The Sanger Brand: The Relationship of Margaret Sanger and the Pre-War Japanese Birth Control Movement.

Carolyn Eberts

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
March 2010
Committee
Walter Grunden
Tiffany Trimmer
ABSTRACT

Walter Grunden, Tiffany Trimmer

Margaret Sanger, one of the best known promoters of birth control in the first half of the twentieth century, only visited Japan twice in the pre-war era. However, riding on the heels of a tradition of foreign visitors and receiving a vast amount of media coverage, the first trip in particular generated a great deal of interest not only in birth control but also in Sanger. In subsequent years, until the beginning of World War II, Sanger’s name took on a life of its own. Frequently mentioned in newspapers to catch the audience’s attention and strengthen the author’s credibility, Sanger’s name also was used to sell contraceptives. In addition, she was called on for her opinion and endorsement, including for a brand of pessaries that would have great importance for the birth control movement in the *United States vs. One Package* case. Still, though feted after the war and given great honors, including medals and the right to address the Japanese Diet, Sanger’s fame ultimately overshadowed her ultimate importance to the Japanese birth control movement. Due to traditional and developing attitudes towards family, abortion, and the nation, many Japanese eschewed Sanger’s general message in the pre-war era. As a result, Sanger’s real significance to the birth control movement in Japan in this era was not to be located in the terrain of the substance or influence of her message, but rather in the crass reduction of her name and image to a “brand” that could be exploited by journalists, doctors, and merchants for their own arguments and personal gain.
In memory of Dr. Kawashima, an inspiring instructor and a truly great man.
Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I desire to extend my gratitude to Dr. Grunden and Dr. Trimmer for standing with me through my graduate and undergraduate years. Indeed, I owe a lot of my interest in Asian history to one of the first classes I had at BGSU, Dr. Grunden’s History 180. Likewise, my understanding of current and past events has been expanded greatly by Dr. Trimmer’s class concerning Human Rights and history. The simple, straightforward way in which these individuals disseminate information is clear and refreshing. Moreover, one would be hardpressed to find more inspiring and friendly advisors.

I also would like to thank Dr. Jessamyn Abel for assisting me early on in my graduate career and on this project, and for introducing me to many aspects of early modern Japanese history. The freedom she granted me in exploring a range of subject matter and her guidance in my readings are greatly appreciated. Likewise, I am thankful for the aid of Dr. Johnathan Abel in learning more about the literature and literary women of 20th century Japan, the study of which fueled my interest in related women’s movements, including birth control.

I am grateful to the Margaret Sanger Papers Project for giving me the opportunity to assist with their program, and utilize their archives. The weeks spent in New York were not only enlightening but enjoyable as well, largely due to the wonderful people at the Project.

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate years, I have also been most fortunate to learn the Japanese language with Akiko Kawano-Jones. The enthusiasm she has for imparting information on the nation and culture, as well as the many kindnesses she has shown me, are some of the primary reasons that I have selected this field of study.

Last but certainly not least, I thank my parents for their patience and support. And now for something completely different indeed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: BIRTH CONTROL BY 1922</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: THE FIRST VISIT</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: LONG TERM RESULTS</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFTERMATH AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Advertisement for “Sanga-“ brand contraceptives</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Advertisement for Koyama pessary</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Abbreviations

- ABCL – American Birth Control League
- AMA – American Medical Association
- LCM – Library of Congress Microfilm Collection
- MSM – Margaret Sanger Papers Microfilm Edition
- NBCL – National Birth Control League
- NEL – National Eugenics Law
- NYBCL – New York Birth Control League
- MSPP – Margaret Sanger Papers Project
The Sanger Brand: The Relationship of Margaret Sanger and the Pre-War Japanese Birth Control Movement.

Introduction

For most Americans, December 7, 1936, was a day like any other. Still roiling in the depths of the Great Depression, concerned about the growing strength and enmity of Germany and Japan, the results of a New York court appeal concerning a single package of contraceptives hardly seemed of great importance. For those involved in the United States birth control movement, however, the day marked a turning point. That afternoon, Judge Augustus N. Hand and his court handed down their decision in what is usually called the United States v. One Package case.

The case started in 1932 with the seizure of a box of experimental diaphragms by U.S. customs officials under the Smoot- Hawley Tariff Act, a remnant of the oppressive Comstock laws of the late Victorian period. The laws were in place to prevent the spread of obscenity through the U.S. mail and thus the deterioration of American morality. This particular package, however, had been en route to the office of a physician, Dr. Hannah Stone, who was a friend and colleague of Margaret Sanger, the foremost advocate of birth control in the U.S. With the aid of lawyer Morris Ernst, Stone challenged this seizure, arguing that the law blocked the progress of scientific study, hindering the advancement of medicine and women’s health. The original decision by Judge Grover M. Moscowitz in favor of Stone was quickly

---

challenged by the State, but upheld that December day, four years after the initial seizure, by Hand. Through the decision of these men, one of the last major restrictions on the proliferation of birth control was removed; as long as doctors were involved, there were no further *de jure* restrictions on the use of the mail to spread information or contraceptive devices within the United States or internationally. More importantly perhaps, with this final restriction gone, the American Medical Association (AMA), long antagonistic to contraceptive use and discussion, finally recognized the utility of contraceptives for preventive medicine. Thus, birth control, once seen as obscene and radical, became respectable and common place in the U.S. It was the sort of acceptance that Sanger and her colleagues had sought since they first became involved with the issue in the 1910s. However, what is often forgotten in this tale of U.S. victory is the international aspect. This is not surprising as the major drama itself, after all, took place solely in New York. Yet, this case, fully known as *United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries*, is part of larger story of transnational interactions focusing around Margaret Sanger.

Of course, it could be said that the pessaries being of Japanese origin was a coincidence. After all, by 1932, Sanger was the recipient of a variety of inventions and marketed contraceptive devices from friends around the world. But why a Japanese box of pessaries? How had Sanger made such an impact that an inventive physician in Osaka would go out of his way to contact and send her and Dr. Stone samples of his wares for testing? And how was it that following World War II, she became the second foreigner to receive a medal from the emperor in recognition of her work, was the first permitted to speak before the Diet,

---


and was generally greeted as a heroine upon her post-war visits? The answer lies in the lasting popularity Sanger gained from two trips to Japan in the pre-war years, especially her first in 1922.

Much has been written about Margaret Sanger, probably the most familiar advocate of birth control in the United States. This fame is due to her hard work and educational endeavors, as well as her fiery personality and ardent self-promotion. Aiming to be remembered after her death, Sanger also kept a substantial paper trail in the form of letters, diaries, and journals, many of which were eventually given to the Sophia Smith College or the Library of Congress for posterity. Microfilm and copying has led to the gradual diffusion of these documents to other locations, such as the Margaret Sanger Papers Project (MSPP) in New York City, where microfiche versions of the documents available are kept for research purposes. The existence of these pieces, as well as interviews, writings, and countless newspaper and magazine articles from her time period, enable detailed study of her life and work. Of these, in letters and journal entries alone, there are at least 100 detailing her contact and efforts in Japan between 1922 and 1945, and an even larger number of newspaper articles. However, in regards to her work in Japan, deep analysis of these sources has been rare.

This deficit is not particularly surprising. Physical and linguistic barriers are often limiting factors, sometimes making it difficult to access appropriate resources. Moreover, there was little work done in regards to women’s issues and history, Japanese or otherwise, until the 1960s. Birth control itself was often discussed, but not usually in a historical framework. Instead, older articles discussing contraceptives tend to do so in the context of eugenic theory, how birth control could help or hinder national objectives, the decline of morality, Malthusian fears, and other concerns of what was then present day. In short,

---

4 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 441.
academic study of the individuals involved in the birth control movements, like Sanger, and how they and their actions figured into the lives and fertility practices of women, is a relatively new development. Even then, little work has been done in regards to discerning Sanger’s actual impact.

**Relevant Works**

One of the earliest discussions of Japanese birth control and Sanger in a historical context appears in Mary R. Beard’s *The Force of Women in Japanese History*. The latter, with a section co-written by “Japan’s Margaret Sanger,” birth control leader Baroness Ishimoto Shizue, does give a short history of the Japanese birth control movement and practices, though the information was repeated and expanded on in other works by Ishimoto, including her autobiographies. Of her autobiographies, the one most commonly referred to in monographs and articles of other scholars is her first, *Facing Two Ways*. As Ishimoto was an important leader of the Japanese birth control movement, the work contains much first hand information. Pertinent for scholars of the Japanese birth control movement are the descriptions of how her work and that of others was received, the chronology of events, and discussion of problems that she and other advocates faced. Moreover, since the baroness was...

---

5 Mary R. Beard, *The Force of Women in Japanese History* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1953). The work was actually written in the 1930s, but could not be published until after WWII.

6 Ishimoto-Katō Shizue was one of the closest associates of Sanger in Japan. Married to Baron Ishimoto Keikichi at 17, she was essentially abandoned when he departed for Manchuria in the 1930s to pursue a new career. She finally obtained a divorce just before the end of WWII and married her long-time lover Katō Kanju shortly after. Thus, she is more commonly known today by the name of Katō Shizue. However, during the time period involved herein, she was known by the name Ishimoto. Following the tradition set by other scholars, I will be using this name for her as well. Also, although Ishimoto typically anglicized her name as Shidzue, Shizue is the more common spelling among contemporary scholars and the one which I will utilize except in citations where her name is printed as Shidzue.

a good friend of Sanger’s, the autobiography can be used for those examining the Japanese-U.S. connection and topics personal to the two women.

Sanger has her share of biographies and autobiographies as well. Given Sanger’s fame in the United States, even a decade before her death, such works were being written. They tend to focus on the activist’s domestic efforts, though. In most early biographies, Sanger’s trips to Japan are only briefly outlined, usually discussing just the first of the two from the pre-war era. Lawrence Lader’s *The Margaret Sanger Story* is one such example, spending only a couple pages on her 1922 voyage. Moreover, while Lader does not give citations or a bibliography, the information is much the same as that presented in Sanger’s notoriously unreliable autobiographies and is further limited by the fact that Sanger herself did a final edit to ensure the continuation of self-generated myths. Although she did not have the same physical presence on Virginia Coigney’s *Rebel with a Cause*, the work still adds few revelations, especially in regard to Sanger’s trips to Japan. The reader is left with questions raised by the vague comment that Sanger was not solely responsible for the movement there.

---

8 Sanger made multiple trips to Japan. In the pre-war era, there were two: her first in 1922, and another in 1937 that was cut short by various mishaps including a broken arm. After the end of World War II, Sanger came over five more times; two of the trips were for pleasure. Her first post-war trip was 1952, where she spoke against abortion and for population control. She came again in 1954 and was the first foreigner granted permission to speak before the Diet, a huge honor. The topic was “Population Problems and Family Planning.” The following year, she oversaw the Fifth International Conference on Planned Parenthood, which was held in Tokyo.


10 Chesler, *Woman of Valor*, 16; Grey, *Margaret Sanger*, 324-6, 368-9; Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 130. To be fair, Lader does not give citations so it is hard to say where he got his information, but much of what he says mirrors Sanger’s biography, repeating many of the falsified or “sanitized” explanations she gave for her actions. As her friend Hugh de Selincourt said at the time and scholars like Grey and Reed have since explained, Sanger’s autobiography was something of a “hagiography” that ignored or rewrote distasteful aspects of her past, such as her turbulent marriages or involvement with anarchists and the radical left.

That question remains unanswered in Madeleine Grey’s 1979 *Biography of the Champion of Birth Control* that offers only four pages concerning Sanger’s trip to Japan in 1922.\(^{12}\) Moreover, the focus of this discussion is not on her work but her interactions with J. Noah Slee, a suitor and later husband, who accompanied her. Sanger’s second visit is mentioned only in passing, and no other discussion of interaction between Sanger and the birth control advocates in Japan is provided. However, more than the other biographies, Grey’s stands out for its analysis of Sanger as an individual, and cited reliance on a variety of documents. Moreover, it breaks down the myths that surround Sanger.

Another work that is powerful in this manner is David Kennedy’s *Birth Control in America: the Career of Margaret Sanger*. Kennedy purposefully avoids discussion of Japanese interactions to focus solely on the American side of the story, and thus develop a solid background of the world of which Sanger was a part.\(^{13}\) He succeeds, providing an informative and analytical monograph that, like Grey’s, helps explore Sanger’s real motives and thoughts, going beyond her own and earlier biographical works. Because of his domestic focus, the lack of attention to her efforts in Japan is not surprising; the most he writes on her trips is that Sanger had a “not inconsiderable” effect on the birth control movements of the world, especially Asia. Later, discussing the *United States v. One Package* case, he only mentions that the box came from Japan, without telling how and why this came to be. But then, again, it was not until the 1980s that a new interest within the U.S. concerning Japanese women’s history led to more attention being paid to these trips.

Interest in Japan and its history existed in the United States from the late 1800s onward, especially following the Russo-Japanese war (1904-5) which marked Japan’s


\(^{13}\) Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, ix-x.
“coming of age” as a modern nation-state. However, until the rise of gender studies as a field of historical inquiry in the 1960s, little attention was paid to the narratives of women and women’s issues, including how birth control affected their lives, until the late 1960s. The following years saw a rise in the number of publications concerning Japanese women’s history, as well as the republishing of old journals and biographies. Among these, scholarly works concerning the Japanese birth control movement and Sanger’s interaction finally began in earnest. However, such investigation has typically been on a limited basis. Those works that include her story frequently use only a handful of sources and fewer pages for their discussion, despite the fact that most scholars appear to agree her work, particularly the media-hyped 1922 trip that instigated her efforts in Japan, was pivotal for the Japanese birth control movement. This is true of both scholars in the U.S. and Japan.

One of the earlier examples is Dorothy Mowry-Robins’ The Hidden Sun: Women of Modern Japan which presents an informative though broad overview of Japanese women’s history, devoting three pages to the pre-war birth control movement. She describes Sanger’s visit as the “fountainhead” of this development and discusses her visit in 1922 in more detail than previous works. For her information, she mostly draws on an interview with and the autobiography of Ishimoto Shizue, but also utilizes records from the Planned Parenthood Organization of Japan. Still, although Mowry-Robin’s work goes into more detail of the visit and even the aftermath than many other writers, as her goal is to present a basic overview of Japanese women’s lives and history, she does not provide much analysis of Sanger’s impact on the Japanese birth control movement.

---

14 Hiroko Tomida and Gordon Daniels, introduction to Japanese Women: Emerging from Subservience (Kent: Global Oriental, 2005), 4, 7-8.
The same is true of the work entitled *Nihon Joseishi* (Japanese Women’s History), written by Wakita Haruko, Hayashi Reiko, and Nagahara Kazuko. Also a general study, the book devotes only a couple paragraphs to the discussion of birth control advocacy in the pre-war era. The mention of Sanger is brief, explaining that she visited at a time when the Japanese people were starting to discuss issues such as motherhood, abortion, and chastity. Thus, Sanger’s proposition of birth control caught the attention of Japanese people, fitting into discussions of class, eugenics, and women’s issues, and leading to the creation of a birth control organization through Ishimoto Shizue. Going into no further detail on the topic of Sanger and birth control, the utility of this monograph, like that of Mowry-Robins, is how the overview of events and individuals can be used as a reference for more analytical pieces.

Fujime Yuki’s *History of Sex* is such a work, exploring the ways which sex and related issues, including prostitution and birth control, were viewed in early modern Japan. Sanger’s first visit is mostly mentioned in relation to the intense media coverage and her importance in generating popularity for birth control. The visit, Fujime explains, was a great opportunity for spreading information about birth control and, concurring with the general opinion, instrumental in popularizing family limitation. She then compares the ideas that Sanger expressed to those of a Japanese midwife, Shibahara Urako. A member of various progressive organizations, Shibahara worked on a small scale to quietly spread contraceptive information among the fishermen of villages in the Onomichi area. Fujime points out, though, that contrary to the law and at odds with what Sanger promoted Shibahara, working

---

18 Ibid., 247-250.
19 Onomichi is a scenic city on the Seto Inland Sea, not far from Hiroshima.
with the people on a daily basis, supported abortion at least in secret.\textsuperscript{20} Using the term \textit{sanji chousetsu} (birth control\family limitation) as opposed to \textit{datai} (abortion) or \textit{hinin} (contraception), Fujime continues that Shibahara was part of a trend to use nebulous terminology to evade legal action. This description of Shibahara’s work illuminates how birth control advocates “in the field” operated, contrary to law or the birth control ideology supported by Sanger, adjusting their language to do so.

Of course, it was not only midwives who shaped family limitation theory to shape their own beliefs and better serve those with whom they frequently interacted. There were also known reformers like feminist Hiratsuka Raichō and socialist Yamamoto Senji, whose beliefs are compared and contrasted in an article by Ishizaki Nobuko, “Reproductive freedom and the birth control movement.”\textsuperscript{21} Like Fujime, Ishizaki describes how Sanger’s visit in 1922 helped to popularize birth control in Japan, before delving into her main discussion.\textsuperscript{22} Again too, Sanger’s anti-abortion stance is contrasted to those of Raichō and Yamamoto, who, like Shibahara, tended to support early terminations. The article thus clearly delineates a variation among important Japanese reformers and Sanger’s ideology, helping to explain the path that the Japanese birth control movement took in the pre-war era.

Juliette Yuehtsen Chung’s \textit{Struggle for National Survival} goes into more depth with her discussion of Sanger, while still comparing her work to that of a Japanese individual. Overall, Chung examines the intersection of society and science through the lens of the eugenics movement in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, comparing the experiences of China

\textsuperscript{20} Abortion was technically illegal, although it remained a common means of family limitation, especially in rural areas like that where Shibahara worked. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Nobuko Ishizaki, “Seishoku no jiyū to sanjichōsetsu undō: Hiratsuka Raichō to Yamamoto Senji” (Reproductive freedom and the birth control movement: Hiratsuka Raichō and Yamamoto Senji), \textit{Rekishi Hyōron} \textit{503}, (1992), 93. \\
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}, 93-99.
and Japan. Then, concerning birth control in East Asia, Chung states that the Japanese and Chinese women were “inspired by Margaret Sanger’s promotion of birth control in the 1920’s and 1930’s,” leading to “the ensuing social movement of birth-control campaigns” where only scientific inquiry had existed before. Chung then delves into a discussion of the eugenic and morality based arguments of Yoshioka Yayoi, a female physician bitterly opposed to Sanger’s message and fame. Though the focus necessitates that Chung looks not so much at Sanger’s importance overall but how her visit affected Yoshioka, the page or two devoted to this topic does offer some new and interesting insight into the forces against birth control. Specifically, through the description of Yoshioka’s staunch opposition and reasons for it, Chung’s monograph gives a personalized account of the ideological forces obstructing the spread of contraceptive knowledge. This is indeed useful for understanding how Sanger’s message was received and understood by supporters and detractors. Moreover, there is a strong sense that, even if Sanger was a catalyst for the birth control movement, there were a number of limitations as well.

This idea, of Sanger as catalyst, is continued in Tiana Norgren’s Abortion Before Birth Control, the focus of which is to discern why legislation and attitudes towards abortions in Japan have been more lenient and progressive than those towards contraceptives. In discussing Sanger and the U.S.-Japan connection, she relies primarily on secondary sources, although writings by scholar-activist-politician Abe Isō are also cited. Norgren argues that Sanger’s visit was a turning point for the Japanese birth control movement, inciting endeavors

---

24 Ibid., 106-7, 133.
to spread birth control information via clinics and writing. The main focus in this section, though, is how eugenic theories were viewed and what effect they had on legislation regarding birth control. This is important information, and extremely useful for evaluating Sanger’s overall impact, not to mention understanding the world around her.

Sabine Frühstück’s *Colonizing Sex*, a work that traces the changes concerning the perception of sex and sexuality in modern Japan, likewise does not explore Sanger’s impact in great depth, but still is extremely valuable for its discussion of birth control and eugenics in Japan. Of all the articles and monographs mentioned so far, hers presents the most thorough background on the Japanese birth control movement, and views towards contraceptives in Japan during the Taishō and early Shōwa eras are a major part of her discussion. Frühstück argues that Sanger’s visits of 1922 and 1937 were the direct cause of the “diverse groups of social reformers” gathering and forming “what became a birth control movement.” Using newspaper articles and letters, along with writings by Ishimoto, Sanger, and proletarian birth control advocate Yamamoto Senji, Früstück argues that, in essence, the Japanese birth control movement took two forms: one of a Marxist-socialist style led by Yamamoto Senji, and another, eugenics based ideology proposed by Abe Isō. Frühstück also discusses the fact that, despite all the lobbying and work, birth control largely remained unpracticed in rural areas, due to cost and continued ignorance on practical methods. Sanger is portrayed as influential in terms of generating support, but not necessarily in distribution of her message. Ultimately then, Früstück’s analysis of the movement as a whole and the

---

eugenic aspects involved is helpful for understanding how Sanger’s ideology and methods differed from those of Japanese advocates.

Früstück, Chung, and Norgren are not alone in their interest in eugenics and its relation to women’s history topics. Indeed, one of the original authorities on this topic is Suzuki Zenji, who started his investigation in 1967, desiring to understand the relationship between Japan and foreign science, particularly eugenics. Because of the relationship between eugenics and birth control, Sanger’s name is mentioned in his *Japanese Eugenics: History of the Ideas and Movement.* Overall, he repeats the refrain of Sanger being important because of the attention her visits drew to the cause of birth control, though Suzuki also mentions that especially in the post war years, her ideology was largely eschewed for its tendency to focus on the quantity rather than the quality of births. His work has had a great impact on other, more recent scholars, including those who focus on the relationship between eugenic ideology and women.

One of these scholars is Otsubo Sumiko, who wrote her doctoral thesis concerning the careers of five eugenicists who popularized the ideology in Japan and how it was received. Subsequent articles she penned have gone into more detail on some of these individuals, most notably feminist Hiratsuka Raichō. Another writer of interest is Terazawa Yuki who has written articles concerning how race and gender were incorporated into medical and popular

---

eugenic science in Japan.\textsuperscript{33} These works are informative for understanding the context of the Japanese birth control movement and Sanger’s visit, particularly in regards to the use of eugenics both to support and oppose contraceptive use. Sanger’s work and trips, though, remain in the background, if mentioned at all.

