


Feminism as a trigger for change in the dynamics of danjyo kankei and the unmarried trend in Japan

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Article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-10-06 Revised: 2024-12-04 Published: 2024-12-31	The patriarchal culture in Japanese society can be observed from its smallest and most basic unit, the family, where all decisions are made by men as heads of the household and must be obeyed, making women's actions dependent on men. Although the trend of remaining unmarried has mainly highlighted women, many Japanese men also follow this pattern. This study aims to analyze the introduction of feminism, its influence, and the impact of the unmarried trend on Japanese society. The research employs a qualitative approach, collecting primary data from official Japanese government websites and secondary data from academic literature. Thematic analysis is applied to identify patterns and relationships, while triangulation and peer review ensure validity and reliability, providing a comprehensive understanding of feminism's influence on social dynamics and marriage trends in Japan. The study shows that the second wave of feminism in Japan successfully challenged patriarchal norms and promoted gender equality. Women, particularly middle-class mothers, gained the freedom to choose their life paths and develop themselves beyond traditional roles (ryosai kenbo). This shift also influenced young people's perceptions of marriage and transformed the Danjyo Kankei relationship into a more equal one, empowering women. The study contributes to understanding gender dynamics in Japan by demonstrating how the second wave of feminism changed the Danjyo Kankei relationship and traditional female roles. The findings expand academic insights into gender equality, women's empowerment, and the impact of social movements on cultural norms and young people's attitudes toward marriage.
Keywords: Japan, Danjyo Kankei, Feminism, Unmarried.	

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To cite this article (APA Style):

Nisrina, A. D., Devi, R. S., Surayya, D. P., Tias, R. N., Turnip, G. E., & Prakoso, S. G. (2023). Feminism as a trigger for change in the dynamics of danjyo kankei and the unmarried trend in Japan. *An-Nisa Journal of Gender Studies*, 17(2), 99–116. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v17i2.306>

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INTRODUCTION

Before the rise of feminism worldwide, patriarchal norms were deeply embedded in many societies, including Japan. Crabtree & Muroga (2021) argue that one of the most prominent expressions of patriarchy in Japan is the Danjyo Kankei system, which emphasizes men's dominant roles in economic, social, and political life. According to Hamasaki et al. (2023), this system established sharply defined roles for men and women within the family the smallest social unit where men acted as heads of households and primary decision-makers, while women's duties largely depended on their husbands' authority. Similarly, Anisa and Erna Ikawati (2021) as well as Anisah Hasan and Irwan (2015) explain that historically women were educated primarily to fulfill domestic responsibilities, such as caring for husbands and raising children, thereby confining them to the private sphere. Nugroho et al. (2022) add that Confucian principles further reinforced these cultural norms, solidifying women's subordinate position within both family and community structures. Collectively, these perspectives highlight how cultural and educational practices maintained a rigid patriarchal system one that later became the target of feminist critique.

The patriarchal system in Japan placed significant pressure on women, creating social constraints that prompted resistance and a desire to participate more actively in society. Lukyantseva (2023) and Fukuda et al. (2020) argue that feminism gradually reached Japan and became visible after World War II, challenging longstanding gender inequalities. Before this period, women's rights were severely limited. Harisuddin (2015) and the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (1947) note that the 1946 Japanese constitution granted civil and political rights to women, taking effect in 1947. The Labor Standards Act of 1947, according to the International Labor Organization (1947) and Sakina & A. (2017), prohibited discrimination against female workers, particularly in wages, establishing a legal foundation for employment equality. Bullock et al. (2018), Jones et al. (2020), and Martin (2021) explain that in response to the 1975 First World Conference on Women, the Japanese Diet ratified the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985 to promote women's workplace equality. Mutiah (2019) argues that constructivist feminism reshapes social roles from domestic to public spheres. Japanese women began balancing household duties with participation in education, law, human rights, and politics (Khuseini, 2018; Luthfiyah, 2015), though persistent domestic expectations continue to challenge full gender equality (Harun AR, 2015; Sidani, 2005).

