

MIRRORS OF MODERNITY, REPOSITORIES OF  
TRADITION: CONCEPTIONS OF JAPANESE  
FEMININE BEAUTY FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO  
THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree

of Master of Arts in Japanese

at the University of Canterbury

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University of Canterbury

2015

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance and support during the preparation of this thesis. Many years after my first encounter with Japanese literature as an undergraduate student at the University of Canterbury, I have been lucky enough to have had my first teacher, Dr. Susan Bouterey, serve as my advisor and mentor for this thesis. Susan scheduled meetings around my work commitments (often volunteering her nights and weekends), read countless drafts, discussed ideas, offered advice, and kept me moving forward with limitless support and encouragement. To her I extend my deepest gratitude. Dr Rachel Payne also read my drafts and offered helpful suggestions which enhanced the interdisciplinary qualities of this project, in particular with regard to Japanese art. I appreciate her continued support and supervision. I would like to thank the University of Canterbury for allowing me to complete this thesis while living in Japan, and the benefactors of the Barbara Mito-Reed Award for providing funding.

**Abstract**

This thesis examines conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, with an emphasis on the Meiji period (1868-1912). Through an examination of artistic, literary and cultural representations of beautiful women during this period, I address changes in representations of Japanese feminine beauty from the Tokugawa to the Meiji periods; the role the Meiji state played in shaping Japanese conceptions of feminine beauty; and Japanese women's response to Western ideals of feminine beauty during the Meiji period. I argue that the Meiji state's employment of the Japanese feminine image to assist its nationalistic agenda, together with the adoption of Western aesthetic values, led to the development of conceptions and representations of feminine beauty during the Meiji period which demonstrate an intricate cultural synthesis and symbiosis, comprising both nostalgia for Japanese tradition and Western aesthetic ideals.

## Notes to the Text

Japanese names traditionally present the surname or family name first, followed by the first or given name. The first full reference to a Japanese artist or author's name in the text will follow this order. Many Tokugawa and Meiji period artists and authors adhered to a Japanese custom in which they were designated by their first name, known as the "artist name". In these cases, all subsequent references to an artist will use the first name (thus Suzuki Harunobu, mentioned later in the text, becomes Harunobu after the initial reference). Where non-English single words and short phrases are cited, these are in italics with no apostrophes, with macrons employed to indicate long vowels. Exceptions are foreign words commonly used in English, and place names such as Kyoto and Osaka. Where available, I have provided titles of artistic and literary works in their original language, followed by their title in English; however a number of artistic works are listed exclusively under English titles in museum or library sources. In instances where only Japanese titles are available I have provided English translations. Following their initial introduction, artistic and literary works are referred to by their English titles. Spelling is standard British. The first word of Japanese titles of artistic and literary works is capitalized, and the remainder of the title given in lower case. The exception is for personal names contained within titles, which are capitalized. Title case is employed for English titles.

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## Introduction

A long history of depictions of *bijin* (beautiful women)<sup>1</sup> exists in Japanese culture. *Bijinga*, images of beautiful women, comprise one of the main themes of the *ukiyo-e*<sup>2</sup> genre of woodblock prints and paintings favoured by Japan's merchant class<sup>3</sup> during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), and *bijin* feature in a variety of Tokugawa literary genres, including *kanazōshi* ('books in common script'), short narratives intended for children, women, and modestly lettered people; *yomihon* ('reading books'), intellectual didactic long fiction; and *ukiyozōshi* ('books of the floating world'), popular fiction commonly set in the licensed pleasure quarters. Although there is evidence to suggest that Japanese conceptions of beauty, many of which originated in the Heian period (794-1185), may have been influenced to some extent by Chinese aesthetic ideals<sup>4</sup>, they remained essentially untouched by external influence throughout the Tokugawa period

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<sup>1</sup> Literally 'beautiful person', *bijin* sometimes referred to males as well as females; however by the end of the eighteenth century it was used almost exclusively to denote women (Brown 5). In this paper I employ the term to refer to women.

<sup>2</sup> Literally 'pictures of the floating world'. The 'floating world' refers to the urban culture which developed in the Yoshiwara licensed pleasure quarters in Edo (present-day Tokyo), the site of numerous brothels and theatres frequented by Japan's merchant class during the Tokugawa period.

<sup>3</sup> The Tokugawa Shogunate established a rigid Confucian social hierarchy intended to stabilize the country which ranked warriors, farming peasants, artisans and merchants in descending order. While the merchant class (*chōnin*) comprised the wealthiest segment of the population, their low social ranking effectively denied them political power, and they turned to art and culture as arenas in which they could participate on an equal basis with the elite upper classes. Ranking above these four classes were the nobility (which included the Emperor, the shogun [military governor] and *daimyō* [lords]), while below were outcast groups including the *eta* (literally 'abundance of filth'), who were often employed as executioners, undertakers, butchers and tanners, occupations which were considered spiritually unclean, and the *hinin* (literally 'non-humans'), a group which typically included ex-convicts and vagrants.

<sup>4</sup> Cho observes that the popularity of translating Chinese literature during this period produced Japanese adaptations of Chinese works, written in *kana*-based Japanese interspersed with Chinese-style expressions, which contained both omissions from the original texts and the addition of details. Descriptions of beautiful women in these works include direct borrowings of Chinese phrases as well as the adaption and addition of phrases to fit the Japanese context in which the works would be read. To what extent these borrowings actually influenced Japanese conceptions of feminine beauty, however, is difficult to ascertain. See chapter 7 for a detailed discussion.

due to Japan's isolation from foreign contact under the policy of *sakoku*.<sup>5</sup> The depictions of beauty contained within Tokugawa artistic and literary sources are thus remarkably consistent, and reveal that Japanese conceptions of feminine beauty were well-established by the end of the Tokugawa period.

The transition from the Tokugawa period to the Meiji period (1868-1912) represented a time of dramatic social and political upheaval in Japan. The signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854 brought an end to the *sakoku* policy and opened the country to Western trade, and Japan experienced an influx of Western images of feminine beauty which differed radically from established Japanese traditions. Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which officially started the deconstruction of the feudal system of rule, the newly-created Meiji state embarked upon a modernisation program in which Japanese women's appearance played a strategic role. My aim in this thesis is to provide a comprehensive study of conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century which addresses changes in representations of Japanese feminine beauty from the Tokugawa to the Meiji periods; the role the Meiji state played in shaping Japanese conceptions of feminine beauty; and the extent to which Japanese women embraced or rejected Western ideals of feminine beauty during the Meiji period. While a body of literature addressing representations of beautiful Japanese women does exist, it remains a relatively unexplored area, and I hope that in some small way this study may help to fill this gap by providing a concise examination of Tokugawa and Meiji conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty and the cultural and political contexts which shaped them. In this study I will be focusing on

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<sup>5</sup> Literally 'locked country', *sakoku* refers to the foreign relations policy enacted by the Tokugawa shogunate from 1633 under which foreigners were forbidden from entering Japan, and Japanese prevented from leaving the country on penalty of death.

conceptions of beauty relating to the female face and physique. Although I do touch briefly on women's hairstyles and clothing, due to the nature of this study as an MA thesis and its attendant limitations in scope I do not discuss these areas in detail; however a more detailed study including these aspects would be interesting and worthwhile.

In the first chapter, I provide an outline of Tokugawa period conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty. Referring to artistic depictions of women in *bijinga*, a genre which comprises one of the main themes of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and paintings, and literary depictions of women in the *kanazōshi*, *yomihon*, and *ukiyozōshi* genres of Japanese fiction, I discuss depictions of women's eyes, eyebrows, noses, mouths, skin, and physique during this period. As this chapter is intended to provide a general background from which to embark upon my examination of Meiji period conceptions of feminine beauty rather than an in-depth study of Tokugawa aesthetic conventions, I refrain from overly-detailed discussion of Tokugawa conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty here.

In the second chapter, I explore the central role women's appearance played in Japan's transition to modernity during the Meiji period (1868-1912). I begin with an examination of the state's construction of a 'new' Japanese womanhood during the early Meiji period. I discuss the employment of the image of Empress Shōken (1849-1914) as a symbol of Western-style beauty and progressiveness, and explore the ways in which upper-class Japanese women embraced this new definition of womanhood through the transformation and occidentalization of their bodies. I then examine the redirection and expansion in the state's attempts to redefine Japanese gender roles during the mid and



late Meiji period through the adoption of Confucian *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother') ideology as the official model for Meiji women. I discuss the state's exaltation of the *jogakusei* (female student) as a symbolic representation of Japanese modernity, and explore the state's employment of the image of the *bijin* both domestically and internationally to further Japan's nationalistic agenda. Referring to depictions of women in *nihonga* (modern Japanese-style painting), *yōga* (Western-style painting) and literature from the Meiji period, as well as cultural representations of women in beauty contests, I consider the ways in which the Japanese female image was shaped both by *ryōsai kenbo* discourse and increasing contact with Western culture, resulting in a Japanese femininity which demonstrates an intricate cultural synthesis and symbiosis.

In the third chapter I examine Meiji aesthetic ideals and cosmetic practices in detail. Drawing on examples from Meiji period artistic (*nihonga bijinga* and *yōga bijinga*) and literary sources, as well as advertising posters and photographs, I compare and contrast depictions of women's eyes, eyebrows, noses, mouths, skin, and physique with those of the Tokugawa period discussed in chapter one, and explore the ways in which Meiji aesthetic ideals were influenced both by the state's nationalistic objectives and by contact with Western culture. Finally, I attempt to draw conclusions.

### *Literature Review*

A number of previous studies examine aesthetic ideals and representations of beautiful Japanese women during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, and these have been invaluable in the compilation of this thesis. I am particularly indebted to Cho Kyo's

work *The Search for the Beautiful Woman* (2012), which provides a detailed examination of changes in traditional aesthetic sense and depictions of feminine beauty in Japan and China. In my examination of artistic representations of Japanese women during the Meiji period, I refer to Norman Bryson's discussion on the central role of the image of women in Japan's transition to modernity in his chapter "Westernizing Bodies: Women, Art, and Power in Meiji *Yōga*" (2003). Kendall Brown's *Dangerous Beauties and Dutiful Wives: Popular Portraits of Women in Japan, 1905-1925* (2011) provided both an analysis and examples of Meiji period *kuchi-e* (frontispiece illustrations). The POLA Research Museum of History's *Bakumatsu-Meiji bijinchō (Late-Tokugawa and Meiji Notebook of Beautiful Women, 2009*, referred to in the text as POLA) has been invaluable both as a source of images of women in the late Tokugawa and Meiji periods and in providing an examination of conceptions of feminine beauty during these periods. *Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa osake no hōkoku gurafitii: Sakatsu korekushon no sekai (Liquor Advertising Graffiti in the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa Periods: The World of the Sakatsu Collection, 2006)* and *Taishō retoro, Shōwa modan hōkoku posutā no sekai: Insatsu gijutsu to hōkoku hyōgen no seika (World of Taishō Retro and Shōwa Modern Advertising Posters: The Essence of Printing Techniques and Advertising Expression, 2007)*, both edited by Tajima Natsuko, are excellent sources of images from Meiji period advertising posters. Terry Bennett's *Photography in Japan: 1853-1912* (2006) contains a wealth of rare, hand-coloured images of Tokugawa and Meiji period women which has been useful in illustrating my discussion.

In examining literary depictions of women, Miya Mizuta Lippit's doctoral dissertation *Figures of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Beautiful Woman in Meiji Japan*

(2002) and her article “Reconfiguring Visuality: Literary Realism and Illustration in Meiji Japan” (2002) are excellent analyses of the Meiji *bijin* as a symbol which serves as a material point of contact between the literary and artistic communities. Mariko Inoue’s article “Kiyokata's *Asasuzu*: The Emergence of the *Jogakusei* Image” (1996), Rebecca Copeland’s “Fashioning the Feminine: Images of the Modern Girl Student in Meiji Japan” (2006), and Indra Levy’s *Sirens of the Western Shore: The Westernesque Femme Fatale, Translation, and Vernacular Style in Modern Japanese Literature* (2006) also provided excellent discussions of the image of *jogakusei* (female student) in Meiji period literature and art.

In examining cultural representations of beautiful Japanese women, Heather McKenzie’s doctoral dissertation *Madame Chrysanthème as an Item of Nineteenth-Century French Japonaiserie* (2004) provided an in-depth discussion of Western perceptions of Japan during the Meiji period. Miya Elise Mizuta’s ““Fair Japan”’: On Art and War at the Saint Louis World's Fair, 1904” introduces the Meiji state’s employment of the image of the *bijin* and the deployment of beautiful Japanese women to international exhibitions and world fairs to disguise Japan’s ascendant image as a military aggressor. Ashikari Mikiko’s articles “The Memory of the Women's White Faces: Japaneseness and the Ideal Image of Women” (2003); “Urban Middle-Class Japanese Women and Their White Faces: Gender, Ideology, and Representation” (2003); and “Cultivating Japanese Whiteness: The ‘Whitening’ Cosmetics Boom and the Japanese Identity” (2005) provided a detailed history of the meaning attached to white skin in Japan. While somewhat dated, Wagatsuma Hiroshi’s “The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan” (1967) also contains an interesting analysis of this. Karen M. Fraser’s chapter “Beauty Battle: Beauty and Portraiture in Late Meiji Japan”

(2012) provides a detailed history of beauty contests in Japan, and Jennifer Weisenfeld's "Selling Shiseido 1: Cosmetics Advertising and Design in Early Twentieth-Century Japan" (2009) introduces the history of Shiseido cosmetic products in Japan. Toby Slade's *Japanese Fashion: A Cultural History* (2009) is an informative examination on the way in which Japan's transition to modernity shaped Japanese aesthetics.

Sharon L. Sievers' *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (1983), and *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945* (1991), edited by Gail Lee Bernstein, both provide excellent general backgrounds on the roles and positions of women in society during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods.

I have limited my use of *bijinga* images to those works found in the collections of museums, galleries, and libraries in Japan, Britain and the United States. These include the British Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harvard Art Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Legion of Honor Art Museum, the Honolulu Museum of Art, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Tokyo National Museum, Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Menard Art Museum, Chiba City Museum of Art, Mizuta Museum of Art, Okada Museum of Art, MOA Museum of Art, Edo-Tokyo Museum, Keio University Library, the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library, Waseda University Library, Waseda University Theatre Museum, the National Diet Library Digital Collections and the Congress Library of Prints and Photographs. All images are reproduced with permission. As illustrations, *bijinga* are artists' interpretations of female beauty rather than true-to-life representations. In addition, *ukiyo-e* as an artistic school possesses its own artistic conventions. *Bijinga*, in line with these conventions, are highly simplified and stylised, particularly with regard to facial features, and

therefore do not represent a true reflection of facial form. As the major source of images of beautiful women during the Tokugawa period, *bijinga* do, however, allow us to draw general conclusions about Tokugawa conceptions of female beauty, and the highly stylised nature of the depictions of facial features acts to highlight the features that were considered beautiful. For these reasons, I believe that *bijinga* constitute a valid source of material for this investigation.

## Chapter One

### Tokugawa Period Conceptions of Japanese Feminine Beauty

The Tokugawa period was a time of rapid urbanization and economic development in Japan.<sup>6</sup> Movement toward a commodity- and monetary-based economy led to the expansion of the merchant class, and during the eighteenth century the population of Edo (present-day Tokyo) grew to one million, making it the largest city in the world (Jones & Watanabe 4). Along with the growth of the merchant class, a thriving popular culture developed in which artistic and literary representations of *bijin* (beautiful women) featured prominently. Developments in printing techniques enabled the mass-production of *bijinga* (images of beautiful women), a genre which comprised one of the main themes of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and paintings. As Salter (2001) explains, the social circumstances in which this art form flourished are important in understanding its attraction to the public. The term *ukiyo-e*, literally ‘pictures of the floating world’, originates from the Buddhist concept of *ukiyo* (‘the floating world’), which refers to the illusory or sensory world and the transitory nature of life. During the Tokugawa period, the wealthy class of merchants in the business areas of Japan’s large cities reinterpreted this idea of *ukiyo* as the enjoyment of all the pleasures of life. With money at their disposal but denied access to the higher forms of art such as Noh theatre or approved schools of painting under the strict rules of Japan’s stratified society, their solution was to create their own alternatives (10), and their patronage saw the development of numerous brothels and theatres which provided the backdrop for *ukiyo-e* works.

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of urbanization during the Tokugawa period see Hall (1955, 37-56).

*Bijinga* were employed in a variety of contexts during the Tokugawa period.

While some were produced with an awareness of sexually oriented consumption (Cho 91) and targeted a male audience, many were designed for a female audience. In addition to their use in the advertising of merchandise and the provision of information on contemporary fashions, hairstyles and makeup to which ordinary women could aspire, they featured in *jokun*, didactic Confucian texts designed for the moral instruction of women.<sup>7</sup> Initially, the majority of *bijinga* either featured or used courtesans as models (Cho 88). Cho explains that in premodern times the term ‘beautiful woman’ was often employed as a euphemism for a courtesan, and as the depiction of a courtesan represented a portrayal of feminine beauty, even women who were not in the entertainment profession were depicted in a style very similar to that of courtesans in early Tokugawa period *bijinga*, sharing the same hairstyles, clothing and makeup (90-91). By the end of the Tokugawa period, however, the range of women depicted in *bijinga* had expanded, and included not only courtesans but also prostitutes, historic figures, fictional characters, notable townswomen, shop girls and non-professional women of all classes (Brown 5).

In this chapter I will examine conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty during the Tokugawa period. Referring to artistic depictions of women in *bijinga* and literary depictions of women in the *kanazōshi*, *yomihon*, and *ukiyo-zōshi* genres of Japanese fiction, I will discuss depictions of women’s eyes, eyebrows, noses, mouths, skin, and

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<sup>7</sup> A well-known example of *jokun* is Kaibara Ekken’s (1630-1714) *Onna Daigaku* (*Great Learning for Women*). For a detailed discussion of this see Sievers 4-5. *Bijinga* artists drew on Confucian teachings in depicting the moral character of their subjects in series such as Kitagawa Utamaro’s (1753?-1806) *Kyōkun oya no megane* (*The Parents’ Moralizing Spectacles*, 1802) and Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s (1797-1861) *Teiso chiyo no kagami* (*Mirror of Eternal Feminine Virtue*, 1843). See Davis (chapter four) for an examination of Utamaro’s works, and Robinson for a discussion of those of Kuniyoshi.

physique during the Tokugawa period. In discussing representations of beautiful women in Tokugawa period literature, some explanation of literary style is necessary. As Cho explains, literary style during the Tokugawa period differed depending upon the intended audience (209). In this study, I have attempted to include depictions of beautiful women in three literary genres which together encompass a wide segment of the Tokugawa population: *kanazōshi* ('books in common script'), short narratives intended for children, women, and modestly lettered people; *yomihon* ('reading books'), intellectual didactic long fiction; and *ukiyozōshi* ('Books of the floating world') popular fiction commonly set in the licensed pleasure quarters which reflected the interests of the burgeoning merchant class. Due to constraints of space I will omit detailed examinations of hairstyles and clothing from my discussion. At no point is it my intention to suggest that notions of feminine beauty during the Tokugawa period were limited to those I introduce here; rather my aim is to identify trends that were evident in the visual and literary media of the period.

### *Eyes*

Women in Tokugawa period *bijinga* are generally portrayed with narrow, upward-slanting eyes and with long-slit, single-edged eyelids<sup>8</sup> reminiscent of the *hikime* (slit eyes) feature of illustration employed in Japanese artworks dating from the Heian period (794-1185).<sup>9</sup> In works by Isoda Koryūsai (1735-1790, fig. 1), Kikugawa Eizan (1787-1867, fig. 2), and Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806, fig. 3), the eyes of the women depicted are so narrow that the iris is partially hidden by the top and bottom eyelids.

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<sup>8</sup> Single-edged eyelids refer to eyelids with an epicanthic fold, which do not fold over themselves when opened as double-edged eyelids do.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of *hikime* in Heian period painting, see Munsterberg (1957, 47).



The narrowness of the eyes is particularly striking when viewed in relation to the length of the women's faces.



Fig. 1. Isoda Koryūsai. *Gifu no bu* (Courtesans). From the series *Ukiyo onna fūzoku shūkō* (*Observations of Female Customs and Manners in the Floating World*). 1770-1780. Area depicting eyes enlarged below image for clarity.

Fig. 2. Kikugawa Eizan. *Furyū kobushi no seichō* (*Young Townswoman Holding a Falcon*). Early nineteenth century.

Fig. 3. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Takashima Ohisa*. (*The Courtesan Takashima Ohisa*). Early nineteenth century.

