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Japanese Women's Fight for Equal Rights
Feminism and the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952

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On October 28, 1945, the *New York Times* ran an article titled “Out of Feudalism: Japan’s Women”, written by Lindesay Parrott. “The dawn has slowly begun to break in the Land of the Rising Sun for Japan’s most depressed class” he wrote “the patient, plodding, Japanese women.”¹ Just fifteen days earlier, the Japanese cabinet had decided to amend the election law granting suffrage to women and lowering the voting age from 25 to 20 years. As the *Times* lead correspondent in the Far East, Parrot was one of the first to report on the decision.² Nevertheless, despite having lived much of his life in Japan, his writing illustrated an image of Japanese women that echoes racial and gendered stereotypes contemporary to the period.

“For centuries there has been dinned into her little ears ‘obedience and modesty are essential virtues of the Japanese woman,’” he wrote. “She has had her marriage arranged for her. She has stood in train or streetcar so her husband could sit. She knows it is wrong to take a seat at the dinner table until the men have finished, and she drops back to let the males precede her through doors... Now all of a sudden, and mostly through the insistence of the allied occupation authorities, she has become a citizen of Japan, vested with the power to vote, choose her government, organize meetings... and express her thoughts without fear of the secret police, even, possibly, by an extreme stretch of the imagination, talk back to her husband.”³ In just a couple of sentences, Parrott paints a picture that would have been easily recognizable to American readers in 1945: Japanese women, docile and subservient, oppressed for centuries by Japanese feudalism, now liberated by Americans during the occupation.

The narrative of the submissive Japanese woman dominates the historiography of not just the occupation, but of Japanese feminism as a whole. However, the history of Japanese feminism has never been the story of passive victims of oppression and to characterize them as

¹ Lindesay Parrot, “Out of Feudalism: Japan’s Women” *New York Times*, October 28, 1945, 10.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

merely secondary players is misleading. The true story of Japanese feminism is the story of the women who fought, protested, and debated, sometimes for and sometimes against the nation. It is the stories of mothers, housewives, professionals, and intellectuals who wanted to better their position within society, maintain the status quo or just have their voices heard. Still, accounts like Parrott's that dominated the media in 1945 and 1946 raise many questions. Why did the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), led by General Douglas MacArthur, choose to grant universal suffrage and extend the rights of Japanese women? Did Japanese women have a role in the changes that occurred during the Occupation? How did Japanese women respond to these changes and most importantly how did their voices get lost within the greater discourse?

In 1945, Japan accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration⁴ and agreed to “unconditional surrender.” Unconditional surrender placed the United States in political and military control of the Japanese government under SCAP. During the early months of the Occupation SCAP began a program of sweeping economic, social and political reforms under “the Reorientation and Reeducation of Japan,” which was developed to introduce democratic principles, eliminate militarism and prevent future aggression. According to a report by the State-War-Navy Coordinating subcommittee for the Far East, drafted in January of 1946 at the start of the occupation, the goals of the program were to “change the ideologies and ways of thinking, which have in the past motivated the Japanese people as a whole in the pursuit of chauvinistic and militaristic policies” and to “develop new attitudes of mind conforming to the

⁴ The Potsdam Declaration or the *Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender*, issued on July 26, 1945, was an agreement between the United States, United Kingdom and the Nationalist Government of China, which outlined the terms of surrender for Japan.

basic principles of democracy and fair dealing.”⁵ It was during this time that SCAP chose to prioritize the expansion of women’s rights.

One of SCAP's first decisions was to grant universal suffrage to Japanese women. Over the next several months many other rights were granted to women through the revision of the Constitution and Civil Code, as well as through the reform of higher education. For MacArthur, “of all the reforms accomplished by the occupation in Japan” he felt “none was more heartwarming to me than [the] change in the status of women.”⁶ For MacArthur, the introduction of women into politics brought “the wisdom of the home” into the political sphere, reflecting discourses that linked national stability with women’s role as the natural stabilizing influence of the family.⁷ This mirrored the views of SCAP, which not only saw women’s political participation as indicative of American democracy, but saw women’s “natural inclination towards moderation” as a way to counterbalance political extremism and generate support for democratic policies.⁸ However, neither SCAP nor MacArthur were solely responsible for the sweeping changes that occurred during this period. In fact, the majority of the revisions and new laws were developed by individuals who acted within the lower levels of SCAP, which was divided into various sub-divisions, each acting autonomously and mostly independent of MacArthur and the U.S. Government. It is through these subdivisions that many Occupational leaders were able to work with Japanese women, both directly and indirectly, communicating with them as equals and making their concerns a priority in their decisions.⁹

⁵ Report by the State-War-Navy Coordinating subcommittee for the Far East, January 1946, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1946, Vol. VIII.

⁶ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill), 305.

⁷ Ms. Beard to Lt. Ethel B. Weed, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 24, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York

⁸ Mire Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan*. (Philadelphia, 2008), 50-51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Researching feminism during the U.S. Occupation is important, because it has rarely been studied in the past. Many scholars have explored prewar feminist movements as well as the Japanese government policies during World War II, while other scholars have focused on the so-called “second wave” of Japanese feminism of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰ This has left a large gap in the historiography of Japanese feminism and women’s rights. Only a few articles and even fewer books have been written about the topic. John Dower, who has written one of the most influential books of the U.S. Occupation of Japan, *Embracing Defeat*, places women's rights within the larger narrative of democratization and reorientation, focusing primarily on issues such as sexuality and prostitution, while failing to explore women's political realities as separate from men's.¹¹ In addition, in reaction to historians of the 1950s and 1960s who tended to define the occupation as an example of benevolent American rule, which “liberated and democratized the Japanese,”¹² Dower takes a critical stance against the Occupation, regarding it as exploitative and ultimately oppressive.¹³ He argues in favor of what is known as the “reverse-course”, a shift from conservatism and towards socialism followed by another shift back towards conservatism. According to this narrative, SCAP and MacArthur reversed the democratic reforms that had been introduced in the early phases of the occupation, in order to build Japan as a Cold War ally.¹⁴ The “reverse-course,” accepted by many historians of the Occupation, makes the study of women's rights during this period problematic, because it argues that the United States used early

¹⁰ Well known works on “first wave” feminism include Barbara Molony, Kathleen S. Uno and Gail Lee Bernstein (1991) while prominent works on “second wave” feminism include authors such as Mackie Vera (2003).

¹¹ John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. (New York, 1999), 84.

¹² Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy*, 5-13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ Jack Napier, Frank Rizzo, and Douglas H. MacArthur, *Political Reorientation of Japan: September 1945 to September 1948* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 178.

democratic reforms as an exploitative tool to weaken Japan as a nation, therefore overlooking or even denying feminist victories.¹⁵

Regarding Japanese feminist history, revisionists of the traditional narrative such as Dower argue that rather than being liberated by Americans, Japanese women were instead oppressed by the occupational government. This theme is common among much of the literature surrounding the status of Japanese prostitutes known as “Pan Pan Girls,” a subject that has been more thoroughly researched than women’s suffrage or civil rights. An example of this is historian Michiko Takeuchi, who revealed that “similarities and continuities between European colonial sexual politics towards indigenous women and U.S. politics towards Japanese women” suggest “the U.S. Occupation of Japan was a form of neo-colonialism” or in other words “imperialism without colonies.”¹⁶ She argues that regulating female sexuality was instrumental in creating postwar hegemony in East Asia concealed under the rhetoric of democracy.¹⁷ The wealth of research on Japanese sex workers during the Occupation, while important in their own right, fails to account for the experiences of other groups of women during this period and once again paints Japanese women as the victims of oppressive forces rather than as active players.

Other discourses surrounding Japanese women in the postwar period, however, reveal a lack of consensus. Susan J. Pharr, one of the earliest writers on women’s rights during the Occupation, explored the reasons for the success of women’s rights during this period, when many other suffrage and equal rights movements were met with much more resistance. Pharr concluded that Japanese feminist leaders finally had their voices heard because they were able to

¹⁵ The term *Reverse Course* was coined by the Japanese and U.S. media during the early 1950s and has become central to the arguments of historians such as John Dower (1999) and Michael Schaller (1985).

¹⁶ Michiko Takeuchi, “Pan-Pan Girls” Performing and Resisting Neocolonialism(s) in the Pacific Theater: U.S. Military Prostitution in Occupied Japan (1945-1952),” in Maria H. Höhn, and Seungsook Moon, eds., *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire*. (Durham, 2010), 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

cooperate with American women occupiers.¹⁸ In particular, she stresses the role of women such as Beate Sirota and Ethel Weed, who contributed greatly to the extension of rights through their positions in SCAP. But this image of success and cooperation is heavily contested by authors such as Mire Koikari who argues that the Occupation was part of the “American pursuit of cold war hegemony” in which “seemingly positive reform efforts... originated and fed back into American assertion of Imperial hegemony and racial and national superiority” and essentially “hindered rather than promoted Japanese women's democratic emancipation.” Koikari challenges authors like Pharr, and the narrative that occupational women such as Beate Sirota and Ethel Weed, liberated Japanese women from the oppressive ideology of Japanese feudalism. Writing from what she describes as a “critical feminist perspective,” she argues instead that American woman occupiers simultaneously promoted and undermined the U.S. pursuit of Cold War hegemony and that by promoting “American ideals” these women justified American Imperial expansionism.¹⁹

This thesis argues that Japanese women were not passive victims of the Japanese nor the Americans; rather, they were active participants of their own liberation. The concept of equal rights was not transplanted by American reformers during the occupation; it had developed out of earlier feminists discourses, which had flourished during Japan’s vibrant feminist movement prior to WWII and were merely reignited after SCAP granted universal suffrage and equal rights. Ideas such as universal suffrage had gained momentum in the 1920s, but were halted by the rapid militarism and nationalism of the 1930s. When power shifted from the militarists to the occupational government, universal suffrage once again became a reality and Japanese women

¹⁸ Susan J. Pharr "The Politics of Women's Rights During the Allied Occupation of Japan." In Robert E. Ward and Sakamoto Yoshikazu, *Policy and Planning During the Allied Occupation of Japan*. (Tokyo, 1986; Honolulu, 1987), 247.

¹⁹ Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy*, 9-15, 192.

reorganized political groups and engaged in a wealth of movements and protests. They claimed the rights they fought for and greatly approved of the social and political reforms.

