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# The Life and Work of Marie Stopes with Reference to her Association with Japan

Hiroko Tomida

## Introduction

The name of Marie Stopes has been widely known to the public as a pioneer of family planning in Britain, a sexologist, and a campaigner for eugenics and women's rights. Prior to her involvement with these causes, she established herself as a noted palaeobotanist, had a successful academic career, and made significant contributions to the studies of plant palaeontology and coal classification.<sup>(1)</sup> Many of the birth-control clinics and mothers' clinics founded by her continue to exist, and retain a wide range of valuable records. Her son, Harry Verdon Stopes-Roe, an academic and a philosopher noted for his active role in the British humanist movement, wrote his mother's biography.<sup>(2)</sup> Although there are about a dozen biographies, examining her life from her childhood to her death, most of them tend

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(1) Information about Marie Stopes's academic achievements and career are obtainable from the archives of University College London where she was awarded a B.Sc. degree in 1902, and the archives of Manchester University where she was appointed as an assistant lecturer in botany in 1904. She also left numerous letters, which are major primary sources for research on her promotion of birth control. As most of them are stored at the British Library and the Wellcome Library, they are accessible to any researcher.

(2) Henry Stopes-Roe and Ian Scott, *Marie Stopes and Birth Control* (London: Priory Press, 1974).

to focus on her activities and accomplishments as an advocate and promoter of the British birth control movement, and give a brief account of her successful scientific career in palaeobotany.<sup>(3)</sup> Her 18-month stay in Japan, her relationship with Kenjiŕō Fujii and her interest in Noh plays have hardly been discussed.

This article will be divided into two sections. In the first part, Stopes' upbringing, family and educational backgrounds, and her parents' influence will be explored. Then her academic career and achievements as a palaeobotanist will be examined. An assessment of her roles as a pioneer and promoter of the birth control movement will be made. The article will evaluate her contributions to the women's movement. In the second part, I will pay special attention to her association with Japan, which is the most neglected research area in studies of Marie Stopes. In 1907 she went to Japan where she spent the next 18 months. After her return to Britain, she published a book based on the journal of her daily life, travels, memories and experiences during her stay in Japan, saying much about its people and culture. Her major activities in Japan are documented in her book *A Journal from Japan*.<sup>(4)</sup> This article will clarify why she decided to visit Japan in the first place, and then discuss her major activities there. After her return to Britain, she continued to show interest in Japan, which I will also investigate. Finally I will look at whether her experiences in Japan influenced her later life and careers as a pioneer of birth control and campaigner for women's rights. I will also examine whether her activities in Japan

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(3) Keith Briant, *Marie Stopes, A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1962); H. Begbie, *Marie Stopes, Her Mission and Her Personality* (London: G.P. Putnam, 1927); Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes, A Biography* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1977); Aylmer Maude, *The Authorized Life of Marie C. Stopes* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1924); Aylmer Maude, *Marie Stopes, Her Work and Play* (London: Putnam, 1933); Clare Debenham, *Marie Stopes' Sexual Revolution and The Birth Control Movement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); June Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

(4) Marie Stopes, *A Journal From Japan: A Daily Record of Life as Seen by a Scientist* (London: Blackie & Son, 1910).

had an impact on Japanese women or scientists.

## I. Biographical sketch

### Her early life

Marie Stopes was born on 15 October 1880, in Edinburgh, as the eldest daughter of Henry Stopes (1852–1902) and his wife, Charlotte (1849–1929). Henry was the son of an English brewer, and later helped to run the family brewing business as his father's junior partner. He also became an ardent amateur palaeontologist, regularly attending meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and was elected to the Royal Historical Society.<sup>(5)</sup> His large private collection of prehistoric stone implements was particularly famous, and he also collected fossils after he developed an interest in paleobotany.<sup>(6)</sup> Marie's mother, Charlotte Brown Carmichael, was born in Edinburgh as a daughter of J.F. Carmichael, a landscape painter. From an early age she had a passion for writing, and desired to become a writer.<sup>(7)</sup> Unfortunately her father died prematurely when she was only fourteen years old. Therefore after she completed her schooling, she had to earn her living by working as a governess, which was one of the few occupations available to middle-class British women in the 1860s.

As Charlotte was an intelligent and highly motivated young woman with a great interest in writing, she became a member of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating

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(5) On Henry Stopes, see F. Wenban-Smith, 'Henry Stopes: Engineer, Brewer and Anthropologist', *Journal of Lithic Studies*, vol. 30 (2009), pp. 65–84; Hall, *Marie Stopes*, pp. 16–17.

(6) The estimated number of items of Henry Stopes' palaeontological collection was believed to be over 100,000, and all of these were sold in 1912 to the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, where his collection continues to survive today.

(7) On Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, see, F.S. Boas, 'Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, Some Aspects of Her Life and Work', *The Transactions of the Royal Society Literature*, 10 (1931), pp. 77–108; Stephanie Green, *The Public Lives of Charlotte and Marie Stopes* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013); Hall, *Marie Stopes*, pp. 15–18.

Society which was founded in 1865 by Sarah Mair (1846–1941), a Scottish campaigner for women’s education and women’s suffrage.<sup>(8)</sup> Charlotte contributed her various literary works to the Society’s journal *The Attempt*. She also joined the Edinburgh Ladies’ Educational Association, which was created by Mary Crudelius (1839–1877), a supporter of women’s suffrage, who campaigned for higher education for women, aiming to achieve equal educational opportunities for women since the University of Edinburgh was not open to women then.<sup>(9)</sup> Having gained support from several male academics working for the university, the Association arranged to provide women with classes on subjects including science and philosophy at a university level, and Charlotte, who was extremely keen to receive higher-level education, immediately attended such classes. She was the first member of the Association to sit exams for the university certificate, and became the first woman in Scotland to gain a Certificate of Arts. Moreover she further advanced herself, pursuing her academic interests in English literature, especially the works of William Shakespeare, and she published a number of books on his life and works.<sup>(10)</sup> Having been highly influenced by Mary Crudelius and Sarah Mair, who were active campaigners of the Scottish women’s suffrage movement, Charlotte also became a supporter of the women’s suffrage movement, and published *British Freewomen: their Historical Privilege* (1894).<sup>(11)</sup> The book was successful, and helped inspire the British women’s movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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(8) On Sarah Mair, see ‘Dame Sarah Mair’, *The Times* (24 February 1941), p. 7; S. Innes, ‘The Edinburgh Women Citizens’ Association’, *Women’s History Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2004), pp. 621–647.

