

FERENC TAKÓ

**Education and ‘Civilization’**  
*Westernisation through Centralisation and the Concept of*  
*Women’s Education in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Japan*<sup>1</sup>

Studies on the transformation of the Japanese educational system in the Meiji period usually emphasise the intensity of reforms and their comprehensive character. In the framework of the present study, I will briefly summarise the central aspects of this transformation, then turn to the examination of the tension manifested in Meiji period discourses on education. This is a tension that emerges when one compares the interpretation of the Meiji era as the introduction of ‘enlightened’ Western liberalism and the ideology of centralised reform, far from being as liberal as reported by Meiji period intellectuals themselves. In my study, I will draw attention to this tension as manifested in the purposes of Meiji educational reforms, then I will turn to the analysis of the education of women as a central question in terms of the interpretation of the family in Meiji Japan. The analysis is based on the writings of the leading intellectuals of the era, basically their essays published in the famous journal of the 1870s, *Meiroku Zasshi*.

**Transformation of the educational system:  
Westernisation through centralisation**

Reforms introduced in the beginning of the Meiji era had several antecedents in the *bakumatsu* period, i.e., in the final decades of the Tokugawa *bakufu*. At the end of the Edo period, there existed four main types of educational institutions in

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<sup>1</sup> This study is a modified and extended version of a paper published in Hungarian in *Gyermeknevelés [Child Rearing]*, journal of the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in November 2019, based on a presentation held at the same faculty in 2017 at the conference titled “Gyermekkép és oktatás Japánban” [“Notions of the Child and Education in Japan”].

Japan. Schools of the *bakufu* and of the *han* operated mainly for the *bushi*; there were local schools, *gōgaku* 郷学, which sometimes belonged to the *han*, open to commoners; private academies, the *shijuku* 私塾; and monastery schools, the so called *terakoya* 寺子屋 in which sometimes only one person served as a teacher.<sup>2</sup> Between 1854 and 1867, within the decade following the arrival of Admiral Perry, more than 4000 *terakoya* opened in the country. The curricula and the methodology of teaching were quite different in the various institutions. Children of the *bushi*, constituting the ruling class of society, were basically educated in classical Chinese studies, writing and martial arts; i.e., the studies of *bun* 文 and *bu* 武. Meanwhile in one third of the schools the knowledge of ‘national learning’ (*kokugaku* 国学) was also part of the curriculum, and one quarter of them also included studies of ‘Western learning’ (*yōgaku* 洋学) which was restricted to technical subjects (medicine, military strategy, shipbuilding).<sup>3</sup>

For the new administration unifying and centralising the curriculum in terms of both its structure and its content represented one of the most urgent tasks, as it was an important means of renewing Japanese society. However, while it is unquestionable that education was a central factor in shaping the character of Meiji Japan, this role must not necessarily be understood in the sense suggested by the frequently used terminology of ‘reforms’. It is true, on the one hand, that the Meiji transition focused on Western learning, shifting the emphasis from Confucian studies and from *kokugaku* teaching. The new organisation, as Rubinger argues, is well characterised by newly introduced terms such as *gakkō* 学校, the second component of which (校) had rarely been used in a general sense for ‘learning’, ‘science’ or ‘studies’ as a pair for *gaku* 学, but much more in terms of “restriction, limitation, or conformity to a uniform standard”.<sup>4</sup> The aims of the Meiji government were exactly of this kind: regulations and restrictions, the formation – and adoption – of ‘uniform standards’. On the other hand, the reason why the ‘new’ terms and the corresponding *kanji* compounds were so easily applicable in practice was simply that while denoting the elements of the ‘reformed’ structure, they still carried a thousand-year-old web of meaning complexes comprehensible to everyone. As I will argue through the examples below, the way the old traditions appeared in form of old ‘names’ (*ming* 名) with reformulated meanings – as if appearing in new robes made of the same cloth<sup>5</sup> – truthfully reflects the internal tensions of the intellectual atmosphere which permeated various aspects of the Meiji transition.

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<sup>2</sup> Rubinger 1988: 196.

<sup>3</sup> Rubinger 1988: 197–198.

<sup>4</sup> Rubinger 1988: 211.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wakabayashi 1984: 491.

