According to Dr. Shizuko Koyama, the word *ryousai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) in the title of this book refers, in a narrow sense, to the ideal of Japanese women’s education before World War II, and it was established through promulgation of the Ordinance on Girls’ High Schools in 1899. In other words, it is the paragon of an education that inseparably links to the idea of the Japanese National Polity and the ideology of the Family Nation, which is a characteristic of prewar Japan, and the ideas of Confucianism existed in its roots.

Against such conventional interpretations as mentioned above, the author proposes a paradigm shift of the ideal of *ryousai kenbo*. That is, the ideal of *ryousai kenbo* was an ideology that justified and rationalized the division of labor by gender in the manner of “men work while women do housework and raise children,” and this existed not only in prewar Japan, but also in postwar Japanese society. Furthermore, this was something that existed in modern western societies as well. When perceiving through such a perspective, the ideal of women’s education referred to as *ryousai kenbo* requires an even broader as well as elaborate interpretation. Firstly, the ideal of *ryousai kenbo* should be “examined as a way of thinking that is inseparable from such issues as the formation of the modern citizen-state and the formation of the ‘modern family’.” (p. 7.) Second, how the principle of *ryousai kenbo*, which was once established in the Meiji period, *transformed* along with changes in social conditions after the Meiji period must be pursued.

The book begins with the preface that shows the author’s approach to the issues regarding *ryousai kenbo*. Next, in Chapter One, the author explores the type of ideal image of women that was mentioned in the *Jokunsho* (instructional textbooks that inculcated moral codes for women) of the Edo period. This chapter also includes a fascinating section that theories of “kenbo” (wise mother) that appear in various educational textbooks (*Oraimono*) in the Meiji

* Soka University  
  e-mail: sakamoto@soka.ac.jp
Enlightenment period is discussed. Finally, the author brings her readers to the course of how the idea of *ryousai kenbo* was established.

The second chapter brilliantly shows how the concept of *ryousai kenbo*, which was formed through the processes mentioned above, was inseparable from the establishment of the Japanese principle of “home education”. “[T]he notable aspect of these discussions, [...] is the appearance of the mother as agent of education and the emphasis on the importance of this function”. (p. 60) Now, “home education” was incorporated as an essential public education policy for uniting the people through cultivating the citizens of the next generation.

The author opens Chapter Three by suggesting that World War I signaled the beginning of modern history, and that was also a turning point in women’s history. Debates regarding the liberation of women also occurred in Japan, as there were influences especially of the philosophy of women’s liberation from western countries. There appeared “the development of new theories of girls’ education that went beyond the limits of prior *ryosai kenbo*.” (p. 95.)

Chapter Four, the most illuminating one in the book, addresses in depth how theories of women’s education were discussed and in what direction the idea of *ryousai kenbo* was led to in popular magazines, such as the *Fujo-shinbun* (women’s newspaper) and the *Kyoiku-jiron* (public opinions regarding education) which had a wide and varied audience at the time. Chapter five reveals how the reality of the ideal of *ryousai kenbo* seen in moral textbooks was greatly changed in just 20 years.

In her conclusion, Dr. Koyama argues that women were first given an *indirect* role to raise the citizens of the next generation by supporting the activities of men while remaining inside the household. Then, after World War I, women were expected to use their abilities as well as energy for the state and society more *directly*. The task of the educational policy was “to develop the latent abilities of women and to cultivate women who were active and assertive, while preserving the older sexual division of labor.” (p. 182.)

For readers from English speaking regions, the ideal of *ryousai kenbo* displayed in this book may remind them of “The Cult of True Womanhood” presented by the historian Barbara Welter. This “True Womanhood” spoke of the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. These all became one and held all mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives living in the antebellum American society spellbound. “True Womanhood” was in reality a cult. As Patricia Albjerg Graham discussed regarding the argument of Welter, these four cardinal virtues, which may be referred to as “futoku” (“feminine virtues”) in the context of Japanese women’s history, did not survive after entering the 20th century, yet the cult of “True Womanhood” continued to live on through the transformation of its contents.

The Japanese edition of this book was published in 1991, and has already become an essential monograph in the field of women’s history or history of women’s education in Japan. There are several English books and articles that use this book as reference. Now, with the help of an extremely gifted translator, Dr. Stephen Filler, the English edition of the entire work, which *Choice* magazine extolled as “crystal-clear English,” has been published. I sincerely hope for the English edition to attract even more new readers.

Notes