In short, most works discussing Japanese birth control in the Taishō and Shōwa eras provide a solid understanding of the movement, but rarely give much detailed attention to Sanger’s contributions. When Sanger is mentioned, the common view is that her importance was her ability to serve as a catalyst for popularization of birth control alone. The reason given for this importance is usually explained as the result of a media blitz during her trip in 1922 that occurred when conservatives in the Japanese government tried to prevent Sanger from visiting. Is familiarity through the media enough though, one must ask, to create such interest in Sanger herself that Dr. Koyama in Osaka would send her the pessaries instead of someone of importance in his nation, especially considering that Sanger only visited twice and, as will be explained, had limited correspondence and contact with the Japanese public?

There are, of course, works from the U.S. point of view that also discuss the Japanese interaction with Sanger in some detail, though questions remain. One such work is Ellen Chesler’s biography of Sanger, \textit{Women of Valor}. Chesler generally seems to agree that Sanger was a major catalyst for the Japanese birth control movement, but also points out that there were a variety of social forces working in Sanger’s favor to help maintain and increase interest generated from her first visit.\textsuperscript{34} To explain this point, Chesler utilizes not only biographies, but also some of the letters from the Sophia Smith archives, as well as personal


\textsuperscript{34} Chesler, \textit{Woman of Valor}, 365-8.
interviews she conducted. In synthesizing and relating this information though, Chesler is, like Grey, generally more interested in Sanger’s personal life than the impact of her work, or her activities in Japan.

One of the few who has investigated Sanger’s work in Japan at length is Malia Sedgewick-Johnson, who discussed Sanger’s Japanese work for her doctoral thesis at the University of Hawaii in 1987. Sedgewick-Johnson, a nurse by profession, who views Sanger as a great nursing pioneer, studied Sanger’s influence on the Japanese birth control movement from 1921 to 1955, focusing on her relationship with Ishimoto. Ultimately, she argues that Sanger’s influence on the Japanese birth control movement came primarily through her friendship with Ishimoto. To explain this point, Sedgewick-Johnson utilizes a diffusion model. This model, created by Everett Roger, argues that “human interaction in the form of interpersonal communication is essential in order for change to occur within the social system,” with social change being defined as a “phenomenon producing structural and functional alterations within the basic social system.” The process involves several steps including introduction of an idea, communication of the idea, and the ultimate acceptance or rejection of said idea. The originator of the idea is a change agent. In Sedgewick-Johnson’s study, Sanger assumes this role as it was her communication and interaction with Ishimoto that led to the eventual acceptance of birth control in Japan. This process though, is not actually explained clearly until the last chapter. The rest of the work is designed to provide the

---

35Malia Sedgewick-Johnson, *Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in Japan, 1921-1955* (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1987). Sanger was not technically a nurse, having dropped out of a nurse-probationer program to marry her first husband, Bill Sanger. She did, however, frequently claim that she was a nurse to offset criticism about a layperson giving what was ostensibly medical advice. She also did some work as a midwife and pediatric nurse through her sister, Ethel, who actually was a licensed professional. See Grey, *Margaret Sanger*, 26-31, 53).

36 Sedgewick-Johnson, *Margaret Sanger*, 110-120.


background information onto which this model can be retrofitted, offering descriptions of events Sanger participated in or influenced in some manner.

Sedgewick-Johnson conducted interviews with Sanger’s son, Grant Sanger, and Ishimoto Shizue among others, and also visited the National Diet Library in Tokyo, though she cites no Japanese language sources and only a couple of translated articles by Baron Ishimoto and Ishimoto-Katō. She also utilized the Sophia Smith archives, mostly paying attention to the journals, diaries, and notes left by Sanger pertaining to her Japanese interactions. A lot of her information, though, comes from Sanger’s own autobiography, as well as the autobiographies and writings by Ishimoto-Katō Shizue. Interestingly, considering her desire to demonstrate how Ishimoto served as Sanger’s point of diffusion in Japan, the letters that make up a major portion of the Sophia Smith archives and that provide access to professional and personal discussions between the two advocates among many others, are rarely cited. The letters, the primary method of communication between Sanger and her Japanese colleagues, and the variety of individuals represented within, could have raised questions as to how or if the model might have applied to other advocates besides the baroness. To be sure though, where Ishimoto is concerned, there is nothing within the notes to disprove the diffusion theory.

Sedgewick-Johnson’s argument is intriguing, overall, and the basic idea of Sanger’s beliefs influencing the Japanese birth control movement through her friend is sound, a good starting point in the investigation of Sanger’s importance to Japan and its birth control movement. There are other factors, though, beyond Sanger’s work with Ishimoto, including her contact with other individuals as well as the media, and her place in a history of foreign visitors that must be taken into consideration. With all such factors considered, one can see
not only how Sanger’s message shaped the Japanese birth control movement, but also, how the Japanese actually utilized her message, and her image.

**Shifting Perspectives**

As the historiography demonstrates, very few scholars have looked at Sanger’s importance to the Japanese birth control movement in great depth, despite the importance her accolades would seem to demand. Indeed, Japanese and American scholars alike generally seem to have more interest in the topics of eugenics and feminism. Sanger and her work in Japan is sometimes mentioned in conjunction with these discussions, but few have presented anything beyond a cursory overview, or considered more than a few factors in evaluating Sanger’s significance, not just to the pre-war contraceptive movement itself but to the Japanese in general. Although scholars frequently mention that Sanger’s first visit to Japan was a catalyst for the burgeoning birth control movement, there appears to have been little done to investigate this claim in depth, or expand on the question of why she had such an impact.

This thesis attempts to clarify and more completely analyze Sanger’s significance to the Japanese birth control movement between 1920 and 1940. Particular attention is given to this period since it was during these years that the popular Japanese birth control movement took shape, fought for private contraceptive use, and ultimately was co-opted or forced underground by an increasingly militaristic and pro-natalist government. Sanger’s fame in Japan likewise waxed and waned along these lines, her status depending on public opinion towards birth control and foreigners in general.

---

39 This includes discussions of middle-class feminists like the literary women involved in the Seitō literary magazine, women during wartime, and women’s relationship to socialism among other factors.
Though often overlooked, it is important to recognize that much of Sanger’s significance stemmed from her U.S. origins. One in a long line of visitors from the West to Japan, her foreign name brought with it a certain cachet that granted her instant status as someone to pay attention to. Sanger, though, arrived at a time when this paradigm was being questioned by some people, often in government circles. The subsequent attempt to suppress Sanger’s visit by these powerful individuals led to a fight between the two schools of thought, widely reported on by a relatively liberal media that generally championed Sanger. The resulting deluge of reports drew attention to Sanger and the birth control movement, thus aiding in its popularization. However, as with the foreign teachers who had come before her, Sanger’s message was not necessarily taken to heart even if her name was a household word.

Throughout the decades following her first visit, the prevailing means and attitudes towards birth control in Japan did not necessarily follow Sanger’s beliefs or teachings. The Japanese instead shaped the birth control movement in their own way, according to their traditions, legislative freedoms, and needs. Nevertheless, because of her cachet, Sanger’s name and image were used like a brand by various individuals, with or without her permission and/or knowledge. Writers utilized her name to garner attention to their ideas, as an example of desirable “modern” thinking, or simply to provide an “expert” opinion on a topic. Marketers, meanwhile, used Sanger’s name as a slogan to help sell contraceptive goods.

In short, as this thesis argues, Sanger’s name and image, enhanced by a tradition of foreign teachers and her struggle against government oppression, was her most important contribution to the pre-war Japanese birth control movement. Although the resulting fame did not mean that her beliefs were implemented, positive remembrance of her pre-war efforts resulted in her

---

becoming the recipient of many accolades for her work and support after the war. Her status as a famous Western teacher also led to the instigation of correspondence, resulting in a fateful package of Japanese pessaries being sent to the United States.

The present thesis will utilize a variety letters from the MSPP’s archives to reconstruct the correspondence between Sanger, various Japanese individuals, and birth control advocates, examining their questions, her responses, and how the writers viewed her. Newspaper articles and advertisements of the time will also be analyzed to illustrate how Sanger’s image was exploited by advocates and others.

The argument will be presented in three chapters. The first chapter provides historical context, explaining and discussing Japanese cultural and social trends that were in effect or that came into play between 1922 and 1940. The second will examine Sanger’s first trip to Japan, focusing on the controversy of her arrival and the immediate impact of her work. The “long term” effects of this 1922 visit, as well as her second trip in 1937, will be explored in chapter three, focusing on her interactions with Dr. Koyama and her relation to the main Japanese birth control movement.
Chapter I: Birth Control by 1922

Overview

To better assess Sanger’s contributions to Japan and the pre-war Japanese birth control movement, it is imperative to understand her ideas, goals, and methods as well as the situation into which she entered upon her voyage to Japan in 1922. Thus, this chapter examines the evolution of discourse on contraceptives in the U.S. and Sanger’s place within it. There is also a discussion of birth control in Japan, and how earlier feminist discussions of family limitation and related topics helped familiarize and open a discursive space for Sanger’s similar arguments. Finally, this chapter will explain the larger context of Sanger’s visit in relation to a tradition of foreigners being brought to Japan in order to lecture, teach, and advise.

Origins of Family Limitation in the United States

The origins of the birth control movement in the United States lie in the Industrial Revolution and resulting social changes. A time of rapid technological developments, this period began in the late 1700s as farms became increasingly mechanized. As there was less demand for agricultural laborers, many people moved to urban centers in order to attain new work in mechanized factories. With the increased cost of living and cramped residential quarters, the large families that had been advantageous to an agricultural lifestyle were increasingly viewed as a disadvantage in the new urban environment.

Dissatisfaction with the new fast-paced, technology-based lifestyle led some people to question the rise of machines and factories. Spurred by this wave of thought, a minority of individuals broke away from the traditional parameters of marriage, based on financial

---

advantages and sexual restraint, to advocate romantic love and sexual pleasure for both men
and women. Some of the more socially radical individuals even advocated free love or
polygamy.

Most people, of course, did not participate in the sexual freedoms of this new wave of
thinking. However, the romantic notion of love did inspire some individuals, including
women, to reconsider the institution of love and marriage. Combined with the constant fear
of a wayward husband infecting his wife with venereal disease, early feminist reformers
began to question the duel sexual standard that prevailed and call for reforms. According to
the typical feminist vision of this era, a man should control his sexual desires in respect for
the well-being of his wife and family, refraining from dalliances outside the house, and
practicing near abstinence within. However, few men were willing to maintain such
discipline. Thus, if women were going to maintain their health and control their fertility so as
to survive in an industrialized world, they needed some form of protection.

Even as the need for contraceptives increased, though, it became more difficult to
obtain information. Traditionally, there had been a range of herbal remedies and physical
procedures to prevent conception or induce an abortion. The wealthier could buy access to
the best devices, such as male sheaths made from animal skin or intestine. Sponge also could

---

4 Early feminists were working within the constraints of their society, often described as one of “duel spheres.”
This system is defined by feminist scholar Linda Gordon as “a male-imposed doctrine to keep women from
escaping from their homes and a women’s adaptation to their new situation” (Gordon, 18). In this social
structure, men were considered to have a predisposition to be outgoing, intellectual, and also highly sexual.
Their place was outside the home, providing for and protecting the family. Meanwhile, women were viewed as
inherently good. This notion was based largely on the common belief that they were inherently sexless.
Supposedly driven by emotion and maternal instincts, females were to stay within the house. Many early
feminists, unable to cast aside this ideology completely, often played up the role of women being morally
superior to men. According to this way of thinking, women provided a role model that men not only had to
protect but also respect and try to follow. Thus, in this ideology, men would become more like women through
women’s moral guidance- emotionally focused on the family unit, and nearly sexless.
be bought and used as a sort of diaphragm. Those without money, access, or desire to utilize these means relied on withdrawal or even infanticide to maintain family size, despite the condemnation of such practices from Judaeo-Christian ideology.\textsuperscript{6} Information regarding these procedures had been distributed primarily by midwives or word of mouth between women. However, with the industrial revolution and the resulting social changes also came scientific revolution. This result was a shift from medical practice based on faith and herbal knowledge, to one rooted in the scientific method and technological advancements.

In the United States, this scientific revolution led to the founding of the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1847. The initial goal of this organization was to restore people’s trust in physicians. This trust had been eroded from experiences with ineffective or even dangerous treatments administered by poorly trained physicians, not to mention a host of scam artists selling patent medicines. To fight back, the AMA supported legislation that forced all individuals practicing medicine to obtain a medical degree from a university.\textsuperscript{7} As a result, midwives and others who had learned by experience were forbidden to practice. Moreover, as most universities only accepted men into their classes, the majority of physicians, including gynecologists, were males during the 1800s. At the same time, a conservative swing in social attitudes resulted in a prudishness that made discussion of anything related to sex taboo in polite society, particularly between sexes. As a result, obtaining basic information on contraceptives became extremely difficult and embarrassing.

\textsuperscript{6}Chesler, \textit{Woman of Valor}, 63; James Reed, “The Birth Control Movement Before Roe v. Wade,” in \textit{The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective}, ed. Donald T. Critchlow (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 25-6. With the adoption of Christianity in Europe, infanticide and abortion came to be viewed as a form of murder that could condemn both the killer and baby to Hell. However, both practices, especially abortion, were often overlooked even where official legislation existed. Withdrawal, meanwhile, was sometimes seen as a sin due to the waste of “seed” as condemned by God in traditional interpretations of the story of Onan. The story told of a Onan who was asked by his father to impregnate his sister-in-law so his brother, recently struck down by God, would have an heir. When he refused and instead practiced withdrawal, God slew him as well.

\textsuperscript{7} Chesler, \textit{Woman of Valor}, 63; Kennedy, \textit{Birth Control in America}, 176-8.
for most women. Even if they had the money to visit a physician and the courage to inquire about possibilities though, physicians were frequently hostile on the subject and refused to suggest any method save abstinence.

In their quest for respectability, physicians and the AMA sought to put “a new emphasis on investigation, classification, and accurate diagnosis,” as David Kennedy explains, “[giving] scientific innovators more cause to throw out old cures than to devise new ones.” Among the old “cures” being discarded were many traditional means of birth control. For the most part, there was good reason for this as a number of these methods, such as miscarriage-inducing herbal concoctions or crudely executed surgeries, were exceedingly dangerous. Still, more than other fields of medicine, physicians were uninterested in finding better methods. After all, even if birth control was used in secret, publicly, it was still a controversial and obscene subject. There were too many fears - of danger to the body of a woman, of moral transgression for standing in the way of God’s will, or, increasingly, of a decline of the white race due from a falling population. Not desiring to become embroiled in the controversy and risk the new prestige of their profession, many physicians publicly spoke against the use of birth control. Despite this, the desire for family limitation did not go away, nor was it completely ignored.

Though a minority, there were some individuals expounded on the positive values of family limitation, especially those aspects that could benefit society as a whole. These first advocates came from Britain, and frequently based their advocacy on their observations of social ills created by overpopulation. One of these individuals was political and economic

---

9 There were, of course, some physicians who did prescribe use of a contraceptive device on an individual basis, usually as a way to improve a patient’s health. Still, even they were typically unwilling to support contraceptive use publicly.
theorist, Thomas Robert Malthus. In the early 1800s, he began to write about the problem of excessive births, explaining that something needed to be done lest the rapidly expanding population overtake the slower growing food supply and lead to disaster. His fears fueled concern among others in turn, and continued to do so well after his death in 1834. Although Malthus, like most physicians, was only willing to support abstinence to meet these ends, others risked their reputations to examine and spread information on other, more practical means.

One of these was another political and economic theorist, John Stuart Mill. An advocate of free speech, Mill also took up the cause of birth control and was even jailed briefly for distributing pamphlets written by activist, Francis Place, that blatantly discussed birth control methods. However, the law could not stop the spread of the ideas he advocated, which eventually crossed the ocean to the U.S. in 1831 via Robert Dale Owen, son of utopian-socialist Robert Owen, and editor of a New York newspaper, *The Free Enquirer*. Significantly, though, Owen discussed birth control as a means not just to improve a family’s economic situation or prevent overuse of scant resources as the earlier advocates had, but also argued for contraceptives on the grounds that proper family limitation would also give women a degree of self-determination and freedom. These controversial writings in turn influenced a physician, Charles Knowlton, who wrote a tract seminal to the burgeoning contraceptive movement entitled “Fruits of Philosophy” in 1839. His desire to put birth control in

---

11 Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 6. The methods described were withdrawal and insertion of sponges. Place was a member of a group of “freethinkers” in the early 19th century who discussed and advocated for a variety of social causes that would benefit the working classes.
women’s hands would have a profound impact on later advocates when his pamphlets were redistributed in Britain in 1877 by Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh.\(^{15}\) Arrested for obscenity, the resulting trial received heavy media attention and gained popular interest. The ruling, though, was especially significant as it removed contraceptives from the list of “obscene items” in Britain.\(^{16}\)

In the meantime, even though many physicians continued to ignore or condemn birth control, new methods were being developed, including the first rubber devices. A decade after Charles Goodyear invented vulcanized rubber in 1837, British chemist Alexander Parkes discovered a “cold cure” process that enabled the creation of extremely thin but durable rubber that could be made into a male sheath. These new condoms proved to be far cheaper than the animal-skin/intestine based contraptions.\(^{17}\) The new rubber also could be used in “womb veils,” or diaphragms, which gained a great deal of popularity as a medical device to “support the womb” in the 1850s.\(^{18}\) The veils were not recognized as a potential contraceptive method until 1864 with the publication of *Medical Common Sense* by Edward Bliss Foote, and even then were not frequently used in this manner.\(^{19}\) In short, though superior in their function to any other method then available, neither condoms nor veils enjoyed much popular success at first. It did not help that prostitutes quickly took to using condoms, creating a negative perception of the products, or that the devices cost more than what an average American could reasonably afford.

\(^{15}\) Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 10.
\(^{16}\) Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 287.
\(^{17}\) Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 13-5.
\(^{19}\) Chesler, *Woman of Valor*, 36-7; Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 16. Foote was a physician, but not held in high regard by his fellows due to his advocacy for radical causes, including birth control. This unpopularity, combined with poor distribution and the generally poor opinion of contraceptives meant that his version of the devices never caught on. Better methods – the pessary and cervical cap - were eventually developed in continental Europe. These devices did earn the respect and attention of both physicians and the public.
Despite the cost, these new devices were widely advertised as “health products” for years, one of many available to those able to pay. In refusing to assist women with their fertility, physicians had unintentionally created a problem similar to the one they had tried to eradicate: myriad businessmen peddling untested, unregulated “miracle cures” to desperate individuals. Descriptions of the devices and medicines were purposefully vague to avoid censorship, particularly in the magazines and newspapers where they were advertised. From “Portuguese Pills” surreptitiously promising the abortion of “unwanted obstacles” to an array of “French” or “Feminine Hygiene” products, a plethora of unregulated devices and medicines flooded the market. Like the old herbal remedies, most of these modern medicines were completely worthless, some downright dangerous. However, when federal regulation of the industry finally began in 1870, instead of weeding out the harmful products, the U.S. government instead passed a series of laws that simply tried to stamp out contraceptive use and distribution altogether.

Behind these new laws was a single man: Anthony Comstock, a postal inspector. 20 Part of a post-Civil-War society, with ex-abolitionists seeking new causes and frequently taking up issues of morality, such as temperance or the abolition of prostitution, he was heavily involved in the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). 21 He took the fight against obscenity and sin to new and personal levels, though, leading a vice squad in New York which worked with the police and legal systems to enforce existing laws and create new ones that tried to regulate public morality. His fervor was based on the Biblical notion that for a man to even think a licentious thought was a sin. 22 As birth control was likely to make people think about intercourse, not to mention remove the fear of pregnancy as a reason to

20 Chesler, Woman of Valor, 38; Gordon, Woman’s Body, 53-7.
21 Reed, The Birth Control Movement and American Society, 34.
22 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 44; Reed, The Birth Control Movement and American Society, 37-8.
abstain, Comstock saw it as a dangerous temptation needing to be erased. That being impossible, he instead used his connections and influence to create a bill, passed through a lame duck Congress on their last day before recess, to forbid “obscene materials” from being sent through the mail. The definition of obscenity was extremely loose and up for individual interpretation, meaning that it could easily be used to crush freedom of speech and expression, as well as immoral activities. Despite the danger inherent to the bill, though, every state except New Mexico quickly passed similar, local laws to put further restrictions on “vice.”

Collectively, these vice laws were known as the Comstock laws, and in New York, Comstock himself enforced them as postmaster.

Besides simply monitoring the mail for materials he deemed obscene, Comstock, who had a special hatred for contraceptive use, pursued doctors who he suspected of prescribing birth control or distributing information. Though he did not have the power to go into a physician’s office to enforce the law, he used surreptitious means to catch suspects, including fake letters begging for help, or having members of his vice squad pose as desperate patients. When a sympathetic physician responded provided contraceptive information, Comstock called in the police to arrest the offender, who faced prison or heavy fines for their “crime.” As a result, the spread of contraceptive information and devices ground to a halt. Still, though Comstock might have made it difficult for women to learn how to control their fertility, he could not halt social change and sexual revolution that had started with the romantic and free love movement of the early 1800s, and intensified with the turn of the century.

---

23 Chesler, Woman of Valor, 67-9; Grey, Margaret Sanger, 44; Reed, The Birth Control Movement and American Society, 37-9.
Reconsideration

The turn of the century saw the advent of new notions about women, sex, and morality. In a faster paced era with consumerism on the rise, especially after WWI, old beliefs in the importance of patience and self-sacrifice were increasingly replaced with self-realization and the pursuit of pleasure. These new values were encouraged by a change in the understanding of emotion, based on the teachings of Dr. Sigmund Freud. His ideas, including the centrality of sexuality to one’s persona, caught the attention of psychologists and physicians, and resulted in the opening of a discursive space on the topics that Victorian mores had deemed taboo. The discussion did not stay only among mental and physical health professionals, however.

Freud’s theories about sex spoke to a new generation that was questioning and frequently discarding the Victorian ideology of their parents. Many, encouraged by their understanding of Freud’s discussion of sexual repression and mental health, eschewed the belief in pre-marital abstinence and the myth of female sexlessness of the 1800s. Among females of the upper and middle classes, this thinking resulted in a way of life and belief, that of the New Woman, a lifestyle that questioned and often cast off traditional gender roles to pursue intellectual and physical stimulation. Nevertheless, even with a new attitude towards

---

26 Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, 131. When Freud spoke of how sexual repression stressed one’s mental health, some people took this to mean that indulgence in all sexual desire was a good thing.
27 Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, 50-65; Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 61-2. A “new woman” was essentially a lady who did not fit into societal and gender-based norms, and questioned or completely eschewed them. Typically, a “New Woman” was an upper or middle class girl who sought a career to gain financial independence from families that could have supported them. Among these women, there were many who did not marry, or at least not right away. Having cast off Victorian morality though, being single did not mean that these women practiced abstinence. Unhindered, some used their sexuality to gain admiration and even financial support from lovers. Because of this, these “new women” were often seen as the product of declining morality or crumbling society. Others, though, considered them to be the result of modernity and thus signs of social progress. Playwright Henrik Ibsen was among the latter, and many of his female characters, most notably Nora of “A Doll’s House,” are examples of new women.
sex and family life, most women still did not have access to or knowledge of reliable means of contraceptives. They certainly could not get much advice from medical professionals, still generally men, willfully ignorant of the topic.

