Samurai Studies

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Managing Editor:
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Asian Studies
(ISSN: 0004-4679)

April-August-December, 1978 Vol. XVI

contents

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA*

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Introduction:

Women in the People's Republic of China are considered to be among the most "liberated" in the world.[1] This was not always the case; in fact, traditionally only Japan and some of the Islamic countries had a worse record than China as regards women's rights. In the twenty-five years since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the masses of Chinese women have evolved from one of the most oppressed to one of the most "liberated." To achieve this phenomenal transformation within one generation, the Chinese Communists had to change not only the legal status of women but also the entire socio-political order that had kept women oppressed for centuries.

This is remarkable considering that male supremacy was inherent in traditional Chinese culture. In the words of Confucius: "To be a woman means to submit."[2] This submission spanned the woman's entire life through the Confucian doctrine known as "The Three Obediences and Four Virtues." The "Three obediences" were reserved first to her father when young, to her husband when married and to her sons when widowed. The "four virtues" included "women's virtue," "women's speech," "women's appearance," and "women's chore."[3] With a few rare exceptions, such as the Empress Dowager Tzu-hsi who wielded tremendous power at the turn of the century, women were second-class citizens for centuries.

The inferior status of women inherent in Chinese culture was

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*This is a modified version of a masteral thesis submitted to the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies entitled, "The 1950 Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China: Its Repercussions on the Status of Women in Chinese Society."

[1]The term "liberated", as used in this paper, must be understood in the context of the society of the People's Republic of China today. "Liberation" to the Chinese Communist leadership means equality between the sexes, not sexual license. Many Western writers on this subject seem to equate the liberation of women with sexual liberation. With regards to sexuality, women in China are liberated in the sense of being equal, i.e., there is no double standard when it comes to sex, but neither men nor women are liberated in the sense of sexual license. For a discussion of the difference between these two concepts, see Claudie Broyelle, *Women's Liberation in China,* trans. Michele Cohen and Gary Herman (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1977), especially Part V, "A Contribution to the Debate on Sexuality in China."

[2]*Book of Rites,* IX:24, quoted in William T. de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 816.

[3]Specifically, women's virtue meant that a woman must know her place and act in complete compliance with the feudal ethical code. Women's speech meant that a woman must not talk too much. Women's appearance meant that a woman must adorn herself according to the feudal ethical code. Women's chore meant that a woman must do all the household work well, and willingly serve her husband and parents-in-law.

sanctioned both by tradition and by law. Women were bereft of any political, economic or social rights and what laws were legislated were extremely unfavorable to them. This was particularly true of the marriage laws in traditional China. Included in these laws, such as the marriage laws of the Ching Dynasty, were provisions for her marriage to be controlled by the *pater-familias,* for her betrothal to be sealed with a "bride price" and for her husband to have complete control over her during her lifetime under penalty of divorce without any provisions for her future. She was not allowed any legal rights even in case of criminal violence against her.

With the introduction of Western values to China at the end of the 1880's, attitudes towards women began to change, at least among certain members of the intelligentsia and the urban elite. Many women leaders during this period founded anti-footbinding groups, schools for women and newspapers. Gradual changes occurred throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the pioneering efforts of both individual women and organized groups. These activities, sporadic as they were and elitist in orientation, formed the basis of the so-called "women's movement" in modern Chinese history.

The women's movement slowly began to be integrated into the larger movement for social change that swept the country during the May Fourth Movement. However, women's struggles during this period were mainly individualistic. They demanded for the right to work, to vote, to choose their own husbands, to get divorced and freedom from compulsory motherhood. But the demand that all women be given socially productive and meaningful labor did not emerge as an ideology until they joined the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party. Before they joined the Party, women's movements were mainly reformist in orientation. For instance, those who demonstrated in the Treaty Ports for sexual equality were mainly interested in equal education opportunities and the freedom to select their own husbands. Thus, although the women's movement was stirred by the social upheavals of the period, it was the Communist policy that gave ideological direction and at the same time made the struggle for women's liberation a thorough-going movement.

As soon as the Communists came into power and the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, they instigated an extremely radical program for the emancipation of women. The key to this reform was the 1950 Marriage Law which was promulgated within the first year of the new government's rule. The 1950 Marriage Law represented the culmination of the Chinese Communists' experience with marriage reform in the "red areas" and the embodiment of their ideology of sexual equality. The very first article abolished the age-old tradition of the "supremacy of man over woman" and introduced what must be one of the most pro-feminist marriage laws in existence.

On May 1, 1950, the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China had been promulgated, stipulating free choice of marriage partners, monogamy, equal right for both sexes and protection of the "legitimate

interests of women and children." Two months later, on June 30th, the Agrarian Reform Law came into effect. The simultaneous implementation of these two laws were deemed as important steps for bringing about the liberation of women in China. For while the Marriage Law specifically enunciated provisions affecting women directly, the latter law provided the material conditions that would enable women to take advantage of the new Marriage Law. As Engels said:

> ...the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree.[4]

The fundamental themes that will be developed in this paper are: first, although there were incidences in Chinese history which reflected the beginning of the struggle for women's liberation, such as the rebellion of women during the Ming Dynasty and the doctrines included in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in the mid-1850's, these struggles were not conceived of as a principle of social and political equality. The concept of sexual equality as a social movement had to wait until later in the Ch'ing Dynasty, a concept which was reinforced by the introduction of Western ideas but remained elitist in outlook; second, the struggle for women's liberation during the May Fourth Movement up to the late 1920's was confined mainly to individual rights and was later subordinated to the larger issue of nationalism; third, it was only the Chinese Communist Party that recognized the relationship between the liberation of women and the liberation of the Chinese semi-feudal, semi-colonial and colonial society.

