

## Feminism as a Trigger for Change in the Dynamics of Danjyo Kankei and the Unmarried Trend in Japan

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### Abstract:

The patriarchal culture that develops in Japanese society can be seen from the smallest or basic scope, namely the family, all decisions in the family are made by men as the head of the family who must be obeyed so that the things that women have to do will depend on men. Although the unmarried trend focuses more on women, many Japanese men also commit this act. The formulation of the problem in this research is how the incoming feminism can change the dynamics of Danjyo Kankei and trigger the unmarried trend in Japan. The method used in this research is qualitative and the data sources used are primary and secondary. The theories and concepts used are Feminism and Danjyo Kankei. The purpose of this research is to analyze how the process of the entry of feminism then its influence and what impact the unmarried trend has on people's lives in Japan. The results of our research show that feminism can change the dynamics of Danjyo Kankei and become one of the triggers for the rise of the unmarried trend in Japan.

**Keywords:** Japan, Danjyo Kankei, Feminism, Unmarried.

### Introduction

Before the emergence and development of feminism in the world, patriarchy became a fixed culture in the society of every region or country. One of the strongest patriarchal cultures in Japan is Danjyo Kankei. This culture emphasizes the role of men in economic, social, and political affairs (Crabtree & Muroga, 2014; Crabtree & Muroga, 2021). The roles of men and women are very different. This can be seen from the smallest scope or basic, namely the family, all decisions in the family are made by men as the head of the family who must be obeyed. Men are the head of the family and must be obeyed so that the things that women have to do will depend on men (Crabtree & Muroga, 2021). women must do will depend on men (Hamasaki et al., 2023). Moreover, the education given to women Revolves around her role in the household, how to take care of her husband and educate her children. Take care of their husbands and educate their children (Anisa & Erna Ikawati, 2021; Anisah Hasan & Irwan, 2015). This can be interpreted that the role of women is only limited to the scope of the home. This is also driven by Confucianism, which is the basis of society (Nugroho et al, 2022).

The patriarchal system in Japan put pressure on women who eventually rebelled and wanted to be active in society. Until feminism emerged in the world, it eventually reached Japan and became visible after World War II (Polina Lukyantseva, 2023; Fukuda et al., 2020). Previously,

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women's rights were severely restricted, but in 1946 women were granted civil rights through the Japanese constitution (Hanim, 2020; Harisuddin, 2015; Rif'at & Nurwahidin, 2022) which pertained to political rights listed in Articles 14 and 24 of the Equal Rights and Civil Rights of Women, which took effect in 1947 (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 1947). In addition, in the Labor Standards Act (Act No. 49 of 1947) Article 4 it is not allowed to discriminate against women workers compared to men, especially regarding wages (International Labor Organization, 1947; Ismiati, 2018; Sakina & A., 2017). Later in 1985, the Diet ratified the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO) in response to the First World Conference on Women by the United Nations in 1975. The EEO emphasized employment equality for women in Japan (Bullock et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2020; Martin, 2021). It affects women's lives in a society where feminism focuses on social construction. Constructivist feminism seeks to change roles and treatment starting from the domestic sphere before finally in the public sphere in various aspects. Japanese women felt that they could balance household chores with working in the public sphere (Mutiah, 2019; Rosadi, 2011).. Women also began to show their existence in broader fields of education such as law, human rights, and social politics (Nugroho et al., 2022; Khuseini, 2018; Luthfiyah, 2015). However, through such efforts, it is not easy for women to achieve their rights as there are still demands to take care of the household and children (Harun AR, 2015; Imamah, 2023; Sidani, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of the feminist movement on the changing cultural dynamics of Danjyo Kankei in Japan, and to explore the phenomenon of the trend of non-marriage among Japanese women as a result of these changes. This research aims to understand how feminism, which began to develop after World War II, successfully challenged patriarchal norms in Japanese society and affected traditional gender roles, particularly in the context of women's roles in the family and in the public sphere. It will also examine the response of the Japanese government, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, to these social changes, as well as their impact on shifting views of marriage and women's career lives in Japan.

The feminist movement that developed in Japan, especially after World War II, has played an important role in changing the dynamics of the Danjyo Kankei culture, which was previously highly patriarchal, and has led to a trend of non-marriage among Japanese women. Feminism, through the struggle for civil rights, education, and gender equality, successfully influenced society's perception of women's roles in the family and society, encouraging them to pursue careers and financial independence. These changes led to a decline in interest in marriage, as women felt that marriage and its inherent domestic role as a housewife could hinder their career achievements and independence. In addition, the Japanese government's responses, such as the implementation of gender equality laws and more inclusive employment policies, have supported this trend by providing more space for women to develop outside of the household.