Tokugawa period commentaries on etiquette and deportment reinforce these criteria for beautiful eyes. Late-Tokugawa cosmetics researcher Sayama Hanshichimaru (date of birth and death unknown), the author of *Miyako fūzoku kawai den* (*Customs, Manners, and Fashions of the Capital*, 1813), noted that large eyes were considered “unsightly” (in Cho 18), and suggested that women should “keep their eyes at eight-tenths level, looking down rather than straight ahead” in order to make their eyes appear downcast and narrow (in Cho 215). Similar descriptions of beautiful female eyes can be found in Tokugawa period literature. In *Botan no tōrō*, popularly known as *Botan dōrō*

(*The Peony Lantern*, 1666),<sup>10</sup> Asai Ryōi (1612-1691) describes a beautiful woman with “slanting eyes” (in Cho 185).

While the majority of visual and textual examples of beautiful feminine eyes during the Tokugawa period depict eyes which are narrow and upward-slanting with long-slit, single-edged eyelids, references to beautiful eyes which do not conform to these criteria can also be found in Tokugawa period literature. In *Kōshoku ichidai onna* (*The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 1686), Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) states criteria for feminine beauty, observing that a woman “should have the most up-to-date good looks...Narrow eyes are not wanted” (trans. Morris 132-133). In *Honchō suikoden* (*Japanese Outlaws of the Marsh*, 1773), Takebe Ayatari (1719-1774) describes a beautiful woman with “eyelids charmingly overlapping” (in Cho 199). Cho notes that cosmetic illustrations in *Customs, Manners, and Fashions of the Capital* (1813) record an eye makeup method with cosmetic illustrations which include double-edged eyelids, and suggests that it was probably known in the Tokugawa period that double eyelids gave brighter looks to the eyes than single eyelids (200). Anthropological evidence also supports the view that criteria for beautiful eyes were not limited to those which were narrow. Conducting research on the skeletons of the women of the Tokugawa family, forensic anthropologist Suzuki Hisashi observes that Tenshin-In (1823-1848), the formal wife of the thirteenth shogun Tokugawa Iesada and a representative beauty of the Tokugawa period, had large eyes (113). Such evidence suggests that aesthetic ideals regarding women’s eyes may have been showing signs of a shift in favour of large eyes and the double-creased eyelids common in Western physiognomy even before widespread contact with Western culture.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Peony Lantern* is an adaptation from *The Account of the Peony Lantern* in the late fourteenth-century Chinese collection *Jiandeng xinhua* (*New Lamp-Wick Trimming Stories*) by Qu You (1341-1427).

### *Eyebrows*

During the Tokugawa period, the ancient Japanese custom of eyebrow removal as part of the coming-of-age ceremony became widespread among women of all classes,<sup>11</sup> and came to symbolise women's married status (Ashikari, "The Memory of the Women's White Faces" 76-77). Literary descriptions of beautiful women from the period make reference to this practice. In *Five Women Who Loved Love* (1685) Saikaku describes "a maiden not more than sixteen or seventeen years old...It seemed at first as if the girl were engaged to be married already, for her... eyebrows [were] removed" (trans. Keene 337). Married women were regarded as being more appealing with their eyebrows removed. In *Shunshoku tatsumi no sono* (*Love-Tinted Garden of Fukagawa*, 1833-1835), Tamenaga Shunsui (1790-1843) remarks that a woman will "shave her eyebrows and tie her hair up with a round chignon, and she'll turn into such a good-looking mature woman" (in Cho 211). Late Tokugawa period author Shikitei Sanba (1776-1822) describes with horror a woman who has kept her eyebrows, noting "she must already be thirty-seven or eight, but she's still with her eyebrows... This is a woman who doesn't shave off her eyebrows when she should, so she's handicapped. True. Kin with monsters, so to speak. Not in the same group as human beings" (in Cho 211). The exception to the eyebrow-shaving trend was the women of the pleasure quarters, for whom eyebrows, which symbolized youth, were an essential factor in their young and beautiful image. Kitagawa Morisada (1810-?), the author of *Morisada mankō* (*Morisada's Rambling Writings*), a comprehensive recording of Tokugawa customs and manners based on first-hand observations and published in 1853, notes that "in Kyoto and Osaka courtesans and young geisha do not shave their eyebrows. Even at a mature

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<sup>11</sup> The circulation of printed images of women depicted in *ukiyo-e* which accompanied increasing urbanization may have contributed to this spread.

age, those women keep their eyebrows” (in Cho 90). As courtesans formed the model for beautiful women in the Tokugawa period, it was common for artists to add in eyebrows when drawing women to emphasize their youth, even when the women depicted were not courtesans. The majority of women in Tokugawa period *bijinga* are thus depicted with eyebrows. Morisada makes reference to this practice:

*Ukiyo-e* artists, who focus on worldly themes, portray beautiful women in certain ways. Today, women between twenty and thirty years of age shave their eyebrows, but in *ukiyo-e* art, eyebrows are intentionally drawn. Without eyebrows, the woman in a picture would seem over forty years old. Thus, this deliberate practice. (in Cho 91)

When female eyebrows are depicted in early Tokugawa period literature, such as those of courtesans and young, unmarried women, they tend to be thick. In *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686), Saikaku notes that a beautiful woman’s eyebrows “should be thick and spaced well apart on either side of the nose” (trans. Morris 132-33). In *The Peony Lantern* (1666) Ryōi compares the crescent shape of a woman’s eyebrows with the bushy *katsura* tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*), introducing a detail not included in the original Chinese text 185-186), and this is echoed in *Udonge monogatari* (*The Tale of Udumbara Flowers*, 1804), in which Kyōden describes a beautiful woman with “eyebrows of katsura” (in Cho 204).

From the mid-Tokugawa period, however, the eyebrows of beautiful women, when depicted, are increasingly portrayed as narrow, a development possibly influenced by depictions of beautiful women in Chinese literature. In *Tsūzoku suiko chūgi-den* (*A Popular Account of Loyal Outlaws of the Marsh*, 1757), Okajima Kanzan (1675-1728) employs the analogy of the thin, delicate willow tree to describe beautiful feminine

eyebrows, retaining a description from Shi Nai'ai's (1296-1372) original Chinese text *Shuihu zhuan* (*Outlaws of the Marsh*, fourteenth century) of a beautiful woman whose “eyebrows resembled willow leaves of early spring” (trans. Cho 196-197), which Santō Kyōden (1761-1816) echoes in his 1801 work *Chūshin suikoden* (*Loyal Retainers: Outlaws of the Marsh*), mentioning a beautiful woman whose “eyebrows are like tender willow of early spring” (in Cho 203). In *Japanese Outlaws of the Marsh* (1773), Ayatari describes a beautiful woman “with eyebrows very slim” (in Cho 199). Kyōden's depiction of the heroine in *Sakurahime zenden akebono sōshi* (*The Full Account of Sakurahime*, 1805), based on Bai Juyi's (772-846) *Changhen ge* (*The Song of Lasting Regret*, ninth century), portrays a beautiful woman with “gently curved” eyebrows (in Cho 204). “Gently curved” eyebrows also appear in Kyōden's *Utō yasukata chūgi den* (*An Account of the Loyal Vassal Utō Yasukata*, 1806) in the description of a daughter who “was a beauty so beyond compare that she could be called the country's finest or a lady of an immortal's appearance” (in Cho 205). In *Chinsetsu yumiharizuki* (*The Crescent Moon*, 1811), Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848) also adopts Chinese conceptions of feminine beauty, praising a woman with “thin eyebrows curved like the moon of the third day” (in Cho 210).

It is clear that aesthetic ideals relating to women's eyebrows underwent significant changes during the Tokugawa period. While the Japanese practice of eyebrow removal to symbolise women's married status became widespread among women of all classes during this period, it appears that when women did keep their eyebrows, aesthetic ideals were increasingly influenced by Chinese conceptions of

feminine beauty, with the thick eyebrows of the early Tokugawa period gradually being replaced by thin, curved eyebrows by the mid-Tokugawa period.

### Nose

Straight noses were regarded as beautiful during the Tokugawa period (Cho 192). Women in *bijinga* from this period are portrayed with narrow, well-formed noses with straight bridges (figs. 4-6). Fig. 6, a work by Katsushika Ōi (1800-1866), the daughter of renowned artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), provides a rare glimpse of a female artist's perspective in depicting feminine beauty. The eyes depicted in these works are narrow and upward-slanting with long-slit, single-edged eyelids, and the eyebrows narrow, conforming to the aesthetic ideals discussed above.



Fig. 4. Isoda Koryūsai. *Hachigatsu shiromuku* (Courtesans Dressed in White in the Eighth Month). From the series *Fūryū jūnisetsu* (Fashionable Twelve Months). 1770-72. Area depicting nose enlarged below image for clarity.

Fig. 5. Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825). *Takashima Hisa (The Beauty Takashima Hisa)*. Early nineteenth century.

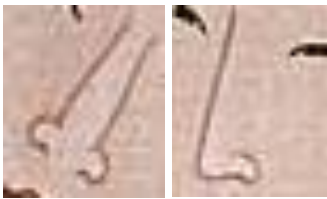


Fig. 6. Katsushika Ōi. *Sankyoku gassō zu (Three Women Playing Musical Instruments)*. Early-mid nineteenth century. Area depicting nose enlarged below image for clarity.

Literary descriptions support these criteria. Morisada states that “because the nose is at the center of the face and catches others’ eyes, it is desirable that its ridge is straight” (in Cho 216). In *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686), Saikaku notes that a beautiful feminine nose “ought to stand fairly high” (trans. Morris 132-133), and describes an ideal courtesan with “a beautiful profile and a straight nose” in *The Life of an Amorous Man* (1682) (in Cho 191). Yanagi Rikyō (1703-1758), a poet, artist, and noted connoisseur of womanhood in the late-eighteenth century, included “a big, flat nose” in his list of objectionable features for women (trans. Wagatsuma 411).



Photographic evidence from the late-Tokugawa period also corresponds with these aesthetic ideals regarding beautiful feminine noses. A photograph of Niimura Nobu (1852-1905, fig 7), consort of Japan's last shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837-1913) and a representative beauty of the Tokugawa period shows her to be straight-nosed (Cho 218). The similarity of this narrow, straight-bridged nose to the high-bridged nose commonly seen in Western physiognomy may have helped to lay the foundation for the acceptance of Western aesthetic ideals during the Meiji period.



Fig. 7. Niimura Nobu. Ca.1860.

### *Mouth*

The attention given to the mouth in both Tokugawa period *bijinga* and literature demonstrates the importance of this feature in determining feminine beauty. Women in *bijinga* are generally depicted with small, button-shaped mouths. Rikyō included “thick lips” in his list of undesirable qualities in women (trans. Wagatsuma 411), and Saikaku lists “a small mouth” as one of his criteria for feminine beauty in his 1686 work *The*



*Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686) (trans. Morris 132-133). Rouge (*beni*), made from pigment extracted from safflowers, formed an essential element of women's cosmetics during the Tokugawa period (Ashikari, "The Memory of the Women's White Faces" 64). A light application of lip rouge was generally regarded as a mark of refinement, although during the late Tokugawa period a heavier application which created an iridescent effect enjoyed popularity.<sup>12</sup> Depictions of women applying or wearing red lip rouge appear frequently in Tokugawa period *bijinga*. Works by Utamaro (fig. 8) and Torii Kiyomine (1787-1868, fig. 10) depict women applying rouge with a brush, while a print by Katsukawa Shunchō (active 1783-1795, fig. 9) shows rouge being applied with the fingers. The mouths of the women depicted in these works appear relatively small in proportion to the size of their faces, a look which was achieved by partly covering the lower lips with white powder before applying rouge so as to make them appear smaller (Wagatsuma 436). The eyes, narrow eyebrows and noses depicted in these works also provide further examples of the aesthetic ideals discussed above.

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<sup>12</sup> Japan Cosmetic Industry Association (*Nihon Keshōhin Kōgyō Rengō Kai*). Web. 18 March 2013.



Fig. 8. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Oiran (High-ranked Courtesan)*. From the series *Hokkoku goshiki-zumi (Five Shades of Ink in the Northern Quarter)*. 1794-95.

Fig. 9. Katsukawa Shunchō. *Tea-house girl Takashima Ohisa seen in her mirror about to apply rouge to her lips*. 1792-1793.

Fig. 10. Torii Kiyomine. *Girl Applying Rouge to her Lips with a Brush*. Early nineteenth century.

Descriptions of red lips appear in Tokugawa period literature. In *Five Women Who Loved Love* (1685), Saikaku describes “a lady known as the Almanac-maker’s Beautiful Spouse, [whose] lovely lips looked like the topmost leaves of Takao in full autumnal glory” (trans. Keene 335). In *Japanese Outlaws of the Marsh* (1773), Ayatari

mentions a beautiful woman with “lips deep red” (in Cho 199); and in *Loyal Retainers: Outlaws of the Marsh* (1801), Kyōden depicts a beautiful woman whose “cherry-like mouth lightly assumes a soft red shade” (in Cho 203).

In addition to red lips, green bottom lips also enjoyed popularity during the Tokugawa period. Women coloured their lower lip with *sasabeni*, a mixture of green from the bamboo (*sasa*) plant and red rouge (*beni*), which imparted a shimmering effect. This trend is also visible in Tokugawa period *bijinga* (figs. 11-13). Fig. 13, by Katsushika Ōi, provides an excellent example of a depiction of feminine beauty from the point of view of a female artist. While the depictions of eyes and noses in these three works support the aesthetic ideals discussed above, as do the depictions of narrow eyebrows in figs. 12 and 13, it is interesting to note that the eyebrows of the woman depicted in fig. 11 are thick, and do not appear to have been shaved. This suggests that while aesthetic trends from the mid-Tokugawa period tended to favour narrow eyebrows, not all representations of beautiful women conformed to this.

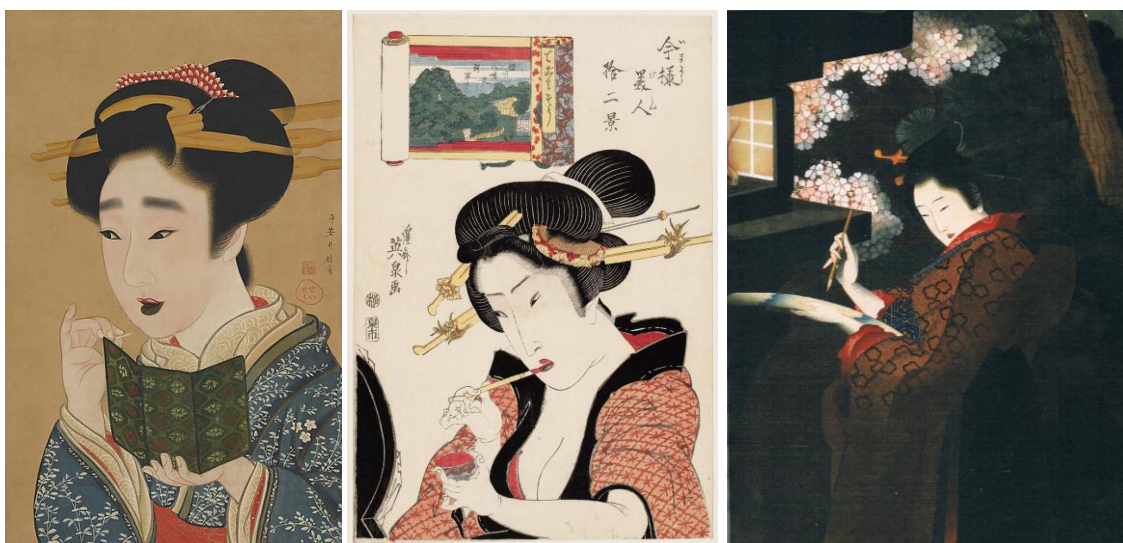




Fig. 11. Gion Seitoku (1755-1815). *Keshō bijin zu* (Woman Applying Makeup). Late eighteenth-early nineteenth century.

Fig. 12. Keisai Eisen (1790-1848). *Tegowasō: Fukagawa hachiman no shin fuji* (Tough-looking: The New Mount Fuji at the Fukagawa Hachiman Shrine). From the series *Twelve Views of Modern Beauties* (*Imayō bijin jūni kei*). 1822-23.

Fig. 13. Katsushika Ōi. *Yozakura bijin-zu* (Beauty with Cherry Blossoms at Night). 1850s. Area depicting lips enlarged below image for clarity.

During the Tokugawa period the ancient custom of *ohaguro*, tooth-blackening, which was associated with puberty rites among girls of the warrior class, came to symbolize married status among commoner women.<sup>13</sup> In *Five Women Who Loved Love* (1685), Saikaku describes “a maiden not more than sixteen or seventeen years old...It seemed at first as if the girl were engaged to be married already, for her teeth were blackened” (trans. Keene 337). Tooth-blackening was also prevalent among courtesans and prostitutes. Morisada noted that “in Kyoto and Osaka courtesans and young geisha dye their teeth alike” (in Cho 90). Women used a combination of *fushi* powder, made from the gall nuts of the Japanese sumac tree, and *tesshō* (‘iron juice’), created by

<sup>13</sup> The origin of *ohaguro* is unknown. Some studies suggest that it had already been an ‘indigenous’ custom among the Japanese people before the assimilation of Chinese civilization in the fifth and sixth centuries, but currently no definite proof of this exists. Heian literature suggests that *ohaguro* was originally associated with coming-of-age ceremonies for upper-class girls, at which time girls blackened their teeth, drew their eyebrows and changed their hairstyle for the first time. By the end of the Tokugawa period, the make-up style of teeth blackening as a part of the coming-of-age ceremony had become widespread among women of all classes, with the exceptions of outcaste women, and Tokugawa townswomen started to blacken their teeth when they got engaged or married (Ashikari 76-77). As with eyebrow removal, the circulation of printed images of women depicted in *ukiyo-e* which accompanied increasing urbanization may have contributed to the spread of this custom. For a detailed discussion of *ohaguro*, see Ashikari (66-67); Ema (179) and Casal (5-27).

heating iron scraps and plunging them in an acidic mixture of tea, vinegar and rice wine to create a stain that was applied to the teeth with a brush (see Slade 116; Wagatsuma 436). The dye also assisted in the prevention of tooth decay (DeMello 288). Depictions of *ohaguro* can be found in Tokugawa period *bijinga*. A print by Suzuki Harunobu (1725?-1770, fig. 14) shows a woman in the process of blackening her teeth; a work by Utamaro (fig. 15) features a woman admiring her blackened teeth; and in a work by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861, fig. 16), the contrast in colour between the blackness of the woman's teeth and her rouged lips is particularly striking. The eyes, narrow eyebrows, and noses depicted in these works conform to the aesthetic ideals discussed above.



Fig. 14. Suzuki Harunobu. *Ohaguro o tsukeru yūjo* (*The Courtesan Senzan Blackening her Teeth*). 1765-1770.

Fig. 15. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Omoshirosō* (*Looking Funny*). From the series 'Ten Types in the Physiognomic Study of Women (*Fujin sōgaku jittai*)'. 1792-93. Area depicting lips enlarged below image for clarity.



Fig. 16. Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *Iki kujira* (Whales from Iki). From the series *Sankai medetai zue* (Celebrated Treasures of Mountains and Seas). 1852. Area depicting lips enlarged below image for clarity.

Highlighting the essential role of the teeth in determining feminine beauty, Saikaku recounts the way in which “a woman of exquisite taste”, initially regarded as “a prize for some lucky fellow” left her admirers completely disillusioned when they realised that one of her lower teeth was missing in *Five Women Who Loved Love* (1685) (trans. Keene 336). Examples of the importance of oral hygiene can also be found in Tokugawa period *bijinga*. A print by Kuniyoshi (fig. 17) shows a woman cleaning her teeth with a toothbrush. Her eyes, narrow eyebrows, nose and lips all provide representative examples of the aesthetic ideals discussed above.



Fig. 17. Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *Ishibe* (Ishibe Station: Woman Cleaning her Teeth). From the series *Tōkaidō gojūsantsui* (Fifty-three Pairings along the Tōkaidō Road). 1845.

### *Skin*

The aesthetic ideal of white skin in Japan predates the introduction of Western notions of beauty. Wagatsuma observes that the Japanese valued “white” skin as

beautiful long before any sustained contact with Caucasoid Europeans (407), and Cho also notes the existence of this view prior to Japan receiving influence from the West (216). During the Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1185) periods, the whiteness of untanned skin symbolized the nobility, who resided at the Imperial court and were spared any form of outdoor labour. Court ladies applied white powder to their faces, and numerous references are made in Heian period illustrations and literature to women with smooth, white skin (Wagatsuma 408). In *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, early eleventh century), Murasaki Shikibu (c. 973 or 978 - c. 1014 or 1031) mentions a beautiful woman whose “color of skin was very white”, and in *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* (*The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*, early eleventh century) she depicts both Lady Dainagon and Lady Naiji as being white-skinned, noting that Lady Naiji had “beauty and purity, a fragrant white skin with which no one else can compete” (in Wagatsuma 407-408).