(9) On Mary Crudelius, see Mary Crudelius, *A Memoir of Mrs Crudelius* (1897; London: Nabu Press, 2010).

(10) Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *The Bacon-Shakespeare Question* (London: T.G. Johnson, 1888).

(11) Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *British Freewomen: Their Historical Perspective* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1894).

Marie Stopes' parents first met at the Glasgow meeting of the Royal Association in 1876, and married in 1879. They had two daughters, Marie, the eldest, and Winifred, both of whom were brought up in an intellectual, highly stimulating and close family environment. When they were young, many girls even from an upper-middle class background were taught at home and hardly received higher education. However, their mother, having been one of the first women to benefit from it, naturally encouraged her daughters to pursue their academic interests, and urged the significance of women's higher education. At home she introduced women's causes to them, and made sure that her daughters would be fully aware of the arguments for women's suffrage from their childhood.<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore it was natural that they followed her footsteps. Marie was highly influenced by her parents, and certainly inherited her father's enthusiasm in science, especially his interest in palaeobotany, which led to her later academic career. She also inherited her mother's literary talent, strong will, determination and feminist fervour, which influenced her later dedication to the issues of sexual equality and birth control.

### **Her education and academic career**

Marie studied at St George's School in Edinburgh, which was established by Sarah Mair. Marie's mother, who worked closely with Mair for the causes of the promotion of women's higher education and votes for women, chose to send Marie to her school, hoping to give her daughter the best education available to girls in Edinburgh.<sup>(13)</sup>

After graduating from St George's, she went to the North London Collegiate

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(12) Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *The Sphere of Man in Relation to That of Woman in the Constitution* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907).

(13) Some pupils of St George's School were among the first female graduates of the University of Edinburgh, which finally opened the door to women in 1903. On St George's School, see Hall, *Marie Stopes*, pp. 27–28.

School, which was founded in 1850 by Frances Buss, an English pioneer of women's education.<sup>(14)</sup> The school was known as the first girls' school in Britain which provided them with the same educational opportunities as boys, and successfully earned an excellent academic reputation.<sup>(15)</sup> The school seemed to be ideal for Marie who was extremely eager to learn. Indeed the school met her expectations, and laid a groundwork for her future academic success.

When she was eighteen years old, she won a science scholarship to University College London. She graduated with a first-class degree in botany and geology, and also won the Gold Medal and the University's Gilchrist scholarship which enabled her to do postgraduate work abroad. The Botanical Institute at the University of Munich gave her an ideal opportunity to work with Professor K. Goebel, Europe's leading plant morphologist.<sup>(16)</sup> She was the first woman to be accepted to do a science Ph.D. at the university in 1903, and was also the only female postgraduate student among 500 male students. Within a year she wrote a thesis in German, and became the first woman to be awarded a Ph.D. degree there in June 1904. As she specialised in palaeobotany, the study of fossilized plants, in 1904 she was appointed as an assistant lecturer and demonstrator in botany by Owen's College in Manchester (which later became the University of Manchester), and was the first female science staff member of the college.<sup>(17)</sup> In the same year she came to be one of the first women elected to be fellows of the Linnean Society of London, the world's oldest active biological society founded in 1788. In 1905 she was awarded

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(14) On Frances Buss, see Annie E. Ridley, *Frances Mary Buss and Her Work for Education* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1895); Josephine Kamm, *How Different from Us: A Biography of Miss Beale and Miss Buss* (London: The Bodley Head, 1958).

(15) On the North London Collegiate School, see Olive Banks, *The Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists*, vol. 1 (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), pp. 40–41.

(16) Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 29–34; Hall, *Marie Stopes*, pp. 41–43.

(17) Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, p. 35.

her D.Sc. degree by London University, and was the youngest Doctor of Science in Britain. Clearly she was an extremely talented scientist with great potential.

In 1907 she went to Japan to do research in particular on fossils. On her return she taught palaeobotany at the University of Manchester until 1910 when she resigned her job on grounds of ill health. She published many academic papers and books including *Ancient Plants*, which established her reputation as a palaeobotanist of distinction.<sup>(18)</sup>

Her early life was characterized by her highly successful academic career and her research trips abroad. In her youth she also grew an interest in politics, and supported the women's suffrage campaign. She became a member of the Women's Freedom League, which was a non-violent organisation and opposed the militant approach of the Women's Social and Political Union.<sup>(19)</sup>

In terms of her personal life, after several unsuccessful romantic affairs, during her visit to America she met Dr Reginald Ruggles Gates (1882–1962), a Canadian botanist and geneticist, at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1910.<sup>(20)</sup> They married in Montreal on 18 March 1911, and soon settled in London. To other people's eyes, their marriage appeared to be a well-suited match because they were intellectually compatible and had shared academic interests. However, Marie, a liberal, forward-thinking woman and a

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(18) Marie Stopes, *Ancient Plants* (London: Blackie, 1910).

(19) Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 99; Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, p. 42. On the Women's Freedom League, see Claire Louise Eustance, "'Daring to be Free": The Evolution of Women's Political Identities in The Women's Freedom League, 1907–1930' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of York, November 1993). On the Women's Social and Political Union, see Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Movement* (London: Routledge, 2001); Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (1914; London: Virago, 1979); June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002); Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchison, 1959).