Still the liberation of China from the Kuomintang forces did not automatically liberate the Chinese women from oppression. It did, however, focus national attention to their oppression. As indicated above, the Marriage Law was passed to insure the emancipation of women from centuries-old feudal bondage. A few months later a nationwide land reform program was instituted to insure economic equality between men and women. Land reform, however, was only one of the first steps the Chinese took in involving women in social labor. Later, with the introduction of transition stages in the socialist transformation of China—from New Democracy to Socialist Construction to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat—women were as much involved as men in the forging of these revolutions.

The liberation of women in China, in a larger sense, is the transformation not only of men's patriarchal and feudal attitudes towards women, but also the transformation of the women themselves—in their evaluation of their own selves and the group, the reassessment of their roles in relation to their own husbands, children, families and the larger collective where they play active parts.

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[4]Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 152.

The heart of the Chinese message on sexual equality is that women, by liberating themselves, liberate half of the Chinese society. More important is the welding of this liberated force with the continuing socialist revolution.[5]

I. The Status of Women in "Pre-Communist" China

Much has been written on the traditional Chinese family, the clan system and the inferior status of the Chinese woman. These traditions are succinctly expressed in many of the old sayings of China—the proverbs, the songs, the adages. The following are some samples from the traditional literature, including the classics:

(on the status of women)

> Old society is a deep well,
> In which we common people dwell.
> And at its very bottom,
> Live the women.[6]

> A woman's lack of talent is in itself a virtue.[7]

> To be a woman means to submit.[8]

> The wife's words should not travel beyond her own apartment.[9]

> A man does not talk about affairs inside [the household] and a woman does not talk about affairs outside [the household].[10]

> It matters not if a cock crows; but if a hen crows, it must be decapitated.[11]

> Men may roam the country, but women should only travel 'round the stove.[12]

> Heaven is man: Earth is woman.[13]

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[5]Although this paper touches on the modes of production in the course of explaining the central role played by class struggle in the Chinese revolution, particularly women's liberation, it will not include an extensive discussion of the social forms of management, the allocation of tasks, production relations and class relations. The theoretical and practical significance of this topic requires too much space and should be discussed in another paper.

[6]Lu Chen-Hsiang, "Marriage in the Village: Yesterday and Today," *China Reconstructs* (July 1962), p. 10.

[7]C.K. Yang, *Chinese Communist Society: The Family and the Village* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 112.

[8]*Book of Rites,* IX:24, quoted in William T. de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 816.

[9]*Book of Rites,* I:24, *ibid.*

[10]*Book of Rites,* X:12, *ibid.,* p. 817.

[11]Vermier Y. Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China* (Hong Kong: Lung Men Press, 1966), p. 66.

[12]Sun Yu, "The Women's Representative," *The Women's Representative* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956), p. 69.

[13]Jack Belden, *China Shakes the World* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1949), p. 288.

(on husband/wife relationships)

The thread controls the needle; a husband controls his wife.[14]

Women are like wheelbarrows; if not beaten for three days, they cannot be used.[15]

If I buy a horse, I can beat it; if I marry a wife, I can do as I like.[16]

When a woman is angry, her husband beats her; when he is angry, he also beats her.[17]

Officials depend on seals; tigers depend on mountains; women depend on their husbands.[18]

Marriage! Marriage! Clothes to wear; food to eat.[19]

Get a husband, get a husband; only then can you wear clothes and eat rice.[20]

A wife married is like a pony bought; I'll ride her and whip her as I like.[21]

A wife is like your clothes but your brothers are like your hands and feet.[22]

To be reverent and obedient, that is the golden rule of wifehood.[23]

If a wife is like a shadow or an echo, how shall she not be praised.[24]

(on divorce and remarriage of women)

A good horse will not serve two masters; a good woman will not marry two husbands.[25]

A good girl never marries twice.[26]

When you marry a chicken, stick with the chicken; when you marry a dog, stick with the dog.[27]

A faithful minister doesn't serve two emperors and a good woman doesn't marry twice.[28]

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[14]*Ibid.*, p. 314.

[15]*Ibid.*

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 313.

[17]*Ibid.*

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 314.

[20]Yang Lu, "The Correct Handling of Love, Marriage, and Family Problems," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* (Spring 1969), p. 38.

[21]Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, *China! Inside the People's Republic* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 266.

[22]Chiu, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[23]Robert H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1961), p. 100.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 101.

[25]Chiu. *loc. cit.*

[26]Belden, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

[27]C.K. Yang, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[28]Chin Chien, "Chao Hsiao Lan," *The Women's Representative* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956), p. 40.

