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ADVANCE OF JAPANESE WOMEN

IN THE POST WAR YEARS

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東京婦人少年室



ADVANCE OF JAPANESE WOMEN

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WOMAN'S ADVANCEMENT
IN JAPAN
A STUDY OF THE
POST-WAR PERIOD
BY
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FOREWORD

The Japanese women have had the most stimulating and challenging experience through the transition period in the post-war years. They have been in the midst of the nation's drastic reform in political, social and economic set-up, which, however, have worked to equip them with full citizenship and equal rights and opportunities with men, for the first time in their history.

The following article is to show how a series of the reformation made in these years have established the new status for women, how the women themselves have been reacting on it and adjusting themselves to the new way of living, so that they now play an important role in most fields of the society.

We hope this may be of some use to those in other countries interested in the around-the-world progress of women as citizens.

Women's & Minors' Bureau

Ministry of Labor

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It may be said that women's life saw the biggest changes during the years after the War.

First of all, "The New Constitution", promulgated November 3, 1946,
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guaranteed the people of Japan the fundamental human rights and equality
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of men and women, and then followed the revision of the Civil Code, the Education Law, the Labor Laws and others, so that the Japanese women's status was raised legally to the international level at one bound. Accordingly, it may be said that the past six, seven, years have been spent in trying to make the actual status of women approach to the legal one.

* Article 13 All of the people shall be respected as individuals. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness shall, to the extent that it does not interfere with the public welfare, be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs.

** Article 14 All of the people are equal under the Law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.

The first thing to be mentioned is that the suffrage was given to women which they had long been striving for to gain. Right after the end of the War, in Dec. 1945, men and women above full twenty were given suffrage by the revision of the Election Law, and on April 10, 1946, Japanese women voted, for the first time, for and in the members of the House of Representatives. As the result, 39 women, which was quite a big number, the total seats being

466, were elected, and thus, they struck the signalfire for the advance of women after the War. Following this, in October the same year, women were the right to vote for local assemblies, so that women were given the complete right to participate in the politics. And so far, since the end of the War, women exercised their suffrage three times for the House of Representatives (Lower House), twice for the House of Councillors (Upper House) and the Local Assemblies.*

* Dates of General Election after the War

for House of Representatives

1. April 10, 1946
2. April 25, 1947
3. Jan. 23, 1949

for House of Councillors

1. April 20, 1947
2. June 4, 1950

for Local Legislatures

1. April 5, 1947 (Prefectural Governors, City, Town and Village Heads)
April 30, 1947 (Members of Prefectural Assemblies, Municipal Assemblies, Town & Village Assem.)
2. April 23, 1951 (City, Town & Village Heads Members of Municipal Assemblies, Town & Village Assemblies)
April 30, 1951 (Prefectural Governors Members of Prefectural Assemblies)

In 1948 the women's organizations gathered in celebration of April 10, the date when Japanese women exercised franchise for the first time, as Women's Day, and they held rallies to show their interest and zeal, and since 1949, sparked by the Women's and Minors' Bureau of the Labor Ministry, a week from 10th to 16th in April every year, has been set as the Women's Week, and all women throughout Japan have made it their customs to concentrate their efforts for the elevation of Japanese women's status.

However, women members elected for the Lower House decreased to 15 in the second election and to 12 in the third election, and in the Upper House, too, they were 10 in the first election, and 5 in the second election, and yet, the quality of the women members of the Diet is rising gradually. Now, a total of 24 Women, 12 in the Lower House and 12 in the Upper House, are in the Diet.

These 24 women constitute only 3.4% of the total membership, but this proportion of woman Diet members is not necessarily low in comparison with that in other countries.

On the local level, as the results of the local election last year, 7 women now hold the headship of towns and villages, while it was five previously. And women prefectural assembly members increased from 22 to 34 and the local assembly members on the lower levels also increased and so, the total women members of local assemblies increased from 798 to 979 in all. So, it may be said that women advanced in the local election which has been considered very difficult to win without having influence in the local constituency.

As to the voting rate of women voters, some 54-68% of the eligible women voters cast their ballots at the elections for the Diet members, while for the Local Elections the figure showed 73.8 per cent on the first time and 85.8 on the second.

* Three out of the ten successful women candidates at the first Upper House Election were assigned three years' service and got disqualified in 1950. Now the total number of the women members is 12, including 5 newly elected by the second election.