Douglas Howland drew attention to this internal tension in his important work *Translating the West* through the famous story of Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901),<sup>6</sup> usually cited as an example of Meiji liberalism. The story describes the scene in which a peasant jumps off his horse on seeing Fukuzawa coming along the road since he cannot remain on horseback in the presence of a *bushi*, but Fukuzawa teaches him that such distinctions no longer exist. However liberal Fukuzawa's attitude might seem in this interpretation, says Howland, examining Fukuzawa's autobiography, the picture immediately gets another layer of meaning that is rarely referred to in the literature. Fukuzawa here describes how he explained the structure of the new social order, teaching the peasant he could sit on his own horse any time he wanted, but as he still did not behave as if he had understood the message; Fukuzawa went on to say:

“‘Now, get back on your horse,’ I repeated. ‘If you don’t, *I’ll beat you* [*bun-naguru* 打ん撲る]. According to the laws of the present government, any person, farmer or merchant, can ride freely on horseback without regard to whom he meets on the road. You are simply afraid of everybody without knowing why. That’s what’s the matter with you.’

*I forced him to get back on the horse* [*murimutai ni noseta* 無理無体に乗せた] and drove him off.”<sup>7</sup>

It hardly needs to be explained how well the two-sided character of Meiji period ‘liberalism’ is reflected in the cited passage. Still, it must be added that although the Meiji era was not purely liberal in the sense it is usually considered to be, it was not despotic either. Its bipolarity is symbolised, on the one hand, by its ‘revolution’, which was imposed from above, sharply distinguishing it from the revolutions of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, but was nonetheless a re-volution in its achievements; and, on the other hand, by the ‘restoration’ of the authority of the ruler of the country in a form in which it had never actually existed before.<sup>8</sup> The following examples will reflect how this tension was manifested in different areas of the field of education.

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<sup>6</sup> Howland 2002: 22–23.

<sup>7</sup> Howland 2002: 23. *Fukuōjiden* 福翁自伝 1899, p. 390. Translation cited by Howland 2002: 22–23 from *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi*, translated by Eiichi Kiyooka, Tokyo, Hoku-seido, 1981: 243–244. My emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Eisenstadt 1996: 264–277.

### Education and the establishment of a nation state

One of the most crucial and far reaching traumas of the early Meiji era was the moment when the new government was informed – basically through the reports of the delegation led by Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視 (1825–1883) on its return from the West – of the extent to which Japan ‘lagged behind’ Western countries in terms of modernisation, industrialisation, its social and governmental system, and in building a ‘nation state’. From the 1870s on, many Japanese intellectuals travelled to the West to collect knowledge about the economic, political, educational, bureaucratic and social systems operating there. Mori Arinori 森有礼 (1847–1889), who later became one of the leading intellectuals and also Minister for Education of the Meiji government, had already been studying in England in the 1860s, then between 1871 and 1873 he served as the ambassador of Japan to the United States. One of his main activities was to study the educational system of the country. With that purpose, he wrote letters including a short survey to high-ranking personalities of the USA, asking for advice regarding the Japanese educational reforms. Mori collected the responses in a volume, in the preface of which, besides expressing humility towards Western countries and their institutions, he assured his readers with considerable emphasis that the dynasty reigning on the Japanese islands was the oldest one in the world.<sup>9</sup> There were, however, several realms, such as education, where the country required development based on Western models.

“The political giants of yesterday are the dwarfs of to-day. Our youths, educated abroad, are returning with their faces flushed with enthusiastic sympathy with the modern civilization of Christendom. Their opinions and ideas are influencing and bending the actions and desires of their leaders and patrons. One of the difficult problems for our solution is the restraint of our youths, so that their little knowledge will not prove a danger, but will become, in its maturity, a powerful weapon of defence, and a beneficent influence in the grand advance of our nation. Wise advice from abroad on this vital question is called for. Education has become imperative.”<sup>10</sup>

It is clearly reflected also in this short paragraph that the main motivation behind Mori’s endeavours towards reforming the educational system was the establishment of a unified, firmly established nation state. He considered the development of education as an organic element of that unity, and the American system

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<sup>9</sup> Mori 1873: iv.