## Methods

The method in this study uses qualitative methods. The definition of qualitative methods according to Bogdan and Taylor (1975: 5), that qualitative methods are a process in conducting research whose final results are descriptive data consisting of words both written and oral from people and behaviors that are used as the object of research by focusing on individuals and individual settings as a whole (Moleong, 2007). In addition, qualitative methods can be defined as research conducted to interpret a phenomenon related to things experienced by research subjects, such as activities, behavior, perceptions, and others, by describing them in the form of language so as to achieve a certain natural condition (Moleong, 2007). Meanwhile, the selection of data sources in qualitative research serves as the earliest material for compiling opinions and

information used in research so that the ability to determine the type of data source will affect the data obtained (Septiawan Santana K, 2010). Two types of data sources are used in this research, namely primary data sources obtained from the Japanese government website related to data on the decline in marriage in Japanese society presented from year to year or other important documents obtained from related organizations. Meanwhile, secondary data sources will be obtained from literature studies of several journals, articles, and others related to the declining marriage rate in Japan.

## Results and Discussion

### Dynamics of the Unmarried Phenomenon in Japan (2020-2023)

The unmarried trend in Japan, which has increasingly become an option for many young people, has a certain impact. This is because being unmarried affects the pattern of people's lives, resulting in changes in several aspects (Smock & Schwartz, 2020). One of them is the changing dynamics of marriage in society (Abera et al., 2020; Sassler & Lichter, 2020). The unmarried trend can be seen with the declining marriage rate every period. Based on data from the Statistics Bureau of Japan and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in 2022, which categorizes by age, said that 31.8% of men and 23.7% of women aged 15 to 24 years were not married. In addition, the marriage rate in the age range of 25 to 34 years old is less, so the number of unmarried people is higher. It is stated that 69.3% of men and 54% of women in the 25 to 30 age range are unmarried and in the 30 to 34 age range, 42.9% of men and 26.6% of women are unmarried. The lowest rate of unmarried people between the ages of 25 and 29 is still quite high for men at 61.2% in Miyazaki Prefecture. The lowest rate for women was 45.9% in Fukushima Prefecture (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2022).

The declining marriage rate is also related to the average age of couples getting married from year to year (Lesthaeghe, 2020). According to data from the Statistics Bureau of Japan in its publication entitled "Statistical Handbook of Japan 2023" states that in 2021, the marriage rate in Japan is 4.1 with a total of 501,138 married couples with an average age of 31 years for grooms and 29.5 years for brides (Statistics Bureau, Ministry Of Internal Affairs And Communications, 2023). This means that more and more people are getting married when they are 30 years old or above. The latest year's data from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare shows that in 2022, the average age of the first couple to marry increased again to 31.1 years for grooms and 29.7 years for brides (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2023a).

**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

(Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

The average age of the first couple to marry, which is increasingly towards the age of 30 years and above, can be seen that people avoid marriage at a young age or even do not prioritize marriage in their lives (Wibowo et al., 2021). This does not rule out the possibility that people who do not marry at such an age will gradually lose the desire to marry into old age (Carr & Utz, 2020). People who do not marry until old age will further make Japan's population produce a constructive pyramid or old population pyramid (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024). There are fewer young people than productive and old people (Fang et al., 2020). People who do not marry until old age are recorded in the following data which explains the Never Married Rates of Japanese people aged 50 and above.

**Figure 2. Proportion who never married at exactly 50 years of age**

**Proportion of Never Married at Exact Age 50 by Sex <sup>1)</sup>**

Year	Males		Females	
	Proportion (%)			
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 <sup>2)</sup>	24.8		14.9	
2020 <sup>2)</sup>	28.3		17.8	

