

Looking for Transpacific Genealogy in Early Feminism: A Study on the Analogy between Margaret Fuller and Ume Tsuda

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1 . Introduction: Two Articles on the Same Page

There are two articles on the same page titled “Only Woman’s Page” of the *New York Tribune* on June 4, 1901. One reports the launch of a new school to promote women’s education in Japan.

A boarding school for girls has been opened in Tokyo Japan, by Miss Tsuda, a young Japanese woman, who is anxious to furnish some of her countrywomen with an education such as that with which she herself has been favored. Miss Tsuda came to this country when a child, with several others who were sent to be educated. Her early experiences were very trying, for there was no room for them at the Japanese Legation, and the lonely children were dependent solely on hired help for care. Finally the family of Charles Lanman, of Washington, adopted Miss Tsuda. She completed her education at Bryn Mawr, but has returned to Japan to identify herself with the life of her own people.¹

Ume Tsuda started a small school at Kouji-machi, Tokyo in 1900. It can be

remarkable that the *New York Tribune* included this piece of news among the articles that depict the new trends of women in the United States.

The other article tells about the selection of the site for the memorial monument for Margaret Fuller, who died in the shipwreck in 1850 at the age of 40.

A site has been selected by the Point o' Woods Improvement Society, of which Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake is president, for the memorial to Margaret Fuller which the society has been for some time planning to erect. Point o' Woods is five miles east of Fire Island Light and on the same beach. It was there that Margaret Fuller, her husband, the Marquis Ossoli, and her little son were drowned in a shipwreck on July 19, 1850. Only the body of the child was ever recovered. The memorial, which is to be in the form of a small pavilion will be placed on a dune overlooking the sea and every effort is being made to have it ready for dedication on the anniversary of the disaster. The committee in charge of contributions consists of the president, Mrs. Blake; Mrs. Katherine C. Walbridge, secretary, and Mrs. Lillie W. Meredith, treasurer.

When she died in the maritime accident, she was on the way home from Italy. She was a correspondent of the *New York Tribune*. In the middle of the 19th century, it was exceptional for a woman to stay in a foreign country as a correspondent. Margaret Fuller started her career as an editor of the *Dial*, the journal of the Transcendental Club, and then moved to New York to accept the offer from the *New York Tribune* in 1844. She published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1845, the first feminist book in the United States. In 1846 she was sent to Europe, and she eyewitnessed the revolution in Italy,

Half a century after the death of Margaret Fuller, Ume Tsuda met her on the same page of the *New York Tribune*. This coincidence connects the

start of the pioneering school in Japan and the final eternalization of the feminist work in the United States.

2. Ume Tsuda as a Feminist Activist

In Japan Ume Tsuda is a historical figure and her achievement as a pioneer of women's education is highly evaluated. She is usually thought to be an educator rather than a feminist. She was indeed enthusiastic to develop the education for women beyond the second level, and she never had the intention to be a politician.

However, more attention should be paid to Ume Tsuda as a feminist. She attended the 4th international convention of the General Federation of Women's Club in Denver, in 1898. Moreover, she made a speech as a representative from Japan.

By the end of June, Ume stood before an auditorium full of women in Denver, thanking them for their warm welcome and their inspiration. (Nimura 259)

She responded to the audience and declared the genealogy of feminism.

The present time will mark an era in our advance, and I feel that the day will not be long before our women, too, may take a stand in the foremost part of the strife for the highest and best for women, and in turn, we may, in the future, lend a helping hand and set a brighter example to the women of other lands in the orient.

Thus from one nation to another will be passed on the work of education and elevation for women," Ume told them; "thus, step by step, will woman arise, throughout all the world, from the slave and grudge

of savage days, from the plaything and doll of later periods, to take her place as true helpmate and equal of man. (quoted in Furuki 92)

She emphasized the influence beyond the boundary of a country or area that would spread out like ripples.

Ume Tsuda was born in 1864 as a second daughter of a high ranked samurai who worked as an interpreter for the treaty negotiations in 1867 and accompanied a delegation to the United States. Ume was sent to the United States by the Meiji government in 1871, as one of five girls accompanied by Ambassador Tomomi Iwakura.

As Margaret Fuller's father had the decision right on his daughter's education, it was Ume's father that decided for his seven-year daughter to visit the United States. Fortunately, Ume could stay with Charles Lanman, secretary of Japanese legation, and his wife Adeline, in Washington DC. She spent ten years with them and returned to Japan in 1882.