Although the AMA and scientific medicine had become fairly well established, the fear among physicians of losing public respect remained strong. The surreptitious, barely legal advertising for contraceptive devices, medicines, and information that continued to proliferate under legal radar was hardly able to inspire confidence or lead most scientists to investigate, let alone promote family limitation. Many doctors simply associated the practice with radicals and abortionists, declaring it a detriment to public morality and health. Increasingly too, some chose to interpret the practice as negative to national health, involved as they were in the popular theories of eugenics.

Eugenic theory originated with the work of Englishman Francis Galton in the 1860s. Inspired by the findings of his cousin, Charles Darwin, Galton began to discuss how heredity could apply not only to physical traits but characteristics of personality as well. Around the same time, Austrian monk, Gregor Mendel, offered proof on the importance of genetic heredity based on observations made while crossbreeding different types of peas. It was not until the turn of the century, though, that their works gained much popular attention as scientists began to use these observations and theories in practical applications. Largely setting aside previously accepted theories of a parent’s acquired traits being handed down to a child, new eugenic thought emphasized the importance of good genetics. Thus, it seemed

29 Kevles, *In the Name*, 3-4.
30 Ibid., 42-5.
possible to improve humanity simply by careful and deliberate breeding. For most who supported eugenic thought, this involved encouraging marriage between healthy, typically wealthy, and intelligent couples of Western European heritage.\textsuperscript{32} Peoples of other races, the poor, or those who suffered a range of illnesses deemed hereditary, needed to not reproduce. The most common suggestion for achieving this was to create eugenically strict marriage licenses, or legalize limited sterilization, coerced or voluntary. Despite the clear possibilities for its application, the majority of eugenic reformers were not willing to discuss birth control for fear of the law or morality. Eugenicists also tended to fear birth control for its potentially dysgenic effects – that is results contrary to eugenic goals, namely genetically fit couples using contraceptives to have small families. This fear was the foundation of the larger issue of “race suicide,” a term often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, and referring to the concern that the wealthy whites desiring to economize with a smaller family were more likely to use the devices than the poor or non-whites.\textsuperscript{33} This, it was thought, would doom the desirable racial-economic group to extinction as undesirables would overwhelm the gene pool. Careful application of sterilization, a permanent and fool-proof solution, when permitted only to people deemed genetically unfit in some manner, was thus preferable to contraceptives for many.

Even though many eugenicists did not support contraceptive use, those involved in the birth control movement were quick to call on eugenic science to provide support for pro-contraceptive arguments. Easier to use and less invasive than sterilization, advocates claimed

\textsuperscript{32} Kevles, In the Name, 20-1, 86-8. Overall, what constituted the “genetically fit” in this era generally meant an individual of Western-European origin, physically and mentally sound, and well-off financially or at least possessing the ability to become so. Of course, the definition of a “fit” person varied somewhat depending on who was giving the definition. Some individuals with socialist beliefs, for instance, believed that monetary wealth should not be a measure of “fitness.”

\textsuperscript{33} Gordon, Woman’s Body, 130-6; Kennedy, Birth Control in America, 42-7.
that contraceptives were the cheapest, most accessible way to ensure genetic perfection. These arguments were frequently intertwined with those concerning poverty, which contraceptives could theoretically help people escape by enabling the limitation of family size and thus family expenditures. The health of mothers was also a common reason touted by advocates, as birth control would enable the spacing of pregnancies and give a woman’s body time to heal between births. Advocates pointed out that a healthy, financially sound mother with fewer children was more likely to raise a genetically fit child due to the increased ability to nurture him or her, tying in both Mendelian genetics based on heredity and older ideas of acquired traits.

These arguments of health, financial stability, and eugenic benefits were the most common and acceptable to mainstream society of the various claims that birth control advocates made. Most 20th century advocates though, like Robert Dale Owen or Edward Foote Bliss before them, also spoke on the society-changing potential in birth control. One such professed possibility was the use of contraceptives to grant women the right to truly control her own fertility, a belief notably supported by gynecologist Robert Latou Dickinson.34 He also believed, along with British physician-philosopher Havelock Ellis, that sex itself needed to be seen as separate from marriage. Tied into the discourse made possible by Freud’s theories, and rooted in the ideas of the romanticists of a century prior, these advocates believed that frequent intercourse was necessary to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of an individual. By freeing people of the fear of unwanted pregnancies, contraceptives made sexual exploration and healing possible.

---

34 Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 148-57, 164-80. Dickinson would later go on to be an associate of Sanger’s, despite the contempt it brought him from other physicians. He would attempt to combine the research and footwork done at her birth control clinic with the prestige and scientific expertise of his fellow professionals.
Using all of these arguments, and also advocating vocally on the grounds of free speech in relation to contraceptives, was anarchist Emma Goldman.\footnote{Grey, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 39-40, 53; Reed, \textit{The Birth Control Movement Before}, 47-8, 51. Emma Goldman was born in what is now Lithuania, but spent much of her life in New York City where she fought for various reforms, typically along anarchist lines. Although her actions and writings mainly focused on political change, she also was an advocate for women’s rights and birth control. Having earned a license abroad, she even worked as a midwife in the United States and endeavored to teach contraceptive techniques to the impoverished and immigrant peoples, all before Sanger became involved. However, Goldman’s promotion of the radical ideology of anarchy hindered her word from reaching let alone influencing mainstream society which tended to regard her with apprehension. Following the transformation of Russia into a Communist entity, Goldman, along with some 200 others, was deported by the U.S. government to curtail what was seen as their rabble-rousing.} In her view, the government had no right to pass laws that limited speech, as the Comstock laws did with the mail. Although her anarchist political views made it difficult for her arguments to make a major impact on mainstream society, Goldman did have a lasting influence on a housewife she became friends with in the 1910s, Margaret Sanger.

**Becoming a Reformer**

A petite Irish woman with auburn hair, those who met Sanger often had trouble believing she was the same outspoken and fiery woman described in the newspapers, and the leader of the U.S. birth control movement.\footnote{Grey, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 348; Kennedy, \textit{Birth Control in America}, 35; Morehouse, “The Speaking,” vii, 11.} Born Margaret Higgins in 1879, she was the 6\textsuperscript{th} of 11 children. Her father, a gravestone carver, was often out of work because of his tendency to outrage the community with criticisms of both church and state based on socialist ideology. Thus, much of her early life was spent in poverty as the family tried to make do with limited funds.

Sanger’s education was also limited, although her two years of high school was considered sufficient for a short-lived job as a teacher for immigrant children.\footnote{Chesler, \textit{Woman of Valor} 22, 49-53; Grey, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 20-31. Because of her dissatisfaction with the public school in Corning, two of Sanger’s older sisters paid for her to attend a small boarding school called Claverack College near Hudson, New York. However, after she left to tend to her dying mother, she lacked the interest and her sisters the funds to permit her to return for the last two.} She did not
enjoy the work however, and sought new opportunities. Long fascinated with medicine, she was happy to obtain a position as a nurse probationer in a private hospital in White Plains, New York. 38 Halfway through, though, she met and quickly married an architect named Bill Sanger, then quit the nursing program to go with him first to Manhattan and then Hastings, a New York City suburb. 39 For a time, she attempted to enjoy life as a middle-class suburban housewife, and gave birth to three children. However, terrified of passing on the latent tuberculosis she carried, and generally disinterested in housework or domestic life, she spent much of her time working as an in-house nurse, taking care of newborns and their mothers. 40 In the evenings, she and Bill frequently invited friends over to chat. However, their guests were not the average neighbor dropping in for a game of cards and a drink. Visitors to the Sanger household frequently included some of the most important and radical reformers and thinkers of the time, including Emma Goldman and “Big Bill” Haywood. 41

It was not long before Margaret Sanger was heavily involved in reform movements, starting with strikes and protests for labor unions. Her interest and interaction increased after a fire destroyed the family’s home in Hastings, prompting them to move back to New York

38 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 25-7. Sanger actually had some aspiration to be a physician, but lacked the education necessary to get into medical school. Thus, she turned to a friend from Claverack College who helped her attain the position of nurse probationer at White Plains. This meant that she would work in the hospital for a year or two, gaining knowledge and experience. After a period of time, a board of administrators would gather and decide whether or not to permit a probationer into nursing school proper.

39 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 53. Bill Sanger’s full name was William, but he went by and is typically referred to as Bill.

40 Sanger attained the position through her sister, Ethel, who did complete nursing school and practiced the profession in New York City. The job entailed helping new mothers during the first few weeks following a birth.

41 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 46-7, 142; Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 194-5. William Dudley Haywood, better known as “Big Bill,” was a well-known advocate for workers rights and unionization; he was also the leader of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or Wobblies. An organizer for strikes and workers demonstrations, he knew socialists, anarchists, and other political radicals from all over the world. With the passage of the loosely worded Espionage Act during World War I, essentially enabling prosecution of any individual whose stated views could be seen as conducive to disruption or riot, Haywood found himself facing legal penalty. To avoid prosecution, he fled to Russia where he lived out the remainder of his life.
City at Margaret’s request. There, she took up nursing in the infamous slums of the Lower East side. The misery and squalor had a profound effect on her psyche, and led her to start seeking ways to improve the lives of her patients. Influenced by Goldman, Sanger began to consider contraceptives as a method to help her impoverished patients. Her interest in family limitation was further stoked by a 1913 family vacation in Europe where, through Bill Haywood, she met with a few foreign advocates of birth control who gave her more information about methods.

After the trip, Sanger concluded she should make some of her new knowledge available to others. Moreover, inspired by the example of her politically radical friends, she decided that the laws forbidding the spread of contraceptive information needed to be challenged in court. Towards these ends, she began to publish The Woman Rebel, a monthly periodical. Supposedly, Sanger’s goal with this journal was to challenge the laws concerning the dissemination of contraceptive information via mail, potentially bringing the issue to court. Initially, though, the publication mostly consisted of sensational diatribes influenced by a hodgepodge of socialist, anarchist, and free-love ideas that captivated Sanger’s imagination. Under pressure from subscribers to deliver on her promise for contraceptive information, Sanger finally began to write pieces about what she had learned in
the spring of 1914. In so doing, she and a group of friends coined the term “birth control,” while searching for a way to describe contraceptives in a manner that would grab attention and make the message clear. No matter what word was used, though, publication and mailing of writings on contraceptives was considered obscene and thus illegal.

In April of 1914, Sanger was informed by the New York City postmaster that the newest issue of *The Woman Rebel*, ready for publication, was considered illegal under Section 211 of the U.S. Criminal Code. Continuing with her aim of challenging the law, Sanger sent out the issue anyway. At first, the authorities did nothing, although subsequent issues were not allowed to be distributed. Decisive legal action was finally taken in August of 1914, when Sanger was charged with 9 counts of breaking the New York Comstock laws.\(^{47}\) However, the indictment was not based solely on her distribution of contraceptive information, but also on her earlier articles attacking church, marriage, the wealthy, and the government. Thus, were the issue to come to court, the laws against the distribution of contraceptives would not really be challenged as the main focus would be on other charges - of inciting murder and riots. Facing up to 40 years in jail with little prospect of making a difference for her cause, Sanger jumped bail and fled to Europe. It was there that she began the transformation from an acerbic activist with little real influence, to a controversial though respected改革家 known around the world.

The year spent traveling in Europe saw the creation of a network of friends, who remained close to Sanger throughout her life, many of whom were described as “neo-Malthusians.” Agreeing with Malthus’ conclusion that overpopulation was a danger, neo-Malthusians believed that population control needed to be enacted on an individual, if not a

Unlike Malthus, though, they felt that abstinence and self-control were unnecessary, not to mention dangerous to the psyche and spirit. This was a view that Sanger, long interested in free-love and Freudianism, agreed with. Talking with them, she also came to believe in the efficacy of their method of spreading information: a genteel process of educating social leaders through tactful discussion and writing, quite different from agitating the masses with inflammatory rhetoric.

Of her new friends, the most influential for Sanger was the physician-philosopher Havelock Ellis. A shy individual who believed in the psychic and physical benefits of emotional and sexual love, his views were radical for his time, even while his scholarly publications earned him respect from others in his field. With Ellis as her mentor, Sanger reformed her strategy. Realizing her previous socialist-anarchist haranguing against the capitalist system and social elites made her message unappealing to mainstream society, and that she had found little success in inciting the masses to change in any event, she decided to focus solely on the issue of birth control. Following Ellis’s example, she recognized that she might have more luck working with middle to upper class reformers instead of criticizing them.

Sanger also became interested in birth control clinics during her time in Europe, visiting a functional facility in Holland where she learned how to properly fit diaphragms. Although Sanger had previously believed and advocated that birth control could be spread at a grass roots level, women teaching one another, this experience and discussions with the clinic

---

49 Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 89-90.
50 Grey, *Margaret Sanger*, 40, 87-93; Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, 30-1; Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 130, 137-8. Along with being her mentor, Havelock was also one of Sanger’s many lovers and dearest friends.
51 Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, 31; Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 95.
physician, Dr. Johannes Rutgers, convinced her that licensed physicians with gynecological training needed to be involved. After all, even though a layperson might give an adequate explanation of how to use a contraceptive, many women had underlying gynecological issues only a doctor could recognize and treat. Moreover, devices like diaphragms required internal measurements to ensure a proper fit, measurements only a professional would know how to make.

Sanger’s educational European adventure ended in 1915 after her husband was arrested through one of Anthony Comstock’s infamous decoy traps. With both Sangers now martyrs to their cause, the resulting court case drew a good deal of public attention and sympathy. More news was made when Comstock died a few weeks after Bill Sanger’s arrest. As a result, the court was able to show some compassion, giving Bill a mere 30 day sentence. By this, Margaret Sanger recognized that the prevailing attitudes would be beneficial to her own trial, and thus decided to return and face the law.

Her decision was strengthened, and the outpouring of public sympathy increased, when her daughter unexpectedly died in November. Needing to immerse herself in work so as to escape the grief and guilt, Sanger was prepared to face a lengthy prison sentence if it meant she could make a courtroom argument for the legality of birth control. The court, however, decided that rather than face the controversial topic and potentially make Sanger even more of a martyr, it would be better to throw out the case on the grounds that she was “not a disorderly person” and had not broken the law in over a year. Although losing the

---

52 Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 97.
54 The Sangers’ only daughter, Peggy, had suffered polio as a child and had not been truly well since. Given her frailty, a bout of pneumonia claimed her life quickly. Margaret Sanger never truly recovered from the death, and always marked its anniversary with a day of mourning. However, she also was driven by the memory of her daughter, claiming that legal and accessible birth control was a tool she would have wanted Peggy to have had.
chance to make her case was a disappointment, Sanger was glad to have the opportunity to focus on creating a viable and organized birth control movement, or at least one which she would run.

In her absence, and spurred by her and her family’s suffering, supporters and friends had already begun to rally around the cause of contraceptives. Emma Goldman had traveled around the nation lecturing on the issue of birth control, using some of Sanger’s earlier writings in attempt to inspire its use among laborers and fellow radicals. Meanwhile, middle-class reformer Mary Ware Dennett and her friends had set up the first major contraceptive organization in United States, the National Birth Control League (NBCL). Members tended to be middle-class women with liberal views, interested in spreading use of contraceptives, if only among their friends of similar socio-economic status.

Though all these efforts were good for publicizing birth control, none fit what Sanger had in mind. Goldman’s anarchist ideology and notoriety as a dangerous radical made it impossible for her to gain support from mainstream society, while Dennet’s league was too focused on the middle and upper class for Sanger’s taste at the time. That Dennet flatly stated that she did not approve of Sanger’s methods, and was staunchly against physicians being involved in the topic of contraceptives, destroyed hopes of reconciliation and cooperation, leading to a division in the U.S. birth control efforts. The immediate result was the creation of Sanger’s first group, the New York Birth Control League (NYBCL).  

---

57 Ibid., 74-5.  
One of the first actions of the League was to push the boundaries of New York law via the creation of a birth control clinic.\textsuperscript{59} At the time, the law had two sections, one that forbade discussion of birth control completely, and another which gave physicians permission to prescribe contraceptives if there was sufficient cause. Sanger wanted to see what would happen if a non-physician tried to provide information and aid to the impoverished women of the city. Although the clinic was an immediate success in terms of popularity, the operation was quickly shut down by the police, as expected.\textsuperscript{60} Sanger and the clinic staff, including her sister Ethel who had been assisting, were arrested, and the siblings were jailed. Aided by Ethel’s subsequent hunger strike and publicized force feeding, the event drew a great deal of media attention and public sympathy, as well as interest in the cause. The entire episode resulted in a judicial statement at Margaret’s trial that solidified the prescription of birth control for medicinal purposes. The time in jail also gave Sanger an opportunity to plan her next moves. By this time, World War I was underway and public attention was increasingly drawn to issues related to the devastation in Europe and threat of U.S. involvement. Realizing that further direct action tactics would probably not be worth the effort in such an environment, Sanger began working to establish a firm base of support instead.\textsuperscript{61} To these ends, she gave speeches, started a new contraceptive-focused periodical called \textit{The Birth Control Review}, and met with potential sponsors for the NYBCL. Unlike her earlier work that tried to arouse interest in only the lower classes, Sanger’s new efforts focused mostly on wealthy or middle class women. This change in membership, as well as infighting in the

\textsuperscript{59} Gordon, \textit{Woman’s Body}, 231; Sanger, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 217.
\textsuperscript{60} Reed, \textit{The Birth Control Movement and American Society}, 107-8; Sanger, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 217-37.
\textsuperscript{61} Sanger, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 251-2.
NYBCL, eventually led to the creation of a new organization in 1921, the American Birth Control League (ABCL).\(^62\)

Although her ultimate goal was still to improve the lives of the lower classes, Sanger recognized that she could reach more people when her supporters had time and money to contribute to the cause.\(^63\) In addition, many of her new friends had experience fighting in other reform-minded campaigns such as suffrage or temperance, and also brought an air of respectability to contraceptive advocacy. Given the Red Scare following the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia 1919, it was a good time for Sanger to disavow her radical roots in any event.\(^64\) While old comrades like Goldman were deported for their political beliefs, Sanger made friends with the same people she had once criticized, and managed to avoid prosecution from communist witch hunts.

Even though the new strategy enabled Sanger to gain many friends, and the prevailing attitude towards contraceptives was increasingly sympathetic, she still faced plenty of opposition, especially from the Catholics. Besides daily harassment and denouncement of Sanger and her cause in letters, papers, and radio, conservative Catholics of power also tried to stop her from giving speeches, most notably influencing Irish-Catholic policemen to forbid her from speaking at the New York City town hall.\(^65\) This “Town Hall Incident” in turn sparked a near riot and numerous reports in newspapers around the world, a fact that would cause problems for her first trip to Japan. The incident also generated support, however, within the United States as a number of people, angered at the suppression of free-speech and at the church’s audacity to use the police for their own aims, raised their voices in protest.

\(^{62}\) Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 110.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 107-9.
\(^{64}\) Reed, *Margaret Sanger*, 99.
Eventually, Sanger would use the public interest generated by the event to start her second clinic, this time staffed by physicians and able to legally provide contraceptive information and care. Its success further proved the efficacy of taking a more mainstream approach to reform. This second clinic opened in 1923 and might be seen as marking the settlement on a path of reform Sanger would continue to follow for the rest of her career. Most details of her brand of advocacy, though, were well in place by the time she visited Japan in 1922. To better understand what Sanger stood for, and thus to examine her effect on Japanese birth control practices, it is imperative to look at these details.

Sanger’s Beliefs

The most important tenet of Sanger’s advocacy was her unique focus on birth control alone. As David Kennedy states, “to Margaret Sanger, birth control was a panacea that made all other reforms irrelevant. She invoked nearly every imaginable argument in its support and made extravagant claims for its benefits.” Correct use of contraceptives, she believed, would enable families to better support, educate, and raise their children, in turn granting the family members better lives overall. Moreover, every child would be a “wanted child,” worked and planned for. This, Sanger believed, would benefit the child psychologically as well as physically. Aside from children, though, she also had the specific interests and rights of the mother in mind.

Although operating at a time when motherhood was still viewed as a woman’s ultimate goal – her duty even - like Goldman before her, Sanger ardently believed that bearing

---

66 Kennedy, Birth Control in America, 180-3.
67 Ibid., 126.
68 Reed, Margaret Sanger, 53.
69 Kennedy, Birth Control in America, 109.
children was a choice. “A woman’s body belongs to herself alone,” she had once written in *The Woman Rebel*, and though her political views became more moderate in time, she remained adamantly unwilling to compromise in regards to a woman’s right to control her fertility.⁷⁰ For this reason, she supported and promoted forms of birth control that gave women agency in this regard, especially diaphragms.

Besides granting women increased control over their fertility, Sanger liked diaphragms as they did not interfere with sexual pleasure and could be used discretely once inserted. To be sure, her preference for diaphragms did not mean that she ruled out other popular methods. However, each had a certain weakness that she felt rendered them inferior. Condoms and withdrawal, for instance, were easy to understand and practice, but use required the consent and cooperation of the male partner, not always easy to attain.⁷¹ She also was not against douching, and even advocated the practice early in her career. From experience, though, she had learned that douches were difficult to use for many, especially those in tenement houses with tiny, shared bathrooms. Douches also were not as effective or safe as devices like diaphragms.