By the early Tokugawa period there were elaborate treatises on etiquette and deportment for women that also gave detailed instructions on the proper use of cosmetics, and the custom of painting one’s face and neck with a white, lead-based<sup>14</sup> pigment containing rice powder (*oshiroi*) was considered a woman’s moral duty. In *Onna chōhōki* (*Women’s Treasure Trove*, 1692), a text designed to educate samurai

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<sup>14</sup> Lead toxicity appears to have been common among the upper classes in Tokugawa period Japan. After testing the bones of seventy people from a samurai burial place in the ancient city of Kokura (current day Kitakyushu), scientists at the University of Occupational and Environmental Health in Kitakyushu determined that the women in the group had higher lead levels than the men, while the children’s levels were up to fifty times higher than those of their parents. The most elevated levels was discovered in children under the age of three, likely passed through close contact with the lead powders their mothers wore, and reached a median of 1241 micrograms of lead per gram of dry bone, or more than one hundred and twenty times the minimum amount now believed to cause neurological disorders, behavioral problems and severe intellectual impairment. Several rulers during the Tokugawa period were also afflicted with mysterious disorders that are consistent with lead toxicity. See Nakashima for a detailed discussion.

class women, Namura Jōhaku (1674-1748) declares that “putting white powder on the face is a law which all women should obey. White powder is not only for make-up, nor only decorating yourself. Since you were born a woman, you should not show your face without white powder even for just one day in your life” (in Ashikari, “The Memory of the Women’s White Faces” 64-65).<sup>15</sup> Wagatsuma observes that during the early Tokugawa period this remained a custom of women in the cultural centres of Kyoto and Osaka, while women in Edo used powder sparingly; however from the early nineteenth century, under the influence of fashion from Kyoto and Osaka, Edo women’s makeup also became thicker (437-438).

References to pale skin as a marker of feminine beauty are found throughout Tokugawa period literature. Cho explains that the metaphor of beautiful white skin “rivaling the snow” originated in Chinese vernacular fiction (209); while comparisons of women’s complexions to “pinks” represent a traditionally favoured metaphor in Japan absent in Chinese literature (202). In *The Life of an Amorous Man* (1682), Saikaku describes an ideal courtesan as having “skin that rivals the snow in whiteness” (in Cho 191); and in *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686), he praises a beauty who “embellishes her face discreetly with light powder” (trans. Morris 108) and “a beautiful woman with...skin with a faint pink color” (215). In *Japanese Outlaws of the Marsh* (1773), Ayatari describes a beautiful woman with “a face white and shiny who made the other women present [seem] darker than mountain crows on the snow” (in Cho 199). In *Loyal Retainers: Outlaws of the Marsh* (1801), Kyōden describes a beautiful woman with “snow-white skin” (in Cho 203). In *Shunshoku ume goyomi (The Love-Tinted Plum Calendar, 1832-1833)*, Shunsui depicts a woman whose neck is “whiter than snow” (in

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed explanation of the history of *oshiroi*, see Wagatsuma (438) and Ema (52-78).



Cho 209), and observes that another woman is lucky that her skin is white (in Cho 210). In *The Crescent Moon* (1811), Bakin describes a woman with “skin so very white that it could rival the snow” (in Cho 208). Wagatsuma notes that Rikyō listed “black skin” as a “disagreeable feature” for a woman, contrasting it with the “amiable” feature of white skin. He explains that Tokugawa women made constant use of parasols or face hoods to hide their skin from sunlight, and polished their skin with a cloth bag containing rice bran or the droppings of the Japanese nightingale in order to increase its whiteness and smoothness (410-411). Shunsui makes reference to this practice in *The Love-Tinted Plum Calendar* (1832-1833), describing a courtesan whose “light makeup, with white powder called Immortal Woman’s Scent applied to the skin polished with rubbing bran, is particularly elegant” (in Cho 209). Wagatsuma observes that when a woman’s constant care of her skin achieved desired results, she would enjoy such praise as “Her face is so smoothly shiny that it seems ready to reflect”, “Her face can compete with a mirror”, and “Her face is so shiny as to make a well-polished black lacquered dresser feel ashamed” (411). Numerous Tokugawa period *bijinga* depict women applying white face powder (figs. 18-20).



Fig. 18. Yanagawa Shigenobu (1787-1832). *Kyōka momochidori ehon* (*Kyōka about Myriad Birds: A Picture Book*). Late eighteenth century.

Fig. 19. Tamagawa Shūchō (1789-1804). *Furyu kesho kagami* (*Mirror of Elegance*). Late eighteenth century.



Fig. 20. Keisai Eisen. *Bien senjokō* (*Woman Putting on Face Powder*). 1820-22.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, *bijinga* were employed in the advertising of merchandise and in providing information on fashionable styles to which ordinary women could aspire. The history of the sale of whitening cosmetics can be traced back to the Tokugawa period (Ashikari, “Cultivating Japanese Whiteness” 89). Pollack notes

that many prints by Kunisada, Kuniyoshi, and Eisen depict beautiful women using well-known cosmetic products such as *Senjokō* (also known as *Sennyokō*), *Kumonoue* and *Kumoinokō* white base ointments (85), concoctions that promised “to turn the skin as white as the snow found on the peaks of high mountains” (Wagatsuma 411). *Bien Senjokō*, a medicated white face powder released in 1807, attained lasting fame by doing advertising tie-ins with a publisher of *ukiyo-e* prints (Nakada 35), and is depicted in prints by Utagawa Kunisada (fig. 21) and Eisen (fig. 22). References to this product can also be found in Tokugawa period literature. Shunsui mentions *Bien Senjokō* as being “the best white powder in Edo” in *Shunshoku koi no shiranami* (*The Love-Tinted White Wave*, 1839-41) (Nakada 35).



Fig. 21. Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865). *Ekyōdai chūshingura rokudaime* (*Chūshingura Matching Pictures: Act Six*). Late eighteenth century.

Fig. 22. Keisai Eisen. *Bien senjokō* (*Fairy Lady Face Powder*). From the series *Tōto meisan tsukushi* (*Famous Products of the Eastern Capital*). Early nineteenth century.

Facial lotion, which was applied under white face powder to protect the skin from its lead content, was also popular during the Tokugawa period. Nakada refers to a lotion named *Edo no mizu* (‘Water of Edo’), which sold so well that an imitation, called *Nise*

*no mizu* ('Imitation Water') appeared (33). 'Imitation water' is depicted in an 1842 illustration by Shikitei Kosanba (1812-1853) (fig. 23).



Fig. 23. Shikitei Kosanba. *Nigiwai shikitei hanei sugoroku* (Prosperous Shikitei prospering at sugoroku [a traditional Japanese board game played with dice]). 1842.

The fact that white skin continued to be regarded as an essential element of feminine beauty throughout the Tokugawa period may have been assisted, at least in part, by commercial interests. The development of cosmetics such as white base ointments and facial lotions, and the use of *bijinga* to advertise them, provided women with models to which they could aspire and facilitated the spread of this aesthetic ideal to the general population.

### *Physique*

Depictions of women's physique in early Tokugawa period *bijinga* correspond with the aesthetic values of the Heian period (794-1185), when roundness and plumpness of face and body, which carried associations of affluence, social standing and nobility, were presented as characteristics of beautiful women in Japanese-language

narrative literature and picture scrolls (Cho 149; Wagatsuma 408). *The Tale of Genji* (early eleventh century) contains a description of a beautiful woman who is “plump with an attractive face”, and in *The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu* (early eleventh century) Lady Dainagon is described as being “beautifully round” (in Wagatsuma 408).

Heian period aesthetic values relating to the female physique survived through the following centuries. Standards of feminine beauty during the Muromachi period (1336-1573) continued to emphasize corpulence of body, and preference was voiced for woman with round faces (Wagatsuma 409). In *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*, 1330-1332), author and Buddhist monk Yoshida Kenkō (1283?-1350?) describes how the magician of Kume lost his magic power after looking at the white leg of a maiden washing clothes in a river, and explains that “this may well have been because the white limbs and skin of a woman cleanly plump and fatty are no mere external charms but true beauty and allure” (in Wagatsuma 409).

Describing criteria for feminine beauty in *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686), Saikaku observes that a woman “should have the most up-to-date good looks—that is, the face slightly rounded” (trans. Morris 132-133). Examples of beautiful women with round faces can be found in *bijinga* prints (figs. 24-26).



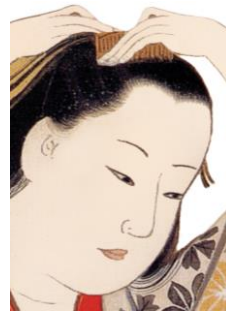


Fig. 24. Torii Kiyonobu (1664-1729). *Kayagai no danjo* (Courtesan and Guest with Mosquito Net). Early eighteenth century. Area depicting face enlarged below image for clarity.

Fig. 25. Miyagawa Chōshun (1683-1753). *Endai bijin zu* (Courtesan Seated on a Bench). Early eighteenth century.



Fig. 26. Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815). *Kesa gozen* (*This Morning*). From the series *Wakoku bijn ryakushū* (*Modern Versions of Japanese Beauties*). 1781.

From the mid-Tokugawa period a shift in aesthetic ideals occurred, and oval faces began to be favoured over round faces (Cho 216). Late eighteenth century poet Rikyō noted that a disagreeable feature for a woman was a large face, while “a small and well-shaped face” was considered an “amiable feature” (in Wagatsuma 410-411). Women depicted in *bijinga* from the mid-Tokugawa period onwards are generally depicted with long, slender oval faces. Prints by Eizan (fig. 27), Kunisada (fig. 28), and Eisen (fig. 29) represent this aesthetic change.



Fig. 27. Kikukawa Eizan. *Woman Writing a Letter*. From the series *Furyū gosetsu kachō awase (Elegant Pictures with Birds and Flowers for the Five Seasons)*. 1810-15.

Fig. 28. Utagawa Kunisada. *Odori shishō (Dance Teacher)*. From the series *Tōsei bijin awase (Contest of Present-day Beauties)*. 1827.

Fig. 29. Keisai Eisen. *Kagami no mae ni suwaru jūjo (Woman in front of a Mirror)*. From the series *Ukiyo fūzoku mime kurabe (A Contest between Contemporary Beauties)*. Mid-nineteenth century.

Both anthropological and photographic evidence support the equation of an oval-shaped face with beauty. Cho notes that in the early years of the Tokugawa shogunate, political considerations often dominated the choice of formal wives, but from the third generation onwards the stability of the shogunate removed this necessity, allowing appearance to factor into selection. There were, furthermore, no political constraints in the selection of consorts from the beginning of the Tokugawa period, and many consorts came from commoner families and were chosen for their beauty (6). Forensic anthropologist Suzuki Hisashi observes that Tenshin-In (1823-1848), the formal wife of the thirteenth shogun Tokugawa Iesada (1824-1858) and a representative beauty of the Tokugawa period had an oval face, and suggests that the features of shogun consorts were similar to those of women portrayed in Tokugawa period *ukiyo-e* woodblock



prints (113). Cho supports this observation, noting that the aforementioned Niimura Nobu was oval-faced (218, fig. 7).

Mirroring the change in aesthetic ideals relating to faces from round and plump to oval and narrow was a shift in the type of female body that was regarded as beautiful. Wagatsuma discusses the changes that occurred in ideals of feminine beauty during this period, noting that “gradually, slim and fragile women with slender faces...began to be preferred to the plump, pear-shaped ideal that remained dominant until the middle of the eighteenth century” (409). Cho concurs, observing that from the mid-Tokugawa period onward tallness and slenderness, which represented new aesthetic ideals (199), were generally regarded as the standard for female beauty (192). As is the case for the shift from thick to narrow, curved eyebrows, this development may also be linked to the influence of Chinese aesthetic ideals. Cho notes that metaphors comparing beautiful women to willow trees can be traced to *The Song of Lasting Regret* (ninth century), but are also often seen in literary Chinese fiction (186). In *The Peony Lantern* (1666), Ryōi describes a beautiful woman whose “body shape of willow was delicate” (in Cho 185), and in *The Crescent Moon* (1811), Bakin describes a beautiful woman whose “waist of willow [was] supple” (in Cho 206).

*Bijinga* prints from the early to mid-Tokugawa period feature depictions of women who are solidly-built and plump. The women depicted in prints by Kiyonobu (fig. 30), Kaigetsudō Ando (1671-1743, fig. 31), and Tsuneyuki (1677-?1744, fig. 32) have body-types referred to as *rokutōshin*, which indicates a body a body six times longer than the length of the head. Literature from the early and mid-Tokugawa period also contains examples of these aesthetic ideals. Describing an ideal courtesan in *The*

*Life of an Amorous Man* (1682), Saikaku notes that she is “graceful and plump” (in Cho 191).



Fig. 30. Torii Kiyonobu. *Tachi bijin zu* (*A Popular Beauty*). 1703.

Fig. 31. Kaigetsudō Ando. *Yūjo to kamuro zu* (*Courtesan with a Child Attendant*). Early eighteenth century.

Fig. 32. Kawamata Tsuneyuki. *Yūjo to kamuro zu* (*Courtesan with a Child Attendant*). Mid-eighteenth century.

From the mid-Tokugawa period, these images were gradually replaced by representations of *hattōshin bijin*, beautiful women with well-proportioned bodies eight times longer than their heads. Works by Shunshō (fig. 33), Utagawa Toyohiro (1773-1828, fig. 34) and Eizan (fig. 35) all portray women with this elongated body-type.



Fig. 33. Katsukawa Shunshō. *Bijin kanshō zu* (*Appreciation of Beauties*). Mid-eighteenth century.



Fig. 34. Utagawa Toyohiro. *Woman Putting on Finger Plectrums to Play the Koto*. Early nineteenth century.



Fig. 35. Kikukawa Eizan. *Furyū yusuzumi sanbijin* (*Three elegant women enjoying the evening cool*). 1810-20.

References to women's height can also be found in Tokugawa period literature. In *The Life of an Amorous Man* (1682), Saikaku describes the courtesans Ōhashi, who is “tall and beautiful”; Asazuma, who is “tall with a charming way of carrying herself”; and Seyama, whose “petite figure is a flaw” (in Cho 192); and in *The Life of an*

*Amorous Woman* (1686) he notes when listing criteria for feminine beauty that a woman's body "should be taller than average" (trans. Morris 132-133).

In Heian period literature slender fingers often served as a metaphor for a beautiful woman (Cho 151-152), and this trend continued into the Tokugawa period (Cho 199), with the addition of slender limbs, hands, feet, and even fingernails. According to *Customs, Manners, and Fashions of the Capital* (1813), dainty hands and feet were regarded as "indications of feminine beauty" (Cho 216). In *Customs, Manners, and Fashions of the Capital* (1813), Sayama states that "when hands and feet are delicately slender and gracefully supple, that is called an indication of beauty", and introduces cosmetic methods for making hands and feet slender, detailing massage methods in sections such as "How to Make Fat Fingers of Hands and Feet Slender, Knuckled and Hard Fingers Tender, and Short Fingers Longer" and "How to Make Hands and Feet White and Glossy, Fat Hands Slender and Supple" (in Cho 201). Wagatsuma discusses the use by Tokugawa period women of rings and socks during sleep to stunt excessive growth of extremities in accordance with the value attributed to small hands and feet as attributes of feminine charm, a practice referred to by Saikaku in *The Life of an Amorous Man* (1682) (410; Cho 201).<sup>16</sup> Saikaku also mentions slim hands and feet in *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686) when listing criteria for feminine beauty, noting that fingers should be "long and slim, with thin nails. The length of the feet is fixed at size eight and three-tenths, the big toe curved so that you can see its underside" (trans. Morris 132-133). In *Japanese Outlaws of the Marsh* (1773), Ayatari describes a beautiful woman whose "limbs were slender and graceful"

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<sup>16</sup> While the Chinese practice of foot binding was not practiced in Japan, it is possible that the aesthetic value placed on small feet during the Tokugawa period stems in part from the influence of Chinese conceptions of feminine beauty which favoured small feet.



(in Cho 199), and the “slender nails” of another, who he described as “particularly clean and graceful” (240). In *Loyal Retainers: Outlaws of the Marsh* (1801), Kyōden describes a beautiful woman whose “hands of spring bamboo extend tender fingers” (in Cho 203). Cho notes that Bakin and Shunsui also equate slim fingers with feminine beauty (201). Many *bijinga* depict women holding an object such as a letter, a brush, a fan, an umbrella, or a pipe, or playing games or musical instruments to emphasise the suppleness and beauty of their slender white fingers (figs. 36-38).



Fig. 36. Suzuki Harunobu. *Hagi no tamagawa, ōmi no meisho, toshiyori* (*The Jewel River of Bush Clover, a Famous Place in Ōmi Province*), from the series *Mu tamagawa* (*Six Jewel Rivers*). 1766-67.

Fig. 37. Isoda Koryūsai. *Bosetsu* (*Twilight Snow: Karauta of the Ōgiya*). From the series *Seirō bijin hakkei* (*Eight Views of Beauties of the Pleasure Quarters*). 1776-81.

Fig. 38. Kikukawa Eizan. *Shōgatsu* (*Playing Cards at New Year*). From the series *Fūryū gosekku* (*Fashionable Five Festivals*). 1809.

Breasts and hips were not regarded as objects of beauty during the Tokugawa period. Cho explains that while erotic literature sometimes praised wide hips, they were not, at least publicly, regarded as aesthetic objects. Some examples of large breasts can be found in *ukiyo-e* art from this period, but the number is limited, and no fantasy about well-developed breasts seems to have existed (216). On the contrary, women attempted

to disguise their body line with their dress and deportment. A section from *Customs, Manners, and Fashions of the Capital* (1813) on “How to Conceal Protruding Hips to Look Good” introduces appropriate postures and dress so as to de-emphasize the hips, and warns that “even if a person is by and large good-looking, protruding hips make her deportment greatly inferior and unattractive” (in Cho 216-217). Cho observes that in addition to breasts and hips, long legs were not regarded as a criterion for feminine beauty in the Tokugawa period (217). The nape of the neck, however, being one of the few parts of the female body left uncovered by kimono, was regarded as highly erotic and beautiful, and many *bijinga* prints emphasise this part of the female body (figs. 39-41). Saikaku also discusses the beauty of women’s necks. In *Five Women Who Loved Love* (1685), he mentions “a lady of thirty-four or thirty-five with a graceful long neck” (trans. Keene 336-337), and in *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (1686) he notes that “the nape of the neck should be slender and free from any stray wisps of back hair” when listing criteria for feminine beauty (trans. Morris 132-133).



Fig. 39. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Takashima Ohisa (Takashima Ohisa)*. 1795.

Fig. 40. Katsushika Hokusai. *Natsu no asa (A Summer Morning)*. 1804-13.

Fig. 41. Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *Eri o nukitai (Wanting to Tweeze the Nape of the Neck)*. From the series *Sankai medetai zue (Celebrated Treasures of Mountains and Seas)*. 1852.

Representations of beautiful women in Tokugawa artistic and literary sources provide a remarkably detailed and consistent picture of conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty during this period. Tokugawa aesthetics generally favoured narrow, upward-slanting eyes and long-slit, single-edged eyelids, and the majority of depictions of beautiful women from this period correspond to this ideal. There are, however, references to beautiful feminine eyes which do not conform to these criteria, suggesting that aesthetic ideals regarding women's eyes may have been showing signs of a shift in favour of large eyes and double-creased eyelids even before contact with Western culture. The customs of eyebrow-shaving and tooth-blackening became widespread among women of all classes during the Tokugawa period, and came to symbolise women's married status. The exception to the eyebrow-shaving trend was women of the pleasure quarters, for whom eyebrows symbolized youth and beauty. Early-Tokugawa period depictions of feminine eyebrows tend to portray them as thick, however from the mid-Tokugawa period a shift toward narrow eyebrows is evident, a development possibly influenced by depictions of beautiful women in Chinese literature. Narrow, straight-bridged noses similar in appearance to the high-bridged nose commonly seen in Western physiognomy were regarded as beautiful during the Tokugawa period, and may have helped to lay the foundation for the acceptance of Western aesthetic ideals during the Meiji period. Tokugawa aesthetics favoured small, button-shaped mouths, and

women minimized the size of their lower lip with powder before applying red or green rouge.

The ancient Japanese aesthetic ideal of white skin continued to be regarded as an essential characteristic of feminine beauty, and was further reinforced during the Tokugawa period by the development of commercial interests in cosmetic products including white facial powder and lotions which protected the skin from the powder's lead content. The use of *bijinga* to advertise these products provided women with models to which they could aspire and facilitated the spread of this aesthetic ideal to the general population. Early-Tokugawa depictions of women present roundness and plumpness of face and body, which carried associations of affluence, social standing and nobility, as desirable characteristics. From the mid-Tokugawa period, however, a shift in aesthetic ideals occurred, and slim and fragile women with slender faces came to be favoured over plump women with round faces, a development which may be linked to the influence of Chinese aesthetic ideals. Slender limbs, hands, fingers and feet, as well as long necks also came to symbolize feminine beauty.

