

ZOFIA PRAŻUCH<sup>1</sup>

## IRENA KRZYWICKA AND HIRATSUKA RAICHŌ – LIFE, ACTIVITY, WORK

### Abstract

The main aim of this article is to draw a comparison between two female figures – Hiratsuka Raichō from Japan and Irena Krzywicka from Poland. Despite the fact that these two women lived in different countries and came from totally different cultural backgrounds, they fought for a better future for women. Both Irena Krzywicka and Hiratsuka Raichō lived during a difficult time of war and were witnesses to dynamic political and social changes in their respective countries. As in historical terms, this was the very beginning of feminist movement, both in Poland and Japan, their lives and activities fall within the period of the first wave of feminism.

Key words: Hiratsuka Raichō, Irena Krzywicka, Poland, Japan, feminism, marriage, motherhood, women's activism

### INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, a trend towards women gaining emancipation became visible, one which enabled women to obtain an appropriate education and professional positions, as well as allowing new opportunities to open up for them. Over the years, increased activism has resulted in the regulation of women's rights in various areas of life. Activities such as the fight for gender equality, marriage, motherhood, birth control, pacifism, and gaining the right to participate in political life intensified. As women began to unite, support each other and set up various charity organisations and trade unions, they became politically active. As this

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<sup>1</sup> MA Student; Jagiellonian University in Kraków; ORCID: 0000-0002-0249-3131; zofia.prazuch@student.uj.edu.pl.

phenomenon was also visible in Poland and Japan, the main subject of this article derives from the need to reach back to the origins of feminism in these countries. In both Poland and Japan, issues related to this type of subject are frequently socially underestimated or forgotten, a phenomenon which unfortunately leads to generalization or drawing conclusions without taking into account its original genesis. It is, therefore, important to provide an outline of feminist movements and, consequently, the pioneers who have contributed to their intensive development. According to the beginnings of feminism in the above-mentioned countries, two figures will be mentioned, namely Irena Krzywicka and Hiratsuka Raichō.

To understand not only their activity but also the historical period in which feminist movements of the 20th century existed, biographical research as a part of a qualitative and comparative research will be used in this article. This method, developed on the basis of research conducted by the noted Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki, is concerned with the reconstruction and analysis of life stories and the author's private attitude towards a presented reality and social or political situations based on biographical narratives and documents, such as diaries, biographies, or memoirs. An inherent feature of biographical research is that the above-mentioned documents are personally written by the author. Moreover, the content of such documents is focused on the author's internal experience of described incidents completely shaped by them (Sołoma, 2002, p. 204).

The major inspirations for this article will be the biographies *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun* by Hiratsuka Raichō and *Wyznania gorszycielki* by Irena Krzywicka. In this regard, the material is focused not only on the lives of both activists, but also on the historical background, which is an important factor affecting their social life. In this way, in her biography Krzywicka presents the context of the situation of women in Poland, while Raichō presents the place of women in Japanese society. The comparison of both identities aims to indicate which decisions or value systems were guided by them, as well as granting the possibility of identifying their worldviews, both individual and unique, and formed within the social currents and trends at the time. Moreover, the decision to juxtapose Krzywicka and Raichō results from their many similarities, especially in the context of their beliefs and activities. Both are considered leading figures in the feminist circles which developed very intensively, especially at the beginning of the 20th century. Thanks to their efforts, the struggle for women's freedom was no longer just a dream, ultimately becoming a reality.

## HIRATSUKA RAICHŌ

Hiratsuka Raichō is known primarily as one of the pioneers of the spread of feminism in Japan. Interestingly, nothing in her life really suggested that her future would involve being a leader of women's movements.

She was born on January 30, 1885 as Hiratsuka Haru and the second daughter of a wealthy, well-educated family. Her father, Hiratsuka Sadajirō was a son of a samurai from the Kishu (Wakayama) domain. Over the years, thanks to his proficiency in German and continuous language education, Sadajirō became a high ranking government official and was asked to help in drafting the Meiji constitution of Japan (Nakajima, 2003, p. 38). Raichō's mother, Tsuya, was a daughter of Iijima Hōan, a physician serving the Tayasu family, a branch of the Tokugawa clan. Already from her early childhood Tsuya was well educated, especially in the arts and Tokiwazu traditional music. Unfortunately, after her marriage to Hiratsuka Sadajirō, Tsuya had to set aside everything she had loved over the years. Art was not approved by her husband, a fact she, as a woman, had to accept despite the extreme difficulty in doing so (Hiratsuka, 2010, pp. 13–15). Apart from the great involvement of her parents' in Raichō's life, a major role in shaping the young girl's childhood was played by her grandmother – Yae. In her biography, Raichō portrayed Yae as a hard-working and eternally positive woman who influenced her intensely. Raichō shared a room with her grandmother, spent most of the day with her, and obeyed her most (Hiratsuka, 2010, pp. 6–8).

