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(Citation)
国際文化学研究 : 神戸大学大学院国際文化学研究科紀要,64:1-49

(Issue Date)
2025-09

(Resource Type)
departmental bulletin paper

(Version)
Version of Record

(JaLCDOI)
https://doi.org/10.24546/0100497890

(URL)
https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14094/0100497890

The Possibilities of Historical Writing During Total War: Exploring Kikue Yamakawa's Narratives of "Women's History"

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Problem Statement

History as an academic field emerged in the nineteenth century within Western modernity, mainly to develop national histories. Its practitioners were expected to uphold a "male-gendered profession[1]." The book Academia and Gender, which covers both Western and Japanese history, highlights how these traits are common in the discipline of history.

During the prewar period, women were systematically prevented from pursuing higher education worldwide, not just in history. However, within the humanities and social sciences, the discipline of history—which emphasizes the nation and involves the "public" sphere—can be seen as a field where masculinization processes closely mirrored the development of academic research.

Meanwhile, in Japan during the late 1930s, there was a rise in research on "women's history." However, this field was often equated with historical writing by women and, at the same time, was distinguished from academic historiography, being classified instead as "popular scholarship."

Ōe Yōko, a contributor to the Japan section of Academia and Gender, described Nagahara Keiji's Twentieth-Century Japanese Historiography—a major 21st-century Japanese historiographical work—as "a historiography without women[2]." She argued that traditional historiography has confined women to roles as writers of women's history, thereby marginalizing their presence in the broader field.

Although *“women’s history”* and *“historical writing by women”* are not the same, prewar women’s historical research and studies in women’s history—including Nagahara—have often been represented by Itsue Takamure’s work on ancient history. Ōe criticizes this view and argues that, under the conditions of total war, *“national history”* began to open its doors to women.

In prewar Japan's higher education system, women held a marginal position within the school system[3]. However, during the total war period, a context emerged where 'women’s history' and 'women’s life histories' by female intellectuals—including Takamura—were in demand, leading to a series of publications on women’s history written by these women.

So, how should we analyze the phenomenon of women’s history narratives written by female intellectuals during total war?

In postwar historical studies, the field of “women’s history” has played an important role, mainly emphasizing people’s history, labor history, and social movement history. However, around the 1990s, when research on female intellectuals during total war gained momentum, focus often shifted to issues like the “absence of criticism of the war” and “female intellectuals under the wartime regime of national unity,” or female supporters of the wartime national unity regime[4].

However, during total war, women had to assert their agency fully. Therefore, dismissing critiques of the intellectual women who championed “women’s history” as simply “reflective historiography” or labeling their actions as “wartime collaboration” should be considered too hasty.

When analyzing a text, it is essential to use a method that doesn’t focus solely on the author’s “intentions” or “awareness.” Instead, the publication should be seen as a message directed at society and its readers within a specific historical setting.

This paper, focusing on the structural position of women in Japan’s

higher education system before the war, highlights Yamakawa Kikue, who continued publishing and creating unique historical narratives even during the final stages of the Asia-Pacific War. It examines the connection between ‘women’s history’ and ‘historical writing by women’ during total war.

Yamakawa Kikue is recognized as one of the leading social thinkers of the twentieth century, yet she has not been included in the historiography of the discipline. Additionally, her focus on historical writing in her intellectual work lasted only a limited time.

However, Yamakawa’s well-known historical works, *Samurai Women* and *The Village Where I Live*, were created during a period when women’s historical stories were in demand under total war, but they also faced strict censorship.

These texts are characterized as historical narratives written from perspectives such as life history, family history, and local history, and I believe they can shed light on the possibilities of 'women’s history' under total war.

1. Women and Higher Education

1) Women’s Access to Education in Prewar Japan’s Higher Education System

The development of the modern nation-state was closely connected to the creation of higher education institutions. Historically, however, women were systematically barred from these institutions worldwide. Women's ambitions to pursue advanced knowledge and participate in scholarly research were often seen as deviations from prescribed gender roles, leading to social condemnation and sometimes being viewed as conditions needing “treatment.[5]”

In prewar Japan as well, women were barred from higher education—particularly from university-level professional and academic training.

Among the parts of Japan's prewar educational system, government-established institutions of higher learning—such as the two imperial universities founded during the Meiji era—were closely connected to qualification exams for elite bureaucratic roles, like the Higher Civil Service Examination[6].

Simultaneously, the period after World War I marked a turning point in the connection between educational credentials and employment, with secondary education institutions expanding rapidly. Various types of vocational schools for boys were improved, leading to a notable rise in enrollment, as educational qualifications became more closely tied to career prospects. Additionally, the 1918 University Ordinance elevated many private institutions—such as law and economics colleges—to university status throughout the 1920s and 1930s, broadening opportunities for secondary and higher secondary graduates to continue their education.

However, under the prewar system of gender-separated education, women faced significant barriers. Although the number of four-year girls' high schools and their graduates increased, many institutions that expanded during this period—such as dressmaking schools—were classified as "miscellaneous schools", which operated outside the formal education system. In major urban areas, there was some progress with the creation of women's professional schools and improvements to girls' schools; however, entry to universities remained a rare exception for women. Overall, even at the secondary level, the prewar school system limited women's advancement to "higher schools," which served as a marginal or auxiliary track. As a result, the so-called "opening of the gates" to women during the Taishō and Shōwa eras occurred without any systematic institutional reform, and admission policies mainly depended on the discretion of individual universities and faculties. Usually, women were admitted not as regular students but as auditors[7].

For women, the highest formal education available was the two government-run women's higher regular schools. These institutions, along with many other women's colleges, campaigned to be elevated to university status, but the government—specifically the Ministry of Education—consistently refused approval. Consequently, even though many women's higher education institutions adopted the title "university" before the war, their credentials were not recognized as equivalent to those of men's universities.

Yamakawa Kikue's *The Victory of Women* (1919) critically examined secondary and higher education for girls in modern Japan through the lens of gender differences. She first pointed out the disparities in curricular rigor between male and female students, arguing that the curriculum for girls kept their knowledge at a significantly lower level. She also emphasized the impact of differences in the length of schooling, noting that education for girls typically ended with graduation from higher girls' schools, while women's professional schools were few and offered limited specialized fields. As a result, girls seeking professional training had virtually no viable options. Yamakawa therefore criticized the educational system as structurally gender-discriminatory.

Even among conservative women at the regional level, the expansion and improvement of higher education for women was seen as an urgent issue. For example, the 1927 convention resolution of the All-Kansai Women's Federation—a major women's organization during the Taishō and early Shōwa periods—called for the promotion of women's professional schools[8]. However, Yamakawa had already started to view the issue as more than just about quantity.

"Judging by the number of girls' schools and female students, one cannot necessarily say that women's education in Japan is

underdeveloped. However, its content is nothing to be proud of. It is an urgent task for Japan today to abolish the discriminatory treatment between male and female students, to standardize textbooks and educational policies, and to grant girls the freedom to study according to the same standards as boys. While I advocate for a general system of coeducation, I believe that, at the very least, secondary schools should be opened to girls who wish to attend—this is an essential measure.[9]"

By 1922, Yamakawa had also published an essay in English titled "Woman in Modern Japan," in which she connected the issue to women gaining professional qualifications and economic independence, while also critiquing the Japanese educational system.

"—During the last half century, the social conditions of Japan have undergone radical change. But the principle of women's education has not changed accordingly. It has been contended that cultivating the passive virtues of good housewives, as in the past centuries, is insufficient, instead of aiming at the intellectual and vocational training required by the changed conditions of society. This contradiction between women's education and her actual position reacts most unfavorably upon her status as a professional woman[10]."