Despite the progress achieved through the feminist movement in Japan, significant gaps remain in understanding the complex relationship between cultural norms, gender roles, and emerging social trends. While previous studies have documented legal reforms, such as the 1946 constitution, the Labor Standards Act, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, as well as women's increasing participation in education and the workforce, limited research has examined how these changes have influenced contemporary social behaviors, particularly the trend of non-marriage among Japanese women. Furthermore, few studies have analyzed the dynamic interplay between feminist advocacy, government responses, and shifting perceptions of marriage and career within both private and public spheres. This study addresses these gaps by exploring how the feminist movement has reshaped Danjyo Kankei, challenged patriarchal norms, and contributed to new social choices for women, offering a more integrated understanding of cultural, legal, and societal transformations in modern Japan.

This study analyzes the influence of the feminist movement on the changing cultural dynamics of Danjyo Kankei in Japan and explores the trend of non-marriage among Japanese women as a result. It examines how post-World War II feminism challenged patriarchal norms and reshaped traditional gender roles in both domestic and public spheres. The study also considers the Japanese government's response, particularly under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and its impact on marriage and women's career choices. Theoretically, it contributes to understanding

how feminist advocacy transformed social expectations and promoted women's independence. Practically, the research informs policymakers, educators, activists, and social organizations about evolving gender norms, supporting strategies to enhance gender equality and empower women. It also provides insights into the intersection of cultural norms, feminist movements, and contemporary societal trends, particularly regarding women's roles, marriage decisions, and participation in public life in Japan.

Preliminary findings indicate that the feminist movement in Japan has significantly reshaped the cultural dynamics of *Danryo Kankei*, challenging entrenched patriarchal norms and expanding women's roles within both the family and public spheres. These shifts have influenced social attitudes, including a growing acceptance of non-marriage among Japanese women, and have prompted government policies that support gender equality and women's workforce participation. Women's ability to balance domestic responsibilities with careers and education reflects broader societal changes initiated by feminist advocacy, signaling a gradual but meaningful transformation in gender relations. Based on these observations, this study seeks to answer the following questions: How has the feminist movement influenced the transformation of *Danryo Kankei*? How has it affected women's decisions regarding marriage and career? How has the Japanese government, particularly under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, responded to these changes, and what impacts have these responses had on gender roles and societal expectations in contemporary Japan?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is widely regarded as effective for exploring complex social phenomena. Busetto et al. (2020) argue that qualitative methods provide descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behaviors, allowing researchers to understand participants within their natural contexts. Bengtsson (2016) emphasizes that such methods enable a holistic focus on individuals and their social settings, offering nuanced insights into human experiences that cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone. Bazen et al. (2021) further explain that qualitative research interprets lived experiences, behaviors, and perceptions, presenting them in rich, natural language to reflect authentic real-life conditions. Collectively, these perspectives highlight that qualitative methods are particularly valuable for studies examining social dynamics, cultural practices, and personal experiences, allowing researchers to construct meaningful interpretations that integrate context, behavior, and perception.

In this study, data sources are categorized into primary and secondary sources, reflecting established qualitative research practices. Ajayi (2023) emphasizes that primary data provide direct, original insights crucial for understanding specific phenomena, while secondary data offer contextual and comparative perspectives. Accordingly, primary data were collected from official Japanese government websites, including annual reports on declining marriage rates and relevant documents from authorized organizations, providing authoritative and up-to-date information. Secondary data were drawn from literature studies, such as scholarly journals, articles, and reports that examine the unmarried trend in Japan, enabling triangulation and enhancing data reliability (Wickham, 2019). Together, these sources allow a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural dynamics influencing the unmarried trend, ensuring the research captures both empirical evidence and broader theoretical insights.

Data collection in this study involves multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and reliability. Ewuzie et al. (2021) argue that document review, observation of publicly available statistical reports, and analysis of scholarly literature are essential for capturing both empirical evidence and contextual understanding of social phenomena. Applying these methods allows

researchers to examine historical and societal factors that shape the dynamics of Danjyo Kankei and the unmarried trend in Japan. For data analysis, a thematic approach is employed, which, according to Naeem et al. (2023), is effective for identifying patterns, trends, and relationships within qualitative data. This approach enables the study to interpret the influence of feminism on social structures and individual behaviors while systematically organizing insights to reveal the complex interplay between cultural norms, gender dynamics, and emerging social trends.

To ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative findings, this study applies triangulation, which Donkoh and Mensah (2023) describe as a method for cross-verifying information from multiple sources to reduce bias and enhance credibility. By comparing data from government reports, academic publications, and statistical datasets, researchers can identify consistent patterns and discrepancies, thereby strengthening the robustness of the analysis. Furthermore, peer review of interpretations provides an additional layer of scrutiny, allowing alternative perspectives to challenge and refine conclusions. Continuous evaluation of source credibility, including assessing the authority, relevance, and timeliness of each source, ensures that the study's findings are both trustworthy and well-founded, supporting valid insights into the influence of feminism on social trends.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Result

Dynamics of the unmarried phenomenon in Japan

The unmarried trend in Japan has increasingly become an option for many young people, affecting life patterns and societal dynamics, particularly marriage (Smock & Schwartz, 2020; Abera et al., 2020; Sassler & Lichter, 2020). Statistics from the Statistics Bureau of Japan and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2022) show that 31.8% of men and 23.7% of women aged 15-24 remain unmarried, with higher rates among those aged 25-34: 69.3% of men and 54% of women in the 25-30 range, and 42.9% of men and 26.6% of women in the 30-34 range. Regional data indicate that Miyazaki Prefecture has the highest unmarried men at 61.2%, while Fukushima Prefecture has 45.9% unmarried women. The declining marriage rate is linked to increasing average ages at first marriage. In 2021, grooms averaged 31 years and brides 29.5 years (Statistics Bureau, 2023), rising to 31.1 and 29.7 years in 2022 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2023a). These trends indicate that more people delay marriage into their 30s.

Figure 1

Average Age at First Marriage

Mean Age of First Marriage		
Year	Grooms	Brides
1950	25.9	23.0
1955	26.6	23.8
1960	27.2	24.4
1965	27.2	24.5
1970	26.9	24.2
1975	27.0	24.7
1980	27.8	25.2
1985	28.2	25.5
1990	28.4	25.9
1995	28.5	26.3
2000	28.8	27.0
2005	29.8	28.0
2010	30.5	28.8
2015	31.1	29.4
2020	31.0	29.4
2021	31.0	29.5

Note: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

The average age of first marriage in Japan has increasingly shifted toward 30 years and above, indicating that many individuals delay marriage or do not prioritize it in their lives (Wibowo et al., 2021). This delay suggests that those who remain unmarried at this age may gradually lose the desire to marry even in later life (Carr & Utz, 2020). Consequently, this trend contributes to Japan's aging population structure, creating a constrictive or top-heavy population pyramid characterized by a higher proportion of older adults compared to younger generations (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024). The imbalance between the shrinking youth population and the growing elderly population raises concerns regarding labor force sustainability, social support systems, and demographic stability (Fang et al., 2020). Statistical data on never-married individuals aged 50 and above illustrate this phenomenon, showing a significant increase in lifelong singlehood among older adults. These demographic shifts reflect broader social, cultural, and economic changes influencing marriage behavior and population dynamics in contemporary Japan.

Trends in non-marriage and its impact on population dynamics

The following findings examine current trends and social implications of the unmarried phenomenon in Japan. By analyzing marriage rates, age at first marriage, and the proportion of individuals who have never married, this study highlights how changing social norms, economic pressures, and evolving gender roles shape personal decisions regarding marriage. The findings further explore the broader consequences for population structure, labor force participation, domestic consumption, and societal organization, offering insight into how demographic shifts and cultural transformations intersect. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing marriage patterns and their implications for contemporary Japanese society.

Figure 2

Proportion who never married at exactly 50 years of age

Proportion of Never Married at Exact Age 50 by Sex ¹⁾		
	(%)	
Year	Males	Females
1950	1.5	1.4
1960	1.3	1.9
1970	1.7	3.3
1980	2.6	4.5
1990	5.6	4.3
2000	12.6	5.8
2010	20.1	10.6
2015 ²⁾	24.8	14.9
2020 ²⁾	28.3	17.8

1) The proportion is computed as the mean value of the proportion remaining single at ages 45-49 and 50-54.
2) Based on results with imputation for persons of unknown marital status.

