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Panel Title: From Kitsch to Art Moderne: Popular Textiles for Women in the First Half of Twentieth-Century Japan

by Arai, Mutoh, and Wada
(for introduction to panel, see paper by Wada)

Jogakko Meisen: Kimono Mode in Women's Schools in the Early 20th Century

by Masanao Arai
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Meiji period: New Women Student Phenomenon

When we think of the Meiji period (1868-1912) and the definition of women student's roles in Japanese society, we envision young women with long black hair worn in the style similar to the "Gibson Girl" of the American Victorian period, but with a wide ribbon tied in a big bow, wearing arrow-feather-pattern ikat (*yagasuri*) kimono with maroon (*ebicha*) pleated long culotte-like skirt, called *hakama*, and lace-up boots. The fashion mode of *Jogakusei* (women students) played an important role in the production of *meisen* textiles.



[Fig. 1, 1911 (Meiji 44)] Graduation of Tokyo Women Teacher's College. This shows students practicing dance or calisthenics. As women students became more physically active, their clothing became more practical, such as *meisen* kimono and *hakama*.

They're often depicted riding on a bicycle, which was a novel attraction at that time. Around 1878 (Meiji 11), women students preferred purple for their pleated culottes, but within ten years, maroon became popular and the students were often referred to as "Lady Maroon" (Ebicha Shikibu) with a touch of sarcasm alluding to the famous 11th-century courtier / author of *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki Shikibu, whose name translates literally as Lady Purple. The formal culottes were made with the ribbed dense high-quality silk fabric (*shioze*), and ordinary culottes were made with cashmere.¹

In a September 1901 (M 34) article titled "Song of Summer Fashion" in Tokyo's *Miyako Newspaper*, textile scholar Kitamura Tetsuro refers to "*meisen chugara jogakusei*" (women students wearing medium-size pattern *meisen*) describing it as "fresh and fashionable."²

The way the women students dressed inspired many women, much as geishas in Tokyo and Kyoto set trends among fashionable urban ladies. As the number of woman students grew rapidly in the early twentieth century, the textile makers developed *meisen* to suit the young women's tastes and need.

The newly formed Meiji government in Japan (founded in 1868) established a school system in 1872 (M 5). The first public women's school, built in Tokyo later became Tokyo Women Teachers' University High School and is now called Ochanonizu Women's College (and high school to kindergarten). Following this school there were many more private women's



[Fig. 2, 1892 (Meiji 25)] Graduation of Tokyo Women Teachers' College High School. These women students are wearing layered, formal, and luxurious kimono. School was not for common people. The photo shows women who appear to be daughters of the privileged class. Note that all male teachers (and the one female foreigner) are dressed in Western clothes.



[Fig. 3, 1900 (Meiji 33)] Graduation of Tokyo Women Teachers' College, High School. Shows stripes and *kasuri* kimono and *hakama*. Since the government guidelines passed in 1899, stripes and *kasuri* kimono (*meisen*) with *hakama* became prevalent in women's schools.

schools established. In 1899 (M 32) the government passed a women's higher education systems guideline, which encouraged the establishment of women's junior high schools. Before and after the government's guideline, there was a noticeable change in the way women students dressed (Figures 2 and 3).

Without going into the details of the development of education in Japan, it is important to think of the various schools and levels of education in the Japanese historical context and to realize that they are different from what we are familiar with in the West. The very first women's school was founded by a missionary, Miss Gitter, in Yokohama in 1870 (M 3) and is now the Ferris Women's School. Yamawaki Women's High School and Miwata Women's High School, both of which I will mention later, were established around this time as well.³

Women Students in Japan

Year	Women's Schools	Women Students
Meiji 26 (1893)	28	3,020
32 (1899)	66	10,662
40 (1907)	234	53,352
45 (1912)	280	83,428
Taisho 8 (1919)	526	143,911
15 (1926)	919	342,945
Showa 5 (1930)	975	368,999
12 (1937)	996	451,423