(20) Reginald Ruggles Gates, *Heredity and Eugenics* (London: Constable and Co., 1923).

supporter of women's suffrage, did not approve of her husband's traditional views about how women should behave, and his strong opposition to her membership of the Women's Freedom League. What was worse, the sexual aspect of their marriage turned out to be disastrous, and five years later in 1916 their marriage was annulled on grounds of non-consummation.<sup>(21)</sup>

After the failure of this unsatisfactory marriage, driven by her own frustration, she devoted herself to reading books on sexual relations. She also began to pay special attention to birth control after July 1915 when she attended a lecture given at the Fabian Hall in London by Margaret Sanger, a pioneer of the American birth-control movement.<sup>(22)</sup> Prior to the lecture, Marie knew nothing about the subject of birth control, and she was inspired by Sanger and convinced that it would be vital for women to have birth control and sex education to achieve sexual fulfilment. She was eager to learn more about the issue directly from Sanger, and contacted her, and was shown birth-control devices brought from America and Sanger's pamphlet on family limitation.<sup>(23)</sup>

Marie wrote *Married Love*, which was considered to be 'Britain's first modern sex manual', and discussed the idea that marriage should be based on an equal relationship.<sup>(24)</sup> To begin with, she had great difficulty in finding a publisher for the book since it covered sensitive topics such as sex and birth control, but it was eventually published in March 1918. Although strong criticism was made of the book by medical practitioners and Catholics, it was an immediate success. 2,000 copies of the book were sold within a fortnight, and six issues were printed by the end of the year. The book was widely read by both men and women, and had a great

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(21) Debenham, *Marie Stopes' Sexual Revolution and The Birth Control Movement*, pp. 59–65.

(22) Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 115. On Margaret Sanger, see Margaret Sanger, *My Fight for Birth Control* (New York: Farrer Strauss, 1932).

(23) June Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, p. 90.

(24) Marie Stopes, *Married Love* (London: A.C. Fifield, 1918).

impact on numerous women who were sexually naive. Naomi Mitchison's statement confirms this. She said that '*Married Love* was a light in great darkness to many of us, though a light shining through a lantern which was possibly not in the best taste'.<sup>(25)</sup> Marie received countless letters from its readers, which are now kept in the Wellcome Library in London.<sup>(26)</sup> She was requested by many readers to give them more information about birth control because the book only briefly discussed contraception.

In order to meet her readers' demands, Marie wrote another short book entitled *Wise Parenthood*, a manual of contraception methods, which was published in 1918.<sup>(27)</sup> With these successful publications, she launched her second career as a campaigner for sexual fulfilment and birth control. She continued to publish more books and pamphlets on the topics of marriage, birth control, family planning and sex, and responded to numerous letters seeking her personal advice on the issues.<sup>(28)</sup> Moreover she edited the newsletter *Birth Control News*, in which she gave practical advice to readers, and also gave many public lectures.<sup>(29)</sup>

1918 was a very memorable year in her private life. She married Humphrey Verdon Roe, a wealthy aircraft manufacturer, and finally found sexual fulfilment in this marriage. Although in the following year she had a stillborn baby at the age of thirty-eight, she gave birth to a son, Harry Verdon Stopes-Roe in 1924. As her husband shared her interest in birth control, and gave financial support to her

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(25) Cited in Peter Fryer, *The Birth Controllers* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1967), p. 252.

(26) L.A. Hall, 'Archives of Birth Control in Britain', *Journal of Society of Archivists*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1995); L.A. Hall, 'Marie Stopes and Her Correspondents: Personalising Population Decline in an Era of Demographic Change, in R.A. Peel (ed.), *Marie Stopes and the English Birth Control Movement* (London: Galton Institute, 1997), pp. 27–48.

(27) Marie Stopes, *Wise Parenthood* (London: A.C. Fifield, 1918).

(28) Ruth Hall (ed.), *Dear Dr Stopes, Sex in the 1920s* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978).

(29) Marie Stopes, *A Letter to Working Mothers on How to Have Healthy Children and Avoid Weakening Pregnancies* (London: Leatherhead, 1919).

activities, in 1921 she founded her first British birth-control clinic with him in Holloway, a deprived area of north London. She chose the area because she wanted to spread wider knowledge of birth control, especially among the poor, who normally had more children. Her clinic offered birth-control advice for mothers, and actually taught them birth-control methods.<sup>(30)</sup>

With this clinic as a start, she established many other small birth-control clinics throughout England, and also gave numerous public lectures. Marie, who was a prolific author, wrote more than 70 books on the subject of birth control, and among them *Married Love*, *Wise Parenthood*, *Radiant Motherhood* and *Enduring Passion* were all best sellers.<sup>(31)</sup> Although she was denounced by the British medical establishment for having committed the ‘monstrous crime’ of spreading information about contraception in the early stages of her birth-control activities, she was widely honoured as a birth-control pioneer in England in her later years.

## II. Marie Stopes’s association with Japan

As Carmen Blacker, a former Cambridge Japanologist, rightly stated, ‘the fame and notoriety Marie Stopes gained as a birth-control pioneer had overshadowed her connection with Japan in her early life.’<sup>(32)</sup> It is arguable that without the earlier Japanese episode, her attention might never have turned to birth control, and she might have remained an academic teaching and researching on palaeobotany at university. Therefore it is worth observing Marie’s activities in Japan and assessing the impact which her Japanese experiences had on her later life and career.

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(30) Deborah Cohen, ‘Marie Stopes and the Mothers’ Clinics’, in Peel (ed.), *Marie Stopes and the English Birth Control Movement*, pp. 77–94.

(31) Marie Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood* (London: P.G. Putnam’s Sons, 1920); Marie Stopes, *Enduring Passion* (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928).

(32) See Part III, Chapter 6 ‘Marie Stopes and Japan’ of Hugh Cortazzi (ed.), *Carmen Blacker: Writings and Reflections* (Kent: Renaissance Books, 2017).

