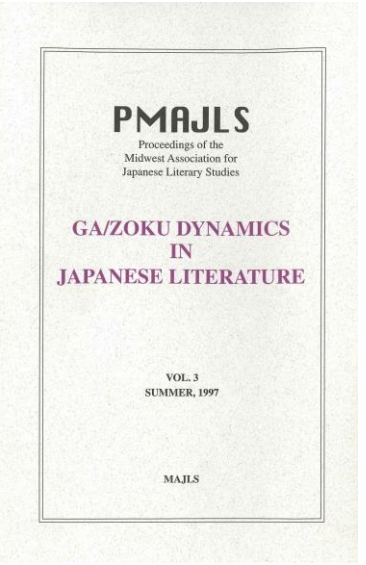
“Women Politicians Authoring Their Own Lives”

Sally A. Hastings

Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies 3 (1997): 261–281.



PMAJLS 3:
Ga/Zoku Dynamics in Japanese Literature.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

Women Politicians Authoring Their Own Lives

SALLY A. HASTINGS
Purdue University

In 1905, Mary Nitobe, the American-born wife of the Japanese scholar and diplomat Nitobe Inazō, wrote to the American public that Japanese women were "in what might be called the domestic stage of social development--very rapidly passing into more public life."[1] Indeed, in 1905 any number of Japanese women were entering the public sphere as physicians, writers, philanthropists, and activists. The first group of women, however, who could indisputably claim to be actors in the public space of national politics were the fifty-two women who won political office in 1946 and 1947 in the first elections in which Japanese women could vote and run for office. This essay is an exploration of how three of these women--Takeuchi Shigeyo, Kōra Tomi, and Oku Mumeo--all of whom had husbands and children--negotiated between the public and the private, the personal and the political, in their autobiographies.

Public autobiographies by political women defy neat categories of elegant and vulgar, male and female. In Western literature public biography has been a male genre, the story of success in professional and intellectual life. The classic examples are all by men: Augustine's Confessions (400), Rousseau's Confessions (1781), or Franklin's Autobiography (1791).Although women such as the American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the British philosopher Harriet

---

[1] Mary P. E. Nitobe, "The Japanese Character," Outlook, quoted in Japan Times, April 8, 1905.

Martineau wrote autobiographies, their writings have not been included in the canon that defines the genre (Jelinek 1980:7-9).Moreover, a century after Stanton, it is still difficult to narrate women's lives as anything other than romances. Carolyn Heilbrun has observed of Western literature, "romances, which end when the woman is married at a very young age, are the only stories for women that end with the sense of peace, all passion spent, that we find in the lives of men" (Heilbrun 1988: 39).

In the Japanese category of biographical literature, the distinctions between history and fiction, male and female are somewhat less rigid. Autobiographical fiction has been more highly prized than autobiography itself, and critics often include Miyamoto Yuriko's Nobuko in the former category (Nihon bungaku shōjiten 1968:798-799).Even in fiction, however, Japanese women have been constrained by the social construction of women as private beings. The first modern women to become authors wrote primarily marriage stories and faced harsh judgment if either in their writings or in their lives they deviated from what male editors and readers alike considered to be proper and womanly (Copeland Forthcoming).Writers, such as Amino Kiku, whose heroines deviated from the male ideal, have been excluded from the literary canon (Ariga 1995).

In Japan, where the oldest examples of life writing are the diaries of Heian court ladies, women have not been completely excluded from the ranks of noted Japanese autobiographers. The feminist Hiratsuka Raichō finds a place amidst male rebels and reformers such as Fukuzawa Yukichi, Uchimura Kanzō, Ōsugi Sakae, and Katayama Sen. As pioneering women who fought for suffrage, the abolition of prostitution, consumer unions, and labor unions, the political pioneers who are the subject of this essay could perhaps be considered rebels and reformers, but in taking office they in fact joined the government.

