Women's History Review, Volume 6, Number 3, 1997

Ishimoto Shizue: the Margaret Sanger of Japan [1]

ELISE K. TIPTON
University of Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT Post-1945 Japan is known for its remarkably low birth rate and a heavy reliance on abortion for birth control purposes. What may be less well known is the extensive use of contraceptive methods as well to limit or regulate births and the role played by the prewar birth control movement in making the concept of birth control socially acceptable. The prewar movement owed its origins and much of its success in changing attitudes toward birth control to the efforts of an individual feminist – Ishimoto Shizue. Ishimoto, in turn, owed much support and guidance to the American birth control leader, Margaret Sanger. A study of Ishimoto and the prewar Japanese birth control movement highlights the importance of international cross-currents in feminist thought and practice, for Ishimoto's meeting of the dynamic and controversial American leader focused her energies on birth control as a means to bring about women's liberation in Japan. Ishimoto's relationship with Sanger continued and grew throughout the following decades, ending only with Sanger's death in 1966. The way in which Ishimoto promoted birth control in Japan shows a strong influence from Sanger, but at the same time it was not a simple replication of Sanger's approach. Ishimoto's strategies for gaining support appear to have been shaped by her own social background, and also by the constraints of the interwar Japanese social and political environment. Ishimoto and her arguments for birth control therefore provide an insight into social trends of the pre-1945 period and an example of ways in which Japanese have accommodated Western ideas in the twentieth century.

Birth Control and the Taishô Mood

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...". Although Japan was not on the brink of a momentous revolution as was France, this famous opening line might aptly describe what is known as the 'Taishô' [2] period (1912-1926) in Japanese history, particularly the years following the First World War and the early 1920s. This period has often been overshadowed by the Meiji Restoration which preceded it and began Japan's modern development, and by the Second World War which followed it and resulted in national disaster. Nevertheless, in many respects the 1920s were equally

important, for they witnessed establishment of the roots of what are regarded as characteristic features of postwar Japanese society and culture as well as political and economic life.

On the one hand, the end of the First World War seemed the best of times, for the Japanese economy was still riding the crest of a boom stimulated by increased wartime demand for its manufactured goods, and Japan, while expending relatively little in terms of lives or resources on the war, expected to reap the benefits of being on the side of the victorious Allies. Not having experienced the European western front, neither Japan's leaders nor its ordinary people were yet disillusioned with war, but they were nevertheless swept up with the ideas of democracy, self-determination of nations and pacifism popular among the winning nations. More radical leftist ideologies inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution also became influential among university students and the intellectual élite. New ideas were not confined to the political sphere, but invaded the social and cultural as well. The 'modern girl' (moga) and 'modern boy' (mobo) became symbols created by the expanding mass media of new concepts of the individual and changing views of gender roles and attitudes toward sexuality.[3]

To conservatives, these social changes indicated the coming of the worst of times, which would be dominated by a selfish generation preoccupied with materialism and pursuit of their own individual interests in disregard of family or society as a whole. Many social commentators of the 1920s and early 1930s also viewed the changing lifestyle of the cities with a critical eye. Worried discussions of 'modernism' abounded in the magazines and semi-intellectual journals, focusing on what were regarded as hedonistic pastimes offered by the entertainment sectors of urban areas. The decline of morality was visualised in the brazen posturing of modern girls and boys parading the fashionable streets of the Ginza district in Tokyo. The moga in particular, flaunting her rejection of subservience, chastity and domesticity, posed a challenge to the ideal of 'good wife, wise mother' (ryôsai kenbo) which had been officially supported and propagated through the schools since the Meiji period (1868-1912).[4] In sum, the Taishô period witnessed a wave of Westernisation, the second since the 'opening' of Japan in the mid-nineteenth century and Meiji Restoration of 1868, and one which similarly brought about a questioning of how far it would or should go.

Among the many sociopolitical movements inspired by the new ideas and ideologies from the West was a birth control movement. In fact, there is no better example of direct influence and transplantation of Western concepts and organisational methods than the birth control movement initiated during the early 1920s by Ishimoto (later Katô) Shizue according to the advice of her mentor, Margaret Sanger. Ishimoto was not the only advocate of birth control in Japan during the interwar period, but she was a recognised pioneer and has continued to be a leader in the main family planning organisations of the post-1945 period. She was one of the founders

of the Japan Family Planning Association in the 1950s, President of the Family Planning Federation of Japan for many years beginning in 1974, and has been Vice-President of the Japanese Organisation for International Cooperation in Family Planning since 1984. In addition, she was a member of the Diet for approximately 20 years, beginning in 1946, and was still visible in public affairs at the time this article was written. In 1975 she received government recognition of her achievements with the award of the First Order of the Sacred Treasure.

Despite these public accolades recognising her leading role in birth control as well as public life more generally, there is no doubt that the visit of a prominent Westerner, namely Margaret Sanger, to Japan in 1922 stimulated interest in birth control and gave impetus to the fledgling birth control movement more than any efforts by Japanese leaders such as Ishimoto at that time. On the one hand, this indicates the strong appeal and influential role that Westerners and Western models played in Japan during the 1920s. There was still in the 1920s something reminiscent of the earlier Meiji desire to catch up with the West and the equation of 'modern' and 'fashionable' with 'Western'. This is one implication of the attribution, 'the Margaret Sanger of Japan', to Ishimoto. On the other hand, rather than seeing Ishimoto and the movement that she led as a mere copy of Sanger's, the close similarity may suggest the large extent to which influential segments of Japanese society by the 1920s were familiar with and integrated into social, cultural and intellectual trends in the USA and Europe. Ishimoto was strongly influenced by Sanger in terms of the birth control methods she favoured and the organisational approaches she adopted for promoting birth control practice. Sanger's forceful personality (which biographers often note) and dominance of the field at that time help to account for this heavy influence.[5] At the same time, however, Ishimoto's attraction to Sanger was not that of a blind disciple. She would also have been drawn to Sanger by the similarity in their motivations and goals.