I will also argue against neo-imperialism as a lived experience of Japanese women during the occupation. Further insight proves that women were not granted rights because occupational officials wanted to justify their occupation or to legitimize it in the face of Cold War tensions. Rather than exploitative in nature, I argue that the early period of the occupation was characterized by racial ideology and paternalistic intentions and it was these perceptions that were the driving force behind occupational ideology. However, while racial discourse can help us understand the motivations of MacArthur and other occupational leaders, it cannot speak for the experience of Japanese women. In order to understand why Japanese women were so overwhelmingly accepting of the U.S. Occupational reforms, this paper will argue that an overlap in feminist discourse in both America and Japan, which tied feminine identity with domesticity and placed value on women's role as wives and mothers ultimately helped Japanese women both conceptualize American ideals of gender equality and accept the many social and political changes that were being made during this time. This challenges authors who analyze from the perspective of neo-imperialism, such as Mire Koikari who argues that "cold war discourses of femininity and domesticity" were enforced upon women in order to serve their own interests.²⁰ Rather, I argue that Japanese women embraced American ideals because they were flexible, malleable, and could be fit within their own feminist discourses.

Scholars who tend to cite this period as an example of American neo-imperialism, also focus heavily on the policies enforced by American occupational leaders. This shifts focus away from the experience of the women themselves as their voices get lost within the greater

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

discourses of power relations between America and Japan. By placing this period within the context of Japanese feminism and the suffrage movement, I will first deconstruct the traditional narrative through an exploration of the continuities between feminist activism prior to World War II and feminist activism during the Occupation. I will then, re-center the narrative on Japanese women through an analysis of oral histories, memoirs, journal and newspaper articles, and explore the story of Japanese feminism from the perspective of those who were involved. In addition, I will use archival materials from locations such as the Douglas MacArthur Papers, the National Archives and the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) to analyze SCAP's major policies and the rationale that went into their development. Afterwards, I will explore the development of the 1947 postwar Constitution as well as the reform of the Civil Code and women's higher education, to show how Japanese women cooperated with occupational reformers in all aspects of the occupation to further the rights and opportunities available to them. By doing this I hope to not only to illuminate the perspective of the many Japanese and American women who experienced and actively participated in this period of massive social change, but to give further insight into the nature of the occupation as a whole.

Deconstructing the Traditional Narrative

On July 19, 1946 SCAP's General Headquarters received a letter from Dr. Mary R. Beard, a prominent historian from the United States. Praising General Douglas MacArthur for taking an active role in advancing the rights of Japanese women, she writes "The whole procedure in Japan relative to enlisting the force of women on the side of democracy is so superior in intelligence to the military occupation in Germany that General MacArthur's

leadership in this respect shines with brilliant illumination.”²¹ Dr. Beard received a reply two months later from Lieutenant Ethel B. Weed, Information Officer at GHQ and well known advocate for the extension of women’s rights in Japan. “Ms. Beard should be informed that General MacArthur for many years has considered the intervention of American women in American politics as one of the greatest stabilizing events in our political history. Because of this view, his initial planning of policy to govern in the occupation of Japan laid particular emphasis upon the early emancipation of the women and their encouragement toward independent political thought and action.”²²

The traditional narrative, reflected by both SCAP official reports and the American media, has provided the foundation for not only how we have remembered and understood the extension of suffrage to Japanese women, but of the expansion of women’s rights during the Occupation as a whole. According to this narrative, on October 4, 1945 MacArthur met with Prince Konoë Fuminaro who served in the cabinet of Prince Naruhiko Higashikuni, leader of Japan’s first post-war government. During their meeting MacArthur expressed his desire to reform Japan’s suffrage law. When the Higashikuni cabinet resigned on October 5, and the Shidehara Cabinet was established on October 9, MacArthur met with Prime Minister Shidehara and provided him with a list of five reforms.²³ On the top of this list was “the emancipation of the women of Japan through their enfranchisement.”²⁴ Following this meeting, on October 13, after being given a proposal by Home Minister Zenjiro Horikiri, the Shidehara cabinet voted to amend the Japanese election law, granting women’s suffrage and lowering the voting age. After

²¹ Ms. Beard to Lt. Ethel B. Weed, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 24, New York State Library, Albany, New York.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kyoko Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution: A Linguistic and Cultural Study of Its Making* (Chicago, 1991), 9.

²⁴ “Statement to the Japanese Government Concerning Required Reforms” Jack Napier, Frank Rizzo, and Douglas H. MacArthur. *Political Reorientation of Japan: September 1945 to September 1948*. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 178.

only a few short meetings, MacArthur had apparently influenced the cabinet to undo centuries of feudalistic oppression and began a chain of events that would, over the next few months, elevate the status of women through the reform of the Constitution, the Civil Code and women's education.

But the traditional narrative is problematic for multiple reasons. One, it reinforces the myth that Japanese women had experienced “centuries of feudalistic oppression.” Prior to the more modern Meiji State, gender roles were not clearly defined and the roles attributed to women were not uniform across class boundaries. In the lower classes (farmers, merchants, artisans) women had more autonomy, while in the higher classes (samurai) women were more restricted.²⁵ It was only during the political and social reforms of the Meiji Restoration of 1868 that the state began to pay attention to the role of women and it would then be in response to these sweeping changes that women would begin to organize and advocate for reforms.²⁶

Secondly, it denies Japanese women agency in the story of their own enfranchisement. In 1878, a woman by the name of Kusunose Kita, a widow of samurai background and head of her household since her husband's death, publically demanded rights equal to her male counterparts, spawning the birth of the women's movement in Japan.²⁷ Advocating for suffrage in local elections and equal rights, members of the women's movement began speaking in public meetings and attending political events.²⁸ In response, Meiji leaders and intellectuals began to discuss women's roles in the new modern Japan.²⁹ Although prior to the Meiji period, there was a diversity of marriage and inheritance practices throughout Japan, the state developed laws

²⁵ Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, "The Meiji's State Policy Toward Women" In Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Recreating Japanese Women: 1600-1945* (Berkeley, 1991), 153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 151-153.

²⁷ Liddle, Joanna, and Sachiko Nakajima, *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters: Gender, Class, and Power in Japan* (London, 2000), 9.

²⁸ Vera C. Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment, and Sexuality*. (Cambridge, 2003), 20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-19.

concurrent with patriarchal samurai values and reflective of a Confucian family state. The Meiji Constitution of 1889 limited women to their role within the household,³⁰ and the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 placed the father as the head of the household, with full authority over his wife and children, who were considered his property.³¹

Women's education further enforced these state-defined gender roles. In 1872, compulsory education was introduced in Japan. At first, women's education was based on Confucian morals, which argued that women should be given little or no education because "a woman is to spend her time doing housework."³² However, in the 1890s the education ministry popularized the ideals of *Ryosai Kenbo* or "Good Wife, Wise Mother," which held that women were expected to contribute to the state through their roles as housewife and mother, and should only be educated enough to fulfill those roles effectively.³³ As a result, after the fifth year girls attended separate high schools where they received a lower quality education, centered on home economics and moral education. Post high school, women were further limited to attending two-year vocational colleges, mostly developed for teachers and nurses. While women could attend men's universities, they could not receive credit for the classes they attended nor receive a recognized degree.³⁴ *Ryosai Kenbo* was not only enforced by the Japanese imperial state, but was culturally accepted among many Japanese women. Shidzue Kato, prominent prewar leader of the birth control movement, describes her feelings towards her mother's acceptance of *Ryosai Kenbo* in her autobiography *'A good wife' and 'a wise mother'*. How well those words sound! Indeed there would seem no objection to them in any society or age. But when we peel off the

³⁰ Nolte and Hastings, "The Meiji's State Policy Toward Women," 151.

³¹ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 22-23.

³² Taki Fujita "The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women" *Contemporary Japan* 1948, The Gordon W. Prange Collection, Microfiche C290, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland 274

³³ Nolte and Hastings, "The Meiji's State Policy Toward Women," 152.

³⁴ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 26.

skin from this perfect fruit of feudalism, we expose bondage to husbands and subjection to the tyranny of the family system as a whole.”³⁵ For Kato, marriage was a system in which Japanese women lost their individual freedom and Ryosai Kenbo, she argues, was a tool used to enforce the family system onto women. “Consciously or unconsciously my mother taught her daughter to crush her desires and ambitions and trained her to submerge her individuality in her husband's personality and his family's united temper.”³⁶ Kato's childhood experiences illuminate the ways Meiji state law and Japan's education system complemented one another.

Since a woman's role was solely within the household as a wife and mother, the Meiji government believed women should be denied political rights. The 1889 Electoral Law restricted the right to vote or stand as a candidate in national elections to male Japanese subjects and soon after in 1900, as part of the revision to the Peace Preservation Law, women were barred from engaging in politics, and prohibited from joining or organizing political parties as well as from participating in political events.³⁷ In addition, rising nationalism, as a result of the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese Wars, led to the temporary suspension of the women's movement.

Unable to publicly participate in political activities, women turned to the power of literary discourse in order to fight back against state oppression. In 1911, the young Hiratsuka Raicho formed *Seito*, or Bluestockings, Japan's first literary journal created by and for women. *Seito* became a forum in which feminists could debate women's issues. Through this forum, two separate ideological groups were formed: one identifying as bourgeois feminists, middle class women who struggled for the equality of men and women through the current capitalistic system;

³⁵ Shidzue Kato, *Facing Two Ways: The Story of My Life* (Stanford, 1984), 78

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 32

second, identifying as proletariat feminists, who fought for women's rights through reform of the capitalistic system and the promotion of socialism.³⁸

For working class women identifying as proletariat feminists, the labor movement provided unique political opportunities. These women participated in strikes against wage reductions and employer abuse and advocated in favor of equal pay.³⁹ Women such as Tame Sakai, Kiyo Endo, Eiko Fukuda, and Yamakawa Kikue emerged as prominent leaders and in 1912 the Yuaikai Union Federation organized a women's section.⁴⁰ Women identifying as bourgeois feminists focused primarily on reforming the state laws that had been implemented during the Meiji period.

Ichikawa Fusae was one of these reformers. A teacher born to a farm family in Nagoya, Ichikawa was said to have rebelled against her father at a young age after witnessing abuse against her mother.⁴¹ In 1910, she became exposed to leaders of the women's movement after she moved to Tokyo to work for the women's division of the Yuaikai Union Federation. In 1920 she co-founded the New Women's Association alongside Hiratsuka Raicho and Oku Mumeo, the first Japanese organization formed exclusively for the improvement of the status and welfare of women. The New Women's Association focused their efforts on amending the Peace Preservation Law, which led to a victory in 1922, when the Imperial Diet modified article 5, allowing women to attend political meetings. However, the association disbanded shortly after.⁴²

But Ichikawa did not stop there. In Japan, women were still unable to join political parties or exercise the right to vote. This motivated her to study in the United States and become

³⁸ Raicho Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*. New York, 2006), 351.