** Women's Advance in the Diet of Various Countries.
(source: Economic & Social Council of United Nations)

Country	women member	per cent total membership
Australia	5	4.5
Belgium	13	3.5
Canada	3	1.0
China	84	5.0
Denmark	20	9.0
Cuba	6	3.2
Dominica	0	0
El Salvador	0	0
Finland	24	12.0
France	51	5.4
Guatemala	0	0
India	11	3.3
Israel	12	10.0
Japan	24	3.4
New Zealand	3	3.7
Norway	6	4.0
Panama	1	2.4
Philippine	1	0.8
Poland	33	7.5
Sweden	25	6.6
South-Africa	2	6.0
United States	9	1.7
United Kingdom	20	3.0
Uruguay	4	3.0
Yugoslavia	20	3.5

*** Voting Rate at General Elections

	average	men	women
1st Election for H.R.	72.1%	78.5	67.0
2nd "	67.9%	74.9	61.9
3rd "	74.0%	80.7	67.9
1st Election for H.C.	61.1%	69.6	54.2
2nd "	72.2%	78.2	66.7
1st Election for			
Prefectural Governors	72.1%	77.7	66.5
Prefectural Assen. M's	81.6%	83.3	80.6
Local Headship	73.5%	88.8	68.6
Local Assemblies	81.1%	82.9	79.5
2nd Election for			
Prefectural Governors	82.6%	84.5	80.9
Prefectural Assen. M's	83.0%	84.9	81.3
Local Headship	90.1%	91.3	90.0
Local Assemblies	91.0%	91.1	91.0

Moreover, women have gradually come to take the high public offices by election or by appointment, such as, Member of Board of Education, Civil Liberties Commissioner, Member of Mediation Committee of Family Courts, Public Welfare Commissioner, Social Education Commissioner, Member of Advisory Committee on Employment Service etc. and now the number of women in such public offices amounts nearly to about 50,000.

Next, the revised Civil Code has caused many big changes to the family life of women. The most important point is that it abolished the old family system, and provided in its place freedom of marriage, equality of husband and wife, ⁱⁿ the right of property, the reasons for divorce, the duty of chastity, and right of guardianship, equality of succession among children, etc.

In the past when troubles arose concerning about marriage, inheritance, or family-support, the Family Council, legally consisting of the close relatives to the family, had the absolute power to decide the matter, but now, the Family Court has taken its place. The family courts were established in the Local Courts and their branches in all prefectures and they have been good advisers for women in trouble. Many sensible women were appointed as members of Mediation Committees of the family courts and the family courts have been made much use of, as being convenient, and kind institution.

Among the cases of judgement dealt with by the family courts during the one year from 1950 to 1951, the number of abandonment of the right of succession is very big, counting nearly 191,000, and 67% of them were appealed by women, mostly the rural women. The reason for that may be found in the facts that the farm lands in Japan are small, and if they are divided into all brothers and sisters, the family may be bankrupted, so that they abandon the right of

succession in order to prevent this. The trouble here is that many women do not know the meaning of the abandonment of the right succession even though they appeal for it to the court themselves. This shows us that women are not yet conscious of their own rights.

In the cases of mediation on family affairs, divorce suits seem very numerous (12,746), too, and the majority of that, again, are appealed to the court by women.**

* Abandonment of Succession (June-Dec., 1951)			
Total	Filed by men	by women	by both parties
191,000	62,652	128,263	85
	32.8 %	67.1 %	

** Divorce			
Total	Filed by men	by women	by both parties
12,746	2,789	9,907	50
	21.9 %	77.7 %	

The new education system has been carried out since 1947. The compulsory education was extended from six to nine years, and also the principle of co-education and equal opportunity for education, has been set up, and so now boys and girls are studying side by side in secondary schools and universities as well as in primary schools. At present, the number of women studying in the higher educational institutions counts nearly 50,000.*

* Number of students in colleges (April, 1951)

men	women
364,584	48,455

Thus, it is expected that old-fashioned ideas of predominance of men over women may be improved by the next generation, and in reality, women's ability is rising little by little. The new educational system encourages social education, too, and the adult education is being carried on utilising the public libraries and the public halls as its centers, and its programs include institutes

and meetings aiming specially at the education of women.

In order to carry out such works in the field of education, the system of Board of Education was newly established and sensible civilian people have been elected for the Boards. At present, 35 women are in office of the prefectural Boards of Education in the whole country out of 324 total membership.

Next, the advance of women in the field of occupation since the War is most remarkable, * Women workers employed number some 3,500,000 and if we add women workers helping their family business, proprietors and those engaged in their family farm work, working women in the wider sense count more than ** 15,000,000. This number is over the half of the comparable number of men workers, and women workers gainfully employed are equivalent to one-third of such men workers. We can see by this, that women contribute a great deal to the economy of the country.

* Number of paid workers (May 1951)

Total	Men	Women
13,390,000	9,800,000	3,590,000

** Number of workers

Total	Men	Women
36,980,000	22,120,000	14,860,000

Speaking of the type of the women's occupations, women have made such a remarkable advance that now it might be said that there is no occupation in which women are not found. Among the manufacturing industries, women workers in textile mill products decreased very much during the War, but they have increased up to over 600,000 by now. Shop girls and office workers are as numerous as in the past, and it is especially to be noticed that those in public service increased after the War. It is not only with those service

workers engaged in miscellaneous business and accountings in the government as in the past, but also the number of women who pass the government officers' examination and are appointed as officials through the regular channel are increasing. Moreover, it is a new tendency that many women officials have appeared in the executive position in the field concerned with women and children.