Having provided a general overview of Tokugawa period conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty, in the following chapter I will explore the central role women's appearance played in Japan's transition to modernity. I will examine the state's construction of a 'new' Japanese womanhood during the early Meiji period and explore the ways in which upper-class Japanese women embraced this through the transformation and occidentalization of their bodies. I will discuss attempts by the State to further redefine Japanese gender roles during the mid and late Meiji period through the adoption of Confucian *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother') ideology as the



official model for Meiji women and the exaltation of the *jogakusei* (female student) as a symbolic representation of Japanese modernity. Referring to depictions of women in Meiji period *nihonga* (modern Japanese-style painting), *yōga* (Western-style painting) and literature, I will explore the ways in which the female image was shaped both by *ryōsai kenbo* discourse and increasing contact with Western culture, resulting in a Japanese femininity which embodied a complex hybridity. I will examine the employment of the image of the *bijin* both domestically through the medium of beauty contests and internationally in response to the Japonism movement in the West during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and discuss the way in which the beautiful woman became one of the primary figures through which Japan presented itself to the West.

## Chapter Two

### Meiji Period Conceptions of Japanese Feminine Beauty

#### *Early Meiji Period: Empress Shōken*

The transition from the Tokugawa to the Meiji period represented a time of dramatic cultural and political upheaval in Japan. Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which officially ended the feudal system of government, the newly-created Japanese state embarked upon a comprehensive modernization program which aimed to gain the respect of Western powers, to extricate Japan from unequal trade treaties<sup>17</sup> and to avoid colonization. The so-called ‘unequal treaties’, which specified a low tariff rate on foreign goods and exempted foreign nationals from Japanese law, had been instituted on the opening of Japan to Western trade on the grounds that Japan was an uncivilized nation. The subordinate position of women in Japanese society was cited both by Western diplomats and Japanese reformers as evidence of Japan’s backwardness and inferior status,<sup>18</sup> and from the late 1870s onwards there was a widely shared

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<sup>17</sup> These included the Treaty of Kanagawa (*Nichibei Washinjōyaku*, 1854), the Anglo-Japanese Friendship Treaty (*Nichiei Washinjōyaku*, 1854), the Ansei Treaties (*Ansei Jōyaku*, 1858) and the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, also known as the Harris Treaty (*Nichibei Shūkōtsūshōjōyaku*, 1858). For a detailed discussion of the treaties and their eventual revision, see Perez (1994, pp. 320-334).

<sup>18</sup> During the first two decades of the Meiji period debate on gender roles and the proper place of women in society and the family took place in Japanese male intellectual circles, with reformers arguing that the strength of the United States and Western Europe was linked to the dignified treatment these countries afforded their women (Sievers 4). Prominent educator and social critic Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), influenced by John Stuart Mill’s (1806-1873) *On the Subjection of Women* which was translated into Japanese in 1879, advocated education for women, equality of sexes, the monogamy system and women’s liberation, and published a number of works on women’s position in society, including *Nihon fujin ron* (*The Japan Women Theory*, 1885), *Danjo kōsai ron* (*Companionship Theory between Men and Women*, 1886), *Onna daigaku hyōron* (*A Critique of the Greater Learning for Women*, 1899), and *Shin onna daigaku* (*The New Greater Learning for Women*, 1899). Fukuzawa chastised men for regarding their wives as mere instruments for producing children, observing that “women of our country have no responsibility either inside or outside their homes, and their position is very low... [A woman] owns no property of her own, and in society she cannot hope for a position of any consequence. The house she

understanding in Japan that in order to favorably impress Western observers, the treatment of women needed to be changed (Hastings 102). In her autobiography, educator Hatoyama Haruko (1861-1938) recalled that the year 1884 “was the era of preparation for treaty revision, and for the sake of revision, it was necessary that Japan win recognition that it was civilized in every respect; towards that end, we had to remove every trace of barbarian customs oppressing women” (in Hastings 102); and in her 1891 work *Japanese Girls and Women*, American writer, educator and foreign advisor to the Meiji government Alice Mabel Bacon (1858-1918) observed that “until the position of the wife and mother in Japan is improved and made secure, little permanence can be expected in the progress of the nation toward what is best and highest in the Western civilization... that [Japan] is far behind the civilised nations of Europe and America... [is] a fact, that, unless changed, must sooner or later be a stumbling-block in the path of her progress” (115-116).

In order to demonstrate that the Japanese people were as civilized as those of the West, thereby gaining respectability in the international community and building an argument for the revision of the ‘unequal treaties’, the Meiji state extensively adopted elements of Western technology, institutions and material culture under the slogan *bunmei kaika* (‘civilization and enlightenment’)<sup>19</sup> during the early Meiji period. One of the most visible examples of this effort was state’s construction of a ‘new’ Japanese

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lives in is a man’s house and the children she brings up are her husband’s children” (Kiyooka 11-12). Statesman Mori Arinori (1847-1889), the first Japanese ambassador to the United States (1871-1873) and Japanese education minister in 1885 advocated the legal equality of men and women in marriage, and in 1875 demonstrated his commitment to this idea by marrying Hirose Otsune in a public ceremony, witnessed by Fukuzawa, which featured the signing of a marriage contract (Sievers 20). However, despite their support for greater dignity for women in society, the majority of Japanese intellectuals were unwilling to accept women in significant roles outside of the household.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion of *bunmei kaika* see Craig (2009).

womanhood which outwardly conformed to Western notions of femininity.<sup>20</sup> Adopting the image of Empress Shōken (1849-1914) as a symbol of Western-style beauty and progressiveness, the state actively regulated Japanese women's appearance. In March 1868, two months after the Meiji Restoration, the Empress declared that "henceforth her teeth and eyebrows would be allowed to remain as nature formed them" (Wagatsuma 434-436).<sup>21</sup> An official government decree in 1870 outlawed both practices among the peerage, and in 1873 the Empress appeared in public with white teeth and natural eyebrows (Sievers 14-15). Social pressure to move away from these practices was compounded by the publication in 1875 of influential author Fukuzawa Yūkichi's (1835-1901) satire *The Deformed Maiden*, in which he chided women for what he referred to as "manmade deformities" (Slade 116). Both tooth-blackening and eyebrow-shaving gradually disappeared as Japanese women followed the example of the

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<sup>20</sup> Sievers notes that the primary concern of the new Meiji government leaders, the majority of whom were former samurai, was to enact policies that could answer Western criticism without actually engaging Japanese women in the sweeping social change of the early Meiji period (10). The government undertook a number of initiatives relating to women that were motivated by image rather than substance, including the selection of five girls, ranging in age from six to eighteen, to accompany the Iwakura mission sent to renegotiate the 'unequal treaties' with the United States and European powers in 1871. Sievers notes that while young men sent abroad as students were typically given two or three-year assignments specifically related to government needs in areas such as transport, law, finance, trade, and industry, the girls who accompanied the Iwakura mission were given a vague charge to become "students of American home life" for a ten-year period, and when the young women who had managed to stay in the United States for the full period returned home, no one in government seemed able to recall precisely what the purpose of their journey had been; however it continued to be used in later years as a convenient example of Japan's progressive attitude toward women in speeches and articles intended for Western consumption. The women themselves were very accomplished: Ōyama Sutematsu (1860-1919) obtained a nursing license during her time in the United States and graduated from Vassar College; Tsuda Umeko (1864-1929) majored in biology and education at Bryn Mawr College and later founded Tsuda College, which remains one of the most prestigious women's institutes of higher education in Japan; and Nagai Shigeko (1862-1928), who also graduated from Vassar College, was one of the first women piano teachers in Japan to teach Western classical music and a piano instructor to the first graduates of the Tokyo School of Music in 1885. These later achievements, however, were not the result of continuing government support or encouragement (Sievers 12-13).

<sup>21</sup> See Ema (1959, 52-78) and Casal (1966, 5-27) for a discussion of the history of tooth-blackening.

Empress,<sup>22</sup> and by the end of the Meiji period middle-class women with shaved eyebrows were rarely seen in urban areas (Ashikari, “Japaneseness and the Ideal Image of Women” 64).

In addition to cosmetic practices, women’s hairstyles and clothing were also regulated by the state. During the early Meiji period, short hair for men symbolised progressive attitudes and individual willingness to embrace drastic change for the sake of the country, and following the example of the Emperor Meiji (1852-1912), who cut off his topknot in 1872, many men adopted short hairstyles. Indicating their desire to participate in this social change, some women also bobbed their hair. Short hairstyles were embraced by *jogakusei* (female students, discussed in detail later in this chapter) (see fig. 42), and in 1871 an association promoting shorter and more practical hairstyles for women was organised in support of the kinds of changes the government was advocating for the male population.

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<sup>22</sup> Tooth blackening was still popular among married commoner women in urban areas until around the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), and survived in rural areas until the early years of the Shōwa period (1926-1989). The most recent example, reported in 1977, was that of a 96-year-old woman in Akita who blackened her teeth every other day (Ashikari “Japaneseness and the Ideal Image of Women” 77).



Fig. 42. Female student Wada Kuniko. Ca. 1870.

These early attempts by women to participate in the change that was sweeping the nation were met with firm opposition by male Meiji leaders. The author of an 1872 newspaper editorial complained:

A woman with cropped hair is practically indecent. Although we see such creatures in the cities now, such a practice did not exist of old, nor do we see it among women of the cultured countries of the West. This reprehensible custom is unbearably ugly. In any country, a gentle and temperate lady has long hair which she dresses. Do they think they are the images of enlightenment, these self-satisfied faces who have thrown away their long black hair? They go about in men's *hakama* over their wide *obi*, *geta* on their feet, sleeves rolled up, and carrying books of Western learning. They are absurd. (in Dalby 75)

The government proceeded to declare short hair for women illegal in 1872, requiring that older women who wore a shorter hairstyle for reasons of health obtain a license before they could have their hair cut, and in 1873 the Empress made a public

appearance demonstrating the correct hairstyle for women, her long hair tied back neatly (Sievers 14-15). The official policy on hair-cutting illustrates the importance of women's appearance on the Meiji state's political and social agenda. In order for Japan to be accepted as a 'civilized' nation, her women needed to conform, at least outwardly, to Western notions of femininity, and as the author of the newspaper editorial mentioned above noted, short hair was not seen "among women of the cultured countries of the West".

In addition to their attempts to imitate men's hairstyles, female students adopted men's clothing for practical reasons during the early Meiji period. *Sendai-hira hakama*, culottes made from a striped, sombre-coloured stiff silk fabric which had previously been part of the male samurai formal costume, allowed women to retain their dignity while sitting in unfamiliar Western chairs (see fig. 42). In 1883, however, mirroring the state's regulation of women's cosmetic practices and hairstyles, the Ministry of Education issued an edict forbidding women to wear men's attire. The masculine *sendai-hira hakama* was redesigned to resemble a skirt rather than trousers, and the stiff fabric softened and dyed in gentler hues. *Ebicha-bakama* (maroon-coloured culottes), which allowed female students to ride bicycles and to participate in the exercise classes that were by this time a regular feature of girls' school curricula<sup>23</sup> (Copeland 7-9) came to represent the *jogakusei* uniform of the mid-Meiji period (see fig. 43).

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<sup>23</sup> Following Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), women's physical education was introduced to school curricula to support the development of healthy and robust women suitable for childbearing in accordance with Japan's increasingly militaristic aims (Ikeda 537). This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.



Fig. 43. *Ebicha-bakama no jogakusei* (Female student wearing maroon culottes). Ca. 1900.

As with cosmetic practices and hairstyles, the image of Empress Shōken was employed by the Meiji state to instruct Japanese women as to appropriate attire. From 1886, the Empress appeared exclusively in Western-style clothing in public (see figs. 44 and 45), and other female members of the imperial family, the Empress' ladies-in-waiting, and the wives of officials were required to follow suit (Hastings, “A Dinner Party” 102). Following the example of the Empress, upper-class Japanese women began to adopt elements of Western dress both on formal occasions and in everyday life.

Hastings notes that the Empress' change in costume constituted a permanent change in her public image, both in her own personal appearance and in the representations of her viewed by the domestic and international public. Her Western gowns and accessories served the same function as the emperor's military uniforms, designating the imperial couple as Western-style monarchs (“The Empress' New Clothes” 685).





Fig. 44. Empress Shōken. 1886.



Fig. 45. Yōshū Chikanobu (1838-1912). *Kōkoku kiken kanka no zu* (*The Appearance of Distinguished People of the Japanese Empire*). 1887. Empress Shōken is pictured next to the Emperor.

### *The Ladies of the Rokumeikan*

The most striking representation of the Meiji government's determination to demonstrate Japanese competence in Western social rituals was the construction in 1883 of a European-style ballroom dance hall called the Rokumeikan (Hastings, "A Dinner Party" 102). Designed to house foreign diplomats and to provide "truly free intercourse

between Japanese and foreigners” (Bryson 90), the Rokumeikan formed the stage upon which upper-class Japanese women were showcased as symbols of Japan’s modernisation and Westernisation.<sup>24</sup> At the Rokumeikan, which lent its name to the period between 1884 and 1889 (Bryson 90), upper-class Japanese women attended concerts of Western music, charity bazaars, banquets, tea dances, and balls attired in gowns ordered from Europe (Sievers 93; Bryson 91) and showcasing Western hairstyles and accessories such as brooches, ribbons and parasols (see figs. 46 and 47).



Fig. 46. *Rokumeikan jidai no bassuru doresu o kita Nabeshima Nagako* (Nabeshima Nagako wearing a bustle dress during the Rokumeikan era). Late 1880s.

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<sup>24</sup> See Watanabe (1996), Tomita (1984), Bryson (2003) and McKenzie (2004) for detailed discussions of the Rokumeikan.



Fig. 47. Yōshū Chikanobu. *Rokumeikan ni oite kifujin jizenkai no zu (Ladies' Charity Party at the Rokumeikan)*. 1887.

While the balls and dinner parties held at the Rokumeikan are often relegated to examples of indiscriminate, uncritical imitation of the West in conventional histories of modern Japan (Hastings, “A Dinner Party” 96), they in fact represented a crucial part of a strategically-designed and implemented plan by the Meiji government to impress Western powers and facilitate treaty revision. As Hastings observes, Japanese women’s behaviour at these events was one of the standards by which Westerners judged Japan’s level of civilization. While prior to the Rokumeikan era the Western custom of wives accompanying their husbands to public events was unknown in Japan, with this role being undertaken by geisha, the inclusion by the Meiji state of wives at these events demonstrates an acknowledgment of the importance of gender relations to the Western conceptualization of civilization (“A Dinner Party” 95-97).

The women of the Rokumeikan invited both praise and censure from Japanese and Westerners alike. In 1885, the *Japan Weekly Mail* reported that “a subject of frequent remark among all nationalities was the successfully Western appearance of the Japanese

women present” at one such ball and “their honorable acquittal on the dance floor”, explaining that it had “now become difficult to distinguish them from their sisters of the West, so thoroughly have they adopted European costumes, and so perfectly versed are they in the usages of Western society” (November 7, 1885 [in Bryson 92]). However, from 1884 the Rokumeikan balls also received negative reviews in newspapers, with critics fearing that the intimate physical contact of social dance would provoke vulgarity and cause moral damage to Japanese women (Veemees 126). This fear was exacerbated by press reports of scandals at the Rokumeikan, including speculation that Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) had an affair with a married woman from high society during a masquerade ball in 1887 (Mehl 168, 176; Seidensticker 100). The presence of geisha at these events was also met with opposition by some upper-class women, including the aforementioned Tsuda and Ōyama (see 56), who perceived professional female entertainers as a threat to male morality and the practice of monogamy in Japan, and who may also have feared that they themselves would be categorized as sexual objects to be toyed with (Hastings, “A Dinner Party” 107). A number of officials of the Meiji government married former geisha and prostitutes (Hastings, “A Dinner Party” 105), and the prominence of these women as glittering lights of Rokumeikan life reinforced Japanese suspicions that Western manners forced respectable women to perform in public in roles normally reserved for geisha (Hastings, “A Dinner Party” 107).<sup>25</sup> Criticism of the Rokumeikan’s role in the degradation of

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<sup>25</sup> Hastings (1993) notes that what particularly troubled Japanese men about the Western gowns and the social events they facilitated was the possibility that their wives, sisters, and daughters would be required to act like geisha or at least behold the antics of such professionals. Fears that Japanese men would act at balls as they did with geisha were fueled in the 1880s by the fact that the chief exemplars of Western dress at Western-style social functions were Countesses Itō and Inoue, both of whom had formerly been geisha (690).

traditional morals, combined with its failure to achieve its initial aim of treaty revision, growing nationalist sentiment in Japan from the late 1880s, and vigorous debate in 1887 and 1888 over proposals for treaty revision in which the Rokumeikan came to symbolise Japan's cultural subservience to the West (Hastings, "A Dinner Party" 107) created a strong social backlash which led to the ignominious decline of the Rokumeikan Era around 1889.

The women of the Rokumeikan thus played a strategic role in Japan's transition to modernity. They embodied the 'new' Japanese womanhood constructed by the Meiji state through the transformation and occidentalization of their bodies, and operated as a symbol of Japan's 'civilization and enlightenment'. It is important to note, however, that the subject of Meiji modernization was resolutely male (Bryson 116), while Japanese women remained its "objects", "satellites", and "mirrors" (Bryson 101). The purpose of the Rokumeikan's transformation scene was to add to women's bodies "a new value, a brilliance, and a modernity" (Bryson 117-118) which demonstrated Japan's newly acquired modernity and civilized society to the West, not to turn traditional women into the sovereign subjects of the modern era. Even reformers such as the aforementioned Fukuzawa (see 54), who criticized Japanese-style parties at which women were forced to sit separately like attendants with no opportunity to socialize with men on equal terms, rejected Western social practices, noting "In the West, women's behavior sometimes goes beyond control: they make light of men, their minds are sharp, but their thoughts may be tarnished and their personal behavior unchaste; they may neglect their own homes and flutter about society like butterflies. Such behavior is no model for Japanese women" (in Hastings, "A Dinner Party" 104). Papanek has noted that in rapidly changing societies, fears are often translated into attempts to prevent changes in

women's roles, resulting in women becoming the repositories of 'traditional' values imputed to them by men in order to reduce the stresses men face (15). By casting the women of the *Rokumeikan* in the dual roles of repositories of tradition and mirrors of modernity, inwardly retaining their essential Japaneseness while outwardly reflecting Japan's 'civilization' to the West, the Meiji State demonstrated its ability to employ the female image in assistance of its own agenda, a strategy it would utilise repeatedly throughout the Meiji period.

*Mid- and Late Meiji Period: Ryōsai Kenbo (Good Wife, Wise Mother) Ideology*

Following the decline of the *Rokumeikan*, the Meiji state redirected its gender construction in support of Japan's nationalist project. Amidst growing nationalist sentiment following Japan's military victories in the Sino-Japanese (1894-1895) and Russo-Japanese Wars (1904-1905), the government adopted the Confucian-based ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* ('Good wife, wise mother') as the accepted view of Japanese feminine roles in an attempt to protect native culture and values from Western influences and to motivate all nationals to contribute to the family-state (Ashikari, "The Memory of the Women's White Faces" 74).<sup>26</sup> Coined in 1875 by scholar and social commentator Nakamura Masanao (1832-1891) in a speech titled 'Creating Good Mothers',<sup>27</sup> *ryōsai kenbo* ideology was centred around the notion that in order to improve the character and

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<sup>26</sup> The family-state, or *kokutai*, refers to the paternalistically hierarchical system of Meiji government in which the emperor was viewed as the father of the nation and the people as his children.

<sup>27</sup> Although the Meiji State later appropriated the term 'Good wife, wise mother' to advance its own agenda, Sato observes that it was not Nakamura's intention for women to accept a status inferior to men's (86); the role he proposed for women, based on the 'Cult of True Womanhood' model from the nineteenth-century West, championed women's education and suggested significant social change (Sievers 22-23, also see Levy 52-53). For a discussion of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' in Britain and the United States during the nineteenth century see Welter.

customs of the Japanese people and to advance into the realm of civilization it was necessary to attain good mothers, who could prepare their children to be devoted subjects of the Emperor by instilling in them diligence, loyalty and patriotism (Uno 38; Levy 53). Women were expected to render service to the nation from inside the home (Uno 38), showing their loyalty to the emperor through housework, frugality, efficient home management, care of the young, old and sick, and the responsible upbringing of children.<sup>28</sup>

While *ryōsai kenbo* ideology may appear to resemble Tokugawa period elite views of womanhood (see footnote 29), it in fact constituted a new conception of femininity presented in the guise of tradition (Uno 38). The addition of motherhood as a specialized enterprise to the list of desirable feminine attainments represented a significant departure from Tokugawa-period norms for both elite women, who had previously enjoyed little authority in their households and whose children were usually educated by tutors and servants, and those in commoner households, where children were generally raised by both parents as well as by siblings and extended family. Karlin has discussed the discourse of nostalgia which operated around this invention of tradition in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. He suggests that the rapid social change caused by the state's aggressive program of modernization during the Meiji period produced forms of desire which sought a return to the past, and that through the idiom of gender and nation, new reified representations of continuity, timelessness, and history were fashioned to compensate for the unmooring of inherited practices from the shared locales of everyday life (3). Slade has also commented on this, observing that a large part of the reordering of aesthetics which occurred with Japan's

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<sup>28</sup> See Koyama (1999) for a detailed examination of Meiji state policies and how women contributed to the nation through their capable household management.



transition to modernity did not conform to modern reasoning but was based in the redefinition of ‘Japan-ness’ that accompanied the arrival of the new twin others, modernity and ‘The West’. He explains that the perceived unstoppable trajectory of modern progress that was embraced by Japan resulted in nostalgia and the invention of traditions to authenticate reconstructions of the past and the very idea of Japan itself (4-5).

