

# Women's Gender Equality Lesson

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Related History Institute: Experiencing Japanese History, Politics, Foreign Relations, Economics, and Culture

Grade Level: High School: 11, 12

Time Frame: Two class periods

## Objectives

1. Students will explore how historians use the central historical concepts of change/continuity and causation/consequences
2. Students will be introduced to some key tools of basic historical analysis: "levels" (socio-economic, cultural and political) and phases (long-term, medium-term and short-term)
3. Students will carry out a historical analysis that helps them to appreciate the complex nature of historical developments by integrating international-mindedness, working with sources, and multiple perspectives
4. Students will focus on an important episode in women's history in Japan, women's obtaining gender equality, to explore factors influencing the evolution of democratic states and the struggle for equality (ideology; economic forces; foreign influences)
5. Students will explore the potential for an individual to affect history through learning about Beate Sirota Gordon, who as a 22-year old employee of the American Occupation forces wrote the sections relating to women for the Japanese Constitution of 1946, establishing the principle of gender equality.

## Relation of this lesson plan to IB History standards

This lesson applies four of the six key concepts that the the IB Diploma history program is focused on (causation, consequence, change, continuity, significance and perspectives):

- **Change** The study of history involves investigation of the extent to which people and events bring about change. Discussion of the concept of change can encourage sophisticated discussions such as encouraging students to think about, and look for, change where some claim none exists, or using evidence to challenge orthodox theories and assumptions about people and events that it is claimed led to significant change.
- **Continuity** While historical study often focuses on moments of significant change, students should also be aware that some change is slow, and that throughout history

there is also significant continuity. ... students may question and assess whether a change in political leadership, for example, brought about a change in foreign policy, or whether it was more accurately mirroring policies of previous governments.

- **Causation** Effective historical thinkers recognize that many claims made about the past seek to more thoroughly explain and understand how a certain set of circumstances originated. Deep historical understanding is demonstrated where students recognize that most historical events are caused by an interplay of diverse and multiple causes that require students to make evidence-based judgments about which causes were more important or significant, or which causes were within the scope of individuals to direct and which were not.
- **Consequence** History is the understanding of how forces in the past have shaped future people and societies. Students demonstrate competency as historical thinkers where they understand and can explain how significant events and people have had both short-term and long-lasting effects. Students use evidence and interpretations of those people and events to make comparisons between different points in time, and to make judgments about the extent to which those forces produced long-lasting and important consequences.

This lesson plan furthers the following declared goals of the IB Diploma history program:

- #8. Encourage students to engage with multiple perspectives and to appreciate the complex nature of historical concepts, issues, events and developments
- #9. Promote international-mindedness through the study of history from more than one region of the world
- #10. Develop an understanding of history as a discipline and to develop historical consciousness including a sense of chronology and context, and an understanding of different historical perspectives
- #11. Develop key historical skills, including engaging effectively with sources

This lesson plan covers the following prescribed topics in the “Emergence of democratic states” strand of the IB Diploma history program:

- Conditions that encouraged the demand for democratic reform: aftermath of war and/or political upheaval; political, social and economic factors; external Influences
  - The role and significance of leaders
  - Development of political parties, constitutions and electoral systems; the significance/impact of those developments
- The development of democratic states
  - Factors influencing the evolution of democratic states: immigration; ideology; economic forces; foreign influences
  - Responses to, and impact of, domestic crises
  - Struggle for equality: suffrage movements; civil protests