To be sure, diaphragms were not a perfect method either. Like douches and jellies, insertion required privacy that could be difficult to attain, especially if used in tandem with the messy jellies or powders which Sanger recommended. More problematic was the price, much higher than most working class families could afford. For many years, this cost resulted from the fact that no one produced diaphragms commercially within the United States,

⁷⁰ Reed, *Margaret Sanger*, 46.
⁷¹ Sanger, *Margaret Sanger*, 87-9. Sanger had learned from nursing in the slums of New York that some men were unwilling to use birth control. This was often because of a sense that the devices and methods threatened their masculinity, though differing personal or religious convictions between partners could also play a role. She also had heard many stories of women whose husbands had been too drunk to properly use contraceptives, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy. Thus, a device like a diaphragm that could be inserted long before intercourse, and theoretically used without a partner’s knowledge, was preferable.
meaning that they had to be smuggled into the country illegally. Even after 1925 when Sanger managed to convince the Holland-Rantos company to manufacture the devices domestically, the costs remained relatively steep since proper use necessitated a visit to and a proper fitting by a physician.  

To overcome this difficulty, Sanger envisioned a network of birth control clinics where a woman could go and receive advice, an examination, and a device for a nominal fee. The creation of her second, legal clinic in 1923 was the first step. Women who came could consult with the female doctor who presided, and pay only $5 for the visit. The rest of the money needed to run the operation was gained through fundraisers and donations. However, even in the 1920s when the economy was strong, finding contributors was difficult. Sanger thus was constantly seeking new ways to strengthen her arguments. Although her favorite strategies of utilizing tragic stories, neo-Malthusian warnings, and feminist rhetoric were good starts, she increasingly turned to the field of eugenics to provide numeric, scientific reasons that birth control was a cause deserving of popular support and funding.

As Miriam Reed explains, “Sanger sought every avenue whereby [birth control] might gain widespread general acceptance. She could scarcely ignore the apparent legitimacy of eugenics.” Arguing for birth control on the grounds of improved racial stock, fewer mentally and physically disabled people, and slowed population growth of “undesirable”, gained support for the cause among those who believed in the importance of quality over quantity, willing to risk “race suicide” for a fitter humanity. Still, although a frequent topic in her speeches, much of Sanger’s discussion of eugenics appeared to be purely for pragmatic

72 Kennedy, Birth Control in America, 183; Reed, The Birth Control Movement Before, 32.
73 Reed, The Birth Control Movement Before, 116.
74 Reed, Margaret Sanger, 148.
75 Gordon, Woman’s Body, 281-3; Kennedy, Birth Control in America, 115-8;
reasons.\textsuperscript{76} Privately, she was concerned by how and by whom eugenic policies would be enforced, knowing that legislated conformity could be detrimental to society by removing not only the dangerous and disturbed, but the eccentric and genius as well. Moreover, she tended to sympathize with the very groups most typically targeted for sterilization by eugenic-based rhetoric – the lower classes and immigrants. Overall then, her use of eugenic theories was mostly to win support through scientific arguments, and her message was that use of birth control was the logical base for any attempt at making eugenic ideals a reality.

Sanger also had reservations about abortion, especially as she aged. Although in her radical days she had promoted terminations of pregnancies along with prevention, her time spent with Havelock Ellis and conversion to genteel reformer had led her to change her mind.\textsuperscript{77} By 1922, she promoted the idea that contraception, properly used, would render the dangers and tragedy of abortion obsolete. Although she did believe that in certain cases the operation was justified, ultimately she viewed it as an unnecessary and dangerous waste, especially when there were preventative alternatives.\textsuperscript{78}

All in all, Sanger’s platform by the time she first visited in Japan in 1922 was heavily revised since her days editing the \textit{Woman Rebel}. Nevertheless, though her arguments were more mainstream and her approach more genteel, her platform was still quite radical in the United States. To the Japanese, especially a growing coalition of nationalists in the government, her cause was potentially dangerous to the wellbeing of the country. So as to understand this opposition, as well as the status of family limitation in Japan before Sanger’s arrival, it is necessary to discuss the situation that she entered on her first trip.

\textsuperscript{76} Gordon, \textit{Woman’s Body}, 281-2; Kennedy, \textit{Birth Control in America}, 115-8; Reed, \textit{The Birth Control Movement and American}, 136; Reed, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 150-1
\textsuperscript{77} Grey, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 159.
\textsuperscript{78} Kennedy, \textit{Birth Control in America}, 109; Reed, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 55.
Taishō Japan

All considered, the atmosphere in Japan when Sanger first visited in 1922, was relatively tolerant towards new ideas. It was a period known as the “Taishō democracy,” a time between the two World Wars known for a relatively permissive attitude towards the organization of various reform groups, including socialists, suffragists, and feminists.  

Nevertheless, there was a powerful and growing contingent of individuals, often in positions of power, who were exceedingly wary of desired reforms, particularly those applying to women.

Japanese women had long faced a great amount of sexist discrimination due to old beliefs regarding their inferiority. Buddhism and Shintō, the two major religious factions in Japan, saw women as “unclean” due to their association with blood and childbirth, and taught that being the inferior sex, a female could only achieve salvation by first being reborn as a man.

This sexist attitude was inherent to what would become the predominant family system and smallest unit of government following the Meiji restoration in 1868, the *ie*. Under this system, sex and age were the deciding factors in who controlled power, property, and the destinies of family members in a household, with males always superior. In the *ie*, women were essentially the property of their fathers, husbands, and later sons, and had no real rights of their own.

---

81 Kozy Kazuko Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-choice Ideology in Japan: A Social History of the Contest Between the State and Individuals over Abortion” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1993), 12-13, 20-4; Jones, *Live Machines*, 25-7. The Meiji Restoration was the return of the emperor to official power and ending of rule by the military leader or shōgun. Although originally the idea was to restore the Emperor to avoid Westernization, government officials quickly realized that reforms on Western lines were needed to be seen as a “modern” nation and avoid being divided into spheres of influence or colonized. Among these early changes were new codes that enforced this *ie* system, most notably the Civil Code of 1898. Previously, this system was only seen uniformly among the upper classes; peasants and lower class families had followed more fluid family structuring.
As time progressed, the harshness of the system started to ease. Although notions of female inferiority never fully dissipated, with the work of pro-education, pro-Western reformers, women gained new respect as mothers and wives. This resulted in the idea of “ryōsai kenbō,” to be a “good wife and wise mother,” a phrase that largely summed up mainstream expectations for women in the pre-war years. How the phrase was defined, though, depended on who was giving the definition. Kathleen Uno explains this well in her article, “Womanhood, War, and Empire,” stating:

...one of the virtues of ryōsai kenbo was its ambiguity. Nationalists of liberal or conservative stripes could support it. Those more open to Western models could support ‘wise mother,’ derived from the notion of educated motherhood, while those who looked to Japan’s own tradition could emphasize woman’s role as a ‘good wife,’ a frugal manager and hard worker in the enterprise household (ie).

In other words, depending on who interpreted the phrase, ryōsai kenbō could lead to the education and social involvement of women to mold them into good role-models for their children, and/or demand their selfless obedience and sacrifice to their spouses and household.

Overall, though, the ideology essentially taught that a woman served the state and justified her existence by bearing and raising children. In addition, women were to be the “repository of tradition,” instructing and rearing their offspring in non-western manners and customs. They

---


were also supposed to exemplify and maintain Japanese traditions by continuing to dress, behave, and interact with others in an old-fashioned, government approved style.\textsuperscript{84}

Further enforcing this ideal of femininity, the government forbade women from participating in political organizations via Article 5 of the Peace Preservation Law, added to the codex in 1900.\textsuperscript{85} This did not exclude women from clubs or societies that fought for reforms, though, and especially in the Taishō era, anti-prostitution, temperance, and patriotic associations flourished. In the minority of these club-going women were also more radical female reformers, feminists who fought not for increased morality, but for the redefinition of femininity.

Of these feminists, the best known were involved in Bluestocking (\textit{Seitō}), a woman-only literary journal headed by an educated middle-class feminist, Hiratsuka “Raichō” Haru.\textsuperscript{86} She, like most of the participants, was a self-proclaimed “New Women.”\textsuperscript{87} With such contributors, the journal quickly changed from a literary review to a sounding board for

\textsuperscript{84} Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-Choice Ideology,” 56; Lowy, \textit{The Japanese ‘New Woman’}, 2, 58; Terazawa, “Racializing Bodies,” 292-3. Though there were exceptions, women were generally discouraged from wearing Western clothing or hairstyles, and were instructed in school and via the media to continue to talk, move, and interact with others following traditional etiquette. When new fashions like the ladies’ hakama and simpler hairstyles were pushed by the government for reasons of hygiene, they still were constructed using Japanese aesthetics. This was a contrast to men who were mostly encouraged to adopt Western dress and manners so as to survive in the changing world of work.

\textsuperscript{85} Lowy, \textit{The Japanese ‘New Woman’}, 4; Mowry-Robins, \textit{The Hidden Sun}, 4-5; Sievers, \textit{Flowers in Salt}, 51-3. 133; Sayoko Yoneda, “ Hiratsuka Raichō’s Idea of Society: Nature, Cooperation and Self-Government,” in \textit{Japanese Women: Emerging from Subservience, 1868-1945}, ed. Hiroko Tomida and Gordon Daniels (Kent: Global Oriental, 2005), 27. The Peace Preservation Laws originated with the suppression of populist opponents of the Meiji government in the 1880s. Briefly repealed, even harsher versions were created and enforced in 1900, again, to help with the suppression of vociferous labor and socialist groups. Article 5 was included in reaction to the involvement of women in some of the more dramatic anti-government plots. Through the efforts of various feminist lobbyists, though, it would be repealed shortly before Sanger’s arrival in 1922.

\textsuperscript{86} Vera Mackie, \textit{Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900-1937} (Hong Kong: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82; Sumiko Otsubo, “Engendering Eugenics: Feminists and Marriage Restriction Legislation in the 1920s,” in \textit{Gendering Modern Japanese History}, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 227. Hiratsuka took the pen name “Raichō”, snow grouse, so that her father would not realize she was involved in the radical feminist movement. The thought was that the birds, indigenous to Japan, could survive the harshest environments. “Bluestocking” was a reference to the literary salon for women organized by Elizabeth Montagu in 1750s Britain.

\textsuperscript{87} Lowy, \textit{The Japanese ‘New Woman’}, 2.
feminist discussion on topics ranging from marriage and married life to the exploration of sexuality. The Seitō members also were among the first feminists to publicly discuss a woman’s right to abortion and family limitation. They were not the first individuals to discuss family limitation in Japan, though.

**Family Limitation in Japan**

In Japan, the primary methods of birth control had long been abortion or infanticide. Over the centuries, various legal attempts had been made by governments to forbid these methods, but rarely with much determination; generally, practitioners and patients were only prosecuted if bodily harm or death of the mother resulted from a botched procedure. This permissive attitude was aided by Buddhist and Shintō traditions which did not completely condemn the practices, since children under the age of seven were said to simply return to the heavens instead of facing the cycle of rebirth. Thus, to abort or kill a child was often viewed as returning him or her to the Gods, and was referred to euphemistically as *mabiki*, or pruning. Moreover, a woman was not truly considered with child until four or five months into the pregnancy, at which point a band would be tied around the abdomen, both to provide extra support to the growing womb as well as signify the existence of a pregnancy to the community.

---

91 To some extent, these beliefs and practices continue in the present day.
Even after the Meiji Restoration and increased efforts to unify the country and its people with far-reaching laws, the practices continued, especially in the countryside where attempts at enforcing new laws forbidding abortion or infanticide had always been weak. Still, the laws grew progressively stronger and enforcement more definite. The first of such laws was passed in 1868, banning abortion. In 1880, abortion was re-codified as a penal offense, signifying harsher consequences for both the mother and abortionist. In 1907, the punishments’ severity were enhanced, with women found guilty of utilizing abortion methods sentenced up to a year in prison, and the administering midwives or doctors, seven.

The harshening of the laws was due to a variety of factors, including fears for public health and international criticism. One of the main reasons, though, was the growing strength of a pro-military, pro-natalist contingent in the government and military. Victories over China and Russia in 1895 and 1905 respectively, had led many to consider the nation’s future as an imperialist military power on par with those of the West. To add to and consolidate current holdings, there needed to be more soldiers born as quickly as possible. The wars had also led to reconsideration of the future of the Japanese race, eugenically speaking.

As with the rest of the world and around the same time, eugenics quickly gained popularity. Early on, some theorists believing in the superiority of the white race, suggested intermarriage to give the Japanese race some of their genetic attributes. After the success of the Sino- and Russo-Japanese wars, though, people started to view the Japanese people as superior to others, especially in comparison to the Russians, Chinese, Koreans, Okinawans,

---

92 Norgren, Abortion Before Birth Control, 23.
93 Mackie, Creating Socialist Women, 85; Mowry-Robins, The Hidden Sun, 73-4.
and Ainu.\textsuperscript{96} Notions of intermarriage became reprehensible, even traitorous, as it would dilute and pollute the Japanese bloodline. Indeed, the Japanese race was increasingly considered a cohesive “family” with the emperor as its patriarch. Thus, abortion and infanticide came to be seen as killing the emperor’s children.\textsuperscript{97} There were also race suicide arguments, where proliferation of the Japanese race was seen as the only way to preserve and strengthen the Japanese people in the face of discrimination against them by the West.\textsuperscript{98} Despite the increasing prevalence of such pro-natalist attitudes, though, there were simultaneously concerns for the potentially harmful effects of an overly large population.

Because of modern sanitation as well as improved hygienic and medical knowledge, the average lifespan in Japan had increased while infant mortality rates declined, even while fertility rates remained the same. Combined with industrialization and the movement of families to cities, the nation had to deal with a population boom and subsequent glut in the work force by the turn of the century. While militarists railed for colonization as a way to soak up the surplus people, others, often relying on studies of Malthus and fearing war, looked for ways to limit population growth.\textsuperscript{99}

Discussion of modern contraceptive devices, at least in intellectual circles, started in earnest in 1902 with Waseda University Professor, Ukita Wamin.\textsuperscript{100} These first proponents of the technology were dubbed traitors by pro-natalist opponents, and heavily criticized. Thus, their discussion did not initially reach the public. Twelve years later, the growing concern

\textsuperscript{97} Terazawa, “Gender, Knowledge, and Power,” 276-8. Here, “Japanese” meant those individuals without Ainu or Okinawan heritage.
\textsuperscript{99} Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-Choice Ideology,” 75; Suzuki, “Geneticists,” 160.
\textsuperscript{100} Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, 229; Mowry-Robins, The Hidden Sun, 83-4.
over the “population problem” and Taishō permissiveness led to a few writings on contraceptives to be published, including *Sanji Seigenron – Ichimei Hinin no Kenkyū* (Birth Limitation – a Study of Contraception), written by a female reformer named Nishikawa Fumiko, and published in a middle-class woman’s magazine. According to historian Ishizaki Shōko, this was the first use of the term “sanji seigen”, and probably one of the first popularly available works to describe birth control devices, namely condoms, sponges, IUDs, suppositories, and sterilization. In this, though, it was exceptionally rare. In the 1910s, most discussion of birth control simply debated whether or not it was a moral practice and what benefits, if any, it could provide a family and the state. The only other notable exception was in the discussion and debates of some of the members of *Seitō*.

**Feminists and Fertility**

Starting in 1915, a couple of *Seitō* members took up the issue of family limitation and the rights of mothers. A variety of opinions were expressed, from Harada Satsuki endorsing both contraception and abortion as a woman’s right, to Yamada Waka’s abhorrence of both. Hiratsuka Raichō herself participated to some extent, discussing the merits of eugenic-based family limitation, as did journal editor Itō Noe, who viewed abortion as murderous but contraception as beneficial. These articles did not reach a large audience, though, as *Seitō* was not widely published and more typically ridiculed than read.

---

102 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/.
Better known were the arguments of the “Motherhood Debates” which took place between 1917 and 1919 after the Seitō journal had folded due to Hiratsuka’s personal and financial problems. Instead, the articles that made up the debate were published in more popular women’s journals, including Women’s Review (Fujin Kōron), The Housewife’s Companion (Shufu no Tomo), and Women’s World (Fujin Sekai). The debate consisted of submissions to these journals by the participants, who referenced and critiqued the articles of others in their pieces. Although many people participated in some fashion or another, four women originally involved in Seitō led the debate: poetess Yosano Akiko, Hiratsuka Raichō, socialist Yamakawa Kikue, and conservative reformer Yamada Waka. Each woman wrote about their beliefs concerning the government’s ideal role in motherhood, which was the focus, but there were also frequent mentions of their thoughts on education, gender roles, and sexuality.

Yosano, for instance, was against government aid, believing as she always had that a woman needed to be self-aware and self-reliant. She did not say much about contraception in the debate, but supported a family’s right to have many children (as she and her spouse did). Nevertheless, she ultimately believed that love and passion were more important in a marriage than reproduction. Yamakawa also opposed government involvement, arguing that before any talk of law took place, the entire government had to be overthrown and an egalitarian socialist system put in its place. Waka, though, thought that government intervention was needed. Influenced by Swedish feminist Ellen Keys, she believed strongly in the importance of motherhood for a woman and the child. Much more conservative than her fellows in any

event, Waka also advocated traditional gender roles and the ideal of ryōsai kenbo. Meanwhile, Hiratsuka, despite having sworn to never give birth in her Seitō years, had done so, and subsequently discovered the works of Ellen Keys also. She found that the Swede’s ideas could be used to help justify her own change in attitudes towards children, and adopted many of them. Thus, in the debates, Hiratsuka supported the financial and legal involvement of the government in regards to maternal-natal aid. She also discussed the health of mothers and children, as well as women in general, endangered as they were by lethal illnesses such as tuberculosis and venereal disease.106

Following the debates and into the mid 1920s, Hiratsuka began to work towards safeguarding women from these diseases. For this reason, she established the New Women’s Association (Shin Fujin Kyōkai), through which she fought to have legislation passed that would control their spread.107 To back her arguments, she turned to eugenics, which she had learned about while studying home economics under Ōsawara Kenji, one of the first scholars in Japan to link genetics and race, and render eugenics a medical issue as well as a social one.108 Hiratsuka, though, did not see birth control as the best way to control hereditary and sexually transmitted diseases. Instead, she promoted the use of marriage licenses that would forbid those with certain diseases from marrying and, presumably, from having children or spreading their diseases. This in itself was not a new idea as marriage licenses had often been discussed for similar purposes before.109 Hiratsuka’s advocacy, though, was gendered, arguing that only men needed the licenses as it was usually men who spread sexually transmitted diseases.

106 Otsubo, “Eugenics in Imperial Japan,” 151.
109 Otsubo, “Eugenics in Imperial Japan,” 163.
Although Hiratsuka’s form of the bill was never actually passed, her advocacy for it occurred just prior to and continued for a short time after Sanger’s first visit. Like Freud’s writings or other feminist debates, her actions helped open a discursive space for gendered discussion of family limitation and eugenics. As she had broached the subject, it could now be discussed without the new speakers facing so much criticism for talking about a previously taboo topic. Moreover, Hiratsuka’s connecting eugenic principles to feminist ideas also made the arguments of Margaret Sanger, who used some of the same types of arguments, that much more familiar to the Japanese public.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, like the brief discussion of abortion and contraception in Seiitō, the main significance of the Motherhood Debates and Hiratsuka’s work was to lead to reader consideration of the topics discussed. Scholar Laurel Rasplica Rodd states that the writings also “set the stage for later public debate over women’s roles and for women’s active participation in society.”¹¹¹ Likewise, these discussions also helped lay the groundwork for Margaret Sanger and the popularization of birth control, since though still controversial, it would no longer be a completely new topic to the general public. Of course, it was not only the feminists’ advocacy for women’s rights to fertility and motherhood that helped. Sanger was also part of a long tradition of foreign visitors, a tradition which granted her a special status that made her voice more potent than it might have otherwise been.

The Oyatoi Gaikokujin Tradition

Westerners had a long presence in Japan starting well before the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As early as the mid 1500s, Jesuits from Portugal had come to proselytize, followed

¹¹⁰ Chung, Struggle for National Survival, 111; Otsubo, “Eugenics in Imperial Japan,” 150.
¹¹¹ Rodd, “Yosano Akiko,” 198.
shortly by Dominicans and Franciscans from Spain.\textsuperscript{112} Initially, these holy men were welcomed as fonts of information, and served not only as spiritual guides but teachers of Western science and medicine. Fights between the various sects as well as rebellions led by Christian converts, though, led to a series of laws and edicts starting at the turn of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century that forbade proselytizing or practicing Christianity, and put strict controls on contact with Western nations. As of 1636, no Japanese citizen was allowed to go abroad, and Westerners could only visit Japan in specific locations, the best known of which was an artificially constructed island called the Dejima at the port of Nagasaki.\textsuperscript{113} There, though confined with little freedom, Westerners could conduct profitable trade. The trade was not only in goods, though, but knowledge as well, especially Western medical science.

Although Western medicine had been introduced by the Portuguese in the 1550s, it was through the Dejima that it became popular. Dutch physicians that came to take care of the traders were asked to share some of their information with Japanese physicians, sometimes including those who treated the shōgun.\textsuperscript{114} Still, discussing information or publishing Western texts was difficult given the lack of skilled interpreters and truly capable physicians in the Dejima, as well as a hostile environment towards Western ideas and strict laws against the human dissections necessary for training.\textsuperscript{115} Thus, it was not until 1774 that the first Japanese publication on Western medicine, a translation and adaptation of a German anatomy textbook, was made available. Following this, interest and information concerning

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid.}, 8-13. The Dejima was originally built for use by the Portuguese. However, the association of Portugal with Christianity and discord eventually led to their expulsion. The Dutch, generally not interested in spreading religion, moved in and became the primary Western presence from 1641 onwards.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}, 9-14. In fact, many of the doctors were not from the Netherlands. Many came from Germany or Britain. However, to gain entry to Japan, they pretended to be from Holland.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid.}, 12-20, 26. Most of the first Western physicians who came were not highly skilled as few people wanted to live for one to four years in the cramped quarters of the Dejima for a paltry salary.
Western methods became more widespread. By the time of the Meiji Restoration, Western medicine was entrenched in the highest echelons of society and government, and a tradition of foreigners instructing the Japanese on modern procedures for hygiene and health, was set in place.

The tradition was strengthened in the Meiji period as, to help ease the modernization process deemed necessary for Japan’s survival, the government actively sought and employed thousands of Westerners as advisors and teachers. Called the oyatoi gaikokujin (hired foreigners), and hailing from a range of Western nations, these individuals gave lectures, taught classes, drilled armies, led projects, and so on. Most of these oyatoi were called on to help with matters of technology and science, especially military science, but there were others asked to give instruction on modern medical techniques.

No matter what topic they were hired to assist with, the oyatoi enjoyed a high level of prestige and value, simply for being foreigners in possession of special knowledge. Due to their Western origins alone, oyatoi were considered superior teachers to Japanese scholars, even those who studied abroad. Their instruction was straight from the source and thus superior. Being held in such high regard, many Western instructors received monetary compensation on par with some of the highest ranking officials in the Japanese government.