In her study of women in the People's Republic of China, Ruth Sidel described traditional Chinese society thus:

> The purpose of marriage was to produce male heirs to perpetuate the paternal grandparents' family, to assure the continuity of the husband's family structure, and to provide additional work power, from the son- and daughter-in-law. The preference for male children, the importance of descendants through the male line, and the young wife's moving in with the paternal in-laws are further evidences of male dominance... Women were worse than second-class citizens; they were very nearly slaves...
>
> If one was unfortunate enough to be born female, before 1949, one might very well not survive. Female babies were an economic liability; they would never become part of the family's work force and would only bring a marriage price. Often parents did not know how they could feed a daughter, and, in fact, the practice of drowning girl babies was common. Those female babies that survived were likely to be treated warmly and permissively in the first few years. Between the ages of five and seven they might have their feet tightly bound, so that, in the future, walking would be nearly impossible...
>
> In addition to having their feet bound, women were kept to their menial role by a number of other practices. Illiteracy was generally high in China before Liberation, and women were denied an education even more systematically than men... In addition to being denied education, women were discouraged from developing any skill outside those related to the home or from working outside the home. Thus, they would be completely dependent economically on their husbands and on their inlaws, no matter how badly they were treated.
>
> In all the social classes, whether urban or rural, girls were married at a young age to men they were likely not to know beforehand; the marriages were arranged by both sets of parents, with a view to strengthening the family of the groom. Girls were generally married at the ages of fifteen to seventeen, and boys at sixteen to eighteen, but frequently girls were married even younger than that, often as children. The young bride belonged to her husband's family and was discouraged from even visiting her own family. Essentially, she lost her identity as a human being and was totally subservient to the needs and wishes of her new family. She was the last to eat and ate the most inferior foods available to the family; the clothing she was given was inadequate, and often she was cold in the winter. She was beaten at will by her husband and by others in his family. Most of all, she was a slave to her mother-in-law, perpetuated by tradition. Because she knew no trade and had no means of support, she was in bondage to her husband and his family.
>
> Women were married for life; divorce was not permitted to them. Even if the husband were to die, remarriage was frowned upon, for the widow was still considered part of her husband's family... Suicide was the only way out of her miserable existence, and suicide were not uncommon in old China...[29]

From the foregoing description, it is evident that to have been a woman in traditional China was to have been oppressed. From the

[29]Ruth Sidel, *Women and Child Care in China: A Firsthand Report* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 11-14.

moment of her birth—almost always a disappointment to her family—she was considered inferior:

> When a son is born,
> He is cradled on the bed,
> He is clothed in robes,
> Given a jade sceptre as toy.
> His lusty cries portent his vigour,
> He shall wear bright, red knee-caps,
> Shall be the lord of a hereditary house.
> When a daughter is born,
> She is cradled on the floor,
> She is clothed in swaddling-bands,
> Given a loom-whorf as toy.
> She shall wear no badges of honour,
> Shall only take care of food and drink,
> And not cause trouble to her parents.[30]

Although as an infant there was not much differentiation in treatment between girls and boys, by the age of about four years old "role differentiation on the basis of sex was genuinely imposed upon the lives of children and was never thereafter absent from their lives."[31]

Throughout her life, the woman was subordinated to a male—to her father as a child, to her husband when married, and to her son-in-law when widowed. Moreover, she was cast into a role that a man did not experience, namely that of changing from the family in which she was reared (her family of orientation) to the family in which she reared her own children (her family of procreation).[32]

In addition to her subordinate role in her interpersonal relationships, the woman in traditional China was bereft of any political or economic status in Chinese society. As the "property" of first, her family of orientation and then her family of procreation, she had no legal rights either. There was thus no way out for her and, except for the few who chose to rebel through suicide, the woman in traditional China accepted her lot in life in silent submission.

Changes in the status of women in Chinese society, did not occur overnight with the Communist take-over in 1949. Gradual changes took place throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the pioneering efforts of both individual women and organized groups. These activities, sporadic as they were, formed the basis of the so-called "women's movement" in modern Chinese history. Several stages in the development of the women's movement during this period (late 1800's to 1949) can be noted and for purposes of analysis can be broken down as follows:[33]

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[30]*Book of Odes,* No. 189, quoted in van Gulik *Sexual Life in Ancient China. . .*, pp. 15-16.

[31]Marion J. Levy, Jr., *The Family Revolution in Modern China* (New York: Octagon Books, 1963), p. 75.

[32]*Ibid.*, p. 147.

[33]C.K. Yang, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-135.

(1) The initial stage lasted from the last decade of the 19th Century until the Republican Revolution of 1911;

(2) The second stage included the first half-dozen years of the Republic;

(3) The third stage began with the New Culture Movement of 1917 through the May Fourth Movement and lasted until the early part of the Second Revolution, 1921-1924, and

(4) The last stage covered the period from the mid-1920's, when the Second Revolution was in full swing, until the Communist victory in 1949.