Although in Japan the category of autobiography can include women authors, the story of a Japanese woman whose life's work is in politics is difficult to tell. As Dorinne Kondo has noted, "in the. . . context of Japanese culture, women's narrative productions of identity in work are not part of the central story (1990: 259).This is all the more true when a woman's work outside the home consists of politics. Writing in 1981, Susan Pharr confidently stated that "There is inherent conflict between the norms and expectations associated with the female-gender role, as defined in all modern societies, and the norms and expectations linked to political roles" (2).

Let us turn now to our three women politicians. The oldest of the three was Takeuchi Shigeyo (1881-1975), who was elected to the lower house in the 1946 election but barred from re-election by the Occupation political purge. Both Oku Mumeo (1895-) and Kōra Tomi (1896-1993) were elected to the upper house in 1947; Oku served three six-year terms, Kōra only two. By the time she took office, each woman had established a national reputation as an expert on women's issues--Takeuchi as a physician, Oku as a social worker and activist in the consumer movement, and Kōra as a professor of psychology.

These women did not, of course, grow up aspiring to political office. When Takeuchi was born in 1881, Japan did not even have a national legislature and only that year did the emperor promise a constitution. All three women were at least in their twenties by the time British and American women could vote, and even the youngest of the three turned fifty the year when Japanese women first voted. Nevertheless, they narrate their autobiographies as success stories. All three begin with their birth into families active in public life, treat their election to office as a triumph, and close with their departure from

politics: Takeuchi purged in 1947, Kōra defeated at the polls in 1959, and Oku in electoral loss in 1965.

The autobiographical narratives, all three of which begin with father's name and occupation and mother's name, situate the authors as daughters who were heirs of a tradition of public responsibility. Takeuchi's father, a graduate of a normal school and one-time teacher, was from a long line of village headmen. Oku's father was a blacksmith; Kōra's a civil engineer. Takeuchi and Oku authenticate themselves as members of families with a history of civic leadership by describing their fathers. Takeuchi's father was a member of the county assembly and the head of a post office and Oku's was elected to a city assembly. Kōra's father, a civil engineer in the employ of the state, did not hold political office. Kōra claims an inheritance of civic participation by describing her mother, the graduate of a Christian mission school, who gathered women together to study the activities of early feminists such as Kishida Toshiko (1863-1901) and participated in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Women's Patriotic Society, philanthropic work, and the suffrage movement (Takeuchi 1966: 12; Oku 1988: 9, 15; Kōra 1983: 15-17).

From family, the narratives move to education. Although in the 1870s the Japanese state had mandated elementary school education for all children, parents were quicker to educate their sons than their daughters, and all three women credit their families for allowing them the best possible education. When Takeuchi finished the four years of primary education, her mother needed her at home, but she arose early each morning to study Chinese with her father and in the evenings she worked on a correspondence course that allowed her to complete the equivalent of a women's higher school education. Oku's parents allowed her to enroll in the elementary school attached to a

normal school in order to obtain six rather than the usual four years of education. Kōra, who moved innumerable times in connection with her father's job, began and ended her elementary education at the school attached to the Niigata Normal School (Takeuchi 1966: 12-13; Oku 1988: 19; Kōra 1983: 20, 23-26).

To explain why they aspired to higher education and why their parents supported them, these autobiographical narratives give examples of prominent women who served as role models and inspiration. Takeuchi would not have been able to attend medical school at all had it not been for Yoshioka Yayoi (1871-1959), who in 1900 founded a medical school for women. Yoshioka Yayoi was herself a physician, the twenty-seventh Japanese woman to earn that status. The daughter of a physician, she studied at Saisei Medical School, a private institution. She opened her medical school because in 1900 her alma mater expelled its women students, thus closing off any opportunity for Japanese women to study medicine. She and her husband Arata started out, teaching all the classes themselves, with four students in a small room (Hastings Forthcoming).The importance of Yoshioka in Takeuchi's life is underscored by the fact that Takeuchi's longest autobiographical work is entitled Yoshioka Yayoi sensei to watakushi (Dr. Yoshioka Yayoi and I).That is, Takeuchi embeds the story of her own life within her biography of her teacher.