The promulgation of ‘Good wife, wise mother’ ideology also represented a significant expansion in the scope of the Meiji state’s gender construction. While the ‘new’ Japanese womanhood of the Rokumeikan era was limited to the upper-class, *ryōsai kenbo* encompassed middle-class women, unifying gender ideologies which had historically differed according to class and region (Ashikari, “The Memory of the Women’s White Faces” 74).<sup>29</sup> However, while the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal represented the visible, recognised model of Japanese womanhood promoted by the state for its contribution to Japan’s economic and military development through motherhood and patriotic activities in the family and community, there were other critically important ways in which women contributed to the nation which are invisible in this model. The

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<sup>29</sup> The official adoption of Confucianism by the ruling samurai class during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) defined women’s status. A set of moral principles and political ethics emphasizing filial piety, diligence, loyalty, education, meritocracy, and observance of rigid social hierarchy, Confucianism emphasized men’s superiority over women and subjected women to the ‘three obediences’: obedience to their father when young, to their husband when married, and to their children in old age (Iwao, 1993: 5). The activities and social spheres of men and women were also kept separate and distinct, with women in charge of reproductive work in the inner sphere of the home, and men charged with productive work in the outer realm of society. These norms, however, applied mainly to samurai women. Women of the middle and lower working classes of farmers, artisans, and merchants, who comprised the majority of the female population, enjoyed autonomy to some extent (Takemaru 1999: 10-11, Tonomura et al., 1999: 10). For these women, gender roles tended to overlap extensively due both to living arrangements and to economic necessity. Productive and reproductive tasks were shared between men and women, particularly in rural areas, and a higher degree of social and economic equality prevailed among women and men than in samurai society. For in-depth examinations of women’s status and the division of labour during the Tokugawa period see Uno (1991).



contributions of lower-class female factory workers<sup>30</sup> and prostitutes,<sup>31</sup> who also supported their families while assisting in the development of the Japanese economy, was unacknowledged by the state, highlighting the roles of gender and class in the creation of national respectability in the international community (Sievers 11).

### *The Meiji Bijin (Beauty)*

Alongside the State's adoption of *ryōsai kenbo* ideology and the designation of women as 'repositories of tradition', an ideology developed around the *bijin* which included nationalistic claims to the unique purity of Japanese womanhood (Brown 7). Lippit ("Figures of Beauty") analyses the Meiji *bijin* as a conceptual figure that evolved from the aesthetic discourse of the second and third decades of the Meiji period. Entering into journals, newspapers, literary texts, paintings, illustrations, photographs, and advertisements with unprecedented frequency, the *bijin* appeared where a number of epistemological fields intersect, serving as a material point of contact between the literary and artistic communities and providing a pivotal site from which to assess the modern aesthetic landscape and the cultural and political dynamics of Meiji Japan (i). The depth and breadth of *bijin* discourse is suggested by several journals devoted to defining her: *Bijin (Beauty, 1889)*, *Nihon no bijin (Japanese Beauty, 1891)* and *Bijin gahō (Beauty Pictorial, 1910-1911)*. The latter featured articles by a range of writers,

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<sup>30</sup> In 1882, young unmarried women from poor rural backgrounds comprised 66 percent of the industrial labour force (Bryson 117) enduring brutal working conditions. See Sievers (chapter 4) and Tsurumi's *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (1990) for a detailed discussion on female textile workers during the Meiji period.

<sup>31</sup> Although prostitution was licensed in Japan during the Meiji period and women from lower-class families were often encouraged, and sometimes sold, into the sex trade in order to support their families, the Meiji government actively attempted to prevent Japanese women from migrating overseas in search of work as prostitutes, wary that they would sully Japan's image as a nation that embraced female chastity. See Mihalopoulos (2011) for a detailed discussion of prostitution in the Meiji period.

including *bijin* artists Terasaki Kōgyō (1866-1919) and Ikeda Shōen (1884-1917). There were also books devoted to the subject, including Aoyagi Yumi's *Nihon no bijin* (*Japanese Beauty*, 1913). In addition, popular magazines of all kinds devoted articles to the *bijin* phenomenon, and art journals contained discussions on *bijinga*. For instance, the September 1910 issues of *Nihon bijutsu* was devoted to the *bijin*, offering essayists debating the definition of beauty, the conflation of beauty with women, and the connection of *bijinga* to the core values of a culture. *Bijin* discourse extended to women's education, clothing reform, marriage customs, to legality of prostitution, and a range of issues now termed 'women's studies' (Brown 8).

The Meiji government's employment of the *bijin* to assist the country's political agenda and economic development was not confined to the domestic stage, but extended to the international arena. The state promoted art as part of its administrative policy of *shokusan kōgyō* (increasing production and promoting industry) in an effort to increase national power and thereby avoid colonization, and *bijin* featured as the subjects of many of the Japanese artworks showcased at the London World Exposition (1862), the Paris World Exposition (1867), the Vienna World Exposition (1873), the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876), the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893), the Paris Exposition (1900), and the St. Louis World's Fair (1904) (Mizuta 32). In addition to benefitting the economy, the triumphs of these artworks abroad helped ensure the nation's continued independence by winning Japan the status of a "civilized" nation in the world community (Mizuta 33). The government's eagerness to distance Japanese women and culture from the Western fascination with the subservient and sexual image of the geisha was a significant factor in its support of artistic images of

beautiful Japanese women internationally. Following the opening of Japanese ports to trade with the West in 1853, the Japanese woman became a familiar figure outside Japan as the subject of illustrated books and photographs, a decorative motif on ceramics, and in *ukiyo-e* prints, which constituted the primary means whereby the *bijin* achieved international recognition (Mizuta 28-29). Prints featuring beautiful women, many of whom were geisha, influenced European impressionist painters and helped to inspire the Japonism<sup>32</sup> movement in the West during the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Lippit (*Figures of Beauty*) observes that regardless of their actual statuses, in the West all Japanese women came to be known indiscriminately as “geisha” (13). The aim of bolstering the status of art as a measure of national prestige linked *bijin* images with the Meiji government’s attempt to redefine Japanese identity (Brown 7). With its promotion of *bijin* paintings, which were painted as *hon-e*, academic painting considered high art in opposition to popular *ukiyo-e* (Lippit, “Reconfiguring Visuality” 17), the Japanese government attempted to distance the Japanese feminine image from the exotic and reconstruct it as the exalted. The aspiring girl student, the virtuous wife, and the self-sacrificing mother became constructs of femininity that dominated *bijin* painting from the mid-Meiji period through World War II (Brown 7).

The image of the *bijin* also functioned strategically to disguise Japan’s ascendant image as a military aggressor. At the same time that Japan was embarking upon the

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<sup>32</sup> Japonism (also known by the French term *Japonisme*) is the influence of Japanese art, fashion and aesthetics on Western culture, and refers particularly to Japanese influence on European impressionist art. See Wichmann (1999) and Lambourne (2007) for a detailed discussion of Japonism.

<sup>33</sup> Works such as *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), French writer Pierre Loti’s (1850-1923) novel about a naval officer married to a geisha, and *Madama Butterfly* (1904), Italian composer Giacomo Puccini’s (1858-1924) opera inspired by the novel, also contributed to the development of the Japonism movement. For a detailed discussion see Heather McKenzie’s *Madame Chrysanthème as an Item of Nineteenth-Century French Japonaiserie* (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2004).

Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the country's first war with a Western power, the Meiji government dispatched beautiful Japanese women to international expositions and world fairs in an attempt to secure the country's association as an artistic, feminized nation. "Fair Japan", the Japanese exhibition at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, boasted "350 of Japan's fairest and handsomest geisha girls"<sup>34</sup> (Mizuta 35; Lippit, "Reconfiguring Visuality" 12-13) (fig. 60). By the end of the Meiji period the *bijin* had become one of the primary figures through which Japan presented itself to the West (Mizuta 29). In his work *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904), Irish writer Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) noted that "the most wonderful aesthetic products of Japan are not its ivories, nor its bronzes, nor its porcelains, nor its swords, nor any of its marvels in metal or lacquer – but its women" (393). The degree to which the feminine image came to symbolize Japan abroad during the Meiji period is apparent in a poster from the 1904 St. Louis Worlds Fair titled 'Types and Development of Man', in which the only woman depicted is the 'representative' of Japan (fig. 61).

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<sup>34</sup> While the title of this photograph describes the women pictured as 'Geisha Girls', considering the Meiji state's eagerness to distance the Japanese feminine image from its previously exotic association with professional female entertainers, and the fact that the women are dressed in hakama and have simple hairstyles, it is likely that they were in fact *jogakusei* (female students) rather than geisha. The caption was probably chosen by the book's Western publisher, and demonstrates the extent to which the Japanese feminine image was still linked to geisha in the West.



Fig. 60. *Geisha Girls of Fair Japan*. 1904.



Fig. 61. *Types and Development of Man*. 1904.

The category of *bijinga* achieved critical social mass in Japan when *bijin* paintings were displayed in the Ministry of Education's annual art exhibition (*Monbusho Bijutsu Tenrankai*, abbreviated as *Bunten*), initiated in 1907 (Brown 7). Both *nihonga* (modern

Japanese-style painting)<sup>35</sup> and *yōga* (Western-style painting) were employed as vehicles for transmission of the Meiji state's vision of women as icons of traditional femininity. While Tokugawa *ukiyo-e bijinga* images generally featured women of the pleasure quarters actively engaged in activities such as applying make-up (figs. 12, 14 and 20), entertaining customers (figs. 24 and 26), or enjoying themselves (figs. 35 and 38), women depicted in Meiji *nihonga bijinga* paintings appear to exist for the viewer, either being posed and displayed like objects in a still-life or shown engaged in some task meant to convey their character (Brown 9). Women are overwhelmingly depicted with long hair and wearing Japanese dress, conforming to the state's prescription of 'proper' female appearance, and are portrayed as being passively sweet, vulnerable, delicate, and devoid of overt sensuality, their gaze directed either meekly downwards (figs. 49 and 50), or wistfully into the distance (fig. 51). In addition to illustrating literary works, *nihonga* images of beautiful women as carriers of tradition and taste feature prominently in Meiji period advertisements, where they served as a form of 'image advertising', promoting the image of products rather than their functional attributes (Sapin 330).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the term *nihonga* (literally 'Japanese painting') began to be used in order to distinguish contemporary Japanese painting in traditional media such as ink from works produced by Japanese artists employing Western-style methods such as oil painting, which were identified as *yōga* ('Western-style painting') (Inoue 431). The *bijin* genre continued as the leading category of *nihonga* through the 1930s (Brown 17).

<sup>36</sup> Examples of *nihonga* images of beautiful women in Meiji period advertisements are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

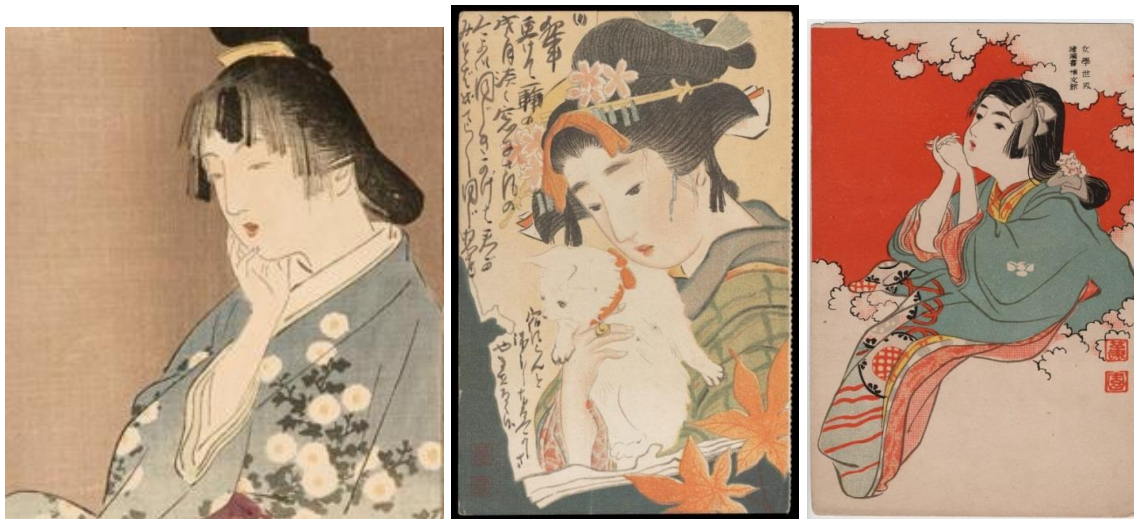


Fig. 48. Kajita Hanko (1870-1917). *Kōyō* (Coloration of maple leaf). 1907.

Fig. 49. Ikeda Shōen (1886-1917). *Woman with a Cat*. From *Jogaku Sekai* (World of Women's Learning) magazine. 1907.

Fig. 50. Ikeda Shōen. *Clouds of Flowers*. From *Jogaku Sekai* (World of Women's Learning) magazine. 1906.

Mostow has observed that *nihonga* of this period almost exclusively feature women, who served as the repositories of a national and 'traditional' beauty while their men competed in the modern West (13), a conclusion which supports Karlin and Slades' discussions of nostalgia and the invention of traditions via the female figure to authenticate reconstructions of the past and of Japan itself. By eliminating all male figures from the visual field, artists made femininity into the quintessence of Japanese aesthetics as opposed to the masculinity of Western civilization (Croissant 137), women's graceful and 'natural' feminine beauty providing an antidote to the masculine domain of military aggression, mercantile struggle, and mechanical advance (Brown 19). In addition to being their subject, women also featured as the audience and creators of *nihonga bijinga* during this period. Brown notes that *bijin* pictures in all formats during this period coincided with a brief florescence of female artists, some of whom were noted as *bijin* themselves. Shimazaki Ryūu (1865-1937), Kawasaki Rankō (1882-1918),

Ikeda Shōen, Uemura Shōen (1875-1949) and Shima Seien (1892-1970) won prizes, awards of special selection (*tokusen*), or certificates (*hōjō*) at *Bunten*. As consumers of *bijin* pictures were primarily women, female artists were thought to have a special affinity with both the subject and the audience, and *bijin* pictures provided female artists with a critical social space as well as an economic base (16).

*Ryōsai kenbo* ideology is evident in *nihonga bijinga* painted during the mid to late Meiji period. Depictions of a soldier's dream of his traditional, kimono-clad wife welcoming him home after the Sino-Japanese War (fig. 53), and of a virtuous wife dreaming of her husband fighting in the Russo-Japanese War (fig. 54) allude to the gender roles promulgated by the state which positioned men outside the home contributing to the development of the Japanese Empire and woman inside preserving tradition culture and values in accordance with *ryōsai kenbo* ideology.



Fig. 51. Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915). *Seiseigun taisen yaei no yume* (A Soldier's Dream at Camp during a Truce in the Sino-Japanese War). 1895.





Fig. 52. Kajita Hanko. *Kajin no yume (Dream of a Beauty)*. Frontispiece illustration from the literary magazine *Bungei kurabu*, vol. 10, no. 7, 1904.

The feminine figure also took centre stage in *yōga* during the final decade of the nineteenth century (Lippit, *Figures of Beauty* i). As in *nihonga bijinga*, women in *yōga* from this period are depicted as repositories of traditional Japanese beauty, portrayed with long hair and attired in kimono (figs. 53 and 54). Of his inspiration for ‘Maiko’ (1893, fig 55), painted upon his return to Japan after almost a decade spent studying in France, Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924) wrote that he had “the same feeling as Westerners who describe Japanese females as pretty small birds...They look like very rare, pretty and fragile decorations”.<sup>37</sup> Bryson explains that these works position the artist, painting in the Western medium of oil, as the cosmopolitan subject, while the women, who never left Japan and who wait behind in premodern loveliness, remain outside this cosmopolitan process, embodying the limit against which the male artist’s modernized subjectivity is defined (115). It is interesting to note that while these works overwhelmingly depict Japanese women as repositories of tradition, they also contain

<sup>37</sup> “Kuroda Seiki and Kyoto”. *Tokyo National Museum*. 18 March 2013. Web.

touches of Western influence. In Kobayashi Mango's (1870-1947) *Mono Omoi* (*Reverie*, 1907. Fig. 54), the subject is shown with her long hair unbound, a style which was unusual for Japanese women at this time and which may borrow inspiration from works by Western artists.



Fig. 53. Kuroda Seiki. *Kohan* (*Lakeside*). 1897.

Fig. 54. Kobayashi Mango. *Mono Omoi* (*Reverie*). 1907.



Fig. 55. Kuroda Seiki. *Maiko*. 1893.

*The Jogakusei (Female Student)*

Women's education provided the principal vehicle by which the Meiji state created 'good wives and wise mothers' who could prepare their children to be devoted subjects of the Emperor.<sup>38</sup> The state undertook major initiatives in this area during the mid and late Meiji period, including the requirement of city and prefectural governments throughout Japan to establish and maintain girls' higher schools from 1899 (Levy 143), and state-controlled women's education came to play a significant role in the process of Japan's Westernization, modernization, nationalization and gender differentiation (Ikeda 543). With rapid economic growth and the expansion of the middle class following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), middle-level education for daughters became a symbol of affluence (Nagahara 161). The number of women's higher schools rose from 37 between 1895 and 1902 to 207 by 1912, with student enrolment growing from 8,857 to 64,871 in the same period (Inoue 434). While boys were trained to be *risshi shusse* ('successful in life') and to serve the state loyally, *ryōsai kenbo* ideology formed the basis of the curricula of girls' elementary and higher schools (Uno 38).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Meiji government's program designed to make Japanese women "Good wives and wise mothers", see Smith (1983).

<sup>39</sup> Inoue observes that the academic standard of most *jogakkō* (girls' schools), which consisted of a four-year program beyond the compulsory six years of education, fell below that of boys' middle school, or *chūgakkō*. Both *chūgakkō* and *jogakkō* offered general liberal arts programs that included Japanese, mathematics, science, and foreign languages; however these courses were available less often at *jogakkō* than at *chūgakkō*, for women students were required to spend a substantial amount of time in home economics and sewing; in addition, the Ministry of Education was eager to provide them with more hours for traditional ethics or moral courses. As a result, female adolescents were likely to receive Confucian-based moral education rather than academic training. The objective of such an approach was to produce

In addition to state-supported education, both women's and girls' magazines<sup>40</sup> instilled the virtues of *ryōsai kenbo* while providing a diverse mix of entertainment and educational information (Inoue 438; Brown xi; Ikeda 544), and the Ministry of Education introduced policies for controlling the publication of articles which opposed this concept (Sievers 180). The male editor of *Jogaku sekai*, a magazine published between 1900 and 1925 and directed toward women's higher-school students, addressed readers in 1901 with the magazine's mission of "supplement[ing] those areas that are lacking in women's education today". He stated that "By soliciting articles from authorities in the field of education, we will cover all facets of knowledge that a woman needs in order to become enlightened and knowledgeable in the necessary techniques required for understanding her household work. We hope to help form wise mothers and good wives" (Sato 91). Articles like *Shochū zakkan - dōtoku to reiseisu* ("Summer Thoughts – Manners and Morality", September 1904), *Joshi no seishin kyōiku* ("Moral Education for Women", April 1905), *Kifujin no konomi* ("A Noblewoman's Tastes", January 1905), *Tegami no kakikata* ("Letter Writing", January 1905), and *Katei eigo*

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obedient, chaste, and submissive women who would serve family and State as "Good wives and wise mothers" (434; also see Ikeda 543).

<sup>40</sup> The magazine industry came into being between 1887 and 1906, taking advantage of the emergence of the middle class, the expansion of education, and the well-developed communication and retail networks across the nation (Inoue 437). The growing literacy resulting from mandatory primary education and the encouragement of secondary education for girls increased the number of women able to read magazines by the 1910s, and the equally rapid development of an urban, industrial economy meant that these women had the means to buy the magazines aimed at them (Brown 10). Women's magazines included titles such as *Shinfujin* (*New Woman*, 1888), *Katei zasshi* (*The Journal for Home*, (1892–8), *Fujin shinpō* (*Women's News* 1897), *Katei* (*The Home*, 1901), *Fujinkai* (*Women's World* 1902), *Katei zasshi* (*Home Magazine*, 1903–9), *Katei no tomo* (*Home's Friend*, 1903), *Fujin no tomo* (*Lady's Friend*, 1906), *Fujin sekai* (*The World of Women*, 1906), *Fujin gahō* (*Illustrated Women's Gazette*, 1907), and *Fujokai* (*Woman's World*, 1910); while publications including *Jogaku sekai* (*World of Women's Learning*, 1901), *Shōjo sekai* (*Girls' World*, 1906), *Shōjo no tomo* (*Girls' Friend*, 1908), *Shōjo gahō* (*Illustrated Girls' Gazette*, 1912), *Shōjo* (*Girl*, 1913), *Shin shōjo* (*New Girl*, 1915), and *Shōjo kurabu* (*Girls' Club*, 1923) were marketed toward girls.

