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Female Narratives of the Edo Period: A comparative case study of Tadano Makuzu, Ōgimachi Machiko, and Ema Saikō

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Introduction

During my college years, I have studied many diverse topics, but within those topics, I was always fascinated by the lives of Japanese women, both present and past. As a young student, I quickly realized that women's voices were often overlooked in our studies, which were primarily taught from a male perspective. This observation intrigued me, leading me to explore works by female authors such as Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon.

Initially, I wanted to write a thesis on the role of *The Tale of Genji* (源氏物語) within women's education in the Edo period. During my research on this topic, the work *In the Shelter of the Pine* (松影日記 *Matsukage nikki*), written by Ōgimachi Machiko 正親町町子 (1679? - 1724), caught my eye. I was impressed by the way Ōgimachi described her life and was left captivated by her story. I felt like I got a glimpse into her life and could imagine what it was like to live as a woman within the Edo period. I was also fascinated by her work and wanted to learn more about her and how she managed to write this memoir. How did she get the opportunity to write? What factors caused her to be able to write the memoir? And how was the memoir able to find its way into the present day? These questions eventually became the stepping stones for this thesis.

This thesis focuses on female writers of the Edo period (1603 - 1868), specifically Ōgimachi Machiko (1679? - 1724), Tadano Makuzu (只野 真葛, 1763 - 1825) and Ema Saikō (江馬 細香, 1787 - 1861). They led different lives, but what they have in common is that all three focused on writing at some point in their lives. I wanted to explore how they came to write and what obstacles they encountered in their writing. Answering these questions can tell us about the position of female writers in this period, and even women in general. By studying their lives, we can argue that their achievements as artist were quite unique, given the limited

availability of literary education at that time, as well as the social position and imposed expectations that women of similar backgrounds needed to live by.

During my thesis, I will answer the following question:

How were Tadano Makuzu, Ōgimachi Machiko, and Ema Saikō able to write their works, and what does this reveal about the position of women during the Edo period?

To start off this thesis, Chapter 1 will provide a look into the lives of women in the Edo period, with a primary focus on women's education in Edo Japan. To focus on women's education here is a deliberate decision: the accessibility to education and the contents of an education can tell us substantial things when it comes to how women were viewed in society as a whole. It highlights about the norms and values they had to live by, and what they were expected to (or not to) do to live meaningful lives. The moral guides that were popular in women's education, portray women as submissive characters: a woman always must follow instructions of male figures in her life. The image pictured of women in Edo Japan was one of submissiveness and duty: a woman must keep quiet, obey her parents, husband or children, and do as she is told.

Chapter 2 will be focused on the question why these three women have been chosen as a case study. What makes it so that these lives in particular are chosen? The chapter will also focus on the source material that I have used and describe how the sources are implemented in this thesis. The chapter will discuss the fact that these women come from similar backgrounds, which makes them comparable to one another.

In chapter 3, the three cases will be treated separately, but they will each follow a similar pattern. Each paragraph will start with a short introduction to the person, by discussing their family and educational opportunities as a child, then followed by a discussion of how each

person started out the path of their journey as a writer, and the opportunities and hurdles that came with it. Specific attention will be given by significant people in their lives who helped them along the way. Each paragraph concludes by listing the specific factors that contributed positively and negatively to their position as a writer in the public space. The chapter will conclude with a paragraph combining the three cases together, answering the question how the women were able to write their work and what challenges they faced.

The cases are then combined in Chapter 4. This chapter focuses on what these three cases can tell us about the uniqueness of their achievements within a socio-historic context. After highlighting the parallels and differences that can be found across the cases, it will discuss what the lives of Ōgimachi, Tadano and Saikō tell us about the position of women in Edo Japan. The lives of the three writers confirms the idea that the chance to get educated depended significantly on one's family. Their lives also show that receiving support from male peers, adherence to socio-norms and values when it comes to display of femininity are important factors which indicate opportunities within their careers.

Chapter 5 will provide a summary and conclusion of these research findings, followed by a discussion of the limitations and the overall usefulness of the research. The primary limitation is that the research is based on only three case studies, which may not be extensive. However, despite this limitation, I believe the research provides a valuable general overview of the factors influencing the opportunities available to women during the Edo period. The idea that women should be submissive and not make themselves heard much is also reflected in women's lives, but there are also ways in which women do get to show their work to an audience: by displaying femininity in their work. Not doing so has a negative impact on their ability to publish work.

Chapter 1: Educational Norms for Women in Edo Japan

To understand the position of women in the Edo period, and to discover how Tadano, Ōgimachi and Ema could focus on writing at some point in their lives, it is a necessity to know how women were educated in the Edo period. Therefore, this chapter will provide a general outline of women's accessibility to education and the contents of their education. It is also important to take note of its social and moral context in Edo period society.

1.1 Society during the Edo period

When we look at how education was organized in the Edo period, we need to look at how society was organized as a whole. The Edo period spans over 250 years, starting in 1603 and ending with the inauguration of emperor Meiji in 1868. The administrative and military power was in the hands of the shogunate, the governmental structure that controlled all of the military and governmental functions. These functions were held by shogunate family members or allies, who all had residencies around Edo (modern day Tokyo). The shogunate owned around fifteen percent of the cultivated land. Ten per cent was owned by Edo retainers who served the shogun directly.¹ Around three-quarters of the land was divided into hereditary fiefs. The number of fiefs varied over time, but there were around 240 to 280 fiefs.²

The Edo society was modeled according to the feudal system: the shogunate primarily received income through the tax paid over the land by farmers. The Edo shogunate owned around 10 percent of the area. Generally, the Edo society was divided in classes that were ranked according to their economic merit. There were the samurai, followed by the farmers,

¹ R.P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 7.

² Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, 11.

merchants and artisans. In an ideal picture, these classes would be strictly divided. However, people were able to mobilize between them.³

During the Edo period in Japan, Neo-Confucianism became an increasingly important influence in society. Thus, understanding Neo-Confucianism can give us better insights into the social norms and values during this time. Neo-Confucianism encouraged all people to have the ability to read and write. This had a great impact on women's education and eventually led to many women becoming teachers in local schools in the late Edo period.⁴

Many East Asian lives, of both men and women, were shaped by the emergence of Neo-Confucianism. Within Neo-Confucianism, gender roles play an important part. It is believed that men and women are born with different human qualities. However, they do have a similar purpose of contributing to a peaceful, self-governing society. Men are yang (brightness) while women are yin (darkness). Men are Heaven and women are Earth. Thus, meaning men and women are different, but, as Neo-Confucianism implies, both men and women depend on one another. When it comes to social roles, men are expected to take up space within the public sphere, whereas women are expected to manage the household where they nurture children.⁵

Understanding the social norms and values of Neo-Confucianism is essential in learning about the position of women during the Edo period. Overall, according to Neo-Confucianism the "Way of women" is to be in service to men, a notion reinforced in many moral guides throughout the Edo period. However, Doi states that it is crucial to know the difference between the concept of women serving men and the idea of women blindly following men. While these

³ Ibid., 11.