Note: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research

Based on the data, the proportion of individuals in Japan who have never married has steadily increased over the years, reaching significant levels by 2020. In that year, 28.3% of men and 17.8% of women aged 50 and above remained unmarried, marking a notable rise compared to previous decades. This trend reflects changing social norms, evolving personal priorities, and economic considerations, as many individuals delay or forgo marriage altogether. The growing prevalence of lifelong singlehood has broader societal implications, particularly for population dynamics. With fewer people forming family units, fertility rates decline, contributing to slower population growth and an aging demographic. Additionally, delayed or absent marriage affects household structures, consumption patterns, and labor force participation. Understanding these shifts requires analyzing the interplay of cultural expectations, gender roles, and economic

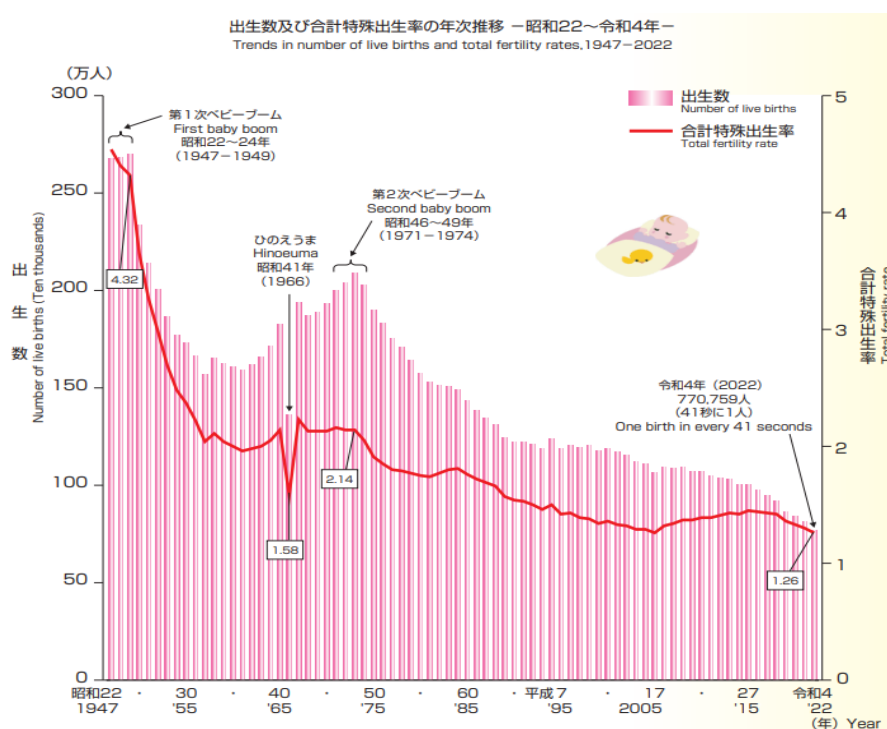
pressures. Overall, the increasing unmarried population underscores the need for policies and social frameworks that respond to evolving family structures and demographic challenges in contemporary Japanese society.

Impact of population decline on Japan's economy

The declining marriage and birth rates in Japan have significant economic implications. As the population ages and the number of children decreases, the workforce shrinks, creating challenges for sustained economic growth. Reduced tax revenue from a smaller working population must support an increasing demand for pensions and healthcare for the elderly. Recent data from the OECD show that Japan's GDP has been declining, highlighting the urgent need to address demographic and economic challenges.

Figure 3

Total Births 1947-2022



Note: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

The continued decline in marriage and birth rates in Japan is projected to have profound economic and social consequences. As the population ages and the number of children shrinks, the future workforce is expected to contract, posing challenges for sustaining economic growth. A smaller productive population will generate lower tax revenues, limiting the government's ability to fund pensions, healthcare, and social welfare programs for the rapidly expanding elderly population (Embassy of The Republic of Indonesia in Tokyo, 2018). This demographic imbalance also increases the dependency ratio, placing heavier economic pressure on working-age individuals and businesses. Recent OECD data indicate that Japan's GDP experienced declines between 2020 and 2022, reflecting broader economic constraints linked to population trends (OECD, 2022). These patterns suggest that Japan must develop comprehensive policies to address labor shortages, promote workforce participation, and incentivize family formation. The intersection of demographic decline and economic performance underscores the urgency of strategic planning to sustain both social welfare and economic stability in the coming decades.