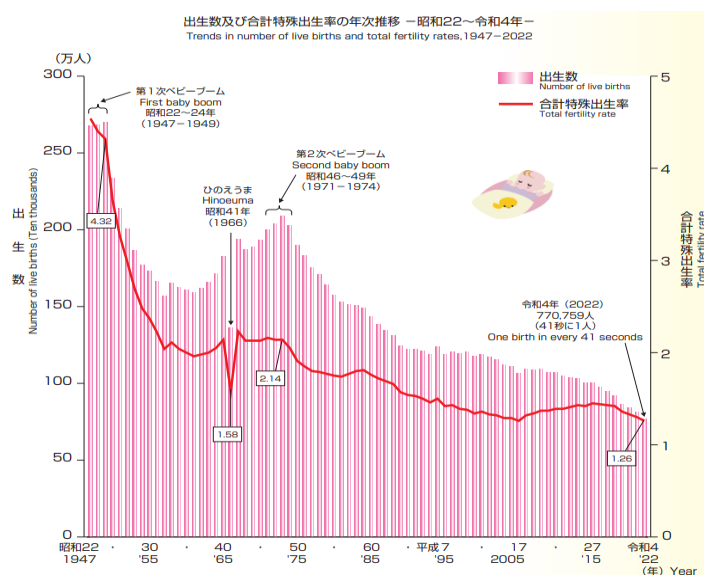
1) The proportion is computed as the mean value of the proportion remaining single at ages 45-49 and 50-54.

2) Based on results with imputation for persons of unknown marital status.

(Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research)

Based on the data above, Never Married Rates calculated from year to year until the latest data in 2020 are increasing every period. The years before 2020 are used as a comparison that there was a drastic increase so that it touched 28.3% for men and 17.8% for women in 2020. This means that the number of people who have never married until the age of 50 and above is increasing every year. Declining marriage rates while increasing the choice not to marry could result in a declining birth rate.

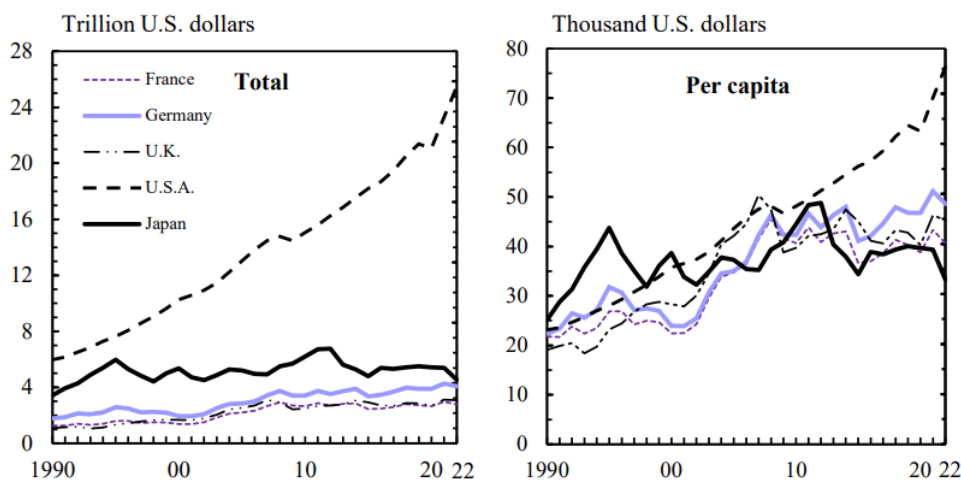
**Figure 3. Total Births 1947-2022**



(Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

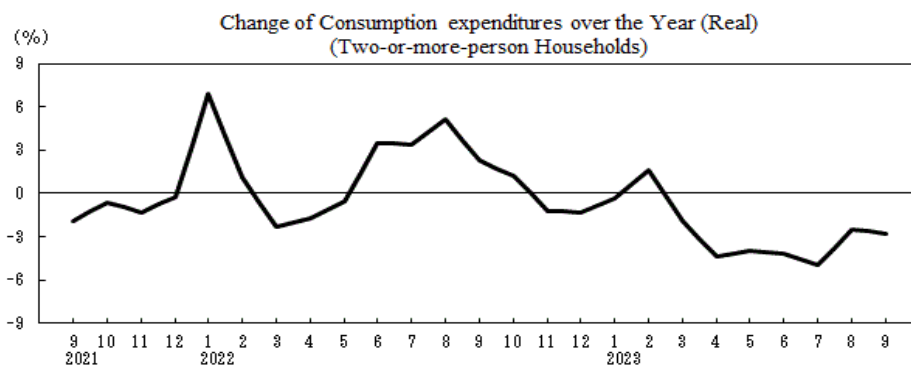
As marriage and birth rates continue to decline, it will also indirectly affect the economy. This raises concerns for the years ahead. A buildup of old age population will occur while the population of children will further decline. Rapid population decline makes economic growth more difficult to achieve. Fewer children will be born, which will lead to fewer workers in the future. This includes the tax problem where the amount of tax revenue will decrease while the aging population will definitely need more pension and health care support. While the funds for these things are paid by tax contributions which are people before retirement or in productive age (Embassy of The Republic of Indonesia in Tokyo Japan, 2018). In recent years, Japan's GDP has decreased. It can be seen in the following data according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, where in 2020 GDP decreased further until the last data in 2022 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022).