Raichō was quite an unusual child, not interested in typical girlish activities. Her appearance also differed from the look of a typical girl, being quite plump with a pink face and tousled hair. This is why she often heard from her grandma "it's really too bad you weren't a boy" (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 38). Indeed, at that time, it seemed that being a boy was not only more practical but also easier.

The conditions in which Raichō and her sister Taka lived were quite impressive for those times. Both sisters could attend kindergarten and then school, thus having constant contact with the arts. Raichō attended the elite Ochanomizu Tokyo Women's Normal School. She was a very engaged student, full of patience and ambition. However, what made her stand out from the rest were her quite modern views contradicting the conventional vision of women's issues (Hiratsuka, 2010, Introduction).

Raichō, despite her father's objection, wanted to enter university and asked her mother to convince father to let her study. He finally agreed but there was one condition, namely Raichō could study, but only home economics, not English literature. As a result, on April 1903 Hiratsuka Raichō entered Japan Women's University (Nakajima, 2003, p. 39).

Unfortunately, however, Raichō felt kind of lost there, especially because of the many differences between her and her peers. What uplifted her most were lectures given by the founder of the university, Naruse Jinzō (Nakajima, 2003, p. 39). He was mainly inspired by spiritual education regarding a wide range of subjects – religion, philosophy, ethics, as well as women's issues. His universalistic view was not typical for those times, a fact which hugely impressed Raichō. Naruse focused mainly on the need for education, as broadly understood, and modern ideals, an approach which was highly original. He was the person who first aroused in her the desire to change the situation of women in Japan. In her autobiography she wrote: "In Naruse Jinzō, for the first time in my life, I found a person with a generous vision regarding women, a person whom I could truly respect and admire" (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 67).

Throughout her college years, Raichō immersed herself in Zen meditation. For her, it was essentially liberating and gave her courage to defend social criticism. She often repeated the statement that a "totally new world had opened up" (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 85). Ultimately, in 1906 Raichō attained *kensho*. Her Zen master, Roshi, gave her a religious name, Ekun (Nakajima, 2003, p. 39). Raichō treated this as her "second birth". From that moment Zen Buddhism became a guiding light in her life. Therefore, her later works became mostly focused on mysticism and contemplation about the transcendence of life and death (Bardsley, 2008, pp. 219–220).

In the meantime, Raichō took English lessons at Seibi Women's English Academy. She also joined the Keishū Literary Society, a literary study group for women formed by Raichō's friend, Ikuta Chōkō (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 100). As, for Raichō, literature was still something new, she knew that she would have to encounter many new literary works. As a member of the group, she was most interested in foreign literature. With Chōkō's advice, she started reading English translations of Ivan Turgenev and Guy de Maupassant, before later translating the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Turgenev by herself (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 101).

In joining the Keishū Literary Society, Raichō met Morita Sohei. Morita was one of the lecturers, a student of Natsume Sōseki and close friend

of Chōkō. They made contact through Morita's letter containing a critical review of Raichō's story *The Last Day of Love* (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 105) written for the group's magazine. Gradually, through letters and meetings their relationship became increasingly intense. Raichō was more fascinated by Morita than in love with him, being impressed by his intellectual qualities. Unfortunately, this relationship quickly gained a toxic turn. Raichō, strongly influenced by Morita, fled with him to the Nasu mountains in March 1908 in order to commit *shinjū*<sup>2</sup> (Nakajima, 2003, p. 39). The suicide plan failed when the couple was found by a police officer. This scandal, called the Shiobara Incident, had serious consequences. The fact that two highly educated and distinguished people had tried to commit *shinjū* drew widespread public criticism.

After the Shiobara Incident many changes happened in Raichō's life. First of all, her relationship with her father categorically deteriorated. Moreover, the family status dropped significantly, with Hiratsuka Sadajirō almost losing his job (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 123). At that moment Raichō's life was all about three things, namely *zazen*, English classes, and reading in the Ueno Library (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 135). Everything changed after returning to Tokyo in September 1911 when her friend Chōkō suggested she found a monthly literary journal for women writers (Nakajima, 2003, p. 39). This was the first step in announcing the birth of the women's liberation movement in Japan.

Initially, Raichō was not convinced by the idea of founding a magazine. Only when she asked Yasumochi Yoshiko (her sister's friend) for help did she decide to begin preparations. Even Raichō's mother offered help and financial support (Hiratsuka, 2010, pp. 141–143). The journal created by women for women was finally named *Seitō* as a direct reference to Blue-stocking societies, England's women's social and educational movement from the mid-18th century. *Seitō*'s founders' main aim was to help awaken women and enable them to grow through writing. They cared most about their limited social opportunities and wasted talents. As Raichō said:

When I looked at the women around me, they seemed false. They were presumably endowed with extremely admirable qualities, but these remained hidden because of social conditions. They were surely capable of greater things [...]. (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 144)

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<sup>2</sup> *Shinjū* – a suicide pact between lovers.