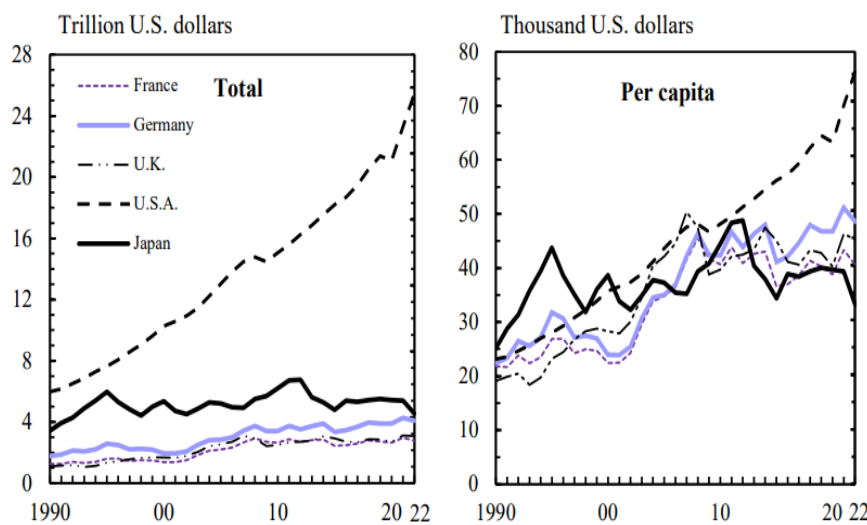
The Impact of the Unmarried Trend on Domestic Consumption in Japan

The rising unmarried trend in Japan has significant effects on domestic consumption and the broader economy. As more individuals choose to remain single, spending priorities shift, with less focus on family-oriented goods and services such as housing, childcare, and household appliances. This change reduces overall demand in certain sectors, prompting businesses to adjust production and marketing strategies to cater to smaller households or single consumers. Consequently, these shifts influence employment patterns, as labor needs adapt to new consumption behaviors. Over time, the combination of declining marriage rates, altered spending habits, and demographic changes contributes to slower economic growth, as reflected in Japan's stagnating or declining GDP trends, highlighting the social and economic implications of the unmarried phenomenon.

Figure 4

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

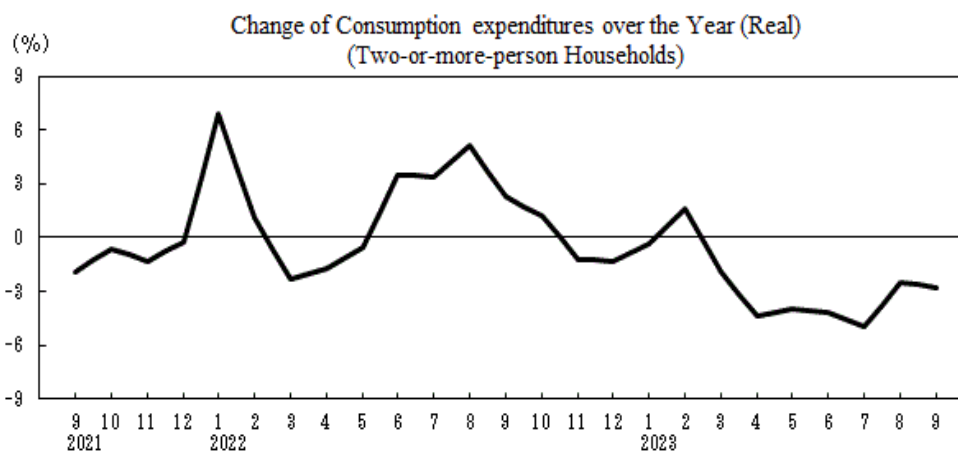
Gross Domestic Product (Nominal prices, converted into U.S. dollars)



Note: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Figure 5

Consumption Expenditures



Note: Statistic Bureau of Japan

The unmarried phenomenon in Japan has a notable impact on domestic consumption, which continues to decline annually (Srivastava, 2020; van Heerde & Dekimpe, 2024). In 2023, reduced consumption is expected to affect multiple sectors of the domestic economy, as public spending on goods and services decreases (Arvin et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2022). Lower demand forces companies to reduce production, decreasing income and potentially affecting employment. Declining domestic consumption also reduces national income, since it is a key driver of economic growth. The correlation between the unmarried trend and consumption decline is evident: delays or decisions not to marry affect family structures and spending patterns (Kridahl & Duvander, 2023). Individual spending priorities differ from those of families, and the presence of children in a household significantly influences consumption (Aranda et al., 2021; Coghill et al., 2023; Hastings & Schneider, 2021; Truong & Truong, 2022). Additionally, constraints on women's careers motivate greater independence, further affecting consumption behaviors (De Clercq & Brieger, 2022).