### Her meeting with Kenjiro Fujii

Marie's interest in visiting Japan originated from her romance with Kenjiro Fujii.<sup>(33)</sup> He was born into the samurai (warrior) family in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture in 1866, and was raised by his aunt as his parents died in his childhood. After he completed his undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in science at the Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo), which was the best academic education available in Japan, he was offered the position of a research assistant in botany there in 1895. In 1901 he took study leave to conduct research on plant morphology and cytology in Europe since he had already been an authority on the ginkgo tree in Japan. While he was researching at Professor Goebel's laboratory in the Botanical Institute at the University of Munich, he met the twenty-three year old Marie who was a Ph.D. research student there. Fujii was a thirty-seven year old married man, and lived in Munich alone, leaving his wife and daughter in Japan.

Although Marie was admired by many young German students and one of them actually proposed to her, she preferred Fujii's company.<sup>(34)</sup> One wonders why she was attracted to a much older Oriental man. There are some reasons to explain this. Fujii, who was short and gentle, was never a physical threat to her. She may have been looking for some sort of father figure, as he was fourteen years senior to her, and in 1901 she had lost her father who had been very close to her and had shared scientific interests with her.

Secondly, Fujii and Marie had the same academic pursuits. As he had already established himself as a rising academic in her field in Japan, he was in a position to give her academic advice and encouragement in her Ph.D. research. They regularly went on mountain walks to collect specimens together, and carried out

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(33) On Fujii, see Kono Yasui, 'Rigaku Hakushi Fujii Kenjiro Sensei', *Shokubutsugaku Zasshi*, vol. 65, no. 763-764 (Jan.-Feb. 1952), pp. 1-2; Debenham, *Marie Stopes' Sexual Revolution and The Birth Control Movement*, pp. 40-44; Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 37-38, 45; Hall, *Marie Stopes*, pp. 56-64.

(34) *Ibid.*, p. 44.

joint research in Munich, which was later published as their first joint paper ‘The Nutritive Relations of the Surrounding Tissues to the Archegonia in Gymnosperms’ in 1906.<sup>(35)</sup>

Under her mother’s influence Marie was well-read in literature and philosophy, and enjoyed her literary discussions. Even for this purpose Fujii was an ideal companion to her since he was also fond of poetry and philosophy, and introduced Oriental literature which she had never encountered before.

As Fujii claimed to be married to an uneducated Japanese woman, he appreciated the company of cultivated western women like Marie, who was intellectually compatible to him. He also stated that his arranged marriage turned out to be loveless. By the time he first met Marie, he had already spent two years in Europe, and had become quite westernized. His command of German and English was good enough to converse with her. His fascination with her must have been unavoidable since Marie was a young, vibrant, beautiful, highly intelligent and gifted scientist.

Their attraction to each other was mutual, and Fujii’s name began to appear regularly in Marie’s letters sent to her family in England. Especially in a letter addressed to her mother, she described him as ‘very nice, very interesting and wonderfully western and observant’.<sup>(36)</sup> After she was awarded a Ph.D. degree in 1904, she left Munich to take up her first academic appointment as ‘demonstrator’ in the Botany Department at the University of Manchester. Fujii followed her to England and settled down in London to research plant anatomy and fossilology at University College in London, her old college. They began to exchange love letters, and on weekends she often returned to London to see him. Fujii was introduced to her family, and became a frequent visitor to her family home in London. Apparently

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(35) Marie Stopes & Kenjirō Fujii, ‘The Nutritive Relations of the Surrounding Tissues to the Archegonia in Gymnosperms’, *Beihefte zum Botan Centralblatt*, vol. 20 (1906).

(36) Cited in Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, p. 32.

he told her that his wife in Japan was having an affair, so he was in the middle of taking legal action to divorce her. Marie, who was young and inexperienced, believed his story.

The Imperial University in Tokyo offered Fujii an assistant professorship, which ended his stay in Britain, and he returned to Japan to take up the position in July 1905. Marie claimed that they became engaged before his departure, but kept it a secret because he was still married and wanted to avoid a scandal. Their romantic relationship was fairly platonic although they kissed and continued to exchange very affectionate letters for over two years. The letters published in 1911 as the *Love Letters of a Japanese*, by Marie under the pseudonym of G.N. Mortlake, were believed to be real love letters exchanged between her and Fujii, and in them they referred to each other as husband and wife.<sup>(37)</sup> On the other hand, Fujii did not leave any documents to explain their relationship and engagement.

### Her journey to Japan

In the introduction of *A Journal from Japan*, Marie asserted that a scientific interest in coal mines and the fossils which they often contained had inspired her to go to Japan, for purely scientific purposes.<sup>(38)</sup> This statement was true because she believed that ‘nodules known to be of cretaceous age from Hokkaidō might contain permineralized angiosperms and that, if so, these would be a significant palaeobotanical discovery’.<sup>(39)</sup> Therefore she urged Fujii, who had already returned to Japan, to obtain such material and send it to her. According to Marie’s diary, the material from Fujii had arrived in October 1906, and she cut the first section which revealed an angiosperm.<sup>(40)</sup> She used this finding when she applied to the Royal

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(37) G.N. Mortlake (pseudonym for Marie Stopes), *Love Letters of a Japanese* (London: Stanley Paul, 1911).

(38) See the Introduction of *A Journal from Japan*, p. 9.

(39) Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 63.

(40) Stopes-Roe & Scott, *Marie Stopes and Birth Control*, p. 29.

Society for a grant to search for angiosperm fossils, and to conduct research on the cretaceous fossil plants to be found in the rocks and coal-seams in Japan.<sup>(41)</sup> In her application she submitted a proposal intending to compare them with carboniferous fossils found in European coal, and to prove that the Japanese fossils were of a much later date than the European ones, which would thus afford entirely new evidence for plant life during the late Mesozoic period.