³⁹ Liddle and Nakajima, *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters*, 13-14

⁴⁰ Taki Fujita, "The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women" 276

⁴¹ "Fusae Ichikawa, 87, Led the Japanese Feminists" *New York Times*, February 11, 1981, 23.

⁴² Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 60-61.

acquainted with leaders of the American Suffragist movement. When she returned in 1924, she established the League for the Attainment of Women's Political Rights (*Fujin Sanseiken Kakutoku Kisei Domeikai*) as an offshoot of the New Women's Association and began to advocate for women's suffrage. In April of 1925 the name was changed to Women's Suffrage League (*Fusen Kakutoku Domei*) and began to receive a large amount of support.⁴³ In 1931, Japan came closest to granting suffrage to women, when Home Minister Adachi was able to successfully pass a bill in the House of Representatives.⁴⁴ However, the rise of militarism led to opposition from representatives of the Japanese army's general staff, who argued that "women are pacifists and if granted franchise will oppose the war" and the bill was vetoed by the House of Peers.⁴⁵

After the Manchurian Incident in September of 1937, when the Japanese government officially declared war on China, the Imperial government suppressed progressive social activities. Political organizations were no longer able to autonomously carry on its activities and were instead placed under the command of the government authorities.⁴⁶ Shortly after the Manchurian Incident, on September 28, 1937, eight major women's organizations, including the Women's Suffrage League, were ordered to be dissolved and reorganized into a single national organization known as the Greater Japan Alliance of Women's Organizations (*Dai Nihon Fujin Dantai Remei*), which was controlled and used as an instrument by the state to mobilize women for the war effort and further their imperialistic and expansionist goals.⁴⁷ Rather than advocate for issues concerning women's rights, these organizations were forced to focus on issues such as

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Japanese House Votes for Women's Suffrage, But Defeat of Bill by Peers Is Expected" *New York Times* May 11, 1930 8

⁴⁵ Lindsay Parrot, "Out of Feudalism: Japan's Women" *New York Times*, October 28, 1945, 44.

⁴⁶ Taki Fujita "The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women," 280.

⁴⁷ Kikue Yamakawa "Japanese Women Under the New Constitution" *Contemporary Japan* 1948, The Gordon W. Prange Collection, Microfiche C290, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland 143

consumer prices, savings, and frugality.⁴⁸ “Drowned out by nationalism and imperialism”⁴⁹ the Suffrage League was forced to dissolve,⁵⁰ citing that the decision was made “because of the government’s plan to reorganize all national life along ‘Japanese totalitarian lines.’”⁵¹ Once again, rising nationalism and militarism had temporarily suspended the women’s movement.

Contrary to the traditional narrative, women’s rights were not handed to them by General MacArthur nor were the Japanese women liberated by American authorities. In fact, the postwar period represents a continuity and not a discontinuity, from the prewar period. Japanese women had been advocating for decades for three crucial things: political participation, reform or dissolution of the family system, and the expansion of educational opportunities, and it was precisely these three things that immediately Japanese women continued to fight for upon the end of the war.

The Reform of the Election Law and Political Education

In October 1945, shortly after the announcement that suffrage would be extended to women, Ichikawa Fusae was interviewed by the *New York Times*. Speaking with reporter Lindsey Parrot, she stated that she believed universal suffrage “would have been granted within a very few years even if Japan had won the war.”⁵² Her claims were not without merit. In fact, on the August 25, 1945, two months before MacArthur’s meeting with Prince Konoe, Ichikawa met with Japanese pre-war feminist leaders of the women’s movement and established a postwar committee named the Women’s Committee to Cope with Postwar Conditions (*Sengo Taisaku*

⁴⁸ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 107.

⁴⁹ Fujita, “The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women,” 79.

⁵⁰ Yamakawa, *Japanese Women Under the New Constitution*, 143.

⁵¹ “Japan’s Suffragists Quit: Women Disband Because of New ‘Totalitarian Regime’” *New York Times* August 27, 1940, 5.

⁵² Lindsey Parrot, “Out of Feudalism: Japan’s Women” *New York Times*, October 28, 1945, 10.

Fujin Inukai).⁵³ Their first meeting on September 11, 1945 was attended by over seventy women and focused on issues such as food, saving and modesty, issues that had been of importance to women during the war. However, on September 24 the committee met again this time shifting focus to discuss political issues including suffrage for women over 20.⁵⁴ The actions of the Committee show that the postwar period marked an immediate continuation of the women's movement. For Ichikawa, the war had been not a break, but rather a catalyst for women's rights. She argued that the biggest change in the postwar period was "psychological" and that women had acquired "a new form of self-respect" during the war.⁵⁵ She believed that the work of women during war helped them "realize that they have previously unsuspected abilities" and proved to themselves that they were able to "carry on in the absence of men."⁵⁶ However, she also noted a "parallel change in the Japanese male attitude" and argued that "men have seen how women, in the face of a national crisis were able to ...keep the home land going, while the army and navy sent their men abroad." She illuminates the rising level of support for suffrage by both Japanese women and men that would have led to eventual change in the postwar period.

Not everyone was as immediately accepting of being granted suffrage by an occupying nation. For women such as Hiratsuka Raicho, having the vote handed to them by MacArthur was a source of frustration. "Suddenly, along with the humiliation of defeat the right to vote was being handed to women on a platter, through no effort of their own. How ironic! When I thought back to the twenty odd year efforts of feminists that underlay this turn of events, I could not bring myself to accept the gift with good grace and unmitigated joy."⁵⁷ But in the months after

⁵³ Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy*, 48.

⁵⁴ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 120-121.

⁵⁵ Lindsay Parrot, "Out of Feudalism: Japan's Women" *New York Times* October 28, 1945, 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun*, 312.

the war, many including Raicho, realized that collaboration with SCAP and occupational officials could be advantageous to their own self interests.

When the Election law was officially promulgated on December 17, 1945, it undid the restrictions that had been in effect since the promulgation of the Peace Preservation Law in 1900. This opened up a wealth of opportunities that had been previously denied to women by the government, including the ability to join political parties. As a result of women's entry into the political sphere, each of the four major parties, the Liberal, Socialist, Progressive and Communist party, made an effort to both incorporate and appeal to Japanese women. By February 1946, each of the parties had incorporated statements on women's rights into their party platforms, developed women's divisions, and drafted special platforms designed to appeal to the female vote.⁵⁸ The Liberal Party focused on the link between the household and politics, stressing the need for equal educational opportunities for women, co-education, the revision of civil code, political education for women, and the protection of mothers and infants. The Socialist Party's platform was similar to the Liberals. At the time, they had nearly 50-60 women members, several holding positions in local executive committees. The Communist Party focused on the interests of women factory workers, housewives and farm women. Appealing mostly to young women through the young communist league, they advocated for issues that affected working class women, including equal pay with men and special holidays for women workers, through the development of pamphlets for the education of housewives and young girls. A group of 30 women communists were also beginning to develop a women's division.⁵⁹ While

⁵⁸Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, *Microfilm F d1120*, New York City, New York February, 1946, 6 and 35.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the Progressive Party had not yet developed a special platform for women,⁶⁰ they invited 100 leading women to join the party and a few accepted. They also held a progressive party rally, where around 300 women attended.⁶¹

Women were also able to develop their own parties. On December 30, 1945 the first all-women's party, the New Japan Women's Political Party, was organized in Tokyo, where it held its inauguration and first meeting.⁶² Sponsored by the New Japan Party, the New Japan Women's Political party was a small group led by Mrs. Yoshiko, their elected President. Many of the women in the party were married to members of the New Japan Party. They advocated democracy under the emperor, disarmament and the establishment of permanent world peace, rejection of political violence, increase in food and fuel production, the improvement of railway transportation, the elimination of social evils, social equality for women, cooperation between men and women, promotion of ideal Japanese womanhood, and the "raising of the standard of Japanese women" through widening the scope of their activities.⁶³

As women were also allowed to stand as candidates in national elections, each of the major parties selected female candidates for the diet, 79 in total by the time of the election. (13 from the New Japan Women's Party)⁶⁴ In certain cases, SCAP approached members of the women's movement and encouraged them to run for election. Shizue Kato, recalls being called by a SCAP official and asked to stand as a candidate in the national election. "One day an occupation official called at my home and demanded to know why my name was not on the list of candidates. Me? I honestly hadn't thought about it. But when I did, I realized the lieutenant

⁶⁰ Ibid. January, 1946, 270.

⁶¹ Ibid. February, 1946, 35.

⁶² Ibid. December, 1945, 5.

⁶³ Ibid. February, 1946, 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid. March, 1946.

had a point. Here I had fought for women's suffrage all these years and now I wasn't making full use of it."⁶⁵ But for many women, entry into politics did not require a push from SCAP.

When the Election Law was revised, it also lifted the suppression against progressive organizations that occurred during the rise of militarism in the 1930s.⁶⁶ In addition to joining political parties, women were also able to once again form and participate in political organizations, without control of the government or fear of persecution and they wasted no time in reorganizing some of the groups that had been active during the war. Many of the women's groups had been forced underground and continued to meet secretly. During the war, Ester Crane, a teacher and columnist in Japan during World War II, attended a meeting of a women's organization that were against prostitution. "They had a series of meetings" she explains. "They were always very hush hush because they couldn't have any publicity given to their names, but they were trying."⁶⁷ During the early months of the occupation, many pre-war women's group such as these were revived, including the Association of University Women and the women's section of the Society of International Peace.⁶⁸ Other organizations were formed after the war. One of the first of such organizations was the Democratic Women's Club, which sought to spread information about the women's movement "through contact with women in every prefecture."⁶⁹ Many of the groups were led by pre-war leaders of the women's movement as well as female leaders of the major parties. Mrs. Yayoi Yoshioka president and a director of the

⁶⁵ Shidzue Kato, *A Fight for Women's Happiness: Pioneering the Family Planning Movement in Japan* (Tokyo, 1984), 90.

⁶⁶ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, *Microfilm F d1120*, New York City, New York December, 1945 24.