Discussion

The wave of feminism, danjyo kankei, and the unmarried trend in Japan

Feminism has developed through several waves, each emphasizing different focuses and strategies. The first wave, from the late 19th to the early 20th century, according to Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006), was led by activists from urban industrial backgrounds, liberal politicians, and socialists opposing gender-based discrimination. The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention was a symbolic moment in the struggle, where the Seneca Falls Declaration was designed to establish new strategies and political ideologies (Wellman, 1991). Interpretative scholars emphasize that women's moral recognition and suffrage could enhance the quality of political and public processes. The second wave (1960-1990s) focused on reproductive and sexual rights, advocating freedom to choose childbirth and access to contraception (Bracke, 2021). In the Japanese context, Molony (2018) interprets the second wave as a critical response to traditional patriarchy during the Heian and Meiji periods, when women were confined to domestic spheres and subject to their husbands. This analysis highlights that the second wave opened spaces for female autonomy, expanded educational and political access, and shifted gender structures toward equality.

During the second wave of feminism in Japan, married middle-class women mobilized movements that emphasized their daughters' rights and their own freedoms. Shigematsu (2012) explains that the Tatakau Onna group opposed restrictions on reproductive and sexual rights, affirming women's autonomy in deciding whether to have children. Higgins and Smith (2016) note that these activists established shelters and women's organizations in Shinjuku in 1972, while staging symbolic protests such as wearing pink helmets to demand legal oral contraception and challenge double sexual standards. Harp et al. (2013) observe that feminist liberation ideas were disseminated through mass media, particularly in Onna: Eruso and Feminisuto. Matsui Yayori contributed by reporting on Asian women's issues and founding the Asian Women's Association. Gelb (2003) emphasizes that Ichikawa Fusae and Tanaka Sumiko coordinated women's organizations for the 1975 UN conference, while Lukyantseva (2023) interprets these initiatives as a turning point in reshaping women's roles in Japanese society.

The third wave of feminism in the mid-1990s was influenced by postcolonial and postmodern thought. Sari and Fikri Zufar (2021), WARITS (2017), and Yaqin (2016) argue that it emphasized struggles against unstable social constructions while promoting universal equality concerning sexuality, gender, the body, and heteronormativity. In Japan, these ideas were reflected in feminist activism protesting domestic violence, showing how patriarchal structures continued to confine women in the private sphere. Abdullah (2014), Nazah (2020), and Sumiyatiningsih (2013) note that the fourth wave arose from dissatisfaction with the earlier

waves, focusing on persisting barriers to rights and gender equality. From a constructivist feminist perspective, contends that domestic labor predominantly performed by women became a contested domain due to its low wages and its marginal status compared to public work. This view highlights how social constructions shape power relations and participation, revealing enduring inequalities between domestic and public spheres.

By the late 1990s, feminist participation in Japan experienced renewal through a constructivist approach. Prasetyo (2010) and Thouaille (2018) argue that power is socially constructed and gender operates as a code of power, positioning individuals as dominant or subordinate. Shimizu (1987) interprets that since the late Heian period, women's rights had weakened, placing them in economic subordination to men. His analysis of the *ie* system during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods highlights the prioritization of men in social and political life, where the head of the household held full authority over family members and even domestic servants, while women were required to produce male heirs. Davies and Ikeno (2011) further explain that during the Tokugawa era, Confucian teachings reinforced gender hierarchy through the dictum "women inside, men outside," restricting women to domestic roles. Proverbs stressing obedience to fathers, husbands, and sons, as well as terms like *shujin* and *kanai*, reinforced male superiority and created psychological pressure on women seeking independence or public participation.

The unmarried trend in Japan can be interpreted as women's response to the heavy social and domestic burdens attached to marriage, such as responsibilities for household, children, husband, and elderly parents. The White Paper reports that more than a quarter of people in their 30s 25.4% of women and 26.5% of men do not wish to marry, a rate that has continued to rise since the 1990s. Scholars note that the 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Act fostered financial independence among women, making single lifestyles more socially accepted. Xinhua (2022) observes that other factors, including job instability, employment insecurity, and declining quality of interpersonal relationships, have also shaped this decision. Mitsuki (2021) further argues that patriarchal cultural expectations, such as the obligation to join the husband's family and care for in-laws, create psychological pressures. She emphasizes that many Japanese women now seek recognition as independent individuals, guided by economic considerations and Western cultural influences that normalize non-marital relationships, marking a shift in gendered perspectives.