Therefore, the content of *Seitō* was to give women the opportunity to express their individuality and find their true self. Thus, it was founded with the aim of self-fulfilment and to awaken the suppressed literary genius of women.

The initial idea for *Seitō* did not come from a desire to fight in order to contribute to the development of the feminist movement. Its greatest achievement was the creation of the journal itself, supporting gifted and prosperous literary talents. Only after some time, when Raichō engaged herself in Japanese and Western literature on women's issues did she start to be more focused on *Seitō's* new awakened mission. She was, in particular, influenced by Ellen Key, a Swedish activist in the women's movement, and her book, *Love and Marriage* (Lowy, 2004, pp. 369–371). These influences can be seen not only in the activity, but also in the essays of the young Raichō. Ellen Key's ideology was based on two pillars, namely the need for a relationship based on genuine love, and on the importance of motherhood (Lowy, 2004, p. 364). Her new sexual morality arose from real affection, not from duty, and it was primarily about equal treatment of both spouses. Unfortunately, her views were contrary to the sexual ideology of Japan of that time. Inspired by Key's ideas, Raichō began to be seriously involved in fighting against popularly accepted standards. Therefore, her views were revolutionary. She tried, as one of the first, to shift the focus from the good of the nation towards respect for individuality. In her later essay *To the Women of the World* (*Yo no fujintachi ni*, 1913), Raichō called for a change in life values, a struggle with inequality, as well as for people to seek out alternatives that would support women's lives (Lowy, 2004, p. 372). Nonetheless, such issues were still very questionable for many.

Meanwhile, it was at that time she decided to use the pen name "Raichō", meaning "snow grouse", a name linked with the time when she lived in Nagano near the northern Japanese Alps (Nakajima, 2003, p. 39). The main reason for this decision was to maintain honour of the family and the good name of her mother and father. Raichō preferred to keep her identity secret because of the controversial content appearing in the monthly journal.

One month before the release of the journal's first volume, Raichō was asked for an opening statement. Her quite long essay mainly focused on women's achievements, determination, and evoked spiritual revolution, the main themes of literary naturalism. She wanted to spread

self-awareness and the fact that a woman has many options, not just those that the Japanese narrative dictates. As “being a good wife, a wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*<sup>3</sup>) was a widely promoted role that maintained social inequality (Smith, 1983, pp. 70–83), Raichō, in her introductory essay, wanted to lift women’s spirit. “In the beginning woman was truly the sun, an authentic person...”, she wrote, “Now she is the moon, a wan and sickly moon dependent on another, reflecting on another’s brilliance” (Heisig, Kasulis & Maraldo, 2011, p. 1148). The sun and the moon were symbols of realities of women’s history – the breakdown of a matrilineal society and the rise of patriarchal system, the tyranny of men and subjugation of women, the decline of women’s status as a human being (Hiratsuka, 2010, p. 160). *Seitō*’s role was to show that it is time to break free of the historical bonds dictated to women for centuries.

The first issue’s modern cover, designed by Naganuma Chieko, Yosano Akiko’s feminist poem *Rambling Thoughts* and Hiratsuka’s Raichō famous manifesto, reached a huge readership and helped *Seitō* become a resounding success. When *Seitō*’s founders decided to publish articles on women in modern European dramas (such as Nora from Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*), journalists labelled them *The New Women* (Kano, 2001, p. 127). Thanks to this, the society gained many new members. However, this initially positive term turned very quickly against *Seitō* because of two scandals in 1912, namely the so-called Five-coloured Liquor Incident and the Dalliance in Yoshiwara (Hiratsuka, 2010, pp. 178–181). These caused a huge drop in the popularity and status of the journal.

Over a few years, topics shifted towards political and socio-cultural women’s issues. In January 1915, the editorship of *Seitō* was handed over to Ito Nōe. Unfortunately, because of many other scandals, inappropriate issues, and financial problems, *Seitō* was closed in 1916. In fact, *Seitō* gave its members and readers an opportunity to write or read about issues they could not even talk about. Indeed, correspondence, novels, and essays on private life and the burden of being a woman in Japanese society were often published there. Therefore, it could be said that the country was not properly prepared to meet the expectations of women who wanted freedom and independence.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ryōsai kenbo* – “good wife, wise mother”, during prewar period in Japan the most representative of the attitude toward women (Smith, 1983, p. 75).

In 1913 Raichō met an artist, Okumura Hiroshi, her one and true love. Raichō admired him mainly because of his magnificent character and unconventional decisions (e.g. not getting married in the country where marriage was one of the most important social values). In the patriarchal society of the Taishō period (1912–1926), examples of a men such as Okumura were extremely rare. Always supporting and understanding Raichō, he let her enjoy literary freedom and individuality. Until 1941, despite having two children, both of them rejected entering into an official form of marriage (Nakajima, 2003, p. 40).

