

Nishiki-e (brocade picture) depicting the area around the settlement. *Tokyo Tsukiji Teppozu Kei* (Utawaga Kuniteru II; 1869) / Image: courtesy of Mizuno Printing Museum

Turning the Tide: Girls' Education in Tsukiji

The seeds of Tokyo's modern-day diversity were planted in the course of the Meiji era (1868–1912)—the period that saw Tokyo become Japan's capital. Here, we unravel some of that history.



Julia Carrothers established the Presbyterian Mission Female Seminary, the predecessor to Joshigakuin, the first girls' school in Japan. Photo: courtesy of Joshigakuin

Did you know that there was a settlement for foreign residents in the Tsukiji area after the Meiji Restoration (1868–1869), otherwise known as the dawn of modern Japanese civilization? The Tsukiji Foreign Settlement, as it was called, was in place from 1869 to 1899 and was home to churches built by foreign missionaries and numerous mission schools centered on female education.

However, the settlement was destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, leaving almost no data, and its full extent remains a mystery. Mizuno Masao, chairman of the Tsukiji Foreign Settlement Historical Society, a non-profit organization that conducts research into the settlement, explained the history.

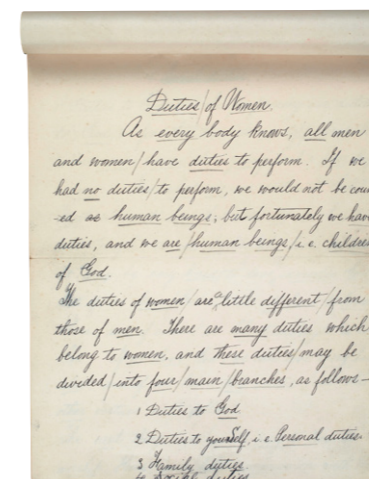
“Yokohama was actively engaged in business with foreign countries under the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1858. The settlement

was established because the Meiji government wished to promote the development of a town within Tokyo that would be open to the rest of the world as well,” said Mizuno. The first to set up in Tsukiji were the consulates and legations of nine countries, including Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States. In 1873, the *kosatsu* (public edict) prohibiting Christianity was abolished, and many missionaries began to arrive in Japan.

The Starting Point of Girls' Education in Japan

Mizuno continued, “The missionaries saw that female education in Japan was lagging behind that of other countries, and set up many schools for girls.” It started with an English tutoring school in Block 6, established by Julia and Christopher Carrothers, a married couple and pair of missionaries who had come to the settlement from San Francisco, in 1870. “At the time, Japanese people were eager to learn foreign languages. Schools were seen as places for boys, but one of the students at the school opened by the missionaries, although dressed in boys' clothing, wrote on the blackboard, ‘I'm a girl.’ This led Julia to decide to open a tutoring school for girls.” The school later became Joshigakuin, a girls' school, and still exists today.

In 1874, another female missionary, Kate Youngman, opened the Girls Boarding School (later Shinsakae Girls' School). This institution came to be known as one of the three “flowers of Tsukiji,” along with Kaigan Jogakko



“As everybody knows, all men and women have duties to perform. If we had no duties to perform, we would not be counted as human beings,” wrote Matsueda Suma.



St. Margaret's School, founded by Bishop Williams of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America in 1877. It was developed in the Tsukiji area from 1879, but was then moved to Suginami City following the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The chapel was built in 1932. Photo: courtesy of St. Margaret's School

(later Aoyama Gakuin) and St. Margaret's School. These schools aimed to cultivate free and independent women who did not fit the conventional model of “a good wife and wise mother,” and this spirit has been passed down to the present institutes. The neatly laid-out streets lined with magnificent brick churches and mission schools must have presented a progressive atmosphere, and one that was welcoming to girls and women wishing to break the mold.

The historical society has in its possession an essay written by a woman who graduated from St. Margaret's School when the settlement was still in place, which shows the high level of female education in those days. “Classes were held almost all in English, and students had to write all of their reports and papers in English as well. At the time, women generally only received four years of mandatory education, starting from when they were six years old, and ending while they were still in elementary school. So you can see how advanced the education was at these schools,” said Mizuno.

There are 13 schools that had premises in the Tsukiji Foreign Settlement that are still in existence today. The teachings of these missionaries, which were based around evangelism and involved various welfare projects—focusing on issues such as female education and relief for the poor—laid the foundation for women in Japan to be active and vibrant members of society.