⁶⁷ Oral History Interview with Ester Crane, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1961.

⁶⁸ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, *Microfilm F d1120*, New York City, New York December, 1945, 179.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, January, 1946, 13.

progressive party, developed the Women's Fellowship Society, while Mrs. Miyamoto of the Communist Party and Kanju Kato of the Social Democratic party, worked with educator Mrs. Hani to form the Women's Democratic Club, which formed speeches, organized discussions, and even showed a movie on the history of Japanese Women's Suffrage during one of their events.

Once again, SCAP encouraged women by assisting in the organization of women's groups. Prior to being asked to run for office, Shizue Kato was approached by SCAP. She recalls "No sooner had the occupation forces arrived than I found myself summoned to headquarters to advise the Americans about policies on women and family reform." She was told that her first autobiography, *Facing Two Ways*, had used as a text on Japanese social relations by Americans planning the occupation one year before the war's end, and was asked to "establish an association of democratic women." Kato proposed twenty candidates to lead the new organization, out of which five were chosen. Soon after, in March of 1946 a group of Japanese feminists formed the Women's Democratic Club "to encourage civil consciousness among the new electorate leading up to the April election."⁷⁰

Some groups were evidently developed on their own initiative. Josephine McKean was an education officer stationed in Kobe, tasked with overseeing the progress of the city's public school system, and educating the school's teachers on democratic procedures. One day after leading a meeting, she was approached by a group of female teachers, who asked about the League of Women Voters, a prominent and successful American organization aimed at the betterment of women through the privilege of the vote. A few days later the group approached her again. "How do we form a League of Women Voters?" they asked; "That is what we want to do here in Kobe." They gathered a large group of women and asked McKean to speak about the League of Women Voters and their function in America. They then wrote directly to the League

⁷⁰ Kato, *A Fight for Women's Happiness*, 89-90.

of Women voters in the United States and asked for materials to help start their own Japanese branch. Once organized, they advocated for many issues affecting women including better education, better working conditions and better housing. Of the many successes that McKean recalls, the women petitioned for the local government to fix a bridge, persuaded Japanese male officials to come to their meetings, received financing for their members to travel to the United States and even wrote a book.⁷¹

Japanese women were able to take advantage of this enthusiasm that SCAP had towards women's organizations. SCAP provided encouragement and guidance by supplying information on women's organizations from other countries, helping plan campaigns for social and political reforms, and public forums.⁷² After disbanding the Women's Committee to Cope with Postwar Conditions, Ichikawa Fusae, formed the New Japan Women's League, a non-partisan group "aimed at improving the status of women and fostering political education". The League would become one of the most prominent postwar women groups, often sponsoring meetings, organizing lectures and inviting representatives of the major parties to discuss their platforms and make campaign speeches at conferences. By February of 1946, they had already gained around 500-600 members.⁷³ The League inspired other organizations such as the Japan Women's Democratic League, which also was formed with the aim of raising the political consciousness of women.⁷⁴ In addition, women formed several "advisory committees" to plan a series of five

⁷¹ Oral History Interview with Josephine McKean, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1962.

⁷² Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, *Microfilm F d1120*, New York City, New York November, 1946, 168.

⁷³ *Ibid.* February, 1946, 35.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* March, 1946, 39

evening forums on suffrage, presenting the political viewpoints of the major parties as a “part of the program for intelligent voting in the election.”⁷⁵

Women’s groups were also active in labor organization and played a major role in several strikes.⁷⁶ Many females of the labor unions also used their position to educate women on their voting rights. In January, Mrs. Kimiko Ito, head of the women's section of the transportation workers union, spoke to working women on the importance of women's suffrage.⁷⁷ In December 1945 Japan’s women's organizations came together and held a rally in Tokyo. With around 2,000 women attending, it was largest meeting of its kind.⁷⁸ In June of 1946, there was a strike of 7,600 miners in Hokkaido. During the strike, Miss Toshiko Karasawa, a 36 year old union leader and prominent communist, assembled a group of over 1,000 women. Addressing the women she stated “The miners - your husbands, fathers, and brothers, are striking for betterment of conditions throughout the whole laboring class. This is in the interest of you women, too. You may be housewives who never go underground, but the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the houses you live in depend on this issue.” The women, following her lead, walked over to the company office and demanded to speak with officials and state their case. It was called the first all women demonstration in Japanese history.⁷⁹

But not everyone was enthusiastic about women’s new found political rights. In fact, the extension of suffrage to Japanese women was immediately met with resistance by both the Japanese and Americans overseas. In September 1945 the *Oriental Economist*, an English language newsletter focused on Japan and US-Japan relations, wrote in its monthly review that

⁷⁵ Ibid. December, 1945, 179.

⁷⁶ Ibid. November, 1945,168.

⁷⁷ Ibid. January, 1946, 270.

⁷⁸ Ibid. December, 1945, 179.

⁷⁹ Lindsay Parrot, “Now a Japanese Woman Can Be a Cop: She Likes the Idea too, and Is Looking About for Many More Similar Opportunities” *New York Times* June 2, 1946, 18.

although they had always been an “ardent advocate of female suffrage” they nonetheless felt “doubtful” that it would be a “wise policy to grant franchise to women” in the coming election. Their argument was that a “hasty, unprepared extension of suffrage” would not “contribute to the healthy growth of democracy,” suggesting that it would perhaps be more wise to first grant women suffrage in local elections.⁸⁰ Many believed that “Japanese women were too steeped in the tradition of subservience to their husbands to act with any degree of political independence” and worried that women would not vote according to their own opinion.⁸¹ Even Ichikawa Fusae argued that most women were not prepared to use their new found privilege and would mostly abstain from the polls.⁸² However, SCAP had a plan set in motion to ensure that Japanese women would be prepared on Election Day to contribute to the establishment of a new Japan led under democratic principles, and Japanese women were prepared to use this to their advantage.

In November 1945, the Civil Information and Education Section of SCAP (CI&E), led by Ethel B. Weed of the Women’s Affairs Information Office, began what would become an intensive program of political education for Japanese women.⁸³ In order to educate Japanese women “in the democratic meaning of the franchise and the responsibility of the individual to use the ballot,” SCAP developed special programs directed towards Japanese women. They encouraged the development of radio, newspapers, magazines and public forums, discussing social, political and economic issues.⁸⁴ This media campaign progressed until the election. National radio programs discussed issues such as equal rights for women, relation of vote to

⁸⁰ “Review of the Month” *The Oriental Economist* September 1945, The Gordon W. Prange Collection, Microfiche 0115, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland.

⁸¹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 305.

⁸² Jack Napier, Frank Rizzo, and Douglas H. MacArthur. *Political Reorientation of Japan: September 1945 to September 1948* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 321.

⁸³ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 123

⁸⁴ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, Microfilm F d1120, New York City, New York December, 1945 169

current problems, and education and its place in women's future.⁸⁵ These programs often brought in representatives from each of the major political parties, discussed party histories or compared party platforms. This was done to help women vote more “intelligently” by providing information on not only the issues, but the stances of politicians in relation to such issues.⁸⁶ In the press, many magazines and newspapers included editorials, news stories and articles about the women’s movement. In January 1946, in order to encourage discussion of women’s issues in the press, SCAP invited fifty managing editors and political writers to a press conference on the women's movement. They stressed that the suffrage movement in Japan was part of a world movement and that there was a need for men and women to come together.⁸⁷

Media played a large role in helping spread the views of women’s organizations and the platforms of political groups. In March 1946 SCAP estimated that household radios were being kept on for an average of five hours a day, making airwaves at least as important as the printed word as a vehicle of communication and politicization.⁸⁸ Women appeared frequently on radio programs such as *The Women's Hour*, a series of six political commentaries discussing political issues in the coming election.⁸⁹ These programs were designed to “encourage the free discussion of current problems of Japanese women” and featured many leaders of the Japanese women’s movement.⁹⁰ SCAP encouraged the regular appearance of Japanese women on national radio forums, in the hope that it would “offer evidence of their place in society.”⁹¹ Through this

⁸⁵ Ibid., February 1946, 273.

⁸⁶ Ibid., February 1946, 274.

⁸⁷ Ibid., January 1946, 270.

⁸⁸ Education in the New Japan Vol I, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 124, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York 243

⁸⁹ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, *Microfilm F d1120*, New York City, New York February, 1946 274

⁹⁰ Ibid., November 194, 168

⁹¹ Ibid. December, 1945 179

platform, women were able to advocate in favor of the pressing social issues pertaining to women.

Political parties also took advantage of the campaign to raise women's political consciousness. The Progressive and Socialist Parties developed a radio forum by the name of "women's place in Political Parties" in order to encourage the political participation of women.⁹² Many of the women sections of the major parties arranged speeches forums and discussion groups in order to discuss women's issues in relation to the election.⁹³ They also sent candidates to women's political meetings to stimulate the interest of women voters.⁹⁴

On the eve of the election, SCAP organized a 10-day intensive drive using various media platforms in order to promote women's interest in voting.⁹⁵ It was the end to nearly 6 months of a campaign to raise women's awareness of social and political issues so that they could effectively use the power of their vote to build a stronger democratic Japan. In the end this campaign was a success. Nearly 13,000,000 or 66% of the 20,000,000 eligible women voters went to the polls. This was strong considered that the male vote had been 79%. In addition, out of the 79 women candidates for the Diet, almost half, 38, were elected, including one from the New Japan Women's Party.⁹⁶ Shidzue Kato, running under the Socialist Party, won in the largest electoral district in the country and as a result received the largest amount of votes. Her victory would begin a 29 year career in the Japanese diet. Taki Fujita, prominent educator recalled the day of the election with vivid memory. Reflecting on that day she states' "one cannot forget the elated looks of our village women, old and young, going to the polls, clad in their Sunday dresses and

⁹² Ibid. January, 1946 270

⁹³ Ibid. February, 1946 273

⁹⁴ Ibid. March, 1946 39

⁹⁵ Ibid. April, 1946

⁹⁶ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York, 22-23

stepping along on their new clogs.”⁹⁷ Now armed with political power, Japanese women were able to focus their attention towards reforming the system that they had for so long felt oppressed by.