Beginnings of the Japanese-American Connection

The similarity between Sanger and Ishimoto is not immediately obvious given the great difference in their family backgrounds. Margaret Sanger was the sixth of 11 children, born in a factory town in upstate New York in 1879. Her family was a poor to middling one, though not the poorest. Her father, Michael Higgins, was an Irish stonecutter who never did very well financially because of his outspoken views in favour of socialism, the single tax, feminism and other radical proposals. He also aggressively criticised Catholicism. Biographers believe that Margaret, though ambivalent about her father, was influenced by his iconoclasm and injunctions to do "something here and now to make the lives of other human beings more decent".[6] Her father's radicalism led to his children's social ostracism, so

Margaret persuaded her family to send her to a boarding school. However, she was unable to graduate because she was obliged to return home to nurse her dying mother. She later blamed her mother's death from tuberculosis at the age of 49 on "overwork and the strain of too frequent childbearing" – her mother had been pregnant 18 times. [7]

Margaret Sanger would have liked to go to medical school at Cornell University, but since the family could not afford it, she enrolled in a nursing school. Although she later claimed to have been a nurse, it is unclear whether or not she actually finished the course. She was not a registered nurse in any case, since the registration system did not come into effect in New York until 2 years after she left nursing school.[8]

At this time she married William Sanger, an architect, would-be artist and socialist, who introduced her to the world of radicalism and the bohemian life of New York's Greenwich Village. She became strongly influenced by anarchists, anarcho-syndicalist leaders of the International Workers of the World or Wobblies, and the Socialist Party. In particular, the anarchist Emma Goldman had been speaking in favour of birth control for several years already, and her arguments strongly influenced Sanger's interest and ideas on birth control. While Sanger was becoming politically active, she was also working as a home visiting nurse in the Lower East Side. She later pointed to this experience of seeing the poverty, the poor health of women from too many and too frequent pregnancies and childbirths, and the tragic consequences of illegal abortions as the turning point in her life. It was this experience which decided her to take up birth control as the cause to which she would devote her life.

This decision led Sanger to Europe to learn about birth control methods, and on her return in 1914 she began the self-consciously strident journal, The Woman Rebel, in which she coined the term, 'birth control'. This ran counter to the Comstock laws, federal and state laws which made dissemination of birth control information and devices for contraception a crime. Adopting confrontational tactics, she deliberately contravened the laws, using the subsequent publicity to promote discussion of the previously taboo subject of birth control. In 1916 she opened the first birth control clinic in the Brooklyn section of New York City, which police raided and closed almost immediately. Again, however, publicity gained support for her cause. In 1917 she started the Birth Control Review. Though still in trouble with authorities, by 1921 when she was invited to make a lecture tour of Japan by the Kaizô publishing group, Sanger was the acknowledged leader of the birth control movement not only in the USA, but in the world.

This is the point at which her path crossed Ishimoto Shizue's. Prior to 1920 when Ishimoto met Margaret Sanger, however, her life had been quite different. Born in 1897 into a wealthy ex-samurai family in Tokyo, her father, Hirota Ritarô, was a successful engineer who had received his education and training at the élite Tokyo Imperial University. Because he travelled

frequently in the West, brought back Western gifts for his six children, and built his family a Western-style house, his daughter Shizue grew up familiar with Western things. Both he and Shizue's uncle, the prominent intellectual Tsurumi Yusuke who lived with the family for several years, instilled an ethos of service to society in the children. Shizue learned much about Western historical figures from her uncle and felt a particularly strong admiration for Joan of Arc. Her mother had also been exposed to Western things while receiving an education in a progressive Canadian missionary school. Nevertheless, like her father, her mother retained traditional samurai values and brought up Shizue to the officially sanctioned ideal of 'good wife, wise mother'.

Shizue's aristocratic training proceeded at the Peeresses' School and her sheltered, affluent life would have continued if she had not married Baron Ishimoto Keikichi. Although she was not eager to marry immediately after graduation from school, her Uncle Yusuke persuaded her that it was a good match because the Baron was very liberal in his ideals, a Christian humanist interested in social reforms. In this respect, the Baron represented a typical member of the young Taishô élite. Like Margaret Sanger's first husband, Ishimoto Shizue's introduced her to socialist ideas and personalities. Instead of taking up law, the Baron had done engineering at Tokyo Imperial University and within months after marriage, took his young wife to the coal mines of Miike in Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan.

There, while her husband went down in the mines himself, working 12 to 14 hour shifts, Shizue faced "ugliness and squalor" for the first time in her life. Like Margaret Sanger in the Lower East Side, Ishimoto's sympathies for workers and especially working mothers were aroused by her contacts with the mine workers and observations of their miseries. She felt particular anguish for the women mine workers who often worked right up to the time of childbirth, sometimes even giving birth in the mines, and returned to work almost immediately.[9] However, her sympathies at this time were still emotional and unformed politically. At the same time her husband prodded her to become more independent and treated her as an equal in their daily routines, such as sitting together at meals, which was contrary to traditional, and especially samurai, customs.