Although her research intention was genuine and enthusiastic, the major reason she decided to go to Japan was that she desperately wanted to see Fujii. She needed to raise substantial sums of money because travelling expenses to Japan and living costs there were dear. As she had already gained an excellent academic reputation and her research proposal was considered original, the Royal Society, the oldest national scientific society in the world, and a leading scientific society in Britain, awarded her the grant, which was the first ever given to a woman.<sup>(42)</sup> This generous financial assistance enabled her to go to Japan, and she was accepted as the first female visiting professor at the Imperial University in Tokyo, where Fujii had a permanent position.

### **Her arrival in Japan**

After five weeks on board ship, she arrived in Japan on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1907. As her visit was official, she was greeted by leading scientists and government officials. Fujii, whom she was most eager to see, was among the crowd. Although he continued to send her passionate love letters even after his departure from England and promised to marry her, he sent her the following most upsetting letter on her arrival:

That I should have loved any lady in such a strong way as I loved you is

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(41) Debenham, *Marie Stopes' Sexual Revolution and The Birth Control Movement*, p. 51.

(42) *Ibid.*, p. 63; Stopes, *A Journal from Japan*, p. 9.

quite out of my natural thought, and the thought of any Japanese. I told you in earlier times that love is immoral with us. And now I know that it is really so, if it has such a strong power against my natural habit... I hope you will marry some nice Englishman.

Yours sincerely,

K. Fujii<sup>(43)</sup>

Fujii, who never divorced his wife and did not want to destroy his academic reputation on the basis of an affair with an English academic, must have had no option other than terminating his relationship with Marie. Since their meeting in Yokohama after two years' absence remained undocumented, it is difficult to imagine how Fujii welcomed her and felt about her stay in Japan. However, he made all arrangements at his university for her and also found her accommodation in Tokyo, in a traditional house belonging to the widow of an officer killed in the war who lived with her English-speaking daughter.<sup>(44)</sup>

From the date of her arrival until 11<sup>th</sup> January 1909, when she returned to England, she kept a journal in which she gave a detailed account of her daily activities over that period of 18 months in Japan. In 1910 after her return to England, she published this under the title of *A Journal from Japan*. One might expect her journal to include a romantic account about her and Fujii, but it hardly gave any hints that there was a relationship between them. In it she simply described Fujii as a professor at her research institute at the Imperial University, someone doing joint research with her, and his name appeared from time to time. She did not give any account of how her feelings towards him changed during her stay in Japan and how her relationship with him developed. Judging from her

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(43) Mortlake, *Love Letters of a Japanese*, p. 65.

(44) Marie Stopes, *A Journal from Japan: A Daily Record of Life as Seen by a Scientist, Illustrated* (1910; Istanbul: e-Kitap Project, 2015), p. 18.

journal, Fujii made many excuses and kept a distance from her during her stay. Naturally she must have been hurt by his conduct because she had travelled half way around the globe to see him, but she continued to show much respect and concern for him whenever he became ill.

### **Her academic activities in Japan**

Having been a dedicated academic, she hid her sorrow and commenced her research at the Imperial University, where she met leading Japanese scientists, some of whom had been abroad and could speak English or German. Although this academic circle was circumscribed and completely male-dominated, she soon became accepted because she tried very hard to cultivate as many Japanese academics as possible, and they were impressed with her charm, social skills, intelligence and dedication to her work.<sup>(45)</sup> Since she was the first foreign female scientist that anybody in Japan had met or heard of, she was treated as a celebrity and frequently met the President and Dean of the University.<sup>(46)</sup> She was also invited to attend university functions such as Faculty lunches and the Tokyo Bachelors' Ball, and many private parties and dinners held at academics' houses.

At the beginning of her stay, she made much effort to adapt to the Japanese style of life, and tried to learn the Japanese language. Although she found written Japanese too difficult, within a month she had learnt enough Japanese to be able to travel by herself, and did her best to learn about Japanese people and culture. One could assume she made these efforts in the early part of her stay because she was still hoping to marry Fujii and settle down in Japan as his wife. She must have wanted to be accepted by as many Japanese people in his academic and social circles as possible.

As Fujii was constantly absent from work, she hardly saw him, which was a

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<sup>(45)</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>(46)</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

great disappointment to her. However, she desperately wanted to make her stay in Japan worthwhile and was hoping to succeed in her academic work. Therefore she determined to lead a very hectic existence, organising a few expeditions to visit coal mines where she dug and collected many specimens of fossils. During her first trip to coal mines in Hokkaidō in September 1907, she battled through the northern jungle, leading a party of thirty men, comprising a policeman, a land-surveyor, a special courier and correspondent, an interpreter, a local guide and half a dozen coolies in her quest to find fossils.<sup>(47)</sup> She hammered away to collect specimens. The details of her movements during her first expedition to Hokkaidō were reported in Japanese newspapers, and one member of her retinue acted as a special correspondent for the newspapers.<sup>(48)</sup> She was asked to give many interviews and a few public lectures. In Sapporo she gave a lecture to the women's organisation, the Patriotic Women's Society (Aikoku Fujin Kai), in English with a Japanese interpreter.<sup>(49)</sup>

This expedition was followed by another to Okayama, the Inland Sea and Kyūshū in October 1907.<sup>(50)</sup> During this expedition she even went to an island, one of the least civilized areas of Japan with no proper roads. She was welcomed by local people wherever she went, but she became annoyed with a few interviewers who followed her around. She also felt as if she was an animal at a zoo since she was the first foreigner whom working-class people in provincial areas had met, and they stared at her.<sup>(51)</sup> Other than in these regards, she enjoyed her celebrity status, and was very grateful to the Japanese central government, local governments and academics for their help and courtesy during her stay.

Apart from a few expeditions and occasional trips, she was mainly based in

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(47) Ibid., pp. 26–47.

(48) Ibid., p. 51.

(49) Ibid., pp. 41–42.

(50) Ibid., pp. 59–81.

(51) Ibid., p. 63.