Even though *Seitō* was disbanded in 1916, Raichō continued to publish her views and concerns in other magazines and newspapers. From 1915 to 1919, with four other women interested in ensuring the economic ability of mothers to raise their children, she engaged herself in a “Debate on Protection of Motherhood” (Tomida, 2004, pp. 243–271). Raichō viewed the protection of motherhood as a way to advance women’s interests in an increasingly conservative and imperialist society. Inspired mainly by Ellen Key’s concept of motherhood, Raichō demanded its protection. She also believed that Japanese housewives should be finally economically independent and should demand financial compensation for taking care of their children (Lowy, 2004, p. 374).

Between 1919 and 1920, motivated by the investigation into female workers’ conditions in textile factories in Nagoya, Hiratsuka, together with Ichikawa Fusae and Oku Mumeo, founded the New Women’s Association (*Shin-Fujin Kyōkai*), as well as the journal *Josei Domei* (Nakajima, 2003, p. 40). The association submitted three petitions to the Diet of Japan. The first of these, accepted in 1922, concerned the amendment of Article 5 of the Police Security Regulations to allow women to join political organizations and attend political assemblies. The second petition was concerned about providing women with legal protection against venereal diseases (here it failed to achieve any legal changes due to much criticism). The last petition was submitted to give women the ability to be politically active and to elect members of the House of Representatives (Tomida, 2005, pp. 52–57). It was the first women’s suffrage petition submitted to the Diet of Japan. Unfortunately, because of the social and political situation of that time, the implementation of the goals of the petition proved to be impossible. Indeed, Japanese women had to wait until 1945 to receive the right to vote.

During the Second World War, Raichō withdrew from the public eye until 1945. When, in 1946, a new constitution was promulgated she was



excited as everything she had desired for years had finally come to pass (Nakajima, 2003, p. 41). She became politically active once again and, in 1950, in order to calm growing tension between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, she sent an appeal to John Foster Dulles who visited Japan as a special envoy. In 1951 due to the occupation of Okinawa and American military bases established all over the country, she wrote a letter to the Senate showing her indignation. In April 1953, Raichō founded the Federation of Japan Women's Organizations which aimed to oppose the presence of military bases and nuclear weapons. In October 1961, in connection with the Vietnam War, together with Nogami Yaeko and Iwasaki Chihiro she founded The New Japan Women's Association (*Shinfujin*), which, as its predecessor, was still progressive and open to everyone (Nakajima, 2003, p. 41). Raichō was active within the organization until the end of her life, dying in 1971. In spite of the cancer she suffered from and her old age, she lived in the hope that one day women would achieve their goals and possess opportunities for social advancement.

## IRENA KRZYWICKA

Today, one might get the impression that the figure of Irena Krzywicka has been forgotten. Despite her many achievements and her interesting life story and ideas continuing to attract interest until now, she has never been sufficiently appreciated by Polish society. Despite this, it is an indisputable fact that she should be, or even must be treated as one of the most influential women of the interwar Second Polish Republic (Koper, 2011, pp. 43–61).

Irena Krzywicka, née Goldberg, was born into a family of Polish-Jewish left-wing intellectuals in 1899 in Yenisei, Siberia. Her father, Stanisław Goldberg, a physician by education, had been sent to Siberia for possessing socialist sympathies. Unfortunately, he died of tuberculosis in Poland three years after their return from exile. After his death, Irena was mainly brought up by her mother Felicja Barnabel. She was a brave and independent woman in those times. In spite of being a dentist by profession, she devoted herself to teaching Polish (Tuszyńska, 1999, p. 25). Felicja instilled tolerance, rationalism, and a patriotic tradition in Irena's young mind. She talked a lot with her daughter, and was not afraid to raise any subject, even those considered most embarrassing at that time, thus providing her

with an education in sexual and political matters. Irena often emphasized that her mother raised her in an extraordinary way, in that knowledge and education were paramount for Felicja. Therefore, Irena's childhood was a peaceful one, being raised in a family atmosphere and in the company of books, albeit only good ones, as Felicja had decreed that "poor books were forbidden" (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 33).

Brought up with a love for the Romantic writers, Irena lived and breathed reading, creating her own imaginary picture of the world. Irena traveled a lot with her mother, which was very inspiring for the girl. Although she often spent time alone, she never got bored (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 36). Krzywicka was particularly fond of the mountain resort of Zakopane, where she lived for a year, mainly due to her poor health. This proved to be a crucial moment, one where she felt an amazing bond with the surrounding natural world. Since then, as nature had become something her life could not exist without, her homes always had to be surrounded by a garden.

At the age of thirteen, Irena and her mother moved from the suburbs to Warsaw. Despite their difficult financial situation, her mother took care of Irena's education while the girl attended Ms. Werekka's Junior High School (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 37). The school's status was the highest among girls schools in Warsaw, mainly because Jewish girls were accepted there. However, Krzywicka did not like this school, even though she was very clever, gifted in a literary sense, and always prepared for classes. In fact, she felt enslaved and lost.