Yoshioka Yayoi was among the women whom Oku Mumeo's father pointed out to her as examples of what she could achieve. He told her that the journalist Hani Motoko, (1873-1957) the physician Yoshioka, and the actress Mori Ritsuko (1890-1961) had all made names for themselves in the world, and Mumeo would do well to imitate them. He gave her a copy of the Bluestocking, the women's literary journal that began

publication in 1911, and thus implicitly endorsed the example of its founder, Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971)(Oku 1988:14).[2]

For Kōra, her mother was a model of public life, a source of contacts, and a fount of advice. Among the other women for whom she expresses admiration were Yoshioka Yayoi, Haraguchi Tsuruko, Yasui Tetsu (her teacher at Japan Women's College), and Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House in Chicago (Kōra 1983: 31, 39-40, 63, 101).

Takeuchi's arrival at medical school was the beginning of the professional career which shaped her public life. Yoshioka's was the only institution in Japan where a woman could study medicine, and Takeuchi writes positively about her experience there. In 1908, when Takeuchi graduated from Tokyo Women's Medical School, the first student ever to do so, her proud teacher seized the opportunity for publicity and invited representatives from the political, scholarly, and medical worlds, including the distinguished statesman Ōkuma Shigenobu, to an elaborate graduation ceremony (Takeuchi 1961: 13).

Both Oku and Kōra graduated from elementary school in 1908 and continued their education at prefectural women's higher schools, Oku in Fukui and Kōra in Niigata. This placed both in a privileged elite; Oku notes that only one or two other girls from her community continued their education after elementary school (Oku 1988:19).Oku recalled a few of her teachers in Fukui as "modern," "new women," but she characterized the school as a whole as feudal (hōkenteki na shitsujitsu gōken).She found the literary magazines to which her brother introduced her far more interesting than her school work, and she stayed up late into the night reading them. While Oku was in higher school, and just as she was getting old enough for her family to receive

---

[2] On Hani Motoko, see Mulhern (1991).

proposals for her marriage, her mother died. Her bereaved father at first argued that since she would probably die young like her mother, she should refrain from marriage and attend normal school in Tokyo. Towards the end of her days in girls' school, however, he wanted her to accept a particular proposal. Oku was not attracted to the individual and resisted her father's wishes. The Fukui school turned out to be patriarchal as well as feudal, for the teachers there urged that Oku marry (Oku 1988: 20-26).

Kōra, whose father's job required that her family move often, attended several women's higher school. Perhaps because of its expectations for women--sewing classes and cleaning the building after lectures--she was disappointed in the Niigata school. The Umeda School in Osaka was no more to her liking. The next year, when she transferred as a second-year student to a prefectural school in Kobe, she finally found a school that inspired her to learn. The school was famous for its strict discipline and feudal virtues (shitsujitsu gōken), buthere teachers who were graduates of normal school lectured on English, mathematics, history, and physics. With teachers who were so interested in their subject matter that they spent their vacations at lectures in Tokyo, she developed a love of learning, especially of history (Kōra 1983:26-27).

Both Oku and Kōra entered the same private, Christian college after their graduations from higher school. Kōra seems to have been happier there than was Oku, in part because of the circumstances of their entrance. Oku's dream was to attend Meiji Gakuin, a Christian school where several women whom she admired had studied, but her father insisted that she study home economics at Japan Women's College (Oku 1988: 25-26).[3]Kōra

[3] The women she mentioned by name were the journalist Hani Motoko (1873-1957), Sōma Kōkō (1876-1955), and Yamamuro Kieko (1874-1916), the wife of a prominent leader of the Salvation Army.

was genuinely at a loss as to what she should do after graduating from higher school and welcomed her mother's suggestion that she study English at Japan Women's College. One of the highlights of Kōra's college years was her meeting with Tagore (Kōra 1983:30, 32-38).

In 1917, after graduating from Japan Women's College, Kōra went to the United States. She received a master's degree in 1920 and a Ph.D. in psychology in 1922 from Columbia University. In addition, she did graduate study at Johns Hopkins University from 1920 to 1922 (Brown 1926: 370).Her research was on famine. The major inspiration for her choice of graduate schools was the example of Haraguchi Tsuruko, a graduate of Japan Women's University, who studied psychology at Columbia University and became the first Japanese woman to receive a Ph.D. (Kōra 1983: 39-40).