The Postwar Constitution and the Dissolution of the Family State

When Japan’s first postwar elected House of Representatives opened on June 29, 1946, Shidzue Kato immediately joined the committee to oversee the new constitution and the bill for the revision of the civil code.⁹⁸ Speaking on behalf of the women legislators, Kato pledged to General Douglas MacArthur, “Our foremost concern ...is peace, and our second is the ending of the feudal family system.” After gaining political rights, reforming women’s legal status became the priority of Japanese feminists. In December, the Home Minister stated in the Diet that “women’s place had not changed much under the new laws” causing an increase in discussion by Japanese women of the family system.⁹⁹ In January, several women leaders of the major political parties agreed on the need for revision of the Constitution and Civil Code. By mid-January the Japanese public was showing a great deal of interest in constitutional reform as well. Newspapers had published suggested changes, and several political parties made public their ideas for a new democratic constitution. The Communist Party publicly released specific articles in the Civil Code, which they felt needed to be abolished or revised. They pointed towards regulations which denied legal safeguards for the property rights of Japanese wives and urged the revision of regulations centering on divorce, parental rights, and inheritance.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Fujita, “The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women” 281

⁹⁸ Kato, *A Fight for Women’s Happiness* 90

⁹⁹ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, *Microfilm F d1120*, New York City, New York December, 1945 176

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* January, 1946 270

The legal system of women's subordination to men, however, was not an "obvious continuation of the practices of a past era"¹⁰¹ Rather, it was a system legally institutionalized during the Meiji period. As part of the political restructuring of the Japanese government, Meiji leaders had sought to legally define the roles of men and women as imperial subjects.¹⁰² These roles were defined within the context of the newly constructed *ie* (political family), which was seen as the building block of the national structure known as the *Kazoku Kokkan* or the family-state system. Structuring the family as a political entity as opposed to the individual was considered more efficient and productive, and thus essential to the development of empire.¹⁰³ Instead, the roles of individuals were defined in relation to one's position within the family. For women, this was based on the assumption "that the management of the household was in women's hands."¹⁰⁴ Women were expected to serve the state through their role as housewife and mother and were subordinated to the patriarchal head of the household, who was further subordinated to the state in the form of the emperor.¹⁰⁵

This process was institutionalized through a series of legal reforms, beginning with the 1890 Meiji Constitution, which constructed the people as subjects of an emperor rather than as citizens with natural rights.¹⁰⁶ Although the family system became a legal institution in 1871 with the development of the *Koseki* or the family register, the laws regarding this system were not codified until the 1898 Civil Code, which was based on Confucian and samurai practices.¹⁰⁷ Family registers were a legal unit centering on the "head of the house" who exercised complete authority over the individuals and property within the household (or the *ie*). All Japanese

¹⁰¹ Nolte and Hastings, "The Meiji's State Policy Toward Women" 151

¹⁰² Ibid. 153-154

¹⁰³ Liddle and Nakajima, *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters* 50-51

¹⁰⁴ Nolte and Hastings, "The Meiji's State Policy Toward Women" 171-172

¹⁰⁵ Liddle and Nakajima, *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters* 51-52

¹⁰⁶ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan* 21-24

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 22-23

subjects were registered into a family register upon birth. The household would include not only the wife and children but also grandparents, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces.¹⁰⁸ Upon the death of the family head, his position passed to his eldest son.¹⁰⁹ In addition, marriage, divorce, or adoption had to be registered in the house system.¹¹⁰ Marriage was only legally recognized when a wife registered in a husband's household.¹¹¹ Changes to the family register could only be made through the head of the house.¹¹² The Civil Code legally recognized women as property of their husbands. They could not hold property, nor make independent decisions without the consent of their husbands and they were also unable to sue for divorce or retain custody of the household's children.¹¹³

Criticism of the family system was present throughout the prewar era and although there was debate over how reform should be shaped, the desire for reform was nearly universal among Japanese feminists. Shidzue Kato wrote extensively in her prewar diary of the disdain she had for position of Japanese wives within the *ie*. "The relationship between man and wife in a Japanese home is not that of two supplementary personalities, but that of master and servant. It is the relation between absolute possessor and the property."¹¹⁴ Ai Kume, who became the first female lawyer in Japan in 1927, was also critical of the family system and women's lack of legal protection. She argued that "legally, politically and economically we were denied almost every right. We were just part of man. For instance when you got married you lost your rights as an

¹⁰⁸ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York

¹⁰⁹ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan* 23

¹¹⁰ Kato, *Facing Two Ways* 26

¹¹¹ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan* 23

¹¹² Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York

¹¹³ Vera, *Feminism in Modern Japan* 24

¹¹⁴ Kato *Facing Two Ways* 349

individual. So even in the olden days we were against this [and] there were many women who fought against these things.”¹¹⁵

In the post-war period, feminists such as Kato continued to fight for legal equality. As member of the committee for constitutional and civil code reform, Kato made it her mission to lobby support for the revision, despite criticism from her male colleagues. “When I spoke about wanting to do away with the feudal family system, so long oppressing Japanese women,” she recalls, “the male understanding was so narrow, so uninformed, that I was accused of proposing to destroy Japanese home life!”¹¹⁶ Despite backlash among male members of the diet, women such as Kato continued to advocate on behalf of women across Japan, and laid the foundation for government officials to create change.

According to SCAP, “fundamental reform of the Meiji Constitution was necessitated by Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, which required that the Japanese Government ‘remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies,’ and establish “...a peacefully inclined and responsible government.” By SCAP’s own interpretation of the Potsdam Declaration this required reform of Japan’s basic laws.¹¹⁷ Initially this was meant to be done by the Japanese postwar government, and direct action by SCAP was to be a “last resort,” because of fears that the Constitution would be seen as “having been prepared for them rather than as having been created by them,” and might inadvertently encourage the Japanese to radically alter it after the end of the Occupation.¹¹⁸ To legitimize this, SCAP followed the precedent of the Meiji Constitution, which stated that in order for a new constitution to be

¹¹⁵ Oral History Interview with Japanese Delegate United Nations Madame Ai Kume, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1962

¹¹⁶ Kato, *A Fight for Women’s Happiness* 92-93

¹¹⁷ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York 26

¹¹⁸ “Reform of the Japanese Constitution” January 7, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, Vol. VIII 100

approved, it had to be submitted to and passed by two-thirds of the Diet, approved by the Privy Council, and issued by the Emperor.¹¹⁹

The need for a revision to the Meiji constitution was brought to the attention of the Japanese government in October 1945. The Shidehara cabinet gave the responsibility of developing a draft to Joji Matsumoto, the Minister of State, who formed the “Matsumoto committee.”¹²⁰ During this time the Japanese had full autonomy over the revision of the Meiji Constitution, and MacArthur played no role in its development. It was not until February 1, 1946 when the Matsumoto committee released the Matsumoto’s draft, which was deemed too conservative and thus unacceptable by SCAP, that MacArthur took over. On February 3, after being assured that there was no international policy regarding constitutional reform, he ordered the Government Section to release their own version of the constitution.¹²¹

But while Japanese women had indirect influence, they, unfortunately, did not have direct influence on the revisions that were made to the postwar Constitution and Civil Code. However, SCAP provided Japanese women a voice by enlisting a young American woman by the name of Beate Sirota Gordon to develop the clauses for equal rights and the protection of women within the constitution, and provide the foundation for the changes within the Civil Code. Gordon’s role, however, has been a source of debate among historians. For some, she is celebrated as a liberator of Japanese women, while for others, she is criticized for simultaneously reinforcing American imperialism.¹²² But often neglected is the fact that although Gordon was an American, she was raised and educated in Japan. Born in Vienna to Russian-Jewish parents, her family

¹¹⁹ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York 27-29

¹²⁰ Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution* 9-12

¹²¹ Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution* 15-16

¹²² Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy*, Pharr

moved to Tokyo when she was six years old after her father, a pianist, accepted a teaching position at a Japanese University. She moved to the United States to attend Mills College in 1939 and at the time she began working as translator for SCAP's Government Section, she had just become an American citizen only a few months prior. Looking closer, her role in the development can be seen more as an ally of rather than a liberator or oppressor of Japanese women.

It was on February 4, 1946, the day after MacArthur ordered the Government Section to create their own draft Constitution, that Beate Gordon was assigned to the Civil Rights Committee, one of the eight subcommittees tasked to work on constitution.¹²³ Headed by Col. Roest, the committee moved to develop the articles of the constitution that would pertain to the protection of "fundamental human rights" under the section titled *Rights and Duties of the People*. Gordon, as the only woman, was asked to develop the articles related to women's rights. "The matter was sometimes decided quite summarily. 'You're a woman; why don't you write the women's rights section?' Col. Roest said to me. I was delighted."¹²⁴

Over the course of the next week, Gordon put all her energy into studying the constitutions of countries across the world. As she developed these articles, it was not American values that she reflected on, but the memories of the women and children she had met throughout her life in Japan. In one instance she recalled the conversations of the women her mother had associated with:

"The Japanese women who had attended my mother's parties in the old days had often talked about mistresses and adopted children... They talked angrily of men who, without bothering to ask their wives, brought home and then adopted children they had fathered outside marriage... I wrote: 'No child shall be adopted into any family without the explicit consent of both husband and wife if both are

¹²³ Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution* 16

¹²⁴ Beate Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room: A Memoir* (Tokyo, 1997) Kindle Version Locations 1239-1252.

alive, nor shall an adopted child receive preferred treatment to the disadvantage of other members of the family. The rights of primogeniture are hereby abolished.”¹²⁵

In another instance, she reflected on the health of the Japanese children:

“I remembered the friends I had played with in Nogizaka, tossing lumps of coal about in the street on cold winter days. As the scene came back to me, I saw again the boy with the runny nose, one of his eyes inflamed by trachoma, and the girl with a cheek swollen by toothache and wrapped in a towel, gamely playing hopscotch. “The children of the nation, whether in public or private schools, shall be granted free medical, dental and optical aid,” I wrote... “They shall be given proper rest and recreation, and physical exercise suitable to their development.”¹²⁶

In total, Beate Gordon developed eight articles, but only two were accepted.¹²⁷ These two articles would later become articles 14 and 24 of the new constitution. Granting women legal equality, they are today considered one of the hallmarks of Japanese women’s liberation. Article 14 states that “all... people are equal under the law” and that “there shall be no discrimination... because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.”¹²⁸ Article 24 states that “marriage should be based on the mutual consent” and that “laws should be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes”¹²⁹ Throughout the rest of the negotiations, these articles would be met with contention, by the Japanese government.

