

"Burn the Ships"

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Have you ever heard the phrase, "Burn the ships"? It comes from an event that happened exactly 500 years ago, in 1519. Yet, it is as powerful today, in 2019, as it was back then.

In 1519, Captain Hernán Cortés landed in Veracruz, in the "New World," to begin his great conquest. Upon arriving, he gave the order to his men to burn the ships. He had travelled half way around the globe and then, he burned his own ships! Let that roll around in your head for a second. What Cortés did was force himself and his men to either succeed or die. There was no looking back, success was to be found by only looking forward.

I would like to share with you how, in 2019, this phrase, "Burn the ships," profoundly relates to Japanese education in general, Japanese women in particular and myself in situ, in the search for success. I'd like to discuss these topics in reverse order, so I'll begin with myself.

In the future, I hope to find success in the world of acting. I plan to attend a technical school and study theater arts and follow my dream. "What ships do you have to burn to do that?", you might ask. Well, in Japan, attending a four year university is considered compulsory for future success. That is the ship I have burned. I had to give up the safest path to success. I'm thrilled about looking forward and I'm not looking back, but it wasn't easy for me. It isn't easy for my friends and classmates either, who have chosen to take the tried and true road to success by committing to entering a good university. They too, have burned their ships.

At school, all around me, are students who have given up everything and committed every waking moment to passing their university entrance test. Their entire existence is focused on one test score which will determine the rest of their lives. For the young women, the highest of goals and thus the most motivating, is to pass the entrance test for medical school. That would mean guaranteed success. At least it did, until October of 2018.

Last October, we learned that the Tokyo University Medical School, as well as, at least 20 other medical schools in Japan, had been deducting 20% off the scores on the women's written tests for the previous 10 years! If a young woman got a score of 100 points, she only got credit for 80! But, it didn't stop there. They also added 20 points to the young men's test scores! Is this an example of the forward thinking government policy of "womenomics"? Is it 2019 or 1519?

Tokyo University admitted that they were changing the test scores to keep women out of medical

school in order to keep the number of female doctors from increasing. These women's families paid the same cram school fees as the men's did. The women studied just as hard as the men, they burned their ships just like the men, only to be met with 16th century style sexual discrimination. Hence, for the future success of Japanese society, there is only one thing that can be done. It is time for the Japanese education system to burn its ships.

For me, considering the depth of the institutional discrimination against young women like myself, trying to find a road to future success is a scary thing. You see, if it happens in the medical field, it is probably happening in other fields, as well. But, there is no looking back. I've burned my ships, and I'll discover my own "New World"! I hope you find yours!