The next stage in Ishimoto's development came again with a decision by her husband, this time to go to the USA to learn more about the labour movement. He encouraged her to leave their two young children behind with their grandparents in order to follow him to the USA and become educated about the world. On her arrival in New York she found herself living "like a revolutionary" in a tenement apartment and after being pressed into enrolling in secretarial and English courses, abandoned by her husband again as he went off to Washington, DC to act as consultant and interpreter for the Japanese delegation to a conference of the International Labor Organization. In the meantime, her husband had introduced Shizue

to his socialist friends, who included Agnes Smedley. Smedley, in turn, introduced Shizue to Margaret Sanger, and it was this meeting with Sanger that crystallised Ishimoto's purpose and decision to form a birth control movement on her return to Japan in late 1920.

The association of socialism and birth control advocacy at this time is not surprising since both represented radicalism, though one was political, the other social. Moreover, the Baron's attraction to them was not uncommon among the young Taishô elite. The years following the First World War and Bolshevik Revolution witnessed a mushrooming of so-called 'social movements' claiming to represent the interests of various disadvantaged groups, including industrial workers, tenant farmers, former outcasts (burakumin) and women, but largely led by leftist intellectuals.

Among these, a women's movement pushed for abolition of restrictions on women's political activities, but broader debates on women's roles had also emerged from the pages of Seitô (Bluestocking) during the mid-1910s. Those on motherhood and marriage often referred to writers such as Ellen Key and Havelock Ellis, illustrating again Japanese intellectuals' attention to Western social and cultural as well as political ideas of the time. As with other social movements, the leaders of the women's movement were mainly from the upper and upper middle classes, and like Ishimoto Shizue, a number had begun their careers with the encouragement of their husbands. Their prominent social backgrounds brought them to media attention, even though this attention did not always put them in a favorable light. Several of the Seitô contributors, for example, were criticised for their nontraditional views of marriage and lifestyles.[10] Ishimoto's aristocratic background and marriage meant that her return to Japan from New York in late 1920 received national newspaper coverage, as did her announcement that she was inaugurating a birth control movement.[11] Considering the attraction of liberal and radical ideas to the educated élite and the relatively free political environment of postwar Japan, it is therefore not surprising that Ishimoto had her fateful meeting with Sanger at this time despite differences in their socio-economic backgrounds.

Building Support for Birth Control in Japan

That Ishimoto should develop and continue a close relationship with Sanger can be explained not only by Sanger's desire to become an international leader of birth control, but also by a convergence of motives and goals between the two women. Although Sanger still had notoriety for radicalism apart from birth control when she met Ishimoto and deliberately used confrontation with authorities to publicise her cause, she had already begun efforts to broaden her constituency, and during the 1920s dissociated herself from her radical friends and socialist ideas. Notably, she denied any influence from Emma Goldman, who after numerous arrests had been

deported from the USA to the Soviet Union in 1919. Having decided not to make the mistake of spreading her efforts thinly on every worthy cause, such as pacifism during the war, she concentrated on the single issue of birth control and wooed the middle and upper classes with less revolutionary-sounding appeals.[12] The decision was indeed successful, not only in avoiding the full brunt of police persecution, such as characterised the 'red scare' of 1919-20, but especially in gaining support from wealthy women seeking an object for their philanthropic efforts.

Similarly, although Ishimoto was introduced to birth control through socialist acquaintances and gave lectures to workers during the early 1920s [13], she was more of a humanist than a socialist. This helps to explain her lack of involvement in socialist birth control organizations in the Kansai region around Kyoto and Osaka led by Yamamoto Senji until his death in 1929, and the fact that she never contributed to the journal, Birth Limitation Review (Sanji seigen hyôron), which Yamamoto and other socialist birth control promoters published. Instead she wrote for more mainstream and popular women's magazines such as Shufu no tomo (The Housewife's Friend) and Fujin saron (Women's Salon). Upon returning from the USA in late 1920 and declaring commencement of a birth control movement, she had told newspaper reporters that her strategy would be to win over the educated classes first, because the women of Japan were still relatively unliberated compared to those in Western societies.[14] During the early 1930s the birth control association organized within the proletarian movement actually attacked her by name as a 'bourgeois' activist who falsely linked birth control with the solution of population problems rather than the emancipation of workers. Although elected as a Socialist Party representative to the Diet in 1946, she later said that she did this only for her second husband Katô's sake, so that after his death, she dropped her party affiliation and ran as an independent. [15]

Ishimoto, like Sanger, did not link birth control with a critique of the capitalist system, although she based her case for birth control on concern for improving living conditions of poor families. Equally important were her arguments that birth control would protect the health of mothers and children and give women control over their own childbearing. From a feminist grounding which became even stronger in the years after the Second World War, she argued that birth control was women's concern and would contribute to women achieving self-fulfillment. In a 1922 article in Shufu no tomo shortly before Sanger's first visit to Japan, Ishimoto concluded that Japan's population problem was a problem that could be resolved mainly by women.[16] In this way she was proclaiming a new sphere in public life where women could actively participate and play a leadership role. This represented an important attempt to bring about women's emancipation from the home at a time when Japanese women not

only remained disenfranchised but legislation prohibited them even from participating in political organisations and activities.[17]

At the same time it should be noted that the justification for a prominent women's role in birth control was its association with essentially and traditionally female concerns. Ishimoto's interests centred on women and she connected 'birth limitation' with 'women's liberation', but this did not necessarily require rejection of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideal. In fact, she argued that by reducing the number of children in each family, birth control would help women to fulfill their role as good mothers. Ishimoto advocated birth control as a means of strengthening family life, not undermining it. In this respect, her arguments did not contradict the Japanese Government's commitment to preserve the family system.