The public rather than the personal nature of these autobiographical narratives is underscored by the scant attention the authors pay to their husbands and children. In the shorter of her two memoirs, Takeuchi, who probably married in 1916, mentions her husband for the first time in connection with his 1927 doctorate and her achievement of the same honor in 1932. In the same section, she brings her discussion of a marriage to a close by giving the date of her husband's death in 1951 (Takeuchi 1961: 23).From her prewar writings, we know that at age thirty-five, when she was already a practicing physician, she entered into an arranged marriage on her own terms (Takeuchi 1934: 196-197).In her memoirs, Takeuchi's only mention of her daughter in an indirect one in a catalog of family homes in the Tokyo area that were destroyed at the end of the war (Takeuchi 1961: 26).

Although Oku and Kōra found their own husbands, the difficulties of courtship are only a minor theme in their life

stories. Oku, who was twenty-four when she married a struggling poet, regarded her marriage as a turning point in her life, not because it removed her from the world of work (as occurred for many women writers in the Meiji era), but because her husband encouraged her to join Hiratsuka Raichō in the founding of the New Women's Society and thus launched Oku's seventy-year career in the women's movement (Oku 1988: 44-47).[4]Kōra mentions that she met her future husband, Kōra Takehisa, at Kyūshū University when he complained that her habit of leaving equipment all over the laboratory was most annoying. Their decision to marry, when Kōra got a job in Tokyo, is buried in the middle of a paragraph on her housing arrangements in connection with her teaching job at Japan Women's College. Kōra does note that her decision to get married at age thirty-three to someone three years her junior created something of a stir in the newspapers and magazines (Kōra 1983: 61, 69).In a society where arranged marriages were more usual than not, marriage stories are often about bad arrangements which one narrowly avoided, and both Oku and Kōra make passing mention of marriage proposals which they did not accept (Kōra 1983: 40-41).

Kōra and Oku are somewhat more forthcoming than Takeuchi about their married lives, but the personal remains subordinate to their public achievements. Kōra includes in her story the births of her three daughters, a miscarriage, and the inadequacy of her breast milk for her first daughter, details we would scarcely expect to find in male autobiography. She recounts how in her early married life her husband grumbled when the steak she prepared had the consistency of shoe leather.

---

[4] Copeland (Forthcoming) notes that in late nineteenth century Japan writing women were rarely married women, and writing women who married ceased to be writers.

She addresses briefly the conflict between living a public life and fulfilling societal expectations for mothers and acknowledges that she fell far short of the ideals of Yamada Waka and other propagandists for motherhood. She does not, however, seem unduly burdened by this failure. She says that her husband and her mother-in-law (who lived with them and ran the household in Tomi's absence) understood her. Moreover, whenever her adult daughters told her that with her long absences from home she had not been a motherly parent but rather had provided them with an example of what not to do, she replied, "But didn't you turn out just fine?" There is just a hint that she may have felt more conflict with respect to her third daughter, who developed heart problems as a result of malnutrition during the war. She says that the death of this daughter in 1955 at age eighteen is one of the saddest memories of her life, and we are left to imagine how she reconciled her responsibilities to this daughter with her duties as a Diet member (Kōra 1983: 70, 73-75, 98, 114).

Oku intersperses the experiences of motherhood and marriage in among her accounts of circulating petitions and publishing journals. She describes the birth of her son and how she continued her activities, taking him with her everywhere, strapped to her back. She tells of her sadness when the baby born prematurely in 1922 died a week later. When she recounts the Kantō earthquake of September 1, 1923, she adds that she was pregnant at the time and give birth to a daughter the next March. She mentions in passing her separation from her husband and his remarriage (Oku 1988:53-55, 70, 79, 138).