Yamakawa's inquiry was not framed as a broad discussion of women's social status, but instead concentrated on the connection between the educational system for women and their access to professional jobs. This analytical focus and identification of structural issues highlighted a distinctive element of Yamakawa's feminist thoughts, even among her peers [11]. She had already acknowledged the seriousness of the situation at the secondary education level, as shown by the following statement.

“Alternatively, it can be argued that the situation had already reached a critical point at the level of secondary education, as evidenced by the following observation.

—The difference in the education of the sexes became more striking in secondary education, where there is a five-year’ course for both sexes, but so different are the results that girls who finish the five-year’ course are hardly equal in proficiency to boys at the end of 3 years.….[12]“

Yamakawa identified the core issue as gender discrimination embedded in both educational content and the shaping of future opportunities. Japan’s secondary and higher education systems, designed along gendered lines, resulted in a lack of vocational training for women and kept them from reaching career goals. Her critique focused on the structural exclusion of women from academic and professional fields, caused by both the absence of occupational training and gender-based restrictions on qualifications. The fact that such a critical perspective was already expressed at this early stage is highly significant.

“The only institution for women’s higher education established by the government is two high normal schools which provide teachers for girls’ high schools. The other colleges for women were established by private funds, mostly with the help of foreign missionaries. These institutions favorably or religious studies, or various ladylike accomplishments, rather than unbiased investigations of science. Universities and colleges are, in general, still closed to women; only recently have a few allowed women to attend lectures on literature or social science, but not yet permit them to enter as regular students. Thus, the lack of vocational training, as well as sex disqualifications, exclude women from the

learned professions.” [13]

The excerpts cited above are taken from a series of five English-language essays titled Woman in Modern Japan, published between 1920 and 1923 in the Japanese-language popular journal Shakaishugi (Socialism), which promoted socialist ideas. Borrowing Yamakawa’s observations, it is well known that, in prewar Japan, women were institutionally excluded from higher education. Including entry into academia, women as a gender were kept away from opportunities to receive scholarly training. Here, it has been noted that Yamakawa was a thinker who, from an early stage, pointed out the question of what higher education meant for women.

2) How Did Yamakawa Kikue Receive Her Education?

① Yamakawa Kikue’s Educational Background

Yamakawa Kikue—born Aoyama Kikue—was the granddaughter of a respected Confucian scholar who served as an official historian in the Mito domain during the late Edo period. Her mother, Chise, was his daughter, and both her older sister and brother received direct instruction in classical Chinese from their grandfather. However, family dynamics within samurai households during this transitional era were often complex. Kikue recalled that, as a child, she witnessed the tragedies women faced in such families—women forced into concubinage, compelled to marry against their will, or suffering because of their husbands’ misconduct[14].

From Edo to Meiji: After the abolition of the feudal domains and the creation of prefectures in 1871, which stripped the samurai of their economic power, her grandfather’s family moved to Tokyo, where he became a low-ranking bureaucrat in the Meiji government. Kikue was born there. Her father, who learned French, got a job as an interpreter at the Ministry of the Army. Building on that, he supported the government’s

early efforts at industrialization and pioneered Japan's meat processing industry. He promoted pig farming and expanded his business to Hokkaido and Taiwan.

While the family had a strong background in classical Chinese studies and literary tradition, they were also attentive to contemporary society through newspapers and magazines. Kikue's father even brought the Heimin Shimbun (Commoners' Newspaper) into the family sitting room. Both her older sister and brother received higher education and went on to build careers. Raised in a household on the outskirts of Tokyo that embraced the latest intellectual culture of the Meiji period, Aoyama Kikue followed her sister's example: after completing the two-year advanced course at Kōjimachi Banchō Elementary School, she enrolled in the five-year Tokyo Prefectural Second Higher Girls' School in Koishikawa in April 1902. Compared to the average school, these institutions offered notably more extended periods of instruction.

However, even at such elite girls' schools in the capital, the curriculum was, in Yamakawa's words, "monotonous and uninteresting, rooted entirely in the ideology of wise motherhood"[15]. Female students who saw their education as a way to gain qualifications and prepare for jobs—expressing desires like "I want to become independent" or "at the very least, I want to acquire the ability to support myself"—were dismissed by school authorities as "eccentric." She later recalled: "I disliked sewing classes at school and was often scolded. I was told that I wouldn't be able to marry, or that someone as stubborn as I was couldn't build a happy household. It was unbearable to me that, at every turn, marriage and family were used as tools of coercion"[16].

Unable to find fulfillment within the official education system, she turned to self-education, including reading works of naturalist literature, but she remained unsatisfied. She applied to audit classes at Tokyo Imperial

University, only to discover that the institution had never considered women as learners. Neither higher girls' schools nor women's professional schools were designed to provide vocational training or prepare students for employment. These frustrations and criticisms were shared by many women who had strong aspirations for independence[17].

For intellectually driven women like Yamakawa, the male-oriented education system of the late Meiji and Taishō periods offered no clear direction. She vividly described the experience as one of "not knowing where or what to seek, fumbling in the dark, gripped by a frustrating sense of helplessness, unable to cultivate the capacities that should have been nurtured"[18].

② Yamakawa Kikue and Translation

As is well known, Yamakawa Kikue (1890–1980) was a prominent intellectual and public thinker active throughout the twentieth century. After graduating from a higher girls' school, she "abandoned her initial aspirations" and, a year and a half later, enrolled at Tsuda Women's College. Although the curriculum was described as "monotonous, consisting solely of English," the content of the texts introduced her to contemporary thought and new intellectual currents.

Setu Itō, a social policy scholar and researcher of August Bebel, described Yamakawa as having received the highest level of English-language education available to women, stating that she was equipped with "an unshakable weapon—English acquired at an advanced level. [19]"

Later, the modern historian Inumaru Giichi, a leading postwar Marxist historiographer, asked Yamakawa how she had approached writing her English-language essays during her time at Tsuda. Her response was as follows.

It's more challenging to write in Japanese first and then translate into

English. At Tsuda, we had weekly English composition classes. Each week, the teacher critiqued our writing and assigned a new topic for the next week. Topics included issues like ‘women’s suffrage’ and ‘the status of women. [20]’

Indeed, Yamakawa continued to actively engage with contemporary literature on women's issues and labor theory in the English-speaking world, later applying this knowledge within the context of postwar central government administration[21]. Her translation work during the prewar period was particularly notable. She was among the first to introduce and translate texts on the German Revolution into Japanese, including an English translation of The Verdict of the Great War. Besides publishing three monographs, she delivered a presentation on labor issues at the 1918 meeting of the Society for Social Policy—an impressive achievement for a 28-year-old. Setu Itō, a scholar of social thought, praised the high quality of Yamakawa’s scholarship.

In 1919, with the founding of the Comintern, Yamakawa was quick to introduce its policies on women to Japanese audiences. She was the first to organize an International Women’s Day event in Japan, based on the work of Clara Zetkin. Itō later remarked that Yamakawa, “perhaps the only Japanese woman at the time, possessed a level of understanding that grasped the core of the Comintern’s women’s policies.[22]”

Today, Yamakawa Kikue and her ideas are attracting renewed scholarly interest, including large-scale conferences. The Yamakawa Kikue Collection, maintained by the Kanagawa Prefectural Library, is also undergoing efforts to reorganize and catalog the archive[23]. Junko Yamaguchi, who is creating a comprehensive list of Yamakawa’s extensive translation work, has emphasized the critical role translation played in shaping Yamakawa’s thinking, noting that she began her intellectual journey through translation. According to Yamaguchi, “due to currency fluctuations after World War

I, the availability of foreign-language literature greatly increased around 1918, leading to a sharp rise in the volume of translations; quantitatively, her translation output peaked in 1921–22.[24]”

In 1922, Yamakawa completed a full Japanese translation of August Bebel’s *Woman and Socialism*, and in 1923, published Dawn of Russia, a collection of over forty translated articles, including European and American journalistic reports on the Russian Revolution. Her translation-based writings expanded into a broader body of political commentary. Indeed, “compared with her contemporary feminists, Yamakawa Kikue’s remarkable internationalism was grounded in this intellectual labor of translation.[25]”

Here, it is also important to note that Yamakawa’s internationalism in the post–World War I period included an ambitious effort at a comparative history of women, starting with primitive and ancient societies and influenced by developments in the English-speaking world. This is exemplified in The Victory of Women (first edition, 1919), where her focus on the historical changes in women’s status offers a perspective that differs from linear-progressive historical narratives.