The initial stage, lasting from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the Republican Revolution of 1911, consisted of the early introduction of Western ideas on equality between the sexes and on human rights and freedom and the resulting individual action by a few pioneering women and sporadic, short-lived organized adventures.[34]

Mention should be made at this point of K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927), a radical reformer, who led China's first organized modern reform in the late 1800's. On May 2, 1895 he presented what became known as the "Ten Thousand Word Memorial" which inaugurated the Reform Movement of 1895 through 1898. This movement advocated a multitude of reforms, including the establishment of a modern educational system for women as well as men and the unbinding of women's feet. K'ang Yu-wei also organized the first Anti-Footbinding Association.[35] According to him, the "abolition" of the traditional family was a condition for the proper performance of modern public duties.[36] However, the 100-day reform (June 11-September 21, 1898) proved abortive and its abrupt end restored most of the *status quo ante.*

One of the most famous of the women pioneering for equal rights was the revolutionary "martyr" Ch'iu Chin. Daughter of wealthy literati who had her tutored in classical education, she rebelled against her arranged marriage and left her husband and two children to become headmistress in a Chekiang modern women's middle school and a teacher in a boy's school. Her goal was to organize her pupils to stage an uprising and end the Ch'ing dynasty. In 1907, she established the *Chinese Women's Journal,* the first feminist newspaper, in Shanghai. She was later decapitated by the Manchu rulers for her feminist and revolutionary activities.[37] Other women followed Ch'iu Chin's example, including her own students who formed a short-lived para-military brigade to fight in the 1911 Revolution to avenge their teacher's death, as well as the militant woman teacher, Sophia Chang, who took her name from Sophia Priovskaya, one of the assassins of Tsar Alexander II.[38]

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[34]*Ibid.,* pp. 133-134.

[35]Lo Jung-Pang, ed. and trans., *K'ang Yu-wei: A Biography and a Symposium* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967), pp. 38-39.

[36]C.K. Yang, *op. cit.,* pp. 11-12.

[38]For a complete biography, see Mary Backus Rankin, "Radical Psychology: Ch'iu Chin and Heroism," *Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chekiang, 1902-1911* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 38-47.

The Revolution of 1911, led by the revolutionist Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925), attracted into its ranks many such women whose demand for a new feminine role in a different kind of family institution was no less strong than their demand for a new political order. Although the masses of women were not involved in this struggle, it was nonetheless the beginning of women's participation in the political life of China. This Revolution did more than change the political structure of China in that it initiated the break-down of the traditional dominance of the family in social and political life. This first stage thus laid the foundations for the many subsequent popular movements that were to seriously affect the continued operation of the traditional family as an institution.

The second stage in the development of the women's movement, which began with the establishment of the Republic in 1912, was marked by a general retrenchment of this movement. Although Sun Yat-sen was not an active promoter of women's rights during his brief tenure as President, the newly founded women's organizations devoted themselves both to supporting the Republic and to securing equal rights under the draft constitution. The names of these organizations reflect their strident seriousness of purpose: the Shanghai Society of Comrades for Woman Suffrage, the Woman Suffrage Rearguard Society, the Women's Militant Society, the Women's Alliance, the Women's Peace Society, the Society for the Support of Equal Rights for Men and Women, and the Women's Citizen's Society.[39]

Thus a new element was introduced into women's organizations, namely that of their political mobilization. This began in earnest with the formulation of the Suffrage Alliance. The Alliance first tried to petition parliament for guarantees of equal political rights, and when petitioning failed, a small group of members actually stormed parliament demanding women's suffrage. The demonstration was easily dispersed and was taken seriously by few. The Alliance failed to gain substantial support, and concerned women returned to such causes as obtaining modern education and unbinding feet.[40]

During this stage the excitement of early action had cooled down considerably. But the movement made a steady gain in women's education, which trained leaders for the continued development of the movement and disseminated its basic ideas to an ever-increasing number of women students. Alongside this was the development of literature as a medium to propagate the movement and to expand its following among both men and women. The course was staid and unspectacular, but the advance was steady.[41]

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[38]Janet Salaff and Judith Merkle, "Women and Revolution: The Lessons of the Soviet Union and China," *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism,* ed. Marilyn B. Young (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1973), p. 161.

[39]Roxane Witke, "Women as Politicians in China of the 1920's," *Women in China...*, p. 35.

[40]Suzette Leith, "Chinese Women in the Early Communist Movement," *Women in China...*, p. 48.

[41]C.K. Yang, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

Although efforts to legislate women's suffrage and women's rights were abortive in the opening years of the Republic (the Provincial Constitution of May 11, 1912 did not include a clause guaranteeing male-female equality), the issues resurfaced in the polemics of the May Fourth era. A new stage began with the New Culture Movement or Renaissance in 1917 and broke out in full force in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The phrase "May Fourth," which derived from the 1919 student demonstration of that date in Peking, usually designates the whole intellectual movement roughly from 1917 to 1921 or even later. During this period there was an increase in the influence of Western ideas, and traditional Chinese values, especially Confucianism, came under attack and re-evaluation.