To her westernized eyes the position of women in Japanese society was low, and she found even her father clinging to the traditional patriarchal authoritarianism. She felt that she would have limited possibility to make use of the education she had in the United States. During the ten years, the Meiji government had lost interest in women's enlightenment in real meaning. Ume had a post at a prestigious girls' school, but she was not satisfied with the policy of good wife and good mother education.

The disappointment and the eagerness for more education motivated Ume to return to the United States and enter Bryn Mawr College in 1889. She studied biology there for three years and got the strong will to establish her school for women's higher education. The network she gained at Bryn Mawr helped her mentally, intellectually, and financially. She started a small school named Joshi Eigaku Juku (The Women's Institute for English Studies). She taught liberal subjects through discussion and emphasized women's independence, which has similarities with Margaret Fuller's

conversation.

3. Two Pioneering Feminists

It is not clear how Ume Tsuda knew Margaret Fuller, but there are many indirect connections. One thing is that both had a relationship with the New York Tribune. Margaret Fuller wrote for the newspaper, and Ume Tsuda also sent a letter from Japan, and the New York Tribune reported her activities when she visited America. The following is the article on October the 24th in 1898, which tells that after she attended the conference in Denver, she visited her alma mater.

.....The De Rebus Club held its first meeting last Tuesday evening, being addressed by Miss Ume Tsuda, of the Peeresses' School of Tokyo. (Only Woman's Pages, the *New York Tribune*, 24 Oct 1898)

Moreover, another article in 1900 introduces her letter, as a kind of reduced version of Margaret Fuller's dispatches.

"Women's organizations in Japan are called societies rather than clubs," said Ume Tsuda, of Tokyo, in a recent letter to a club woman of this city. "The word club prejudices many people, and so we prefer the other term, society. Our work in these societies is not much like club work in America, partially because our women are retiring and partially because there is little social life of any kind for our women, or for men and women together.

"The Woman's Educational Society, which meets once a month, has for its president Princess Mori. Its membership is about five hundred. The Sanitary Association also meets monthly. Both organizations have

lecturers, who occupy from one to two hours at each session. The latter society has between three hundred and four hundred members. The character of the Interrogation Society is more like that of an American club. Its object is to bring up useful topics for discussion. At each meeting an original paper is read by one of the members, and this is followed by a discussion. This society has about fifty active members.

"The Monday Club, which has formed during the last year, by a number of foreign residents with some prominent native women, has for its purpose instruction and social enjoyment. This meets every two weeks during the season. A short lecture in either Japanese or English, interpreted so that all may understand, is given at each meeting. The membership of this society is limited to fifty.

"Besides these are associations for work among Christian women, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, a society to; promote home study by correspondence, the women's branch of the Red Cross hospital work, and of the Charity Hospital, which was founded by the Empress.

"Our women, of course, need experience, and our work in these lines is a mere beginning. We are not used to going about as American women do. and for this reason it is difficult to get the members to be regular in attendance, even when they wish to do their part faithfully. In my opinion the old social customs hinder the progress of such work. I believe much more can be done now to foster a taste for intellectual pursuits and for social life through school work and life among the young girls." ("Women's Clubs in Japan, Woman's Realm, the *New York Tribune*, 06 May 1900)

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Here she referred to women's associations in Japan and mentioned the way how Japanese women were instructing each other. "The character of the Interrogation Society is more like that of an American club. Its object is to bring up useful topics for discussion. At each meeting an original paper is

read by one of the members, and this is followed by a discussion.” It can be called the Japanese adaptation of Fuller’s conversation.

4. Troubles and Social Conventions

Ume Tsuda suffered from the massive gap between the liberal society she had experienced in the United States and the conservative society based on the Confucian value. However, the America she knew was limited to the circle of the upper middle class. The Lanman, her foster parents in America, provided everything necessary for her with profound affection. Ume Tsuda found America an ideal society. In comparison with the society in the United States which seemed to her ideally modernized and democratic, Japan was a deteriorated and backward country. She lamented in a letter to her foster mother;

……Oh, women have the hardest part of life to bear in more ways than one. Even in America I often wished I were a man. Oh, how much more so in Japan! Poor, poor women, how I long to do something to better your position! Yet why should I, when they are so well-satisfied, and do not seem to know any better? (dated on Dec 7, 1882 *The Attic Letters* 23)

The more responsibility she had, the more frustrated she got by the situation of women in Japan.