## Steps in the lesson plan

### Day 1, in-class activity

1. Read this article in class: “Beate Gordon, Long-Unsung Heroine of Japanese Women’s Rights, Dies at 89” By Margalit Fox. *New York Times*, January 1, 2013.  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/02/world/asia/beate-gordon-feminist-heroine-in-japan-dies-at-89.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0&hp&pagewanted=all](https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/02/world/asia/beate-gordon-feminist-heroine-in-japan-dies-at-89.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0&hp&pagewanted=all) It describes the pivotal role played by Ms. Gordon, who in 1946 formed part of the group charged by General Douglas MacArthur to develop a model constitution for recently defeated Japan, which was in fact adopted with few modifications as the Japanese Constitution of 1946. Ms. Gordon drafted the sections which granted a broad set of new rights to Japanese women, including the principle of gender equality.
2. Define Guiding Question: Was Beate Gordon’ work in 1946 really the main cause of Japanese government adopting gender equality?
3. Discuss problem of causation in history
  - a. What is a “cause” in history? “A cause in history is an event, action or omission but for which the whole subsequent course of events would have been significantly different..” W. H. Walsh, *The Philosophy of History*
  - b. What is the relation between causes and a historian’s central activity, of interpreting the traces of the past? “The essence of a historian’s interpretation is the relative significance of one set of causes or of another, and their hierarchy.” E. H. Carr,
4. Re-formulate Guiding Question, to: “What was the relative significance of Beate Gordon’s work in 1946, compared to other causes, in the Japanese government’s adoption of the principle of gender equality?”
5. Discuss two analytical frameworks useful in sorting causes into logical clusters:
  - a. Causes by stage: long-term, medium-term, and short-term
  - b. Causes by level: socio-economic, political, and cultural
  - c. If desired, use this presentation: “Causation in History–Gender Equality in Japan”  
[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1901U5lwaPIVS-tR1x\\_P\\_Y1lw\\_nWV17Tnr8Q-hEseW4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1901U5lwaPIVS-tR1x_P_Y1lw_nWV17Tnr8Q-hEseW4/edit?usp=sharing)
6. As a class, scan through the provided compendium of excerpts from histories of Japan, focused on aspects of women’s history. They are organized by period in Japanese history: Meiji to World War I, Interwar (1918 to 1937), the Pacific War (1937-1945), and Post-World War II. And they include both factual and interpretive statements about women’s history in Japan.
7. As homework, students should read through the excerpts and sort statements by stage and level. They should “copy” and “paste” sentence-level statements onto the appropriate column of the provided Google Documents chart. Students should seek to have at least one statement per “level” and per “stage” on the chart.

## Day 2: In-class activity

1. Divide the class into three groups, with each group tasked to focus on a different historical period: Meiji, interwar, and post-1937.
2. Each group should focus on their assigned period and review how the group members have sorted out statements from the excerpts among the different “level” categories (socio-economic, political, and cultural). Questions to consider: Do all statements belong on the chart? Are they sorted into the most appropriate category? In what way does each statement constitute a cause of the Japanese government adopting the principle of gender equality?
3. By the end of 20 minutes, each group should have hammered out a joint view on which statements belong on the chart, and in which category. Each group should share its results, by pasting its chart onto the shared online Google Documents chart.
4. Project the shared online chart onto the SmartBoard.
5. As a class, each group should share its results, by presenting their portion of the shared online chart and explaining their reasoning.
6. To conclude, each group should summarize what its work indicates about the causes of the Japanese government adopting the principle of gender equality in Japan during its assigned period.
7. As a class, discuss what this exercise indicates about historical causation:
  - a. Was there a single cause of the Japanese government adopting the principle of gender equality in 1946?
  - b. How many causes did the class identify?
  - c. How many causes could we find if we were to dig more deeply into the evidence? [an infinite number]
  - d. Do you think some causes are more significant than others? [Yes. We don't need to agree on which ones are the most significant to agree that some are more significant than others. And the discussion about which are more significant than others is the essence of what historians do!]
8. As homework, students should each prepare an essay outline, answering the Guiding Question, “What was/were the most important cause, or causes, for the Japanese government adopting the principle of gender equality in 1946?”