The linking of birth control to population problems, specifically Japan's overpopulation but also overpopulation throughout the world, widened the importance and worthiness of the cause beyond women's concerns. It also constitutes another common element in Ishimoto's and Sanger's views. Their view of birth control as an international problem is evident in Sanger's international organisational work throughout her career and in Ishimoto's post-1945 activities with the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning. In the 1922 article for Shufu no tomo, Ishimoto, like Sanger in her book Woman and the New Race, blamed overpopulation for territorial expansion and war, using examples from European history. She went so far as to claim that birth limitation was not only the best way, but the only way to solve Japan's population problem. By extension, achievement of birth control would lead to world peace, while at the same time improving the quality of the Japanese population.

The importance of eugenics ideas in the birth control movements led by Ishimoto and Sanger reflects the influence and respectability of eugenics throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. According to Ishimoto, children born to two healthy parents were better than those born to sick or weak ones. Furthermore, limiting the number of children would make available more time for mothers and more money for families to raise their children in a healthier and richer cultural environment. Since children represented the future generation of the country, this would strengthen Japan as a nation. Here the eugenicist argument combined with a nationalistic one.

The eugenics basis of the birth control movement before the Second World War did not disappear completely in the postwar period despite disavowal of the wartime regime and its population policies. It can still be discerned underlying the 1948 law, which permitted abortion to prevent hereditary diseases from being passed on to children as well as for other reasons such as protection of maternal health and prevention of economic distress for families. The law was notably entitled the Eugenics Protection Law (Yûsei Hogo Hô) until 1996. Although this may be seen as a revised

extension of the 1940 National Eugenics Law (Kokumin Yûsei Hô) which was heavily influenced by the Nazi sterilisation law of 1933, it is also evident from Ishimoto's arguments that eugenics ideas carried respectability even before the Germans carried them to a racialist extreme.

Another element in Ishimoto's argument was her promotion of birth control as a means to raising better children. This is significant as another indicator of Taishô social trends. Articles on the nurturing and education of children appeared frequently in Shufu no tomo, so that Ishimoto's argument would have held great appeal to its largely urban middle-class readers (as well as the many women of other classes who also read it). By the Taishô period the meritocratic principles established by the Meiji government had become internalised by the majority of Japanese, and education was seen as the means to a successful career.[18] Also appealing would have been the references to having more income to spend on a 'cultural lifestyle' (bunka seikatsu), a popular catchphrase in the 1920s which epitomized the new urban middle-class lifestyle of increased leisure activities and consumption that was becoming an ideal promoted by the mass media. The decade of the 1920s saw the fruits of a mass compulsory education system and the economic boom accompanying the First World War in the proliferation of department stores, restaurants and cafés, movie theatres showing Hollywood films and American-style revues in the cities which both created and catered to the modern, Western-style tastes of the expanding white collar class.[19] Women's magazines carried articles on Western-style clothing for children, recipes for Western dishes and the latest advice on household management and finances. This wave of Westernising may have been a peculiarly Japanese development, but the desire for rationalisation of the household and the laying of foundations for mass culture and consumerism replicated worldwide trends.

Although the emphasis on improved educational opportunities for children and lifestyle for the family distinguished Ishimoto's arguments from Sanger's, in the use of the media, organisational activities and structures, and the actual birth control methods that Ishimoto favoured, she followed the lead of her American teacher. Ishimoto never adopted civil disobedience as a tactic as Sanger had during the 1910s, but she was equally aware that bad publicity could be as effective as good publicity in promoting the birth control cause. There could be no other lesson than that to be learned from the sensation aroused by Sanger's visit to Japan in March 1922, which Ishimoto later likened to the impact of Commodore Perry's Black Ships in the 1850s. The furore began when Japanese consular authorities in San Francisco refused to grant Sanger a visa to enter Japan to conduct a lecture tour under the sponsorship of the liberal-left Kaizô.[20] According to her autobiography, Sanger was denied the visa on the grounds that both her subject matter and herself as an individual were regarded as undesirable.[21] The fact that birth control was considered a "dangerous thought" suggests

that it was being put in the same category as radical ideologies such as anarchism and communism by government officials.

The rejection of the visa, however, became but the first of a series of less than final decisions since, on the advice of a friendly Japanese official who happened to be at the consulate at the same time, Sanger boarded her ship as planned on the pretext of travelling to China. She hoped that on the way she might win support from Japanese diplomats returning on the same ship from the Washington Conference. These included future prime minister Katô Kômei as well as Ambassador to the USA Shidehara Kijûrô and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Hanihara Masanao. She successfully enlisted their help by arousing and utilising media publicity for her cause as well as displaying a feminine charm which was unexpected of a notorious radical.[22] From the time of the ship's stopover in Hawaii, Japanese reporters swarmed around her. Their newspapers in Japan were full of articles not only reporting the daily changing rumours regarding the Government's decision on her entry permit, but also discussing the pros and cons of birth control.