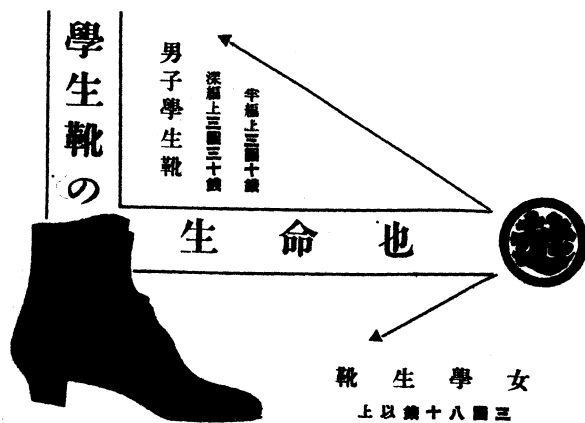
Population in Japan

Year	Male Population	Female Population	Total Population
Meiji 26 (1893)	20,906,465	20,480,848	41,388,313
40 (1907)	24,645,028	24,174,627	48,819,630
Taisho 8 (1919)	28,914,562	28,319,380	57,283,906

General Nogi and the development of *Moyo Meisen* (Pictorial Pattern)

The emergence of *meisen* as trendy "popular" kimono was marked by the creation of showy *meisen* kimonos in *hogushi gasuri* technique. In 1907 (M 40), when General Nogi became the head of the Gakushuin, a prestigious private school established for education of imperial household members, nobility, and the wealthy, he found the women students' clothing to be inappropriately showy and extravagant—wearing colorful kimono with swinging sleeves (*yuzen furisode*) to school! The General, being an austere and strict military man, tried to restrain what students wore, hoping they would be persuaded to wear some kimono that are lesser rank or the modest, plebeian *meisen* kimono. However, the General felt it was not appropriate to force those upper-class women to wear the modest stripes or small ikat patterns that were identified with the working class, and he hoped to see something more appropriate produced for the women students.

Many believe that General Nogi provided the impetus for development of *moyo meisen* using *hogushi* technique. According to Tagaya Isematsu,⁴ who was president of the Isesaki Weaving Industry, the kimono dealer whom General Nogi asked for advice happened to work with weavers of Isesaki and thus development of *moyo meisen* took place there. The story was also recounted in *Nihon Senshoku Shokoshi* (Japanese Annals of Trade and Technology/Industry



[Fig. 4, 1915 (T 4)] Mitsukoshi Department store advertisement for Western style boots for male and female students.⁶ Picture shows women's style boot.

During General Nogi's time at Gakushuin, 1907–12 (Meiji 40 - Taisho 1), the subject of restraining the extravagance in clothing was mentioned on many occasions. Within his first six months as chancellor, the General added a clause called "Guidelines for Clothing for Women Students and Younger Pupils" in the students' manual stating that the fabric for Western-style as well as Japanese-style clothes should be limited to cotton, hemp/linen (*asa*), wool, home spun silk (*tsumugi*), *meisen*, or less expensive blends. The colors and patterns of the clothes should be restrained or subdued. Formal occasions are no exceptions.⁷ In 1925 (T 14), for Japanese-style clothes (meaning kimono), the sleeves should be short *Genroku-sode* and Western clothes should be modeled after *hyojunfuku* (the standard style) specified by the school. In 1933 (Showa 8), the school established more detailed regulation for clothing including specific sleeve length (this length is the part of kimono sleeve that hangs down on the side) for each class level.⁸

However, during the Meiji period, most women's schools did not have school uniforms; and despite the schools' suggestion to dress modestly and simply, there was a wide variety of clothes being worn by women students—some being quite luxurious. In *Soritsu Goju Shuunenn* (Fiftieth Anniversary) published in 1932 (S 7), we find recorded another example of clothing regulation for women students from 1906 (M 39): Tokyo Women's Teachers' University High School, which prides itself on educating girls to be *ryosai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) even sent a notice to parents instructing the students to dress appropriately.⁹

In 1906 (M 39), this school adopted a Hakata silk belt (traditional obi-sash material woven in Hakata on Kyushu Island) with a belt buckle of the school emblem. The emblem has an octafoil mirror which is a metaphor for becoming a model for others. It also contains chrysanthemum and orchid symbolizing feminine virtue and wisdom.¹⁰ In 1932 (S 7), when this high school established a school uniform designed after a Western sailor's uniform but with a skirt, this same belt was worn as a part of the uniform.

Moyo Meisen Becomes "Official" in Women's Schools

In *Ryomo Kigyo Taikan* (Overview of Textile Industry in the Ryomo Area) written in 1917 (T 6), *fushiori* and *hogushiori* (in this case the same as *moyo meisen*) are cited as favorites of women students)¹¹

in Weaving and Dyeing) by Izumi Toshihide,⁵ who reported that the project was executed by Shimojo Yaichiro who was a well respected businessman, weaver, and had served president of the Isesaki Weaving Industry Association.

