries except for China.
13. Michio Takaya, *A Collection of Letters Written by S.R. Brown*, (Tokyo, Nippon



- Kiristokyodan Shuppankyoku, 1965), p.239.
14. Ferris Jogakuin, *A Collection of Letters Written by Kidder*, (Tokyo, Kyobunsha, 1975), p.1.
  15. Ferris Jogakuin, 1975, p.45
  16. Ibid., pp.40-41.
  17. Ferris Jogakuin, *Ayumi - Ferris Archives Bulletin*, no.22 (Yokohama, Ferris Jogakuin, 1988), p.2.
  18. Ferris Jogakuin, 1982, p.15.
  19. Ibid., p.13.
  20. Ferris Jogakuin, 1988, p.9.
  21. The Educational Alliance of Christian Schools, 1977, p.204.  
Masahisa Uemura (1857-1925) is the representative in Japanese Christian history. He played an important role not only as a religionist or theologian, but also as an educator in modern Japan.
  22. Kohiyama, *American Female*...., p.270.
  23. The Publication Committee of Shizuko Wakamatsu, *Shizuko Wakamatsu- her monumental life*, (Tokyo, Kyoeisha shuppan, 1977), p.18.  
The colloquial style was founded by Shimei Futabatei's *Ukigumo* in 1887 and Bimyo Yamada.
  24. Kohiyama, 1992, p.56.
  25. Ibid., p.56.
  26. Ibid., p.55.
  27. The Publication Committee of Shizuko Wakamatsu, 1977, p.23.
  28. Ibid., p.22.
  29. Ferris Jogakuin, 1988, p.9
  30. The All Japan History Education Study Conference, *A Japanese History Glossary*, (Tokyo, Yamakawa shuppan, 1995), p.121.  
*Sanjū-no oshie* was formed in the Edo era, and it restrained life of women.

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