⁴ Risako Doi, "Beyond 'The Greater Learning for Women': *Instructional Texts (Joshiyō ōrai) and Norms for Women in Early Modern Japan*," (MA thesis, University of Colorado, 2011), 12-14.

⁵ Ibid.

two ideas may overlap, they are fundamentally different. Serving men, in this context, implies that women are expected to discipline themselves and cultivate wisdom, enabling them to be not just supportive, but sometimes even competent partners.

In the early years of Edo, women were valued for their passivity and their ability to maintain harmony through prayer. As time progressed, however, they were increasingly praised for demonstrating female virtues, such as gentleness and filial piety, through their own actions and skills. This shift meant that women were expected to be more proactive. Various acts that were thought to be unconventional for women in the early years of the Edo period, such as learning to write and read the Chinese language, working in the public eye and the use of violence as a form of self-defense, were justified in the later years of the Edo period, as these actions were in line with accepted values like chastity, filial piety, and moral development. By conforming to those social norms, some women had the opportunity to be publicly active outside their homes, which then ironically led to them deviating from the Neo-Confucianist social norms of the Edo period.⁶

1.2 Organization of Education in the Edo period

At the start of the Edo period, the Japanese society was hardly a literate one. To be literate was not something that was evident, and Edo society was not dependent on the written word.⁷ Education was not something that was regulated by the shogunate, the central government. Fief schools were formed depending on the region, meaning that schools were mostly formed in cities rather than on the countryside. There was also no rigid curriculum. During the Edo period, education was not accessible to everyone. Whether somebody received an education or not

⁶ Risako Doi, “*Beyond ‘The Greater Learning for Women,’*” 12-14.

⁷ Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, 3.

depended on their family's wealth, income, and social status. In addition to this, one's gender also played a role.

The uneven distribution of education was largely due to the absence of a national education system, and the shogunate did not prioritize or invest in education outside of its own institutions. Additionally, the shogunate did not pay attention to elementary education, and there were no insights into the contents of the study material which was used throughout Japan in its different schools. It was only after the Edo period when initiatives in the field of education and its contents were centralized by the Meiji government.⁸

The majority of the population received education at local schools, also known as terakoya 寺子屋. The textbooks which were used in the terakoya were commercially produced, whereas the local schools in rural or poor areas relied on manuscript copies of printed textbooks. Domain schools and some private academies published their own textbooks for its advanced students.⁹ According to Dore (2011), women's education in the samurai class during the Edo period was carried on inside the home.¹⁰ There were no fief schools for samurai women: it was however, practice for commoner girls to go to a fief school with boys.¹¹

Tocco mentions the increase in possibilities for women in education throughout the Edo period, as well as the increase of institutional development and rising levels of education. Seeking better education for their daughters, as well as their sons, became a more common

⁸ Kornicki, Peter, "From Liuyu Yanyi to Rikuyu Engi Taii: Turning a Vernacular Chinese Text into a Moral Textbook in Edo-Period Japan," in *Listen, Copy, Read*, edited by Matthias Hayek and Annick Horiuchi (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 205.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, 65.

¹¹ Ibid.

practice for parents, leading to increasing enrollments in local and private schools (*shijuku*).¹² At the end of the Edo period, books were in great demand, and the society saw a huge transformation from a highly non-literate society to a fairly literate one.¹³ It also became more common for women to read and write in Chinese characters. Whereas this might come across as a subtle change within the literacy culture, it increased social opportunities for women.¹⁴ A large group of women across all classes knew how to read and write by the end of the Edo period. In addition to this, women were also seen in the role as teachers at schools: this shows that more women knew how to read and write.¹⁵

1.3 Women's moral education

By looking at what was written in women's textbooks, an idea can be formed about what women were taught and what their position was in society. Textbooks focused on what women should do to get into heaven and be guaranteed of a prosperous next life: it tells them how they can be good women. This kind of education is called *dōtoku* 道德, 'moral education'.

In what Dore tells us about women's education, it becomes clear that the question what women should be educated on, is not met with a straightforward answer. There was discussion on what women should learn. One factor that was discussed was the idea of women learning Chinese. *Daimyō* such as Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759 - 1829) thought it wise that

¹² Martha C. Tocco, "Norms and Texts for Women's Education in Tokugawa Japan," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Ko, Dorothy, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R Piggott 194–218. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), p. 194.

¹³ Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, 1-3.

¹⁴ Doi, "Beyond "The Great Learning for Women" 62-3.

¹⁵ Tocco, "Norms and Texts for Women's Education in Tokugawa Japan," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Ko, Dorothy, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R Piggott, 194.

women learned at least the Four Books, but other scholars found that unnecessary.¹⁶ In any case, women should not show to others what they know.¹⁷

Women's educational books were focused on moral education: how to be a good woman, wife, and mother. The most prominent textbook was the *Onna daigaku* 女大学, ('*Great Learning for Women*'). The author of the work is unknown. The *Onna daigaku* sums up a list of qualities a woman should have, the bottom line being that women should be submissive and obedient to her parents, her husband, and if she was widowed, her children.¹⁸ In the Edo period, being a good woman meant to live in accordance with Confucian norms and values. Listening to one's elders was seen as one of the basics of moral education for both women and men, as part of the principle of filial piety. For women, this meant that as long as they were unmarried, they should listen to their parents. If they married, women should listen to their husbands and parents-in-law and obey them.¹⁹

According to Oka, Edo women should follow the five virtues of Confucianism. These are: benevolence, relationship, (societal) etiquette, a fair sense of judgement, and reliability. In practice, this means that women should have a gracious character, should not lie, should not be egocentric and should be jealous – in other words, women should remain quiet and obedient.²⁰ This attitude also is reflected by the *sanjū*, the three principles a woman should follow according to Buddhism. If a woman is unmarried, she must listen to her father. If a woman is married, she must listen to her husband, and if her husband dies, a woman must listen to her sons.

¹⁶ Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, 65.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Yasuko Oka, "*Joshikyōiku ni kansuru hitotsu no kōsatsu (Dai nana hō): Edo jidai ni okeru joshikyōiku*," Hiroshima bunka joshi tanki daigaku, 38.

²⁰ Ibid., 39.