In 1917, after graduation, Irena began her studies at the University of Warsaw. Meanwhile, the revolution broke out in Russia, which significantly influenced Irena's political commitment. The entire period proved to be very intense. She was engaged in activities of the Polish Socialist Party – the Polish Left, but quickly changed her views. Having observed class equality between the working class and intelligentsia to be a myth, her party activity quickly began to be limited only to writing articles for the *Workers' Voice* (*Głos Robotniczy*) (Pietruszewski, 2013, p. 41).

Despite Poland regaining independence after one hundred twenty-three years of partitions, the situation of Jews in Poland began to gradually deteriorate, a fact which Irena learnt the hard way. Unaccustomed to racist insinuations, Irena did not understand why her friends looked down upon her, or why she could not belong to the Polish language club (Krzywicka, 2002, pp. 81–82). Unlike her friends, she did not want to get married as a young woman. Intellectual development and education were most

important to her. She wrote a doctoral dissertation, but unfortunately she did not finish it because of a conflict with her thesis supervisor. In the end, studies did not play any significant role in her life, and she even regretted that she had started Polish studies instead of gardening. However, she had, as an ambitious student during her time at the university, published her first essay entitled *A Spray of Lilac (Kisć Bzu)* (Krzywicka, 2002, pp. 106–107).

In 1922, she graduated from the University of Warsaw and a year later married Jerzy Krzywicki, a lawyer and a son of a well-known sociologist and women's rights activist, Ludwik Krzywicki. Their marriage was completely atypical for those times because of its open form, which was difficult for many to accept. This decision was made mainly due to Jerzy's symptoms of paratyphoid and venereal disease. Therefore, Irena agreed to wait two years for Jerzy (until he recovered) and then marry him, on condition that it would be on the model of an open marriage. Moreover, Irena did not treat this disease as something shameful. It was just the reception of the public that did so (Krzywicka, 2002, pp. 134–135). As a couple, although they remained friends forever, there was no deeper feeling between them. Moreover, Krzywicka postulated a model of *companionate marriage* (Pietruszewski, 2013, p. 46). She was inspired by American lawyer, Ben Lindsey, who considered that marriage should consist of two stages: the first, "trial period" – after a year the marriage could end in divorce without any consequences, and a second stage, which assumed the conscious life of spouses and their planned future together. The main thing was to give young people some time and not to subject them to social pressure. Krzywicka also believed that the idea of marriage had been "disfigured" by society and the church. For that reason, she was faithful to Lindsey's concept, saying that the marriage changed in his way could become a beautiful thing, a voluntary union of friendly and loving people living without jealousy, respecting each other's private lives and enjoying a non-binding freedom (Krzywicka, 1932).

In the meantime, Irena fulfilled herself as a writer. She started to work with many socio-cultural journals, mainly the *Literary News*. At that time during an interview in 1927, she met Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, then one of Poland's best known writers and translators (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 181). That was a crucial moment in her life. From the first meeting, Irena felt a great affection for Tadeusz, which almost immediately turned into love. Since then, she lived in two parallel worlds – with Jerzy Krzywicki as her husband, who provided her with a family life, and with Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński

who became her mentor and partner. Such a situation gave her many intellectual possibilities, e.g. active participation in Skamander, an elite Polish group of experimental poets in Warsaw. In her biography she wrote:

[...] the year 1928 began, the happiest year of my life. All happiness fell upon me all at once: I had an amazing child, Jerzy started earning well, I wrote and became known and I was madly in love. In a word, all my desires were fulfilled. (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 189)

For Irena, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński was like her “*maître à penser*, her master, her guide” (Tuszyńska, 1999, p. 22). This excellent translator of French literature, brilliant critic, and physician by profession, immediately attracted Krzywicka’s attention. It was Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński who presented Warsaw’s bohemian world to Irena. Inviting her to the Ziemiańska Café<sup>4</sup>, he opened up new possibilities for her, and introduced Irena to many well-known friends. Ultimately, Krzywicka was hailed as the star of the salons and she loved the company of famous people (Tuszyńska, 1999, pp. 21, 31). After a year, this intellectual fascination turned into an affair. Żeleński was not only her inspiration, but also her first true love. She never hid it and did not care what people thought. Tadeusz supported Irena very much, especially at the time of her subsequent controversial activities.