<sup>10</sup> Mori 1873: lii.

as one of the possible models for such development.<sup>11</sup> The questions sent to the addressees of his letters, important thinkers and governmental figures of the time, were formulated in a similar spirit:

“In a general way, I wish to have your views in reference to the elevation of the condition of Japan, intellectually, morally, and physically, but the particular points to which I invite your attention are as follows:

The effect of education –

1. Upon the material prosperity of a country.
2. Upon its commerce.
3. Upon its agricultural and industrial interests.
4. Upon the social, moral and physical condition of the people; and –
5. Its influences upon the laws and government.”<sup>12</sup>

As it can be seen here, while the Confucian tradition was by this time no more the foundation of curricula, a very important element that also characterised the Confucian mind-set still defined the ideas and world-view of Mori: the praxis-oriented nature of his approach to education. This aspect of education in itself was also stressed by Fukuzawa Yukichi in his *The Encouragement of Learning* (*Gakumon no susume* 學問ノススメ), a work which had an enormous impact on Meiji intellectuals. There was another important point, however, also related to practical considerations, on which the opinion of Fukuzawa differed from the convictions of the majority of Meiji intellectuals. Mori and other leading figures of the 1870s, most of the members of the Meiji Six Society (Meirokeisha 明六社), a group of the most influential Meiji period thinkers, believed that intellectuals cannot and should not be independent from the government of the country. They saw the task of education as establishing national unity, with everyone making efforts to promote that unity as part of one and the *same* hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Thus Mori, a leading figure of the Japanese ‘civilization and enlightenment’ movement (*bunmeikaika* 文明開化), living for years in the home of the *Declaration of Independence*, an etalon text of the revolutions of European Enlightenment (translated into Japanese by Fukuzawa Yukichi himself), asked his American contemporaries for advice from a viewpoint which was ‘civilising’ in a significantly different way to that described in such principal texts of Western liberalism. What Mori had in mind was not the establishment of a *civil* society in the Western sense of the word, i.e., a people constituted by free individuals (cf. *citoyen*), but the need of forming a strong *nation*.

<sup>11</sup> Swale 2016: 106. ff., Fisher 1983: 83–84.

<sup>12</sup> Mori 1873: 1–2.

<sup>13</sup> Fisher 1983: 87. ff.

This requirement of unity appeared in various aspects of the transformation of Japanese society in the Meiji period, overriding all kinds of traditional barriers inherited from the past. The discussions regarding the reform or eventual change of the writing system is a telling example for this. In the opening issue of *Meiroku Zasshi* 明六雜誌, the journal of the Meirokusha, Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897) and Nishimura Shigeki 西村茂樹 (1828–1902) published a debate on the possible consequences of introducing the Latin alphabet in Japan. Nishi argued that the developments required for comprehensive progress in the country could only be reached *through* the introduction of the alphabet, while Nishimura believed that the alphabet could not be introduced without reaching a certain level of general education of the people.<sup>14</sup> Without going into details about their arguments, I would like to emphasise that the *only* point where Nishi's and Nishimura's views differed was the question of *when* the Latin alphabet should be introduced. They had no concerns with regard to either the means, or the complexity of such a crucial reform; both took it for granted that the Latin alphabet should be introduced in Japan. The explanation for this is that while such novelties definitely meant radical, so to speak 'revolutionary' changes in society, these were changes that could only be coordinated under the closest centralised state control – Meiji intellectuals were indeed thinking within such a framework. They had no doubt that reforms as complex as a new alphabet or even language (Mori was arguing for the introduction of English in the same period<sup>15</sup>) were possible if the purpose was to establish a country that equaled the 'West' in all terms of modernisation and development. In this respect, as Nishi argued, the introduction of the alphabet (just like the importing of any other Western institutions) would actually have been one of the oldest traditional solutions Japan had applied: the introduction of a new alphabet or language was imagined in the Meiji period in the very same way as it had been more than a millennium earlier. At that time the main task of the intellectual elite had been the introduction of the Chinese model with the purpose of achieving equal rank with China. China was now replaced by the West, and equality of rank was replaced by equality of rights. The latter concept, however, while the idea itself became more and more important, basically meant equality of Japan as a whole with other countries of the world. In the social context, the 'equality of rights' could only be understood with certain characteristic restrictions, as we find exemplified by the discussion of the education and the rights of women.

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<sup>14</sup> Nishi [1874]; Nishimura [1874].

<sup>15</sup> Swale 2000: 64–65.