Nevertheless, respect and a comfortable salary did not necessitate that the Japanese adopted every lesson the oyatoi gave. As historian Iriye Akira explains, “the Japanese leaders wanted to appropriate Western methods, not Western values.” That is to say, practical things like machinery, systems for conducting surgery, drills for training troops, or plans to

116 Bowers, Medical Education, 28; Jones, Live Machines, xviii-xv.
117 Jones, Live Machines, 1.
118 Bowers, Medical Education, 33-4; Iriye, Across the Pacific, 37-8, 45.
119 Jones, Live Machines, 11-15, 90.
120 Iriye, Across the Pacific, 46.
improve farm output would be followed. Social constructs, like the belief in the equality of man or superiority of democratic government, were typically ignored or oppressed.

In the late 1800s, the number of oyatoi began to shrink as, largely for financial reasons, Japan began to replace costly Westerner advisors with less expensive Japanese scholars who had studied abroad.\textsuperscript{121} Along with this, among typically conservative individuals, a fear of becoming westernized instead of simply modernized started to spread along with nationalism and, increasingly, xenophobia.\textsuperscript{122} A growing enmity towards Japan from the West did not help.\textsuperscript{123}

Given its recent victories over Russia and China, Western nations were becoming suspicious of Japan and its intentions towards the rest of Asia, particularly Western colonies and spheres of influence.\textsuperscript{124} There were also fears spurred by the rapid population growth in Asian nations.\textsuperscript{125} Summed up in the term “yellow peril,” some Westerners feared that the growing gap in numbers between “white” Caucasians and “yellow” Asians would lead to military and economic strife, and racial domination, by the latter. Japanese immigrants, especially to places like California which were popular destinations for émigrés from Asia, faced increasing discrimination, segregation, and even violence from white natives. Given such hostility, some in Japan began to turn to nationalism and xenophobia of their own, even opposing the further introduction of Western ideas. However, as of 1922 when Sanger first visited, these individuals were still a minority whose views and actions were typically criticized by most, including the press.

\textsuperscript{121} Jones, \textit{Live Machines}, 38-40.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{124} Akami, \textit{Internationalizing the Pacific}, 33-8; Iriye, \textit{Across the Pacific}, 103-7, 123-4.
\textsuperscript{125} Reed, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 137; Ishimoto, \textit{Facing Two Ways}, 220-1.
Overall, the tradition of the *oyatoi* was still alive when Sanger first arrived, even if the heyday was well over. Thus, since she possessed foreign knowledge, in this case concerning hygiene and medical practice, she was automatically viewed as someone to listen to. Moreover, her foreignness granted her increased prestige and importance traditionally ascribed to all Western teachers. All of this helped call attention to her visit, enabling a vast amount of media coverage, and ultimately leading some Japanese people, including Koyama Sakae, to write her rather than more easily accessible advocates in Japan. In addition, her name held a prestige that few advocates in Japan could hope to match, and thus became of use for advertisers and journalists alike. As with the *oyatoi* before her, the Japanese would not necessarily adopt her teachings, especially the ideological aspects of them. However, they would listen.

**In Summary**

As of 1922, Margaret Sanger had changed from a vociferous but relatively unimportant agitator for radical social change, to a respectable middle-class reformer focusing solely on birth control. Her platform of advocacy had been essentially finalized, with roots in a long tradition of British and U.S. birth control reformers, particularly Malthus and the later Neo-Malthusians. Despite continuing opposition, often in the form of the Comstock laws, she persevered with her unique woman-centric vision of birth control dissemination, calling on eugenic theory to further support her claims.

Despite different traditions in regards to family limitation, especially where abortion was concerned, Sanger’s message would not be altogether unfamiliar to Japan by the time she arrived in 1922. The *Seitō* feminists’ public debate on related issues in particular had opened
a discursive space for popular discussion of contraception. The Neo-Malthusian and eugenic based ideas Sanger often utilized to support her arguments also were not unknown, easing communication on some of her points. In addition, Sanger was immediately marked as someone of authority, her foreign origins granting her words extra clout thanks to the tradition of *oyatoi gaikokujin* being granted illustrious status for the specialized knowledge they brought. Still, there were still myriad problems to overcome to bring her form of birth control advocacy to Japan. Most problematic would be the increasingly pro-military, pro-natalist attitudes prevalent in the Japanese government that nearly prevented her first, and most important, pre-war trip.
Chapter II: The First Visit

Overview

By 1922, the beliefs that Sanger would support throughout her life had been formed, and the opening shots of her fight for readily available birth control in the United States mere echoes. Although there was plenty of work to be done domestically, a unique opportunity to spread her doctrine internationally was too interesting for Sanger to pass. Arranged through the Japanese publishing company Kaizō and the efforts of the Baroness Ishimoto Shizue, an admirer and friend, the goal of the tour was for Sanger to present information on the need for birth control in lectures. Despite stiff opposition, especially from the Japanese government, Sanger’s first and best known trip to Japan proved to be a rousing success, even if not in the way originally planned.

By the end of her month in the archipelago, she had become an overnight media sensation, her name and image spreading through magazines and newspapers from the first moment word of her trip was made known. However, given her limited time and severely censored speeches, the effect of her actual message and doctrine was largely curtailed. The primarily middle-upper class make-up of the majority of the audiences also limited the range of people affected. Still, even if they might not see or learn practical methods from Sanger, her name immediately became of use, not only for those promoting birth control, but also for advocates of free speech and personal liberty.

Origins of Interest

By 1920, Margaret Sanger had managed to garner much attention, not only for her cause, but also to herself. As the self-proclaimed mouthpiece for birth control, women in the
U.S. often turned to her for information rather than their typically hostile physicians, sending vast numbers of letters to her office, begging for help. Moreover, due to ever-increasing media coverage of her actions, her name was becoming well known abroad. Thus, foreigners joined American citizens in seeking out Sanger for advice and information, including some individuals from Japan. In February of 1920, twelve Japanese men from government and labor related fields of work visited her in New York for answers to questions on birth control and related literature.¹ That year she was also interviewed by a Japanese social worker, Takayuki Namaye, who posted the article in a magazine.² The piece came to the attention to the publishers of a monthly periodical called Kaizō.

The monthly review, despite politically radical leanings, was popular in Japan, especially during the Taishō era.³ Besides discussions of politics, literature, and leftist theory, the magazine was known for inclusion of articles written by important foreign luminaries, some of whom were brought to Japan for lecture tours, a remnant of the oyatoi tradition with its permanent instructors. The editors of Kaizō found that these speakers could attract good audiences with their names and foreign prestige. Large audiences in turn signified increased attention and subscribers for the magazine.⁴ Given that the booming population in Japan was a major concern at the time, Sanger, the editors realized, would be another good candidate for their lecture tour program. After all, by 1921, besides the interview with Takayuki, Sanger had been alluded to elsewhere, such as an article in the Yomiuri Shinbun mentioning “The United States birth control president” who claimed that use of contraceptives would lead to

---

¹ Reed, Margaret Sanger, 137.
² Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, 229-30.
³ “Advocate of Birth Control Will Land: Government to Permit Mrs. Sanger to Stop Here, but Not to Preach Doctrines: Passport not Visaed: Action is Official Sign she Isn’t Wanted --- Invited by Baron Ishimoto,” Japan Advertiser, 21 February 1922; Chesler, Woman of Valor, 245 Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 51-3.
⁴ Other speakers Kaizō brought on lecture tours included Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell.
peace.\(^5\) Kaizō itself had published four translated writings by Sanger which had met with general approval.\(^6\) What ultimately ensured Sanger’s invitation, though, were the efforts of Baroness Ishimoto Shizue, and her husband, Keikichi.

Although destined to become one of Japan’s best known feminist reformers and a member of the post-war Diet, Ishimoto Shizue came from a samurai-class family and a mostly conservative background.\(^7\) Despite some nurturing of political and activist ideas in childhood by mentors like her uncle, Tsurumi Yusuke, and his friend, Dr. Nitobe Inazō, her true awakening in this field occurred after her marriage to Baron Keikichi Ishimoto, a young engineer with an avid interest in socialism.\(^8\) Seeking experience with “the people,” he moved his family to the coal mines first at Miike then at Manda, home to the squalid huts of poverty-stricken miners whose misery would haunt and drive Shizue later.\(^9\) When his health gave out, forcing him to take an office job, the young Baron decided to take time and pursue the socialist dream in the United States.\(^10\) Although it necessitated leaving her two young children in Tokyo, hoping to gain mental independence and strength (as well as her spouse’s respect), Shizue soon joined him.\(^11\) Soon after her arrival, her husband signed her up for secretarial courses at the YWCA in New York City, and rented a shabby room in upper

---

\(^5\) “Shussan Seigen Koso Sekai Heiwa no Kökyuuteki Kaiketsu de aru” (With birth limitation world peace will last forever), *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 14 November 1921, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/.

\(^6\) Reed, *Margaret Sanger*, 137.

\(^7\) Tomida and Daniels, introduction, 11-12; Ishimoto, *Facing Two Ways*, 6-10, 87-97. Ishimoto’s parents were very conservative in their lifestyle and outlook. Her beloved uncle, Tsurumi Yusuke, was different, though. A humanist and liberal, he introduced her to Western ideas and values and encouraged her to “be ambitious,” and “grow to be an important woman of Japan!” In her autobiography, Ishimoto explains that these words were a powerful influence. “Uncle Yusuke” also introduced his niece to a fellow humanist and friend of his, Dr. Nitobe Inazō, a well known politician and thinker in the Meiji era. Significantly, Nitobe gifted her with various books that introduced her to new, Western ideas.

\(^8\) Ishimoto, *Facing Two Ways*, 41-141.


\(^11\) *Ibid.*, 157, 170. She bore her first son Arata while living at the mines; Tamio, her second son, was born in the Ishimoto home in Tokyo.
Manhattan, the goal to be closer to the “people” as fit his socialist notions. He, however, was soon gone, seeking action in Washington D.C. then Russia. Ishimoto Shizue thus had to rapidly learn how to survive and make friends on her own. She had some acquaintances that he had introduced her to, though, including a woman named Agnes Smedley. A journalist who sympathized with socialist and communist causes and friend of Margaret Sanger’s, at the time of Ishimoto’s first visit to the United States, she was also the editor of The Birth Control Review.

Upon first meeting, Ishimoto had no knowledge of birth control, the birth control movement, or of Sanger. After hearing the name of the activist at the house of another person, though, she mentioned it to Smedley. Noting Ishimoto’s interest in the reformer, as well as her desire to help the poor, Smedley arranged an introduction. The baroness was immediately struck both by the story Sanger told her concerning the U.S. birth control movement, as well as by the woman herself; she said later that she “felt instantly her magnetism and my respect for her deepened as she talked about her difficulties.” Sanger too was charmed by the elegant noblewoman with her quick grasp of English and interest in family limitation. The two became good friends, remaining so throughout their lives.

After a trip to Europe, Ishimoto returned to Japan with her husband, where they both became involved in socialist activities and, gradually, the advocacy for birth control. With

---

12 Ibid., 176-7
13 Ibid., 176-180.
14 Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 301.
16 Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, 183.
17 Ibid.
18 Sanger, Margaret Sanger, 295-6.
him supporting her intellectual growth, Ishimoto Shizue was able to start a yarn-importing and knitting business where, besides earning money for a leper hospital and other causes, she was able to interact with a variety of people and sometimes engage in discussions of birth control theory.\(^{20}\) Being a woman, particularly one of high rank, these controversial activities and her friendships with foreign birth control advocates earned her great ridicule, evident in rude caricatures and epithets like “Madame Control” seen in newspapers.\(^{21}\) In her autobiography, she recalls that people even “hissed, pulled one another’s sleeves secretly or smiled ironically at me when they met me on the street or at any other place.”\(^{22}\) This negative attention was distressing and somewhat frightening, but Ishimoto and her husband bore the insults. At least the public was paying attention, providing an audience that the Ishimotos and others could try to talk with about the need for family limitation.

Along with others sympathetic to the cause of birth control, notably politicians like Abe Isō and Yamamoto Senji, the Ishimotos did what they could to create interest and spread information about birth control.\(^{23}\) This included a conference on the issue in May 1921, the first of its kind in Japan.\(^{24}\) Still, even with such domestic progress, foreign support and interaction was always advantageous. Thus, when it became known that Kaizō was considering Margaret Sanger for a lecture tour, the couple was quick to offer their assistance, as well as their home for her lodging in Tokyo.\(^{25}\) Sanger received the official invitation from the company shortly after, and, eager for new experiences and promotion of her cause,

\(^{21}\) Ishimoto, * Facing Two Ways*, 232.
\(^{23}\) Ishizaki, “Principles of Procreation,” 282, 291; Otsubo, “Eugenics in Imperial Japan,” 179. Abe Isō was a professor at Waseda University. Involved in politics as well, he supported a variety of social reforms, including women’s rights and temperance. Yamamoto Senji was also an academic, studying and teaching on theories of sexology at Kyoto University. In addition, he was engaged in socialist politics and organized labor.
\(^{24}\) “Elizabeth Coleman to Margaret Sanger,” 15 May 1921, [LCM 18:932].
immediately accepted. She was joined on her journey by wealthy suitor J. Noah Slee, who refused to let the recent divorcee sail alone. For this reason, she also brought her son, Grant, to serve as a chaperone. The three prepared to set sail in February from San Francisco.

**Dangerous Thoughts**

Sanger’s trip was well timed in regards to audience receptiveness. Along with the relatively permissive nature of the Taishō democracy, reformers and their organizations were winning political battles. Most notably, in February 1922 when she set sail, feminists and supporters won a repeal of Article 5 of the Police Protection Law, which had forbidden women from participating in political organizations and meetings. This meant that women and their concerns could have more presence in government debates. In addition, a continuing economic recession and high unemployment rate had been causing civil unrest, including rice riots in 1918. Intellectuals were already discussing ways to limit population growth to curb the growing misery, and the populace was turning to socialist and labor groups more open to reforms, including birth control, than the older, traditional organizations.

When it became known that Margaret Sanger was coming to lecture, politicians, activists, and others already interested in and advocating birth control made extra efforts prior

---

26 Grey, *Margaret Sanger*, 184; Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society*, 113. Margaret and Bill Sanger had divorced in 1920 for various reasons, not the least of which was her devotion to her career. James Noah Slee, also a divorcée with three children, was a millionaire who had made his fortune selling a “Three in One Oil.” Despite completely differing politics, he was attracted to Sanger’s vivacity and beauty, and the two would marry shortly after their return to the States. Margaret, however, kept Sanger as her surname, given that it was already well-known and associated with her cause.


to her departure to drum up support in the press. Such engagements included interviews with the newspapers, such as one given to the Yomiuri Shinbun by Ishimoto Shizue. The article consisted of some details on “the spirit of birth control’s” upcoming visit, complete with an eye-catching image of the baroness. The same issue also included an article written by Abe Isō, discussing the benefits of birth control and his desire to set up a Western system of disseminating information in Japan, if only for couples with marriage licenses. He added that as a professor at Waseda University, he recommended the works of Margaret Sanger as a source for information on the topic, in effect offering his endorsement to the American and boosting her credibility further by his acceptance.

In short, it seemed as though the lecture tour was off to a good start. Thus, it was something of a surprise when the government refused visas to Sanger and her companions. The Consul General informed her that strict orders from the Japanese government were to deny her passage as she was “personally undesirable.” As Sanger had set up speaking engagements in China to follow her lecture tour, though, she was able to obtain a Chinese visa and embark on time, only able to hope that the government of Japan would change its mind before her arrival. Given her notoriety as well as the public interest in her trip, reports, letters, and opinions on the matter quickly filled newspapers and telegraph wires.

---

31 “Sangā-fujin no Raichō wo Ki Toshite Nihon ni mo” (There is a chance that Sanger will come to Japan), Yomiuri Shinbun, 6 February 1922, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/.
33 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 184-5. For whatever reason, Sanger had waited until the last minute to secure the document. Madeline Grey states that in fact she had actually forgotten this step in international travel prior to her arrival in San Francisco.
34 “Birth Control,” Japan Times and Mail, 3 April 1922; Chuo; “Mrs. Sanger is Coming.”
35 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 185; Katō, A Fight for Women’s Happiness, 51; “Mrs. Sanger Arranges for Oriental Lectures: Movements are Begun Here Both Supporting and Opposing her Proposed Policies,” Japan Advertiser, 22 February 1922; “Mrs. Sanger is Coming Despite the Prohibition: If She Cannot Land in Japan She Can
The majority of these first articles were favorable towards Sanger, and quick to examine the reason for her troubles. The official cause, as explained to her by the Consul General in San Francisco, stemmed from the Town Hall affair; if her own nation would not allow her to lecture, the logic went, then neither should Japan. However, the press quickly claimed that the real cause was reluctance on the part of a pro-natalist faction of the government to permit such flagrant discussion of family limitation. Some conservatives in the Diet, it was said, had even postulated that her mission was a sinister one, meant to handicap the Japanese race in future military confrontations and expansions. There was also the issue of public morality, which, many reactionaries felt, would be compromised by any discussion of sex, let alone advocacy for an ideology which could theoretically enable promiscuity without fear of consequence. Sanger’s cause was not helped by the fact that many Japanese who showed interest in and advocated for birth control were socialists, a school of political thought abhorred by many in the government, as exemplified by the proposal of the “Dangerous Thoughts Bill.”

This law, aiming to clamp down on the Bolshevik and Socialist movements, was introduced into the Diet on 18 February 1922, to much protest and discussion. As many

---

Proceed on to Other Lands,” Japan Times & Mail, 17 February 1922; Margaret Sanger to Hugh de Selincourt, 19 February 1922, [LCM 3:763].

36 Chesler, Woman of Valor, 246; Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, 227; Grey, Margaret Sanger, 185; “Letter to Juliet Rublee,” 27 March 1922, [MSM C2: 28]; Margaret Sanger, “Margaret Sanger in Japan,” The Birth Control Review, Vol. VI, No. 6, (June 1922), [MSM 70: 934]. Again, the Town Hall affair was an important catalyst for public attention to Sanger and contraceptives in the U.S., occurring when Catholic policemen, as ordered by the Church, forbade Sanger from giving a speech at the New York City Town Hall.


38 “Birth Control in China and Japan,” 30 October 1922, [LCM 128: 491]; Hopper, A New Woman, 23.


40 “Dangerous Thoughts Under Control,” Japan Time & Mail, 2 March 1922; “Japanese Press Comment on Topics of the Day: Sympathy with Mr. Montagu in his Dismissal --- Lloyd George Should Meet Gandhi --- Severe Criticism of the Radical Control Bill --- ‘Childish’ Army Reduction Proposals,” Japan Advertiser,
journalists were quick to point out, the terms of the proposed bill were vague enough that its harsh punishments could be applied to essentially anyone with original thought, and even distant associates of guilty parties. Noting the connection between the proposed new law and refusal of a visa to Sanger, news sources quickly began to use her name as an example of the bill’s danger.

The Japan Times & Mail was one of the first to do so, in an article published 2 March, 1922.41 Explaining that the law was “extremely dangerous to the best interests of the mental growth of the nation,” it cited the denial of a visa to Margaret Sanger as a prime example. A few weeks later, the Japan Advertiser wrote on this topic in a piece entitled “Dangerous Thought Readers Increase.”42 Here, the journalist used Sanger as an example of how the government’s conservative actions had resulted in the skyrocketing sales of “radical books” and requests for “forbidden” information, here, concerning birth control. The writer explained that the reaction demonstrated the law’s inefficiency and the likelihood of results opposite of those desired. Continuing a few days later, the Advertiser opined that the government should listen to controversial new ideas, such as Sanger’s teachings on birth control, before judging them.43 This piece also complained that the passing of such a restrictive law made it appear that the whole populace was narrow minded. The Yomiuri Shinbun posted statements arguing along these lines as well, bemoaning the lack of leeway or

---

41 “Dangerous Thoughts Under Control.”
42 “Dangerous Thought Readers Increase: Government said to be Defeating its Own Ends by Radical Activities Control Bill: Reaction is Following: Seiyukai Organ Calls Attention to Growing Popularity of So-Called Radical Books,” Japan Advertiser, 8 March 1922.
sympathy in the new law. However, though the example in all of these articles, none expressed much interest in Sanger herself or the details of her cause.

For these articles, it was Sanger’s name alone, instantly recognizable to readers, which the writers used. Her ideas were unimportant in this context. In oyato tradition, Sanger could be used to represent the West and new ideas, the very things that the conservative new law was trying to suppress. In other words, her well-known name, associated with modernity, new information, and prestige, could be and was used by writers and journalists to both catch the attention of readers and make a stronger argument. It did not matter what she said so much as who she was, where she came from, and thus, what she represented.

Accomplishments through Struggle

The debate of the “Dangerous Thoughts Bill” was just one example of the polarized atmosphere in Japan at the time. As one reporter put it to her, there was a “great gap which exists between the people of Japan and their government.” The problem was, as Sanger later wrote in the Birth Control Review, that though “sympathizers can be numbered in the hundreds” and did include some powerful individuals, “they seem to be powerless in special departments,” including those necessary to permit her trip to continue. Public and press sympathy alone would not be enough to change the minds of those in charge, individuals increasingly suspicious of the foreigners that predecessors had welcomed. Instead, Sanger would have to use her own charm and wits to win over someone who could help.