The year 1930 proved to be the most productive year for Irena. At that time she was the most recognizable figure as a modern woman and pioneer of the feminist movement in Poland. Then, Irena decided to write about things which were extremely controversial for the majority of Polish society. She started to call for an open debate on the sexuality of women, planned motherhood, and taboo issues connected with the female body. The starting point of Krzywicka’s activity was the situation of workers dying from illegal abortions. She asked Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński for help, because his voice, as a physician by profession, would be more valued. They began writing for magazines, e.g. the *Literary News* where they even had their own column entitled *Conscious Life* (Koper, 2011, p. 181). Indeed, the concept of “conscious life” could be considered as Krzywicka’s motto. A “conscious life” meant conscious decision-making, first of all about marriage, and then about having children. Krzywicka believed that the transformation

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<sup>4</sup> Mała Ziemiańska – one of the most known meeting places of Warsaw intelligentsia: poets, writers, artists, painters, e.g. Jan Lechoń, Julian Tuwim, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (Zientek, 2018).

of social morals and institution of marriage was essential. In the meantime, Irena debuted with her first novel, *The First Blood (Pierwsza Krew)* (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 227). Considered one of her most controversial works, it concerned a story of three teenagers growing up and discovering their own sexuality, then seen as something absolutely stunning in Polish literature.

Irena Krzywicka was in fact the first publishing feminist of a new wave, one who did not see the world through men's eyes but through her own – the eyes of a woman. Without any discomfort or embarrassment she wrote about important things that were still overlooked by Polish society. She condemned the taboo nature of sexuality, claiming that the issue of women's sexual satisfaction was a social problem. She also claimed that women, despite having a lot of new opportunities, were still not using their potential. Although her controversial views met with a large dose of criticism, Krzywicka did not seem to care, being a stubborn person who wanted to achieve her goals at all costs.

The next step in the popularization of conscious life was Żeleński's article *The Biggest Crime of Criminal Law* in the *Morning Courier* (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 419). It was also the beginning of a campaign for the decriminalization of abortion. Krzywicka helped him with editing it. Finally, both of them, with the help of Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, Zofia Żeleńska, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, founded the first Polish Conscious Motherhood Clinic in Leszno (Tuszyńska, 1999, p. 15). The main aim of this clinic was to provide protection for single mothers, combating induced miscarriage and underground abortions.

Unfortunately this kind of help met with criticism of the press. Women were also afraid to use services of the clinic.

A clinic [...] where outstanding doctors served without compensation, where there was no abortion, but the prevention of pregnancy and infertility treatment, was not very successful. Women were afraid and ashamed to use it. This institution met only with condemnation and mockery. (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 242)

Despite the fact that the clinic had failed, the discussion about motherhood, abortion, and contraception had not gone away.

The last time Krzywicka saw Boy-Żeleński was on the way back from Zakopane. The first day of war changed Krzywicka's sheltered life: "[...] And one day came, the only one – September 1, 1939 – when I found myself suddenly at the very bottom of adversity" (Krzywicka, 2002, p. 346). During the Second World War and the occupation of Poland, Krzywicka had

to remain in hiding under a false name, Stanisława Piotrowska, as she had been placed on a list of people the Nazis had marked for extermination. She spent a year and a half in Podkowa Leśna. Then, she wandered from the home of one close friend to another. Even Boy-Żeleński's wife, Zofia Żeleńska, took good care of her. Nobody turned Irena in.

Three people close to her perished during the war, namely: her husband, probably murdered in the Katyn massacre; Boy-Żeleński, murdered in Lviv with a group of Polish professors from Lviv's universities; and her son Piotr who became ill and subsequently died. Having lost those closest to her, Krzywicka suffered a shock from which she never recovered (Tuszyńska, 1999, pp. 43, 52).

After the war she could not find herself in the new reality she now faced. Living in a dream world, it was difficult for her to move from life under the Nazi and Soviet occupations back to normal life. Subconsciously, she also felt that she was not ready for the new era to come. In 1945 Irena received a proposal from the Polish Embassy in France to become a cultural attaché (Tuszyńska, 1999, p. 64). Uncertain at first, she decided to take this job, primarily because of the need to support her family. After almost two years, she returned to Poland. She wrote theater reviews and expressed herself on women's issues in a journal entitled *Women* (Tuszyńska, 1999, pp. 96, 117). At the same time, Irena commented on political matters and women's issues, as well as delivering many lectures and radio broadcasts. Unfortunately, in the new post-war Poland she felt very lonely. Her activities, appreciated before the war, now lost their significance. In 1962, due to her son Andrzej's career, Krzywicka left the country with him, first to Switzerland, then to France (Tuszyńska, 1999, pp. 202–206). She never returned to Poland and lived for a long time in Bures-sur-Yvette, where she eventually died. For the rest of her life, Krzywicka wrote about important matters. Unfortunately, a vast majority of the issues she fought for still remain as challenges for women today.

## WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE JAPANESE AND POLISH SOCIETIES

Despite the fact that these two figures lived in two different societies and came from a totally different cultural and political background, their activities were similar. Nevertheless, when discussing feminism in both countries, Poland and Japan, some kind of distinctions can be seen.