(“English in the Home”, April 1905) were regular monthly features and dwelled on the virtues of the Imperial Family, enjoining young women to adopt the ‘traditional’ lifestyle as it was then being reconstructed (Sato 92). *Fujin sekai* (*World of Women*), which eclipsed *Jogaku Sekai* after the Russo-Japanese War, also catered to schoolgirls and young unmarried women and showed a deep regard for ‘traditional’ culture and feminine grace (Sato 93).

Images of *jogakusei* feature in artistic works from the mid and late Meiji period. Despite being the product of a largely male world of publishers and artists, *bijinga* was transmuted into a genre for female consumption (Brown 19) which directed itself toward edifying female viewers and echoing the new ‘civilizing’ ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* as proclaimed in women’s magazines (Croissant 137-138). Brown observes that *bijin* could be classified along a variety of moral criteria that lauded the pure and the healthy (10). This is evident in an illustration for Kosuji Tengai’s (1865-1952) novel *Makaze, Koikaze* (*Winds of Demons and Love*, 1903) (fig. 55). The sturdy physique of the *jogakusei* protagonist Hatsuno embodies the Meiji state’s objective of developing healthy and robust women suitable for childbearing in accordance with Japan’s increasingly militaristic aims. Her long hair conforms to the state’s prescription of ‘proper’ female appearance, and her slanted, thin eyes, high-bridged, sharply pointed nose, and the rather heavy lower half of her face are distinctly reminiscent of ‘traditional’ Tokugawa period *ukiyo-e* models (Inoue 441) (figs. 1, 2 and 3). Kaburaki Kiyokata’s (1878-1972) work *Tenisu* (*Woman with Tennis Racket*, 1905, fig. 56) alludes to the introduction of women’s physical education to school curricula in support of this

same objective, and symbolizes the strong, demure, natural, and refined *bijin* who embodied the ostensible verities of Japanese culture (Brown 10).

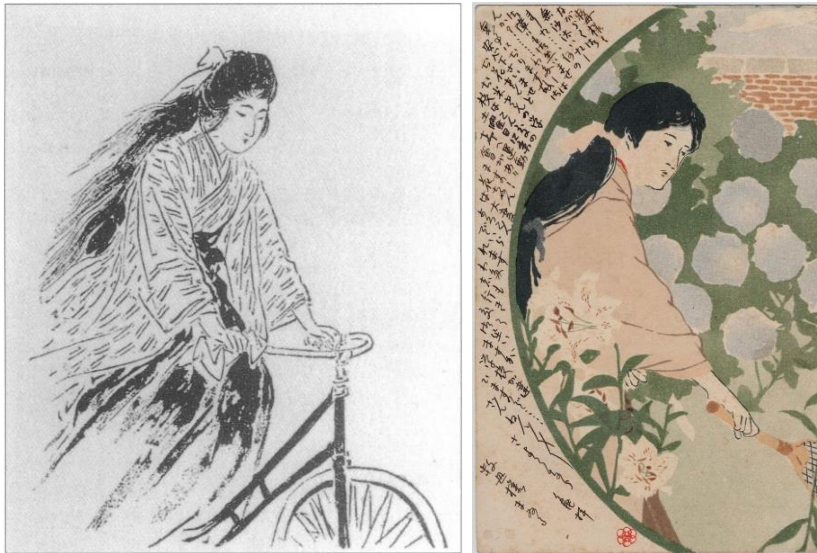


Fig. 56. Kajita Hanko. Illustration for *Makaze koikaze* (*Winds of Demons and Love*, 1903).

Fig. 57. Kaburaki Kiyokata. *Tenisu* (*Woman with Tennis Racket*). From the series *Jogakusei* (*Female Students*). 1905.

As the illustrations above demonstrate, while the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology which formed the basis for girls' education was firmly constructed around the invention of tradition in support of Japan's nationalistic agenda, *jogakusei* were also held up proudly by the state as a symbolic representation of Japanese modernity (Levy 12). This co-existence of conservative and modern elements is evident in women's magazines, which simultaneously diffused the concept of *ryōsai kenbo* and reflected contemporary Western trends and fashions that had been influenced by Western magazines (Ikeda 543). These magazines provided women with access to up-to-date information on rational domestic engineering through practical articles (*jitsuyō kiji*) as well as

information on how they could remain *à la mode* in clothing, coiffure, and makeup through fashion articles (*ryūkō kiji*). By stressing the group consciousness of fashion and emphasizing consumption of the kinds of commodities sold in department stores, these magazines reinforced social norms of citizenship and gender identity even as they offered women a taste of empowerment through decision making, female networks, and contemporary models of female accomplishment in Japan and abroad (Brown 11). Dressed in *hakama*, riding bicycles, reading newspapers and literary magazines, and playing tennis and the violin, *jogakusei* were the embodiment of *haikara* (stylish, literally ‘high-collar’) chic.<sup>41</sup> Advertisers such as Shiseido, a leader in marketing to women and packaging female identity within a larger national identity since the late 1880s (Weisenfeld 2009), employed *jogakusei* in the promotion of their products and recognized them as important consumer targets. In a Shiseido advertisement for skin toner from 1907, a female student with a fashionable coiffure dressed in the standard school uniform wields an oversized bottle of Eudermine<sup>42</sup> cosmetic toner that is nearly as large as she is (fig. 58), suggesting that the stylish bottle with crowning bow that matches the *jogakusei* is a metonym for the girl herself and that by using the product the consumer would be endowed with similar qualities of modernity and style.

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<sup>41</sup> Despite initially being used as a pejorative epithet for pretentious Westernist snobs, *haikara* came to refer to a desirable trait in women. In a special feature on the varieties of female beauty in a 1907 issue of *Shumi (Taste)* magazine, one commentator used the term *haikara* to signify the beauty particular to schoolgirls (Levy 8).

<sup>42</sup> The name Eudermine is derived from the Greek words for ‘good skin’.



Fig. 58. *Eudermine* cosmetic toner. 1907.

Depictions of beautiful women in Meiji period literature played an important role in shaping aesthetic values (Cho 220), and the character of the *jogakusei* in particular was crucial in facilitating the acceptance of Western notions of beauty. Literature featuring *jogakusei* attracted the attention of readers between 1903 and 1904 (Inoue 435), when *Winds of Demons and Love* (*Makaze koikaze*), Kosugi Tengai's (1865-1952) popular novel about the tragic love affair of a poor, orphaned schoolgirl, was serialized in the *Yomiuri* newspaper. Levy has coined the neologism 'Westernesque' to describe the *haikara* heroines, the majority of whom are *jogakusei*, of modern Japanese fiction.

Neither ethnically nor culturally "Western" per se, yet distinguished by physical appearances, personal mannerisms, lifestyles, behaviors, and ways of thinking that were perceived within the Japanese context as particularly evocative of the West, these women emerge in literature as the alluring embodiments of Japan's cultural assimilation of the modern West. More familiar than actual Western



women, yet endowed with an exotic cachet that set them apart from images of Japanese women that resonated with preestablished gender conventions, Westernesque women would assume prominent roles as *femmes fatales* in landmark works of modern Japanese fiction. (5)

The most notable *jogakusei* characters in Meiji period fiction include Osei<sup>43</sup> in Futabatei Shimei's (1864-1909) *Ukigumo* (*Drifting Clouds*, 1887), who delights in brandishing her knowledge of Western thinking and social customs (Levy 64) and who formed the prototype for the Westernesque *femme fatale*; Miya, the heroine of Ozaki Kōyō's (1868-1903) *Konjiki yasha* (*The Gold Demon*, 1897-1902), who receives a proposal of marriage from her German violin professor at the age of seventeen; Yoshiko in Tayama Katai's (1872-1930) *Futon* (*Bedding*, 1907), the graduate of a *haikara* Christian girls' school who reads Western novels and associates freely with men; Mineko in Natsume Sōseki's (1867-1916) *Sanshirō* (*Sanshirō*, 1908) another Christian schoolgirl whose seemingly flirtatious manner mystifies the men around her; the female schoolteacher in Katai's *Jokyōshi* (*The Woman Schoolteacher*, 1903), and the Madonna in Sōseki's *Botchan* (*Botchan*, 1906). Levy notes that it is the qualities that distinguish female characters as Westernesque in modern fiction that mark them as the coveted symbols of modernity for the male characters who pursue them and the male authors who create them (9). In *The Gold Demon* (1897-1902), the fact that Miya can be genuinely loved even by someone who is not Japanese is given as the ultimate measure

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<sup>43</sup> Levy notes that Futabatei derived the name Osei from the word *kokusei*, 'the state of the nation', directly and self-consciously exploiting the discursive connection between the nation and the schoolgirl. Osei's characteristic penchant for imitation is not intended as testimony to the inadequacies of female subjectivity, but rather as a metaphor for one facet of Japan's relationship to the West (61).

and affirmation of her beauty, which is construed as universal, its power far-reaching and limitless (Lippit 11). The Madonna in Sōseki's *Botchan* (1906) is so named because "She's the prettiest girl in these parts...so beautiful all the teachers at the school call her the Madonna, [which is] what foreigners call a beautiful woman" (trans. Turney 96). In *The Woman Schoolteacher* (1903) it is the Westernesque quality of the teacher's physical appearance that first impresses the protagonist and the reader (Levy 173). Katai expressed his preference for such women in a 1908 interview on the subject of feminine beauty for *Shumi* (*Taste*) magazine, declaring, "I like women who are lively when they talk, high-collar women, free women, women who have breathed new air" (in Levy 142).

The figure of the Meiji *jogakusei* emerged as the representative par excellence of modern Japan (Levy 53). Simultaneously embodying elements of *haikara* and *ryōsai kenbo*, both of which were concerned with the process of modernisation and Westernisation towards a modern nation state (Ikeda 544), she symbolised the complex hybridity of Japanese femininity during the Meiji period, and set the stage for the wholesale adoption of Western notions of beauty during the Taishō (1912-1926) period.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion in English of how some of the conflicting and converging aesthetic trends of the Meiji period developed during the Taishō period, see Chapter 2: The Modern Girl as a Representation of Consumer Culture in Sato (2003, 45-77). For discussions in Japanese and examples, see Ikuta (2012); Ishikawa (2009); and Uchida (2005). While the inclusion of the Taishō period is outside the scope of this study, an in-depth examination following the structure and approach I have employed here would be interesting.

### *Beauty Contests*

In addition to literary and artistic depictions of women which supported the Meiji state's nationalist project, female beauty was employed as a symbol of the country's new confidence on the world stage following Japan's 1905 military victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War through the medium of beauty contests.<sup>45</sup> In 1907, in response to an invitation by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* newspaper to participate in an international competition to find the most beautiful woman in the world, the *Jiji shimpō* newspaper organised the first open-admission beauty contest in Japan. Photographs of young women submitted from across the country were judged for the title of 'The most beautiful woman in Japan' and printed. The contest rules stipulated that the entrants be 'ordinary' young women from good (middle-class) families, and entries by women who made a living based on their looks, such as geisha and actresses, would not be accepted. The contest ultimately attracted thousands of entries, and Suehiro Hiroko (fig. 76), a sixteen-year-old *jogakusei*, won the title of Japan's top *bijin* (Fraser 12-13).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Public display of feminine beauty in Japan was traditionally limited to geisha and entertainers. The history of beauty contests in Japan can be traced back to the Tokugawa period, when the evaluation of courtesans in the pleasure quarters was a customary practice (Fraser 12). During the early Meiji period beauty contests gradually became broader in scope and increasingly public in nature. In 1883, the *Tokyo Nichi nichu shimbun* promoted a *bijin kyōshinkai* ('beauty competition') in which photographs of beauties were to be ranked via a voting process and displayed in an exhibition. This was followed in 1891 by an exhibit of photographs of one hundred professional geisha at the *Ryōunkaku*, a twelve-storeyed pavilion in Tokyo's Asakusa district, in which visitors climbed to the top to view the photographs and vote for their favourite, and the woman who received the most votes was named the winner (Fraser 12; POLA Research Institute of Beauty & Culture 264-265).<sup>45</sup> In 1901 the *Hinode shimbun* advertised the first known contest involving photographs published in the news media, in which 'Five Beauties of Tokyo-Yokohama' were to be chosen from five categories of professional women: geisha, apprentice geisha, prostitutes, waitresses, and female *gidayū* players (Fraser 13).

<sup>46</sup> How this winner encapsulated the aesthetic ideals of the day is examined in detail in chapter three.



Fig. 59. Suehiro Hiroko, winner of the first All-Japan Contest of Beautiful Women. 1907.

The *Jiji shimpō* contest represented a startling, public subversion of norms of feminine behaviour. Diffidence and modesty were both encouraged and expected of young women, and the idea of being so bold as to declare oneself a beauty, and then to take the even more audacious step of entering a beauty contest pushed the limits of decorum (Fraser 18). While the spread of photography during the Meiji period had made portraiture possible by the late 1880s, with the exception of the Meiji Empress photographs of ordinary women remained intended for private consumption. The public role of women was severely restricted by the Meiji government, and any kind of public action, including allowing one's photograph to be reproduced, was easily criticized as transgressive behaviour. As women whose portraits were freely circulated were those connected to the sex trade, photographs of any woman published in the media were easily interpreted as suggesting dubious virtue.<sup>47</sup> To promote the contest and assuage

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<sup>47</sup> This was demonstrated in 1895, when the literary journal *Bungei kurabu* (Literary Arts Club) published photographs of women writers laid out in a manner similar to the page design used for previously published photographs of geisha from the licensed entertainment quarters. Strong criticism was directed

socio-moral anxieties, *Jiji shimpō* and other participating regional newspapers appointed special recruiters, with one newspaper president even visiting girls' schools himself, and articles about the contest appeared in the various newspapers encouraging family members and friends to submit photographs of *bijin* (Fraser 18). The outcome of the contest led to winner Suehiro Hiroko, whose photograph was submitted without her consent or even awareness (Fraser 6), being expelled from her school, which issued a denunciation stating that the kind of girl who would participate in such a contest was unsuited to the upstanding atmosphere of the institution (Fraser 19). The *Jiji shimpō* and other newspapers wrote articles criticizing the school's actions, and ultimately the contest seemed not to have harmed the marriage prospects of the top candidates, with second-place winner Kaneda Kenko's father publishing a notice in the *Jiji shimpō* indicating that she had received more than two hundred marriage proposals as a result of her photo appearing in the paper, and Suehiro Hiroko eventually having an advantageous marriage brokered by General Nogi Maresuke (1849-1912), the highly decorated war hero and director of the school, who had been responsible for her expulsion (Fraser 19).

Gendered discourses depend vitally on print culture for their dissemination (Wong 6), and the *Jiji shimpō* contest demonstrated how Meiji-era new media acted as conduits for upper and middle-class women's entry into the public sphere, both as symbols and as individuals (Fraser 22). Advertisers took advantage of this, employing photographs of beauty contest winners in advertisements for cosmetic products, which had previously only employed geisha as models. Third-place winner Tsuchiya Nobuko

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towards the women for allowing their portraits to be published, and the issue was likened to a guide to prostitutes (*oiran saiken*) (Fraser 15; Lippit 18-19).

featured in advertisements for the Hirao Sanpei store's cosmetic brand *Lait* (POLA Research Institute of Beauty & Culture 108-110).

The *Jiji shimpō* contest took place during a period of growing emphasis on the potential of beautiful women serving the nation, and represents one of the earliest extensions of the propaganda machine to middle-class females (Fraser 6). From the 1890s onward, the term *bijin* appeared in increasingly politicized terms in a variety of cultural references, reflecting a modern fascination with the concept of beauty that was strongly tied to Japanese nationalism. Several books were published during this period which promoted the role of women as supporters of a militarist state, including *Sensō to fujin* (*War and Women*, 1904), two books titled *Gunkoku no fujin* (*Women of Militarism*, 1904), and *Sensō bi to fujin bi* (*The Beauty of War and the Beauty of Women*, 1904) (Mackie 31), which marked the female body as a politicized site and a symbol for nationhood and advocated using *bijin* for the public good (Fraser 20). The *Jiji shimpō* contest, with its marriage of the publication of *bijin* portrait photographs to a patriotic display and use of beauty, was fully congruent with these ideas (Fraser 19). In addition to producing future soldiers, married women supported the war efforts by mourning their deceased husbands and sons, charitable activities, or working as nurses at the front (Mackie 31). The contest offered young unmarried women the opportunity to fight for Japan's status on the world stage just as male soldiers had done during the war by parading their physical beauty in the visual realm (Fraser 6). While the *Chicago Daily Tribune*'s claim that their American beauty was the most beautiful in the world suggested a friendly rivalry, the *Jiji shimpō* imbued the affair with a sense of dramatic conflict, issuing in striking language and strongly militaristic terms a call to arms urging the nation's beauties to take on the United States and the rest of the world:

Searching for photographs of Japan's top beauty: We have received from the USA a written challenge claiming that they have extremely beautiful women. If there is anyone among the troops of virtuous girls of victorious Japan who wishes to volunteer to engage in this battle, quickly name yourself...Now, when we are tired of war with weapons, a war with women's beauty is a novel and very interesting idea, and our company, on behalf of millions of beauties all over the nation, accepted the declaration of war. (Fraser 19-20)

The fact that beauty contests were thus being promoted domestically as a way in which young women could contribute to Japan's military efforts at the same time that the image of the *bijin* was being employed to disguise Japan's image as military aggressor on the international stage highlights the strategic nature of the Meiji government's employment of the female image to further its own agenda. The newly public function of *bijin* portraits also resonated with the dissemination in newspapers of photographs of the emperor and deceased soldiers to foster national pride following Japan's triumph in the Russo-Japanese War (Fraser 16). Although the implications of a new public role for *bijin* portraits of teenage girls may not have been as profound as those of soldiers, they represented a parallel development in co-opting private images to serve as symbols of national pride (Fraser 17).

The *Jiji shimpō* contest illustrates the rise of the middle-class woman as the representative of collective Japanese femininity.<sup>48</sup> This represented a significant departure from the Tokugawa period, when geisha and prostitutes provided public images of beauty. Fraser observes that the contest coincided with the emergence of a

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<sup>48</sup> The state's employment of the image of the middle-class woman to represent collective Japanese femininity during the Meiji period will be discussed in more detail in the section titled 'skin' in chapter 3.

new middle class, which grew significantly in the years immediately following the Russo-Japanese War. While theoretically entry was open to anyone, the rules excluded geisha, who typically came from the lower classes. Contestants were also required to reveal their families' occupation and social status, and the selection of Suehiro Hiroko, the daughter of a mayor, in first place and Kaneda Kenko, the daughter of the head of a prefectural office, in second place, suggests that in practice the daughters of families with greater social prestige may have had more success (Fraser 14-15).

Throughout the Meiji period, the Japanese state employed and manipulated the Japanese female image to assist its nationalistic agenda. Women were positioned, sometimes simultaneously, as both repositories of tradition and mirrors of modernity, resulting in a femininity which demonstrated a complex hybridity. While the state's construction of a 'new' Japanese womanhood which outwardly conformed to Western notions of femininity in order to gain respectability in the international community during the early Meiji period was short-lived and limited to the upper-echelons of society, the adoption of *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, which was constructed around the invention of tradition in support of Japan's nationalistic agenda, as the official model for women from the mid-Meiji period was both broader in scale, reaching a significant section of the population through the vehicle of education, and more enduring, with remnants continuing to shape Japanese social practices to the present day.<sup>49</sup> By

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<sup>49</sup> Yamaguchi explains that in present-day Japan, a popular term to convey that a woman is doing something meaningful is "*tsuma toshite (haha toshite)*", which translates as "as a wife (and as a mother)". A Japanese woman cannot really say of herself that she acts only "as a working woman"; while a housewife can say "as a wife (and as a mother)". A woman's professional achievement alone is not enough to win respect, especially the respect of other women (36). See Yamaguchi (36-52) for additional examples. The image of *hakama* worn over kimono retains a strong association with women's education even today, with female teachers adopting the style of dress when attending graduation ceremonies



designating women as capable of assuming greater power in the family to influence and educate Japan's future generations, but not 'ready' for significant social roles outside the family, Japan positioned itself as a civilized nation in the eyes of Western powers,<sup>50</sup> and succeeded in facilitating its national policy of achieving economic wealth and military power while maintaining patriarchal control over women. In addition, the state's exaltation of *jogakusei* as a symbolic representation of Japanese modernity from the mid-Meiji period resulted in the debut of 'Westernesque' Japanese women who embodied Japan's cultural assimilation of the modern West, and assisted in facilitating the acceptance of Western notions of beauty.