Then, women's teachings focused on the *schichi-kyo*. These are seven reasons for husbands to divorce their spouse, rooted in Confucianism. Reasons include being disrespectful to in-laws, having an 'evil disease'; having dead children; being obscene or lewd; and not looking your husband in the eye.²¹ These values show that women as opposed to men needed to be submissive to her husband and family. As Dore quotes: "*If you grow up to be a selfish girl; if you do not learn to obey; if you do not take care of your appearance; if you cannot cook or sew [...] you will be divorced.*"²²

During the course of their education and throughout their lives, educated Edo women from both the samurai and the commoner class often read the same moral guides and textbooks. According to Risako Doi, education for women during the Edo period was supposed to be for learning behaviors and skills which were appropriate to their social roles as wives, mothers and daughters. Doi discusses Kaibara Ekiken's *Joshi o oshiyuru hō* to be revolutionary in the mid-eighteenth century, because it encouraged women to not only learn math, but also learn *kanji* which was originally only to be studied by men. However, this was not because Ekiken wanted women to be liberated or independent, but because he perceived those skills to be increasingly essential for women to manage their household in an effective and efficient way.²³

The things discussed above paint a grim picture on moral education. And indeed, much research thought it to be evidence of misogyny in the Edo period. But we must not focus on that alone: moral textbooks had other functions. According to Martha C. Tocco, moral guides were a means by which people would learn basic literacy, so they were actually of utmost importance. And women were not the only ones who would be encouraged to show moral

²¹ Ibid, 42.

²² Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, 68.

²³ Doi, "*Beyond 'The Greater Learning for Women,'*" 68.

behavior: it was similar for men. Men were taught to treat their superiors, teachers and parents with respect.²⁴

1.4 Conclusion

Women's education was not accessible to everyone in Japan during the Edo period. Whether or not someone had access to education largely depended on someone's social class, region and on someone's gender. Not all boys enjoyed an education, and even a smaller group of girls had the opportunity to enjoy a form of education.

What we do see is that education for women was centered around moral education, based on Neo-Confucianist principles, in which women were made to act in service of men. However, throughout the Edo period, women received more opportunities in terms of education. Taking this in mind, it would be interesting to see how Ema, Tadano and Ōgimachi lived their lives as female writers, and what this tells us about the position of women in the Edo period.

²⁴ Tocco, "Norms and Texts for Women's Education in Tokugawa Japan," 200.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative research design to explore the lives and literary contributions of three prominent female Japanese writers during the Edo period: Tadano Makuzu, Ōgimachi Machiko, and Ema Saikō. These are cases of women who all became writers at some point during their lives but lived during different periods within the Edo period. I found this important because it allows me to observe trends across the Edo period. All three women belonged to the upper classes in some way, making them comparable and enabling us to examine factors beyond social class. I selected Tadano, Ōgimachi, and Ema because there were multiple literary sources available in English about these three women. My research will involve a thorough examination of existing literature to outline and detail the cases of these women. Following this, I will conduct a comparative study to analyze the similarities and differences among their experiences. The aim of this approach is to uncover the factors that enabled these women to focus on writing at specific points in their lives and to understand what their experiences reveal about the position of women in Japan during the Edo period. Through this research, I hope to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities they faced. I am looking forward to learning more about their lives and uncover more about what it meant to be a woman with literary ambitions during this historical era.

Chapter 3: Describing the Case Studies

3.1 Tadano Makuzu (1763 - 1825)

One of the women that became known to the scholarly public only recently, was Tadano Makuzu (1763 - 1825). Her life is inspiring yet tragic – throughout her life Makuzu came to the resolution of publishing her work, but did not succeed in that mission, partly because she was limited by her gender. Taking Tadano’s life as a case study, we can explore how she got the opportunity to take the profession of a writer, and to develop her own literary style. We will see that her marriage and move away from home was very hard on Tadano, but how it ironically granted her the time and space to write. On the other hand, her dream of getting her work published proved challenging and was met with hardship, and in the end her dream was not fulfilled within her lifetime. In her efforts to become known for her work, her gender limited her chances of taking up space in the public realm.

To start our case study, it is useful to zoom in on Tadano’s heritage and how this contributed to developing her interests as a poet and writer. Then, we will take a look into her move from Edo to Sendai, starting off her literary endeavors. During that time, her family’s already ill fortune starts to decline, making Tadano feel angry, but at the same time resolved to save her family’s fortune - or what was left of it. With her family in ruins, she creates a new identity in the role of a daughter: a daughter determined to continue her father’s legacy by publishing her work.

This will lead us to examine the efforts she made to get her work published, and how they were ultimately in vain.

Tadano's Household and Education

Tadano was born into the Kudō family, a family of physicians, as Kudō Ayako 工藤あやこ. Her father Kudō Heisuke 工藤平助 was a renowned physician serving the Date 伊達 domain in Edo, and he had a plan for his daughter. Tadano was expected to bring social capital to the household. Thus, from an early age, her life was shaped by her father's social and political position and the household she grew up in. Little is known about her education, other than that she learned calligraphy and poetry. At the age of nine, she was taught poetry by an outside teacher. Her teacher taught Makuzu to write in the style of the Heian classics. Her teacher was also related to scholars who introduced the literary trend called 'nativist learning' (国学 *kokugaku*). Nativist learning focused on getting Japanese philosophy, culture and thought away from the then-dominant Chinese influences.²⁵

Makuzu was not allowed to study Chinese, unlike her brother. It is important to note that Tadano's prospects of learning Chinese could have been different if she was born into a different family of similar status in a different time period: as we will see, Ema Saikō was born into a family of physicians and she did get the opportunity to study Chinese.²⁶ To gain experience in a samurai household, her mother thinks it best that Makuzu goes into service before being married off. But Makuzu stayed in service longer than expected.

²⁵ Bettina Gramlich-Oka, "Tadano Makuzu and Her Hitori Kangae," in *Monumenta Nipponica* 56, no. 1 (2001), 3.

²⁶ Bettina Gramlich-Oka, *Thinking Like a Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 69.

Years in service

When she was sixteen years old (1778), she entered service and served Princess Akiko, who was the daughter of their lord. Makuzu served Princess Akiko for ten years, after which she returned home. Not much is known about her time there: she did not write about her life there, possibly to respect the privacy of the household she served in.²⁷ What we do know, however, is that her family's fortune takes a turn for the worse. In 1786, the Kudō house burned down completely. It was to be reconstructed, but the money for reconstruction was all wasted by the contractor. And so, the family was forced to move to a cabin. While there, Makuzu's brother - the apparent heir - got sick while in his twenties and died shortly after.²⁸

So, when Makuzu returned home, a lot had changed. The heir apparent was dead, their house burned down, and Heisuke was in financial distress. And so, it was decided that Makuzu was to be married off, at age 27. In her later written work *Mukashibanashi* (昔話) 'Stories From The Past', she recounts that she was very distressed to marry her prospective husband. Makuzu was so unhappy that she asked that the marriage be cancelled, and so it did. Heisuke soon found a new match for his daughter.²⁹

Tadano as an Author

Makuzu was to be married a second time, and her marriage proved to be crucial for her opportunities to write. The new match that Heisuke found for Tadano was Tadano Iga Tsurayoshi 只野伊賀行義. Tadano Iga was a guard to the Date lord in Edo, and sometimes in Sendai. Tadano Iga had been actively looking for a wife since his first wife died the year before.