From the end of the 19th century, the meaning of women's life was determined in Japanese society by the legal system, including the Meiji Civil Code in force from 1898, and Neo-Confucianism, which culturally set women's a path through a patriarchal system. The historical legacy of a feudal society left its indelible mark on social and family structures. This was because the idea that women would never be equal to men was deeply rooted. The key issue of the Tokugawa period (1600–1867) was a political ideology of the Five Relationships known as *wulun*, introduced by Mencius (Hsü, 1970, pp. 27–28). This defined the key norms regulating social relations in Japan. Consequently, these five relationships shaped the idea of a woman, summarized in the Confucian three obediences: namely, to one's father, husband, or son, after a woman had been widowed. As a result, women occupied a lowly and precarious position. The feudal system gave women their meaning in life and set it in the context of a reality rooted in hierarchical relationships. Women were usually not highly educated and nobody was interested in improving their level of education. Therefore, women's value was judged by their effort put into the household, and procreative abilities – especially giving birth to sons (Grosjean, 1988, pp. 169–170).

During the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), Japan was inspired mainly by political and socio-cultural patterns, such as democracy, equality, or access to education. Unfortunately, despite the modernization of the country, the real situation of women was still deeply rooted in Neo-Confucian values. They were deprived of certain civil rights that only men had. For example, in 1889 Japan passed a law forbidding women to participate in any political organizations or attend political meetings (Grosjean, 1988, p. 171). The ideology that dominated at that time still limited the role of women mainly to performing household chores. The Japanese way of life was established mainly by two values: *ei* and *miai kekkon*. *Ei* referred to the Japanese family system, which comprises all family members, including ancestors. *Ei* also emphasized the core relationships between parent and child, especially relations with sons, since daughters left home to become wives. *Miai kekkon* meant an arranged marriage – the establishment of bonds between families. The feelings of the those being married off did not matter at all.

In the 1920's and 1930's, along with the development of women's social activity, the Fujin Sanseiken Undō – Women's Suffrage Movement – developed. The leader was Ichikawa Fusae, who in 1919, together

with Hiratsuka Raichō, formed the New Women's Association (*Shin-Fujin Kyōkai*) seeking to obtain women's right to be active in social and political life (Kamińska, 2020, p. 184). This is why Hiratsuka Raichō was so socially important. Above all, thanks to her efforts, topics previously considered as controversial, such as women's suffrage, women's intellectual, political, and sexual activity began to enter the public consciousness.

As a result, after the Second World War, women's finally received the right to vote in 1946. Although the differences between men and women regarding the possibility of active participation in the social and political life of Japan had not been completely eliminated, they had been reduced to some extent (Kamińska, 2020, p. 187). Therefore, Hiratsuka's Raichō efforts could be finally considered as a great beginning of a new reality for women.

At the time of the partitions of Poland (1772–1795), Polish women were often reduced to the role of mothers who had to focus on their households, a fact which was often emphasized by writers and social activists of that time. After the partitions, when Poland disappeared from the maps, the perception of women changed slightly. The impoverishment of many middle-class families and, above all, the loss of self-identity due to the repressions of the invaders required women to adapt quickly to the new situation. This resulted from the constant struggle for independence and attempt to keep up the patriotic spirit (Krzyżanowska, 2012, p. 150). Women slowly began to appear in the arena of social life. At the beginning of the 19th century, educational issues also began to be taken into account, although this usually concerned upper class women and was limited to playing musical instruments or learning the French language, for instance. Only in some cases (e.g. aristocracy) was the scope of teaching slightly wider. The changes of this period were mainly caused by modernization, democratization and a feudal crisis. Enlightenment influences were more and more visible in urban civilization. Secondary and higher education was gradually introduced and women were allowed to attend schools. The first secular schools for girls (no longer convent schools) were founded. Thanks to this, the number and social significance of members of the intelligentsia gradually increased. Representatives of this social group cared for the education of children of both sexes in the belief that science itself was of value, as well as a tool for social advancement or maintaining one's current position in the social hierarchy (Szwarc, 2014). Unfortunately, the model of obedience to a man or matters concerning the care of home



and children were still socially treated as part of a woman's duties. Therefore, it can be concluded that while the period of partitions contributed to the development of some opportunities, this was, unfortunately, not for all social classes, but only for those who could afford it.

The interwar period was mainly characterized by the triumph of Poland regaining independence in 1918 after one hundred twenty-three years of partitions. Unfortunately, when it came to the position of women, it was also a period filled with some disappointment. Indeed, it has been defined by historians as the time of "equal rights and unequal chances" (Żarnowska & Szwarc, 2000). Women, despite their hard work and fight for a free homeland, despite the postulated equality and obtaining the right to vote in 1918, could not, in the end, find this equality in everyday life (Krzyżanowska, 2012, p. 153). However, it is a matter of record that many women's organizations functioned successfully at that time. Women already had experience of conducting underground activity during the First World War behind them, as well as working in many political organizations.