Although there are striking similarities in the ways the three women under discussion here present their childhoods, their education, and their marriages, the three differ considerably in how they tell the story of their careers up to the point of their

election to office. Takeuchi's autobiography, which is the least personal, is also the most professional. Almost the entire period from her graduation from medical school to the end of the war is devoted to her medical career, with only one page on her activities in the women's movement. This account simply omits the fact that Takeuchi was active in a professional society, an alumni organization, the women's suffrage movement, the W.C.T.U., and numerous civic organizations. Neither is there any mention that she wrote extensively for various women's magazines from the 1920s to the 1940s. Whereas in earlier writings (1933) Takeuchi credited Christianity with giving her the courage to face prejudice against women, to establish her own medical practice and to pursue the doctorate, religion has no place in this late-life autobiography.

Because all of these biographies were written late in life, their shape certainly derives in part from the interests of the designated heirs of their authors. Takeuchi set up her medical practice before her marriage, and her clinic bore her maiden name of Ide. Her establishment was inherited by her youngest brother's son. The autobiography, which begins with the Ide family and ends with Takeuchi's triumph in attaining political office, is the record of a distinguished ancestor and emphasizes her professional achievements. That she was a pioneering woman adds to the luster of the Ide name, but the details of her life in the women's movement are of no more interest than are the husband who married in, the daughter who married out, or the alien religious faith.

Oku Mumeo's activism was her career, and well over half her book is concerned with her participation in the women's movement and the consumer movement. Throughout these years, she was always involved in the publications of these organizations. In addition, she headed a settlement house from

1930 and set up homes for working women. The prewar activities were all in some sense forerunners to the Housewives' Association (Shufuren) that Oku founded in the postwar era, and that organization is her legacy to her daughter, who long served as vice-president to her mother's presidency (Oku 1988: 79).

After Kōra returned from the United States in 1922, she earned her living as a university faculty member. Her first academic job was at Kyūshū Imperial University, a position she accepted so that she could live near her family in Fukuoka. There she did research on the psychological development of children, and there she met her future husband. From 1927 to 1942, she was on the faculty of Japan Women's College.

Her university position undoubtedly provided Kōra with the prestige that won her a hearing in prewar Japan and her duties as a faculty member must have shaped her daily routine, but in her autobiography she emphasizes her activities as an advocate of international peace: attending the third congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Vienna in 1921, translating for Yajima Kajiko in Washington, D.C. in the same year, accompanying Jane Addams on her tour of Japan in 1923, meeting with Tagore again in 1924 and 1929, meeting Lu Xun, Tagore, and Gandhi on a trip in 1935, and participating in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. As a Diet member in the postwar era, she visited Europe, India, China, and the Soviet Union. Kōra's legacy has been spiritual rather than institutional. Her interest in Japan's linkages to Asia is shared by her daughter Rumiko, a feminist who has translated Asian and African poetry into Japanese.[5]

Although Takeuchi includes in her life story virtually nothing about her civic activities after the 1920s, Oku and Kōra

---

[5] On Rumiko's life and writings see Buckley (1997: 102-130).

make no effort to conceal the fact that their country at war called upon them for expert advice. Because she had set up a home for working women in Osaka in 1933 and one in Tokyo in 1935, Oku was an authority on working women. When the Welfare Ministry began to plan for the mobilization of women into the work force in 1939 to compensate for the labor shortage resulting from heavy military conscription, Oku was made a member of the Commission for the Investigation of Labor Management. Oku's concern was that women were being recruited into a work environment in which there were no protective laws. Acknowledging her sadness that such improvements had come about only in wartime, Oku nevertheless takes some pride in the fact that some of her ideals were incorporated into a 1940 government report and that a law of 1943 required factories with over two hundred women workers to provide day care. She explains her participation in the investigation committee of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association in terms of her lifelong dream of socialist cooperatives. In mentioning her 1941 book on women on the home front, however, she acknowledges that she, too, bears some responsibility for the "dark clouds" of the war (Oku 1988: 154-158).