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<sup>50</sup> This social role mirrored those prescribed for women in the West during this period. Although women gained the vote in New Zealand in 1893 and in Australia in 1902, American and British women did not achieve emancipation until 1920 and 1928 respectively.

## Chapter Three

### Meiji Period Aesthetic Ideals and Cosmetic Practices

In chapter two I examined the hybrid nature of Japanese femininity during the Meiji period, shaped both by Japan's increased contact with the West and by the Japanese state's nationalistic agenda, which positioned Japanese women both as mirrors of modernity and repositories of tradition. In this chapter I will explore Meiji aesthetic ideals and cosmetic practices in detail. Comparing and contrasting Meiji depictions of women's eyes, eyebrows, noses, mouth, skin, and physique with those of the Tokugawa period introduced in chapter one, I will attempt to demonstrate how these complex notions of Meiji femininity are captured in contemporaneous images and literature. Due to constraints of space I will again omit detailed examinations of hairstyles and clothing from my discussion. As in my discussion of Tokugawa period conceptions of feminine beauty, at no point is it my intention to suggest that notions of feminine beauty during the Meiji period were limited to those I introduce here; rather my aim is to identify trends that were evident in the visual and literary media of the period.

#### *Eyes*

The Tokugawa period aesthetic ideal of narrow, upward-slanting eyes and single-edged eyelids discussed in chapter one continued to be favoured during the early Meiji period. Beautiful women in early Meiji literature are described as having "cool eyes" (*suzushigena me*), a phrase denoting single-edged eyelids (Cho 16). In *Setchūbai (Plum Blossoms in the Snow, 1886)*, Suehiro Tetchō (1849-1896) mentions the "cool-looking eyes" of a beautiful woman (in Cho 223-4); and Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) depicts

a schoolgirl in *Imo-to-se kagami* (*Mirrors for Wife and Husband*, 1886) as having “cool eyes” (in Cho 224). Cho observes that early Meiji photographs of women include those with single eyelids (219).

From around the mid-Meiji period, increased contact with Western culture effected changes in aesthetic ideals relating to women’s eyes, and large, round eyes with double-edged eyelids came to be considered attractive.<sup>51</sup> This shift is apparent in literature dating from this period. In *Ukigumo* (*Drifting Clouds*, 1887) Futabatei depicts Osei’s “wide eyes” (trans. Ryan 218). In *Yabu no Uguisu* (*Warbler in the Grove*, 1888), Miyake Kaho (1868-1944) describes two female students who wait beside the Rokumeikan dance floor, one with large eyes, the other with “eyes rather narrow”, and notes that the second lady is “passably attractive...but nothing like the [first] young miss” (trans. Copeland 18). In *Tōsei Futari Musume* (*Two Modern Girls*, 1897), Shimizu Shikin (1868-1933) introduces Hanako as having “lovely, double-lidded, black eyes” (trans. Winston 464). In *Gubijinsō* (*A Field Poppy*, 1907) Sōseki describes one of the heroines as having “cute eyes with double-folded eyelids” (trans. Wagatsuma 439); and in *Sanshirō* (1908) Mineko’s eyes are “well shaped, the outer corners chiselled deep and long into the face, the flesh of the lids softly creased” (trans. Rubin 48). In an interview on the subject of feminine beauty in the July 1908 issue of *Shumi* magazine, Katai noted his preference for “eyes that are big and bright, full of expression, lively,

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<sup>51</sup> I note the possible beginnings of the shift in aesthetic ideals from narrow eyes with single-edged eyelids to large, round eyes with double-edged eyelids in the section titled ‘Eyes’ in chapter one. The fact that this occurred toward the end of the Tokugawa period, before widespread contact with Western culture, suggests that Western aesthetic influences may not have been solely responsible for the shift; however contact with Western culture during the Meiji period certainly solidified the change.

eyes that talk, so to speak. Large, dark pupils with long eyelashes are most splendid” (in Levy 142-143).

A similar shift is visible in photographic and artistic representations of beautiful women from the mid and late Meiji period. In 1891, an exhibit of photographs of one hundred professional geisha by noted Tokyo photographer Ogawa Kazumasa (1860-1929) was held at the Ryōunkaku, a twelve-storeyed pavillion in Tokyo’s Asakusa district. Visitors climbed to the top of the pavillion to view the photographs and vote for their favourite, and the woman who received the most votes was named the winner (Fraser 12).<sup>52</sup> While only approximately half the women featured in the Ryōunkaku contest had single-edged eyelids, the *Jiji shimpō* contest of 1907 overwhelmingly features women with double-edged eyelids. Particularly notable is the aforementioned winner Suehiro Hiroko, who possessed especially large, deep-sculpted eyes and double-edged eyelids (fig. 59). *Yōga* works (figs. 57 and 58, discussed in Chapter Two) and *nihonga* advertising posters (figs. 62 and 63) from the mid and late Meiji period also feature beautiful women with large, round eyes and double-edged eyelids.

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<sup>52</sup> The contest was essentially a savvy marketing ploy. The Ryōunkaku, completed in 1890 and celebrated as Japan’s first skyscraper, boasted the first electric elevator in the country. The elevator was removed soon after installment due to safety issues, and the beauty contest opened shortly afterwards as a means of attracting spectators to the building and enticing them to ascend to the top (Fraser 12-13).

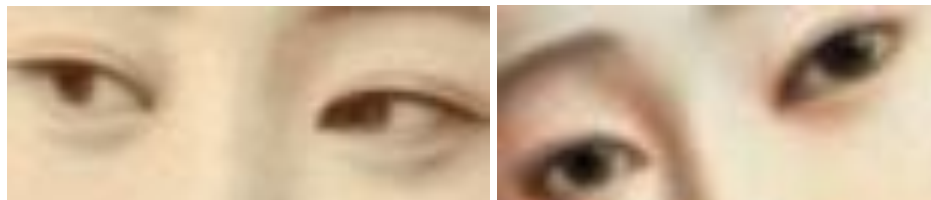


Fig. 62. Anonymous. *Higashi jiman* ('Pride of the East') sake advertising poster. Early 1910s. Area depicting eyes enlarged below image for clarity.

Fig. 63. Kitano Tsunetomi. *Morning Club Tooth Powder* (*Asu no kurabu hamigaki*) advertising poster. 1910. Area depicting eyes enlarged below image for clarity.

The fact that women with large, round eyes similar in appearance to Western eyes came to be favoured over the narrow Japanese eye shape which had traditionally been regarded as beautiful constitutes a major change in aesthetic perceptions. That this change occurred around the mid-Meiji period, at the same time that Japan was asserting itself on the international stage with its pride in Japanese women's beauty (see discussion in chapter two) suggests that in spite of the Meiji state's careful construction and employment of Japanese women's image in assistance of its nationalistic agenda, the actual changes which occurred in conceptions of feminine beauty during this period demonstrate significant rejection of tradition and adoption of Western aesthetic

standards, and serves to highlight the hybrid nature of Japanese femininity during the Meiji period.

### *Eyebrows*

Changes in aesthetic ideals regarding women's eyebrows can also be observed when comparing Meiji artistic and literary sources with those from the Tokugawa period. As explained in chapter one, during the Tokugawa period women shaved their eyebrows as a rite of passage into adulthood. When Tokugawa women are depicted with eyebrows, it is usually for the purpose of emphasizing their youth, such as in the case of courtesans, and their eyebrows are generally narrow, possibly influenced by depictions of beautiful women in Chinese literature. As discussed in chapter two, the prohibition of the practice of eyebrow shaving among the peerage in 1870 and the adoption of natural eyebrows by the Empress from around 1873 led to natural eyebrows becoming standard during the Meiji period, forming the basis of contemporary eyebrow aesthetics (POLA 66-67). *Yōga* works (figs. 53 and 54), *nihonga* advertising posters (fig. 64), and photographs (fig. 65) from the Meiji period all depict women with thick, natural eyebrows. This is particularly evident in fig. 64, in which the similarity of the woman's eyebrows with those of the girl reinforces their natural, untouched quality. The aforementioned Suehiro Hiroko also has full, natural eyebrows (fig. 59).



Fig. 64. Oda Toū. *Nana hon no bin to boshi* (Seven bottles and a mother and daughter). 1910.

Fig. 65. *Araigami no Otsuma* (Otsuma with freshly-washed hair). Ca. 1890. Photograph of popular Shimbashi geisha Otsuma.

Descriptions of beautiful women in Meiji period literature also conform to this trend. In *Mirrors for Wife and Husband* (1886) Shōyō depicts a schoolgirl whose “eyebrows form straight lines, instead of being curved in the so-called distant mountain shape” (Cho 224), referring to the narrow, curved shape popular from the mid-Tokugawa period discussed in chapter one; and in *Sanshirō* (1908) Sōseki notes that Mineko’s “eyes were alive, beneath brows of remarkable blackness” (trans. Rubin 48), a description which suggests thickness.

### Nose

The narrow, well-formed nose with a straight bridge popular during the Tokugawa period continued to be favoured throughout the Meiji period. Beautiful women are generally depicted with narrow, straight-bridged noses in Meiji period *yōga* (figs. 57 and 58), *nihonga* (figs. 61 and 62), and literature. In *Plum Blossoms in the Snow* (1886),

Tetchō describes a beautiful woman who has “a straight nose”, a phrase Cho notes was likely familiar to everyone (223-4). The schoolgirl in *Mirrors for Wife and Husband* (1886) is also introduced as “straight-nosed” (Cho 224). In *Two Modern Girls* (1897), Shimizu Shikin (1868-1933) describes the pretty Kimiko as having a “high-bridged nose” (trans. Winston 464); and the heroine in *The Woman Schoolteacher* (1903) is also portrayed as having a “high nose” (in Levy 142). Photographic representations of women during the Meiji period also support this ideal. The aforementioned Suehiro Hiroko has a narrow, straight-bridged nose (fig. 59). Levy suggests that the similarity of this type of nose to the high-bridged nose commonly seen in Western physiognomy made it the ultimate in Westernesque physical attributes for a Meiji woman. By the early twentieth century significant numbers of fashion-conscious women, including actress and singer Matsui Sumako (1886-1919, fig. 66) and poet Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) were submitting to the pain of paraffin injections to raise their ‘low’ nose bridges closer to the coveted Western standard (142) (fig. 67), indicating a fundamental uncertainty in Japan’s sense of its own natural beauty.

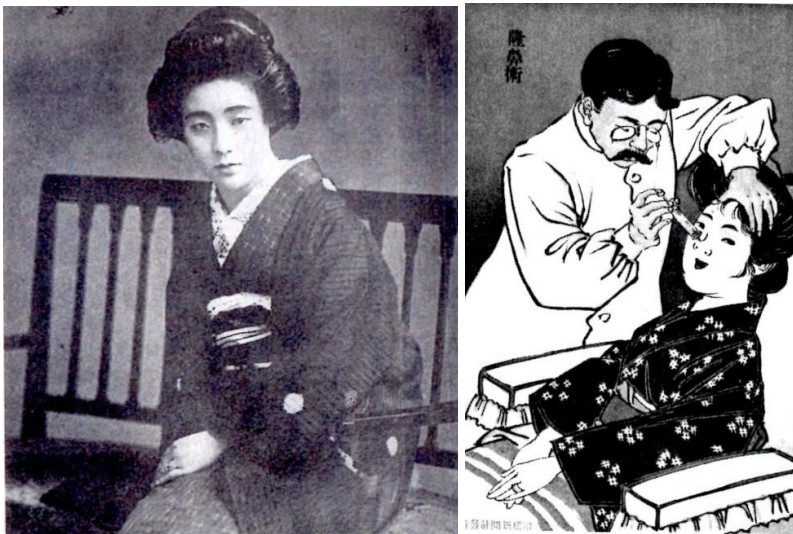


Fig. 66. Matsui Sumako. Ca. 1910.



Fig. 67. Picture postcard of a woman receiving a paraffin injection to raise the profile of her nose. 1908.

### *Mouth*

The small, button-shaped mouth of the Tokugawa period, achieved by partly covering the lower lips with white powder and applying rouge to make them appear smaller, continued to be favoured during the first half of the Meiji period. Shōyō describes the schoolgirl in *Mirrors for Wife and Husband* (1886) as having a “small mouth” (in Cho 224), and in *Warbler in the grove* (1888), Miyake Kaho describes a beautiful girl with “red lips small and tightly pursed” (trans. Copeland 18). In *Takekurabe (Child’s Play, 1895-1896)*, Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896) notes that Midori’s mouth is “a little large perhaps” (trans. Danly 260), and in *Two Modern Girls* (1897) Shimizu Shikin describes Hanako as having a “small, beautiful mouth” (trans. Winston 464).

From the mid-Meiji period, Western aesthetic ideals asserted increasing influence over Japanese cosmetic practices, and heavy applications of lip rouge were abandoned in favour of a natural look. According to Meiji beauty guides, French pomade which resembled the natural colour of the lips became popular from around 1907, and geisha and internationally renowned actress Kawakami Sadayakko (1871-1946) is known to have favoured a light application of lip rouge and a natural look (POLA 232). This trend is reflected in literature from the period. In *Troubled Waters (Nigorie, 1895)*, Higuchi Ichiyō describes Otaka, noting that “her lips were rouged a shade of crimson so deep they lost their charm and suggested more a man-eating dog than a courtesan” (trans. Danly 218). A 1908 advertisement for a Japanese-made beer (fig. 68) also provides an

interesting example of this trend. At first glance, the advertisement appears to reinforce the role the female figure played in the construction of a distinctly Japanese identity discussed in chapter two, depicting the quintessential Japanese maiden dressed in a chrysanthemum-patterned kimono, symbolic of the Emperor and by extension the Japanese empire, and holding a *kabuto* (Japanese warrior helmet), symbolising Japan's military strength. On closer examination, however, we can see that it simultaneously adheres to Western aesthetic ideals by portraying the subject with natural-looking lips, skin, and eyebrows, and with large, round eyes which closely resemble the Western eye shape. The fact that the influence of Western aesthetic ideals remain visible even in an image thus charged with nationalistic propaganda illustrates the limitations of the Meiji state's agenda in the face of wide dissemination of information and fashions from the West via the media.

As discussed in chapter two, the practice of *ohaguro* (tooth-blackening) was banned in 1870 as part of the government's 'civilization and enlightenment' Westernisation movement. Empress Shōken appeared in public with white teeth in 1873 (Slade 122), and the practice gradually disappeared as Japanese women followed her example. While women with blackened teeth can still be found in early Meiji period *bijinga*, the majority of artistic representations from the mid and late Meiji period depict women with white teeth. Advertising posters for a Japanese-made cider (figs. 69 and 70) feature women's white teeth visible between their lips. In both these images, the subjects are depicted with natural-looking skin and eyebrows, and with large, round eyes, appearances which conform to Western aesthetic values. The depiction of these women wearing rather heavy lip rouge, rather than the light application that was popular

during this period, may have been a technique employed to enhance the contrast between their lips and the whiteness of their teeth. It is also interesting to note that in both of these advertisements Western images are employed to promote the product, suggesting a positive association with the West which existed within, or perhaps in spite of, the nationalistic climate constructed by the Meiji state.

Teeth are also mentioned in literature from the Meiji period. In *Two Modern Girls*, 1897), Shimizu Shikin describes Hanako as having “uneven teeth, one of which was grown in behind an eyetooth, another of her charming features” (trans. Winston 464).<sup>53</sup> In *Sanshirō* (1908), Sōseki makes numerous references to the heroine Mineko’s teeth. The protagonist Sanshiro sees Mineko’s “beautiful teeth” (trans. Rubin 48); he looks at her “white teeth” (140); and she cannot help “revealing her white teeth again” (142).



<sup>53</sup> Cho notes that double teeth have historically been regarded as a symbol of beauty, or sweetness, in young girls in Japan. From around the time baby teeth are replaced by permanent teeth, children often have an uneven dental alignment which makes them look sweet when they smile with double teeth. In 2011, double-tooth attachment, which involves covering normal canine teeth to make them look more pointed and less straight, become a fad among Japanese girls, leading to many teenage girls having have artificial teeth attached to their neatly aligned natural teeth by cosmetic dentists (xi).

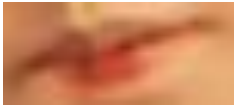


Fig. 68. Anonymous. Helmet Beer (*Kabuto biiru*) advertising poster. 1908. Area depicting mouth enlarged below image for clarity.

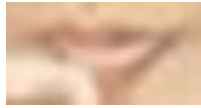


Fig. 69. Anonymous. *Doresu sugata de saidā o nomu josei* (Woman in a dress drinking cider). Takara Cider (*Takara saidā*) advertising poster. 1910. Area depicting mouth enlarged below image for clarity.



Fig. 70. Anonymous. *Man and woman in Western clothing facing each other* (*Yōfuku sugata de mukaiau danjo*). Takara Cider (*Takara saidā*) advertising poster. 1905~1916. Area depicting mouth enlarged below image for clarity.

## *Skin*

As discussed in chapter one, the aesthetic ideal of white skin was already established among the nobility and entertainers by the Tokugawa period.<sup>54</sup> From the mid-Meiji period this ideal spread to a wider section of the female population as women's white faces became fundamentally linked with the formation of a national identity (Ashikari, "The Memory of the Women's White Faces" 55-56). Amidst a climate of growing nationalism, the Meiji state adopted the image of a middle-class<sup>55</sup> Japanese woman with a white, made-up face to symbolise feminine virtue, tradition and native culture. Beauty experts of the period declared that a country's level of civilisation was evidenced by the simplicity or development of its cosmetic practices, and Japanese women were exhorted as to the necessity of possessing makeup techniques that were not inferior to those of Western countries (POLA 233). The extent to which the white face functioned as a vital element in representing the ideal image of Japanese womanhood during this period is illustrated by the fact that although concerns over lead poisoning from the white lead powder contained in women's cosmetics became a publicly-recognized social problem in the final decades of the nineteenth century, a number of intellectuals, both male and female, argued that women's virtue was more important

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<sup>54</sup> Wagatsuma (1967) explains that the Japanese preference for white skin is rooted in the Japanese people's *own* history, rather than their Westernized ideas about race. While the social perception of the West has been that the Japanese belong to a so-called "yellow" race, the Japanese have traditionally used the word white (*shiroi*) to describe lighter shades of their own skin colour, and have rarely used the colour yellow to describe their skin (407).

<sup>55</sup> Ashikari notes that the term 'middle-class women' refers to women in relatively wealthy families where the salaries earned by male members (husbands or fathers) sufficed to support their wife and children as dependants, so that they could stay at home (75). The (reformed and invented) 'traditional' feminine image of white make up, traditional Japanese hairstyle and kimono were generally only accessible to middle-class women, as peasant women were required to work as farmers or in factories alongside their male counterparts. The standardization and unification of representations of Japanese women into the image of the middle-class woman with white skin provided a model for lower-class women to follow when expressing themselves as Japanese women in public (62-63).

than their health and suggested it was immoral for women to abandon this ‘women’s art’ because of their fear of lead poisoning (Tsuda & Murata 20–21), and lead-based cosmetics were not officially prohibited until 1931 (Weisenfeld 2009). The traditional thick white powder (*oshiroi*) functioned as the paramount element of make-up in the early and mid-Meiji period (Slade 116), and its application features in artistic representations and photographs of women (figs. 71-73).

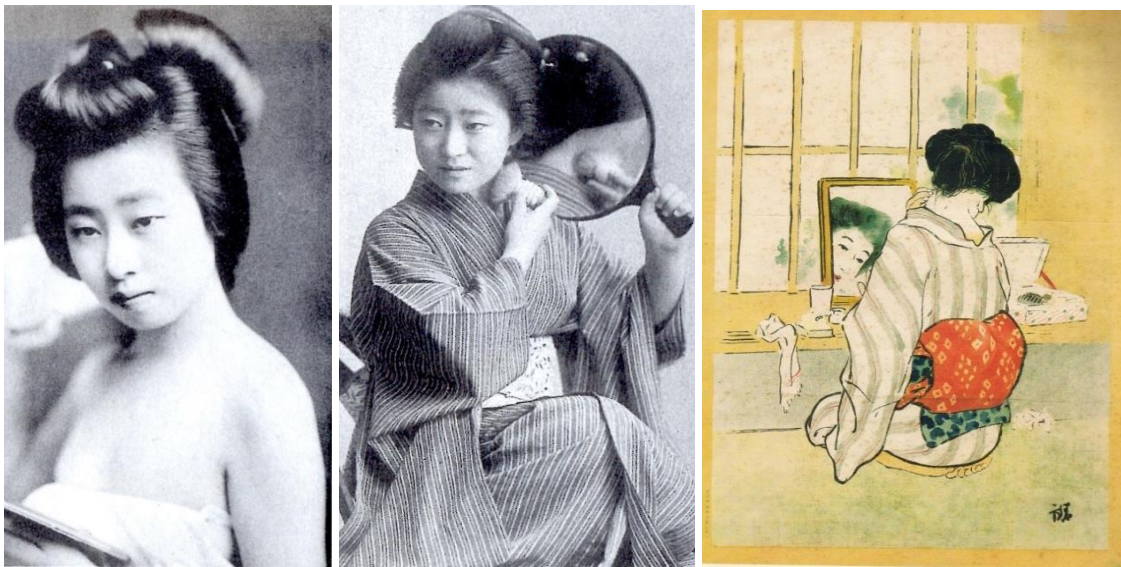


Fig. 71. *Morohada nugi de keshō o suru* (Applying Makeup Naked from the Waist Up). Ca. 1880.