The students' guidelines established in 1906 (M 39) at Gakushuin stated that the women students clothes should be simple and clean without flashy design or garish colors and that they be required to wear *hakama* and Western shoes.

The recent Ashikaga weavings which became most popular were *omeshi* (fine heavy crepe), *fushiori* (nubby silk weaving), and *hogushiori* (printed warp ikat).... I happened to see these *fushiori* and *hogushiori* worn by women students on their way to school in Tokyo on a train. As a Ashikaga textile producer, it was so satisfying to see the way these kimonos, together with cashmere *hakama*, enhanced the loveliness of the young ladies.

In an article in the book mentioned earlier, *Fukushoku-no-Ryuko Monyo*, Tagaya Isematsu writes about the popularity of *meisen* among women students and quotes from a letter from a reader,

I love wearing Isesaki *meisen* for going to school. The designs are always fresh and the quality is dependable. The majority of classmates wear Isesaki *meisen*.

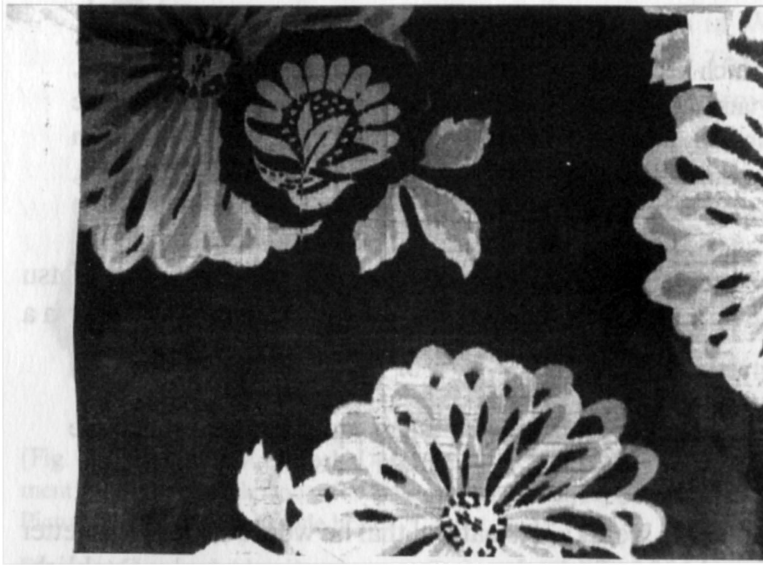
Since Tagaya was a textile producer in Isesaki, it is natural that he would choose this letter mentioning Isesaki. However, around 1925 (T 14), there were numerous examples establishing *meisen* as almost synonymous with women students' uniforms. *Hogushi* is discussed in the kimono industry journal, *Kureha*,¹² of that time:

The pattern which have open ground areas is preferred over denser design. The designs that use black as a central accent and having floral patterns float over colored ground is popular. Furthermore, the design which is enhanced by *kasuri* to give depth and interest to the overall appearance of the kimono is quite successful.

Sakazen Mill and “*Ochanomizu gonomi*” (Ochanomizu’s favorite pattern)

The Hachioji Weaving Industry Association owns a collection of sample swatch books, consisting of fifty-three books, containing 3835 samples.¹³ The collection was assembled by a retired manager of Kubota Wholesale Dealer in Hachioji who gathered samples from the weaving centers the company dealt with, including Isesaki and Chichibu *meisen*, *Yoneryu* (a *Ryaku* style *kasuri* from Yonezawa), and authentic *Oshima-tsumugi* from the southern islands. Most of the swatches date from 1928 to 1937 (Showa 3 to 12), except for a few from the end of Meiji and the late Taisho period--the turn of the century.

Among the samples, there are six examples of *hogushi gasuri* in silk with the notation “*Jogakko meisen*” dated either “Showa 5, Autumn,” (1930) or “Year 5, Autumn.” There is a label on the fabric swatch A (Figure 5) noting that 124 *hiki* (each enough to make two kimonos or a matching set of kimono and *haori*) was ordered, therefore we can assume that kimono-and-jacket ensembles for 124 women or kimono for 248 women were made in this pattern. Four of the six samples (swatches A-F) have school emblems and the name of schools by the *hogushi gasuri* method (warp-printing ikat) at the end of the bolt. This indicates that these six *meisen* cloths may have been made by special order for the schools. Except for swatch A, the fabrics impart a rather luxurious impression because of the use of multiple colors, supplementary decorative thread, or variation in the weft yarns to create a textured pattern. The details of the fabric swatches are as follows:



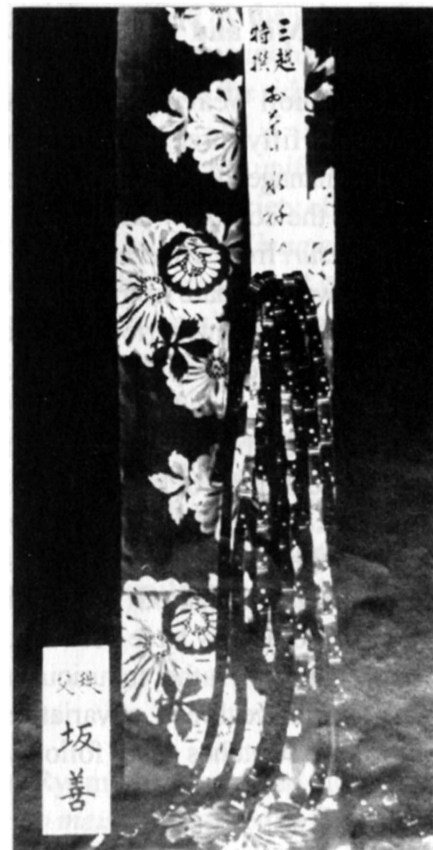
[Fig. 5, swatch A] A large chrysanthemum flower with a pod from a tea flower in its center is scattered with small chrysanthemum flowers and orchid petals (the school emblem for Tokyo Women Teachers' College High School) on bluish purple ground. (3 colors and 2 stencils). On the fabric there is a label noting "*Sakazen.. sama, Ochanomizu gonomi gara* (Ochanomizu's favorite pattern), 124 *hiki*." Sakazen is the name of a representative *meisen* textile mill in Chichibu, which prospered from late 1800s to just before World War II.



[Fig. 6] In the photo album belonging to the Sakamoto family of the former Sakazen Mill in Chichibu, there appears a photograph of a woman student wearing a *meisen* kimono / *haori* ensemble of this particular *meisen* design with the caption "*Ochanomizu gonomi*." She is also wearing a belt and buckle with the school emblem, shown in figure 7.

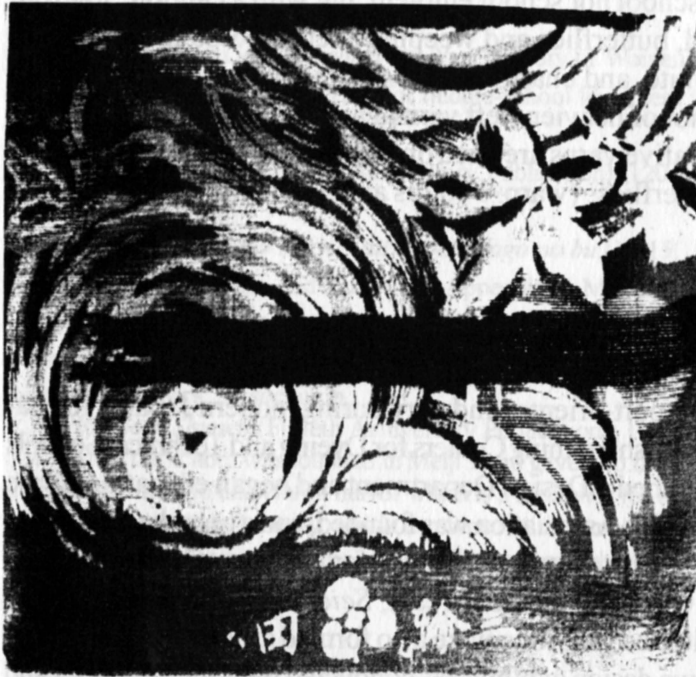


[Fig. 7] Belt and buckle of school emblem of the Tokyo Women Teachers' College High School.¹⁴



[Fig. 8] In another photo from the Sakamoto family album, found in a group of photos taken at the "exposition" held at the Mitsukoshi Department Stores to promote *meisen* products, was a photo of the best selling *meisen* cloth at the sale. This picture shows the "*Ochanomizu gonomi*" pattern with Sakazen Mill's name and the fabric title label with many strings of "sold" tags attached, which corresponds with the notation on the swatch book (fig. 5) from the Hachiogi Weaving Association of 124 *hiki* being sold.