It was during this movement that the term "family revolution" was introduced into the consciousness of the public. Its main objectives included a new role for women in the family as well as in society, in general terms of sex equality; it advocated freedom of social association between opposite sexes; it demanded marriage by free choice and love, not by parental arrangement; it called for greater freedom for the young; it vaguely urged the development of a new family institution similar to the Western pattern.[42]

The idea of the emancipation of women spread rapidly and, according to one writer on the history of Chinese women. "The Chinese women's achievement of a life of independent personality was actually initiated by *New Youth*, and the May Fourth Movement provided the key to the achievement."[43]

The intellectual revolution was centered at Peking National University (Peita) and its leaders included many faculty members of this institution: e.g., Ch'en Tu-hsiu (1879-1942), a leading revolutionary journalist who was Dean of Letters; his principal ally, Hu Shih (1891-1962), and other scholars such as Wu Yu, Lu Hsun, T'ao Meng-Ho and Chou Tso-jen.

Early in 1916, Ch'en Tu-hsiu advocated a new family system and the emancipation of women. Later, in their attacks on Confucian ethics, Ch'en and Wu Yu often made the same suggestion. In January 1918, *New Youth* published T'ao Meng-ho's article on the position of women, introducing Western views of the women's movement. Four months later, Chou Tso-jen published in the monthly his translation from the Japanese of an article by Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) on chastity, opposing one-sided chastity and rejecting the idea that chastity is morality. This view was supported by Hu Shih, Lu Hsun and many other writers.[44]

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[42]*Ibid.*, p. 13.

[43]Quoted in Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 257.

[44]*Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

Like the boys, Chinese girl students developed a great interest in political affairs during the May Fourth Movement. They joined the student movement and its attendant social and political activities. Co-education was established. Before the May Fourth Movement, there were few girls' schools of higher learning, but by 1922, twenty-eight universities and colleges had girl students.[45]

During this period the issues surrounding the role of women were referred to collectively as the "woman problem." While the "woman problem" pervades all May Fourth Literature, serious writers did not deal with the problem as such but with one or more of its substantive issues: the reform of the family system, marriage reform divorce, communal rearing of children, chastity, suicide, suffrage, etc.[46] There were numerous journals of both general and restricted circulation devoted solely to women and most journals included articles and special issues on women. Two of these new journals for women which appeared shortly after the May Fourth Incident include *The New Women* which had for its objective "to rouse women as a means of reforming society," and *The Woman's Bell* whose aim was "to educate women and enable them to take part in the progress of society."[47]

During the period of the May Fourth Movement, journals devoted to the subject of women were mostly prepared by and for men who were in the process of shaping the new China. Mao's writings, such as "Miss Chao's Suicide" (1919),[48] for example, were clearly directed towards a masculine audience. It is likely that the reason for this was that 90 percent or more of the female population was illiterate and the majority of women were still unconcerned with the problems of their own emancipation.[49]

The May Fourth rhetoric, however, belonged more to the world of thought than of action, although there were some suffrage activities, especially in Hunan and Kwantung. In 1920, a number of women in Changsha joined the citizens' demonstration, asking for marriage freedom and personal freedom. In February of the following year, the Women's Association of Hunan was established, and proposed the realization of five rights for women, i.e., equal right of property inheritance, the right to vote and to be elected to office, equal rights of education, equal rights to work, and right of self-determination in marriage. This was later known as the "five proposal movement." It succeeded in December 1921 in obtaining provisions for suffrage and women's personal freedom in the Hunan provincial constitution and in electing a woman to the provincial legislature. Similar movements took place in Chekiang and Kwantung provinces.[50]

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[45]*Ibid.*, p. 258.

[46]Roxane Witke, "Mao Tse-tung, Women and Suicide in the May Fourth Era," *The China Quarterly* (July-September 1967), p. 129.

[47]Chow, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

[48]See Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), pp. 226-228, for text of this essay.

[49]Witke, "Mao Tse-tung, Women and Suicide"..., p. 129.

[50]Chow, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

Attempts were also made at the capital by a group of women students to have a clause guaranteeing male-female equality written into the Constitution when Li Yuan-hung's Peking government convened the Constitution Conference in the summer of 1922. These attempts failed to alter the Constitution in favor of women suffrage. However, the women's suffrage movement had become active during that summer and later split into moderate and revolutionary wings, i.e., the Women's Suffrage Association established in Peking on July 25, 1922 and the Women's Rights League established also in Peking on August 23rd.[51] The Women's Suffrage Organization, composed mainly of students and teachers, focused its demands on women's participation in government, while the Women's Rights League demanded a constitutional guarantee of total equality between the sexes and was concerned with the whole spectrum of women's problems. The activities of these groups were mainly propagandistic rather than organizational; they published, spoke at meetings, shouted slogans in the streets. Both groups were almost entirely composed of urban, educated middle or upper-class women.[52]

Also in 1922, Mrs. Margaret Sanger visited China and delivered a speech at Peking University on "The What and How of Birth Control," with Hu Shih translating. Mrs. Sanger's visit aroused, for the first time, popular interest in the subject. Several organizations were then established in Peking and Shanghai to promote it.[53]

Other leading foreign scholars, such as John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, also lectured at Peita during this period. The extent of the propagation and acceptance of Western ideas may be gauged from the wide circulation of the Chinese translations of Ibsen's plays and their success as stage productions in large cities.[54]

This stage has been discussed in detail because it represents a turning point in the development of the women's movement. For the first time the women's movement was no longer a current isolated from changes in other social institutions but received its support from both the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement, movements that supplied the major ideological orientation for subsequent social and political developments.