Fig. 72. *Awase kagami de eri oshiroi o nuru* (Applying white powder to the neck using a pair of mirrors). Ca. 1880.

Fig. 73. Kaburaki Kiyokata. Illustration from Mayama Seika’s novel *Kūkyō* (Empty) in *Shinshōsetsu Magazine* (Shunyōdō). Vol. 15, No. 7, July 1910.

References to pale skin as a marker of feminine beauty can be found in mid-Meiji period literature. In *Plum Blossoms in the Snow* (1886), Tetchō describes a beautiful woman who has a “white face”; and in *Mirrors for Wife and Husband* (1886), Shōyō portrays a schoolgirl as “white skinned” (in Cho 223-4). In a piece titled *Fūkin shirabe no hitofushi* (An Air for the Organ, 1888) included in a section called *Himekagami* (literally ‘Mirror of Princesses’, a guide of dos and don’ts for good girls) of male-

authored women's education magazine *Iratsume*, Yamada Bimyō (1868-1910) described a schoolgirl he called Okaku ('Miss Square'), who gives a good impression because of her extremely white face (in Levy 55-6). In *Jūsanya (The Thirteenth Night, 1895)* Ichiyō describes a woman whom "people were always complimenting for her fair skin" (trans. Danly 251), and in *Child's Play (1895-1896)* she depicts the heroine Midori as fair-skinned (trans. Danly 60).<sup>56</sup> In *Two Modern Girls (1897)*, Shikin describes Hanako as having a "white face" (trans. Winston 464). In *Hototogisu (The Cuckoo, 1898-1899)* Tokutomi Roka (1868-1927) introduces the "slender, pale face" of the heroine Namiko as "the only hint of white in the blackness of the night sky" (in Lippit 15). In *The Gold Demon (1897-1902)*, Miya is depicted as having "pale white skin" which robbed "even the most splendid of hues to be found in textile" of their beauty when compared to it (in Lippit 9). In *Drifting Clouds (1887)* Shimei describes the heroine Osei as "an angel with pure white skin", and adds that "a fair complexion makes up for everything" (trans. Ryan 228), referring to the Japanese proverb "*Iro no shiroi wa shichinan kakusu*" ("White [skin] compensates for many deformities").<sup>57</sup> The heroine in *The Woman Schoolteacher* is described as having a "white complexion" (in Levy 482); and the Madonna in Sōseki's *Botchan (1906)* has "beautiful white skin" (trans. Turney 104). Sōseki's fondness for pale-skinned beauties is evident in *A Field Poppy (Gubijinsō, 1907)*, in which he describes Sayo as "White in color, born in the

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<sup>56</sup> Cho explains that in the second decade of the Meiji period, there were not yet many female authors, and that generally female authors did not describe beautiful appearances, which makes Ichiyō's depiction all the more striking (234).

<sup>57</sup> A number of other Japanese proverbs also testify to the positive aesthetic valuation of white female skin, including "*Kome no meshi to onna wa shiroi hodo yoi*" ("In rice and women, the whiter the better"), and "*Fujisan no mieru kuni ni bijin nashi*", ("There are no beauties in provinces from which Mt. Fuji is visible"), which conveys the notion that women who live in the snowy northern prefectures of Shimane, Niigata and Akita are pale-skinned beauties compared to those who live in sunnier southern climates, a view that survives today in such expressions as *Akita bijin* ('Akita beauty') (Weiner 423).

shadow of a setting moon” and depicts Fujiko’s “white face [which] shone under her black hair” (trans. Wagatsuma 439).

From around the mid-Meiji period, however, the diffusion of Western aesthetic ideals began to influence Japanese cosmetic practices toward a greater naturalism. At the same time that the image of the white, painted face was being promulgated by the state as a symbol of traditional Japanese femininity, aesthetic ideals which rejected thick applications of *oshiroi* and promoted a more natural look were gradually entering and becoming established in Meiji Japan. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the preceding sections, the proximity of Japanese women’s facial features to Western notions of beauty became a new standard during the Meiji period (Cho 219), and this lighter application of *oshiroi* was likely supported by its similarity in appearance to Caucasian skin. Levy notes that by 1887, schoolgirls had started to look down on the traditional thick coats of white powder as a sign of poor taste (175), and author Tayama Katai described conventional literary decorum as “writings thickly covered in white facial powder”, comparing his preference for the natural look of a woman wearing little or no make-up to his penchant for raw, natural description in literature (in Levy 174).<sup>58</sup> In *Drifting Clouds* (1887), after being ridiculed by Osei for wearing heavy white powder, a servant girl protests “The young lady says she doesn’t use any powder, but it certainly looked like she’d put on a little today. Her skin may be white but not like that” (trans. Ryan 201). In *Sanshirō* (1908), Sōseki describes Mineko, noting that “the contrast between her [white] teeth and the color of her skin was, for Sanshirō,

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<sup>58</sup> Many Meiji intellectuals were either sent to the West to study (as was the case of Sōseki, who was sent to Great Britain by the Japanese government from 1901-1903), or were heavily influenced by Western literature (as was the case of Katai and Futabatei), and thus experienced significant exposure to Western culture. See Levy for detailed discussions (2006).



something unforgettable. Today she wore a trace of white powder. It was not in such poor taste, however, as to hide the skin beneath. With its glow of color, the smooth flesh looked as though it would be unaffected by strong sunlight, and she had given it but the slightest touch of powder” (trans. Rubin 49), demonstrating that while women were still using powder, a natural look was increasingly favoured. In *Warbler in the Grove* (1888), Miyake Kaho praises the beauty of a female student whose “cheeks glow with a natural charm”, criticising a female student who “has secretly used the very powder the maid cautioned her to avoid, telling her its lead base would damage her health, and as a result her skin is shockingly white” (trans. Copeland 18). In *Troubled Waters* (1895), Ichiyō compares a woman named Otaka, whose face is covered with “a thick layer of powder” with Oriki, a true beauty whose “white complexion seemed in need of no make-up. Even on her neck, the use of powder was not obvious” (trans. Danly 218).

Advertising posters from this period depict women with natural-looking skin (figs. 74 and 75). Well-known geisha and actress Kawakami Sadayakko was also known to favour a light application of *oshiroi* (POLA 232).



Fig. 74. Anonymous. *Shima mosurin (striped muslin)* advertising poster. Early 1910s.

Fig. 75. Morimoto Shigeji. *Shima moyō no wafuku o kita sokuhatsu no josei (Woman with her hair in a bun dressed in striped Japanese clothing)*. Hakutsuru (sake) advertising poster. *Kano Gomei Kaisha* (Sake brewery). 1912.

In addition to a fair complexion, healthy skin was considered an essential component of feminine beauty during the Meiji period. As Peiss explains, in the nineteenth-century United States there was already a fundamental distinction drawn between skin improvement products, which fostered a good complexion, and makeup, which masked the skin, with the former constituting part of a hygienic regimen critical to the morally invested notion of general bodily cleanliness (16-17). Frühstück has observed that in Meiji Japan, hygiene likewise became “a concept that not only linked but intrinsically intertwined rules of cleanliness with those of morality, the health of the body with that of the mind, the individual with society, and Japan with other modern nations” (25).<sup>59</sup> Hygienic facial culture developed as a characteristic Meiji beauty practice and was immensely popular amongst the upper middle classes, with facial treatments first being provided in 1906 (Slade 117) (fig. 76).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The Meiji state’s nationalistic agenda of producing strong, healthy women able to bear children who would become strong, healthy soldiers, discussed in chapter two, also played an instrumental role in the hygiene movement.

<sup>60</sup> The *haikara* facial started with Endō Hatsuko’s salon in 1906. The popular term ‘hygienic facial culture’ was invented by a newspaper reporter in order to introduce it to the Japanese public. POLA Research Institute of Beauty & Culture (*Pōra Bunka Kenkyūjo*), ed. *Bakumatsu-Meiji bijinchō* (Late-Tokugawa and Meiji Notebook of Beautiful Women). Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Ōraisha. 2009. 230. Print.

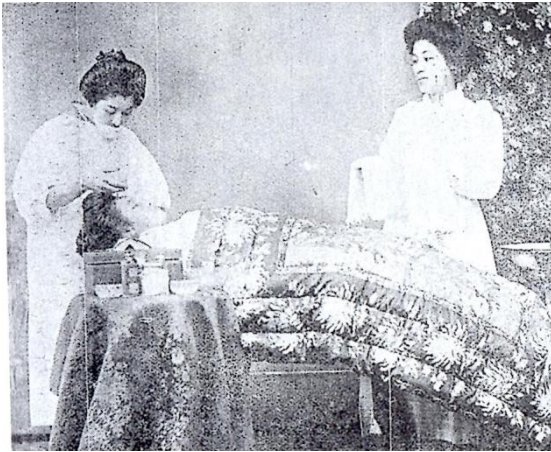


Fig. 76. *Eisei bigao jutsu (Hygienic Facial)*. 1906.

Japanese advertising promoted the notion that beauty began with the skin (Weisenfeld), and numerous domestic and imported cosmetic lotions and creams designed to keep the skin sanitary and protected against both the elements and the harmful effects of the lead contained in white powder were introduced to the Japanese market during this period.<sup>61</sup> In the final decades of the nineteenth century, concerns over lead poisoning inspired a quest to develop a lead-free face powder, and in 1906, cosmetics producer Shiseido launched *Hana Oshiroi* (later renamed *Yayoi Oshiroi*), the first Japanese skin-coloured powder which was non-lead based and considered healthier than earlier lead-based cosmetics (Weisenfeld).

As Cho has observed, when foreign culture is introduced, an exclusive choice is not necessarily made between traditional standards and new, foreign criteria; absorption

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<sup>61</sup> The Hirao Sanpei store, founded in 1878, introduced a powder-based lotion named *Komachisui* in 1878 and a vanishing cream called *Cream Lait* in 1909, and the Nakayama Taiyōdō Company, founded in 1903, introduced *Club Cream* the following year. The Shiseido Company, founded in 1872, produced five different varieties of cold creams for cleansing and softening the skin: vanishing cream (peroxide-based cream); smoothing cream; cold cream (rolling cream, which was considered the first real cold cream sold in Japan); *Tsuya Bijin Cream*; and *Shinbashi Shiseido Cream*. Cream products were released in quick succession subsequent to these early successes, with *Pond's* becoming the foremost brand from the 1910s (Slade 117).

of the new culture proceeds gradually over a protracted period, with new and old aesthetics coexisting (160). Meiji period aesthetic ideals regarding women's skin are thus characterised by a co-existence of aesthetic ideals. While the use of thick white powder continued from the Tokugawa period and was adopted by the state as a symbol of traditional Japanese femininity, the simultaneous diffusion of Western aesthetic ideals influenced Japanese cosmetic practices toward a greater naturalism and promoted a look similar to that of Caucasian skin.

### *Physique*

Oval feminine faces, which had been favoured over round faces from the mid-Tokugawa period, continued to be regarded highly during the Meiji period. Oval faces are celebrated in Meiji period literature, with Futabatei referring to the shape of Osei's face on two occasions in *Drifting Clouds* (1887), praising her "classic oval face" (trans. Ryan 228) and her "lovely oval face" (trans. Ryan 218). Photographs of the aforementioned Suehiro Hiroko (fig. 59) and actress Matsui Sumako (fig. 66) show them to have been oval-faced. Meiji advertising posters also feature women with oval faces (figs. 77 and 78). Fig. 77 presents an interesting juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements, depicting a traditional-looking Japanese beauty with narrow, upward-slanting eyes, white makeup and a small button-mouth painted with red rouge reminiscent of the subjects of Tokugawa period *bijinga* in a modern, Western-like setting, drinking cider surrounded with a variety of exotic fruit. As I noted in chapter two, women depicted in Meiji *nihonga bijinga* paintings often appear posed and displayed for the viewer, as is the case in this image, where the subject is reflected in a mirror much like she is part of a still-life painting. Fig. 78 also contains a combination

of traditional and modern aspects, portraying a modern-looking Japanese woman with natural-looking skin and lips looking at what appear to be Tokugawa period *ukiyo-e* images, emphasizing Japan's distinctive identity and the continuity of Japanese traditions.



Fig. 77. Anonymous. *Nunobiki tansan* (carbonated beverage) advertising poster. 1902-11.

Fig. 78. Hashiguchi Goyō. *Current Beauties (Kono bijin)*. Mitsukoshi Gofukuten (department store) advertising poster. 1911.

Aesthetic ideals relating to women's physique during the Meiji period demonstrate a duality that mirrors those of women's skin. While the slim, fragile physique of the late-Tokugawa period (see discussion in chapter one) retained popularity during the early to mid Meiji period, from around the mid Meiji period a gradual shift in aesthetics towards increasingly healthy, robust female physiques occurred. This was spurred by the state's objective of developing women suitable for childbearing in accordance with Japan's increasingly militaristic aims (see discussion in chapter two). During the mid-Meiji period these two seemingly opposing aesthetic

ideals co-existed, and are represented in literary descriptions of beautiful women. Depictions of slim physiques can be found in *Mirrors for Wife and Husband* (1886), in which a schoolgirl is praised as being “slender and petite” (in Cho 224); and in *Two Modern Girls* (1897), in which Kimiko is “very thin” (trans. Winston 465) and Hanako has “delicate hands” (trans. Winston 466). Women with robust physiques appear in *Warbler in the Grove* (1888), in which a beautiful girl’s “waist may not be particularly trim, but she appears quite at ease in her Western dress” (trans. Copeland 18); and in *The Gold Demon* (1897-1902), in which Kōyō explains that “if one sought to find flaws, one could say that [Miya’s] posture appeared so delicate that it seemed not to withstand a breeze, her face was now so thin that it evoked grief and loneliness, and her neck, so thin that it seemed susceptible to breaking, was painful to see” (in Cho 231). The coexistence of these aesthetic ideals is evident even in single works. In Tokutomi Roka’s (1868-1927) novel *Hototogisu* (*Namiko*, 1898-1899), Namiko’s “slim and willowy figure” (in Lippit 15) is admired, while “the flesh around her cheeks somewhat devoid of fullness could be called flaws” (in Cho 232). *Drifting Clouds* (1887) also contains examples of apparently opposing types of beauty, with Osei described as being “slender, her small waist supple and graceful” (trans. Ryan 228), and having “thin fingers” (in Cho 226), while a “plump, stocky and sturdy” servant girl is also described as “a true buxom beauty” (trans. Ryan 200).

Discussing artistic portrayals of women in the Meiji period, Brown notes that a woman’s face “May be thin or full...Her body may be slim and as supple as a willow, or more robust following modern ideas” (9). Although the One Hundred Beautiful Women of Tokyo (*Tokyo hyaku bijin*) contest held at the *Ryōunkaku* in 1891 featured many willow-waisted women reminiscent of those in *ukiyo-e* prints, there were also

among them healthy-looking, ‘civilised beauties’ (*kaika biin*) (POLA 72-73). The geisha Manryū (fig. 79), a representative Meiji beauty, is also described as being “plump” (POLA 210). We can conclude that Meiji aesthetic ideals concerning women’s physique were significantly influenced by the state’s nationalistic objective of developing women suitable for childbearing in accordance with Japan’s militaristic aims. While a clear trend is visible as the Meiji period progresses, with aesthetics increasingly favouring healthy, robust female physiques over the slim, fragile physique of the late Tokugawa period, during the mid Meiji period these two seemingly opposing aesthetic ideals coexisted, as is represented in literature and art from this period.



Fig.79. *The Geisha Manryū*. Ca. 1910.

## Conclusions

In this thesis I have attempted to provide a comprehensive study of conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century which addresses changes in representations of Japanese feminine beauty from the Tokugawa to the Meiji periods; the role the Meiji state played in shaping Japanese conceptions of

feminine beauty; and the extent to which Japanese women embraced or rejected Western ideals of feminine beauty during the Meiji period.

The opening of Japan to Western trade during the late Tokugawa period and the Civilization and Enlightenment movement of the early Meiji period led to the introduction and adoption of Western aesthetic values, and effected dramatic changes in conceptions of Japanese feminine beauty. An examination which drew on representations of Japanese women in art, literature, advertising and photographs from the Meiji period revealed that conceptions of beauty relating to women's eyes, eyebrows and teeth were heavily influenced by contact with Western culture. While Tokugawa period aesthetics generally favoured narrow, upward-slanting eyes and long-slit, single-edged eyelids reminiscent of those featured in *ukiyo-e* prints, during the Meiji period round eyes with double-edged eyelids came to be considered attractive. During the early Meiji period, upper-class Japanese women were positioned as 'mirrors of modernity' as the state constructed a 'new' Japanese womanhood which outwardly conformed to Western notions of femininity in an attempt to gain the respect of Western powers and thus extricate Japan from unequal trade treaties. The Tokugawa customs of eyebrow-shaving and tooth-blackening were outlawed as archaic, and the natural eyebrows and white teeth adopted by Empress Shōken, whose image was employed by the state as a symbol of Western-style beauty and progressiveness, came to be accepted as standards of feminine beauty.

Tokugawa period aesthetic ideals regarding women's face shape, noses and mouths survived into the Meiji period. Oval feminine faces, which had been favoured over round faces from the mid-Tokugawa period continued to be regarded as beautiful



in the Meiji period, as did the narrow, straight-bridged nose of the Tokugawa period, likely assisted by its similarity to the high-bridged nose commonly seen in Western physiognomy. During the early Meiji period Japanese women continued to minimize the size of their mouths with powder before applying thick lip rouge to a small area of the bottom lip as they had during the Tokugawa period; however as the Meiji period progressed the infiltration of Western aesthetic ideals gradually influenced Japanese cosmetic practices toward a greater naturalism, leading to lighter applications of lip rouge.

Women's skin and physique represent the main sites upon which the Meiji state's employment of Japanese women's appearance in assistance of its nationalist project played out. Aesthetic ideals relating to women's skin were influenced both by the Meiji state's nationalistic objectives and by Western aesthetic values, and demonstrate a complex hybridity. The traditional thick white powder (*oshiroi*) of the Tokugawa period remained the paramount element of make-up during the early and mid-Meiji period. From the mid-Meiji period, the state adopted Confucian *ryōsai kenbo* (Good wife, wise mother) ideology as the basis for girls' education and the official model for Meiji women, who were designated as 'repositories of tradition' in an attempt to protect native culture and values from Western influences. The image of the middle-class Japanese woman with a white, made-up face came to symbolise the qualities of feminine virtue and native culture contained within *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, and women's white faces became fundamentally linked with the formation of a national identity. At the same time that the image of the white, painted face was being promulgated by the state as a symbol of traditional Japanese femininity, Western-

influenced aesthetic ideals which rejected thick applications of *oshiroi* and promoted a more natural look were gradually entering and becoming established in Meiji Japan, and ‘Westernesque’ *jogakusei* (female students) were held up by the state as a symbolic representation of Japanese modernity. Aesthetic ideals relating to women’s physique were also influenced by the Meiji state’s nationalistic objectives. Although the slim, fragile physique of the late-Tokugawa period retained popularity during the early to mid Meiji period, from the mid Meiji period a shift in aesthetics towards increasingly healthy, robust female physiques occurred, spurred by the state’s objective of developing healthy and robust women suitable for childbearing in accordance with Japan’s increasingly militaristic aims following Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War. During the mid Meiji period these seemingly opposing aesthetic ideals coexisted, at times both being employed in depictions of beautiful women within a single literary work.

In addition to employing Japanese femininity domestically in support of its nationalistic agenda, the Meiji state also utilised the Japanese feminine image internationally to assist the country’s political agenda and economic development. Artistic representations of the pure, traditional *bijin* were promoted abroad during the early and mid Meiji period in an effort to distance Japanese women from the exotic image of the geisha popular in the West during the latter half of the nineteenth century, ensuring Japan’s status as a “civilized” nation in the world community and thereby avoiding colonization. From the mid Meiji period, the image of the *bijin* also functioned to disguise Japan’s ascendant image as a military aggressor on the international stage. The Meiji government dispatched beautiful Japanese women to international

expositions and world fairs in an attempt to secure the country's association as an artistic, feminized nation at the same time that beauty contests were being promoted domestically as a way in which young women could contribute to Japan's military efforts.

Japanese women existed on a complex cultural stage as they navigated the changing conditions of modern social experience during Japan's transition from the Tokugawa to the Meiji periods. Designated by the Meiji state as both mirrors of modernity and repositories of tradition, their embodiment of these dual roles resulted in conceptions and representations of feminine beauty which demonstrate an intricate cultural synthesis and symbiosis, comprising both Western aesthetic ideals and nostalgia for Japanese tradition.

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