Since the rise of feminism promoting gender equality for Japanese women, the unmarried trend has become a significant social phenomenon, forming the culture of *Ohitorisama*, or living alone. Analysis shows that this change signifies a shift in traditional social norms, where Japanese society previously tended to avoid living alone. Ryall Tokyo (2022) observes that many young people perceive marriage as an additional burden, including responsibilities for partners and households, and feel unable to build harmonious family lives due to social pressures and high stress. This perspective demonstrates that feminism has not only expanded women's freedom but also influenced younger generations' views on the institution of marriage more broadly. By choosing to live alone, they assert personal autonomy, freedom, and security, rejecting traditional constraints that often limit individual choices and actions, marking a comparative social transformation relative to previous patriarchal norms.

The influence of feminism on the cultural dynamics of *danjyo kankei* in Japan

The dynamics of *Danjyo Kankei* in Japan have shown significant shifts throughout history, which can be analyzed through feminist and historical perspectives. Davies and Ikeno (2011) interpret that before the Nara and Heian periods, Japanese society was matrilineal, where women dominated and many held leadership positions, while Pascale (2023) emphasizes the importance of women in lineage, succession, and inheritance, placing them in a superior position compared to

men. This can be contrasted with the post-Nara and Heian conditions, where male dominance increased through the aristocratic system, placing women in economic subordination. Furthermore, Shimizu (1987) and Davies & Ikeno (2011) interpret that during the Kamakura and Muromachi eras, the ie system reinforced male dominance through patrilineal lineage, while women's roles were limited to reproduction and used as political tools to strengthen Samurai family power. This comparative analysis highlights a sharp shift from a matrilineal society empowering women to a patriarchal system that entrenches gender inequality in Danjyo Kankei.

Male dominance further solidified during the Edo period, which Davies and Ikeno (2011) analyze through Tokugawa Shogun's Confucian teachings: "men outside, women inside," structurally defining gender roles. Women were required to manage the household while men took full responsibility for public affairs, restricting women's mobility, political access, and economic participation. Comparative analysis indicates gradual change during the Meiji era when Japan adopted Western thought; formal education for women was introduced but selective, aiming to cultivate ryosai kenbo, wise mothers and good wives (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). Wulandari (2015) interpretatively highlights that after World War II, feminist ideas began influencing women's awareness of social subordination imposed by patriarchy, revealing contradictions between advances in women's education and structural inequalities. The Bunmei Kaika policy provided limited educational opportunities but still reinforced male dominance, illustrating that comparing the Edo, Meiji, and post-war periods reveals a gradual evolution in women's positions within Danjyo Kankei.

After World War II, feminist movements in Japan began to significantly influence women's positions, particularly in education and the economy. Matsui (1990) emphasizes that since the 1970s, women were no longer confined to the Meiji-era norm of ryosai kenbo-wise mothers and good wives-but instead gained the freedom to pursue careers. He also observes that educational access shifted, with women in universities entering nontraditional fields such as law, politics, economics, and engineering, which had previously been dominated by men, thereby opening new career opportunities. Bullock (2019) and Lukyantseva (2023) argue that women's economic roles also underwent transformation, moving from full-time domestic work toward earning independent incomes, particularly after the late 1970s oil crisis. According to Lukyantseva (2023), the Uuman Libu, or Women's Liberation Movement, which began in the 1960s, successfully fought for labor rights and culminated in the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1986, enabling women to attain financial independence. Collectively, these perspectives underscore how feminism progressively reshaped traditional female roles in Japanese society.

Women's political roles began to emerge after Japan's defeat in World War II, when constitutional revisions granted women the right to vote and run for public office, an achievement that, according to Bullock et al. (2018) and Faison (2018), reflects the outcome of Japanese feminist struggles for suffrage. Analytically, the feminist movement also opposed discrimination in reproductive and sexual rights, which previously positioned women as "childbearing machines," subjected to early marriage, with reproductive rights fully controlled by the state, including under the National Eugenics Law of 1940 (Maxson, 2018). Comparatively, Uuman Libu succeeded in pushing for the revision of this law into the Eugenic Protection Law of 1972, which recognized abortion in cases of rape, genetic disease, or threats to the mother's life (Matsui, 1990). This transformation demonstrates that feminism progressively altered the dynamics of Danjyo Kankei from a skewed system subordinating women to one approaching gender equality, where women can now work, participate in politics, and make their own life choices, although patriarchy remains as a historical and social construct.

