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Japan’s Earliest Women Pioneers in Law Teaching
Brief introductions of their stories

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We have identified eight women pioneers in Japan whom we would label as a first cohort entering law teaching between 1944 and 1960. We have not yet identified much information about these women as this calls for more substantial fieldwork to be carried out in Japan. That said, one common characteristic of all but Professor Torii is that they lived through Japan’s wartime and early post-war years and witnessed as mature young adult women the profound difficulties of those times. One can not help but imagine this would have had a significant impact on their values and world views.

For example, Professor Takako Doi, who witnessed and escaped from the March 1945 Allied firebombing of her home city Kobe, later told of this experience influencing her to study constitutional law under the nation’s new constitution.
Japan’s first woman employed in law teaching was Professor Yoshie Tateishi, 立石芳枝, a specialist in the family law portions of Japan’s Civil Code. The daughter of a Kyoto District Court chief judge born in 1910, Professor Tateishi was in the first graduating class of the women’s law division of Meiji University in 1932, together with the three women who became Japan’s first women lawyers and judges. She continued to Tokyo Imperial University for graduate studies as the law faculty’s first woman graduate student, before accepting an Assistant Professorial teaching position back at the Meiji University Law Faculty’s women’s law division in 1944. Shortly thereafter, the women’s law division was spun off into a junior college for women, and Professor Tateishi relocated her employment to continue her teaching in the women’s college. Ultimately, Professor Tateishi became the president of the Meiji Junior College for Women. She passed away at age 73 in 1983.
Roughly ten years passed before Japan increased its count of women law professors in the 1950s. In 1947, Shizuko Kimura, 木村静子, graduated from Japan Women’s University in science and began law studies at Kyoto University the same year. In 1948, she passed the national bar exam to begin the three-year training for entry into the legal professions. In 1953, Professor Kimura obtained both a judicial appointment as a family law judge and accepted a position as an Appointed Lecturer (joshuu) at Kyoto University. One year later, she left the judicial track for an appointment as Kyoto University’s first woman to become an Assistant Professor in any field.

Professor Kimura was the only woman in the entire university’s faculty at the Assistant or Full Professor level for eight years until Shizue Yanagishima was appointed into the School of Education in 1962. The university had no women at the Full Professor level until Professor Yanagishima's promotion to full professor in 1970, by which time Professor Kimura had already moved on to another university.