The final draft of the constitution was developed in cooperation between both the American and Japanese governments during a 32-hour meeting that began on March 4. Led by General Whitney on the American side and Home Minister Matsumoto on the Japanese side, and assisted by a team of translators that included Beate Gordon, they went through each article and

¹²⁵ Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room* Kindle Locations 1325-1349

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room* Kindle Locations 1322-1348

¹²⁸ The Constitution of Japan, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 101, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York.

¹²⁹ Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution*, 20-24

debated the meaning and significance of each disputed term.¹³⁰ When the civil rights section came under consideration the Japanese immediately contested articles 14 and 24, but the American delegation came to Gordon's defense. "This article was written by Miss Sirota... she was brought up in Japan, knows the country well, and appreciates the point of view and feelings of Japanese women. There is no way in which the article can be faulted," to which the Japanese responded "All right... we'll do it your way."¹³¹ The articles were again debated on October 6 when it was submitted to the Diet. Members feared that the inclusion of the articles would undermine the Japanese family system, but eventually came to the conclusion that although the legal system of the Japanese family would have to change, the traditional values and social customs would still persist. It was passed with more than two-thirds majority.¹³²

Following the revision of the Constitution came that of both the Civil Code and Family Registration Law, which became invalid as it contained "a vast number of provisions incompatible with [the] fundamental principles [of the constitution]".¹³³ The new Civil Code saw the abolition of the house system, which "lost its right to exist" after provision for a family head was removed and the family head lost their legal rights.¹³⁴ After reform, the house was limited to the nuclear family containing the husband, wife, and children. Women were no longer regarded as incompetent, and differences in the legal status of women as spouses and parents were abolished. Women were now legally allowed to divorce and were given parental rights over their

¹³⁰ Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room*, Kindle Locations 1497-1537

¹³¹ Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room*, Kindle Locations 1520-1529

¹³² Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution*, 264

¹³³ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York 19-25

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

children. In addition, because marriage was now based on mutual consent, it did not require parental approval. The final revision was ratified on January 1, 1948.¹³⁵

The new Constitution was considered a great victory for Japanese feminists. Writing in the journal *Contemporary Japan*, feminists Taki Fujita and Yamakawa Kikue, praised the Constitution and called for women to take pride in the rights that had been extended to them. “We women have special reasons to be proud and exultant over it,” writes Fujita, “for it means the complete emancipation of Japanese women from the feudalistic shackles which have been binding women for centuries.”¹³⁶ Fujita also commended the revision of the Civil Code and the uplifting of women’s status; “For the first time women are the equals of men before the law... No longer are wives treated as impotent persons like idiots, lunatics, the blind and the deaf and the dumb”¹³⁷ For Yamakawa, the new constitution was “in name and fact a gospel of freedom for Japanese women,” because it both legally provided equal rights and renounced war, and called for women to use these new founds rights to contribute to the economic and industrial reconstruction of the country as well as peace throughout the world.¹³⁸

But feminists were not the only ones who approved of these changes. According to data from the Jiji and the Mainichi News Agency almost half of Japanese women had read the constitution and the majority approved. In 1947, 47.4% of Japanese women had read the constitution and 74.4% of women were in favor of the abolition of the inequality of sexes in the revised civil code. In total, 64.5% of men and women approved and of the 31.8% who opposed, 58% said that their reason for disapproval had not been because of disagreement but because

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Fujita, “The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women,” 282

¹³⁷ Yamakawa, *Japanese Women Under the New Constitution*,” 141, 144

¹³⁸ Ibid.

they felt the changes were too sudden.¹³⁹ Urban areas were quicker to accept the changes than rural areas, but rural women caught up to these changes as well. Younger women were also more accepting than older women.¹⁴⁰

The widespread knowledge of the legal changes was in part due to an awareness campaign led by the Government Section and the CIE. Continuing the activities that they had participated in prior to the April election, many feminists and political leaders assisted in spreading awareness through various women's organizations and political activities, using public forums and various media outlets such as newspaper, magazines and radio. In 1947, a series of 34 radio programs were developed to educate women about the new civil code. One such program, "The People's Radio School Hour", contrasted the new and the old laws through practical examples drawn from everyday life. In one example, the program was dedicated to discussion of different cases of divorce. The speaker explored various situations taken from the listeners' experiences, and explained the legal aspects and procedures involved. In one case, a woman explained that she had been working at her husband's shop, and upon divorce was told by her husband that she was not entitled to a share of the savings. The speaker explained that "a wife can claim [Legal grounds to a share in the property] under Article 768 of the revised Civil Procedure"¹⁴¹

The effectiveness of these campaigns could be seen in both urban and rural areas. Ai Kume, prominent lawyer prior to and during the Occupation, handled many divorce cases in the postwar period. What was most notable for her was a change between women in the assembly

¹³⁹ Allan B. Cole and Naomichi Nakanishi. *Japanese Opinion Polls with Socio-political Significance, 1947-1957* (Ann Arbor, n.d.)

¹⁴⁰ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *History of the Non-Military Activities of the Occupation of Japan* (Tokyo: SCAP, 1952) Columbia University, Microfilm F d2084, New York City, New York 24

¹⁴¹ Jack Napier, Frank Rizzo, and Douglas H. MacArthur, *Political Reorientation of Japan: September 1945 to September 1948* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 384-385.

and district courts, who, she felt, were no longer simply obedient but truly “claimed their rights.”¹⁴² She notes that even women in the rural areas had a general sense of the constitution as the word *shin-kemp* or *New Constitution* had become “cliché among the people.” She tells the story of a couple in the rural areas who were fighting when the husband said, “Oh I don’t like this new constitution!” showing that the perception among rural men was that their wives had become “stubborn and disobedient,” because the awareness of new rights for women had become widespread. She argued that “even if they don’t understand legally, they knew that [they had rights and that those] rights are guaranteed by the new constitution.”¹⁴³

Josephine McKean’s experience in Kobe during the post-war period also reflects this idea. McKean notes that women “understood the constitution insofar as it affected that one individual personally. That person who had suffered a great deal with the husband, understood that the constitution made her free and able to get a divorce; the person who felt that well the people in her community needed a bridge, by golly, if they can't get it by this they'll get it by that... they may not have understood all the ramifications of the constitution, but they'd say ‘all right this is coming to me and this is what I want.’”¹⁴⁴ While the right to vote gave Japanese women the ability to voice their desire for change, the uplifting of their legal status gave them the ability to take that change into their own hands.

The Expansion of Women’s Education

With political and legal rights secured, feminists began to look towards the future of Japanese women. For many, the next step was education. In order for women to contribute to the

¹⁴² Oral History Interview with Japanese Delegate United Nations Madame Ai Kume, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1962.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Oral History Interview with Josephine McKean, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1962.

process of democratization, many feminists argued educational opportunities needed to be expanded for Japanese women. Kikue Yamakawa pointed to women's introduction into the political sphere as one of the motivations for educational reform. She argued that female politicians were limited to focusing on issues related to the welfare of mothers and children, and although they were "eager to study financial economic and diplomatic problems" facing the country, they had been "limited to such subjects due to the discrimination they had in their past education."¹⁴⁵

Japan's education system prior to the war was complex, and the educational opportunities for girls were both limited and inferior. The highest level of education available in Japan, was the university level. Universities were divided into three types, public, private and imperial universities. Imperial universities, later renamed national universities after the war, were considered to have the highest educational standards. Only nine imperial universities existed throughout Japan. Public universities differed from imperial universities, as they were owned locally by prefectures or cities, rather than the state. As entrance into imperial universities was competitive, private universities provided alternative access to higher education for many Japanese.¹⁴⁶ Women, however, were unable to attend university, due to educational limitations faced at the lower levels.

Inequalities between girls and boys began at the elementary and middle school level. Typically, Japanese students attended six years of elementary school and five years of middle school.¹⁴⁷ Girls attended separate middle schools, known as *Koto Jogakko*, where the educational standards were lower than that of boys, and textbooks were lower in educational level and

¹⁴⁵ Yamakawa, *Japanese Women Under the New Constitution* 142

¹⁴⁶ Survey of the Japanese Education System (Pre-Occupation), The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 124, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York 88-89

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 89

content. Girls also received less instruction in science and humanities and devoted more time to domestic science.¹⁴⁸ This separation continued into high school. High schools were divided into four types of institutions. Higher schools, or *Koto Gakko*, were male only institutions that provided three years of study. Prior to the war, there were only 32 schools nationwide. Students who graduated from *Koto Gakko*, had priority for entrance into the imperial universities.¹⁴⁹ Similar to the distinction between imperial and private universities, were university prep schools known as *Daigaku Yoka*, private three year high schools that were developed for entrance into the private universities. These institutions were also male only.¹⁵⁰

Women's access to education post middle school was limited to the two remaining institutions, junior colleges, known as *Semmon Gakko*, and Normal Schools, known as *Shihan Gakko*. Both institutions were terminal, and education ended upon completion of study as graduates were considered unqualified for entrance into universities. Normal Schools were teacher training schools that provided up to five years of study to both men and women, who studied under separation institutions. Controlled publically, there was at least one in each prefecture.¹⁵¹ Junior Colleges were typically three years, although a small minority had four year programs. These colleges provided practical education for semi-professional and technical positions in the commercial, industrial and agricultural fields. Similar to universities, they were both publically and privately controlled. With around 200,000 students, these colleges contained the highest nationwide enrollment, almost twice the amount of students who attended

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 71

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 93

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 94

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 98-99

universities. For women, these universities were the highest level of education available. One third of the total institutions were women's institutions.¹⁵²

There were, however, a small handful of women's universities, *Joshidai*, that were founded during this period. This included Japan's Women's College, founded by Naruse Jinzo, Tsuda College, founded by Umeko Tsuda, and Tokyo Women's Christian College. Despite this, women were highly discouraged by their families from continuing their education. When Hiratsuka Raicho approached her father with the desire to attend Japan's Women College, her father replied "too much learning is bound to make a woman unhappy" and that "a parent's duty to a daughter ends with high school."¹⁵³ Despite the emergence of these women's universities, women were not allowed to receive degrees equal to that of a university and the curriculum was restricted. 67% of students studied domestic science, while 27% studied Japanese literature. Like Yamakawa had argued, there were no opportunities for women to study economics or political science.¹⁵⁴ By the end of the war women constituted .5 percent of the enrollment in the universities of the country. In the junior colleges women comprised 20 percent of the total enrollment and in normal schools they were 33 percent of the total.¹⁵⁵