Swatch B (not shown): At the end of the bolt of this *hogushi meisen* cloth we can see Mount Fuji enclosed in a heart shape (the school emblem for Yamawaki Women's High School) flanked by two characters, *yama* and *waki*, all printed on the warp. On a reddish brown ground, leaves similar to spiderwort plants (*tsuyukusa*) are interspersed with the school emblem and scattered with discharge-dye in *ebicha*, blue, and dark wisteria purple. Additionally, several random weft-ikat stripes add decorative accent. (4 colors and 3 stencils).



[Fig. 9, swatch C] At the end of the bolt, the school name *Mi wa ta* (Miwata Women's High School) is placed with its emblem in the middle, all in *hogushi* technique. On a reddish brown ground, a rose is depicted with light brush strokes in black, yellow, yellow green, orange, ochre, and grayish pink with discharge-dye printing on the warp. There is a shot of heavier yarn woven into every four weft creating a lightly textured cloth called *kobai*. Also there are gold metallic supplementary weft yarns woven into the emblem design. (warp: 6 colors, 5 stencils; weft: 2 colors, 1 stencil)



[Fig. 10, swatch D] At the end of the bolt, the school emblem of a plum blossom pattern is placed in the middle of the characters *To yo ka sei* in *hogushi* technique. *Toyo Kasei Gakuen* is the Toyo School of Home Economics. On a reddish brown ground, plum blossoms are layered with checkered board design in blue, black, orange, chartreuse, and beige printed with discharge-dye on warp. The stamens of the plum blossoms were decorated with gold embroidery, and two shots of heavier weft yarns to four ground weft yarns were used creating textured cloth called *kobai*. (warp: 6 colors and 5 stencils; weft: 2 colors, 1 stencil)

Swatch E (not shown): At the end of the bolt, the school emblem of cherry blossom is flanked by the characters “*dai ro ku*” (the sixth), which probably was the name for the Tokyo Prefecture Sixth Women’s High School, executed in *hogushi* technique. On a reddish purple ground, cherry blossoms in white, blue, reddish gray, orange, dark and light taupe are printed with discharge-dye on warp, the *hogushi* technique. One shot of heavier weft yarn to five ground weft yarns are woven to create textured cloth called *kobai*.

Swatch F (not shown): No name of a school nor school emblem, but with a caption “*jogakko meisen.*” On a reddish purple ground, butterflies and weeping cherry blossoms or pinks in orange, yellow, grayish brown, off white, and chartreuse are printed with discharge-dye on warp, the *hogushi* technique. One shot of heavier weft yarn against four ground weft yarns creating *kobai*. Supplementary decorative yarns are used on the heavier weft yarns over the butterfly patterns to accentuate the butterflies. (warp: 6 colors and 5 stencils; weft: 2 colors, 1 stencil)

Professionals Who Supported the Design Industry

Since textile was the most important export-oriented industry during modern Japan’s formative years, the government helped to establish Training Centers for Dyeing and Technical Schools for Weaving. Kyoto Art College established a Design Department and began educating future textile designers. Later Kyoto Textile Design Association was founded, and a branch was formed in the Ryomo area where efforts were made to improve designs for kimono. The Kansai Textile Design Group (from the Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe areas); *Seiei kai* (elite textile design group) in Kyoto; and the Tokyo Textile Design Group were also formed around the same time. Designers in those groups held their own design exhibitions, conducted their own research and development, and worked to improve the quality of textile design and to promote themselves.