Tokyo, being absorbed with her research, and spending a great deal of time on her own in the laboratory of the Botanical Institute at the Imperial University. She cut fossils out of the specimens which she had collected during her expeditions, analysed them, and made slides. Sometimes she discussed her research with Japanese colleagues, and was asked to give some lectures in English to students there. Back in 1907 Japanese women hardly received any higher education, and there were no Japanese female scientists.<sup>52</sup> As Marie was the first female scientist from the west to work with Japanese male scientists in the University, Japanese academics were naturally very curious about her.<sup>53</sup>

However, by the spring of 1908 it became clear from her journal and her letters that she began to feel intellectually isolated at work since the great majority of Japanese academics did not seem to understand the significance of her research. She also found them intellectually incompatible to her. Fujii, who shared similar academic interests with her, made excuses that he was either ill or busy, and spent very little time with her. Marie, who was longing for some stimulating conversation, complained to her sister in a letter stating: 'Only when I can get a respectable middle-aged man, can I get such decent intellectual conversation as I have been accustomed to have nearly every day in England.' She began to be drawn to western circles in Tokyo for company.

### **Her other activities in Japan**

Marie had many opportunities to meet a large number of Japanese people of different ranks, from the peasants to the Ainu, to the Japanese Emperor, and had a very active social life in Japan in spite of her busy academic research. She went to dinners of the London University Union in Japan, where she met Japanese people who had studied there.<sup>54</sup> She was invited to Imperial garden parties at Akasaka

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 10–11.

Palace, where she met the Emperor, princes, princesses, Japanese ministers, diplomats and foreign ambassadors.<sup>55</sup> On different occasions she became acquainted with leading military men, politicians, ministers and educationalists, including Admiral Tōgō, Count Ōkuma, Baron Kikuchi, Marquis Itō and Naruse Jinzō (the president of the Japan Women's University).<sup>56</sup> She was also introduced to the wife of the well-known writer Lafcadio Hearn.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from her socializing with Japanese people, she received many invitations from the British Embassy for teas, dinners, receptions and balls, and came to know numerous westerners in Tokyo, whether British, American, French, German and Swiss, with whom she played tennis, went on picnics, played games and went to dances.<sup>58</sup> Many evenings were spent with Japanese and western friends at dinners, and she entertained friends at her house. Moreover she attended local festivals, flower shows, and traditional events such as the Doll's Festival and New Year celebrations, and also saw Noh performances.<sup>59</sup> She cycled around Tokyo, going to Hongō, Ginza, Shiba, Ōmori, Shinagawa and Asakusa, and went on several short holidays to Nikkō, Kamakura, Hayama, Hakone and Enoshima on her own or with her friends.<sup>60</sup> She maintained good health apart from one bout of influenza and a couple of minor illnesses during her stay, and was extremely energetic in her academic work and social activities since she determined to see as many new people, places and things as possible over 18 months.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 144–145.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 90, 92–95.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 95–96.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 304–305.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 87, 90, 92.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 88–89, 113–116, 143–144.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 84, 191.

### Her view of Japanese women

After she left Japan, she worked for women's causes such as birth control and women's suffrage. Therefore it is of much interest to know what views Marie had of Japanese women. Isabella Bird, a well-known travel writer in the Victorian period, who visited Japan, observed Japanese women much more closely than Marie Stopes.<sup>(61)</sup> Bird made many sympathetic comments on them, noting how many suffered from frequently repeated births and ill health. She also noticed how many children there were. Marie, who had not developed her interest in birth control then, commented on neither the large number of children nor childbirth. In the Japanese mines she often came across female coalminers naked to the waist and up to their knees, working underground with men. She found these women dirty and vulgar and did not show any concern for them in her journal.<sup>(62)</sup> Shidzue Ishimoto, the pioneer of the Japanese birth-control movement who was much influenced by the American birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger, developed her interest in birth control because she had lived in a coalmining community in Kyūshū with her husband who was an engineer there.<sup>(63)</sup> She was shocked to see the female coalminers' rapidly repeated births and poverty. Although she was from an upper-class family background, she was very sympathetic and felt that something ought to be done to help them. When she later met Sanger in America, she realised that birth control had to be the answer to the female coalminers' predicament. Although Marie was also later influenced by Sanger and of course became a pioneer in the British birth-control movement, Marie's view of female coalminers in Japan greatly differed from Ishimoto's. Marie, who was single and sexually inexperienced

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(61) Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan: An Account of Travels in the Interiors Including Visits to the Aborigines of Yezo and the Shrines of Nikkō and Ise* (London: John Murray, 1880).

(62) Stopes, *A Journal from Japan*, Illustrated, pp. 70–71.

(63) Shidzue Ishimoto, *Facing Two Ways: The Story of My Life* (1935; Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1984).

then, was probably too naive to appreciate the problems which the married female coalminers faced.

In her journal Marie made many critical remarks about the appearance of Japanese women. For example, when she met the Ainu in Hokkaidō, she thought that the married Ainu women, who were covered with tattoos, were very ugly.<sup>(64)</sup> She found many female school teachers plain, and their work outfit – a special kind of skirt called a *hakama* worn over their kimonos – hideously ungraceful. Although she thought that Japanese women in kimonos were butterfly-like and fascinating, she concluded that the great majority of Japanese women did not know how to dress tastefully in western costumes and looked awful. These comments demonstrated her cultural snobbishness, something shared by many well-to-do English women who were her contemporaries.

Generally speaking, Marie did not form a high opinion of Japanese women. Although she found them polite, humble, kind and subservient, she was unfamiliar with the limitations that they had to endure, and had little sympathy towards them. She criticized them for being unintelligent, uneducated and uncivilized, and decided that they were much inferior to western women. Moreover she could not understand why even leading Japanese men who had studied in western countries and spoke excellent English or German, treated their wives as second-class citizens. Nor did she see why wives never challenged their husbands, and why they accepted their lower status. She was mystified to see wives, who served dinners, never joining husbands and guests at the dining table, and was also disturbed by a Japanese man's remark that only plain girls, who could not marry, needed to go in for teaching. Lacking much perception about husband-wife relationships in Japan, she tried on occasion to persuade well-educated men how to treat their wives. However, she did not attempt to make the Japanese women whom she met become

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(64) Stopes, *A Journal from Japan, Illustrated*, pp. 44–45.

aware of their limitations, or to encourage them to improve their status.