44 “Seifu no Jisō Torishimari Hō” (Government’s Thought Control Law), Yomiuri Shinbun, 14 March 1922, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/.
45 Untitled, Tokyo Mainichi, 12 March 1922.
46 Sanger, “Margaret Sanger in Japan.”
Fortunately for her, her ship was bringing home a group of Japanese delegates from the Washington Naval Conference, including the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hanihara Masano. These men of power were intrigued by Sanger, given the amount of media furor that surrounded her, and decided to listen to her arguments and judge for themselves if she was “personally undesirable” or dangerous. Concluding that she did not pose a threat to the well-being of the nation, Hanihara wired Tokyo and instructed his office to grant Sanger a visa.\footnote{Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 63-4.}

In return, however, she had to sign an affidavit promising she would not speak publicly on birth control methods; she would be limited to abstractly describing the need and utility of contraceptives, topics for which she had to hastily construct speeches from the few notes she had brought with her.\footnote{“Mrs. Sanger has Hope to Address Japan’s Doctors: Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs to Give Aid Upon Arrival,” Japan Times & Mail, 10 March 1922; Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 63-4.}

Such censorship, of course, severely curtailed any practical influence that Sanger might have hoped to have in Japan. Her actual words would be limited to more standard Neo-Malthusian fare, such as how birth control was the best way to prevent the tragedy of a Second World War.\footnote{Margaret Sanger, “War and Population: Address given in Tokyo Y.M.C.A. on March 14, 1922,” The Birth Control Review, Vol. VI, No. 6, June 1922, [MSM S70: 931]; “Overpopulation is Cause of War Says Mrs. Sanger: Local Police Find Opening Speech in Accord with Censor’s Regulations,” The Japan Times and Mail, Wednesday, 15 March 1922.}

This oppression, though, also served to enhance her popularity in the media. As reporters were quick to recognize, the populace loved a scandal, and with the politically polarized atmosphere, papers could be sold by the inclusion of stories featuring the continuing battle between liberal and conservative as exemplified in Sanger’s struggle. Thus, in newspapers like Japan Times and Mail, the Yomiuri Shinbun, and Japan Advertiser, hardly a day went by during the length of her trip without an article or two concerning her work or
some related topic.\textsuperscript{51} Magazines were also active. Sanger reported that 81 of 101 April issues of major magazines contained an article on her trip or about birth control in general.\textsuperscript{52} Whatever the medium though, it was commonly agreed that by opposing her trip and thereby creating the controversy, repressive forces in the government increased both publishers’ coffers and the discussion of family limitation.\textsuperscript{53} It was reported that even before she landed, while permission to lecture was still up for debate, that because of the attention drawn to the cause through the media, her trip was a success in at least drawing more attention to birth control. Moreover, the majority of the attention was positive both towards her and family limitation.

Many newspaper articles published just before, during, and immediately after her visit, discussed what the author saw as the best aspect(s) of birth control. These included such points as: a lower population that would reduce the need colonize or emigrate; use of techniques or devices superior to infanticide or even condoms; and, of course, potential eugenic purposes.\textsuperscript{54} The feminist aspect was also represented by Ishimoto Shizue, who explained in one piece how contraceptives could grant women increased autonomy.\textsuperscript{55} Articles consistently noted the possibility for improved living conditions, prosperity, and health, and

\textsuperscript{51} Articles from February through mid April in: Japan Advertiser, MSPP Archives; Japan Times & Mail, MSPP Archives; Yomiuri Shinbun Database, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/.

\textsuperscript{52} “Birth Control in China and Japan.”

\textsuperscript{53} Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways. 226-7; “Japan and Birth Control,” Japan Advertiser, Tuesday, 7 March 1922; “Mrs. Sanger Must Promise Police She Won’t Talk if She Lands Here Tomorrow,” Japan Times & Mail, 9 March 1922; Sanger, “Margaret Sanger in Japan,” [MSM 70: 934].


\textsuperscript{55} “Nothing Against Birth Control in Japan’s Tradition.”
sometimes complained about the nation’s current national image, damaged by its human fecundity.

There was new interest in contraception on an organizational level as well, with established groups looking at birth control in a new light. The *Japan Advertiser*, for instance, ran an article towards the end of Sanger’s trip telling how the Tokyo Association of Graduates for the Imperial University Medical College had held a meeting to discuss birth control, “to which they [had] hitherto been comparatively indifferent…” with the result being the organization of a committee to study the “relation of population and economy.” New organizations were formed as well, with perhaps the most notable being the Japanese Birth Control Study Society at the Imperial Hotel, founded at a lecture and reception shortly after Sanger’s arrival. Involving Dr. Kaji, Professor Abe, labor leader Suzuki Bunji, and the Ishimotos among others, the goal of this organization, as explained to the press, was to privately study questions concerning overpopulation. In July, writing its mission statement, the group went into more detail. The statement stressed that the research society was established to promote the idea of birth control as something not immoral but able to prevent all manner of evils, from material shortage and resulting international conflict, economic decline, and a variety of social ills like illegitimate children, infanticide, abortion, and poor education. Initially at least, then, this organization had goals very similar to those of Sanger,

---

though as will be seen, division of attitudes and goals among members would ultimately
curtail its influence and viability.\(^{59}\)

Of course, not everyone was inspired to study, let alone promote family limitation and
contraception. Typically citing the increasingly common fears of Western domination,
military weakness, and decaying morality, there were some articles that heavily critiqued or
simply denounced Sanger and her cause.\(^{60}\) Among these immediate critics was Yamada
Waka, who beyond the typical reasons given also added her conservative feminist angle: that
birth control would cheapen love and the position of woman as mother, one which she
believed most women would endure slavery to obtain.\(^{61}\) Meanwhile, the female director of
the Japanese Women Physician Association and vehement anti-Sangerite, Yoshioka Yayoi,
felt that not only were Sanger and her ideas dangerous, but also unnecessary.\(^{62}\) She claimed
that the only people who should have in depth knowledge of birth control, physicians, already
did; making birth control public knowledge only undermined the regulations that already
existed and thus endangered society. However, as Ishimoto Shizue would later write,
negative publicity was still publicity and, as “the main thing was to get birth control
universally discussed,” even these unfavorable writings were welcome.\(^{63}\)

In all, although Sanger’s words were censored to a point that she was unable to present
new or practical information, her very presence had roused a vibrant debate over family
limitation. Moreover, even before she was home, letters from Japan began to arrive in

\(^{59}\) Frühstück, Colonizing Sex, 120, 150. Ultimately, the organization’s actual achievements would encompass
little of the original mission statement, with most of its members pursuing eugenic-inspired legal changes that
focused on permitting abortions.

\(^{60}\) “Birth Control”; Chuo, “Mrs. Sanger is Coming.”

Japan Advertiser, March 1922.

\(^{62}\) Yoshioka Yayoi, “Igakujyōkō kara Shōfukudeshi: Sanjiseigen no” (Medical Doctors Cannot Consent to Birth

\(^{63}\) Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, 227.
Sanger’s New York Office. One such note came from a Mr. and Mrs. Taguchi, requesting information. In response, the staff sent first a pamphlet and later a copy of the *Birth Control Review*, inviting the couple to subscribe.\(^64\) Although much fewer than the quantity of letters that poured into Sanger’s office daily from throughout the United States, similar letters with requests for information and advice would continue to arrive from Japan from that point on, despite the presence of Japanese advocates. Sanger, the individual with information “from the source” as it were, was thus from the start considered the preferred person to contact, a trend that would continue over the years as the fame initiated by this first journey continued to permeate Japanese society.

In short, as other scholars have written, and as the reformer and her friends said at the time, this first voyage to Japan had indeed succeeded in instigating popular interest concerning birth control throughout Japan. The attention lavished upon the incident, enhanced by the government’s censorship, spawned articles and discussion, and also inspired people to seek information. Sanger’s actual message, though, was not necessarily the draw given the limitation on her speaking and actual, physical influence.

**Speeches and the Audiences Reached**

The limitations imposed by the government stifled much of what Sanger would have imparted in terms of her beliefs and thus on the impact of her actual message. For one thing, as mentioned, limitations on the content of her speeches forced Sanger to improvise, something difficult given the lack of her notes and statistics.\(^65\) In addition, the clarity of these messages was frequently compromised by translation. Although most translators, such as the

---

\(^64\) “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. H. Taguchi,” 27 June 1922, [LCM 18:975]

Ishimotos, were able to impart the message clearly enough, others who were not so familiar with the topic, frequently garbled Sanger’s intended meaning; one translator, for instance, used the terms for “abortion” for “contraception” interchangeably, though these were practices that Sanger saw as completely different.\textsuperscript{66} As the police force was constantly watching, care had to be taken to ensure the proper meaning was delivered and understood. Indeed, police surveillance presented an ever present danger, especially when she met people in private to discuss contraceptives in greater detail.\textsuperscript{67} Although the police tacitly accepted that devices and methods could be discussed with physicians in a non-public setting, Ishimoto Shizue would later recall that she still felt inclined to watch the door.

Despite the constant threat, a number of secret, personal meetings were held, along with 13 major public lectures and some 500 interviews.\textsuperscript{68} Most who attended were middle to upper-class individuals with educations, including many doctors, teachers, and students.\textsuperscript{69} Audience size varied from a few friends, to a hall of at least 600 people.\textsuperscript{70} Media coverage, though, meant that her major speeches reached a wide range of people, far greater than those

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{66} Fujime, \textit{Sei no Rekishigaku}, 245-6; Ishizaki, “Principles of Procreation,” 292; Katō, \textit{A Fight for Women's Happiness}, 55; Sanger, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 327-8. As mentioned, through the mid-1920s, the common terms, \textit{sanji seigen} or “birth limitation” and \textit{sanji chousetsu} or “birth regulation,” could mean not only birth control in the contraceptive sense but also could be a euphemism for \textit{datai} or abortion. As Fujime explains, this blurred meaning was sometimes used intentionally to evade the law, though the terms also reflected the tendency to view abortion as a primary means of family limitation. However, the difference in meanings, if left unchecked, presented a danger of misunderstanding that not only went against Sanger’s beliefs, but also spoke in favor of the illegal, though common, practice.\textsuperscript{67} Ishimoto, \textit{Facing Two Ways}, 228.\textsuperscript{68} Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 68.\textsuperscript{69} “Attentive Audience Hears Mrs. Sanger: Birth Control Advocate Speaks on ‘War and Population’ at Y.M.C.A Auditorium: Makes Appeal to Japan: Describes Conditions in Germany and Pleads for Mothers in this Country,” \textit{Japan Advertiser}, 15 March 1922; “Mrs. Sanger’s Visit to Result in Population Study Society”; “Overpopulation is Cause of War”; Sanger, “Excerpt”, 46, 60, 67-8.”\textsuperscript{70} “Attentive Audience”; “Overpopulation is Cause of War.”
\end{footnotesize}
with whom she actually spoke. Thus, at least some element of her talks was able to traverse
the nation.\footnote{Chesler, \textit{Woman of Valor}, 365-6; Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 70; Robert J Smith and Ella Lury Wiswell, \textit{The Women of Suye Mura} (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 11-20, 111-129. Of course, this only applied to those who were literate. During the Meiji Restoration, laws had been put in place to establish a system of education for both men and women, leading Japan to have a fairly high literacy rate, particularly in urban areas. As anthropologist couple Ella Wiswell and John Embree found in the 1930s, though, there remained a fairly low rate of illiteracy or sub-literacy in rural areas, particularly among elder women. These individuals, though, still tended to rely on fellow villagers to popular magazines to them.} Besides giving speeches, Sanger attended a variety of events and functions in the area. This included a tense and hostile meeting with the female physician, Yoshioka Yayoi, at her hospital.\footnote{Chung, \textit{Struggle for National Survival}, 49-50, 133. Although the media ridiculed Yayoi for her obstinacy, one cartoon even showing her kowtowing to Sanger in ten years due to financial loss for not having accepted birth control earlier, the doctor never swayed from her path. She feared for public morality, women’s health, and her own credibility and position as a doctor, a position that had taken a great deal of effort to obtain and hold on to especially given her sex.}\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 26, 31-3.} Far more enjoyable were her meetings with friendlier gynecologists such as Dr. Kaji Tokijiro, having a Japanese style dinner with 25 business men, talking with socialist sexologist Yamamoto Senji, or visiting a group of Westerners in Yokohama.\footnote{Chesler, \textit{Woman of Valor}, 245; Sanger, “Excerpt,” 44, 62; Ishimoto, \textit{Facing Two Ways}, 221.} Clearly, most of these individuals were of an elite class. However, Sanger did make some attempt to reach out to those of the lower classes. While in Tokyo, to the shock of her hosts, she demanded to be taken to the infamous red light district, both the “legal” section of Yoshiwara, and the desperate “unlicensed” Asakusa nearby.\footnote{Sanger, “Excerpt,” 44, 62-3; Ishimoto, \textit{Facing Two Ways}, 221. As was typical of Japanese mills, all the workers were female.} She also visited the mill workers of the huge Kanegi-fuchi cotton spinning mill.\footnote{Ibid.} As these brief visits occurring while the women in question were at work, though, it was difficult for Sanger to impart much in the way of usable information.

In all then, the majority of Sanger’s time was spent among elites, typically of medical, business, or some sort of political profession, and often of high social class and status. At her
speeches, most present were of middle class status, and although audiences could be fairly large, the numbers of attendees was tiny compared to the overall population. Moreover, although she managed to travel to most of the major urban centers – Tokyo, Yokohama, Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe namely – the time she spent in these cities was very short. Thus, what effect her presence in Japan could have on the populace as a whole came primarily from the media coverage.

Though waning slightly after the initial fight with the government had been resolved, reports on Sanger’s whereabouts never ceased during her visit. In a letter to her friend, Juliet Rublee, Sanger commented that most papers in the nation “carried headlines and front page stories and editorials on the subject for a few weeks.” She also commented that she was always surrounded by photographers. Little wonder then that she and her entourage seemed “to be known everywhere.” Indeed, it seemed that not only her name but her image as well had become common knowledge thanks to the media.

In Summary

Sanger’s arrival sparked opposition from conservatives in the government, fearful for public morality and Japan’s advancement as an imperialist power. Because of resulting limitations on what she was allowed to discuss, much of her information concerning actual devices and/or practices could not be delivered, except in private to fellow physicians. The

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
    \item[76] “Attentive Audience.” At the speech presented on 15 March, for instance, the detailed description of the audience describes a group of “prosperous-looking business men, well-groomed women, students, shop girls, coolies, a Buddhist priest or two,” and “a number of foreigners.” He further reports that although a translator was present, the responses of the audience indicated that they understood Sanger’s English, an indicator of good education and thus at least a middle class background. The only clear reference to anyone of a lower class is to two women with fussy babies who paced in the back of the auditorium while Sanger spoke.
    \item[77] “Letter to Juliet Rublee.”
    \item[79] Sanger, “Excerpt,” 61.
\end{itemize}
general public was only able to hear about the dangers of overpopulation and the need to limit births. This was not new information, or even a new debate; theorists, journalists, and feminists had talked about many of the same things prior. The difference was Sanger herself, and perhaps more importantly, the scandal and the media coverage that surrounded her.

From the moment of her arrival, people in Japan might not have know much about actual birth control techniques, and understood even less what Sanger actually stood for, but they would know her name. Sanger was the Westerner who the government opposed because she would bring new ideas to Japan. She was the demure mother whose attempt to offer advice was squelched by those behind a new, controversial law. Sanger was Western, i.e. modern, birth control. Her actual lectures and writings aside, her name had power to command people’s attention and spark their interest. This would continue to hold true as the years passed, as not only advocates and journalists, but also businessmen, would discover.
Chapter III: Long Term Results

Although Sanger spent only about a month in Japan and would not return until 1937, she had helped spark an interest in birth control and in her personage, an interest of which Japanese journalists, salesmen, and birth control advocates were able to take advantage. As this chapter demonstrates, Sanger remained a popular figure, continually featured in the media and receiving a number of letters from Japanese admirers and colleagues. Her name, however, took on a life of its own, especially in advertisements for contraceptives. Among these advertisements were those for the pessary developed by Koyama Sakae, the same brand that would instigate the chain of events leading to the *One Package* case when the doctor sought Sanger’s approval for his product. However, even when her name and image were exploited, her actual beliefs or teachings were rarely recognized.

As had long been the fashion when dealing with foreign teachers, the Japanese were hesitant to accept the values and beliefs inherent in Sanger’s interpretation of the need for and use of contraceptives. After all, most Japanese advocates for birth control already had deep seated attitudes towards family limitation influenced by their education and/or traditions. Many also found it prudent to promote contraceptive use that better fit the increasingly nationalistic political climate of the day, even if it meant co-option of their values. The general practice of birth control and some of Sanger’s arguments deemed compatible with Japanese culture and/or law would be accepted and promoted, but ultimately, the birth control movement in Japan would develop in its own unique way.

A second visit by Sanger in 1937 failed to generate the same attention as her first, let alone alter the path of the Japanese birth control movement in the pre-war era. Eventually,
contraceptives would be banned completely. It would not be until after the war that their use would be reintroduced, though even then, abortion would be more quickly legalized and promoted than birth control. Still, even if her message had little practical impact on Japanese contraceptive practices, Sanger’s fame and association with modernity, progress, and liberalism would be well remembered.

New Interest and Namedropping

Even after Sanger returned to the States following her 1922 trip, the Japanese media continued to feature her in articles. Given the relatively high literacy rate, especially in urban areas, she became a well known figure, associated with all things related to fertility and family limitation.¹ Such was her fame that when the Emperor’s first son was born in 1933, there was even a rumor that Sanger had provided diet instructions to ensure the sex.² The story, though false, was popular and widespread enough that it was published in some international papers as well.

Recognition of Sanger’s name was not limited to the international and urban communities, however. Anthropologists who conversed with residents of the rural hamlet of Suya Mura in the 1930s, for instance, recorded that despite general ignorance of international figures and events, at least one woman of the village recognized Sanger’s name and knew she was associated with birth control.³ After all, nationally read newspapers carried occasional articles that reported on her actions in the U.S., including her secret marriage to J. Noah Slee

---

¹ Chesler, Woman of Valor, 365.
³ Smith and Wiswell, The Women of Suye Mura, 95
and efforts to repeal the Comstock laws. Most articles that used her name, though, talked about birth control in general, with the number of such pieces increasing in number and candidness for nearly a decade following her first trip. This spoke to the mercurial nature of Japanese censorship.

As Sanger had discovered first hand during her first trip to Japan, conservative forces could be quite obstinate towards the introduction of controversial topics. However, there was no actual law that prohibited the discussion of contraceptives; censorship of an article generally hinged on whether or not the information was presented in an obscene manner. As the definition of “obscenity” was vague and could be interpreted differently, throughout the 1920s and early to mid 1930s, censorship depended largely the current political mood. Attitudes could change even depending on the day. For instance, censorship was generally stricter around 1 May, International Workers Day, than other times of year given the date’s association with socialist revolution and leftist activism. Certain events like the Kantō earthquake of 1923 or Manchurian Incident of 1931, also led to the government to temporarily crack down on all potentially controversial speeches or articles, theoretically staving off potential unrest or rebellion. The venue of discussion also could make a difference as to how the government reacted. Information presented in an academic setting generally did not face the same level of censorship as that given in a more popular environment, and speeches or articles intended for youths or laborers were always under higher levels of scrutiny. In print, the size of distribution mattered, with nationally read, popular sources watched more closely

4 “From Baroness Ishimoto to Margaret Sanger,” 8 March 1931, [LCM 18: 1056]; “Ichinen Mae ni Kossori Kekkon Shiteita Sangā-san” (Mrs. Sanger Secretly Married a Year Ago), Yomiuri Shinbun, 13 March 1924, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/. Sanger married Slee very shortly after their return to the United States in a secret ceremony. Apparently the Japanese press did not learn of the event until a year after it occurred, though.
6 Frühstück, Colonizing Sex, 157-9; Norgren, Abortion before Birth Control, 26.
than small or local ones. Despite the uncertainty that advocates and the media faced in regards to censorship, though, especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the cause of birth control continued to be advocated with as many details as were permitted for a particular venue at a particular time.\(^7\) Promotion was aided by increased acceptance not only among the general public but physicians as well.

As suggested by Sabine Früstück in her article, “Male Anxieties,” through and before the 1920s, physicians and pharmacists tended to be suspicious of anything sexual lest it be related to masturbation, widely considered unhealthy to the body.\(^8\) However, by 1930, many had come to recognize and take advantage of lucrative business opportunities promoting various tools to aid with healthy sexual conduct. Birth control was one of these, and as will be seen, various devices and writings on the topic would be promoted throughout the late 1920s and mid 1930s. Thus, although plenty of people, including some medical professionals such as Yoshioka Yayoi, continued to see birth control as immoral and unhealthy, continuous discussion and promotion, when permitted by the censors, helped popularize the cause.

Just three years after Sanger’s first trip, while talking with Japanese birth control advocates, her friend Alice Park found that the topic of birth control had already become a subject of casual conversation.\(^9\) Contraceptives also became a popular topic of discussion in newspapers, with not only journalists but readers also contributing. From late 1929 and into 1930, for instance, there was a series in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* called *Kōkajō* or “Open Letter” where birth control was a frequent topic of discussion.\(^10\) Each article started with a question

\(^9\) “Copy of Letter To Margaret Sanger from Alice Park,” 18 November 1925, [MSM C3: 717].
posed, one example being “what is birth control good for,” and would be followed by a series of short replies or even thoughts associated with the topic.\(^\text{11}\)

By the early 1930s, audiences were sufficiently comfortable with discussion of contraceptives, and censors permissive enough, that the *Yomiuri Shinbun* published a serialized story that presented basic information about the types of devices and methods available. The story, entitled “Hinin no Sōdan wa Muryō” or “Birth Control Advice for Free,” began on 14 July, 1930 and ran for a few weeks, telling the story of a woman who went to a doctor for advice concerning contraceptives.\(^\text{12}\) The fictional doctor proceeded to present information on the various types available. Although the descriptions were not particularly graphic, that this relatively detailed and practical advice was being given in a popularly read newspaper, was new and spoke of a clear trend towards acceptance that the 1922 trip had given a boost.

In short, within a decade of Sanger’s visit, contraceptive issues had gained sufficient respectability to merit discussion in popular formats. Moreover, the tone and attitudes towards the topic had become more positive. Using the *Yomiuri Shinbun* as an example, one can see that prior to her visit, only a handful of articles and a few advertisements existed that promoted use of contraceptives.\(^\text{13}\) The few other articles dealing with birth control before Sanger’s visit are typically either disparaging remarks on the idea and/or use of

\(^{11}\) For instance, the example of “what is birth control good for” resulted not only in replies that contraceptives would help poor families escape poverty but also another question, whether birthing children contributed to poverty, being posed as well.


contraceptives. Neo-Malthusian theories are often repudiated or criticized as well. Most of the early articles also detail perceived danger of contraceptives, such as the decline of morality, the increase in selfishness of women using them, or the danger to human bodies. To be sure, these fears never completely abated, and in the mid 1930s began to regain their influence. However, following her first visit, attention to the cause was such that the general public, not only theorists and scholars, felt comfortable discussing aspects of contraceptive use and application in public forums. And, like the journalists who used her name as a symbol of free speech and modernity to repudiate the proposed thought-control bill early in her first trip, writers continued to use Sanger’s name and image for their own benefit.