The 1920's saw the height of the warlord period in Chinese politics and the rise of a revolutionary movement to re-establish central power. This movement, the so-called "Second Revolution," aimed not only at national reunification but also at social revolution. During this last pre-1949 stage in the development of women's movements, women gained greater political power and, in fact, became political workers in both the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. In 1924 the Kuomintang called for sex equality in law, in economic matters, in education, and in

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[51] *Ibid.*

[52] Leith, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

[53] Chow, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

[54] C.K. Yang, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

society in general; from the 1920's on, sex equality was accepted as a fundamental principle by the urban intelligentsia.[55]

During this period a few noted women became politically influential. Three women—Madame Sun Yat-sen, Madame Liao Chung Kai, and Madame Wang Ching-wei—were elected in 1924 to the first Congress of the Kuomintang.[56]

The Second Revolution culminated in Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition of 1926 and in the establishment of the Nationalist government in Nanking a year later. The rise to power of the Kuomintang meant a new form of government, namely one-party dictatorship. This resulted in a reversal of the earlier clamor for social revolution, including the suppression of mass movements. Thus, in 1927, the women's movement suffered a dramatic setback when Chiang Kai-shek destroyed most of the women's associations. Stalin, in a futile gesture of resistance, ordered the uprising in Canton in December 1927. When this was suppressed, some two to three hundred women were executed by the Kuomintang for simply being caught with short haircuts, a symbol of emancipation. More than one thousand women leaders were killed during this year of reaction.[57]

By this time an open civil war had broken out between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party; the working alliance between the two parties was shattered. This split between the two parties led to divergent courses in the development of the women's movement in the Kuomintang areas and in the "red areas" after the late 1920's. In the areas under Communist control, the women's movement continued to develop as part of the Communist political movement (see Part II) but, in the Kuomintang area, the political aspect of the movement was checked whenever the leadership turned too much to the left, although the women's movement in general continued almost unhindered.[58] There was an accelerated pace in the development of women's educational and economic opportunities in the cities, and women's appearance on the social scene was fast becoming an accepted fact.

Thus, this last stage in the development of the women's movement was marked by increasing identification with revolutionary political movements. Coordinated support now came from changes in the political as well as the educational, economic and family institutions. Most importantly, however, the women's movement began to extend beyond the urban intellectuals, to involve the masses.

An interesting illustration of the advances made in the emancipation of women in pre-Communist China is seen in the history of the abolition of footbinding among Chinese women. The practice of footbinding more than any other symbolized the subjection of women

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[55]Sidel, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[56]*Ibid.*, p. 9.

[57]Katie Curtin, "Women and the Chinese Revolution," *International Socialist Review* (March 1974), p. 11.

[58]C.K. Yang, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

and its gradual eradication over the 50-odd years very closely followed the changes which occurred on other fronts.

Footbinding, a custom which apparently started in the Courts of the Southern T'ang Dynasty in A.D. 937, was commonly practised among all but some of the lower-class Chinese women. The feet of young girls were bound after first being soaked in hot water, then massaged; the four toes were flexed and pressed over the sole of the foot and bandaged with a piece of cloth two inches wide and ten feet long. Suffering great pain the young girl was made to walk on her bound feet with shoes that were made progressively smaller until, after two or three years of having the bandages tightened, the foot was reduced to three and a half to four inches.[59] As the bound feet restricted the women's ability to even walk, no other practice is more symbolic of the subordinate role of women in traditional China.

Towards the end of the Manchu dynasty, opposition to footbinding became more widespread, within the larger movement for reform, modernization, and feminine equality.[60] "Natural-foot societies" were established with considerable success. In 1895, a memorial from women of different nationalities is said to have reached the palace and influenced the Empress Dowager to proclaim the Anti-footbinding Edict of 1902. This natural-foot movement of the 1890's was identified with the liberal reformers and champions of women's rights.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, powerful officials and influential statesmen were giving it increasingly open support. Progress was achieved in stages. During this period, "natural-foot societies" were organized and distributed propaganda in towns and villages around China. This led to greater popular enthusiasm and participation in the years shortly before the Revolution. After the Revolution and the elevation of the social status of women, the elimination of footbinding was considered essential. As noted above, this was one of the goals of the early Suffrage Alliance, and of the New Culture, and May Fourth Movements.

More than twenty years after the Revolution this was still an issue especially among the middle-aged. The *Peking Daily* in January 1935 published a series of pronouncements by the Peking Municipal Government against footbinding, threatening punishment for violators. The press in the 1930's reported unceasing organizational efforts to eradicate this ancient practice.

Even in the liberated areas, where the emancipation of women progressed faster, the Communists were forced to issue a proclamation abolishing footbinding in 1942. But they found that simply issuing the order, and even fining the families of women with bound feet, was not effective; they then rescinded the order and instead educated the people about foot-binding.[61]

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[59]Sidel, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

[60]This historical background on the abolition of footbinding has been taken from Howard S. Levy, *Chinese Footbinding: The History of a Curious Erotic Custom* (New York: Walton Rawls, 1966), pp. 65-103.