Educational reform began almost immediately after the wars' end. The Ministry of Education and leaders of women's schools and colleges formulated specific plans for reform of women's education. This was done with guidance from SCAP advisers, but was not issued as a directive. On November 2, 1945 the Minister of Education in an address to prefectural governors, outlined the steps for reform that would be required to "[raise] the level of female education to cope with the realization of women's participation in politics." After this address,

¹⁵² Ibid., 95, 97

¹⁵³ Ibid., 64,65

¹⁵⁴ Yamakawa, Japanese Women Under the New Constitution," 143

¹⁵⁵ Education in the New Japan Vol I, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 124, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York 258

the Bureau of Social Education directed all prefectural governors to make greater efforts to improve the education of women under post war conditions by fostering and reinforcing cultural organizations for women, which would be set up around elementary school districts and led by local teachers and leaders. These organizations would focus on encouraging the improvement of political, economic and scientific knowledge in addition to traditional female subjects.¹⁵⁶ In December of 1945, the Ministry of Education published *A New General Plan of Female Education Reform*. The plan was to “reform female education with a view to giving equal opportunity of receiving education to men and women; raising female education to the level of men’s education; and furthering mutual respect among men and women.”¹⁵⁷

Outlining plans for reform were followed by legal changes in 1946. In February, women were declared eligible to enter all Imperial Universities. The following October, the Japanese government repealed articles 51 and 63 of the elementary school law, which segregated boys and girls in primary and middle school. In February of 1947, the higher school law was amended to permit women to enter these schools.¹⁵⁸ This was followed by the enactment of the Fundamental School Law, which stated that there should be no educational discrimination on account of sex and more specifically that “men and women shall esteem and cooperate with each other.”¹⁵⁹ Although the law legally ended the separation of men’s and women’s education, it was not compulsory and thus was not forced upon schools, who felt they were unready and the final decision was ultimately left to the communities.

Changes were also made to the curriculum. It became mandated that during the first 12 years the minimum standard curriculum would be the same for both boys and girls in all schools

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 299

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 301

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 301

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 302

and that the same textbooks would be used. Sewing courses were also renamed “Practical Arts and Home Living” and offered to both boys and girls, while home economics was made an elective for both boys and girls, with the assumption that many girls would chose to participate in the course.

While changes to education were made mostly by the Civil Information and Education section (CI&E) of SCAP, most of the major decisions were made in collaboration with female Japanese educational leaders. Many of these female educational leaders had been graduates of mission colleges or traveled abroad.¹⁶⁰ Lulu Holmes was a member of the CI&E and an Advisor on Higher Education for Women in Japan from 1946 to 1948. When Holmes arrived in Japan, she was shocked by the educational inequalities between girls and boys. “The old school law had provided that at the end of the third year the girls should be removed from the boy classes and sent into other classrooms under less well-prepared teachers. Sometimes into other school buildings if there were old school buildings that needed to be utilized. And in every respect, girls’ education was a second-rate education from that point forward. We felt that in a democratic society that situation must cease.”¹⁶¹ She soon realized that she had been given the power to institute whatever changes were necessary and embarked on a process of reform. “I was told by the head of our section that my job was whatever I could make it, that there were no foreordained plans made for higher education or changes in the higher education of Japanese women.”¹⁶²

Holmes noted that according to a directive from General MacArthur, all changes were to be done through and with existing Japanese officials. She worked closely with the Japanese

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Oral History Interview with Lulu Holmes, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project

¹⁶² Ibid.

Ministry of Education; most consistently with Mr. Matsui from the social education section and Mr. Hidaka, chief of the bureau of higher schools. She found difficulty working with Mr. Matsui and Mr. Hidaka and other male educational leaders. When introduced to the president of the Teacher Training College at Sendai, she asked about the possibility of co-education. To her dismay, he replied, "It is possible that the girls and boys might remain together in the same classes through the first five years, but at the end of the fifth year the inferiority of the female mind would become embarrassingly apparent"¹⁶³

It was then that Lulu Holmes decided to consult directly with female educational leaders. One of the first women she met was Ai Hoshino, President of Tsuda College, one of the few women's universities. In this meeting, she asked Hoshino what she felt women in Japan needed the most in regards to higher education. Hoshino's response was quick, "The women of Japan need to be able to get university degrees."¹⁶⁴ This inspired Holmes to research how institutions became a university in the United States, discovering that accreditation associations composed of officers of existing universities typically set standards and sent out examination committees. Together with several university leaders, both male and female, she formed an equivalent Japanese institution, and began the process of promoting women's colleges into universities. On July 8, 1947 the accreditation organization became formally recognized and many vocational women's colleges were elevated to four year universities.

Lulu Holmes also collaborated with several female organization leaders to help gain support for women's education. Holmes met with a woman named Mrs. Matsumiya, an active member of the Tokyo branch of the American Association of University Women (A.A.U.W.) before the war. The A.A.U.W. had been very successful in the United States in persuading

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

American women to continue onto university and in persuading American universities to accept American women students. Prior to the war, the Japanese branch had mostly consisted of American women, but also included many Japanese women graduates of American colleges. Meeting with Mrs. Matsumiya, she discussed establishing an independent Japanese association that would function similar to the A.A.U.W and include Japanese graduates of Japanese universities. Following in early September, Mrs. Matsumiya arranged a group of fifteen American educated Japanese women and discussed the need to build public opinion in favor of more education for women in Japan. She set up the Japanese Association of University Women under the presidency of Taki Fujita, who would later go on to become president of Japan's Women's University. The organization met monthly in Tokyo and increased in membership, eventually organizing several different branches throughout Japan. Holmes and other members of the organization visited colleges, met with student organization officers and spoke with many young girls, in hopes of getting them interested in two more years of college.¹⁶⁵

Japanese women once again led the campaign to spread awareness through organizations. On October 9, 1946, representatives from a small group of women's colleges met to discuss plans for the reform of Japanese education as it affected their institutions. This group became the Association of Women's Higher Schools, established in November of 1946. Two months later, in January 1947, women's institutions across Japan were invited to join the association. The group established relations with other organizations and assisted the accreditation committee in the development of standards for women's institutions.¹⁶⁶ Another organization, the Association of College Alumnae, was organized in Tokyo in September of 1946. Membership consisted of women graduates of Japanese universities and of nine of the women's colleges which were in the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Education in the New Japan Vol I, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 124, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York 280

process of becoming universities. Their goal was to help change public opinion about the extended educational opportunities for women and to inform the public of all new educational laws and plans, particularly as they affect women. They established sixteen branches in key cities across Japan.¹⁶⁷

Many student organizations across Japan also participated in spreading awareness and advocating reform. Many young women in schools showed an increased interest in discussing women's rights. They were interested in the possible new professions for women and in the curricula of the universities to provide necessary training for these professions. In response, these students organized forums and promoted their universities' new programs or advocated for even greater changes. Many even argued for coeducational clubs.¹⁶⁸ However, prior to the occupation, the meetings of most student organizations were monitored by teachers and professors. For women in women's universities, this often meant that they were being monitored by older Japanese men. As a result, many students advocated for the freedom to hold meetings unsupervised. In December 1945, the general secretary of the Tokyo YMCA visited girls' schools and colleges and reported general disagreement between students and faculties on the subject of student organizations. Faculty members continued to adhere to the theory that clubs should be supervised by teachers, while the students wanted their own organizations and the freedom to discuss women's rights privately.¹⁶⁹ At a time where many changes were occurring, the younger generation had already begun to show that they were ready to continue the fight.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 303

¹⁶⁸ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, Microfilm F d1120, New York City, New York November, 1945 168

¹⁶⁹ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea, 1945-1948*, Columbia University, Microfilm F d1120, New York City, New York December, 1945 176

In conceptualizing what a new democratic Japan would be for women, many feminists agreed that there would be more opportunities. But in order for women to take advantage of these opportunities they needed to have access to a better education. Education would allow women to contribute not only as wives and mothers, but as political and economic leaders. In the future Japanese women would be able to participate in new forms of employment and engage in new types of conversations. But feminist also agreed that this had to begin in childhood. For Yamakawa Kikue, “in order to make educational reform a success” parents must “rectify their mistaken idea of giving educational priority to boys only.”¹⁷⁰ Parents needed to come together to uplift their young daughters and educate them in the new world that was opening up to them.

Women’s Rights as a “Stabilizing Force”

One of the biggest questions that historians have asked when researching feminism during the Occupation is what was the primary motivation of SCAP and General MacArthur for putting an emphasis on expanding the rights of Japanese women? In the process of critiquing earlier narratives that portray the Occupation as benevolent, historians have re-characterized the Occupation as both oppressive and exploitative through an analysis of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism, in which SCAP reforms, even those that were seemingly positive, reinforced U.S. hegemony. Within these neo-imperialist narratives, scholars have argued that SCAP “liberated Japanese women” in order to legitimize their neo-imperialistic agenda and garner support from Japanese women.¹⁷¹ But when we place Japanese women at the center of this narrative we realize that neo-imperialism does not reflect their experience.

¹⁷⁰ Yamakawa, *Japanese Women Under the New Constitution*”

¹⁷¹ Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy* 2-14

In the postwar period, Japanese feminists also asked themselves this question. Taki Fujita, writing in 1948, answers it quite simply, “Why did General Douglas MacArthur give Japanese women franchise so swiftly after his landing in Japan? To his attending staff he gave his reason while they were flying on the Bataan to Japan. For many years, he explained he had believed that the intervention of American women in politics was one of the greatest stabilizing events in American political history.”¹⁷² In his own words, MacArthur stated that his biggest motivation for extending rights to Japanese women was “the magnificent influence of the women of America ... to bring to bear upon the furtherance of American progress and the strengthening of [its] free institutions”¹⁷³ But what does MacArthur mean when he argues that women are a “stabilizing force”? How does the induction of women into politics, become one of the most “stabilizing events in American political history?” And how do women “bear upon the furtherance of American progress” and strengthen its institutions?