Kōra's American education was in experimental psychology and her entire research agenda was intended to rationalize (gōrika) daily life. During the war she was invited to contribute her expertise to her country, just as her mentors at Columbia had done during World War I. In 1938, she became a member of a committee to reform daily life, including clothing. On July 10, 1940, she was among the eight women added to the Luxury Abolition Committee of the National Spiritual Mobilization Central Headquarters. From December 1940, she participated in

the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, advocating the founding of a women's section (Kōra 1983: 81, 102-103).[6]

In 1944, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Kōra became part of a commission on the condition of the people (minjō iin).She traveled through Niigata, Toyama, Hokkaido, and Aomori. In addition, she was head of a group of seven women who went to Korea. The group sailed from Shimonoseki to Pusan and then traveled by train to Pyongyang (Kōra 1983: 106).

The one section of the narratives where public service is not the central theme is in the closing months of the war. The women do not present themselves as doing things; things happen to them. By the spring of 1945, the war had driven Shigeyo from Tokyo. Her medical practice was suspended when her hospital was designated a rescue center for the refugees pouring into Shinjuku Station after the fire bombings of March 10, 1945. Her brother's hospital was hit in the air raids of April 13, and her own home and hospital were totally destroyed by bombs on May 25. Having neither work nor home in Tokyo, Shigeyo evacuated to her native Nagano (Takeuchi 1961: 26).

Oku tells how the children of Honjo, having been evacuated to the countryside, ceased coming to her settlement; the residents of her mother's and children's home were evacuated to Nagano, and their building rented out as a dormitory for railroad workers. Her son had already been conscripted into the military in 1942. Her house in Yotsuya was requisitioned and in the fire bombing of Tokyo on March 10, 1945, her settlement house was completely destroyed, as were the homes she had set up for working women in Osaka and Tokyo. Her life's work in ashes,

---

[6] For a critique of Kōra's wartime activities, see Suzuki (1986: 47-75).

she was left with nothing to do but try to raise food crops on the outskirts of Tokyo (Oku 1988: 162-163).

Kōra introduces her section on Japan after 1942 with a one-sentence summary:" The war became more and more terrible; there were shortages of goods, and then the air raids began" (105).In January 1945, while her middle daughter Rumiko was in Nasu with her classmates from Jiyūgakuen and Takehisa continued his medical work in Tokyo, Tomi left Tokyo with two of her daughters to take refuge in the town of Shimotsuma in Ibaraki Prefecture. There she lived with Quakers whom she knew through the Fellowship for Reconciliation, renting a house that had been left vacant when a foreign missionary family was repatriated. When the fire bombing of Tokyo occurred in March, Tomi immediately set out by train for Tokyo and had to walk part of the way. In the midst of terrible devastation, she found her own home in tact. Quickly snatching up Rumiko, who had just come back to Tokyo from Nasu, Tomi returned to Shimotsuma, only to find that the military police had confiscated as enemy property the house in which she had been living. Evicted from Shimotsuma, Tomi and her daughters arrived back in Tokyo for the April 13 bombing of the capital, in which their house was damaged. Leaving her husband alone in Tokyo, Tomi evacuated with her daughters to Shiozawa in Niigata, where she remained for the rest of the war. To the usual catalog of disrupted work, commandeered buildings, confiscations, evacuations, bombs, and conflagrations, Kōra adds regular visits from the military police because of her participation in the peace movement (Kōra 1983: 107, 110-112).

The Pacific War ended with defeat and occupation for Japan, and out of the ashes of war came the political reforms that allowed women to become politicians. When the Japanese Diet granted suffrage to Japanese women in December 1945, women's

groups and political parties alike scrambled to find suitable women to support as candidates. Takeuchi says that old friends, acquaintances, and women's organizations began contacting her in Nagano by telephone, telegraph, and letter--sometimes even arriving in person--to urge her to run in one of the Tokyo districts. Once her supporters had found her a place to live and a campaign headquarters, she agreed to their pleas and returned to Tokyo at the end of January. At the invitation of the leading politician Hatoyama Ichirō, she joined the Liberal Party.

Takeuchi tells the story of her campaign as a list of indebtedness to family, friends, and colleagues. Her campaign staff was drawn primarily from her friends from the women's movement. Yamataka Shigeri headed her office and Miyagi Tamayo was a major advisor. Male physicians and associates also lent their support. Her brother and sister-in-law, who had evacuated to the country, came to help her, bringing with them much-needed food and their three children. The oldest, a student at First Higher School, rallied his classmates to distribute pamphlets, and Yamataka Shigeri accompanied her in a borrowed automobile as she traversed her huge district to make speeches (Takeuchi 1966: 121-125).