[61]Sidel, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Gradually, with the progress in women's emancipation which took place in the economic and political spheres, this remnant of the former oppression of women was abandoned. Visitors to China in 1971 noticed "old women with feet painfully crippled from foot-binding."[62] witnessing the gradual changes which took place in the status of women in Chinese society prior to 1949.

II. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN "COMMUNIST" CHINA

It has been shown how the policies of the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party toward the women's movement differed as a result of the break between the two parties in 1927. In the areas under Communist control the women's movement continued to develop as part of the Communist political movement. To the Communists, women's emancipation was part and parcel of the overall socio-political liberation of the people.[63] Hence, it was imperative that women be politicized and organized along with men. The necessity of recruiting women students, women workers and women peasants for the revolution was high on the Communist agenda. The realization of the indispensability of women to the revolution occurred in the mid-1920's and greatly influenced the Communists' tactics in the following two decades.

The Chinese Communist Party was established in 1921 but it was not until July 1922, a year later, that the party took its first public note of women. This was in the manifesto of the Second Congress of the Chinese Communist Party which called for the right to vote for all, regardless of sex, and for the abolition of all legislation restricting women. At the third conference of the Third International, also in 1922, the Chinese Communist Party announced the organization of a special bureau to incorporate women into the Party:

> . . . it was decided that in all countries a special committee should be established in the Communist Party to lead women, a women's department be elected, and a special column for women be set up in the party newspaper. The CCP decided to adopt this plan as soon as it can.[64]

During this period, the Chinese Communist Party was not an independent party but was working through the Kuomintang. The alliance between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang, under the influence of the Comintern, had developed gradually over the years 1921-1924. Thus, the women's activities decided on in 1922 were

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[62]Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

[63]For a discussioin of the theoretical basis of this ideology, see Sybilla Green Dorros. "The Theoretical Basis of Sexual Equality and Marriage Reform in China," *Asian Studies*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (August 1975) pp. 13-25, and Sybilla Green Dorros, "The Theoretical Basis for Chinese Communist Ideology of Sexual Equality and Marriage Reform," Part III of "Marriage Reform in the People's Republic of China," *Philippine Law Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (September, 1976) pp. 346-355.

[64]Ch'en Kung-po, *The Communist Movement in China* (New York, 1960), p. 28, quoted in Suzette Leith, "Chinese Women in the Early Communist Movement," *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism*, ed. Marilyn B. Young (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1973), p. 49.

incorporated into the Kuomintang's women's department under Ho-Hsiang-ning in Canton. (Raised in Hong Kong, Ho in 1905 had become the first woman to join Sun Yat-sen's T'ung-meng Hui. She was married to Liao Chung-k'ai, a top Kuomintang leader, and had recruited women for the 1911 Revolution.) Ho's main activity as Kuomintang women's director appears to have been the creation of various groups in the Canton area, including an organization of female telephone workers, a "liberation" society, and the all-Kwangtung Women's Alliance designed to organize and educate women of the masses and to awaken them politically.[65] Helen Snow indicates that another function of Ho's organization was to act as a lobbying group for women's rights within the nationalist government, then based in Canton.[66] By 1927, it is estimated that more than a million and a half women in ten provinces were incorporated into women's groups under Ho and the Kuomintang, 300,000 of these also being members of Communist organizations.[67]

The influence of the Chinese Communist Party in the women's movement became evident as early as Women's Day of March 8, 1924, when a rally was held under Communist leadership in the First Park in Canton. Several hundred women, a large proportion of them students, participated in the demonstration; they paraded, made speeches and shouted various slogans: "Down with imperialism," "Down with Warlords," and those more exclusively feminist concern, "Same work, same pay," "Protection for child labor and pregnant mothers," "Equal education," "Abolish child brides and polygamy," "Prohibit the buying of slave girls and the taking of concubines," "Formulate a child protection law," etc.[68]

Demonstrations were held in other cities, too, but they were in most cases organized underground and could not compare in scope with Canton's. Throughout the 1920's, March 8 continued to be a focal point for mobilizing women. By 1926, the movement had grown to such proportions that 10,000 gathered together in Canton, 800 in Hunan.[69]

The March 8th rally undoubtedly gave great symbolic encouragement to the women of China. Furthermore, as the first mass women's demonstration sponsored by the Chinese Communist Party-Kuomintang, it marked the beginning of a new stage in the Chinese women's movement, one in which women's rights were to become increasingly identified with revolutionary political movements.[70]

Communist decisions in 1926 on the women s movement perhaps marked the beginning of a major Chinese party making a political arm

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[65]Leith, "Chinese Women" . . . , pp. 51-52.

[66]Helen Foster Snow, *Women in Modern China* (The Hague, 1967), p. 107, cited by Leith, "Chinese Women" . . . , p. 52.

[67]*Ibid.*

[68]C.K. Yang, *Chinese Communist Society: The Family and Village* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.T.T. Press, 1965), p. 120; and Leith, "Chinese Women" . . . , p. 52.

[69]Yang Chih-hua, "Days I Can't Forget", *Women in China* (March 1956), p. 7, cited by Leith, "Chinese Women" . . . , p. 53.