After arrival in port Sanger still had to wait for days before immigration officials finally allowed her to land; two of the returning Japanese diplomats intervened with their government on her behalf, but the American consul offered no support despite a request from Sanger. It then required further negotiations with Tokyo Metropolitan Police Bureau officials, who were also divided over the issue of birth control, to gain permission to lecture in public. Sanger and her Kaizô sponsors' threat of an appeal to the Diet may have been effective in finally obtaining it, though it was conditional on a promise that she would not speak on the subject of birth control.[23] During the next month Sanger spoke to approximately 500 public and private groups in the Tokyo and Yokohama area, including medical associations, a group of eminent men at the Peers' Club, business and industrial groups and numerous newspaper and magazine reporters as well as women's groups. Then in another case of about-face, police authorities first prohibited but later allowed her to conduct scheduled lectures in the Kyoto and Osaka area as well. Organisers got around the prohibition on public lecturing on birth control by declaring meetings 'private and by invitation only', a ruse that police officers apparently accepted.[24]

The boost that Sanger's visit gave to the infant birth control movement is understandable in the context of the relatively free and open environment for publications of these years, for while censorship was practised, it was not as stifling as it was to become during the mid- and late 1930s. Moreover, publicity in newspapers and magazines reached a wide audience by this period in Japanese history. Not only was readership large enough to support three national daily newspapers, but commercially oriented popular magazines, of which Shufu no tomo was but one of the more successful, had

begun to proliferate and compete fiercely with one another.[25] A controversial subject such as birth control, combined with a newsworthy foreigner with a personality such as Margaret Sanger's, was understandably seized upon to sell newspapers and magazines. As other evidence of the political fluidity of the time, it is notable that much of the news and editorial commentary was critical of the Government's refusal of a visa. Though angry at the Government's "rude" treatment of a "distinguished foreign guest", Ishimoto later concluded that "if the government had deliberately tried to focus interest on birth control, it could not have done a better job. ... Not all the comments were favourable – there was a lot of fierce criticism – but the main thing was to get birth control discussed as widely as possible".[26] How widely is suggested by Ishimoto's count of 81 of the 101 monthly magazines at the time which carried articles on birth control in March.[27] Indeed, Margaret Sanger must have become a household word as Ishimoto has claimed, for she was one of the few foreign women whose name was familiar to Japanese even in remote farm villages a decade later.[28] Articles on birth control continued to appear with regularity in mainstream publications, including the well-respected liberal journal Chûô kôron as well as Shufu no tomo, throughout the 1920s and first half of the 1930s.

For Ishimoto, Sanger provided not only the patina of a Western authority, but ongoing practical support and guidance. As mentioned earlier, Ishimoto did not work primarily through labour organisations and during the 1930s became estranged from those of the proletarian movement. During the early 1920s she relied on private funds for birth control work, since her husband was still actively supporting it at that time. Ishimoto also worked part-time as secretary for the head of the YWCA in Tokyo and then daringly opened up a yarn shop, daring because it was still uncommon and socially not quite acceptable for a woman of the upper classes to enter into business. Through her yarn shop she taught knitting classes, which she used to disseminate birth control information as well as to encourage women to undertake paid work outside the household.

As her husband became more conservative and lost his family's fortune through poor business dealings in Manchuria during the 1920s and early 1930s, Ishimoto turned increasingly to American birth control activists for both financial and educational support. Even during the 1920s, however, she had often received supplies from the USA. Estranged from her husband and in need of funds, Ishimoto embarked on a lecture tour of the USA in 1932. Sanger's lecture agent, William B. Feakins, helped to make the lecture bookings.[29] Then, feeling inadequate in terms of her knowledge, Ishimoto spent several months between 1933 and 1934 studying about birth control methods and the organisation of Sanger's Brooklyn clinic. On the suggestion of historian Mary Beard, she also wrote her autobiography in English, which appeared in 1935 and enjoyed considerable popularity especially on the West Coast. She then made a second lecture tour in the

USA, arranged by Sanger's staff, to promote the book in 1936. That same year Ishimoto received funds, again through Sanger's efforts, from an American woman birth control supporter to start up her own clinic in Tokyo. Needless to say, it was modelled on Sanger's New York clinic. It also led to Sanger's second visit to Japan in 1937, when she spoke to various groups, again amidst great media coverage, and helped to dedicate a new location for Ishimoto's clinic.[30]

Ishimoto's clinic, like Sanger's, gave information to clients on various birth control methods, including condoms, but recommended the Dutch cap (a springform pessary resembling the present day diaphragm) used with a spermicidal jelly as the best available method. Both Ishimoto and Sanger clearly preferred contraception to abortion as a method of birth control and always took pains to distinguish birth control from abortion, but in times when the number of illegal abortions increased greatly, such as the Depression and the late 1940s in Japan, Ishimoto did support efforts to legalise abortion rather than see a continuation of the often tragic consequences of 'backyard' abortions.[31] During the early 1930s efforts to repeal the 1880 law prohibiting abortion failed, foreshadowing the rising tide of pronatalist opposition to birth control that would eventually destroy the movement at the end of the decade.

The Return to Pronatalism

During the 1930s Margaret Sanger's grip on the leadership of the birth control movement in the USA weakened. However, this was a consequence of birth control's achievement of respectability and absorption into mainstream American society and politics through support from the medical profession and governmental agencies. This attainment of Sanger's goals ironically meant a proliferation of birth control associations and the rise of other individuals who rivalled Sanger for prominence in the field.