The structure of the book places Japan, when compared with Western history, as a society that shifted from matrilineal to patrilineal systems. Yamakawa identifies the turning point in the transformation of marriage systems—especially those involving property—and connects the decline in women's status to the rise of the warrior (samurai) class. While using the broad framework of national history, her work tells a history of women’s status through the institution of marriage, from ancient societies to the medieval samurai era, and into capitalist modernity.

This broad scope of what she called “studies on the Japanese woman question” was further expanded in 1922 when she published an English essay that provided a general overview of the “modern woman” in Japan,

covering the period from the Meiji Restoration through the 1920s. A theorist who deeply understood and integrated contemporary socialist thought, Yamakawa used historical narrative as a method to analyze the "woman question" in the 1920s. What she was trying to do, we might say, was a form of women's history that aimed to relativize the "present" and critically examine its structures.

In contrast, Takamure Itsue, recognized as a leading historian of women, aimed to reexamine the origins of the state through "women's history." What, then, were the historical conditions that enabled a narrative centered on women? And within this historical and intellectual framework, how should Yamakawa's writings be positioned?

2. The Shift to Women's History During Total War

1)"Women's History" in the Context of Total War

Following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the total war regime of the 1940s increasingly called upon women leaders to become active participants in the war effort. In this context, Ōe's study notes that in 1944, history departments were newly established at several private women's colleges under the old educational system, and interprets this development as "part of the cultivation of patriotism to support the wartime regime through historical studies in women's higher education institutions[26]). In other words, the opening of history departments to women at that time was aligned with training mid-level leaders during total war.

It was during this period—around the time of the Sino-Japanese War—that Takamure Itsue gradually gained recognition as a researcher of women's history. Starting with her Biographical Dictionary of Great Japanese Women (1936), she increasingly earned a reputation as a writer capable of producing scholarly general histories of women. After the

outbreak of the war, she published A History of Great Japanese Women (1938), A 2,600-Year History of Women (1940), and even during the final phase of the Asia-Pacific War, Biographies of Japanese Women (1944). Thus, she maintained a prolific publishing career throughout Japan's period of total war.

In postwar historiography, Takamure's works are seen as groundbreaking efforts in ancient women's history, especially in their attempt to use textual evidence to argue that early Japan was originally a matrilineal society. Although her active support for the war through her writings has already been heavily critiqued, it is still worth asking: did Takamure's general readership work help foster patriotism among women?

In this context, Takamure aimed to clarify not only the content but also the methodological aspects of "women's history" in the opening of A History of Great Japanese Women. According to her, works of women's history that described events through lists of individual women already existed—for example, the Edo-period Dai Nihonshi (Great History of Japan)—and this style of biographical compilation persisted into the 1910s and beyond. However, Takamure argued that such person-centered narratives were no longer sufficient for modern historiography. She insisted that future research must adopt "cultural and life-history modes of description," proposing that "women's history must not only examine the development of women's culture, but also adopt perspectives grounded in women's positions.[27]"

She further emphasized that, in modern historiography, cultural history should focus on analyzing cultural products created by individuals and society,[28] rather than on political events or biographies of notable figures. From this perspective, Takamure saw women's history not as a discussion of the state and nation, but as a form of life history closely connected to cultural history[29].

In that sense, women's history rooted in everyday life could attract new readers. It might also have connected with the narratives emerging during the final phase of total war—when the line between battlefield and home front, soldier and civilian, was breaking down—providing a gender-breaking form of historical storytelling that crossed traditional boundaries and contributed to new types of national history.

Meanwhile, the Historical Education Research Association, a scholarly society closely linked to the field of history and historical education, also emphasized women's history. In September 1937, the association published a special issue of its journal on the topic, which was later republished as a collection titled *Studies in Women's History*.[30] The volume was organized into three sections, including seven general essays, fourteen thematic essays, and three articles on history education. [31]

In its preface, the editors noted that although modern historiography has made significant progress, "the field of women's history remains academically undeveloped," framing it as an emerging scholarly challenge. They described the collection as "the first attempt to address women's history from a rigorous academic standpoint" (Preface).

The essays in the volume were organized first by historical period and then by social class, covering topics such as "Women in the Samurai Society of the Early Modern Period" and "Women in Urban Merchant Society," while also including socio-economic historical perspectives in the study of women's lives. Notably, Inoue Kiyoshi—who would go on to write one of the first Marxist general histories of women from the perspective of people's struggle—contributed an essay on "Women in Peasant Society in the Early Modern Period."

Although the volume lacked transparent methodologies or uniform topics across the essays, there was a common recognition that women's history could not be reduced to just biographical lists. Mainly, the women

described in these studies were shown as active participants in maintaining livelihoods and family economies. Such portrayals likely aimed to affirm and promote women's active involvement and inclusion in the total war effort.

One notable aspect of this volume—remarkable precisely because it was a scholarly work—was its inclusion of reports on pedagogical practice. In other words, despite being an academic publication, it intentionally incorporated reflections on teaching. Alongside a contribution by Tomohide Naitō, a specialist in Middle Eastern history and professor at Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School, titled "Women and History Education," the volume also featured submissions from female teachers at higher girls' schools and elementary schools, including case studies such as "History Instruction at Higher Girls' Schools" and "Teaching National History to Elementary School Girls."

Institutional changes in history education further supported women's history. Starting in 1937, history was reorganized as part of a new "National Morality Curriculum" (Kokumin-ka) in secondary education, which combined ethics (shūshin), Japanese language, history, and geography. Within this framework, history was positioned as a core subject "related to the national polity" (kokutai). Specifically, at higher girls' schools, history became one of the fundamental components of the Kokumin-ka. According to the new curriculum guidelines, five-year higher girls' schools were required to dedicate 240 hours to history, with 160 hours allocated to Japanese history—thus increasing its importance. New textbooks were expected to be issued starting in the 1938 academic year. Tomohide Naitō even noted that, "in the case of national history textbooks intended for advanced levels at higher girls' schools, the entire volume could be considered a history of women."[32]

However, despite these curricular reforms, practical teaching materials

in women's history remained limited. Under Takamure's leadership, educators in the field expressed both criticism and hope: they noted that the existing national history textbooks for girls' schools were shortened versions of those used in boys' middle schools.

Studies in Women's History also set new expectations for women's history—expectations that differed from traditional political historiography. What, then, was the perceived importance of women studying history in wartime Japan? Naitō highlighted the significance of "the cultivation of sentiment" through learning about "historical facts concerning women."[33] In other words, there was a call for a form of historical storytelling infused with emotion and human warmth—qualities that contrasted with conventional, rational (i.e., masculinized) historiography.

The discourse framing women as emotional beings in opposition to male-associated reason recurs throughout the volume. Thus, while historical realities often challenged rigid categories, the normative gender binary remained firmly in place. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the framework of women's history was expected not to challenge gender roles but rather to reinforce them—or at least not to depart from them.