Among the teachers of elementary and middle schools established by the national and local governments, there are more than 120 women principals. In the judicial field, women who are qualified to be lawyers are 17: probational judges are 5, and public prosecutors are 2, and these numbers are increasing every year, though the total is yet small. Nurses, public-health nurses, dietitians, etc., are also increasing, being suitable occupations for women.

* Number of principals (April 1950)

	Men	Women
Senior High School	1,908	1
Junior High School	10,866	15
Primary School	19,914	112
Total	32,688	128

As the legal measure to protect women workers the Labor Standards Law was established in September 1947, which provides the principle of equal pay for men and women, and many maternity protections. But on the part of women workers themselves too, they have participated very actively in trade union movement women unionists were only about 13,000, but after the War, in order to protect their own working conditions. Before the War, they increased to 1,500,000, and for some time their activities were very remarkable, basing upon the Women's Sections of unions. However, recently, they are not so active as they were just after the War, and their number decreased to some 1,350,000.*

* Number of Women Workers in Trade Union

1924	13,024
1946	1,164,783
1948	1,507,017
1951	1,352,620

As to the wages, the average monthly wage for women workers was ¥6,059 in 1951, forming 46.8% of men workers' average, which counts ¥13,051. The reasons why women's wages are so lower than men's may be found in the difference between men and women workers as to ages, duration of service, or number of dependants as well as in the fact that women seldom advance to technical professions as experts.

* Average Age of Workers (May 1951)

Men	Women
32.5	23.8

** Average Duration of Service

Men	Women
6.6	3.2

*** Average Number of Dependents

Men	Women
2.7	0.2

Let us look now at women at home. After the War, widows and families of mothers and children increased, and they are quite hard up. According to the results of the survey on the living status of women-headed families, made by the Women's and Minors' Bureau, the number of women-headed families in the whole country is presumed to be 1,900,000, and their living standard is as low as 77% of that of men-headed families, and many of the women-headed families supplement their family expenses by way of industrial home work or selling their properties. While the people under the application of the Life Protection Law are about 2,000,000 in the whole country, or 700,000 families, the majority are families of mothers and children. The Welfare Ministry is taking care to help these poor families.

* Average Monthly Income (Per four family members) (November 1949)

Families With Men Heads	¥12,147
Families with Women Heads	¥ 9,297

Ratio of above to below 76.5%

If we look at the rural areas, over 8,000,000 women are engaged in farm lab^o and support the agricultural economy of the nation. According to the surveys of Women's and Minors' Bureau and others, farm women work about 12 or 13 hours a day in average for both farm and home work, and they over-work themselves so hard that they have hardly any time to spend for their own culture. It is for this reason that the improvement of farm-life has been sought for, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has been giving guidance on the improvement of rural life by sending Home Demon^stra-
tion officials to the rural districts. However, it is considered that, unless the farmers' economy does not turn to good, improvement of life cannot be hoped, so that many thoughtful farm women expect Agricultural Cooperative will be helpful for the reconstruction of farmers' economy, and
*
are taking active part in the cooperative movement.

* Membership of Agricultural Cooperative

Men	Women
4,922,386	470,564

The city home makers are very busy too, and everyday they spend about
*
ten hours and a half for domestic work, and the management of household econo-
my is not easy either.
**
Therefore, aspirations for better planned life are rising everywhere, and the movement for more modernized and more reasonable way of living is spreading over the whole country.

* Twenty-four Hours in the Life of House Wife (May 1950)

	Week-day	Holiday
House-keeping hour	10.16	8.35
Income "	34	20
Cultural "	3.04	4.18
Physiological "	10.06	10.47

** Average Monthly Expenditure of Households (of all cities)
(Oct. 1951)

All Disbursement	¥15,169	100 %
Food	¥ 8,391	55.3%
Clothing	¥ 1,924	12.7%
Light and Fuel	¥ 768	5.1%
Housing	¥ 761	5.0%
Miscellaneous	¥ 3,325	21.9%

The activities of women's organizations are contributing much to elevate the living status of home-makers, and at present, some 5,500,000 women are the member of regional and cultural women's organizations, which count almost 12,000 all over the country. Besides these, there are some women's groups organized under some special objectives, and have local branches throughout the country. They are Japan League of Women Voters, Japanese Association of University Women, Democratic Women's League, Democratic Women's Club, Japan Y.W.C.A., National Friendship Association, House Wives Federation, Widows' Associations and Occupational Women's Associations etc. These associations have worked through very difficult circumstances in order to adapt to the social changes after the War, but it seems that they are learning democratic management of organizations better and better, and have at last come to have their own individual characters.

Japanese women, who have been trying hard to make their actual status approach to the legal one in the post-war years, have now seen the Peace Treaty signed, and they have to confront with a more complicated and more difficult social condition. They have now come to the stage in which they must train themselves, protect their own positions and improve them further by their own efforts. It is hoped that, the success will be gained by means of the cooperation of all the women in the country.

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