**Figure 4. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**  
**Gross Domestic Product** (Nominal prices, converted into U.S. dollars)



(Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)

**Figure 5. Consumption Expenditures**



(Source:Statistic Bureau of Japan)

The unmarried phenomenon also undeniably has an impact on domestic consumption figures which continue to decline every year (Srivastava, 2020; van Heerde & Dekimpe, 2024) based on the graph above that in 2023 the consumption rate in Japan continues to decline and will certainly greatly affect various sectors of the domestic economy. Domestic consumption itself includes public spending on goods and services, if in a country there is a decrease in domestic consumption figures (Arvin et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2022), this will affect other sectors such as a decrease in demand for goods and services which can then extend to companies that must reduce production rates to culminate in a decrease in company income which has an impact on

employment. Not only that, the decline in domestic consumption can also reduce overall national income. This happens because domestic consumption is one of the main drivers of economic growth and when there is a lack of family structure in a country, of course, people will save more money than spend it and the resulting impact is a decrease in the overall level of economic activity. It can be concluded that the correlation between the unmarried phenomenon and the decline in domestic consumption can be clearly seen because the number of people who delay marriage or choose not to marry at all can affect the creation of family structures and consumption patterns (Kridahl & Duvander, 2023). This can be evidenced by different spending priorities between individuals and families (Aranda et al., 2021; Coghill et al., 2023). Marriage and the presence of children in the family certainly affect spending patterns (Hastings & Schneider, 2021; Truong & Truong, 2022). The demands that prevent women from fulfilling their career desires make women even more driven to want to be independent (De Clercq & Brieger, 2022).

### **The Wave of Feminism, Danjyo Kankei, and the Unmarried Trend in Japan**

Feminism has its own periods in identifying its actions from each movement proposed at each demonstration. The first wave began in the late 19th to early 20th century spearheaded by activists from urban industrial environments, liberal politicians and socialists. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 marked the activists' protest of the struggle for equality. Hundreds of women and men rallied around the drafting of the Seneca Falls Declaration to outline a new movement for political strategy and ideology. Sex differences are the basis for gender roles in society, so activists argued that sex differences should not be accepted as a reason for discrimination in rights politically and theoretically (Kroløkke & Anne Scott Sørensen, 2006). In wave one, activists discussed women's participation in voting, which was restricted at the time, and made statements about how morally superior women were. If women took part in the civic sphere, it would improve how political and public processes took place.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, feminist activists began to protest again. The dominating issue in the second wave was the fight for reproductive rights and sexuality. Therefore, activists fought to pass these rights in an equal rights amendment to the constitution that guarantees equal rights without discriminating between sexes. The protest started at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1969 and 1970 by parodying how women are considered cattle, beauty being an object dominated by the patriarchy. Quoting from Juliet Mitchell in her book *The Subjection of Women* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone in her book *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) that the patriarchal system has passed to the bourgeoisie where class or racial differences do not underlie the patriarchal system, but sexual differences are the basis for the patriarchal system (Kroløkke & Anne Scott Sørensen, 2006). Patriarchy requires women to stay indoors doing household chores or working in low-paid jobs. The second wave period can be categorized as the period where feminism in Japan could fight for its rights against the patriarchal system. The situation during the Heian and Meiji periods required women to stay at home doing all the household chores and obeying all the orders of their husbands.