Sometimes, as in an article by Yamada Naomitsu, Sanger’s name simply accompanies a few lines saying that attitudes towards birth control had changed since her visit, prior to the describing methods and problems of distribution associated with contraceptives. The same is true of an article entitled “Sanjiseigen no Kinshi kara Okoro Wazuwai” or “The Evil that Comes from the Prohibition of Birth Limitation,” which briefly mentions Sanger and her belief in the importance of birth control, before critiquing the Japanese government’s unwillingness to support the cause. This article was even accompanied by an image of Sanger to catch readers’ eyes. Neither piece, though, talked about Sanger’s work, ideas, or actions. It was enough to mention her name, and thus associate their writing and themselves

with what she represented: modern birth control. Doing so not only drew the attention of readers, eager for the new knowledge and advice on family limitation that Sanger represented, but also enhanced the prestige of their article by its association with Sanger and the air of authority that she, as a Western teacher, possessed.

Like sexologists and suffragists before, writers on birth control found that use of a foreigner’s name boosted the perceived credibility of an article, even if it was only mentioned in passing.\textsuperscript{17} The tradition of the \textit{oyatoi gaikokujin} had conditioned the Japanese audience to listen when a foreign teacher spoke, thus ensuring that useful information for modernizing the nation would be heard, and, if found acceptable, implemented. Writers and lecturers who invoked her name, then, also received some of this attention. Beyond unofficial support from an “expert,” though, use of a foreigner’s name also aided a writer by presenting a “discursive space.”\textsuperscript{18} In this case, the Western teacher’s name and/or image served as a silent reminder that controversial ideas might not be seen as immoral or dangerous elsewhere, providing support for the writer’s opinion, and raising the (typically) unspoken question as to why precisely there was a difference in thought. That established, an argument concerning a controversial idea could proceed without readers completely dismissing the thought contained as radical or immoral. Sanger was particularly useful for this since, despite her politically-radical origins and controversial cause, she was also skilled at playing the role of a gentle mother who just happened to be the world’s foremost authority on birth control.\textsuperscript{19} This demure and domestic image softened opposition by repudiating fears that birth control would lead women to abandon their duties as mothers and wives. This image also kept her

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Frühstück, \textit{Colonizing Sex}, 81-2; Mowry-Robins, \textit{The Hidden Sun}, 76-9.
\textsuperscript{18} Frühstück, \textit{Colonizing Sex}, 79.
\textsuperscript{19} Grey, \textit{Margaret Sanger}, 41; Morehouse, “The Speaking,” 56.
\end{flushleft}
approachable for interested individuals, useful not just for those seeking information on contraception but ultimately businessmen as well.

**The Best Known Name in Birth Control**

Sanger herself, of course, was busy with the birth control movement in the U.S., and although she maintained fairly regular correspondence with a few important Japanese advocates, overall, the most direct contact between her and the Japanese people was through a handful of her books which had been translated, or via letters sent to her U.S. office. Sometimes, the writers requested pamphlets or books Sanger’s office had available, so that the writer could then translate them for popular Japanese consumption. One such proposal came from a university student writing less than a year after her first trip.²⁰ Sanger granted his request, as she did with others who asked.²¹ Most of the time though, there was no indication of any desire to translate, but only to receive information on methods of birth control and related issues, or even simply be in contact with the famous individual.²² A letter from K. Kitano provides a case in point. A Buddhist minister, Kitano professed in his first letter to Sanger that although the underlying reason he wrote was because he could not contact a certain Dr. Cooper regarding contraceptive information, he mostly desired to write, if not to meet, the woman whose “influence is living in the spirit all of Japanese advocates in this field.”²³ For him, as for others, Sanger was not only a source of ideas and information, but also a sort of idol, albeit a very busy one.

²⁰ “From Schiju Chiba to Margaret Sanger,” 25 December, 1923, [LCM 18: 1005].
²¹ “From William T. Ogawa to Margaret Sanger,” 21 February 1926, [LCM 18: 1015], 1-5; “Letter to Margaret Sanger from Akira Ito,” May 17, 1929, [LCM 18:1021]; “To Schiju Chiba from Margaret Sanger,” 2 January 1924, [LCM 18: 1008].
²² “From Iwao Naniwa to Margaret Sanger,” March 5, 1935,[LCM 18: 1205]; “From William T. Ogawa to Margaret Sanger”; “Michitaro Honjo to Margaret Sanger,” 1 July 1931, [LCM 18:1079].
²³ “K. Kitano to Margaret Sanger,” 21 January 1931, [LCM 18: 1048].
Although Sanger generally responded to every letter sent to her, whether in person or in form letter handled via her office and secretaries, she often suggested the Japanese writers contact Ishimoto Shizue.\(^{24}\) She made the same suggestion to Westerners interested in birth control in Japan as well.\(^{25}\) Indeed, many people inquiring about birth control in Japan did appear write or visit Ishimoto. An article she penned in 1934 noted that not only did her mailbox nearly explode every time birth control was mentioned in the media, but that at least 50 people a month would visit her for help.\(^{26}\) Yet, even though she had been making headlines before Sanger’s visit and had continued to appear in the media, there were people who did not know of her, or still wrote Sanger even if they did.\(^{27}\) Few could compete with Sanger’s “brand name” status or her position as an icon of all things birth control, and nowhere was this clearer than in advertisements for contraceptives.

Although books about contraceptives were advertised before Sanger’s first trip, it was only after she had come and gone that such notices began to appear with frequency in papers, with a noticeably large number appearing in the early 1930s.\(^{28}\) Devices and procedures themselves were commonly promoted in popular women’s magazines like Shufu no Tomo or

\(^{24}\) “To Dr. Senzi Yamamoto from Alice Park,” 20 August 1923, [LCM 18:1001]; “Margaret Sanger to Dr. Sakae Koyama,” 20 February 1932, [LCM 18: 1096].

\(^{25}\) “From Baroness Ishimoto to Margaret Sanger,” 8 August 1930; “Margaret Sanger to Baroness Ishimoto,” 22 June 1931, [LCM 18: 1075].

\(^{26}\) Shizue Ishimoto, “Tasan Yue ni Naku” (Crying from Many Births), Yomiuri Shinbun, 13 May 1934, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/

\(^{27}\) “From Iwao Naniwa to Margaret Sanger”; “From Margaret Sanger to K. Kitano,” 14 April 1931, [LCM 18: 1061].

Fujin Sekai, as well as newspapers, particularly from the late 1920s until around 1937.\textsuperscript{29} Such advertisements typically included a paragraph or two about the benefits of using contraceptives in general, then a few lines as to why the promoted version was the best. Specific pharmacists or doctors who had developed the device might be mentioned, or even a famous doctor who (supposedly) recommended the brand. The latter was frequently the case with a brand of pessaries that used Japanese birth control advocate and physician Majima Kan as a spokesperson.\textsuperscript{30} Sanger’s name was also prominently utilized as an advertisement gimmick, but not always with her permission, and certainly not with her beliefs in mind.

Aiming to cash in on Sanger’s notoriety and authority, a number of contraceptive companies in Japan used her name or derivatives thereof in the marketing of their product. The Japanese advertisements included such brands as “Sangerm” suppositories, “Sangai” diaphragm and jelly, and, most hateful to the reformer, “Sanger” patent medicine, actually an abortifacient (Fig. 1).\textsuperscript{31} Claiming that its formula was copied from a recipe given to the CEO by Sanger when he visited her in the United States, the drug was a thorn in the side of Sanger and her Japanese colleagues.\textsuperscript{32} For one thing, its very existence was technically illegal. For another, like most abortifacients and patent drugs, there was no guarantee that the medicine


\textsuperscript{30} “Gomu-sei Pessari-”; “Majima Kan Dacchi Bessari.” Dr. Kan was a prominent member of some of the more important birth control societies. A known abortionist, Majima made headlines in 1934 when he was arrested for performing the operations.

\textsuperscript{31} Chesler, Woman of Valor, 365; “From Ishimoto Shizue to Margaret Sanger,” 5 April, 1923, [LCM 18:995]; “From Shizue Ishimoto to Margaret Sanger,” 5 June, 1931, [LCM 18: 1062]; “Sanga-” (Sanger) Advertisement, Yomiuri Shinbun, 11 June 1931, https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/.

\textsuperscript{32} “From Shizue Ishimoto to Margaret Sanger,” 5 June 1931.
was safe, let alone capable of producing the promised results. There was also the fact that, as discussed, Sanger was generally against abortions.

Abortion drugs such as this were, of course, hardly uncommon. Indeed, as Sabine Früstuck discusses in *Colonizing Sex*, selling and promoting blatantly contraband contraceptives was not an uncommon occurrence up through the mid 1930s. Nevertheless, this particular brand created an image problem for both Sanger as an individual and for the cause as a whole, given that it and the American’s name were synonymous; criticism of one could affect the entire Japanese birth control movement. Thus, reformers in Japan, notably Ishimoto Shizue and Majima Kan, tried to prevent unwarranted use of Sanger’s name and the selling of similar devices. They were not always successful, however, since although claims could be made concerning the lack of truth in advertising, the law permitted use of Sanger’s name without her permission. Thus, sales of contraceptive goods using the name of “Sanger” to attract and assure buyers of quality and safety, continued to flourish. Ultimately, only one brand did so with her knowledge and tacit permission: the Koyama pessary.

---

33 “From Baroness Ishimoto to Margaret Sanger,” 20 November 1931, [LCM 18: 1087]; Früstuck, *Colonizing Sex*, 118.
34 “From Baroness Ishimoto to Margaret Sanger,” 20 November 1931, [LCM 18: 1087]; “From Margaret Sanger to Baroness Ishimoto,” 7 April 1931, [LCM 18:1060]; “Kan Majima to Margaret Sanger,” 22 August 1932, [LCM 18: 1122].
Fig. 1: Example of an advertisement for “Sangā,” an abortifacient using Sanger’s name without permission. The text explains that this medicine, supposedly “improved” by Sanger, will start a woman’s period if it is late, ensuring good health and hygiene – buzzwords used to get around censorship.


Fig. 2: Example of an advertisement for Koyama Pessary. Along with giving reasons why his product is superior, Koyama makes special mention of the fact that Sanger recommends it.

Koyama

The correspondence between Margaret Sanger and the device’s creator, Koyama Sakae, combined with resulting advertisements, present a microcosm of the various meanings her name and notoriety had developed, and the ways in which they were used commercially. Koyama, president of the Juzen Hospital in Osaka, first met Sanger briefly at a Birth Control Conference she organized in Zurich in 1930.\textsuperscript{35} Apparently inspired, Koyama wrote Sanger a year later.\textsuperscript{36} With this first note, written and sent in October 1931, he enclosed a sample of his pessary which was patented in Japan.\textsuperscript{37} Already a successful product domestically, he wanted Sanger herself to examine it as well and, more importantly, to tell him if she knew of anyone who would be willing to buy the rights and sell it in the United States as well.

Sanger replied to his letter and sample favorably, though she could suggest no possible buyer.\textsuperscript{38} The doctor replied in animated fashion, seemingly desirous to impress her with the explanation that he had created the device not for his own use as he was too old, but to help people throughout Japan, and the growing Japanese empire.\textsuperscript{39} To do so, however, he would need a large quantity of money for advertising, at least $100,000.\textsuperscript{40} Hence, he desired to sell the patent for at least $20,000 to an “American wealthy man of [Sanger’s] direction,” for which he was willing to “entrust all the things with [her]” regarding the matter.\textsuperscript{41} Before she could reply to this letter, he sent another eager note adding that there was already an individual in Japan desiring Koyama to sell him the rights; the doctor claimed, though, that he would prefer that Sanger have them, since, according to him, she was “practically the director

\begin{footnotes}
\item[35] Reed, \textit{The Birth Control Movement and American Society}, 121.
\item[36] “From Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 17 October 1931, [LCM 18: 1083]; \textit{Selected Papers}, 194.
\item[37] “From Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 17 October 1931.
\item[38] “Margaret Sanger to Dr. Sakae Koyama,” 20 February 1932.
\item[39] “Dr. Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 26 March 1932, [LCM 18: 1104]; “From Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 28 March 1932, [LCM 18: 1110], 1-3.
\item[40] “Dr. Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 26 March 1932.
\item[41] \textit{Ibid}.
\end{footnotes}
of the Birth Control, the most famous in the world.”

Such was his faith in Sanger and her image that Koyama was willing to entrust his life’s work to her despite having met her only once, knowing her mostly through a few short letters and from her mentions in the media.

For her part, Sanger was pleased with Koyama’s interest in the cause, and likely flattered by his apparent reverence. However, as she replied to him in April 1932, she could not be of direct assistance in his endeavors as not only did she lack the money to buy the patent, but such an action was not a part of her mission. Her goal, as she stated it to him, was “to inspire research for better methods than the pessary,” even if at that point it was still her preferred and recommended method. She was, though, willing to study his design to determine if it was better than other current models, as Koyama adamantly claimed. For this purpose, she requested some extra samples of the pessaries, as well as some tubes of a spermicidal jelly called Saflin that he suggested be used in tandem with the device.

Following the seizure of these materials by U.S. customs, Sanger and her colleagues would request a second set, eventually leading to the decision of United States v. One Package. This case was a defining moment in Sanger’s career and the United States birth control movement, removing some of the final restrictions on the spread of information through the mail and leading to approval by the AMA. In turn, Koyama profited from the event, or more specifically, from his interactions with the famous advocate, especially through his advertisements.

With Sanger’s tacit permission, Koyama included her name in his advertisements (Fig. 2). The presence of her name helped generate attention and, as always, and provide a

---

42 “From Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 28 March 1932.
43 “From Margaret Sanger to Sakae Koyama,” 30 April 1932, [LCM 18:1116].
44 “Dr. Sakae Koyama to Margaret Sanger,” 26 March 1932. Saflin, Koyama claimed, had been developed by one of his daughters who had a Bachelors in Pharmacology. It is mentioned in the advertisement, Fig. 2.
respected outsider’s support for his claims. Clearly recognizing what he had, Koyama even used printed copies of her letters in his advertisements to prove to his customers that he had Sanger’s support, even though other advocates of birth control, especially Ishimoto, found it crass and distasteful. Koyama may not have won many friends by using Sanger as a brand name, but it was clever, topical advertisement.

In all, then, the interaction between Koyama and Sanger demonstrated how important she was to pre-war Japan, at least symbolically. As an icon of Western, modern birth control advocacy, Japanese people like Koyama would specifically write her for information and support. Personal contact with Sanger offered the chance to obtain information straight from the individual considered to be the foremost authority on the topic of contraception. From there, her name and image could be used by savvy writers or business people to gain the attention and confidence of the public. Such was the case of Koyama’s pessary advertisements. Sanger’s actual involvement in all of this, though, was indirect. Her continual correspondence with Koyama was, in fact, rather unusual, as there were very few Japanese people with whom she kept in close contact, Ishimoto being the main exception.

Overall, even if Sanger was the most famous advocate for contraception, it was the Japanese advocates who led and shaped the movement according to their own needs and beliefs.

**Japan’s Margaret Sanger**

Of Sanger’s Japanese compatriots, none was as devoted to the American’s vision in the pre-war era as Ishimoto Shizue, and for this she merits a special mention. As she wrote
many articles and gave lectures on birth control, she soon became one of the better known
advocates in Japan. By 1925, she was sufficiently famous that when Alice Park visited, she
found simply describing a Japanese woman involved in the birth control movement was
enough for a hotel desk clerk to know who she meant. That she was known to be a good
friend of Sanger’s only helped improve this image, and even earned her the nickname of
“Japan’s Margaret Sanger.”

The name was apt as she shared many of the same beliefs as her mentor. Like Sanger,
she generally viewed birth control from a primarily feminist angle shared only by a few other
women such as Hiratsuka Raichō or Yamakawa Kikue, and thus tended to focus on how
contraceptives could aid women in terms of health and autonomy. She also pushed the view
that use of contraceptive devices was preferable to birth control by abortion. Furthermore,
inspired by Sanger, Ishimoto tried to shape a similar birth control movement; though of the
upper-class herself, Ishimoto endeavored to reach out to laborers, tried to incorporate birth
control programs into public health systems, and, most notably, attempted to create a system
of clinics similar to Sanger’s. To facilitate the latter’s development, Ishimoto engaged in a
three month internship at Sanger’s clinic in New York City in 1933. Through assistance
from an American philanthropist, she was able to open her own Tokyo clinic the following

46 “Copy of Letter To Margaret Sanger from Alice Park.”
47 “From Ishimoto Shizue to Margaret Sanger,” 5 April 1923.
48 Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-choice Ideology,” 121; Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, xviii.
49 Katō, A Fight for Women’s Happiness, 57-8, 76-9.
50 Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-Choice Ideology,” 121; Chesler, Woman of Valor, 366. Ishimoto’s husband,
Keikichi, continued to be involved in promoting birth control as well, but gradually lost interest and eventually
left to seek his fortune in Manchuria. The majority of work done by the Ishimotos was contributed by Shizue.
51 Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 83-4;
year. Like Sanger’s, the clinic was non-profit and focused on providing information to poor women, though middle class women frequented it.

Ishimoto was not alone in her desire to create a system of clinics in Japan. As early as 1929, the mayor of Tokyo had indicated that the city counsel was looking into the creation of a series of birth control clinics in the city’s slums. Although nothing came of this announcement, there were still a number of privately owned facilities. However, unlike Sanger or Ishimoto’s clinics, most of these operations existed to turn a profit rather than serve a social cause. Thus, even if Sanger’s system was the inspiration for these facilities, it was only the vague idea of clinics alone that operators adopted. The beliefs and operating methodology that Sanger promoted was not.

Overall, in sharing and promoting many of Sanger’s beliefs and methods, Ishimoto was unique. Most Japanese advocates, though happy to use Sanger’s popularity to galvanize interest in the cause, only took what they wanted from her writings and lectures. In this, they continued a tradition of Japanese interactions with all foreign teachers, and shaped the Japanese birth control movement to better reflect their values and traditions.

Advocates and Organizations

Besides Ishimoto, there were many other high profile individuals who worked to spread contraceptive information and use, including the aforementioned Abe Isō, Yamamoto

---

53 Früstück, Colonizing Sex, 138-9.
54 “Birth Control Clinics in Japan,” 12 October 1929, [LCM 18: 1026.].
56 It is hard to say what the actual influence for creating these clinics was. Sanger herself had gotten the idea from Holland, after all.
Senji, Kaji Tokijiro, Hiratsuka Raichō and Majima Kan. Along with less prominent individuals, these advocates wrote articles, gave speeches, and answered letters so as to promote birth control. However, Sanger’s reasons for promoting birth control were not often the same as these advocates, who also disagreed with each other over methods.

In Colonizing Sex, Sabine Früstück describes this division, arguing that there were two major groups in the birth control movement in Japan: the eugenicists and the social-reformists. Eugenicists, best characterized by Abe Isō, were typically upper class reformers, advocating the use of contraceptives for the good of the race, and/or of the nation. Ultimately for this group, contraceptives were best used for strengthening the nation by weeding out ‘undesirable’ elements and helping destitute families by limiting the number of children. Meanwhile, social reformers looked more to Yamamoto Senji and leftist ideology. With strong ties to Marxism, the social reformist group was associated with laborers, and promoted the use of contraceptives to limit the size of workers’ families. This was not only to improve their lives, but ultimately to provide them with time and energy to carry out a social revolution.

From this alone it is clear that the goals of the major factions had broader goals in mind than Sanger’s more woman-centric, contraception-only style movement. Women’s issues were mentioned, especially by those advocates with a feminist background, but overall Japanese advocates instead focused on how birth control could help the nation as a whole, whether through improving the overall genetics or assisting with a political revolution. To

---

57 Früstück, Colonizing Sex, 134.
58 Chung, Struggle for National Survival, 111; Früstück, Colonizing Sex, 148.
59 Isō, “Sanjiseigen no Kōnin Mondai.”
60 Ishimoto, Facing Two Ways, 231-2; Tokutaro Yasuda, “Birth Control in Japan,” Contemporary Japan, December (1933), 474-5.
61 Chung, Struggle for National Survival, 110; Helen M Hopper, “‘Motherhood in the Interest of the State’: Baroness Ishimoto (Katō) Shidzue Confronts Expansionist Policies against Birth Control, 1930-1940,” in
this end, along with local societies and groups, there were a series of regional organizations, often trying to work together, to engender real change.

The first two important organizations both formed during or shortly after Sanger’s 1922 trip. As mentioned, the Japanese Birth Control Study Society was created immediately following her speech and reception at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. Appealing mostly to middle and upper class supporters, who were increasingly interested in eugenic ideology, this organization was not as active or robust as the Osaka Society for the Study of Birth Control, formed in 1923. With a broader base of support due to affiliation with labor unions, this second organization boasted more members than the one in Tokyo and eventually helped sponsor a number of publications and clinics in that region. Dominated by socialist reformers, the ultimate goal of this organization was to help laborers have smaller families and thus gain time to participate in leftist protests.

Regardless of the groups’ underlying goals, advocates in Tokyo and Osaka found common ground when, following a change in suffrage laws, Yamamoto Senji and Abe Isō were voted into the Diet in 1928. Soon after, members from the Osaka and Tokyo based groups worked jointly to produce a petition regarding recognition of birth control. The result was the proposal for a Birth Control Recognition Law. Contrary to the name, though, the style of birth control involved was not contraceptives. Instead, the bill was primarily concerned with limited legalization of abortion, suggesting that the procedure be available

*Japanese Women: Emerging from Subservience, 1868-1945*, edited by Hiroko Tomida and Gordon Daniels (Kent: Global Oriental, 2005), 43; Mowry-Robins, *The Hidden Sun*, 75. Ishimoto and other feminists, like Raichō, did band together for a time as the Woman’s Birth Control League of Japan to pursue the feminist contraceptive goals, but did not appear to have made much of an impact given a paucity of reporting done on its formation or actions.

62 “Mrs. Sanger’s Visit to Result in Population Study Society.”
64 *Ibid.*, 150.
65 Ishizaki, “Principles of Procreation,” 293.
within the first trimester or when a mother’s life was at stake. The bill also proposed that punishments for abortionists and their patients be lessened. In this, the legislation was very in tune with Japanese tradition, particularly a continued reliance especially in the countryside on abortions as a primary method of birth control. 66 Any hope for passage of this or a similar proposal, though, was ended when Yamamoto Senji was murdered by a right-wing militarist in 1929. 67 The shock at the loss temporarily stalled legal action on the part of the birth control organizations.

