

“Japanese Home Economics” and Forming the System of Female Education in Modern Japan

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This study is part of work to clarify the characteristics of “Japanese Home Economics” derived and developed in the parallel of the establishing and developing process of female education in Meiji Period.

Meiji Period in Japan is the era, in which the advanced European and American academic cultures actively accepted through the translations of the specialized books and the dispatch of nationally financed international students. “Japanese Home Economics”, the more appropriate to the circumstance of Japan, was also sought to be built based on the information on the area of study imported from Europe and America. Looking at the process of building such an area of study leads us to shed light on the process of forming and ordering female education in Modern Japan.

In particular this paper focuses on two significant Home Economics researchers who made the major impacts on establishing “Japanese Home Economics” (Sumi Ohe and Hide Inoue) and looks at what these two had learnt from the study abroad experiences and what, they thought, should be imported to build the new academic area, Home Economics in Japan.

The paper consists of the five sections, which are:

- I Forming the system of female education in Meiji Period and the birth of “Japanese Home Economics”
- II The background of the “Home Economics” establishing
- III The characteristics of “Home Economics” in Meiji Period
- IV Personal Development of a Home Economics researcher (1) Sumi Ohe
- V Personal Development of a Home Economics researcher (2) Hide Inoue

The school attendance ratio was much lower in girls than in boys in the early Meiji Period, when the primary education had started as the National Education System. There was a movement, therefore, that some schools added the courses or subjects exclusively for girls to motivate girls to attend. “Sewing” was the common subject to set for girls. In the middle of Meiji Period, the secondary education system for girls was getting organized, and again Domesticities and Sewing were the important subjects for girls.

As the school attendance of girls went up and the secondary education for girls became popular, the local authority was required to establish at least one girl’s high school in each prefecture. So that there was a rapidly increasing demand for teachers in charge of those two subjects, and women’s higher normal schools which trained student teachers cannot keep up with the needed number of Domesticities teachers. “Japanese Home Economics” has been established along with the progress of girl’s education in the third decade of the Meiji Period.

In this epoch, Sumi Ohe (Sumi Miyagawa) studied Home Economics which valued practical skills in UK and came back to lead the Domesticities teacher training in the women’s higher normal schools. Hide Inoue, a professor in Home Economics in Japan Women’s University, who studied scientific Home Management in US, and suggested the improvement of life with the efficiency and rationalization in domestic affairs.

This paper cannot go through Home Economics of Ohe and Inoue, and it requires the further study on what sort of Home Economics they tried to establish and what sort of female education they tried to deliver.