In the second wave of feminism, middle-class married women in Japan united in a movement in which mothers took action to fight for the rights of their daughters. Meanwhile, a feminist group called Tatakau Onna strongly opposed the proposed restrictions on women's reproductive rights and sexual liberation in which women voiced the right to choose whether or not to have children (Molony, 2018). The group established a women's shelter and organizing site in Shinjuku in 1972. There was one group that did a rally wearing pink helmets. The action was used to promote legal oral contraceptives and the disappearance of sexual double standards in Japan. Magazines and newsletters spread across Japan using the theme of the women's liberation movement as a tool for feminism in Japan as a form of public action. Magazines such as Onna:

Eruso and Feminisuto, which referenced *The New Bluestocking* (Molony, 2018). At that time there was a journalist who wrote news about women, especially Asian women, on the pages of one of Japan's respected newspapers, the Asahi. In addition to writing news about women, Matsui Yayori also founded the Asian Women's Association (Ajia no Onnatachi no Kai). In 1974, two feminists, Ichikawa Fusae and Tanaka Sumiko (1909-1995) coordinated all women's organizations from various professions to various schools of feminism to participate in the 1975 UN meeting in Mexico City as representatives of Japan (Molony, 2018). All the women's organizations representing Japan united with feminist organizations from South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines to attack Japanese men who used women for sex tourism (Molony, 2018). In addition, second-wave feminist activists have changed traditional Japanese thinking by emphasizing that a woman is free to choose her career and education equally with men (Polina Lukyantseva, 2023).

Based on post-colonial and post-modern ideas, third wave feminism came into action in the mid-90s. Activists championed unstable constructions and notions of universal womanhood that included sexuality, gender, the body and heteronormativity (Sari & Fikri Zufar, 2021; WARITS, 2017; Yaqin, 2016). This situation also occurred in Japan, where Japanese feminist activists took action to protest the violence received by housewives. Until now, feminism has entered the fourth wave, which occurred due to a sense of dissatisfaction with the second and third waves, so that the fourth wave activists still realize that there are ideas that are still hampered (Nazah, 2020; Sumiyatiningsih, 2013; Yulanda, 2020). The current generation looks at the current situation by not only fighting for women's rights, but also referring to the call for gender equality. Elisabeth Prügl in her 1999 book "The Global Construction of Gender" discusses the viewpoint of constructivist feminism, which theory is based on research that describes how women are treated in domestic work based on the perspective of international law and negotiations. Domestic work, which is usually held entirely by women, is a matter of debate on how the rules of this type of work are seen from the perspective of feminism. Earning low wages and being considered a bad job are used as reasons why domestic work is an unreal job because households are included in each other's private affairs unlike jobs that are in the public sphere that get more attention from people. The book shows how the thinking or understanding of women and feminism participated in the international community's debate on women's rights to domestic work.

By the end of the 1990s there was a renewed basis for feminist and mainstream participation and the participation of constructivism, which uses the legal basis of cause and effect in feminism. The idea of feminist constructivism sees a realization of social construction. Constructivism theory plays a role in feminism by providing a theory of agency. Whereas feminism participates in constructivism by providing an understanding of the integral elements ruling the cause of the construction process. Constructivism scholars explain how social construction can influence power in reproduction or gender (Ni Komang Arie Suwastini, 2013; Prasetyo, 2010). Feminist international relations scholars argue that the constructivist concept of feminism describes power as being socially constructed and gender as a code for power. The reality of social constructionism results in gender taking on a variety of social forms based on the binary construction of masculinity and femininity. Then social construction makes gender express the message that gender can lead to higher power and give lower power to submit to those with higher power.

Meanwhile, at the end of the Heian period, women's rights were significantly weakened, resulting in the subordination of women to men economically. The medieval Kamakura and Muromachi periods were characterized by the *ie* system, in which men were given social and political priority. *Ie* was defined as home and the *ie* system included the family structure at large, not only people who were members of the family, but also servants or domestic helpers and so on. It is explained that the *ie* system means that in a family, the man (father or grandfather) as the

head of the family has full control over the other family members and must obey his decisions. This situation made Japanese society at the time understand that women were expected to have sons when they married. The son of the marriage would be the successor and have inheritance rights for the ie system in the family. The Tokugawa shogunate had a significant influence on people's thinking. Confucianism flourished in the Edo period and the idea that women were inside and men were outside spread and became a custom in Japanese society.

It is stated in the Confucian proverb that a woman should obey her father when she is young, then obey her husband when she is married, and obey her son when she is old. On the other hand, husbands in Japan refer to their wives as shujin, which means the main person, and kanai, which means in the house. The designations given by husbands to their wives illustrate how the traditional thinking of Japanese society believes that a wife must be at home and obey all orders from her husband and the position of the husband is superior to the wife. There are still many men in Japan who adhere to traditional ideas about the role of women in the household. Most men want a surrogate mother figure in their marriage to do all the household chores. This is not possible if a woman wants to be active in society to be financially independent and try to balance taking care of her family and working. Confucian thinking also makes it normal for men in Japan to make unilateral decisions in the family rather than choosing to become a team by cooperating between husband and wife in the household. As a result, traditional Japanese thinking puts psychological pressure on women in Japan when it comes to marriage.