In contrast, the decade of the 1930s in Japan saw not only the weakening of the birth control movement from internal dissension, such as the division between socialist and non-socialist groups, but heightened criticism from external groups such as the medical profession and the coalescence of pronatalist sentiments with national foreign policies of war and imperialism. Criticism of the birth control movement from the medical profession paradoxically grew as the movement enjoyed increasing success with the Japanese public. Dr Ôta Tenrei, birth control advocate and inventor of an intra-uterine device, noted that popular attitudes had ceased to regard birth control as a crime by the late 1920s, a shift reflected by articles in the women's magazines. Articles by this time, in contrast to Ishimoto's in 1922, dealt with successful and unsuccessful experiences with birth control rather than with the question of the concept's acceptability.[32] Birth control

clinics began to multiply with this acceptance,[33] but this prompted doctors' criticism.

In 1930 Dr Honda Misao argued for government legislation to ensure that there was a medical specialist attached to each clinic, and that clinics be forbidden to promote birth control for social reasons, as opposed to medical ones. He also wrote an article enumerating the problems with various birth control methods that were being practised by people without medical advice or supervision. Ôta Tenrei acknowledged that there were in fact some questionable people running clinics at that time and recommending methods aimed at abortion rather than contraception, but attributed most doctors' criticism to their conservative social attitudes rather than to conclusions based on scientific evidence.[34]

This opposition to birth control by the medical profession parallels the history of the birth control movement in the USA and Britain.[35] However, whereas in the USA and Britain birth control won the support of the medical profession and government agencies during the 1930s, in Japan the decade witnessed not only intensified opposition from doctors, but also changed historical circumstances which galvanised pronatalist forces into action. Eugenicists led by Nagai Hisomu lobbied for a sterilisation law similar to that in Nazi Germany which would be coupled with pronatalist measures.[36]

Although proposals for a sterilisation law failed to gain approval until 1940, government officials' concerns about population problems were in the process of shifting in favour of pronatalism. Census reports of the early 1930s showed birth rates declining, and officials therefore worried that Japan was beginning to follow a trend earlier experienced by Western industrialised countries.[37] During the depression high unemployment had inclined some government officials in favour of birth control as a solution to labour problems, but as the economy gradually recovered, concern about unemployment declined. At the same time new concerns accompanying shifts in foreign policy favoured the development of a pronatalist population policy. The Manchurian Incident of 1931 led to the expansion of colonial territories with the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo, and increasingly aggressive activities in north-east China finally culminated in the so-called China Incident and full-blown war in 1937. Therefore, government officials looking at foreign developments in the mid-1930s became anxious to provide soldiers for imminent war and colonists for Japan's expanding empire.

The outbreak of war accelerated the move toward official pronatalist policies, reflected in the tightening of police measures against birth control leaders and culminating in new legislation. Ishimoto was arrested and detained for 2 weeks in December 1937 and forced to close her clinic the following month.[38] The police also arrested Ôta and eventually forced him to cease all birth control activities until after the war.[39] In 1940

government attitudes became official law with passage of the National Eugenics Law (Kokumin Yûsei Hô), followed the next year by an Outline for Establishment of a Population Policy (Jinkô Seisaku Kakuritsu Yôkô) issued by the Cabinet. Like the Nazi law, the National Eugenics Law promoted racial eugenics goals by providing for sterilisation of those with hereditary physical and mental diseases, but unlike the Nazi law, made this sterilisation voluntary rather than compulsory. The slogan 'Give birth and multiply' (ume yo, fuyase yo) epitomised the wide range of measures aimed at increasing the size of the Japanese population, beginning with a complete ban on all contraceptives. The pronatalist policy produced some beneficial results for ordinary Japanese, such as establishment of public health facilities for pregnant women and children and efforts to lower infant and child mortality rates, but it was primarily a political measure aimed at improving the physical condition of present and future subjects of the Japanese empire. Obviously, it destroyed the birth control movement until after the war.

The Triumph of Birth Control in the Postwar Period

In the disastrous living conditions of the early postwar years with repatriation of millions of soldiers and colonists from the old empire, the number of illegal abortions soared along with the birth rate, and the Government's and the medical profession's opposition to birth control disappeared. Prewar birth control pioneers such as Ishimoto, now Katô, reemerged to lead the movement to achievement of its goals.

Although disagreeing with the bill's emphasis on abortion rather than contraception, Katô supported the 1948 Eugenics Protection Law (Yûsei Hogo Hô) which legalised abortion to protect the health of mothers. Subsequent revisions permitted abortions for economic reasons. Concerned with the high abortion rate which followed passage of the law, the Government sponsored a programme promoting contraceptive methods through public health clinics and midwives in the 1950s. The number of abortions fell dramatically from the late 1950s onward with a reversal in the ratio between use of abortion and use of contraception for birth control from 7:3 in 1955 to 3:7 in 1965.[40] As in the USA, the mark of respectability and acceptance of birth control for all socio-economic classes, not only as a means to reduce the poverty of the lower classes, was reflected in the change in terminology from 'birth control' and 'birth limitation' to 'family planning' and 'planned parenthood'.