²⁷ Bettina Gramlich-Oka, *Thinking Like a Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 70-72.

²⁸ Gramlich-Oka, *Thinking Like a Man*, 90-91.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

In Makuzu, he found a suitable candidate to take care of his affairs at home - in Sendai – while he was in Edo. The couple were married in 1797, when Makuzu was thirty-five years old. Having never left Edo before, she took off to Sendai: a place she did not know and where she would have to make a new home for herself.³⁰

In Sendai, Makuzu was left to her own devices for most of the time, since her husband remained in Edo and only came back a couple of times per year. So, Makuzu is left all alone, in this big, empty house, with no responsibilities to bear children or to take care of the house. As a result, she has the opportunity to devote herself to writing. It is during this time of solitude that she starts to produce literary output. In her diary *Michinoku nikki* {みちのく日記}, she writes poems that convey the emotions of loneliness and longing:

陸奥にあふくま河は 有りながら渡りも会へず年ぞ暮れぬる

<i>Michinoku ni</i>	While the river
<i>Afukumagawa wa</i>	Abukumagawa
<i>Arinagara</i>	flows into Michinoku [Sendai],
<i>watarimo aezu</i>	the year comes to an end
<i>toshi zo kurenuru</i>	without a reunion.

Cited from: Gramlich-Oka, Bettina, Thinking like a man: Tadano Makuzu (1763-1825), (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 103.

We see that in this time, creating a new life in Sendai and coping with her family's demise was difficult for Makuzu. And yet, the solitude and restrictions did give her an opportunity to engage in writing in different styles and find her own literary voice. The dramatic events that took place concerning her family's fortune, served as an impetus for Makuzu to use

³⁰ Ibid., 98.

her writing skill as an outlet, be it as a eulogy, a poem or biography. Without the physical space that she got in Sendai, it would have been impossible for Makuzu to grow as a writer.

Tadano and her Mission: Publishing her Work

The continuing decline of her family's fortune causes Tadano to make it her mission to become an author. When her father and brother Motosuke died shortly after one another, the Kudō household had no heir left within the direct family ties. From that moment on, Tadano sees it as her purpose to continue her father's legacy. She wants to spread his ideas and restoring her family's name. With that determination in mind, she began to write *Hitori kangae* 独考 ('Solitary Thoughts') in 1817, at the age of fifty-five. When it was finished, Tadano was determined to make *Hitori kangae* known to the world. But being in Sendai, she had no connections or sponsors that could help her. In getting her work published, she sent her work to the famous author Takizawa Bakin 滝沢馬琴 (1767 - 1848). Takizawa Bakin was one of the most prominent authors of his time. Tadano and Takizawa had never met before and were complete strangers to one another, yet Tadano was determined to send her manuscript to him. An explanation as to why she chose Takizawa as her supporter can be found in her correspondence with him. She writes him that she had been approached by the Buddhist deity Fudō and interpreted this as a sign to get in touch. By approaching Takizawa, Tadano chose a person who knew shogunal relations in Edo and had connections in the publishing world. She must have thought that she had nothing to lose.

As we will see, their literary exchange did not start off well. Tadano sent her manuscript of *Hitori kangae* to Takizawa through her sister Taeko in 1819. From Takizawa's accounts, we know that Taeko arrived at his house to give him the manuscript. Takizawa wanted to get out of this obligation, lying to Taeko that he was a servant of the house, and saying the master was

busy. He reluctantly accepts and reads Tadano's plea. When looking at the manuscript and the letter, Takizawa notes that Tadano addresses him in an inappropriate and arrogant way – she is addressing him like they are intimates. In addition to being rude to him, she is very secretive about who she is. She leaves no personal details, only her name – Takizawa has no idea who she is. More importantly, it is inappropriate for a man and a woman to directly exchange letters without a go-between. Takizawa writes short a reply to Tadano that night, conveying his anger, hoping that she would not reach out to him again. This reaction shows that Takizawa and Tadano had to follow gender-specific etiquette and that Takizawa, to save his image, had to correct it when that etiquette was not lived by. In this exchange, it is clear that Tadano is being restricted by her gender in getting to her goal: she would need a go-between to establish contact with Takizawa, simply because she is a woman.³¹

Contrary to what Takizawa had hoped, their relationship did not end. Tadano wrote back to him that she was grateful for his reply. Tadano describes to Takizawa the misfortune of her family, unable to produce an heir, and the gruesome fact that she cannot take on the role of heir because of her gender. She cannot do anything about it and is powerless. She says to Takizawa: “If only these sisters might have a male heir to praise the name and raise the family, my tears pour down in empathy because there is nothing that can be done”.³²

This example shows that Tadano is aware that her gender limits her ambitions, as she reveals to Takizawa how she was depressed over being a woman, culminating eventually in her death wish. All things considered, she wants to make this clear to Takizawa: I have no other choice, and it took me years and years to get to this point. I am different from others, this is my

³¹ Ibid., 143 – 146.

³² Ibid., 148.

destiny and duty, and you can help me fulfill it. In her plea, she tries to justify her position as a writer, by turning to her role as a good daughter who takes on the burden of restoring her family's honor. Takizawa is touched by Tadano's story and invites Tadano to write back to him. Tadano has gained Takizawa's support, and she invites him to edit her manuscript once again. She writes:

*"Truly this is the work of a woman who does not know the outside world. Ashamed of my imprudence, I had these thoughts on my own. In Hitori kangae, which I previously sent to you, too, please erase by any means the places where I seem to touch upon public authority."*³³

Instead of editing *Hitori kangae* for her, Takizawa gives her advice about the publishing world itself. After reading *Hitori kangae*, Takizawa reacts to it, saying that many of the sections are taboo and there are parts in it which cannot be published due to its contents, discouraging Tadano to have it published. He thinks it best if she entrusts the work to a small circle of friends, saying maybe a few of them are willing to make a copy. But that will not guarantee the work's eternity. He also suggests that he can quote parts of *Hitori kangae* in his own work and have her credited for it.³⁴ This is remarkable, as it shows that Tadano, in her role as an unknown author (and a woman), would not be able to publish the contents under her own name, as that would be taboo, however Takizawa could take the liberty to quote her work and that would do no harm.

