

Gendered Power: Educated Women of the Meiji Empress' Court. Mamiko C. Suzuki. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019. x +147 pp. \$19.95. Paperback ISBN-13: 9780472053971.

In *Gendered Power*, Mamiko C. Suzuki offers a compact yet sweeping exploration of a network of issues related to education, gender, and politics in Meiji Japan. Focusing on the tensions inherent in the activities of elite women promoting new opportunities for female education with curricula that nonetheless oftentimes seemed to encourage the subjugation of women (or at least the limitations of their roles in society), Suzuki paints a complex image of the protagonists at the heart of her study and the wider context in which they lived. Suzuki's work has compelling implications for the history of education, gender, and the formation of national identity in the Meiji era as well as notions of modern womanhood in Japan. While the book's three chapters are centered on women with connections to the imperial court, *Gendered Power* in fact speaks to issues connected not just to a wider population of women in Japan, but indeed to women across the world, as states around the globe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries expanded female education and negotiated changing gender norms. Over the course of their lives, the women at the heart of the study embodied dynamic identities and indeed went by many names at different points and in different settings, a fact that Suzuki helpfully explains in the book's introduction. For the purposes of Suzuki's analysis (and thus this review), they were known as: Empress Haruko; Nakajima Shōen, who went simply by her pen name Shōen; and Shimoda Utako, who was referred to as Utako, an honorific first name given to her by the Empress.

Chapter one focuses on Empress Haruko (1849–1914, formerly Ichijō Masako), wife of the Meiji Emperor. It explores her promotion of female education, both through her example as a highly educated woman and her patronage of new schools for women. The project was explicitly tied to the larger goal of nation building and imperial expansion, and it thus left a dual legacy of expanded individual opportunity but also pressures of conformity and increased state power. For example, while the schools endorsed by the Empress mimicked much of the state rhetoric of the importance of “good wife, wise mother,” Suzuki shows that despite that framing, they in fact offered opportunities for women's empowerment and advancement independent of their families or the state. The very existence of new female spaces in the public, moreover, complicated traditional notions of womanhood and the place of women in the new nation. In fact, the Empress's patronage of schools for women were in many ways a mirror of her own educational experience and her role in the new Meiji state. The Empress, schooled in classical *kanbun* literacy and presented as mother of the nation, used her education and political capital to create new opportunities for women: bringing non-aristocratic women to court for the first time, patronizing female schools, and sponsoring the publication of moral guides whose very existence sanctioned and encouraged an expansion of female literacy.

Yet, in each of these activities, the Empress relied on a language and ethics rooted in tradition, and the schools and guides contained much “conservative” content that might have disappointed more progressive educators. Suzuki shows, however, that it was precisely the Empress's fluency in this classical language and morality that provided her with the capital to

introduce new content and ideals to women's education. Thus, while the Empress created new spaces for women in the field of education and exercised agency in the construction of both the nation and modern Japanese womanhood, she also perhaps created a limited notion of what class of women would have access to power and the ways in which women could participate in the various spheres of public life in Japan.

Chapter two moves away from the Empress herself to the broader network of female educators that she empowered and who expanded the project of female education in new ways. The chapter highlights the work of Nakajima Shōen, a.k.a. Kishida Toshiko (1863–1901), the first commoner to serve as the classical Chinese intendant at the imperial court. Suzuki shows how the orator, political activist, and educator drew on her classical education to transgress previous boundaries in public discourse and maintain a presence in national politics despite restrictions placed on Shōen by society (gender) and circumstance (poor health). The project was met with frequent criticism and controversy, as writers argued that Shōen's use of *kanbun* was masculine and inappropriate, and more broadly, that modern Japanese women needed to play decisively more submissive roles in the new state. Yet at the same time, it was precisely her ability to converse in this *kanbun* style that opened the door for her participation in the male-centered areas of politics and provided female students an aspirational, if controversial, model for their own educations and lives. Examining the language, style, and content of Shōen's diaries, Suzuki portrays Shōen as an active participant in the societal debates of the era, frequently challenging accepted norms and notions of femininity and women's roles in society.

Chapter three focuses on another prominent female educator from the era, Shimoda Utako, aka Hirao Seki (1854–1936). As with both the Empress and Shōen, Suzuki shows how Utako's promotion of female education cannot be understood using simplistic linear notions such as progress or liberation. While Utako worked for an expansion of women's education, she also fought to ensure that the content of that education remained "old-fashioned," a stance which Suzuki argues enabled Utako to maintain her influential position in an era filled with angst regarding changing gender roles in Japan. As with Shōen as well however, Utako's career was not without controversy. She was frequently maligned for supposed sexual transgressions, with male writers focusing on her body in an attempt to delegitimize her intellect and education. Moreover, Utako was not just attacked for her gender, but also for her class, as the emergent body of socialist writers critiqued her (and in many ways the larger project of female education) as only serving the elites of Meiji Japan. While Utako believed that women had a special place in the household and nation, it was a markedly subvariant place, and she cautioned against women "flaunting" their knowledge or embracing the idea of being a "modern woman." Working at the imperial court, opening schools with imperial support, and promoting the idea of "good wife, wise mother," Utako's advocacy for female education offered women new opportunities, yet it simultaneously provided the state with new avenues for social control and power.

Two fascinating themes that run throughout the book are global models of female education and the importance of classical *kanbun* literacy within elite sponsorship of learning for women. These are also perhaps the moments when the book could do more to explore the comparative and

connective issues suggested therein. While Suzuki refers to historical figures such as Queen Victoria who provided the Empress with a model, and to modern scholars such as Dorothy Ko and Joan Judge who have explored the history of elite female education in China, these connections could be explored in more depth, particularly the ways in which classical literacy could serve as entrance into traditionally male dominated fields across multiple cultural and temporal contexts. Doing so might enhance the already fascinating story that Suzuki tells and elaborate on what we can learn both about Japan and the global nineteenth century from the study. Similarly, in her discussion of educational networks in the Meiji era, an engagement with similar dynamics from the Tokugawa period might have been instructive. For that earlier time, for example, Eiko Ikegami has explored ways in which literary circles provided opportunities for both men and women to transgress official boundaries of class and gender. Putting the Meiji and Tokugawa periods in conversation might have enriched the book, showing both continuity and change in the complex ecology of literacy, power, gender, class, and identity in Japanese history.

In all, *Gendered Power* is a concise and compelling exploration of three women whose activities and lives offer fresh insight into the Meiji era and the broader history of modern womanhood, education, and citizenry in Japan. It should be required reading for anyone interested in the history of Modern Japan or the global history of education.

Daniel Barish, Baylor University