The unmarried trend in Japan is characterized by the fact that many women see marriage as an additional burden, such as the obligation to do household chores, take care of children, husbands, and even elderly parents. An official report in 2022 from the White Paper (an official report released by the Japanese government's cabinet office regarding data, current information, and policies), showed that more than a quarter of the population in their 30s, 25.4 percent of women and 26.5 percent of men stated in a survey that they had no desire to get married. The number of people choosing not to marry tended to increase in the 1990s. One of the triggers was the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1986, which allowed more Japanese women to achieve financial independence. There was also a shift in attitudes that can be said to have triggered the unmarried trend, some of which made the single lifestyle more accepted and developed in Japanese society. Meanwhile, social issues such as an increase in precarious employment and threats to job security, as well as a decline in the quality of interpersonal relationships, are also said to influence this trend. (Xinhua, 2022)

One of the manifestations of patriarchal culture in Japan today is that if a woman marries, she will move in with her husband's family. Psychological pressure from the husband's family, the responsibility of caring for the in-laws when they are sick, and restrictions on the right to voice opinions made many women choose not to marry. Japanese women wanted their rights as independent individuals to be recognized, so the feminism movement emerged as a way to push for gender equality so that women could freely choose their path in life and not be bound by social pressure. Some women are also reluctant to marry due to economic factors, most Japanese women argue that living alone is considered much more economical than living in a couple, especially if they have children. In addition, western culture is also influential, where some couples choose to be in a relationship without getting married, something that goes against eastern cultural norms (Mitsuki, 2021).

Starting from the emergence of feminism that encouraged gender equality for Japanese women, it became one of the triggers of the unmarried trend that has developed until now. This trend has become a culture in Japan which is then known as Ohitorisama, this culture is a fairly new habit among Japanese people by being single. In the past, Japanese people had a tendency not to want to live alone, but the dynamics of culture, outlook on life, and social structure began



to change since the emergence of the feminism movement. Many young people in Japan think that getting married can actually add to the burden or pressure of life and they even feel unable to make their partner happy and establish a harmonious relationship in a household because of the high level of stress in Japan, so they prefer to enjoy a life of solitude. Thus, they feel free, safe, and avoid problems related to their spouse, because it will take up time, mind, and energy and there are restrictions or prohibitions from their spouse that sometimes limit a step or action. (Ryall Tokyo, 2022).

### **The Influence of Feminism on the Cultural Dynamics of Danjyo Kankei in Japan**

The dynamics of social life in Japan, especially regarding the relationship between women and men and their respective positions or Danjyo Kankei, have changed according to the current period. Long before the Nara and Heian periods, Japanese society was a matrilineal society where the role of women dominated and there were many female leaders (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). The matrilineal society itself is a society that adheres to a system of descent from the mother's line. The mother plays a role in providing offspring, succession, and inheritance to the next generation (Pascale, 2023). In other words, in a matrilineal society, women are superior to men. Later, in the Nara and Heian periods, men became more dominant with the aristocratic system that made men have more power than women (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). In this period, women were economically subordinated. Furthermore, in medieval Japan, during the Kamakura and Muromachi eras, the ie system developed. The ie system was a family system in which the domestic, economic, political, and religious rules of the members were explained (Shimizu, 1987). The ie system adheres to the patrilineal system for lineage inheritance. The patrilineal system refers to paternal lineage (Pascale, 2023). This system gives a more dominant role to men where men become leaders in every ie whose words and rules must be obeyed. Meanwhile, women in the ie were required only to have children, mainly boys so that they could inherit the ie in the future. Women were also used as political tools by the Samurai to strengthen the political power of the family by marrying into other Samurai families who were respected or honorable (Davies & Ikeno, 2011).

The dominance of men's roles in Japan was strengthened in the Edo period where Shogun Tokugawa with his Confucianism thought of "man outside and women inside", clearly differentiated the roles of men and women (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). Women were required to focus more on taking care of the home while the affairs outside the home were fully carried out by men. Women's movement was limited to taking care of the household and children, political and economic access for women was very closed. Changes occurred in the Meiji era where Japan sought to adapt thoughts from the west. In this era, women's space was wider than before. Formal education for men and women was present in this era. Even so, formal education was not equal because women were deliberately educated with the aim of becoming good wives and mothers (ryosai kenbo) who were expected to provide good support to their husbands and be responsible for caring for and educating children (Davies & Ikeno, 2011).