Takizawa stays reluctant to provide commentary for *Hitori kangae*, but eventually sets himself to the task. He compiles a critique called *Dokkōron* ('*Discourse on Solitary Thoughts*'). Consisting of more pages than *Hitori kangae* itself, it contains meticulously written criticism

³³ Ibid., 155.

³⁴ Ibid., 156.

of the work. He praises Tadano as a writer, but he is shocked that she touched upon political topics, like domestic and foreign relations. Her unconventional writing style bothers him, and in his criticism, he notes how her ideas lack a conventional education, and by that he means a Chinese-centered education. *Dokkōron* is full of references to the Chinese classics, strengthening his criticism. When he wrote *Dokkōron*, a note was with it, asking Tadano to not write back. Although their correspondence did not end then and there, it was the beginning of the end (p 163). Why their relationship ended was unclear, but Gramlich-Oka suggests that Tadano realized that Takizawa would not help her publicize her work.

Gramlich-Oka notes how, in Tadano's letters to Takizawa, being a woman allows Tadano to disregard scholarly conventions, so she can say things directly. Tadano uses her womanhood as a shield, but how at the same time, Tadano also shows her fear of not being taken seriously by her gender.³⁵ That feeling proved right, because Takizawa dismissed many of her thoughts as invalid or taboo. The fact that a woman could engage in discussing political matters and wished to let her ideas known to the world, shocked Takizawa greatly. He made that statement clear when editing *Hitori kangae* for Tadano.

We do not know precisely how it impacted Tadano, but it must have impacted her greatly. In the years that followed, Tadano did not create any new works and she did no further attempts to publicize her work. This implies that she may have given up on her dream of continuing her father's legacy and become known as an author. Tadano died in 1825, her works unpublished. It did only come into publication long after her death.

³⁵ Ibid., 155.

Conclusion

When we look at Tadano's life, we see that during her lifetime, her development as a writer was made possible by the educational opportunities she received, as well as the space she received while being wife to Tadano Iga. It is because of her household and education that she could read and write, as well as find her love for poetry. Her time as a lady in the Tadano household gave her the opportunity to closely observe her new surroundings, and write about her experiences being in Sendai, even if they were not positive. Under the influence of her father, she grew up in a household where a lot of different people. She took her father as an example and looked up to him. While being in Sendai, she watched her family's status get demolished, and through her writing she reinvented herself, as an author and as a daughter, determined to continue her father's legacy.

But even if she knew she had it in her to pass on the words of her father, Tadano was well-aware that taking up a place in the public space as a woman came with its challenges. When she writes to the prominent author Takizawa in the hope of getting her work published, he initially rejects her because she does not follow the proper correspondence etiquette between a man and a woman. In her many attempts to let him revise *Hitori kangae*, Takizawa holds it off, nevertheless advising her to not attempt to try and publish it right away, but to keep the work known within his network of trustees first. He even opts to quote her work into his own. All in all, we have seen that it baffled Takizawa that a woman could write about political matters in the way Tadano did. And although Tadano had hoped she could have claimed her spot in the public arena with the help of Takizawa, Tadano is left disappointed, and makes no further efforts to make her work known. Being a woman, Tadano was simply not allowed to carry her thoughts to the public – at least not by Takizawa. Maybe, if she had confided in one of her close friends, or her father's protégé, she would have witnessed the work be published in her lifetime, but that remains to be seen.

3.2 Ōgimachi Machiko (1677-79? -1724)

We will now turn to look at a woman who created one of the most famous works in the Edo period, and her name is Ōgimachi Machiko. She wrote the famous chronicle *In the Shelter of the Pine* (松影日記 *Matsukage nikki*). The work was translated into English by G.G. Rowley in 2021, with the aim of making the work accessible to a bigger audience.³⁶ The work describes the fortunes of Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu 柳沢義康 and his family. Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu (1658 - 1714) was a chief adjutant to the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646 - 1709). Ōgimachi Machiko was one of Yoshiyasu's concubines and served him until his death. She created this work as a laureate to Yoshiyasu, his house and his legacy. The work circulated widely within the Yanagisawa household and eventually got printed in 1885.

Looking at how Ōgimachi has written the work proves a challenge, as basic facts about her life are scarce. The Introduction in Rowley's translation provides an outline to her life, but further secondary sources provided in English are scarce. Nevertheless, based on the research Rowley has done we can deduct what kind of education she has had, and what made her able to write this chronicle. Being born into an aristocratic family, Ōgimachi had a chance to familiarize herself with poetry and writing. Her heritage also made her a suitable candidate to become a concubine in the Yanagisawa household. And although the main character of the work is Yoshiyasu, Ōgimachi does have some space to show her own literary voice.

³⁶ Machiko Ōgimachi, *In the Shelter of the Pine: A Memoir of Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu and Tokugawa Japan*, translated by G. G. Rowley. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021, XI - XII.

Ōgimachi's Family

Ōgimachi Machiko was born in an aristocratic family residing in Kyoto. Her family had ties to medieval scholars. The question who Ōgimachi's father is, is disputed, but Rowley argues that her father is Ōgimachi Kinmichi. He was a confidant of Emperor Reigen (1654 – 1732). Kinmichi acquired a position in the imperial bureaucracy, making him come to Edo for his job sometimes.³⁷

Ōgimachi's mother also closely connected to Emperor Reigen. When she was young, she served as a gentlewoman to his consort, Takatsuka Fusako. At one point, Fusako recommended Tokiwai to her elder sister, who became the wife of a shogun and needed gentlewomen to run the Inner Chambers of the castle. This was a step up for Ōgimachi's mother. However, she could only take this promotion as a single woman. She divorced Kinmichi and leave her daughters behind to take up this position. As a result, Ōgimachi was brought up by her paternal grandfather.³⁸

Ōgimachi's Education

We do not know what kind of education Ōgimachi received, but we do know that she is a noblewoman, an aristocrat. In the case of Ōgimachi, she most likely would have received a form of education suitable for a noblewoman. Hints as to what education Ōgimachi received can also be found by looking at her work. *Matsukage nikki* is heavily inspired by the Heian classic *The Tale of Genji*. Both works have a narrator that directly communicates to the reader, and the narrators are “carefully crafted characters”.³⁹ These examples show that she must have

³⁷ Ōgimachi, “*In the Shelter of the Pine*”, XVIII.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XXIII.

been familiar with Heian literary classics, and we can be sure that she must have had knowledge of reading, writing and poetry.