## **Excerpts from histories of Japan, assigned to students as sources for homework**

### Meiji (1860-1917)

With industrialization the number of women who joined the workforce rose steadily. Since most women workers did so on contract in the textile mills, however, they were not likely to have the background or opportunity to express themselves. Many more women in remote villages and

depressed areas worked along with, and as hard as, their men in coarse and heavy labor, but they too did not provide promising material for a feminist movement. At the same time, however, women became increasingly important in the modern sector, with jobs like telephone operators, ticket collectors, and clerks. (Jansen)

Japanese women (as well as men) responded to the new intellectual currents of the modern era--nationalism, natural rights, social mobility, imperialism, social reform, socialism, communism, and anarchism. During the heady 1880s, Japanese youth, including daring women, sought a new freedom of thought and action, but as Sievers makes clear, by 1889 the Japanese state chased women from the political world, and after 1899, through the civil code and educational policy, it tried to keep women in the gilded cage of the home. As consolation, they were granted indirect influence in the public realm--as the hands that rocked the cradle of future citizens and statesmen. (Uno)

By the end of the Meiji Era, there had taken shape a number of organizations that allowed women to work in public for the good of society without impinging on the male monopoly on political rights. The Red Cross incorporated the wives of peers and bureaucrats into attracts its ranks. Elite women were also recruited into organizations to promote education hygiene and support for the military. The Patriotic Women's Association, founded in 1901, soon had local branches throughout Japan. Although most of these women's organizations mobilized women to act on behalf of the state there were some instances of organized women criticizing the existing order. in 1886 Yajima Kajiko founded the Tokyo Women's Reform Society, which eventually affiliated with the International Women's Christian Temperance Union. The women's reform society petitioned the government regarding social problems such as concubinage and licensed prostitution, both at home and overseas. The members likewise demanded that the government institute monogamy. Women also agitated on behalf of women's political rights. Yakima Kajiko, the writer Shimizu Shikin, and others expressed their outrage in 1890 when women were barred as even observers observers to the newly instituted Diet proceedings, a decision that was soon rescinded. (Hastings)

### Interwar (1918-1937)

In the economic and social realm, scholars have devoted considerable attention the varieties of women's work early 20th century Japan. In the Taisho and early Showa eras, the growth of the national economy created a greater variety of jobs for women. Whereas women constituted only 6.5% of white collar employees in 1930, by 1940 they occupied 15% of such jobs. Margit Nagy and Barbara Sato have explored the experience of women working in newly created urban positions such as telephone operator, bus girl, and office worker. Mariko Tamanoi has drawn our attention to the *komori*, the caretakers of poor rural children. Regine Mathias has illuminated the lives of women coal miners in the early twentieth century. Historians of women have also been attentive to the fact that women continued well into the twentieth century to constitute more than half of the industrial workforce. Women who worked outside the home became objects of fascination to the mass media. Barbara Sato and Marian Silverberg have investigated

the imagined construct of the "modern girl" that flourished in the 1920s, while Silverberg and Elise Tipton have written about the relationship of the modern invention of the café waitress. At a more elite level, women activists, actors, and writers were well-known figures whose pictures and opinions appeared in the mass media. Such public figures were particularly prominent in the pages of women's magazines. (Hastings)

The air of liberation among members of the urban middle class in the years around World War I included a women's movement. It is not surprising that such a movement developed in Japan. Japanese women faced greater obstacles in their struggle for equality than did their counterparts in most developed countries, but it is noteworthy that a movement for women's suffrage was underway as early as 1918 at a time when only Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom had given women the vote. (Jansen)

The feminist effort can probably be dated from 1911, the year Hiratsuka Raicho (1886-1971) launched a movement with its journal, called "Blue Stocking" in evocation of a contemporaneous group in Great Britain. "I am a new woman," its manifesto began. "It is my daily desire to become a true new woman. What is truly and forever new is the sun. I am the sun." In the years that followed "new women" often startled their contemporaries by kicking over the traces of decorum. Hiratsuka first came to public attention with plans for a double suicide with a novelist. He later changed his mind and wrote a novel about their affair. "Byakuren" (White Lotus) was the pen name of a daughter of the nobility, a famous beauty and poetess, who freed herself from a loveless marriage with a Kyushu coal magnate by eloping with Miyazaki Ryusuke, Shinjinkai leader and son of Sun Yat-sen's old friend Miyazaki Toten. Given the number of upper-class women locked into unhappy marriages, it is probably remarkable that there were not more such escapes.... (Jansen)