However, as Japan transitioned from the Second Sino-Japanese War to the outbreak of World War II and eventually into the Asia-Pacific War, the gender roles established during the formation of the modern nation-state began to break down. In the final stage of total war, when a decisive battle on the Japanese mainland was even anticipated, women were increasingly expected to contribute not just on the home front but also beyond it. In June 1945, during the closing phase of the Battle of Okinawa, the revised Military Service Act expanded conscription to include young women, effectively institutionalizing the possibility of female soldiers.

In this context, the image of the working woman became the ideal

wartime woman—adaptable, mobilized, and aligned with national needs. A more active and assertive stance was required of women. Yamakawa's texts on "life history" and "women's history" should be seen as products of exactly this historical moment.

3. How Should *Women of the Samurai Class* and *the Village Where I Live Be Read?*

1) *How Were the Women of the Samurai Class and the Village Where I Live* Received and Read—Then and Now?

In the 1940s, narratives about women's and everyday life histories grew popular and were often labeled as "books for women." For example, the Women's Series (Josei Sōsho), edited by Yanagita Kunio, was published one after another by Sangoku Shobō, with each volume about 250 pages long. Many contributors who are now known as leading female folklorists participated in the series. Segawa Kiyoko's Ama Memoirs (November 1942) was reissued in a revised edition in September 1943; Ema Saeko's The Women of Hida (December 1942) went through three printings the following year.[34] In June, she also published The Extended Families of Shirakawa Village. These works, which detailed household and family life in the mountain villages of Hida, gained new readers in the final years of the Asia-Pacific War. Yamakawa Kikue's Women of the Samurai Class (March 1943) and The Village Where I Live (December 1943) were also published as part of the same series.

However, the women portrayed in these stories were mostly shown as people involved in everyday work and labor. It is worth considering whether the life-history style of ethnographic writing—using folkloristic methods—was a form allowed under the strict censorship regime of that time. The approach of viewing the world through individual lives and livelihoods did not necessarily align with the state's goal of "cultivating

patriotism to support the wartime regime," as Ōe mentioned about the creation of history departments. However, at the same time, such an approach required writers to use various rhetorical and structural strategies to navigate the censorship environment.

In Yamakawa Kikue's case, this challenge was especially severe. Her writings faced constant surveillance, which intensified during the war.[35] As is well known, her husband, Yamakawa Hitoshi, was arrested and detained in December 1937 under the Peace Preservation Law during the Popular Front Incident, a major crackdown on liberals and socialists. Though he narrowly survived, by 1943 he was still appealing his sentence.

Yamakawa Kikue herself was also targeted. Her earlier work, *Fifty Lectures on Women* (1933), which addressed the "woman question" through the lens of labor issues and international comparisons, faced censorship, with some editions including redactions or substitutions, and it was ultimately banned. In January 1941, her essay collection *Autumn in the Village and the Pig* drew the attention of Yanagita Kunio, who encouraged her to publish more. Although the two subsequent volumes were eventually published with his support, the fact that Yamakawa was considered a problematic author meant that Yanagita had to negotiate with the Home Ministry's Information Bureau repeatedly.

How, then, has earlier scholarship assessed Yamakawa's writings from the 1940s? While Hiroko Suzuki described the period as a difficult time for writers and saw Yamakawa's work as a form of folkloristic storytelling—a kind of "refuge[36]"—Yoshikazu Inumaru adopted a more critical view, arguing that her wartime discourse lacked any clear criticism of the war.

Even in the *Collected Works of Kikue Yamakawa*, compiled in the 1980s, her wartime writings mainly were left out because her discussions during the war were intentionally avoided; therefore, the selections included were limited. While Yoshikazu Inumaru highly praised

Yamakawa's English-language essays written after World War I as "the first accounts of modern Japanese women's history written from a socialist perspective in terms of standpoint, viewpoint, and methodology,[37]" his evaluation of her writings from the 1930s and 1940s mainly focused on whether she had cooperated with the war effort or expressed criticism of the war.

While Yamakawa's two books ultimately avoided suspension after publication, they should be seen as works carefully crafted with extreme caution and meticulous attention to censorship, right down to the most minor details of their narrative strategies.

Unlike earlier historiographical evaluations, modern commentaries on Yamakawa's wartime writings used different criteria. For example, general reviews of Women of the Warrior Class noted that the work aimed "to contribute to the uplift of women's spirit by recounting the biographies of both renowned and unknown women,[38]" with a particular focus on whether it was appropriate for the demands of the time.

However, evaluations of Yamakawa's books by her peers were based on different criteria. The general reception of Women of the Samurai Class highlighted its relevance to the national context of the time, describing it as "a work intended to inspire the spirit of womanhood by narrating the lives of both well-known and obscure women." In other words, the focus was on whether the work was appropriate for the wartime situation.

In contrast, "Women of the Samurai Class" received more detailed attention in "New Works in National History: Revised Title, 1944 Edition" (Kokushi Shincho Kaidai Shōwa 19-nendo), a publication mainly focused on presenting specialized works in historical studies. Shintarō Takagi, who was part of the editorial team of the Encyclopedia of Japanese History (Kokushi Daijiten), praised the book for providing valuable insights into "the economic aspects of samurai life," depicting "the frugal lives of

women grounded in an economic foundation," and offering an "analytical exposition on marriage as the central issue of the household."

Takagi also pointed out that the portrayal of the Mito Domain's "bloody internal conflicts at the end of the Tokugawa period," seen through the experiences of Yamakawa's close relatives, vividly captures the somber atmosphere of a society in transition. He described the book as "an enjoyable read, interwoven with painterly and beautiful vignettes." He concluded that "as a social history of the late Tokugawa period, centered on the Mito Domain, it is of considerable documentary value.[39]"

From the perspective of empirical historiography, Yamakawa's book was seen as a serious academic work. It was judged as a historical account that meets the standards of positivist historiography, blending oral stories from her mother Chise with careful use of historical sources.

Both of Yamakawa's works show a forward-thinking approach to historical sources, foreshadowing methods used in modern historiography. For example, Women of the Samurai Class builds its historical narrative utilizing a mix of ego-documents written by her grandfather Aoyama Enju, related official documents, and oral history. As a family history, it is also noteworthy for its intentional emphasis on the matrilineal line.

Even after the war, the text remained well-known for its detailed depiction of daily life in samurai households. It was widely recognized as an essential account of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji eras.[40]

On the other hand, *The Village Where I Live* is a work of local history. Still, unlike traditional chorographic texts that rely heavily on written records and gazetteers, it is mainly based on intergenerational oral traditions, residents' memories, and family stories. At the same time, Yamakawa expresses gratitude to Hagino Ryō[41] of the Ministry of Welfare's Research Institute—established during World War II—for providing data on population movement. The integration of population data and demographic

insights, especially concerning wartime national policy, marks a new methodological approach.

Although reviews from the time of its release are unclear, the book became recognized as a key reference in postwar regional historiography. In the 1950s, it was cited in specialized studies[42], including research on local transportation history[43], and Yamakawa was invited to contribute an essay titled “Post Town Fujisawa.[44]” The chapter “Cooked Rice and Barley Rice” in The Village Where I Live is also seen as a predecessor to later ethnological studies on rice-planting rituals, and it is listed in the bibliography alongside major works by folklorists such as Miyamoto Tsuneichi and Yanagita Kunio[45].

It should therefore be regarded as a pioneering work of life-history writing in pre–high economic growth Japan that attracted scholarly attention for both its methodology and its subject matter.

As shown above, both of Yamakawa’s books are significant contributions to historical research. Yet, postwar historiography—especially that influenced by Marxism—has not recognized Yamakawa Kikue’s wartime writings as part of the history of historiography or the development of “women’s history.” So, why has Women of the Samurai Class failed to earn a place in studies of the Bakumatsu–Meiji Restoration period or in postwar women’s history?