Ōgimachi's Route to Authorship

How did Ōgimachi come into the position to write the work? Ōgimachi and her sister were asked by their mother to follow her to the Yanagisawa house. The proposal was met with initial reluctance, but eventually, they both agreed to go. To be eligible to be Yanagisawa's concubine, Ōgimachi needed to be of samurai heritage, and so she was adopted into a samurai family household. This procedure was not uncommon in Edo-period Japan.⁴⁰

As a concubine, it was Ōgimachi's duty to provide sons for Yoshiyasu. He did already have two sons, but spares were always welcome. She bore two sons for him. It is important to know that Ōgimachi's and Yoshiyasu's relationship was also a political one: it strengthened the ties between the aristocratic families in Kyoto and the shogun's associates, which would turn out to be beneficial for Yanagisawa's job.

Marrying Ōgimachi was very useful for Yanagisawa, and it was not only because of her family relationships. Ōgimachi was well-educated and was able to devote her time to making *In the Shelter of the Pine*. It is a work written with Yanagisawa as the main character. She depicts him as a hero, putting him on a pedestal like Genji himself. However, although her husband is the main character, she has the space and opportunity to let her own voice come through in her work. She also uses the work to make comparisons to other classic stories, the main one being *The Tale of Genji*. In doing so, she also clearly shows her knowledge and appreciation for that particular work. In her work in Yanagisawa always the main character, but

⁴⁰ Ibid, XIV.

she herself as the narrator also has a role. She takes the reader into the life of the family but also compares herself several times to Murasaki Shikibu, the writer of *The Tale of Genji*.

Conclusion

Although little is known about Ōgimachi's life, we can conclude that Machiko was able to write her work because she had the opportunity to become familiar with literature, reading and writing in her education. When we look at the *Matsukage nikki*, it becomes clear that Ōgimachi had the *Genji* in mind when creating it, so she must have known the *Genji* through and through. She saw the *Genji* as an example of a heroic story, and she wanted to put the fact that her mother was already employed by the family no doubt led her to be in the position where she was given the freedom to write this work.

3.3: Ema Saikō (1787 - 1841)

The most famous female literati painter is Ema Saikō. She specialized in ink wash paintings of bamboo, and also wrote *kanshi* 漢詩, Chinese poetry. What is unique about Ema Saikō is that throughout her life, she was able to make a living with her art as a woman in a male industry.⁴¹ By reconstructing Ema Saikō's life, we can surely see that there have been pivotal factors throughout her life that benefitted to her success. Patricia Fister shows that Saikō had the privilege to receive the support of her family, specifically her father, as well as other male figures. Her father gave his daughter the opportunity to receive a rich education and made arrangements for his daughter so that she could devote her life purely to her art. In becoming

⁴¹ Patricia Fister, "Female Bunjin: The Life of Poet-Painter Ema Saikō, in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 109.

an artist, she was supported by male teachers, and some would become lifelong supporters of her work.⁴²

Saikō's family and education

Saikō was born in the town of Ōgaki in the Mino province. In the *daimyō*, there was a lively environment for the learning of Chinese studies and where there were many scholars and artists. As for her family, she was born into a family of physicians. Her father had the means to support her in getting an education. Because of the support of her father, she was able to learn Chinese – this is quite remarkable, as Chinese was a skill that was almost exclusively taught to men and boys. She was also taught calligraphy and painting. By studying her artwork, we can also deduct things about her education: Matthew Mewhinney illustrates that Saikō must have had knowledge of the *Genji monogatari*, as some of her work takes inspiration from the *Genji*.

In 1834, Ema Saikō composed a *kanshi* style poem titled “Reading *the Tale of Genji*”. In this poem, she recalls iconic scenes from the *Genji monogatari* and describes in the poem how she as a reader experiences the events that happen to the characters in that scene. In 2021, Matthew Mewhinney explored these poems and argues that Ema Saikō sees reading the *Genji* as an emotional experience: an experience where someone can feel the emotions of the characters and judge the character's decisions. Reading the *Genji* calls for someone's empathy and moral compass.⁴³

The fact that Ema Saikō describes such rich emotional experiences in her poem, also tells us about Ema Saikō's own education, as well as her (emotional) intelligence. I argue that,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Matthew Mewhinney, “The Reader Is Hooked: Ema Saikō's Poems on *The Tale of Genji*.” *Early Modern Women* 17, no. 2 (2023): 243–73.

by analyzing the poems on the *Genji monogatari*, it is evident that Ema Saikō understood the *Genji* not just superficially, but that she had a deep and emotionally rich understanding of the *Genji*. As we will see, the poem she has written shows that she was not merely able to read the words, but she was able to understand and *experience* the *Genji* by going along with its protagonists and events. By describing not only scenes from the *Genji* itself, but assuming the position of the reader, and telling us the emotions the speaker has felt when reading the scenes, she takes us on a journey of experiencing the *Genji* through her own eyes and moral compass.

See, for example, the stanza on *The Mischievous Cat*:

*She cherishes graceful beauty, and should stay away from shame;
What carelessness, how could she expose those fine brows?
A single blossom in silhouette near the kickball court,
And a mischievous cat pulls open the brocaded blinds⁴⁴*

In this poem, Ema Saikō lets us feel embarrassment for a princess who is exposed to the male gaze. She describes the pivotal scene in the *Genji* where the third princess, Onna San-nomiya, is accidentally exposed to an audience. She is covered by blinds, but when a “mischievous cat” gets entangled in the blinds and the princess is revealed to the audience. The poem brings the scene to mind instantly, by mentioning the incident like a game of kickball and the cat getting entangled in the blinds.⁴⁵ She challenges the reader of the poem to recall the scene and feel the emotions that the character lives through in that moment: embarrassment, shame, humiliation.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 260.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Mewhinney's observation tells us something about how the *Genji* was read in the Edo period. In addition, it also tells us a great deal about how Ema Saikō herself was not merely reading the *Genji*, but had a deep level of understanding for it. She has not only read the *Genji*, but she has also *experienced* the *Genji*. And above all, she found a marvelous way in applying the artwork into her own art form. It is clear that in life, Saikō was privileged to enjoy an education consisting of knowing the Heian classics, while also being granted the unique opportunity as a woman to learn Chinese and nurture her talents to keep developing her knowledge on these fields of interest.

Her father saw that she was talented, and at the age of thirteen, he arranged a poetry teacher for his daughter. She became a painting student of the Kyoto monk Gyōkurin. Fister notes how Saikō's relationship with her father is unusually close: a possible explanation is that Saikō's mother and other sibling died when she was three.⁴⁶ Her father not only supported her career, but he also made an artist life possible for his daughter. He made sure that his daughter would not have to worry about money. When his son-in-law took over the household after her father died, Saikō was still getting an allowance from him to finance her studies. This also meant that Saikō would not have to get married for the sake of financial security, as she would continue to be financially supported by her own family.⁴⁷

We see that her father played a key role in Ema's foundations as an artist. His status, social standing - and with that, his financial well-being, were vital to the opportunities that he gave his daughter later in life. What is remarkable is that he always supported his daughter in this ambition, which is something that was not expected. Most women were expected to marry

⁴⁶ Fister, "Female Bunjin: The Life of Poet-Painter Ema Saikō," 113.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

to mobilize or reinforce the family's status and well-being, but as there was no need for Saikō to do that, she could focus on her own ambitions as an artist. As we will see, it was not only her father who supported her in her path as an artist, but she was able to surround herself with supportive people in her career, too.