This was also the period when Margaret Sanger made her triumphal return to Japan. Her tour in 1952 was sponsored by the Mainichi newspaper, and in 1954 she was invited to speak to a Diet committee, the first foreigner to do so. The following year the International Planned Parenthood Federation held its conference in Tokyo, with both Sanger and Katô as key speakers.[41] Though too poor in health to accept, she was

invited to visit Japan one more time in 1965, that time to receive the Third Class Order of the Sacred Treasure from the Japanese Government for her contributions to birth control over more than 30 years. The Japanese Government was the only government ever to give her such recognition. Sanger was only the second foreign woman to receive such an honour. These postwar honours for Sanger resulted largely through the efforts and good offices of her Japanese protégée, who by this time was a member of the national Diet and a prominent leader in the women's movement in addition to her role in family planning. The personal and organisational links across cultures and national boundaries therefore continued during the postwar years, but this time in a political environment which fully supported them in contrast to the climate of ambivalent toleration and somewhat contradictory attitudes and measures taken by government officials and police during the interwar years.

As is evident from the examination of Ishimoto's statements and activities, however, much of the groundwork for acceptance of birth control had been prepared during the Taishô period. As in other societies in the world at the time, birth control was not a subject for polite conversation in Japan of the early 1920s. Moreover, it was not only socially taboo, but politically suspect because of its association with socialism and women's liberation. Ishimoto, like Sanger, had been drawn to the birth control cause by her sympathy for the plight of poor families and her desire to elevate the status of women. In these respects, she can be seen as a representative of the 'new woman' of Taishô Japan.

Nevertheless, despite her husband's socialist affiliations until the early 1920s and Ishimoto's own efforts to promote birth control as a means to women's liberation and improvement of workers' lives, in general she had advanced the idea and practice of birth control within the parameters of mainstream social and political discourse. These parameters remained relatively wide during the 1920s and only narrowed constrictively in the late 1930s. Relating birth control closely with daily lives irrespective of social class perhaps explains why birth control appealed to Japanese women more than the issue of suffrage in that period. As presented by Ishimoto, birth control would strengthen rather than undermine the family and motherhood, and women would be able to find self-fulfillment in spheres that were extensions of the officially sanctioned ideal. In addition, presenting birth control as a solution to a national problem such as overpopulation prevented discussion of the topic and activities of the movement from coming under the full force of police repression. By the late 1920s birth control ceased to be regarded as a 'dangerous thought' and even government bureaucrats offered it as one solution to the problems of a large population. Ishimoto's arguments therefore helped to make birth control compatible with mainstream attitudes and government policies. Consequently, when defeat ended Japan's imperialist ambitions, the small

family ideal had already been accepted by the majority of Japanese, and birth control could become fully part of both official social policy and actual practice.

In her pioneering role as a liberal feminist in Japan, Ishimoto had received inspiration and much practical support and guidance from her American mentor, Margaret Sanger. From a Japanese studies perspective, her use of the prestige of a prominent Westerner to promote birth control is significant in demonstrating the role of legitimation that Western models played in 1920s Japan. From the perspective of women's history, her relationship with Sanger illustrates the importance of personal networks across national boundaries in the spread of feminist ideas during the early twentieth century.

Acknowledgement

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Centre for Asian Studies Seminar, University of Adelaide, Australia on 15 September 1995. I would like to thank participants for their comments. I would also like to thank Carole Adams and F. Ben Tipton for reading drafts of this article and giving very helpful comments.

Notes

[1] In this article I have followed the Japanese custom of placing surname first. Ishimoto was the name she took from her first husband, Baron Ishimoto Keikichi. She became Katô Shizue in 1944 when she married her second husband, Katô Kanjû. In original English sources her given name is romanised as 'Shidzue', but I have utilised the more accepted orthography of 'Shizue' for Japanese sources.

[2] 'Taishô' refers to the reign name of the emperor.

[3] On the modern girl, see Miriam Silverberg (1991) The modern girl as militant, in Gail Bernstein (Ed.) Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945, pp. 239266 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).

[4] On ryôsai kenbo, see Sharon Sievers (1983) Flowers in Salt: the beginnings of feminist consciousness in Meiji Japan (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

[5] Marie Stopes came to overshadow Sanger in England, despite having embraced the birth control cause later than Sanger, but in 1920 Sanger stood out as the most prominent advocate in the USA.

[6] Margaret Sanger (1938) Margaret Sanger: an autobiography, pp. 2-3 (New York: W.W. Norton).

[7] Quoted in Malia Johnson (1987) Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement in Japan, 1921-1955, p. 12, Ed.D. dissertation: University of Hawaii.

[8] Ellen Chesler (1992) Woman of Valor, p. 478, n. 7 and n. 10 (New York: Simon & Schuster) .

[9] For further details see her autobiography. Shidzue Ishimoto (1935) Facing Two Ways (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, reprinted 1984, Stanford: Stanford University Press).

[10] Sievers, Flowers, pp. 173-174.

[11] For example, Asahi shinbun, October 5, 1920, p. 5.

[12] Chesler, Woman of Valor, p. 143.

[13] She met her second husband, labour organiser Katô Kanjû, when he arranged for her to speak to miners at Ashio copper mine in 1923.

[14] Asahi shinbun, October 5, 1920, p. 5.

[15] Katô Shizue (1986) Kaihô e no nagai tatakai [The Long Fight to Liberation], Sekai to jinkô, October, pp. 40-41.

[16] Ishimoto Shizue (1922) Sanji seigen no gôriteki hitsuyô [The Rational Necessity of Birth Limitation], Shufu no tomo, January 1.