The impact of population decline on economic growth

The decline in birth and marriage rates in Japan has reduced the productive workforce, which serves as the main driver of economic growth. According to the OECD (2022), Japan's GDP decreased during the 2020-2022 period as a direct consequence of this shrinking labor force. This situation has significantly undermined production capacity and innovation, making slow economic growth unavoidable. Aeni (2022) also argues that the decline in the working-age population narrows the active economic base, which in turn reduces overall economic activity and investment across multiple sectors. From this perspective, the diminishing number of workers presents Japan with serious challenges in maintaining and enhancing national productivity, raising concerns about the country's ability to secure long-term economic stability.

In addition, the growing elderly population compels the Japanese government to allocate greater resources to pensions, healthcare, and social welfare programs. The dependency ratio in 2023 reached 68%, illustrating the significant burden placed on the working-age population to support non-productive groups. This condition creates considerable fiscal pressures, as shrinking tax revenues from a reduced workforce coincide with rising public expenditures to meet expanding social service needs. Walia (2019) argues that the increasing costs of social security and healthcare limit the government's fiscal space for productive investment, which in turn diminishes the potential for sustainable long-term economic growth.

Consistent with the analysis of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Tokyo (2018), the decline in Japan's working-age population has significantly weakened the national tax base, while social expenditures have sharply increased. This situation has widened the fiscal deficit, creating a serious challenge to the country's fiscal sustainability. Karo et al. (2021) further contend that such demographic trends could potentially trigger a social and economic crisis if not addressed through effective strategies, including increased labor migration and labor market reforms. In response to these challenges, the Japanese government has begun implementing several policy measures aimed at reducing the negative impacts of demographic decline on the national economy.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that sex differences, which have long been used as the basis for gender roles in Japanese society, should not justify political or social discrimination. The second wave of feminism in Japan successfully mobilized middle-class women, particularly mothers, to advocate for the rights of their daughters and challenge patriarchal norms that positioned men as the primary decision-makers in the family. Through this movement, women began to pursue gender equality, the freedom to determine their life paths, and opportunities to develop beyond traditional roles as wives and mothers (*ryosai kenbo*). This shift also influenced the younger generation's perspective on marriage, which is increasingly seen as a personal choice rather than a social obligation. Overall, feminism has transformed the dynamics of *Danjyo Kankei* from a repressive system to a more equitable one, opening space for women's empowerment and enabling them to shape their lives according to their personal aspirations.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the understanding of gender as a social construct and illuminate the dynamics of *Danjyo Kankei* in Japan, demonstrating how historically entrenched patriarchal norms can be challenged through social mobilization and feminist movements. The study underscores the importance of a gender perspective in analyzing power structures within families and society, highlighting the interplay between political rights, education, and women's economic independence as key factors shaping gender equality. Practically, this research has implications for public policy and education, emphasizing the need for programs that promote equal employment opportunities, equitable education, and critical awareness of gender stereotypes. The findings are also relevant for social practice and women's organizations,

providing a foundation for legal advocacy, women's empowerment, and strategies for social change that allow women full autonomy, the ability to determine their life paths, and active participation in political and economic life.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the focus is limited to the dynamics of feminism and Danjyo Kankei in Japan from historical and social perspectives, so the contextual analysis of contemporary individual women's experiences may be less comprehensive. Second, most of the data relied on secondary sources, such as literature and prior reports, which may carry interpretive biases. Third, the study does not sufficiently address differences in women's experiences based on social class, age, or geographic location, which could influence how they respond to patriarchal norms. Therefore, future research is recommended to use qualitative field methods, such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic studies, to capture Japanese women's personal perspectives in greater detail. Additionally, comparative studies across generations or cultures could provide broader insights into the transformation of gender relations and the effectiveness of feminist movements in a global context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the International Relations Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret for giving us the opportunity to create and compile this journal article. Also, thank you to the author's friends who have set aside time and energy to conduct research to write this journal article.

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