### Equality of rights – equality of duties: the education of women

The introduction of the general education of women justifiably counts as the most progressive idea of the Meiji period; one that clearly reflects the effects of Western world-views. Still, if one examines the reasoning behind this important reform of the age more closely, it becomes clear that the novelty which at first sight reflects the recognition of the principle of equal rights<sup>16</sup>, carries in itself the same internal tension mentioned above in different aspects. Here I will analyse essays published in *Meiroku Zasshi* to point out how this tension appeared in the discussion of women’s rights, and how the idea of the education of women was connected far more closely to the formation of a strong Japanese nation state than to the true realisation of the idea of the equality of rights. The key to this connection is the way in which the family as the basis of the nation state and the role of the mother in its formation was imagined at that time. As Eisenstadt emphasised, “[w]omen’s roles in Meiji Japan were defined, not as in many Western countries with a strong emphasis on the private family sphere as against the public order, but as agents of the state.”<sup>17</sup> This definition of women can be traced back to the earliest sources of the Meiji transition.

In issue 8 of *Meiroku Zasshi*, several essays addressed the question of the social status of women. One of these studies was Mitsukuri Shūhei’s 箕作秋坪 (1826–1886) “On Education” (“Kyōikudan” 教育談). In the first part of the text, Mitsukuri explains that in Western countries it is already a widely accepted idea that the education of children at home is more important than their education at school. If this is so, he continues, both parents have an important role in educating the child. If parents accept this idea, the described concept becomes a tradition passed on from generation to generation.

“What I desire still more deeply is only that, by actively establishing girls’ schools [*jogaku* 女学] and devoting our energies to educating girls, we may train these girls to understand how important it is for them to educate the children to whom they give birth. Napoleon I once observed to the famous woman teacher Campan, ‘Since all the old methods of education really seem to be worthy of respect, what do we lack for the good upbringing of the people?’ When Campan replied ‘Mothers,’ the emperor exclaimed in surprise, ‘Ah, this is true! This

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<sup>16</sup> As Molony put it, “[t]he Meiji era neologisms for ‘rights’ (*kenri* [権利]), ‘women’s rights’ (*joken* [女権]), ‘male-female equality’ (*danjo byōdō* [男女平等]), and ‘male-female equal rights’ (*danjo dōken* [男女同権]) were, at times, used interchangeably,” despite their significantly different meaning (Molony 2000: 641). For a detailed examination of the term ‘right’ as *ken* in the Meiji period cf. Yanabu 2009: 149–172.

<sup>17</sup> Eisenstadt 1996: 37.

single word suffices as the guiding principle [*hōsoku* 法則] of education.’ These are indeed meaningful words.”<sup>18</sup>

Here we see the ‘equal rights’ of the wife appearing as the prerequisite of the wife’s *duties*, which are equal to those of her husband. It is also telling that the example referred by Mitsukuri does not concern one of the famous liberal thinkers of Europe, but the general and later emperor who had built his empire on the ruins left behind by the French Revolution. Thus, the fact that the rights of women are discussed more and more frequently does not imply that the *individual freedom* of women would become the central topic of such discussions. The latter notion, i.e. the woman as an autonomous individual, would only become a widely discussed topic as late as the turn of the century, as feminist activities would also start at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

“For Meiji-era policymakers and many advocates of women’s rights the immediate goal of women’s education was not to prepare them for suffrage but to mold ethical wives and mothers who led by example in the family and in civil society.”<sup>20</sup>

As Mikiso Hane emphasised, besides all the liberal views Fukuzawa Yukichi himself claimed to have applied in his family and his famous statements on the equality of men and women,<sup>21</sup> “he left the education of his daughters to their mother, who was very conservative and believed that women were innately inferior.”<sup>22</sup>

The first essay of Mori Arinori’s five-piece series “On Wives and Concubines” (“Saishōron” 妻妾論) was published in the same issue of *Meiroku Zasshi*. Mori’s argument was based on the conviction that the moral development of a people can reach the level of Western countries only if “mutual assistance and mutual protection” (*aitasuke aitamotsu* 相扶ケ相保ツ) is realised between husband and wife. This ‘mutual’ relationship can be understood here as a special type of the ‘equality’ of rights which is linked, to a significant extent, with the traditional Confucian roots of the concept of society. Here ‘mutuality’ does not refer to the *same* duties required from each person towards the other, but to a

<sup>18</sup> Mitsukuri 1874: 6. In English: *Meiroku Zasshi* 1976: 108.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed analysis of Meiji state regulations on women’s rights cf. Nolte and Hastings 1991: 151 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Molony 2000: 644.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Fukuzawa’s *Encouragement of Learning* criticising Kaibara Ekiken’s *Onna daigaku*: “It may be natural for a girl to obey her parents when she is young, but in what way is she to obey her husband after marriage? I am curious about that!” (Fukuzawa 2012: 62.)