[17] The prohibition on women's attendance at political meetings was not repealed until later that year. For a discussion of restrictions on women's political activity and the Meiji state's construction of gender roles, see Sharon Nolte & Sally Hastings, The Meiji state's policy toward women, in Gail Bernstein (Ed.) Recreating Japanese Women, pp. 151-174.

[18] On the new middle class, see Earl Kinmonth (1981) The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought (Berkeley: University of California Press); Minami Hiroshi (1987) Taishô bunka [Taishô Culture] (Tokyo: Keisô Shobô).

[19] See Edward Seidensticker (1991) Tokyo Rising (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[20] Others invited by Kaizô were Bertrand Russell, H. G. Wells and Albert Einstein. See Seki Chûka, Kobayashi Eizaburô, Matsuura Sôzô and Daigohô Susumu (Eds) (1977) Zasshi Kaizô no yonjûnen [Forty Years of the Magazine Kaizô] (Tokyo: Kôwadô).

[21] Margaret Sanger (1970 reprint edition) An Autobiography, p. 317 (Elmsford: Maxwell Reprint Co., originally 1938).

[22] Chesler, Woman of Valor, p. 246.

[23] Sanger, Autobiography, p. 325.

[24] Kato Shizue (1984) A Fight for Women's Happiness, p. 55 (Tokyo: Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning).

[25] For a history of journalism, see Kido Mataichi (1974) Gendai jaanarizumu [Modern Journalism], vol. 1, (Tokyo: Jiji Tsûshinsha).

[26] Kato, A Fight, p. 52.

[27] Ibid., p. 55; same figure in Margaret Sanger (1932) My Fight for Birth Control, p. 238 (London: Faber & Faber). Writing from Japan to a close friend and supporter, Sanger reported that "every paper in the country carried headlines

and front page stories and editorials on the subject [of birth control] for a full week". Letter quoted in Chesler, Woman of Valor, p. 246.

[28] Robert J. Smith & Ella Lury Wiswell (1982) The Women of Suye Mura, p. 90 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). To ordinary Japanese Sanger might have become a familiar name not only because of the wide media coverage of her visits, but also because a word play on her name was taken up for commercial purposes. In 1922 she was jokingly referred to as 'Sangai-san', sangai meaning 'destructive of production'. For years a diaphragm-and-jelly kit was sold under that label and makers of commercial abortifacients and suppositories also tried to capitalise on the identification. Margaret Sanger contraception kits were still being sold in Tokyo at the end of the 1950s. Chesler, Woman of Valor, pp. 365, 562 n.16.

[29] Chesler, Woman of Valor, p. 562 n. 17.

[30] Helen Hopper (1989) Ishimoto Shidzue and Margaret Sanger in Japan – August 1937, Phoebe, 1(1), February, pp. 35-50.

[31] Her explanation for supporting the movement to repeal the 1880 law prohibiting abortion. Sanji chôsetsu to datai kônin zadankai [Roundtable discussion of birth control and recognition of abortion], Fujin saron, September 1932, p. 92.

[32] For example, Ueda Hanako (1928) Saigo ni eranda hôhô de chôsetsu shita keiken [The experience of controlling births by the last chosen method], Shufu no tomo, 12, June, p. 115; Aoki Chôko (1928) Ikudo mo shippai shita keiken to chôsetsu no keiken [The experience of numerous failures and the experience of successful birth control], Shufu no tomo, 12, June, p. 118; Woman reporter (1927) Sanji chôsetsu ni seikô no fujin o tou [Speaking with a woman who was successful in birth control], Shufu no tomo, 11(5), May, p. 67.

[33] Tokyo had 60-70 birth control clinics by 1930, and there were others scattered throughout the country. Ryôichi Ishii (1937) Population Pressure and Economic Life in Japan, p. 239 (London: P. S. King & Son).

[34] Ôta Tenrei (1976) Nihon sanji chôsetsu hyakunenshi [A Hundred Year History of Birth Control in Japan], pp. 271, 277 (Tokyo: Shuppan Kagaku Sôgô Kenkyûkai).

[35] See Audrey Leathard (1980) The Fight for Family Planning (London: Macmillan Press); James Reed (1978) From Private Vice to Public Virtue: the birth control movement and American society since 1830 (New York: Basic Books); June Rose (1992) Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution (London: Faber & Faber).

[36] Kôseishô Gojûnenshi Henshû Iinkai (Ed.) (1988) Kôseishô gojûnenshi [A Fifty Year History of the Health and Welfare Ministry], p. 213 (Tokyo: Zaidan Hôjin Kôsei Mondai Kenkyûkai) .

[37] Irene Taeuber (1958) The Population of Japan, p. 59 (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[38] See her diary on her detention. Katô Shizue (1988) Saiai no hito Kanjû e [To Kanjû My Dearest] (Tokyo: Shinyôsha).

[39] Ôta, Sanji chôsetsu, p. 353.

[40] The fertility rate dropped by 50% between 1947 and 1957. Kato, A Fight, p. 106.

[41] Sanger's support for the inclusion of the Japanese Planned Parenthood Federation in the international body apparently overrode objections from Asian members who were still resentful of Japan's war role.

ELISE K. TIPTON is a senior lecturer in the School of Asian Studies at the University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales 2006, Australia. She is author of The Japanese Police State: the Tokkô in interwar Japan (Honolulu & Sydney: University of Hawaii Press and Allen & Unwin, 1991). She is editor of a collection of essays entitled Society and the State in Interwar Japan (London: Routledge, 1997) which includes an article on the birth control movement.