Two provisional answers can be offered here. First, as Tōru Haga has pointed out, Yamakawa was considered part of the Rōnōha (Labor–Farmer Faction) of socialist thought. Until the 1970s, the primary focus in women’s history was on revealing the history of movements like peasant, social, and labor movements. In contrast, Inoue Kiyoshi, a key figure in postwar women’s history, was also a well-known scholar of Kōza-ha (Lecture Faction) Marxist historiography, and the Rōnōha and Kōza-ha held significantly different views regarding the Meiji Restoration. This likely

made it difficult to place Yamakawa's historical writings within the broader field of historiography.

Second, in Japanese historiography, it was not until the late 1980s that the focus shifted from the history of movements to the history of everyday life[46]. With the full-scale adoption of gender-based analytical frameworks, studies emerged that examined life histories inseparable from the public sphere as well as research on middle-class women, marking a stage in which life history was explored in relation to social structures[47]. Therefore, it is necessary not only to recover overlooked texts but also to reexamine the frameworks that have historically defined the scope of what has been considered "women's history."

Kate Wildman Nakai likely made a pioneering observation in the field of political intellectual history. Nakai, a scholar of early modern Japanese intellectual history, provided a different perspective in her preface to the English translation of Women of the Mito Domain: Recollections of Samurai Family Life. She praised Yamakawa's detailed descriptions of the modest and restrained daily lives of lower-ranking samurai families. At the same time, Nakai closely examined how the historical context of the 1940s was embedded within the text. Drawing parallels between the political climate of the late Tokugawa Mito Domain and Yamakawa Kikue's own intellectual and activist world as a socialist thinker, Nakai interpreted the work as subtly critiquing the era of the Asia-Pacific War[48].

Nakai also discussed the limitations Yamakawa faced when writing during wartime, noting[49]: "Her judiciousness in referring to the current situation presumably was intended to prevent the risk that permission would be denied for the book's publication or that, once published, its sale would be restricted." As an example, Nakai highlighted the chapter on "Marriage and Divorce." In this chapter, Yamakawa quotes extensively from The New Greater Learning for Women (Shin Onna Daigaku) by the

Meiji-era intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi, which, Nakai argues, allows her to critically view marriage practices in the Edo period while portraying the Meiji-era legal reforms in a more positive light.

But this raises the question: how did Yamakawa previously understand and critique Fukuzawa's views on women? In a 1922 English-language essay, she directly addressed the influence—and limitations—of Fukuzawa's writings, offering an explicit critique.

> "Shin-Onna-daigaku" enjoyed a good reputation among educated cases and exercised not a little influence on the general public.
>
> This meant the victory the bourgeois ideals over the feudal morality. Doubtless, Mr. Fukuzawa was a fair-minded and honorable gentleman, advanced for the age. But he could not think about the world beyond his class, the bourgeoisie. The only life of a woman he talked of was that of a wife and mother in the bourgeois family.
>
> He never touched the problems of women in the working classes. He took it for granted that home is the only natural sphere of women. But he thought it necessary to give them a little more liberty and independence to make them more clever and efficient companions. In short, his ideas were one of the bourgeois conception of women's emancipation in a somewhat disfigured manner.[50]"

Yamakawa's assessment of Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Shin Onna Daigaku* may seem somewhat typical. However, given the widespread praise Fukuzawa's ideas on women's education received into the 1980s, her feminist critique remains notably sharp. What sets Yamakawa's view apart is her direct challenge to the notion that, despite a long history of women's labor, Fukuzawa—as an Enlightenment thinker—failed to see women as independent, working individuals.

Given Yamakawa's earlier critique of Fukuzawa, her historical writings under fascism might initially seem to represent a form of "ideological conversion." However, the texts should first be examined in light of their specific contexts. In what follows, this article aims to highlight the originality of her two texts as works of historical writing and to focus on the narrative strategies that characterize them.

4. Reading *Women of the Samurai Class* and *The Village Where I Live*

① *Women of the Samurai Class*

This work is a social and life history focused on the daily lives of lower- and middle-ranking samurai and their families in the Mito Domain during the Bakumatsu and Meiji Restoration periods. It offers a grounded, site-specific account of the era through domestic and everyday experiences. The book is divided into thirteen chapters: "Morning and Evening at the Terakoya," "A Housewife's Daily Life," "As a Handwriting Student," "As a Sewing Girl," "Kimono," "Personal Appearance," "Food," "The Home," "Aunts and Female Relatives," "Marriage and Divorce," "The Year of the Rat Commotion," "A Time of Ordeals," and "The Restoration and Women."

The primary focus of this historical narrative is on the life stories of lower- and middle-ranking samurai and their families in the Mito Domain. Starting with the chapter "The Year of the Rat Commotion," the hardships faced by "ordinary women in samurai households" due to political infighting, assassinations, punishments, and purges within the domain—what might be called "politics"—have also been viewed in the context of the book's wartime publication. The final three chapters combine a local and visceral view of late Tokugawa political history with the everyday life of samurai families, creating a unique example of social history.

Yamakawa's method of writing life history emphasizes the varied

circumstances of people born into samurai families, demonstrating how they lived within the broader economic systems that shaped the samurai class during the late Edo period. In this way, her work offers a form of social and economic history that differs from the type of women's history that was officially promoted during wartime.

Furthermore, regarding its connection to the political climate of that era, her depiction of samurai life sharply contrasts with officially promoted ideals of samurai as models of spiritual discipline. Instead, her narrative approaches iconoclasm by challenging and deconstructing the romanticized image of the samurai through a realistic and critical portrayal.

According to Yamakawa, of the 1,000 samurai in the Mito Domain, 700 had stipends of less than 100 koku and could no longer support themselves solely on their official income. Side jobs were permitted, and women and older people worked daily to make ends meet. By the late Edo period, the daily lives of these samurai and their families were plagued by poverty: they had never even seen a "zabuton" floor cushion, nor did they provide one for guests. The sugar they used was unrefined black sugar; while they bought soy sauce, they made their own miso. Food purchases were kept to the minimum necessary.

Regarding clothing and personal appearance, no woman engaged in daily side work regularly used white or red face powder. Yamakawa also provides detailed descriptions of everyday life: the gendered distinctions in samurai hairstyles, the custom of ohaguro (teeth blackening) for married women, hairstyle classifications based on status and rank, and changes in customs as remembered by the elderly.

Simultaneously, Yamakawa's life-history writing highlights gender differences in how people responded to social change. Even before the concept of "gender" was developed, her observations consistently focused on culturally constructed, unequal differences between men and women.

Yamakawa's approach to social and life-history writing is marked by her skill in emphasizing individual cases within their social settings, while also framing subtle changes as components of broader historical trends.

Regarding samurai life, Yamakawa argues that by the late Edo period, samurai households had already shifted away from their traditional roles as units of production and military service. Instead, they had become mainly consumers, relying on the stipends of the male head of household. The view that "samurai had already become consumers" closely aligns with the Rōnōha (Labor-Farmer Faction)'s interpretation of the Meiji Restoration as a significant class-based transformation.

At the same time, Yamakawa's analysis of changes affecting women in samurai households goes further. While grounded in an understanding of the historical shift toward capitalist economic structures, she also identifies the gendered inequalities embedded in those transformations. In doing so, her historical perspective anticipates the concerns of gender theory, offering a proto-feminist critique that recognizes the structural dimension of gender-based discrimination.

In earlier times within the Mito Domain, women made their own clothing and considered these garments their personal property, reflecting a shared sense of self-sufficiency. However, when Japan opened to foreign trade in 1858, women's relationship with clothing changed significantly. The arrival of imported cotton products sparked fascination with foreign fabrics' textures, leading to a shift from hand-making clothes to purchasing them with money.