<sup>22</sup> Hane 1969: 366.

web of interpersonal relations in which participants 'mutually' have their duties, but *different* duties towards the others based on their status in the structure of society.

“The relation between man and wife is the fundamental of human morals. [...] When people marry, rights and obligations emerge between them so that neither can take advantage of the other. If you ask what these rights and obligations are, they may be described as the paths of mutual assistance and mutual protection. That is, the husband has the right [*kenri* 権利] to demand [*yōsuru* 要スル] assistance from the wife while he shoulders the obligation [*gimu* 義務] to protect her. And, conversely, the wife has the right to demand protection from the husband while she bears the obligation to assist him.”<sup>23</sup>

Until the law guarantees, Mori says later, that concubines do *not* have the same privileges as wives, the contemporary system of marriage largely hinders the 'enlightenment' of the people. The only possible way to change the situation, as he writes in the third essay of the series, would be the introduction of general education also extended to women.

“If we really want to achieve marriage worthy of the name, there is not better approach than to spread education generally and then await the time when women voluntarily protect their chastity [*happun rissō* 発憤立操]. Such being the case, we must all endeavour industriously to bring about this condition of affairs. To preach this vainly without achieving actual results is not only useless verbiage. Such conduct generally obstructs the road to enlightenment and is indeed hateful.”<sup>24</sup>

It must be added here that regarding women's role in society, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western societies were characterised not only by the equal rights of women but also by the notion of the mother leading her life focusing on staying at home, taking care of her children and the family.<sup>25</sup> The fact that this *topos* of the loving, caretaking mother had a peculiar, characteristically Japanese counterpart that had been present in Japanese society for a very long time, significantly contributed to the process by which the idea of the equal rights of women was reconciled

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<sup>23</sup> Mori 1874a: 2–3. In English: *Meiroku Zasshi* 1976: 104.

<sup>24</sup> Mori 1874b: 2. In English: *Meiroku Zasshi* 1976: 190. This imperative resembles the way Mori wrote about the successful American practice of the education of women in *Life and Resources in America* edited under his control in 1871 (Mori 1871: 264–266).

<sup>25</sup> McVeigh 2004: 222.

with the traditional concept of the subordinate role of women, which had its roots in Confucian thought.

With regard to the reasons behind the propagation of the education of women, an even more illuminating source might be Nakamura Masanao's 中村正直 (1832–1891) speech, “Creating Good Mothers” (“Zenryō naru haha wo tsukuru setsu” 善良ナル母ヲ造ル説), published in volume 33 of *Meiroku Zasshi* in 1875. In the same way as in the cited articles, here too we find the author emphasising the importance of equal rights, arguing that the basis for this is equal education. But if we look at the final purpose, it is again not the theory, i.e., not the mere idea of equality that underlies the argument.

“Of course, men and women should observe virtuous principles [*zentoku no rippō* 善徳の律法] equally and without distinction. Love is the most important of the many human virtues. To quote the famous words of the poet [Robert] Browning, ‘True love [真正ノ愛] surpasses knowledge.’ [...] A wife possessed of a feeling of deep love will bring her husband ease and happiness and encourage him to exert himself in enterprises useful to the country. Not only in the West but even in China wise men recognize this fact.”<sup>26</sup>

Here follow two references to the *Book of Changes* and to the *Book of Odes*, directly invoking the Confucian tradition. But the argument itself is also very closely related to that. As it can be seen, the education of women is understood as the education of mothers and wives, making them able to give birth to men fit to serve the nation (and the next generation of mothers giving birth to such men). This idea developed later into the concept characterised by the slogan ‘good wife, wise mother’ (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母) that “gave expression to the view that defined women’s role in the society primarily within the family”, and that “continued to govern ideal images of the family for a long time even in the post-war decades.”<sup>27</sup>

It must be stressed, on the one hand, that the ideas investigated above did not mean, of course, an immediate practical change in the daily life of the Japanese household. Kathleen S. Uno’s insightful analysis describes in detail how the traditional family model in which the shared participation of family members, involving in child rearing not only the mother and the father but also older children, was slowly transformed through many struggles to the new structure of the family in an industrialised Japan.<sup>28</sup> What the above examples have shown

<sup>26</sup> Nakamura 1875: 3. In English: *Meiroku Zasshi* 1976: 402–403.

