

## **Girl Talk: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese Prints Depicting Women**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as Japan pursued the status of a first-class nation within the international arena, modernization and Westernization were major themes of national policy. With this in mind, distinct gender roles were advocated by Japanese intellectuals and politicians. Their goal was to elevate the status of women, and, at the same time, to maximize national profit and stimulate economic growth. Inspired both by Christian and Confucian ideals and teachings for women, the principle “good wife, wise mother (*ryōsai kenbo*),” was adopted by many girls’ schools serving middle to upper classes. Female education had a different focus from that of their male counterparts, as women were persuaded to take charge of households, which included such tasks as caring for their husbands and nourishing and educating children who would one day be important national assets.

The lifestyles of such schoolgirls and “good wife, wise mother” figures became an idealized image of femininity to which all women were encouraged to aspire. However, as time passed, some women, especially those educated in the new school system, began to be aware of the value of self-achievement and individualism. “Modern girls” (*moga*) started to appear in public spaces such as cafés and on the street.

A selection of prints depicting various images of modern femininity from the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century displayed in this section will offer a rare opportunity to see the world-renowned work *Tipsy*, which previously traveled to venues across the United States, Japan, and Australia as part of the popular exhibition *Taishō Chic: Japanese Modernity, Nostalgia and Deco*. The subject of *Tipsy* is dressed in the very latest contemporary Western fashion. She wears a ring and watch, has bobbed-hair and heavy make-up, and smokes a cigarette. *Tipsy* epitomizes the modern woman who might have felt resistance to, and questioned, the favored role of “good wife, wise mother.” Donated to the Academy by Philip H. Roach, Jr., *Tipsy* demonstrates the contradictory interpretations of femininity that characterize this fascinating period of Japanese cultural history.