Although Marie had reservations about militant action by the Women's Social and Political Union led by the Pankhursts, she was a supporter of the women's suffrage movement, and was herself an exemplar of the 'new woman'. However, she did not dare to introduce ideas of women's suffrage and other reforms to Japanese women. Perhaps she might have realised that those Japanese women, who usually lacked a higher education, would not have appreciated the significance of such causes. She was also unimpressed with the educational standard of the Japan Women's University (Nihon Joshi Daigaku), one of the few educational institutions which provided women with higher education at that time.<sup>65</sup>

### **Her departure from Japan**

Fujii's name appeared less frequently in her journal and private letters, and their love and a future together were no longer discussed. In the journal she criticised him for his constant absence from work.<sup>66</sup> He gave her the impression that he suffered from a couple of major illnesses and used them as an excuse to terminate their relationship, but he actually lived until he was eighty-six years old. He had two common-law Japanese wives and became an eminent professor after she left Japan. Towards the end of her stay in Japan, he spent more time working with her on their joint research project on cretaceous fossil plants. The outcome of the research appeared in a few articles and books published in 1909 and 1910.

Marie sailed for England via Canada on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1909. Fujii was among the small crowd who came to see her off. Years later in 1925 they were again reunited in England. Fujii wrote a thank you letter to her on this occasion, saying 'For myself December 25 1925 was the most happy day I ever had for twenty years.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 208–212.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 201, 203, 233.

<sup>67</sup> A letter from Kenjirō Fujii to Marie Stopes, 26 December 1925, Marie Stopes Papers

### The significance of her trip to Japan

What was the significance of her stay in Japan? After she returned to England at the end of February 1909, she became highly productive. She finished two books, *Ancient Plants* and *A Journal from Japan*, both of which were published in 1910. Although she did not have much time to analyse Japanese fossils during her stay in Japan, back in England she discovered that they included one of the earliest examples of the ovary of a petrified flowering plant.<sup>(68)</sup> Based on her observations, she wrote a few scientific research papers on the fossils of Japan, which were published in 1909 and 1910. One of them was a joint article entitled ‘Studies on the Structure and Affinities of Cretaceous Plants’ with Fujii, which was published in 1910 although they did not closely work together during her stay in Japan.<sup>(69)</sup> Her original research in Japan and her subsequent publications, which justified her expedition, certainly helped to enhance her reputation as a leading palaeobotanist. Consequently she was elected as a member and fellow of the Linnean Society, which had been founded in the late eighteenth century to promote the study of flora and fauna. A new post in fossil botany at Manchester University was created for her by Professor Weiss, and she took it up in May 1909.

Her official stay in Japan as the first female visiting scientist at the Imperial University had a great impact on Japanese scientists, many of whom rarely travelled abroad. She showed her experiments to them, and gave lectures, explaining the significance of her research, which provided them with an ideal opportunity to familiarise themselves with her progressive research methods and analysis. In these regards she played an excellent ambassadorial role. Her visit also helped to establish, develop and strengthen academic cooperation between Japan

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in the Department of Manuscripts, British Library.

(68) David Gelthorpe, ‘Marie Stopes the Paleobotanist, Manchester and Her Adventures in Japan’, *Geological Curator*, vol. 8, no. 8 (2007), pp. 375–380.

(69) Marie Stopes & Kenjiro Fujii, ‘Studies on the Structure and Affinities of Cretaceous Plants’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 1910, B 201, pp. 167–218.

and Britain.

As the circles of scientists in Japan were completely male-dominated then, they were naturally sceptical about her ability as a female scientist on her arrival. However, her confidence in battling through the jungle of northern Japan and her strong leadership, taking charge of the fossil-gathering expeditions and leading a party of thirty men, completely reversed the normal relation between men and women in Japan. She demonstrated an ideal example of what a devoted and talented female scientist was capable of achieving, and was successful in winning much respect from her male counterparts. They were so impressed with her dedication to research, intelligence and self-assurance that they decided to create the first new academic post for a female scientist at the Science Department of the Imperial University. Kono Yasui took up the position, and subsequently became a leading and pioneering female scientist in Japan.<sup>(70)</sup> Apparently Fujii, who highly evaluated Marie's scientific achievements, strongly supported this appointment. Fujii collaborated with Yasui and published two academic articles.<sup>(71)</sup> In other words the recruitment of the first female scientist in Japan owed a great deal to Marie.

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(70) Yasui's research on the aquatic fern was published in *the Journal of Plant Sciences* and the British journal *Annals of Botany*, which marked the first publication of a Japanese woman's research in foreign journals. She also received the Japanese Ministry of Education's study abroad scholarship, and in 1914 she went to America to conduct research on cytology at the University of Chicago. In the following year she researched on coal under Professor E.C. Jeffrey at Harvard University. In 1927 she became the first woman in Japan to obtain a doctorate in science. In 1929 she founded the cytology journal *Cytologia*. On Yasui, see Leila McNeill, 'How a Pioneering Botanist Broke Down Japan's Gender Barriers', *Smithsonian.com* (21 December 2017); Yōichirō Murakami, *Nihon no Kagakusha 101* (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 2010); Hiroko Hara (ed.), *Blazing a Path: Japanese Women's Contributions to Modern Science* (Tokyo: Committee for the Encouragement of Future Scientists, 2001).