Lower payment for women compared with men working in the same position, aroused great indignation among women. Although this was initially explained by the lower physical strength of women, one could not speak of physical strength regarding those employed in education or offices. In relation to their abilities women still felt many limitations. They still had to compete with men for prestige and high incomes. There was a total lack of freedom of speech and self-determination. The idea of getting married continued to be promoted. The 1930's were the most crucial period, especially when compared with the development of other European countries. Women's efforts during this period focused on activities and work for society in general. Women disagreed with existing laws, rebelled against patriarchal customs and principles. It was also a time of defining your own identity, reviewing your own choices and decisions, while maintaining internal consistency and continuity (Wałęciuk-Dejneka & Postuszna, 2014, p. 7). Women began to organize and unite, with this time proving to be one of great activity. At that time, many women's charity organizations, trade unions, and even political organizations were created and in operation. Women were also involved in pacifist activities (Janiak-Jasińska, Sierakowska & Szwarc, 2008). Literature written by women enjoyed great interest. People began to speak louder and more boldly about issues of self-determination, physicality, sexuality, and motherhood. After many years of struggle, the issue of gender equality and discussions about

women's social role had become relevant, thus giving rise to what we now call gender studies (Nasiłowska, 2011, pp. 120–121). Therefore, the figure of Irena Krzywicka significantly influenced the perception of femininity, both of that time and in the contemporary world. Thanks to activists such as Krzywicka, women's voices and demands became more visible.

## CONCLUSION

According to the assumptions of biographical research, the historical background and development of both of the respective societies that influenced the activities of Krzywicka and Raichō should be summarized.

In the case of the lives of both pioneers, their activities fall within an incredibly formative period in the histories of Poland and Japan. Both societies rapidly began to develop through intensive modernization processes. In case of Japan, this was caused by the Meiji Restoration supported by Western societies, while in Poland, this was due to the country regaining independence, finally opening up to the world and overcoming the oppression of its invaders. Although both grew out of strong native traditions, it was by deriving many ideas and tendencies from the global system that they started to be increasingly modernized. In fact, in Poland, this process took place earlier than in Japan but in a more diverse way. Due to division of the country resulting from the partitions, each part of the country under separate invader developed at a different level. Therefore, after the First World War, the main aim was to unify the country in respect of culture and society. Modernization processes in Japan were more uniform. Although the development covered almost the whole country, it was carried out chaotically and resulted mostly from imposed treaties settled with Western countries. Then, for both Japan and Poland, this was a period of many radical social and cultural changes, characterized by the search for their own identity on an international scale, the struggle with social hierarchy and deeply entrenched traditions which were reflected in the situation of women. Consequently, in both countries an increase in emancipation movements was observed. Women decided to unite and strive together to change their social roles that had been socially conditioned by tradition, ideological or religious tendencies, and politics. The idea of patriarchy played an important role as it set the path of the position of women over the centuries. In Japan, compliance with Confucianism had led to the

degradation of the position of women as members of Japanese society. In Poland, despite obtaining electoral rights, women did not get the desired freedom and independence, which they accordingly expected.

Therefore, activists such as Krzywicka and Raichō had a colossal influence not only on the development and spread of feminist concepts, but mostly on the idea that modern women in the 20th century had rights worth fighting for. Both Krzywicka and Raichō are iconic figures that symbolize the values of progressive and free women, especially taking into account the times in which they had the opportunity to be active. Their similarities on the biographical level and strong aspirations in their respective *de facto* political and social contexts contributed in choosing them as a symbol of women's struggle of those times. By breaking social principles and presenting courage against a moral background, both women brought about a very rapid development of feminist movements in their societies.

To sum up, Irena Krzywicka and Hiratsuka Raichō had much in common. Both activists were from politically engaged families connected with the intelligentsia. They were surrounded by artistic and intellectual milieus which strongly affected their perception of the world. Both took similar degree courses, which inspired them to start their own activities. Both of them wrote about women's rights, marriage, and maternity in the most popular journals of that time. They themselves decided about the form of their private relationships with men who, despite the prevailing social mores, supported their controversial activities. Both felt the need to fight in order to achieve universal goals important for women then and now. They generated new ideas, gradually getting them through, thus creating new principles and values. Most importantly, despite social difficulties, they never strayed from their chosen course, one which to many seemed radical. Therefore, in spite of their significant cultural and social differences, even their personalities can be considered as very similar. Irena Krzywicka and Hiratsuka Raichō activated people and societies around them to fight the stereotypes of the era. As both of them were connected with feminist activities in their respective countries, they can be perceived as pioneers of this movement. Both of them were courageous enough to talk about matters nobody had discussed before. Nowadays, they are recognized permanent figures of feminism in a global sense. The activities of both pioneers, which were close to their ideals, were far-reaching. They inspired many women all over the world to work for a better future for women. In conclusion, their work and initiatives have become an important factor

in the progress of civilization, modern views on women's issues and have paved a new way in perceiving women's role in society.

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