Sumiko Sekiguchi has highlighted Yamakawa's approach to historical writing by emphasizing her stated "future direction," as documented in Modern Women of Japan: A Biographical Dictionary of 100 Contemporary Women, published in the 1940 edition of the *Shin-Joen Yearbook*. The passage is as follows:

> For quite some time, I have been interested in the economic history of modern Japan, especially the period from the end of the Tokugawa era to the Meiji era, and I have gradually started reading about this topic. If possible, I hope to do my own research someday. Right now, I still feel like a first-year student, but I look forward to this work in the future with great anticipation. [51]

Yamakawa's focus on "the economic history of Japan from the end of the Tokugawa period through the Meiji era" closely aligns with the research agenda of the Rōnōha (Labor-Farmer Faction). Additionally, her work demonstrates a compelling empirical approach that integrates gender as a structural factor—primarily through her discussion of cotton and the rise of consumer desire.

An illustrative example is the question: To whom does the kimono belong? Yamakawa compares purchased garments with those that women made themselves, framing this distinction around independence and self-sufficiency. She argues that her husband could not take away a kimono made by a woman because it was not his property. The reason, she explains, is based on the socially shared understanding that the garment was *produced* by the woman herself—an act of labor that conferred ownership.

At the same time, Yamakawa's depiction of Edo-period marriage practices reveals, through episodes involving the complex kinship networks of "aunts and female relatives," that marriage frequently placed women at a disadvantage. Her narrative raises critical questions: What kind of social structure makes marriage an obligatory path for women? And what possibilities for emancipation or independence exist within that framework?

Notably, Yamakawa Kikue was the first in Japan to complete a full Japanese translation of August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*—through the English edition—in 1923. Two decades later, under intense wartime

censorship and surveillance, she revisited the theme of marriage, using specific and localized examples from nineteenth-century Japan to reflect on the nature of society itself.

Yamakawa suggests that the social hierarchy of the Edo period softened gender differences. For example, daughters of merchant families could not become official wives of samurai, and even among samurai men, only the eldest sons inherited the family estate. Second and third sons often faced challenging circumstances and were commonly married into other families as adopted sons. In this system, marriage acted as a way to reproduce the household and secure labor from both men and women.

Yamakawa notes that, in this context, both men and women often experienced divorce and remarriage, frequently due to the need to keep household stability. She also mentions that high mortality rates—among both women and men—were a significant reason for the high rates of remarriage (p. 133). Her analysis of marriage aligns with the demographic and social histories of peasant life in 17th–18th-century Europe[52].

In any case, marriage among lower-ranking samurai during the Edo period was heavily regulated by family, and the authority granted by being male was significantly reduced. Arbitrary actions based solely on gender—such as those later approved under the Meiji Civil Code—were not tolerated. For readers in the 1940s, the realities of the Edo period described by Yamakawa likely highlighted, in contrast, the authoritarian powers given to husbands under modern legal and marital systems.

For instance, in the section right after her quotation of Fukuzawa Yukichi's Onna Daigaku, which Kate Wildman Nakai criticized in her introduction, Yamakawa points out that acts like abusing or expelling a wife would not have been acceptable under the status system. In these cases, penalties for men included disinheritance or forced retirement, carried out through "intervention by relatives" or "adjustment through common sense."

To clarify, on the surface, Yamakawa's text compares the 1940s to the Edo period in a way that appears to favor the 1940s. However, her approach to contrasting early modern and modern social structures prompts readers to rethink the patriarchal roots of the Meiji Civil Code, which legally established an unequal gender binary. By granting the male head of household nearly unlimited authority over the family, the Meiji system formalized gender hierarchy in a way that Edo society, with all its structural limitations, did not necessarily do to the same extent. Therefore, Yamakawa's historical analysis provides readers with essential insights into the coercive elements of modern family law.

However, the true strength of this work as a piece of life history lies in Yamakawa's method of linking the "politics" of the late Tokugawa Mito Domain—marked by terror and internal purges—with the subtle changes of daily life. This is achieved through her careful choice of episodes and how she arranges memories. The idealized image of the samurai is broken down here: instead of being a noble class devoted to duty and honor, they are shown as a group caught up in internal conflicts. Yamakawa presents this reality not through dramatized stories of duels and sword fights like in chanbara films, but through the narrative style of life history.

One of the most vivid ways readers can understand the impact of the "Year of the Rat Comotion" is through childhood memories of Yamakawa's mother, Chise, especially her memories of the large, empty samurai residences. Yamakawa explains that "the domain granted residential land" and that "the size varied by rank… but in every case the houses were old, sprawling, and poorly maintained—empty and echoing samurai estates"[53]. She highlights the disparity between the extensive landholdings allocated based on status and the widespread poverty among Mito samurai, rendering proper upkeep impossible.

But why had these houses become so abandoned? The answer lies

in political violence: “In the final years of the Tokugawa period, Mito was plagued by one bloody disturbance after another, with each incident producing numerous casualties…”[54]. Families caught up in the civil strife were disbanded—*otori tsubushi* (confiscation of property), exile, or dissolution—leaving homes that were once inhabited deserted. “There were many such houses,” she writes, conveying the scale of devastation.

These large, vacant, and decaying samurai residences thus symbolize Mito during the Bakumatsu and Meiji Restoration period. This landscape conflicts with the triumphant story of the Restoration presented by the Meiji government. For Yamakawa, they embody not a heroic history but a haunting psychological and physical mark of internal collapse.

In summary, Yamakawa’s historical writing is a form of life history rooted in economic structures. Still, it is also a deliberately positioned narrative, aware of the perspective from which the past is interpreted. This is clear not only in her wartime texts but also in her postwar writings, such as the account of the “Namaze Incident,” when, during the early Edo period, an entire village was executed by domain authorities and then erased from official records.

These narrative fragments are not meant to add to the domain’s “official history,” much less the national history (kokushi). Instead, they represent a conscious effort to rebuild understanding of history from the ground up. What Yamakawa provides is a historiographical perspective—an authorial way of viewing history—that aims to challenge dominant narratives by reconstructing the lives and experiences left out of traditional accounts.

Yamakawa depicts the Meiji Restoration as a significant turning point—yet one marked by a large gap between political changes and how ordinary people experienced them. “Nothing changed in Mito,” she writes, mentioning that it was only when her mother, Chiyo, moved to Edo after the abolition of the domains that she realized the ongoing transformations.

Additionally, following political upheaval that left many male members of samurai families dead, some households were able to be rebuilt through the female line.

Before her two wartime works, Yamakawa published Autumn in the Village and the Pig, a collection that features memories of her father. Even in her later postwar memoir, A Record of Two Generations of Women, her family history consistently centers on matrilineal stories. While it may be an overstatement to see this as a direct challenge to the male-line imperial system established during the Meiji era, it still offers a subtly different way of telling history—one that highlights women's experiences and family lines, which are often overlooked in mainstream narratives.

② *The Village Where I Live*

> Yamakawa's historical experiment becomes even more compelling in The Village Where I Live, where reconstructing oral testimony takes center stage. The text demonstrates how local histories are rediscovered through a dialogue between Yamakawa—both as a historian and a participant in village life—and the community members, who are also working subjects within that environment. These accounts are not just collected but are shaped through shared experience, resulting in a collective reconstruction of regional history. (①の最後から②の冒頭へ移動)

The setting of this passage is a rural village where Yamakawa, who was raised in Tokyo, moved. It was the place where she conducted extensive field observations, which later formed the basis for this book. After the "May 15 Incident" in 1936, Yamakawa and her family relocated to an agricultural area in Kanagawa Prefecture, near an old highway route, and began raising quail for eggs. "This was my first time living in such a village," she recalled, surrounded by "deeply rooted local farming families," among whom she

became a rural producer.