Besides these organizations, a public facility called Zuan Chousei Sho, literally translated as Design Coordination Center, existed in order to support local industry. Its function was to hold textile design exhibitions; assimilate and disseminate technical information as well as information on fashion and social trends; and to make designs upon request from the local textile makers. These centers later became textile research institutes of various prefectures in which textile production is a prominent local industry.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Dai Nihon Orimono Nissenroppyaku-nenshi, Gekan* (2600 Chronicle of Great Japan), 575.
- ² Kitamura Tetsuo, *Nihon-no-Orimono*, 34.
- ³ Kasuya Kazuki, "Meiji No Jogakko Densetsu" (The Myth of Women's Colleges in the Meiji Period).
- ⁴ *Fukushoku no Ryuko Monyo* (Textile Design Trend for Fashion), 9.
- ⁵ Izumi Toshihide, "Nogi Shogun and Isesaki Meisen," *Nihon Senshoku Shokoshi*, (Japanese Annals of Trade and Technology/Industry in Weaving and Dyeing), 847.
- ⁶ *Osaka no Mitsukoshi*, Vol.4 No. 8.
- ⁷ *Joshi Gakushyuin Goju Nenshi* (Fifty-Year History of Women Gakushyuin), 278.
- ⁸ *Genroku sode* of less than 38 cm for middle-school level; less than 45 cm for junior-high-school level; and less than 64 cm for high-school level
- ⁹ *Soritsu Goju Shunen* (Fiftieth Anniversary Publication), 120.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Okada Jugoro, *Ryomo Kigyo Taikan-Ashikago no bu*, 14-15. [Ryomo is in the Kanto region and includes Ashikaga, Kiryu, Isesaki, and Sano. See Appendix 1: Meisen Textile Production per City, in Wada's paper]
- ¹² *Kureha* (vol. 3, September).
- ¹³ These swatch books, known as the Komata Collection, was previously owned by the Hachioji Weaving Wholesale Dealers' Association.
- ¹⁴ *Soritsu Goju Shunen* (Fiftieth Anniversary Publication), 123. The Empress Dowager Shoken composed a poem when the school was founded in Meiji 9 and gave it to the school. In the poem, which became the school anthem she refers to an octafoil mirror which is a metaphor for becoming a model for others. At the same time, the mirror symbolizes honesty, and is combined in the emblem with the chrysanthemum and orchid which are metaphors for femininity, beauty, and gentility, to embody the mission of the school.

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- Osaka no Mitsukoshi*, vol. 4, no. 5. Osaka: Mitsukoshi Gofukuten Osaka Shiten, 1915.
- Soritsu Goju Shunen* (Fiftieth Anniversary Publication). Tokyo: Tokyo Joshi Shihan Gakko Fuzoku Koto Jogakko, 1932.

Appendix 2: Historical Timeline

1615 - 1867	<u>EDO Period</u>	
1862	<i>London</i>	<i>World's Fair—private participation by Satsuma clan.</i>
1867	<i>Paris</i>	<i>World's Fair</i>
1868 - 1912	<u>Meiji era</u>	
1873	<i>Vienna</i>	<i>First official participation by Japanese government.</i>
1876		Reeled silk yarn exported to USA for the first time.
1878	<i>Paris</i>	<i>World's Fair.</i>
Hereafter, Japanese participated in most of the World's Fairs. Various industrialists, business people and officials from organizations visited these fairs to learn Western technologies and markets.		
1889	<i>Paris</i>	<i>World's Fair</i>
1890		Domestic production of cotton yarn exceeds import Women's Teachers' College established
1893	<i>Chicago</i>	<i>World Colombian Exposition</i>
1894-95		Sino-Japanese War
1897		Export of cotton yarn exceeds import of cotton yarn
1900	<i>Paris</i>	<i>Centennial Exposition</i>
1900		Tsuda English School established by Tsuda Umeko, the first woman to be sent to study abroad (USA) by the government.
1903		Russo-Japanese War
1904	<i>St. Louis</i>	<i>Louisiana Purchase Exposition</i>
1905	<i>Liege</i>	<i>World's Fair</i>
1908	<i>St. Petersburg</i>	<i>Exposition</i>
1909		First mention of <i>Moyo meisen</i> as "hogushi" in Isesaki
1910	<i>London</i>	<i>Japan Trade Fair</i>
1912 - 1926	<u>Taisho era</u>	
1914 - 1918		World War I
1915	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Panama-Pacific Exposition</i>
1917		Tokyo Musical Theatre established (Asakusa Opera)
1923		Great Kanto earthquake
1925	<i>Paris</i>	<i>World's Fair</i>
1926	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>World's Fair</i>
1926 - 1988	<u>Showa era</u>	
1927		TOBU (electric) Railway line to service Ashikaga and Kiryu area.
1928		Painting of <i>Meisen</i> Beauty by Kitano Tsutomu (1880-1947) commissioned by Ashikaga <i>Meisen</i> Guild advised by Takashimaya
1930		National <i>Meisen</i> Federation established
1930	<i>Antwerp</i>	<i>World's Fair</i>
1933	<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Century of Progress Exposition</i>
1935		Ashikaga <i>Meisen</i> production became #1 cotton cloth export reaches highest point at 2.7 billion square yards
1939-1945		World War II
1950-1960		Last peak production of <i>meisen</i>

compiled by Yoshiko I. Wada