One potential source from which Takeuchi did not receive support was her erstwhile mentor Yoshioka Yayoi. Yoshioka, passing up an invitation to join the Liberal Party, had decided to run from the Progressive Party, but both the faculty and the governing board of her medical school strongly opposed her candidacy. Accepting that she herself could not run, Yoshioka asked Takeuchi not to run either. Takeuchi, feeling that Yoshioka's request was irrational and that, in any case, it was too late to withdraw from the election, went forward with her campaign. When Takeuchi spoke at an assembly at Tokyo Women's Medical School and asked the students to support her

in the election, Yoshioka immediately came to the platform and announced that as a member of another party, she could not support Takeuchi. The next day, Miwata Shigeko brought five hundred yen from the alumni association but this low level of support from Tokyo Women's Medical School and its alumni organization was a great source of sadness to Takeuchi (Takeuchi 1966: 123-124).

Takeuchi's account conveys the impression that she did not know whether she would win or lose, but for the thirty-day election period, she devoted herself to the campaign. Her efforts were not in vain. Takeuchi was one of two women elected to the lower house of the Diet from the first district of Tokyo. As the oldest of the thirty-nine women elected from all over Japan, she was an important leader of the Women's Diet Club organized shortly after the election (Hopper 1996: 184).

There is every certainty that Takeuchi intended to continue her political career. Because of the new constitution scheduled to go into effect on May 3, 1947, the next election was scheduled for April 30. Takeuchi began campaigning on April 1 and had several speech meetings set up. She was just starting a speech at a temple in Ushigome when she was suddenly handed an order purging her from political activities. The authorities announced this order to the packed audience and led a dazed Takeuchi from the platform (Takeuchi 1961: 29; 1966: 125).

Oku and Kōra had longer political careers and were not quite so buffeted by the winds of political change. Oku was pressed by friends and former classmates to run in 1946, but she stubbornly refused. She says that she was proud of being in the cooperative movement and disliked the idea of having political power. In the fall of 1946, however, she agreed to become head of the women's section of the National Cooperative Party (Kokumin kyōdōtō).She accepted because Kagawa Toyohiko, her friend

from the cooperative movement, promised that the party would dissolve in just six months (Oku 1988:169-170).In fact, Oku ended up running in the national constituency for the new upper house. In her campaign, she invoked wifely and motherly themes. Oku's last name, with the ordinary form of address "san," happens to be the same as the Japanese word for housewife, and so Oku's son made up slogans such as "A housewife in the legislature!" and "Let us connect the kitchen to politics!" Oku's supporters walked around shouting these slogans through a speaker attached to a baby carriage. The broad base of support she needed to be effective in the national constituency came from women. Her classmates from the women's higher school in Fukui donated time and energy to her campaign and friends in Kyoto and Osaka secured the support of the women's movement in those cities (Oku 1988: 171).Kōra, too, received invitations to run for office after the war and decided to join the Democratic Party and run for the upper house in the national constituency; she finished slightly behind Oku (Kōra 1983: 120-121).

Takeuchi, Oku, and Kōra appropriated autobiography as a female mode of narrative as surely as they entered the male space of politics, and they were not the only female practitioners of this genre. Others from among the first fifty-two women to serve in the Diet who recorded their lives were Fujimura Michiko, Katō Shizue, and Kiuchi Kyō. Ichikawa Fusae and Kamichika Ichiko, who took office in 1953, have also written their own stories. If we expand our list of female public autobiographers to include activists in the suffrage and anti-prostitution movements, then we can add the names of Hani Motoko, Kubushiro Ochimi, Hayashi Utako, and Gauntlett Tsuneko.