The Peace Police Law made it possible for women, who had previously been forbidden from engaging in any sort of politics, to begin to attend political meetings. Publishers now responded to the opportunity with women's magazines, and it became possible to launch a campaign for women's suffrage. The lead in this was taken by Ichikawa Fusae (1893-1981), who was prompted to enter the women's movement by witnessing her father's cruel treatment of her mother. Ichikawa was a true pioneer, and entered employment as the first female reporter for a Nagoya newspaper. In 1918 she moved to Tokyo, where she met Hiratsuka Raicho. In 1921 she left for two and a half years of study in the United States. On her return she founded the Women's Suffrage League, which remained in existence until 1940, when wartime restrictions made further efforts... (Jansen)

The efforts of blue stockings to organize women on behalf of women's self-realization was soon followed by women's organizations dedicated to obtaining women's political rights. The victory of the democratic powers in World War I and mass demonstrations at home in 1918 against rising price prices prompted demands for universal manhood suffrage. Whereas in the Freedom and Peoples Rights Movement women had joined and demands for rights not get enjoyed by any Japanese subject, in the Taisho period, women were joining a chorus of

Japanese subjects such as workers and petty bourgeoisie who demanded a voice in the polity to which they were contributing to their wealth as well as their sons. The cause of women's suffrage met with modest success in 1931 when the cabinet of Prime Minister, Hamaguchi Osachi sponsored a bill supporting limited voting rights for women. To be sure, the bills would not have bestowed upon women rights equal to those of men. The Women's Suffrage Movement in fact opposed the bill, which was in any case rejected by the upper House. At Sharon Nolte noted, however, "the bill signified the achievement of legitimacy for women's rights." (Hastings)

The outbreak of the Manchurian Incident on September 18, 1931 marked the beginning of an era when a sense of crisis in Japan delegitimized reformist efforts such as the extension of suffrage to women. The All Japan Women's Suffrage Congress continued to meet, but by 1935, it had retreated from its earlier emphasis on peace and suffrage. The outbreak of full-scale war in China in 1937 prompted mobilization of all national resources and women's organizations to cooperate with the war regime. (Hastings)

#### The Pacific War (1931-1945)

There were also constructive aspects of life in Japan during the war. One, required by the shortage of male workers, was the increasing importance and confidence of women. The need for mobilization and unity led government officials to encourage and consolidate women's organizations as well, and major women leaders were eager to get more government help. The women's struggle for civil rights had, it will be recalled, been soundly defeated in 1931, and the increasing militarization of life thereafter held out little hope for a reverse on that front. Wartime shortages, however, also required frugality and domestic management, and to that effect the cooperation of women was essential. Prominent leaders in women's efforts in turn saw the opportunity offered by the situation. In 1931 the Greater Japan Federation of Women's Associations represented the first step in the rationalization and unification that the war years would bring to other sectors of society. With the China War of 1937 calls for more effective mobilization led to the Women's Patriotic Association (Jansen)

#### Post-WWII (1945-6)

In area after area the heroic narrative has it that reforms thundered down from the Olympus of the Dai Ichi Building [MacArthur's headquarters, but it is clear that the implementation of complex social engineering required the full cooperation of Japanese officials. The Constitution of 1947 might seem an exception to this theme of cooperation. We have already seen how it was rushed to completion by a small team in General Whitney's Government Section. For guidelines they had only a handwritten note, probably from General MacArthur, that has since been lost, specifying quite generally that the emperor was to rule by consent of the people, that war should be abolished and Japan should rely on "higher ideals which are now stirring the world," and that the "feudal system of Japan will cease." The peerage would be abolished, and budgetary affairs arranged "after the British system." By the end of February 1946 group

members had cobbled together a document that met their needs. It opened with a ringing affirmation of human rights with echoes of the Gettysburg Address and, as we have noted, began with the definition of the emperor as the "symbol" of the unity of the nation who derived his powers from the sovereign people. The provision for women's rights was one of thirty-eight that were guaranteed and not "subject to law" as had been true of all rights in the Meiji Constitution. (Jansen)