According to MacArthur, women’s new found rights allowed them to bring “the spiritual qualities of the home” into Japanese politics.¹⁷⁴ Stressing the role of women’s position within the family, MacArthur was reflecting American wartime and postwar discourses that linked women and the family with the stability of the nation. These discourses were not only widely accepted across the United States, but openly embraced by American feminists. Shortly after Japanese women were granted the right to vote and hold political offices, Mary Beard, historian and feminist, praised MacArthur for bringing the Japanese Government “under the direct influence of the wisdom of the house” through women’s enfranchisement.¹⁷⁵ Responding to a letter received

¹⁷² Fujita, “The Progress of the Emancipation of Japanese Women” 281

¹⁷³ Address to the Business Women’s Committee of Chicago, March 18, 1948, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 960, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ms. Beard to Lt. Ethel B. Weed, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 24, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York

from Lt. Ethel B. Weed, she writes “I’ve got something in this document indicative of General MacArthur’s conception of the family as the core or heart of society and of woman as its prime guardian... That General MacArthur should associate the care and nurture of the family with political democracy - and do this in his own mind, not just by the pressure from another mind - gives him a standing in my mind which is at the top of my judgment statecraft.”¹⁷⁶ For American feminists, General MacArthur's association of women with the stability of the nation was not only considered natural, but worthy of praise.

During the war, the family was regarded in the United States as a key link in the nation's defenses and women were held accountable for familial and social stability and the maintenance of American democracy.¹⁷⁷ It is clear that in the postwar period, these values informed SCAP policies. Roy Helton, writing in *Harper Magazine* in 1940, argued that men and women naturally had a different set of values that were innate to them as human beings; women naturally valued shelter, comfort and the protection of their children, while men naturally valued enterprise, adventure and power. However, it was the balance of the two sets of values that led to a healthy non aggressive society “When the female influence climbs too far into the ascendancy, we have comfort” he argued. “When the male influence comes into ascendancy we have war and destruction.”¹⁷⁸

Therefore, including women into Japanese politics was a way to counterbalance the political extremism that led to past aggression and prevent future aggression. For SCAP, this translated into political stability, something that was a great concern early into the Occupation. From the end of World War II, Japan was suffering from a struggling economy. SCAP officials

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy* 50-51

¹⁷⁸ Roy Helton via Sonya Michel and Robyn Muncy, *Engendering America: A Documentary History, 1865 to the Present*. (Boston, 1999) 192

worried that “economic distress’ could lead “to an attempt to change the existing government to one which promises relief” which would either be the extreme right led by the militarists or the extreme left, led by the communists.¹⁷⁹ There were significant concerns that the Japanese, in rejecting militarism, could shift towards communism, as well as equal concern that the militarists, although having lost support after the surrender, if “organized underground as champions of relief from economic suffering” could again become a political threat.¹⁸⁰ MacArthur urged Japan to take a “political central course” and one of the ways this could be accomplished was through the inclusion of women into Japanese politics.¹⁸¹ Many Japanese leaders argued that women had a natural inclination towards moderation. “They pointed out that voting patterns abroad showed that women voters were more likely to be middle of the road than the extreme left or right.”¹⁸² It was also believed that Japanese women were more open to democratic ideals. Countess Satoko Otani, Emperor Hirohito’s sister in law, when interviewed in the *New York Times* argued that while “men politicians [had] not grasped the thought of democratic principles” with the proper education women could “be of great help” in establishing democratization in Japan.¹⁸³

Although Occupational leaders promote American ideals through their various reforms, it would be misleading to characterize this as being enforced onto the Japanese unwillingly. In fact, discourses that focused on women's roles within the home, overlapped with the ideals of *Ryosai Kenbo* (Good Wife, Wise Mother) and as a result, in the minds of many Japanese women equal

¹⁷⁹ Report by Dr. George E Blakeslee on the Far Eastern Commissions Trip to Japan, December 26, 1945 February 13, 1946. February, 19, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, Vol. VIII

¹⁸⁰ Report by Dr. George E Blakeslee on the Far Eastern Commissions Trip to Japan, December 26, 1945 February 13, 1946, February, 19, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, Vol. VIII, 168

¹⁸¹ MacArthur’s Approval of the Report of the Chief, Government Section on the Japanese National Election, April 22, 1946, The General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection, Microfilm Reel 10, New York State Library, Microfilm Albany, New York

¹⁸² Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy* 50

¹⁸³ “Hirohito’s Sister-In-Law Hopes that Women Will Take a Democratic Role in Japanese Life” *New York Times* October, 10, 1945 22

rights fit neatly within the Japanese *ie*. Research also shows that SCAP's motivations were more paternalistic rather than imperialistic. John Dower, in *Embracing Defeat*, argues that race and culture set Japan apart from the occupation in Germany, because as a “nonwhite, non-western, non-Christian” nation, the Japanese represented an “exotic, alien society”. Motivated by “the assumption that... western culture and its values were superior” to those of the Japanese, American occupiers transplanted their own values into their reforms. In his other work, *War Without Mercy*, Dower argues that racial perceptions that had enhanced violence during the war were transformed during the occupation to legitimize the Occupation's reformist policies.¹⁸⁴ Wartime perceptions of the Japanese as “childlike” influenced a sentiment in which America became parent and the Japanese, the child in need of guidance.¹⁸⁵

Without question, the Occupations early reforms “rested on the assumption that, virtually without exception, western culture and its values were superior to those of “the Orient,” however, many Japanese women and American occupation officials felt as if they were collaborating as a team rather than as the victors over the vanquished.¹⁸⁶ Josephine McKean, reflecting on her time as an Education Officer in Kobe, felt that “the teams that worked in Japan never felt that they were there as occupation people; they were there purely as advisors. Purely as people to share experiences which we have had with another people and to see whether our experiences could fit into their programs, into their needs, into their economic structure. There wasn't this idea of subjugation at all; it was teamwork.”¹⁸⁷ In addition, Ester Crane, teacher and columnist during the war, had worried about returning to Japan as a member of the occupation. Her experience, however, illuminates again how many Japanese and American leaders felt their

¹⁸⁴ Dower, John W. *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. (New York, 1986) 302

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 211

¹⁸⁷ Oral History Interview with Josephine McKean, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1962.

duty was not to enforce, but to encourage real democratic change. “I thought that when I went back it was going to be very awkward, that I would be considered the conqueror and look upon them as a defeated people... well I hadn’t been there a week before I completely changed my mind, because the Japanese people themselves were so relieved to have this thing over and they were surprised that we had come as friends instead of conquerors and dictators and that we had a program. I felt that there was a wonderful feeling between the Japanese who worked in the occupation and the Americans. There was a sort of camaraderie.”¹⁸⁸

For Japanese feminists in the postwar period, the ideals of *Ryosai Kenbo* could be used in order to generate support for women’s rights. In order to encourage women to vote or run for political office, they argued that women would be able to vote for issues that “directly affected household life” such as “the food supply, recipes, availability of clothing and other consumer goods” and compel the government “to give greater attention to the protection of motherhood and young children.” In a Japanese newspaper, a dozen Japanese women were questioned about obtaining the right to vote. They revealed that the majority of women were concerned with issues surrounding the home. Most hoped that receiving the right to vote would give them the power to “force the government to speed up the return to more or less normal living, control prices, and make goods and food easier to get.”¹⁸⁹

In terms of legal rights, support for the equality of the sexes was generated through a re-conceptualization of many American ideals. Kyoko Inoue, in her analysis of the Japanese Diet’s proceedings over the postwar constitution, reveals that Japanese leaders were not forced into accepting the constitution, as it has so been argued. It is no secret that the members of SCAP had little knowledge of Japanese history and culture, and that most did not speak Japanese. In

¹⁸⁸ Oral History Interview with Ester Crane, Japanese Occupation Project, Columbia University Oral History Project, 1961.

¹⁸⁹ Lindesay Parrot, “Out of Feudalism: Japan’s Women” *New York Times* October 28, 1945 44-56

addition, while many of the Japanese officials knew or studied English, they did not understand American thought, ideals and customs. Thinking through a paternalistic lens, Americans developing the constitution had a genuine belief that American democracy had a universal appeal, and, as a result, the postwar constitution reflected many American constitutional principles and democratic practices.¹⁹⁰

Japanese officials reading the constitution were faced with a cultural barrier rather than a political one, and thus interpreted the articles in the way that they best could conceptualize them. This is especially true when it came to the concept of “individual dignity” and “equality of the sexes.” In the American view, individual dignity referred to the right of an individual to think for themselves and make their own decisions. But for the Japanese government, individual dignity was interpreted as the respect for moral and ethical character. This interpretation is closer to a sense of duty or responsibility than a right. Since the Japanese derive their sense of self-worth largely from social relations and the part they play in society, they do not believe that the individual exists separate from the society. Therefore, social equality “meant that each person had the ability to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of his or her social position. In that interpretation, “equality of the sexes” meant that men and women were essentially equal in their ability to fulfill their respective roles in the family, which did not undermine the *ie* system.”¹⁹¹

But for Japanese feminists, utilizing the ideals of Ryosai Kenbo was also seen as a means to a greater end. While the women of the postwar generation were limited to their role as housewives and mothers, through new educational opportunities future generations of Japanese women would be open to many more possibilities. Fusae Ichikawa, speaking after the war, believed that it would take time before women would be awakened to their full potential. “It will

¹⁹⁰ Inoue, *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution* 265-268

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

be 10-15 years before Japanese women learn to use their new privilege of voting for their own advantage and for the advantage of the world” she argued, “and it will be the girls who are growing up today who be the new factor in Japanese life rather than this generation’s adults.”¹⁹²

Although it can still be argued that many of the reforms were imposed from the initiative of the American government, it is clear that these reforms not only appealed to Japanese feminists, but were in line with many of the goals they had developed in the years prior to the war, and that in the postwar period, Japanese women laid the foundation for public support and acceptance. In that sense, it is less important why SCAP put so much emphasis on women’s rights, or why Japanese women were so accepting of SCAP’s changes. What is more important is that Japanese feminists and the American government were able to come together for a mutual desired end. These feminists were able to take advantage of SCAP’s paternalistic policies and make long lasting gains that would impact them for years to come. Regardless of outside forces, Japanese women had a clear idea of what they wanted to accomplish and were willing and capable of obtaining it. SCAP only provided an accessible gateway that not only provided a catalyst for social change, but secured it.

This was a fact realized by feminists such as Hiratsuka Raicho, who was at first reluctant to accept being “handed on a platter” rights from a conquering nation. In an article published a few months after the election, she writes “In 1911 when I was twenty six I wrote ‘In the beginning women was the sun. Now she is the moon, a wan and sickly moon, dependent on another.’ Thirty seven years later, my heart is bursting for joy. I could shout ‘behold behold the day has come. The big big sun has risen from the deep within the hearts of liberated women of Japan’”¹⁹³

¹⁹² Lindsay Parrot, “Out of Feudalism: Japan’s Women” *New York Times* October 28, 1945 10

¹⁹³ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun* 313

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