The feminist thought that began to enter Japan and developed significantly after World War II slowly changed the mindset of Japanese women. They realized that the social system that had been in place forced women to live under the control of men. Eventually, movements emerged that led to changes in their fate in society. This analysis will explain the changes in the social conditions of Japanese women before and after feminism, which include the role of women in politics and economics, women's education, and reproductive issues. Regarding women's education, before feminism flourished in Japan, precisely during the Tokugawa Shogunate, only men could access education, where schools at that time were established by Daimyo in each territory (Wulandari, 2015). Women were not allowed to access education at all and were required to stay at home taking care of housework. Later, during the Meiji Restoration, there was

the Bunmei Kaika policy, one of which was a new education system that allowed women to receive limited education where the purpose of women being educated was to produce women as wise mothers with the ability to educate their children, and good wives who were able to provide support to their husbands (Wulandari, 2015). Again, women's lives in the end were always juxtaposed with men's interests, as if women's lives themselves were not very important, what was considered important for women at that time was limited to women's ability to live for the success of men. This dualism in education was considered to still discriminate against women, even so thanks to the opening of education for women, various female intellectuals were born who later fought for the fate of women in the future. The feminism that flourished in Japan after World War II paid off. Since the 1970s, women have been able to get an education more freely with the ultimate goal no longer being a wise mother and a good wife, but for the sake of pursuing a career (Matsui, 1990). Women at the university level have been able to study non-traditional sciences such as law, politics, economics, and engineering - previously only accessible to men, with the ultimate goal of getting a job in these fields (Matsui, 1990). Since then, until the present day, Japanese women have finally gained access to full education and can use the knowledge they gain in school for their own benefit, no longer for the benefit of men. In addition, with higher education, women are also able to hold high positions in the workforce - previously, high positions were only for men.

Women's role in the economy is also one thing that has changed rapidly after feminism compared to before feminism. Previously, women were not allowed to work outside the scope of household chores at all. There was no opportunity for women to earn money. Their work was limited to being Ryoukaikenbo-wise mother and good wife (Bullock, 2019), or Sengyoushufu-full time housewife (Lukyantseva, 2023). In the late 1970s, especially after the Oil Crisis, housewives began to leave the house to seek paid employment as the sole income from their husbands was no longer enough to fulfill the daily needs of the household. The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan, or uuman libu, which began in the 1960s, fought for women's employment rights and led to major changes with the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1986 (Lukyantseva, 2023). The law succeeded in equalizing employment opportunities between men and women so that women were able to be financially independent. Meanwhile, the political role of Japanese women began to appear after Japan suffered defeat in World War II where Japan then turned into a more democratic country. The Japanese constitution was then revised and gave women the opportunity to vote and run in general elections (Bullock et al., 2018). This success certainly cannot be separated from the struggle of Japanese feminists regarding suffrage. For the first time, Japanese women could take part in the election of their leaders and could work in government offices in the 1946 general election (FAISON, 2018).

The Women's Liberation Movement also sought to fight against discrimination of women by men over reproductive and sexual rights. For a long time women in Japan have been seen as child-bearing machines. Women were judged as good or bad based on whether or not they could give birth. In fact, many women were forced to marry and have children at a young age (Maxson, 2018). In addition, when it comes to birth and contraceptive use, women's rights are completely regulated by the state. For example, the National Eugenics Law of 1940 supported the purification of children from families with hereditary diseases so that at that time if there were prospective babies who had indications of unhealthiness, defects, and so on, they had to be aborted (Maxson, 2018). The Women's Liberation Movement protested by saying that Japanese women had the right to reproductive freedom and the right to decide whether or not they wanted to have the child (Lukyantseva, 2023). Then, in 1972, the government proposed a revision to the law by presenting a new law, the Eugenic Protection Law, which gave Japanese women the right to abortion under certain conditions, with the aim of saving the life of the mother and eliminating

genetic damage - still the implementation of the National Eugenic Law (Matsui, 1990). This law recognized rape, hereditary diseases, and cases where the life of the mother would be endangered if forced to give birth, as grounds for abortion (Matsui, 1990). Regarding contraception, prior to 1974, the power to use contraceptives when men and women had sex was entirely controlled by men with the use of physical contraceptives such as condoms (Matsui, 1990). This resulted in many young women becoming pregnant against their will and being forced to have abortions. Uman Libu's struggle eventually changed this. After 1974, contraceptives such as the IUD, which is placed directly on a woman's body, and physical pills to prevent pregnancy were introduced, but these pills had to be prescribed. In this case, women managed to achieve reproductive and sexual freedom. Even in the current era, women have been able to choose whether they want to get married or not, giving rise to a new trend, namely the unmarried trend.