Under the shadow of military defeat and foreign occupation, the women of Japan acquired legal rights equal to those of men. In December 1945, the Japanese Parliament admittedly under some pressure from the occupation authorities, passed legislation that gave women the right to vote and run for office. Significant numbers of women availed themselves of those rights. On April 10, 1946, in the first election in which women could participate, seventy-nine women stood as candidates and thirty-one won seats. At a time when there were only ten women in the US Congress, these were dramatic results, and there has been a modest degree of scholarly attention to these events. (Hastings)

Women's political rights were granted after the war in 1945. But the story of how they came to be deserves some attention. The main issue here is what Mire Koikari has called the "myth of American emancipation of Japanese women," for this period has often been misunderstood. In the fall of 1945, the head of the Occupation (SCAP) General Douglas MacArthur presented a list of demands to the Japanese government, including the demand that women get the vote. However, feminist leader Ichikawa Fusae and her fellow activists had already been lobbying the Japanese cabinet to grant women's suffrage even before the Occupation arrived. Ichikawa did not want a foreign power to be responsible for granting women the right to vote. The Japanese cabinet was supportive of her initiative. Nevertheless, the subsequent course of events—a revised electoral law granting women the right to vote and stand for office was passed in December 1945—meant that the Occupation could take credit for enfranchising women. This view overlooks the efforts of Japanese women as early as the 1920s as well as their activities in the immediate aftermath of war, as well as the Japanese government's support of their demands. (Anderson)

The question of gender equality also came up in conversations around the postwar constitution. Most familiar to western audiences is the story of Beate Sirota Gordon's role in proposing the gender equality clauses in the postwar Japanese constitution (Articles 14 and 24). At the time, Gordon, who was born in Vienna to Russian-Jewish parents but grew up in Japan, had returned to work for the Occupation as a naturalized American citizen. She was part of a group of Americans charged with the task of rewriting the constitution. Gordon later published her memoir *The Only Woman in the Room* (1997) relating her critical role in writing this legislation. She has been celebrated in some western and Japanese circles ever since. Yet Gordon's story has also been subject to critique from several angles. For example, Mire Koikari sheds lights on Gordon's participation in "imperial feminism," since Gordon portrayed herself and was portrayed by others as liberating Japanese women. As Koikari adds, "In drafting women's rights articles, Gordon tapped into her childhood memory where the Orientalist imagery of oppressed and



helpless Japanese women predominated.” The point here is not to ignore Gordon’s contribution to the constitution for she did indeed draft the gender equality legislation, but rather to place her work in a larger context. In fact, as we saw, Japanese women had been working for political rights for decades. The granting of women’s political rights and guarantees of gender equality cannot be seen as a case where a progressive west granted passive Japanese women political rights. (On a different but related note, acknowledging the agency of Japanese women also means recognizing their complicity in wartime militarism and nationalism, as Koikari emphasizes.) (Anderson)

Sources:

Anderson, Marnie S. “Women in Modern Japanese History” *About Japan: A Teacher’s Resource*, The Japan Society, New York, NY, 2018  
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Jansen, Marius B. *The Making of Modern Japan, Kindle Edition*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, September 11, 2002,

Uno, Kathleen. “Review : Women's History in Japan: A Review Essay. Reviewed Works: ‘Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan’ by Sharon L. Sievers; ‘Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan’ by Mikiso Hane.” *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1990, pp. 112-119. Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4315998>

**Analytical Chart for Homework**

**Causes of Japanese Gender Equality**

	Socio-economic	Political	Cultural
Meiji to World War I (1864-1918)			
Interwar (1918-1937)			

The Pacific War (1937-1945)			
Post-World War II (1945-1946)			

### **Modifications**

More advanced students may be directed to go online to research possible points of evidence in the development of women's history since the Meiji Restoration (instead of just using the assigned readings).

### **Extensions**

Do further research on Beate Sirota Gordon's life, and those of other women mentioned in the sources used in this lesson plan.