Despite this set back, interest and membership in the groups and cause continued to increase, leading to the formation of a new eugenic-focused group, the Birth Control League of Japan, created in 1931 with Abe Isō at its head. 68 The same year, though, the Home Ministry began to crackdown on birth control advertisements for the safety of public health. Displaying and selling any contraceptive device that the Ministry deemed harmful was made illegal, though it was left to officials to determine what was “harmful.” 69 Since advertisements for contraceptives continued to flourish until late in the decade, the law was clearly not applied in a draconian fashion, and it also was never applied to condoms which had been used in the military to prevent venereal disease for years. Still, Japanese reformers from both the eugenic- and socialist-based sides quickly began to try to undo this new ban. Following the Manchurian Incident, efforts in this regard were abandoned. 70 Nevertheless, 

67 Yamamoto’s support for Marxist and anti-military legislation had earned him many enemies, and ultimately was the cause for his assassination.
69 Hopper, “‘Motherhood,” 42-3.
70 The Manchurian Incident, sometimes seen as the true start to World War II, refers to an event in 1931 when a section of railroad belonging to Japan was destroyed with dynamite. Japanese soldiers claimed that the Chinese
promotion and advertisement of birth control still continued through the 1930s when intermittent censorship permitted.71

Overall then, the major thrust of the Japanese birth control movement took little from what Sanger advocated; her anti-abortion stance and feminist ideas were especially ignored. Although certainly on an individual level there were those would adopted some of Sanger’s methods, such as Ishimoto, most followed in the tradition of dealing with yatoi, selecting only those elements of new information deemed useful.72 In this case, it was not so much information or methods but her popularity that advocates found useful, as it enabled the formation of the two first major birth control organizations which would go on to pursue large-scale legal reforms, even as censorship began to increase.

A Second Visit

Ultimately, there was a variety of reasons why Sanger’s methods did not make more of an impact on the pre-war Japanese birth control movement, but the most obvious was that she was rarely present physically. Beyond her first trip in 1922, Sanger only visited Japan one more time before the outbreak of World War II. This was not for a lack of trying, to be sure. In 1935, after a much publicized tour of India, she planned to visit her Japanese colleagues on her return from Asia; illness, however, prevented her from doing so.73 She started to plan her next trip, though, as soon as she arrived in the U.S. Even then, the Japanese bombing of

---

71 Sandra Wilson, The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-33 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 3-6. It should be recognized that the Manchurian Incident, often viewed as marking beginning of World War II and the militarization of Japan, did not cause major changes overnight, and certainly not with contraceptive advertisements.
72 Jones, Live Machines, 124.
73 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 352-4, 369.
Shanghai and imposition of martial-law conditions in Japan almost put an early end to this expedition as well.\footnote{Hopper, \textit{A New Woman}, 80-4.}

Finally reaching Japan in March 1936, Sanger was still not able to make as big an impact as she had the first time. For one thing, she was unable to make some of the visits or give many of the speeches she had planned, having broken her wrist on the voyage. Although Ishimoto Shizue and another advocate, Dorothy Dick, tried to fill in for her, it was Sanger that people wanted to see.\footnote{Margaret Sanger, “News from Margaret Sanger, On Board S.S. President Hoover,” 6 September 1937, [MSM 13: 461].} Moreover, even though the media did cover the trip, the impending war was more an issue of interest at that moment than Sanger. Conservative elements in power also did not risk creating a second media-frenzy by trying to oppose her visit, and thus there was little journalistic need to call on Sanger’s image to discuss issues unrelated to contraception.

Despite these setbacks, Sanger still did what she could to rally interest for the Japanese movement, which was facing increased opposition from conservatives and militarists. Aside from giving a few speeches, the highlight of her trip was the reopening of Ishimoto’s clinic at a new location.\footnote{Hopper, “‘Motherhood,’” 49; Sanger. Margaret, “Margaret Sanger to Baroness Ishimoto, and Friends: Remarks on Opening Japanese Clinic,” 3 March 1938, [LCM 19: 126]; Sanger, “News from Margaret Sanger.”} Otherwise, much of the trip consisted of social visits, and though Ishimoto found Sanger’s visit and support a wonderful boon that could “push back all the depressed feelings which [were] hanging around [her],” the interaction had little impact on the Japanese populace or main thrust of family limitation advocacy.\footnote{“Ishimoto Shizue to Margaret Sanger,” 18 September 1937, [LCM 19: 62]; Sanger, “News from Margaret Sanger.”} By this point, the make up and methods of the advocates were changing anyways as the onset of war led to increased censorship and strengthened opposition from the government.
Legal Battles and War

Sanger’s second visit was one of the last major actions promoting popular use of birth control. Censorship had been increasingly strict since the Manchurian Incident in 1931 as Japan became more invested in its colonial interests in mainland China despite opposition from the West, particularly the U.S. Already, some people were predicting a war between the two since the U.S., for economic and moral reasons, desired an independent China, while Japan increasingly saw domination of Manchuria as necessary for its economic survival.78

Indeed, following the Manchurian Incident, the image of abounding food and natural resources that were said to be available in Manchuria became a national obsession.79

Combined with a history of battle and Japanese blood spilled on Manchurian land during the Russo- and Sino- Japanese wars, not only militarists but the Japanese people in general began to support colonial expansion in China, even if it meant war with the U.S.80 This possibility became increasingly likely after Japan left the League of Nations in 1933, unable to convince the Western powers involved that it was the right of Japan to attain colonies as Europe and the U.S. had in the past, or that Japan was their equal.81

The threat of war led to an increase in pro-natalist advocacy, since to fight a war as well as hold down and increase the nation’s colonial holdings, Japan would need more people. Thus, attacks on birth control and its advocates grew more frequent and heated.82 Still, advocates did not face complete censorship until July 1937 when war broke out in earnest.

78 Iriye, Across the Pacific, 131-7, 152-3, 162-3, 180-2. Economically, the U.S. desired the continuation of the Open Door Policy as opposed to spheres of influence or colonies. Instigated at the turn of the century, this agreement ensured equal commercial opportunity in an administratively independent China. Morally, although opinions were divided, there was a trend in the U.S. where it was felt that the Chinese needed to be autonomous.
79 Wilson, The Manchurian Crisis, 88, 94-5. In truth, Manchuria was not quite the fertile cornucopia of minerals and food that the media would make it out to be. Still, Manchuria as a lifeline, the key to Japan’s survival, flourished as an image during the years leading up to and through World War II.
80 Iriye, Across the Pacific, 164-7; Wilson, The Manchurian Crisis, 89-93.
81 Iriye, Across the Pacific, 172-7.
82 Coleman, Family Planning in Japanese Society, 31; Muramatsu, “Family Planning in Japan,” 2.
between Japan and China following a skirmish at the Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing.\textsuperscript{83}

To prevent rebellion, particularly from socialist elements, the government cracked down on those promoting “dangerous thoughts,” including birth control, shortly after. Ultimately, the government’s pro-natalist policies and censorship had little effect on actual birth rates.\textsuperscript{84}

Birth control advocates, though, were increasingly forced to either cease their activities, or find new ways of arguing for contraception that the government could support.

Ishimoto was one of the advocates who kept quiet, at least in public. Arrested due to her connections with “dangerous” socialists, her new clinic was forcibly shut down at the end of 1937, and heightened pro-natalist censorship made it impossible to publish articles arguing for popular use of birth control.\textsuperscript{85} However, she continued to work “underground,” secretly creating and distributing contraceptive devices in her kitchen.\textsuperscript{86} Other advocates though, especially those who had been involved in spreading birth control information on a eugenic basis, found that with some compromises, they could still fight for their beliefs, and even succeed.

Although the government generally viewed more births as being better, period, some reformers found that when couched in nationalistic terms and accompanied with support from eugenicists, a case could be made for the limited use of sterilizations and abortions.\textsuperscript{87} With influence from Nazi Germany, which had established an infamously wide reaching and harsh eugenic policy, Japanese reformers began working to establish a less strict policy of their

\textsuperscript{83} Früstück, Colonizing Sex, 157; Iriye, Across the Pacific, 194-5.


\textsuperscript{85} Hopper, A New Woman, 112-20; Hopper, “Motherhood”, 49-51. She was arrested primarily because of her public friendship (and secret romance) with labor leader Katō Kanjū, the man who would later become her second husband. She was released due to her high status and family name, though her American friends who, upon learning of the predicament had written letters to high officials, believed it was their efforts that freed her.

\textsuperscript{86} Hopper, A New Woman, 96-108.

\textsuperscript{87} Früstück, Colonizing Sex, 166-7; Norgren, Abortion Before Birth Control, 30
own.\textsuperscript{88} Still, members of the Diet were not quick to pass the bill.\textsuperscript{89} Aside from contradicting the pro-natalist policy, there were concerns over the definition of “unfit.”\textsuperscript{90} Thus, though the earliest versions of this type of legislation first appeared in 1934, it was not until 1940 that the National Eugenics Law (NEL) was passed.\textsuperscript{91} This finalized version permitted voluntary sterilizations and, with special permission, abortions, so as to prevent the spread of certain ailments viewed as hereditary.\textsuperscript{92} Any other form of birth control, though, was strictly prohibited.

Overall, there were very few sterilizations carried out under the NEL.\textsuperscript{93} Still, the law signified the culmination of the pre-war advocacy for birth control. Moreover, the NEL’s provision for abortion, though incredibly strict, would persist into the post-war era and affect family planning legislation in years to come.\textsuperscript{94} Concerned purely with the health of the nation, the belief in a woman’s right to control her fertility or of the need to promote birth control rather than abortions, was completely absent.

\textbf{In Summary}

Between Sanger’s two trips, her fame and image became increasingly familiar throughout Japan. Transformed by the Japanese media into an icon of Western birth control, she was sought out for her opinion and help despite the presence of many Japanese advocates.

\textsuperscript{88} Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-Choice Ideology,” 142-3; Früstück, \textit{Colonizing Sex}, 161; Ishizaki, “Principles of Procreation,” 295.
\textsuperscript{90} Kaso, “Women’s Rights?” 32-3; Otsubo, “The Female Body,” 75.
\textsuperscript{92} Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-Choice Ideology,” 146; Norgren, \textit{Abortion before Birth Control}, 30-2. Eligible illnesses included mental illness, retardation, hereditary deformities, syphilis, and epilepsy, as well as addictions to alcohol and drugs. The bill was originally intended to make some sterilizations compulsory as well, but an Imperial edict prevented that.
\textsuperscript{93} Früstück, \textit{Colonizing Sex}, 166; Norgren, \textit{Abortion before Birth Control}, 32.
\textsuperscript{94} Amemiya, “The Road to Pro-Choice Ideology,” 146.
Her popularity in turn rendered her name useful for advertisements for contraceptives and, much to her consternation, abortifacients. Only one designer of devices, Dr. Koyama, sought her opinion and permission, his letters and advertisements exemplifying not only the reverence that Sanger was often held in, but also her marketability.

Notoriety and brand status did not mean that leaders of the Japanese movement would follow Sanger’s lead or adopt her ideas, however. As other yatoi had found, the Japanese were eager to hear her speak and use her as a source of credibility, but ultimately would only take from her lectures what they liked best. The aspects of Sanger’s advocacy that made her unique – women’s rights, advocacy for birth control alone, and reliance on contraceptives instead of abortion – were not popular in the Japanese organizations as a whole. In all, then, for Japanese advocates, it was Sanger’s status as an icon for popularizing contraceptives that was most useful.

Despite a second attempt to regroup and regain support for popular birth control with a second trip, Sanger’s popularity would fade during the war years along with the Japanese birth control movement. With Japan eventually going to war with the U.S., reliance on the image of an American advocate for a cause whose goals ran contrary to national pro-natalist policies became not only unpopular but dangerous. Promoters of birth control for population control also had to find new ways to seek reform. In the end, the major pre-war result of all the discussion of birth control and family limitation was rooted in the eugenic-based arguments that were popular, and took the form of the National Eugenics Law.

Even as the Japanese turned from Sanger, though, the appeal on Judge Moscowitz’s decision came to court with the 1936 United States v. One Package case. After years of the
Japanese benefiting by use of Sanger’s name, Sanger and the U.S. birth control movement profited from her interactions and fame in Japan.
Aftermath and Conclusions

When the fighting of World War II ceased, the United States moved in to occupy Japan, and a new government and new set of laws began to take shape. Among the many changes immediately instituted was that of granting women the right to vote, thus giving women’s issues new importance for campaigners and helping to bring some of the pre-war women’s rights advocates, including Ishimoto Shizue, to power as members of the Diet in 1946. However, with cities, factories, and food-production industries razed by bombings, it was not until 1950 that much action could be taken in regards to birth control. By that point, the need had become obvious.

The population, which had been merely 66 million at the time of Sanger’s first visit, had ballooned to 85 million, with a population density of 529 people per square mile. In the United States, it was only 44 at that time.\(^1\) Despite tacit legalization of abortions under doctor supervision by the National Eugenics Law, extended in 1946 to permit use of the procedure for economic and social reasons as well, infanticides and “back alley” abortions were common, as many women did not trust their doctors. The same lack of trust made it so women were timid about seeking reliable contraceptive advice from physicians. It short, it was an opportune time for Sanger to make another visit.

The actual trip did not occur until 1952, due to opposition from Catholics and those, like General MacArthur, who feared that permitting Sanger to visit could be construed as an attempt by the U.S. to tyrannically impose family limitation on the Japanese.\(^2\) Still, upon finally arriving, she was greeted as a hero. Escorted by a motorcade, loudspeakers affixed to

\(^1\) Grey, *Margaret Sanger*, 409.
the trucks trumpeted the news of her arrival and hopefully proclaimed that there would be no more abortions. Though 73 years of age and ailing, Sanger did her best to further popularize her cause with more speeches, often to unexpectedly large crowds. She returned two years later, again to great enthusiasm, and was granted the honor of addressing the House of Councilors, the first foreigner to do so. Then, in 1965, Ishimoto Shizue and others from Planned Parenthood arranged for Sanger to be granted the Third Class Order of the Sacred Treasure, a medal, granted only to one other foreign woman, a tutor to then crown-prince Akihito.

Still, as in the pre-war years, Sanger’s fame exceeded her actual influence. For example, as Tiana Norgren explains, abortions, legalized in 1948 for economic and social reasons as well as eugenic ones, have continued to be used as a primary form of family limitation. Moreover, even after the introduction of a Japanese branch of the Family Planning Federation (precursor to Planned Parenthood) in 1954, the general attitude towards woman-centric preventative birth control was lukewarm. The birth control pill, development of which Sanger had initiated in 1945, also was not even tested until 1980 in Japan, despite becoming popular in the 1960s in the United States. The pill was only approved for public

---

3 Ibid., 425.
4 In planning one lecture, for instance, estimates were made that about forty people would come and listen to her talk for a few hours. In fact, at least eight hundred attended and stayed the entire afternoon.
5 The House of Councilors is the “Upper House” in the Japanese Diet.
6 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 441; Sedgewick-Johnson, “Margaret Sanger,” 108-9. The tutor’s name was Elizabeth Grey Vining.
7 Norgren, Abortion before Birth Control, 3.
8 Ishimoto, Facing Two, xxvii-xxviii; Norgren, Abortion before Birth Control, 98.
9 Grey, Margaret Sanger, 318, 412-15, 431-2; Norgren, Abortion before Birth Control, 105-6. Sanger had long sought to find a method of birth control that women could control that allowed for discretion and ease of use. To this end, she helped a scientist, Gregory Pincus, find funding by introducing him to a wealthy widow, Katherine McCormick. This, along with other funds that Sanger raised, enabled him to develop a prototype, tested on patients of physician John Rock, and later in Puerto Rico, with positive results. The FDA approved the Pill in 1960 for use in the U.S. As Grey puts it, Sanger had found her “Holy Grail,” the perfect method of birth control she had always desired.
use in Japan in 1999 and still remains unpopular compared to condoms.\textsuperscript{10} Condoms, of course, had never been illegal in Japan thanks to their use by the military, but as explained, were a method that Sanger promoted replacing with pessaries and, ultimately, the pill.

Again, then, the question arises, why was it that Sanger was so esteemed as to merit the host of awards and honors following World War II? To be sure it was not any tangible contribution to family limitation legislation. Those advocates who worked on a large scale to affect contraceptive practices in Japan, whether from a leftist or eugenic-inspired standpoint, did so without adopting much from Sanger’s methods. The culmination of pre-war efforts, the National Eugenics Law, was based more on a similar law in Nazi Germany than anything Sanger would have ever fought for.

Ultimately, then, it appears that the reason for Sanger’s fame and popularity lies in the importance attached to her name and image following her trip in 1922. The initial attraction for Japanese people was Sanger’s foreignness and the promise of new information. The government’s oppressive response, though, truly catapulted Sanger into the public conscience, by turning her into a martyr for free speech, foreign ideas, “dangerous thoughts,” and any other cause for which a journalist could use her as an example. Thus, even though her speeches to the general public were heavily censored and not particularly enlightening, she became known throughout the country, from the major cities to rural hamlets, as a symbol of fertility control.

In the decade following her first trip, Sanger’s image continued to be used, often in a mascot-like fashion. Journalists and businessmen alike found that use of her name or picture caught the attention of the public. Instantly recognizable as an important figure associated with family limitation, mentioning her was a clear signal as to the topic of discussion. Potential readers with any interest in birth control would be drawn to the article and audience attention thus increased.

In addition, journalists especially found using Sanger’s name useful as it opened a discursive space that permitted more frank discussion of contraceptives. Arguments for the morality and social acceptability of contraception could be instantly strengthened, given Sanger’s projected image of a demure mother who also happened to have an important cause to fight for. That readers knew arguments for contraception were being made abroad, as indicated by the presence of Sanger’s name, also helped to defray some potential criticism.

There was also the air of authority and assurance that surrounded Sanger’s name and image, especially when her approval of a product or idea was claimed. Besides being well versed in contraceptive information and theory, Sanger was a Westerner, and thus commanded all of the attention and respect that European and American visitors had received from the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods on. This oyatoi gaikokuin tradition had established that to thoroughly modernize and thus become equals with the Western nations, Japan needed to listen to Westerners’ advice and adopt those measures necessary for strengthening the nation, though preferably not those at odds with Japanese values. Thus, Westerners visiting Japan to disseminate information commanded attention and prestige; Sanger, though on the tail end of this period adoption, was no exception. Thus, her image and name also exuded authority which could, in turn, be cashed in upon by those using it to back
up their arguments or sell goods. Her foreignness also marked her as the best person to contact for contraceptive information, despite her very limited presence in Japan.

Despite the commercialization of her name, and even as attitudes towards Westerners and birth control advocates grew colder, Japanese people continued to write Sanger for information. Her image as the authority on birth control was sufficiently strong and widespread that the curious would seek her opinion and help, instead of or in addition to that of an advocate in Japan. This speaks to the power and significance accorded her. Amidst the letters asking for information and advice, by no coincidence, were those sent by Dr. Koyama Sakae, who recognized, like other contraceptive designers and manufacturers, that involving Sanger with his business would likely help sales. While other marketers had crassly used variations of Sanger’s name and outlandish claims of her involvement with their product, Koyama sought her actual assistance and approval to help him sell and promote his wares. Even being able to demonstrate his written contact with her was a powerful advertising tool. This did not win him friends, though, among the other advocates of birth control in Japan, the true shapers of policy.

Although Sanger was popular and well known, she was not an active contributor to the Japanese birth control movement. Aside from a few translated pamphlets and books, only those who wrote or visited Sanger actually had any access to the crux of her arguments. Although her first visit to Japan garnered a good deal of attention, and despite giving as many speeches and interviews as she could, the trip was still limited in its duration, and her speeches censored to the point of being redundant, given earlier work by Japanese theorists and feminists. Her second trip had an even lesser chance of effectiveness given the wartime climate and broken wrist that Sanger endured. Thus, although most people in Japan knew of
Sanger and recognized her in relation to birth control, few knew the details of what she actually advocated.

Leaders of the Japanese birth control movement, of course, were more readily familiar with her arguments, and some, especially Ishimoto Shizue, kept in close contact with her. Ishimoto aside, though, most advocates and their organizations had larger goals in mind, whether a socialist utopia or eugenic perfection. Sanger’s vision of contraception was too limited in its scope for most, especially when national legislation was in question.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, advocates for birth control fought for various laws, but none were such that Sanger would have likely approved of them, especially given the reliance on abortion. Ultimately, of course, the militarists’ domination of the government led to a complete banning of the sale of contraceptives and related items, forcing discussion of birth control underground. Some who had strongly advocated for contraception, though, became involved in new types of legislation, namely eugenic laws. The resulting National Eugenics Law, passed in 1940, might not have permitted contraceptive use, but limited availability to abortion which would be expanded upon in later years, would form the basis of birth control legislation in Japan for years to come. It was a law at odds with Sanger’s beliefs, but that equaled a compromise of the needs and values of Japan in the pre-war era.

In all, then, Sanger’s actual influence on actual birth control legislation and practice in Japan was negligible. The information and advice she offered was not generally necessary or compatible with the values, traditions, and needs of the Japanese people as a whole, and certainly not those who shaped the laws. Her name and image, though, were well known and thus useful for a range of advertisements and arguments. She was a symbol of not only birth control, after all, but of modernity and free-speech. Whether seeking information on creating
a better life through a smaller family, arguing for liberal values and liberty of speech, or simply selling contraceptive wares, the Japanese people could rely on the name “Sanger.” Koyama Sakae with his new pessaries was one of many who recognized the viability of this symbol and took advantage of it.

That the pessaries involved in the *One Package* case in 1936 were from Japan was no simple coincidence. Sanger’s efforts in Japan might not have done much in regards to affecting policy or changing contraceptive practices, but they had resulted in the creation of an icon that the Japanese could adapt and use for their own devices, an icon that Koyama could use as a brand. Thus inspired by the potential in a name, a relationship was born that was not only fruitful in a monetary sense as it applied to Koyama in Japan, but also in terms of legal change in the United States.
Selected Bibliography

Primary Sources

Margaret Sanger Papers Project
Library of Congress Microfilm Collection
Margaret Sanger Papers Microfilm Edition
Newspaper Clippings: Japan Advertiser
Newspaper Clippings: Japan Times and Mail
Yomiuri Shinbun Database


United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries, 86 F.2d 737 (2nd Cir. 1936).

Yasuda, Tokutaro. “Birth Control in Japan.” Contemporary Japan, December 1933,
Secondary Sources


----- “The Female Body and Eugenic Thought in Meiji Japan.” In Building a Modern Japan. Edited by Morris Low. New York: Palgrave, 2005