The Influence of Rai San'yō

A person who greatly helped Saikō in her development as an artist, is the artist Rai San'yō. Saikō met him when he was visiting her father. He was a well-known poet and was charmed by her literary talents. He was keen on becoming her poetry teacher. Saikō's memoirs hint at the idea that she wanted to get married to Rai at some point, however, this proved impossible as Rai already had a wife. She remained a close student of Rai throughout her life.

As Rai lived in Kyoto and she remained in Ōgaki, Ema Saikō mostly corresponded with him about her work. She would send him her work, and he would correct it with red ink and provide her with tips. But Saikō was able to go on trips for her artistry, and so she visited Kyoto fairly regularly. Her mentorship under Rai provided her with a great learning environment to nourish her artistry. Rai was a well-known poet, and he was part of a wider network of artists. Through Rai, Ema Saikō was able to meet other artists and study together with them if she was in Kyoto. They would do studies of Kyoto landscapes and discuss their art together.

With the help of Rai, Ema was able to develop her own artistic voice within a predominantly male art form. Nagase (2014) has shown that through their correspondence, Ema was able to create a "female voice", that was in line with the ideas of Rai. Rai encouraged Ema

to describe true events and genuine emotion, often commenting positively on her feminine style.⁴⁸

Not only was her connection to Rai great for her network, Fister shows that, in the correspondence Rai had with his friends, he actively promoted her work, and so it can be said that Rai recognized Ema's talents, and that he genuinely supported her in her craft.

Conclusion

With the above look at of Ema Saikō's life, we can see that there are factors in her life that paved the way for Ema to be an artist. In her ambitions, she received great support from her father, who gave her an education that was unconventional, as Ema was granted the opportunity to learn Chinese and develop her artistic skills. She was able to study under teachers and built up a rich network of people who supported her in her endeavors. She was also in a position where she could remain unmarried: she received stipends from her brother-in-law, even after her father's death. She did not need a man for social security.

The meeting of Rai San'yō can also not go unnamed. They worked together frequently, and he remained one of her mentors until his death. He promoted her work wherever he could, and Ema Saikō was able to visit her peers from time to time in Kyoto.

It is important to realize that her opportunities are connected to her household and the social standing of her family. That made sure that her family had the resources to provide Ema Saikō with an education. The support she received from her family and her mentors proved to be indispensable elements to her success as an artist.

⁴⁸ Nagase, Mari. "Truly, They Are a Lady's Words': Ema Saikō and the Construction of an Authentic Voice in Late Edo Period Kanshi." *Japanese Language and Literature* 48, no. 2 (2014): 297.

Chapter 4: Ōgimachi, Tadano and Ema and the position of women during the Edo period

In the previous chapter it has become clear that these three women had several opportunities to become an artist, and we have seen that these women needed to overcome obstacles in their lives to be able to write their work. This chapter zooms out from the case studies and will answer the question: what can the lives of these women tell us about the position of women in the Edo period? This rather general question will be subdivided into several themes. What do these cases tell us about the accessibility of education during the Edo period? And what does these cases tell us about the position of Japanese women during the Edo-period?

4.1 Access to Education

It is evident that Tadano, Ōgimachi, and Ema all received some form of education throughout their lives. Each of these women possessed knowledge in reading, writing, and poetry. For instance, Tadano began learning poetry at the young age of nine, and Ema had the privilege of having a poetry teacher when she was thirteen. Although the specifics of Ōgimachi's education remain unknown, her memoir provides hints that she was well-versed in Japanese classics, including *The Tale of Genji* and *the Tale of Ise*. Furthermore, Ema's work reveals her familiarity with the *Genji*, as she not only references it but also offers a female perspective on it. Similarly, Tadano held great admiration for the *Genji* as mentioned in her book.

It is interesting to see that Ema, who lived later than both Ōgimachi and Tadano, got the opportunity to learn Chinese. This stands in contrast to Tadano, whose father prohibited her from learning the Chinese language. According to Fister (2019) it became increasingly accessible for women to participate in artistic groups in the later Edo period. This suggests that there was a positive trend throughout the Edo period concerning the opportunities available to

women, also when it comes to education. However, it is important to highlight that Ema grew up in a region renowned for its intellectual environment and the study of the Chinese language, which undoubtedly played a significant role in her educational opportunities. There appears to be a positive trend in the accessibility of education for women over the course of the Edo period, given that Ema was born later in the Edo period than Ōgimachi and Tadano.

4.2 Importance of Family

The fact that Tadano, Ōgimachi, and Ema were able to enjoy education and develop themselves is especially due to the opportunities provided by their immediate environment. Tadano grew up in an intellectually stimulating environment. Her father was a physician with a love for poetry and Japanese classic works. He did not permit Tadano to learn Chinese, believing it to be unnecessary as she should focus on reading and learning about classical Japanese works instead. When she did not agree with the arranged marriage to her first husband, her wishes were respected by her family. This was uncommon at the time, as women were typically expected to marry to elevate the family's status. Nonetheless, she entered into another marriage with a man who was often away from home, giving her plenty of time and space to develop herself rather than conforming to familial obligations such as being a good wife and mother. During the Edo-period, it was emphasized in educational books how to become a good mother or wife.

Ōgimachi was sent by her mother to the Yanagisawa family as a concubine. Her marriage to Yanagisawa was politically motivated, where she joined the Yanagisawa household which was above her status. In order to qualify as a concubine, Ōgimachi was adopted by a samurai family. During her time as the concubine of her lord, she was given the space and opportunity by the house to write. In fact, the family was pleased about her writing, as Ōgimachi wrote a memoir of Yanagisawa, ensuring his memory would endure after his death. In her work,

she elevated him by comparing him to the hero Genji from *The Tale of Genji*. Although her work remained within the Yanagisawa household, historians eventually discovered it, leading to its wider recognition.

Among the three writers, Ema received the most support from her family. This support extended to the point where her family arranged that she did not need to marry for financial reasons, which was truly exceptional for that time. Ema's father recognized her talent for painting at a young age and encouraged her to develop her skills by connecting her to a teacher. She was also given the opportunity to learn Chinese and develop her literary talents. Her father did not urge her to marry and provided her with the means to be financially independent, and not rely on a marriage partner for her livelihood. The example of Ema being supported by her father supports the argument that your family affects your access to educations and opportunities in learning, as made by Tocco in Chapter 1.