(71) Kenjirō Fujii & Kono Yasui, 'Shu no Kigen ni Kansuru Jikkenteki Kenkyū', *Tokyo Shokubutsu Gakkairoku*, vol. 32, no. 378 (1918), pp. 184–186; Kenjirō Fujii & Kono Yasui, 'Saibō no Kōzō oyobi Saibō no Bunretsu', *Hattori Hōkōkai Kenkyū Shōroku*, vol. 2, no. VI (1936), pp. 122–127.

As European visitors to Japan were rare then, her book *A Journal from Japan* provided a valuable record of daily life in the country as seen by a scientist based on her experiences there. Indeed she introduced into this book Japanese festivals, crafts and the beauty of Japanese gardens and houses, gave balanced views of the country and promoted Japanese tradition and culture to British people. Her lively descriptions of Japanese life and customs certainly confirm her literary talent. After her return to Britain, she was invited to give lectures or talks about Japan by many schools, universities and the Japan Society of London, which contributed to a fuller British understanding of Japan, and promoted further links between the two countries. During her stay in Japan she went to see Noh plays (a classic Japanese theatrical form). Her fascination with Noh plays led to the publication in 1913 of her English edition of these famous plays entitled *Plays of Old Japan: the Noh*, which turned out to be a perfect introduction to classic Japanese theatrical forms for western readers.<sup>(72)</sup>

## Conclusion

Marie Stopes began her life with many prospects thanks to the influence of her rational, cultured and scholarly parents who appreciated the significance of women's education. Her mother in particular, who herself was one of the earliest women who benefitted from higher education, wanted to give Marie the best education available then. She followed her mother's guidance, and pursued her academic interests thoroughly. Indeed she graduated from University College London with a first-class degree in botany and geology, and was also the first woman to be awarded a Ph.D. degree at the University of Munich.

Her outstanding educational records were followed by her successful academic career. She became the first woman to join the scientific staff at Owen's

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<sup>(72)</sup> Marie Stopes & Jōji Sakurai, *Plays of Old Japan, the Noh* (London: Heinemann, 1913).

College. She also became the youngest gainer of a doctorate of science in Britain. She was recognised as a young talented scientist with great potential, and even the Royal Society, a most distinguished academic science organisation, awarded her a grant to do research in Japan, which was the first grant ever given to a woman. She was also the first female visiting professor at the Imperial University in Tokyo, which was completely male-dominated, and she conducted highly innovative research, investigating the evolutionary origin of flowers. The results were published in academic articles and books after her return to Japan. Such extremely productive and original research activities certainly helped her to become a rising exemplar of British science and then to establish her reputation as an internationally acclaimed scientist, botanist and palaeontologist.

The key to her academic success was her excellent education, her mother's strong encouragement, diligence and above all her 'determination to achieve the seemingly impossible'. It is no exaggeration to say that she was a role model and a pioneer not only for female scientists but for all female academics in Britain, and she contributed to upgrade the standard of female scholars.

As David Gelsthorpe points out, the significance of her early academic life should not be underestimated, as the events prior to 1910 were key to defining her character.<sup>(73)</sup> Indeed Marie's hectic research and social activities in Japan had a profound impact on her later life. Her experience of leading many expeditions to even remote areas in Japan accompanied with a group of male scientists and assistants, helped to develop her leadership qualities, and demonstrated her determination to achieve the seemingly impossible. Moreover the publication of *A Journal from Japan* also gave her an opportunity to display her literary ability.

One of the aspects of her life which has hardly been discussed before was her literary talent. Having inherited her mother's literary interests, Marie was

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(73) Gelsthorpe, 'Marie Stopes the Paleobotanist, Manchester and Her Adventures in Japan', p. 375.

acquainted with many literary figures of her day such as George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and Aylmer Maude.<sup>(74)</sup> She wrote many poems and published several volumes of poetry in her later years. Her plays such as *Our Ostriches* and *Vectia* were performed in London.<sup>(75)</sup> She wrote a book on the old Japanese play Noh. Under the influence of her mother she also supported the women's suffrage movement, and dealt with controversial women's rights.

Researchers working on Marie Stopes tend to concentrate on her later achievements after her resignation from her academic post. It was not her academic career but her devotion to sex education, ground-breaking birth control and family planning that made her a household name. As Clare Debenham, a political historian states, 'Marie is rightfully regarded as a sexual revolutionary that helped pave the way for modern family planning, and pioneered the formation of birth-control clinics in working-class areas.'<sup>(76)</sup> Many birth-control clinics founded by her continue even now under the auspices of Marie Stopes International.<sup>(77)</sup>

Although she led an exemplary life as a feminist pioneer, there were also darker sides to her life. For example, she corresponded with Hitler, supported his ideas for the creation of an Arian super race, became an active member of the Eugenics Society, and cut her son out of her will because he married a very shortsighted woman.<sup>(78)</sup> Such traits in her are hardly impressive or commendable,

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(74) Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 96–97; Debenham, *Marie Stopes' Sexual Revolution and The Birth Control Movement*, pp. 134–135.

(75) Marie Stopes, *Our Ostriches, A Play* (London: Putnam, 1923); Marie Stopes, *Vectia: A Banned Play and a Preface on the Censorship* (London: Bale Sons and Danielsson, 1926).

(76) Debenham, *Marie Stopes' Sexual Revolution and The Birth Control Movement*, p. 84.

(77) On Marie Stopes International, see <https://mariestopes.org/about-us/>; Patricia Hindmarsh, 'Marie Stopes International Today', in Peel (ed.), *Marie Stopes Eugenics and the English Birth Control Movement*, pp. 98–110.

(78) Richard Soloway, 'The Galton Lecture: Marie Stopes, Eugenics and the Birth Control Movement', in Peel (ed.), *Marie Stopes Eugenics and the English Birth Control Movement*, pp. 49–76.

though they need to be understood as influencing her subsequent initiatives, which are perhaps misconstrued contextually through association with some later political climates and motives. In this spirit then, we need also to appreciate Marie's association with Japan, at an early stage of her career. For it was certainly very influential in the subsequent development of this extremely significant female thinker and activist.

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