Feminism has changed the dynamics of the relationship between women and men, known as *Danjyo Kankei*. Previously, inequality was very pronounced where the status of men was considered much higher than women. Various rules that regulate and build standard expectations of how men and women should behave, have harmed women because women are required to always submit and obey the head of the family, namely men, voices that are never heard, space for movement that is limited to housework, access to politics and economics that are closed, making women powerless and unable to choose to determine their own path. The standard of a good woman at that time was a woman who was able to take care of the household, provide full support to the husband, obey the father, give birth to sons, educate and nurture children skillfully. No education, no job, no income, women were focused on being at home. Unlike men who have a lot of freedom and access to a very wide political and economic space. Feminism has changed the position and role of Japanese women. Today, Japanese women are almost or even on par with men. They can work and do politics; have wider political and economic access. Japanese women can now freely make choices for their own lives. Although patriarchal culture is still inherent in Japanese society today due to the cultural constructs and Confucian beliefs that have become part of the history of Japanese life, it does not go as far as closing access to women's freedom as it used to. In fact, women can choose whether they want to get married or not. Whether they want to have children or not. Feminism in this case has succeeded in changing the dynamics of *Danjyo Kankei*, which was originally very, very oppressive to women and gave room for male domination, into an almost equal relationship where women are finally able to empower themselves.

## Conclusion

Sex differences were used as a basis for gender roles in society, so activists argued that sex differences should not be accepted as a reason for discrimination in rights politically and theoretically. In the second wave of feminism, middle-class married women in Japan united in a movement in which mothers took action to fight for the rights of their daughters. Confucian thinking in Japan meant that men tended to make unilateral decisions in the family, rather than through cooperation between husband and wife. Japanese women then fought for their rights as independent individuals through the feminism movement, which promoted gender equality and freedom to choose a life path without being bound by social pressure. Many young Japanese people saw marriage as a burden and preferred to live alone due to high life pressures. Formal education at the time was also unequal, with women being educated to be good wives and mothers (*ryosai kenbo*), responsible for taking care of the household and supporting their husbands. However, the feminist movement managed to change the *Danjyo Kankei* relationship, which used to be very oppressive to women, into a more equal one, giving women the opportunity to empower themselves.

The strength of this paper lies in its contribution to updating perspectives on social change in Japan through the feminist movement and its impact on gender relations. It explores how feminism changed the patriarchal cultural structure, particularly in the context of Danjyo Kankei, and affected women's roles in the family and society. By analyzing shifting gender roles and the trend of non-marriage, this paper provides insights into how Japanese women are gaining opportunities to empower themselves, both in their careers and personal lives. It also introduces a new approach to understanding social change through the variables of feminism, gender equality, and government policy, and opens up further discussion on the long-term impact of feminism on social dynamics and women's roles in Japan.

This research has several limitations, including limited sources of historical documentation that often have a gender bias, as well as a lack of empirical data that describes the real experiences of women in the past and present. In addition, the approach used is more focused on feminist theory without considering other social theory perspectives. For future research, it is recommended to combine a multidisciplinary approach with empirical studies involving interviews and observations of contemporary women, as well as conduct comparative studies between countries to understand broader gender dynamics. Research could also focus on the development of gender education in the formal curriculum and the impact of modernization and globalization on women's roles in Japan, to provide a more comprehensive picture of changing gender relations and women's empowerment.

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### **Author Contribution Statement**

ADN is responsible for conceptualization, design, analysis, and writing. RSD was responsible for writing and analyzing data related to the impact of being unmarried in Japan. DPS was responsible for interpreting the discussion on feminism and Danjyo Kankei and editing the manuscript. RNT was responsible for interpreting the trend of being unmarried in Japan. GET is responsible for interpreting the research methods and conclusions. SGP was responsible for conceptualizing and finalizing the article.

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