Within families, it was customary for women to marry to elevate the family's status. Hence, families typically concerned themselves with potential partners for their daughters or women within the family. This is evident in the cases of Ōgimachi and Tadano, with the latter being allowed to cancel an arranged marriage, which was quite exceptional for women in the Edo-period. Ōgimachi joined a family that elevated her status by bearing children for her lord within the Yanagisawa family. Therefore, Ema's exemption from marriage can be seen as exceptional. Overall, it can be concluded that these three women were encouraged by their immediate families to develop themselves as writers due to their life circumstances.

Thus, family played a significant role in the development of women during the Edo period. All three women received education thanks to their families, and Ema was even further encouraged to pursue art. Each of these women found themselves in family situations where they had the time and opportunity to engage in literature and writing, a privilege not afforded

to every woman in that period, as not all women had the chance to learn to read and write. Without their familial backing, the accomplishments of Tadano, Ōgimachi and Ema in literature might not have been possible.

4.3 Support from pioneers in the field

Studying the cases of Tadano, Ōgimachi and Ema, we can see that whether or not a woman could claim a space as an artist in the public space, is influenced by the amount of support they receive by men in their direct environment. Both Tadano and Ema sought support from men in the field where they wished to gain recognition. For Ema, this support proved beneficial, whereas for Tadano, it was less successful. Tadano had no network in her new surroundings, which made her feel isolated. She wrote extensively, aiming to publish her book to restore her family's honor. She wrote to Takizawa, one of the most famous writers of that time. After a rocky start in their acquaintance, Takizawa read and commented on Tadano's work. Ultimately, he told her he could not publish it. After "*Hitori Kangae*," Tadano did not write any more works. It is unclear whether this was due to Takizawa's criticism and lack of support, but she did not manage to become a professional author during her lifetime.

In contrast, Ema had significant support from Rai, her poetry teacher. He embraced her style of writing and saw potential in her, even allowing her to write in Chinese. Rai's openness ensured that Ema had the opportunity to find her own voice in poetry and learn from masters in the field.

The people surrounding a woman and their reactions to her work greatly influenced her ability to develop as an author in the Edo period. The lives of Tadano and Ema illustrate that their opportunities were closely tied to the support they received from men in their environment, both within and outside their families.

4.4 Display of femininity

When we examine the reason Tadano was rejected by a potential mentor, we see that it relates to the ideas about femininity and the dynamics between men and women in the Edo period. Takizawa disapproved of her initial approach because she contacted him directly without a go-between, which was uncommon when meeting someone new. After many rejections, Takizawa eventually read her work and was shocked by its content. He believed it was inappropriate for a woman to engage in political commentary, both foreign and domestic, especially concerning ideals about masculinity. This was not appreciated. There were specific rules, norms, and values in the Edo period that did not equate women to men. This indicates that women were not allowed to write about everything or express their opinions on all topics.

This contrast is also evident when comparing Tadano's situation to Ema's. Ema was encouraged in her development as a writer and was stimulated by a male teacher to find her own style where her feminine background was emphasized and valued.

In the Edo period, there were ways as a woman to present work to an audience, by highlighting femininity within the social norms and values. However, this had to align with the accepted standards, as shown by Takizawa's rejection of Tadano's work. Notably, Ema became a celebrated writer with published work during her lifetime, while Tadano never saw her work published. Overall, the cases of Tadano and Ema show that cultural and societal beliefs on womanhood heavily influenced the opportunities available to women during the Edo-period. The norms and values did not only impact the topics which were acceptable for women to address, but also how their work was received and valued by their male peers.

4.5 Position of women in Edo Japan

In certain areas, women had fewer opportunities than men during the Edo period, but there were also norms that allowed for some flexibility, enabling women to develop as writers depending on their environment, education, and the support from pioneers, as well as their adherence to artistic norms and values when it comes to the display of femininity. The cases illustrate that there were exceptions regarding the role of women in the Edo period, making their achievements quite unique for women during this time. Additionally, there was a development toward greater progressiveness in the late Edo period, which possibly offered more opportunities for women. The cases show that some women could pursue personal development and intellectual activities. This highlights a tension between societal norms and individual aspirations.

5. Conclusion and limitations

5.1 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have asked myself the question:

How were Tadano Makuzu, Ōgimachi Machiko, and Ema Saikō able to write their works, and what does this reveal about the position of women during the Edo period?

The lives of Tadano, Ōgimachi, and Ema reveal significant insights into how women were able to write during the Edo period. Each of these women managed to produce literary work despite various obstacles, and their experiences shed light on the complex interplay between education, family support, societal norms, and individual ambitions.

All three women are samurai and received some form of education. Their access to education was shaped by their families and the broader societal context, with Ema benefiting from more progressive educational opportunities compared to Tadano and Ōgimachi. Family support was crucial in enabling these women to retrieve an education. Tadano's intellectual environment was influenced by her father's restrictions, while Ōgimachi's writing was facilitated by her position as a concubine, though her work initially remained private. Ema's exceptional support from her family allowed her to develop her artistic talents and gain recognition within her lifetime, as she was one of the most popular writers during this period.

The level of support from male figures within the writing field also played a significant role. Tadano faced rejection from Takizawa due to societal expectations whereas Ema's poetry teacher, Rai, supported her development and embraced her unique style which expressed femininity in a way which was accepted by the societal norms in the Edo-period.

Overall, the cases illustrate that while societal norms in the Edo period constrained women's literary opportunities, there were exceptions influenced by individual circumstances

and more progressive views during the late Edo period. The literary opportunities for female writers depend on the support they receive from their families and male peers, whether they are given the time and space to write within their marriage and the way femininity is displayed throughout their work.

The case studies show us that the norms active in society as described in Chapter 1, are not as static in real life, in certain conditions.

5.2 Limitations of the research

The research and the conclusions drawn from it have certain limitations. As discussed in chapter 2, a plausible to choose these cases in particular, is because there were a wide range of secondary sources available in the English language. The source selection would be different if I would have had the resources to dive into primary resources written in Japanese. Primary resources could provide additional depth and analysis of the works written by the women I have researched in this thesis. And an obvious limitation to this research's case studies they may be too few a number to see patterns over time. Findings from these three case studies might not be generalized to broader populations. The unique context and conditions of the three cases may not apply to others, especially given their similar background as samurai women. However, I am convinced that my conclusions are valuable, as I have shown that there are visible similarities and differences between the cases which align with the available literature on women in the Edo period.

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