<sup>27</sup> Papp 2016: 210.

<sup>28</sup> Uno 1999: 19–46.

is the theoretical foundation of this transformation, which changed the view of Japanese women as mothers in an important way. As Uno put it:

“From long before the 1868 Restoration, Japanese families had expected the mistress of the house to be a diligent, shrewd, and dedicated household manager; the new element in *ryōsai kenbo* was its emphasis on motherhood – the married adult woman’s indispensable role as the nurturer and above all the socializer of children. No longer was female inferiority ground for denying women, even young wives, a major role in the education of children. In expecting lower-class mothers to raise industrious and loyal citizens and middle-class women carefully to rear future leaders, the state’s new view of womanhood nominally entrusted women with unprecedented responsibility for shaping the destiny of nation and society.”<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand it is important that the above examples must not be misunderstood as if the interpretation of ‘equality’ in the peculiar way we can find in the essays published in *Meiroku Zasshi* simply meant the preservation of Confucian values as such under the veil of Western political philosophical concepts. Yoshiko Miyake righteously warns that “[c]ontrary to the views of many writers in later years, *ryōsai kenbo* was not synonymous with Confucian teachings about women” inherited from the Tokugawa era.

“The term, as used in discussions among intellectuals, such as members of the Meirokusha (Meiji Six Society), meant the creation of a new womanhood suitable for Japan’s modern society. However, its meaning was distorted when Confucianism became an official doctrine in the mid-Meiji period.”<sup>30</sup>

Still, while this ‘new womanhood’ was imagined in a way that was undoubtedly not simply ‘Confucian’, it had several characteristics strongly resembling the Confucian tradition – not in terms of women’s ‘inferiority’, but in the understanding of ‘equality’ in terms rather of ‘equal duties’ than of ‘equal rights’. The concept of women’s roles in the newly established social order had its strong traditional roots in certain Confucian concepts, as we could see above, as well as in the Japanese understanding of the *ie* 家. This concept went through significant changes in the Meiji period, still it was this unity of the family and not the autonomous individual subject that became the basis of the Japanese notion of ‘nation state’.

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<sup>29</sup> Uno 1999: 44.

<sup>30</sup> Miyake 1991: 276. n. 19.

### Conclusion

During his stay in the West, Mori Arinori was fascinated by the role Christianity played in the ‘civilisation’ of Western countries and the moral coherency that religion provided to the West. In this context it is not surprising that he opened his *Education in Japan* with the citation from the Bible: “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” The full passage (Mark 8:34–37) is also cited in Mori’s *Life and Resources in America*. It reads:

“And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples, also, he said unto them – Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his *cross*, and follow me. For whosoever, will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life, for my sake, and the Gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”<sup>31</sup>

The cited passage reflects not only the role of religion (Christianity or any other) in the development of education, but also the extent of the significance of education itself in the eyes of a leading Japanese intellectual in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was primarily in the general and comprehensively reformed and unified educational system that the Japanese intellectuals of the Meiji era saw the guarantee of preserving the ‘soul’ of the Japanese, or rather: *the* ‘Japanese soul’, the unity of which could only be established by means of education. They truly believed that a nation state along Western lines could be built on the 2500-year-long tradition of Japan – but only through the substantial reform of education.

With regard to what this meant in terms of the education and the general treatment of women, I argued above that while in the Meiji period the framework of the education of women was, in fact, modern, in its background there lay more than just the idea of equality brought to Japan from the West. Its foundations were laid, at least to the same extent if not even with more weight, on the traditional concept of the family, understood as a building block in the construction of an empire, reinterpreted (or ‘restored’) and adapted to the needs of modernity. In this old-new concept, the idea of ‘equality’ indeed played an important role, but *not* in the same way as it was understood in its Western political philosophical context. It was not so much their equality as individuals, but much more their equality as performers of the common task of the Japanese, i.e., building a strong Japanese nation, that made them ‘equal’ in the eyes of the ‘enlighteners’ of the Meiji period.

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<sup>31</sup> Mori 1871: 153 (Mark 8:34–37).

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