Michio Nagai observed that the book focused on “peasant life during wartime” and clearly shows how changes in industrial structure were gradually, yet unmistakably, reshaping both daily life and people's awareness of their living conditions[55]. Written during the war, represents an experimental form of contemporary historical writing. Through participant observation, Yamakawa aimed to uncover the underlying structures and shifts behind rural life, reconstructing local experiences by capturing the voices of the people themselves. It is a pioneering effort to tell the history of the present through the lived practices of a community.

The book has fourteen chapters of different lengths. In the paperback edition's afterword[56], Masana Kano breaks down the book’s structure into three sections.

① 「*Unskeu's Tokaido* (Edo-period Edo-Kyoto highway),」「Sukegouyaku’s Disaster」「Kurofue are coming」
② 「*Sagami*-field's olden days」「Village Pioneer」「samurai and peasants」「*Chinju-sama* and *Ujiko*」「Events and *Gonin-gumi*」
③ "Millet rice, barley rice" "The Cotton Field and the Fox" "Daughter of three generations" "Who will take over farming?" "Arable land will be revived" "Rural villages in wartime”

In the following section, I will analyze the features of Yamakawa’s historical writing based on Kano’s three-part division.

The first section (①), which covers the village during the Bakumatsu and Meiji Restoration periods, describes the village where Yamakawa lived and the surrounding communities, placing them within a larger historical context. Villages near former post stations were caught up in the political

upheavals of the Restoration. Frequently referenced in postwar studies on transportation and highway history, this part of the book effectively reconstructs the struggles of peasants working along these routes by weaving together memories passed down through generations.

The political upheaval during the Bakumatsu period led to increased movement of people and information, fundamentally changing the daily lives of those living along the old highways from the outside in.

> "As for the villages scattered along the highway, centered on the post town, the road was practically alive; the villages and the highway shared in sorrow and prospered and declined together."

> "One old woman recounted: 'According to my mother, back then our father was called out for *sukegō* (corvée labor) almost every day. He would barely return home—hadn't eaten yet, hadn't even changed his clothes—when another messenger would arrive from the Fujisawa officials, and off he'd go again, rounding up the local young men. With so many children and the fields at their busiest, it was unbearable, she used to say.' The elderly all continue to pass down such stories of hardship from their parents[57]".

Her interpretation of the 1853 arrival of Perry's Black Ships, as experienced by the villages near the post stations, is as follows:

> "That was the first tremor that cracked the foundation of Tokugawa's three-hundred-year rule. Ever since, it was as though earthquakes struck incessantly throughout Japan. Traffic on the Tōkaidō grew more intense by the day—officials of the shogunate, couriers, masterless samurai, gamblers, and even thieves and bandits came and went along the road.

> The post towns became ever more hectic, the officials increasingly irritable, and every day brought new *sukegō* labor demands that left no time even for tending the fields.[58]"

Compared to that, her own residence was situated some distance from the central post station. Therefore, in Waga sumu mura, the village is described as "like fish dwelling in the deep sea," where "people simply cultivated rice and paid their taxes, preoccupied with the daily toils of subsistence." This contrast gives the text structural persuasiveness.

Along with the author's sharp observational skills as a resident, the book brings together. It blends the voices of village elders—such as an 83-year-old female landowner and an 81-year-old male former rickshaw puller—who still remember the late Edo and early Meiji periods.

The five chapters in Part II describe the village's pre-early modern history over an extended period. Mythological figures appear in the story, and metaphoric insertions such as "[the migration] required greater courage and physical strength than exploring today's North Manchuria or the remote reaches of Mongolia 59" can be seen as rhetorical devices used to bypass wartime censorship.

Ultimately, the story of the village's origins and the kusawake (pioneering settlers) highlights the key dynamic of the division between warrior and peasant classes—heinō bunri. In this context, the depiction of the samurai in Waga sumu mura aligns with that of Women of the Samurai Class: the samurai are portrayed as a class separate from the means of production.

The historical narrative in Part I of the book recounts Bakumatsu and Meiji Restoration history from the perspective of those on the receiving end of power—villagers burdened by the arbitrary demands of the ruling samurai class, including increased sukegō labor during the political

upheaval of the time. For readers of Women of the Samurai Class, this contrast reminds us that even lower-ranking samurai remained part of the ruling class, setting them apart from the oppressed agricultural population depicted in *Waga sumu mura.*

> The samurai gained political power not only through military strength but also because they established control over the land as native farmers, and thus held sway over all wealth generated from it. In other words, their authority depended on a strong economic base rooted in the land. However, over time, they moved into cities as mere consumers, becoming disconnected from and indifferent to production. While their standard of living increased, it was only by consuming resources taken from the countryside. As a result, they contributed to the decline of rural communities, and with the rise of commerce, their vitality gradually diminished, leaving them increasingly weakened. It is therefore not surprising that their political power—like a central pillar eaten away by termites—began to disintegrate with just a single jolt from the arrival of the Black Ships[59].

The way of interpreting and depicting the past through the lived experiences of rural people distinguishes this work from her previous one. Unlike in her earlier book, here Yamakawa portrays the samurai as a unified group disconnected from production and presents the Meiji Restoration as a social change that eliminated a privileged class. The contradictions inherent in the samurai's life are apparent, as taxes paid by peasants supported consumers. While it's easy to understand the perspective of the Rōnōha (Labour-Farmer Faction) in her view of the Meiji Restoration, Yamakawa's historical portrayal—expressed through the voices of familiar human figures within the village—is layered and full of

complexity.

At the same time, her detailed descriptions of village life during the Bakumatsu-Meiji period, especially the focus on annual rituals, are woven together with episodes that highlight the historical context of wartime Japan. In the second part of the book, which includes many folkloric explanations, Yamakawa describes not only traditional kite-flying festivals but also mentions a “young father of a small child who now serves on a warship.” The event of flying large kites was paused, reimagined as a pleasure to be enjoyed “after the war,” while “airplanes and their roaring engines now filled the skies in place of the great kites and their humming.” Wartime conditions had changed local customs, and Kanagawa Prefecture’s location—on the flight paths of fighter planes and close to metropolitan bombing targets—was far from accidental. Yamakawa does not overlook these developments.

In the final part of the book—comprising six chapters and making up nearly half its length—Yamakawa skillfully combines intergenerational oral histories with data from the Ministry of Health and Welfare. This section highlights issues like population movement and demographic challenges in peri-urban rural villages after World War I. The worsening war situation and widespread mobilization further sped up the decline in the village population. The resulting narrative is a complex, historical-sociological account that uses the past to shed light on current problems.

One example involves the recollections of elderly villagers who describe the area as “a place where life has always been difficult.” Due to its mountainous terrain and lack of paddy fields, rice consumption was mostly limited to wealthy landlords; for smallholders and tenant farmers, staple foods mainly consisted of millet, barley, and tubers. It was only after the Taishō period, when living standards started to improve rapidly, that buying rice became more common. Even then, without cash income,

families had no choice but to sell rice and mix it with other grains for consumption. These additional grains were also of poor quality. Based on both local and regional accounts, Yamakawa depicts this ongoing condition of dietary poverty. The chapter titled Millet and Barley Rice vividly captures this reality.

> Even among wealthy farming households in areas that later became part of Tokyo, rice didn't become a staple food until around 1919 or 1920—during the post-World War I economic boom. Until then, people often said that "farmers don't eat rice." Around that time, farming families gained more opportunities for cash income beyond just selling rice, which led to an increase in rice self-consumption. The sharp increase in rice production in Korea and Taiwan also played a role, as imported rice started flowing into mainland Japan.
>
> ...That said, even when farmers started eating rice, they sold the high-quality grains and kept the leftovers for themselves. A few years ago, when germ rice (haigamai) was promoted and women's groups launched a nationwide campaign encouraging everyone to eat it, the old farmers were shocked: "People who don't grow rice sure have it easy. They assume farmers eat the same top-grade rice as they do![60]"

Colonial rule significantly altered the systems of rice production and distribution. Farming households began to enjoy lives where eating polished white rice became more common. However, for tenant farmers in the imperial capital, white rice remained—more than ever before—a highly appealing source of cash income, making it hard for them to eat it themselves. The question of whose perspective is used to tell the rapid social changes of that period is crucial here; the history recorded in this account reflects the survival strategies of farmers themselves.