The three autobiographies examined here achieve coherent accounts of public life without erasing the gender of the

narrators. As women who lived much of their lives without the legal right to vote or serve in the bureaucracy, the authors cannot wed their narratives to a steady upward progression through predictable ranks as we might expect of male autobiographers. Instead, they invoke broad aims--raising the status of women, improving child rearing, rationalizing daily life, and achieving world peace--to lend coherence to their narratives. Moreover, their public lives occur at least in part in a world of women's organizations, women's journals, and women's alumni networks that substitute for the local political bases cultivated by men. Once in office, they work for causes important to women: suffrage, revision of the family law, birth control, the abolition of prostitution, and world peace. In their narratives, they place themselves as heirs to a legacy of female activism. Kishida Toshiko, Hani Motoko, and Yoshioka Yayoi were just a few of the predecessors whose examples they invoked to explain their own ideals.

Their stories are not, then, mere imitations of earlier autobiographies such as those of Fukuzawa Yukichi or Ōsugi Sakae. In recording their lives of public service, these women feel no need to duplicate the accounts of childhood mischief that Japanese men always report--Fukuzawa's substituting ordinary stones for the sacred object in a shrine for instance, or Ōsugi Sakae's killing cats (18).Instead, they record the support their families provided and their successes in school. Moreover, with the exception of Takeuchi, they freely include their bodies and their children in their life stories.

References

Unless otherwise noted, the place of publication for all Japanese books is Tokyo.

Ariga, Chieko M.1995."Who's Afraid of Amino Kiku? Gender Conflict and the Literary Canon." In Japanese Women: New

Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future, ed. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda.New York: The Feminist Press.

Brown, W. Norman. 1926. Johns Hopkins Half-Century Directory: A Catalogue of the Trustees, Faculty, Holders of Honorary Degress, and Students, Graduates and Non-graduates 1876-1926. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University.

Buckley, Sandra. 1997. Broken Silences: Voices of Japanese Feminism. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Copeland, Rebecca L. Forthcoming. "The Meiji Woman Writer 'Amidst a Forest of Beards.'" Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies.

Hastings, Sally Ann. Forthcoming. "Yoshioka Yayoi." In A Biographical Dictionary of Doctors, Nurses, and Practicitioners, ed. Lois N. Magner. Greenwood Press.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. 1988. Writing a Woman's Life. New York: Ballantine Books.

Hopper, Helen M. 1996. A New Woman of Japan: A Political Biography of Katō Shizue. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Jelinek, Estelle C. 1980. "Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition." In Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kondo, Dorinne K. 1990. Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kōra Tomi. 1983. Ahimsa o ikiru: Kōra Tomi jiden. Domesu shuppan.

Mulhern, Chieko Irie. 1991. "Hani Motoko: The Journalist-Educator." In Heroic with Grace: Legendary Women of Japan, ed. Chieko Irie Mulhern. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

Nihon bungaku shōjiten. 1968. Shinchōsha.

Oku Mumeo. 1988. Nobi akaaka to: Oku Mumeo jiden. Domesu shuppan.

Ōsugi Sakae. 1992. The Autobiography of Ōsugi Sakae. Translated by Byron K. Marshall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pharr, Susan J. 1981. Political Women in Japan: The Search for a Place in Political Life. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Suzuki Yūko. 1986. Feminizumu to sensō: Fujin undōka no sensō kyōryoku. Marujusha.

Takeuchi Shigeyo. 1933. "Gakui o eru made." Fujin no tomo 27, no. 11 (November):118-126.

------. 1934. "Ryōen wa aserazu ni matte." Shufu no tomo, April, 196-197.

------. 1961. Yasoji no ayumi. Josei mondai kenkyūjo.

------. 1966. Yoshioka Yayoi sensei to watakushi. Kaneoka shuppan kabushiki gaisha.

Acknowledgments: My trip to Japan in 1994 to begin research on this project was funded by NEAC. For encouragement and logistical support for that trip and the two that followed in the summers of 1995 and 1996, I thank Iwasaki Akio, Iwasaki Kumiko, Yoko Kawashima, Kyōtō Matsuko, Ōgai Tokuko, William Steele, and Anne Walthall. Thanks also to Rebecca Copeland, Hirakawa Hiroko, Ueno Chizuko, and Whitney Walton for encouragement and references.