This frustration can be found in the writings by Margaret Fuller. Not only in Confucian tradition but also American Transcendentalism, there is a double vision of gender. Emerson said “the general voice of mankind has agreed that they have their own strength; that women are strong by sentiment; that the same mental height which their husbands attain by toil, they attain by sympathy with their husbands. Man is the will, and Woman

the sentiment. In this ship of humanity, Will is the rudder, and Sentiment the sail: when Woman affects to steer, the rudder is only a masked sail." ("Woman") From there Fuller drew her radical vision of gender and influenced the tide of thoughts. Emerson's way of saying that civilization means women is a kind of sophistication. In the conclusion of the essay, Emerson does not show his full agreement with the women's suffrage, but he adds that let women decide which would be better, getting a vote or remaining an angel in the domestic sphere.

I do not think it yet appears that women wish this equal share in public affairs. But it is they and not we that are to determine it. Let the laws be purged of every barbarous remainder, every barbarous impediment to women. Let the public donations for education be equally shared by them, let them enter a school as freely as a church, let them have and hold and give their property as men do theirs;—and in a few years it will easily appear whether they wish a voice in making the laws that are to govern them. If you do refuse them a vote, you will also refuse to tax them,—according to our Teutonic principle, No representation, no tax. (Emerson "Woman")

Fuller's radical feminism denies the division of the sexes. She insists that there is no definite boundary between the sexes.

Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman. (Fuller, *Woman* 68-69)

She challenges the conventional view of women's role.

When Fuller gives a strong statement, her rhetoric is always irony.

She asks why so many women have to live alone without any support even though women should have stayed in the domestic sphere.

But the most fastidious critic on the departure of Woman from her sphere, can scarcely fail to see at present that a vast proportion of the sex, if not the better half, do not, CANNOT, have this domestic sphere. Thousands and scores of thousands in this country no less than Europe are obliged to maintain themselves alone. Far greater numbers divide with their husbands the care of earning a support for the family. In England, now, the progress of society has reached so admirable a pitch that the position of the sexes is frequently reserved, and the husband is obliged to stay at home and “mind the house and bairns” while the wife goes forth to the employment she alone can secure. (Fuller, “Wrongs” 129)

Fuller compares the situation in America with that in England, where she points out that social welfare is progressing rapidly, and the gender relation is much better than in the United States.

Margaret Fuller requests women to be independent. She states “That her hand may be given with dignity, she must be able to stand alone.” (Fuller, *Woman* 103) At the same time, she encourages women to be modest. “You hear much of the modesty of your sex. Preserve it by filling the mind with noble desires that shall ward off the corruptions of vanity and idleness.” (Fuller, *Woman* 98) Also, she urges women to judge the virtue of men that are next to them.

.....if they[men] have not purity, have not mercy, they are no longer fathers, lovers, husbands, sons of yours. (Fuller, *Woman* 98)

5. Feminist Echoes

All of these messages from Margaret Fuller echoes in the address of Ume Tsuda, delivered for the graduates.

Graduation from school may be compared to the launching of a ship that starts out to meet the test of wind and wave.

Our great beacon light is Truth. It will shine in every one of our souls, if only we do not refuse to see. It points out to us our own shallow attainments, our petty meannesses, our selfishness, vanity or jealousy; and reveals to us the good in others. Thus we may escape the rocks of pride and self-love. Follow also the guiding lights of Love and Devotion. In women, these are called instincts, but yet how narrow often is our love, how fickle and shallow, our devotion. Learn to love devotedly, and your lives can not fail. With nobler desires, grater earnestness and wider sympathy not limited to just a few, but taking in the many even beyond the home, the weakest of us may attain success. (Tsuda, "Address")

Both Margaret Fuller and Ume Tsuda looked forward to the future, and both believed in the unlimited possibility without denying the virtue that is said to be characteristic to women. However, both rejected essentialism even though they lived in the society that tended to attribute the social inequality to the nature of man and woman. Ume's last entry to her journal is "Storm last night." It means an actual storm of the night just before she ended her life, but it also a metaphor of her life.

Note

- 1 All articles in the *New York Tribune* in this paper are quoted from Newspaper.com.

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