Adding to the hardships of rural life during wartime was the government's food control policy. The system of kyōshutsumai—mandatory

rice deliveries in which the government forcibly bought and distributed rice—imposed a heavy burden on farmers, as noted throughout the text. The mention of the “promotion of germ rice” probably refers to the campaign against white rice led by the Federation of Japanese Women (Nihon Fujin Renmei), established in September 1937 under the leadership of Tsuneko Gauntlett and including key activists like Fusae Ichikawa. Although the organization carried on the legacy of the women’s suffrage movement of the 1930s, it was also closely aligned with national policy.

The elderly farmer's comment—“They think we farmers eat the same top-grade rice as they do”—serves as both a subtle political critique and a vivid expression of deep discomfort toward liberal women’s activism, seen from the perspective of rural life.

Therefore, Yamakawa’s historical narrative primarily focuses on gathering and connecting the words and memories of ordinary people—statements that are not necessarily critical—to encourage readers to think about important current issues through the everyday experiences of regular life.

Military conscription of family members, for example, directly deprived rural villages of their essential labor force. Under harsh working conditions, men and women alike developed physical ailments by the time they reached their fifties or sixties, yet with sons and grandsons conscripted into the military, the elderly were left to toil in muddy rice fields. Yamakawa observes, “Much of the rice they have worked so hard to produce is requisitioned, and many households are left to subsist on rationed rice[61] ”. For rural farmers, the hardship of *kyōshutsu* (wartime compulsory rice deliveries) mirrored the burdens of *sukegō* (corvée labor) in the late Tokugawa period.

Yamakawa also subtly references Japan’s imperialism and ongoing war effort: “Soybeans… have recently stopped arriving from Manchuria, so

we've begun cultivating them again[62]". Wartime rural life was intensified by demands such as "farmers must now shoulder the responsibility of feeding not their children or grandchildren living in the cities with food produced through their sweat and labor, but rather of saving the general population from hunger[63]", and "they must also supply dried grasses as feed for military horses[64]".

For readers familiar with *Women of the Samurai Class*, these observations evoke comparisons across different regions, social classes, and eras: from the white sugar and homemade miso in samurai households to the rationed staples of wartime farming families. Yamakawa's historical narration fosters a comparative awareness rooted in lived experiences. The rapid changes caused by wartime conditions are clearly shown in the descriptions of village life. Each chapter in section (3) mainly consists of the voices of the villagers themselves. These spoken stories take up more space than the author's narration. Using this storytelling approach, Yamakawa successfully and convincingly shows the reader the intense, often painful changes that rural life experienced during war.

Conclusion

"Academicism and Gender" (2022) is the first scholarly work to adopt a critical, gender-informed perspective. The Japanese section of the book argues that traditional historiography has confined women to the role of writers of women's history. Building on this idea, the book places the texts of Yamakawa Kikue—who was not included in previous histories—within the lineage of "women's history." It examines them as historical accounts of women's history during total war.

During the final stages of the Asia-Pacific War, when gender roles were widely questioned and even abolished, the rise of 'women's history' as a new field in history education began. As part of the consciousness reform

during total war, the promotion of 'women's history' occurred, and female intellectuals, using their expertise, were permitted to publish such works.

During the final stages of the Asia-Pacific War, when gender roles were significantly challenged and even started to break apart, the development of "women's history" emerged as a new field of historical study. As part of wartime efforts to shape public opinion, "women's history" narratives became widespread, and female scholars, drawing from their respective disciplines, were permitted to publish such works.

This was especially clear in folklore studies, where many stories showed how women in rural farming and mountain villages have long played vital roles in supporting their families through continuous work.

Unlike these narratives, Yamakawa's Women of the Samurai (1943) and The Village Where I Live stand out because of their intentional focus on the passage of time and its changes, along with a descriptive style that emphasizes social structures and how they shift from a socio-economic historical perspective.

Specifically, Yamakawa's portrayals of detailed changes in women's work and lifestyles highlight the historical context of daily life during wartime as a period of difficult living conditions.

Alternatively, her way of weaving stories about local elders, family, and relatives' memories, her focus on changes in samurai-residence areas and the "highway," and her historical narratives that, as a resident, evoke the memories of local people, aligns with the style of public history projects expected in 21st-century historical writing.

When evaluating the significance of these two works during a time of censorship, the binary frameworks used to describe women intellectuals during total war—such as "absence of criticism of the war" versus "women intellectuals under the Imperial Rule Assistance system"—are not appropriate.

Amid strict censorship restrictions, Yamakawa's narratives demonstrate intense empirical rigor. If so, then historical writing using an "empiricist" approach that can avoid the censor's watch may also reveal the potential of historical research itself.

During a time when images of women conforming to the total mobilization regime were examined in history, Yamakawa's historical narratives intentionally acknowledged the perspective from which history is viewed.

A narrative approach that views themes as personal stories and includes many interviews with people directly involved in labor does not necessarily support an image that endorses a regime. Stories about everyday life during periods of historical upheaval are filled with interesting facts. These texts continue to be cited in postwar studies of Bakumatsu history and local history.

This paper reexamines Yamakawa Kikue as a thinker by placing her within a critical perspective on the structure of prewar higher education, which excluded women from professions, and on translation culture. It revisits two of Yamakawa's texts and clarifies their features as women's history narratives. In doing so, it identifies the historical writing—produced under intense political repression and censorship—that held new possibilities and recognizes its potential as a form of historical narrative.

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7 In 1913, the first formal admission of a woman to a university after passing the entrance examination—famously to the Faculty of Science at Tohoku Imperial University—marked a notable case. However, the "opening of the gates" to women was institutionally framed as *sideline admission* (*bōkei nyūgaku)* and required consensus with the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, female applicants were often considered only in second- or third-round admissions, typically when vacancies remained.

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総力戦下における歴史記述の可能性―山川菊栄の「女性史」をたどる

長　志珠絵

本稿は、戦前日本の歴史学において歴史叙述としての「女性史」とは何か、誰がその担い手となったのかを問い直す視点から思想家としての山川菊栄に注目した。山川は戦前の高等教育と職業との関係への批判的着眼や翻訳文化を通じた学びによって、ジェンダー概念のない時代に性差を分析方法として用いるとともに、歴史叙述に関心を寄せた。特に、総力戦下、ジェンダーロールをめぐる境界が大きく越境し、性別役割の建前が溶解を見せるアジア太平洋戦争末期、「女性史」叙述は、国策に適合的な「働く」女性像を描くツールとしても求められた。良妻賢母理念と異なり、日本の伝統社会は女性の生業労働によって支えられる共労社会、家族の多就労によって生計が維持できる社会であるが、抗する歴史叙述とは何か。厳しい言論弾圧・検閲が自身に向けられた時局下での山川の２つのテキスト『武家の女性』、『わが住む村』に即して検討した。歴史を誰の目線でみるか、ポジショナリティが明確であるうえ、高い実証水準を備えた山川の歴史叙述は、社会構造の変化を女性の働き方から照射することで戦時下の日常を相対化する。また住民の記憶を多く取り込み地域の歴史像の再構築をはかるなど、21 世紀の歴史叙述に求められるパブリックヒストリーの試みに近い。いわゆる「女性史」の作品として読まれてこなかった山川の著作だが、「女性史」の系譜もまた、メタヒストリーとして読み直す作業かが求められている点にも言及した。