She later moved to be a full professor of law with a specialty in criminal law at Seikei University. Dean Kimura was also later the dean of the law faculty at Seikei, the first woman to serve as a law faculty dean in Japan and served as a member of several national public policy commission. She retired with emerita status as Seikei University in 1996.
In 1950, Keio University’s law department graduated three women who set out on academic careers and ultimately joined the ranks of leading law professors in Japan. This early measure towards gender equity presents the school consistently with the school’s position today of Keio’s law faculty’s gender balance standing above and apart from its peers and we believe being the closest to parity in the nation. All three women graduated together and took on post-graduate research fellow positions to begin their career tracks.
Kinko Nakatani’s, 中谷瑾子, research area was in criminal law, as her sempai Shizuko Kimura was also working on at Kyoto University. Online information indicates her taking on a post-graduate research fellow position upon graduation before obtaining promotion to a tenure track Assistant Professor position in 1956. She was then promoted to Full Professor in 1962. In 1987, Professor Nakatani moved to Kyorin University’s School of Social Sciences, before returning to a law faculty full professor position at Daito University in 1991. Professor Nakatani passed away in 2004.
Yasuko Hitomi, 人見康子, similarly took on a post-graduate research fellow position at Keio upon graduation, with her specialty, like Meiji Women’s Junior University Professor Yoshie Tateishi’s, in the family law portion of Japan’s Civil Code. Professor Hitomi obtained a post as a jyoshuu at Keio in 1955, and was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1962. She continued teaching while earning a Ph.D. in law from Keio in 1962. In 1970, she earned the title of Full Professor, continuing at Keio through to her retirement with emerita status in 1992, before passing away in 1998. A prolific scholar, her book “Women and Rights,” a memoir while addressing a wide range of issues from marriage, to employment, to disability, was published posthumously in 1999 and remains in print.
Finally among the three in Keio’s class of 1950, Teruko Yonetsu, 米津昭子, worked in the field of corporate and commercial law. Professor Yonetsu’s post-graduate research appointment commenced with her graduation, where she was recognized with two successive special national Ministry of Education scholarships. She moved up to an joshuu position in 1956, after which she secured an Assistant Professor slot in 1962. Keio promoted Professor Yonetsu to Full Professor in 1970, in the same year as Yasuko Hitomi. Just before her retirement with *emerita* status in 1993, Professor Yonetsu served for one year on Keio University’s Governing Committee (評議会). She passed away in 2010.
Takako Doi, 土井たか子, another member of this earliest cohort, did not continue her career in the academy and instead moved to attain success at the highest level of Japan’s political world. We view Professor Doi as reminiscent of Professor Hillary Rodham (later, Clinton), the Yale Law School graduate of the class of 1973 who had an early career placement in a tenure track position at the University of Arkansas Law School before stepping away to government and politics, where we know she more notably earned great fame. Professor Doi graduated first from Kyoto Women’s University and then enrolled as a matriculated 3rd year law student at Doshisha University’s Law Faculty, graduating from there in 1950. She earned a doctorate at Doshisha in 1956 specializing in constitutional law, and took on a jyoshuu position in 1958, teaching constitutional law in that role for nearly 10 years, while picking up adjunct lectureships at Kwansei Gakuin University and Seiwa Women’s University. Politics ultimately drew her attention. She left teaching after election to the National Assembly in 1969, rising to national leadership positions including serving as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1993 to 1996. Speaker Doi was hugely influential in bringing about Japan’s ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and in the enactment of the nation’s first gender equity law in employment.
Another remarkable member of this cohort in the 1950s was Kinuko Kubota, 久保田きぬ子, a specialist in constitutional law, including American constitutional law, a topic of compelling concern for legal scholars in Japan in the early post-war years. Professor Kubota was born to a local political family on Sado Island in 1913 and graduated from Japan’s Women’s University in 1935. Experiencing the wartime years led her to choose to go back to school for law studies at age 34 and she graduated the Todai’s undergraduate law faculty in 1949 at age 37. Upon graduation she obtained a short-term special researcher appointment at Todai, employed also from 1950 as an adjunct professor at Nihon Women’s University and then traveling to the U.S. to study Princeton University (all male in its undergraduate enrollment at the time.) Sometime in the 1950s she obtained a post-graduate research fellow position at Todai under the tutelage of Japan’s foremost constitutional law scholar Professor Toshiyoshi Miyazawa. By the time she obtained her first tenure-track appointment at Rikkyo University in 1959 to lead the school’s U.S.-Japan Comparative Constitutional Law field, she had already, *inter alia*, been a co-author with University of Tokyo Professor Kazushi Kojima of a treatise on the new constitution and published a Japanese-language translation of U.S. Supreme Court Justice and former Nuremberg War Crimes Trials Chief Prosecutor Robert Jackson’s 1955 work *The Supreme Court in the American System of Government*.

In 1961, Professor Kubota also served as a Special Representative for the Government of Japan to the United Nations General Assembly, likely in conjunction with Attorney Ai Kume’s post to the U.N. at the same time. In later years in her career, she moved to Seikei University and Tohoku Gakuin University, though the details are unclear in our present research. Professor Kubota passed away in 1985.

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We have not documented Professor Kubota as the first woman to graduate from the University of Tokyo’s undergraduate law faculty, but we presume her to be among the first. In any case, she was the first woman graduate of the law faculty to go on to an academic law teaching career.
The youngest member of this group was Junko Torii, 鳥居淳子, who ultimately made her career as a specialist in international and comparative law at Seijo University Law Faculty. Professor Torii was born in 1935 and graduated from the Nagoya University Faculty of Law in 1958, to begin graduate work as a post-graduate research fellow there. In 1961, she moved her graduate research affiliation to Aichi Gakuin University and then the University of Tokyo’s Law Faculty in 1962. Maintaining her association with Todai until 1976, she furthered her studies with overseas research in the Netherlands and France, and taught as an adjunct at Kokugakuin and Dokkyo Universities, before gaining full-time tenure-track appointment at Seijo University as an Assistant Professor in 1976. In 1983, she earned promotion to Full Professor, and served as Director of Legal Studies, counterpart to the Associate Academic Dean at a U.S. law school, for the 1992-1993 academic year. She continued her teaching at Seijo through retirement with emerita status in 2006, while also carrying adjunct positions at Hosei University, International Christian University, and Tsuda Women’s University.

We have chosen to include Professor Torii in the first cohort in recognition of her completing her schooling in the 1950s and commencing her scholarly career at that time. She does not appear to have secured a tenure-track appointment however until 1976.
Kamiya sensei – 15th woman in law teaching in Japan – a star in our midst!
Presence and Voice:
The History and Status Quo of Women Law Professors in Japan

存在と声:
日本の女性法学者の歴史と現在

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