[70]Leith, "Chinese Women" . . . , p. 53.

out of the women's movement by working out systematic tactics for recruiting and organizing its members and by expanding the movement from among the modern urban intelligentsia to women workers and peasants.[71] These decisions were adopted by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party at the Second Enlarged Plenum held in Shanghai, July 12-18, in a document entitled "Resolutions on the Women's Movement":

> Having studied the report of the Women's Department of the Central Committee, we note a certain amount of achievement in the women's movement, which has demonstrated considerable usefulness in the national liberation movement. On the other hand, many weaknesses have come to light, such as failure to penetrate the masses and excessive emphasis on bureaucratic activities. [Party members working in the women's movement] in Kwantung and Peking have neglected the Party's development. Publications are too monotonous and political. Hereafter, the following points should be given special attention in our women's movement.
>
> 1. *Emphasis on the masses.* We have in the past utilized such organs as the Women's Department of the Kuomintang, women's associations, and federations of women of all circles in many places to activate and "summon the masses." Frequently, however, the result has been neglect of the masses. We have failed to penetrate the masses and merely control these organs. Upon the outbreak of certain incidents, we issued manifestos and pamphlets and dispatched telegrams in the name of these organs. Such practice has created increasing fear and suspicion among the masses, separating us further from them and placing us in an increasingly isolated position. This is a very serious mistake.
>
> In our future work, we should not, naturally, refrain from using such organs as women's associations and the Women's Department of the people's school (KMT) to summon the masses. Our primary duty, however, is to summon the masses. To get hold of the masses, it is not enough merely to control certain organs, creating thereby a bureaucratic kind of movement. We must lay primary emphasis on work among the masses.
>
> 2. *United front.* At present, a number of cliques have developed among the masses of women as a result of class differentiation, especially in Kwantung. Hence, a united front of all women's cliques has become a serious problem. We have been too subjective on this point in the past. We have too often merely aimed at our own activities and brought up our own slogan, paying little attention to the interest of women of all classes and the views of women's organizations of all cliques. The result was that our activities were monotonous and isolated and we have lost the sympathy of the majority of the masses. This is one of our past mistakes. We should hereafter pay special attention to the united front of women of all classes and all women's organizations. In order to establish this united front, we must emphasize: (1) more attention to women's own interests; (2) a certain amount of respect for the views and policies of other women's organizations when certain movements occur; and (3) avoidance of monopoly situations and other unnecessary conflicts.

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[71]Yang, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

3. *Female labor and women students.* Resolutions on the method of dealing with female labor and students were adopted at the Fourth Congress and at the Enlarged Conference of last year. To this date however, very little has been done. Little attention has yet been given to this problem at certain places, such as Kwantung, Peking, and Hupeh. This is a very bad situation. We must realize that the labor movement is the essence, and women students a tool, of the women's movement. If we fail to achieve results among these two groups, it is senseless to speak of all other women's movements.

4. *Peasant women's movement.* This has just been initiated. With the peasant movement suddenly and rapidly developing, however, the future peasant women's movement will occupy a very important position in the Chinese women's movement. Although we cannot as yet formulate concrete plans, we should at least begin to give our serious attention to the problem and prepare personnel for the peasant women's movement, especially in Kwantung and Hunan.

5. *Popularization of women's publications.* It is a sign of progress that there has been an increase in local women's publications. Their contents, however, are not satisfactory. Either there is excessive duplication and redundancy, or the writing is too political and theoretical. Very few can really speak on behalf of women, representing their sufferings and actual demands. In the future, our own publications and those under our control should institute improvements, avoid empty political and theoretical discussions, and concentrate on articles on women's own sufferings and practical demands, so that women readers will feel that the articles speak on their behalf. Only thus can we achieve results in propaganda and agitation among the majority of women who are numb and unconscious.

6. *Reform of local women's departments and committees on the women's movement.* Although these organs have been organized, they are for the most part ineffective and unable to guide the work of the women's movement. Reform of these organs is prerequisite to spurring the progress of the women's movement. The Party at all levels should take special note of this point.

7. *Expansion of Party membership and training of personnel for the women's movement.* Since the last Enlarged Conference, the number of female members has increased considerably. It is still a very small figure, however, when compared with the number of male members. Furthermore, female membership is confined to Shanghai and Hunan. In Kwantung, Hupeh, Peking, and other areas, expansion of female membership has been extremely slow. This is indeed a very bad situation! Hereafter attention should be given to the development of female membership everywhere.

The shortage of personnel for the women's movement is even more acute, and consequently local work has been much retarded. The training of personnel for the women's movement (especially personnel for the female labor movement and the peasant women's movement) is the most important immediate task of the Party at all levels. As far as possible the Party at all levels should sponsor training classes for the women's movement, special discussions of the women's movement, or gather and regularly train responsible and promising women comrades [72]

[72]C. Martin Wilbur and Julie How, eds. *Documents on Communism, Nationalism and Soviet Advisors in China 1918-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 308-310.

The Communists thus turned their attention to three group classes of women namely, women students, women workers, and peasant women.

The early Communist movement's four most prominent women—Hsiang Ching-yu, Ts'ai Ch'ang, Teng Ying-ch'ao and Yang Chih-hua—all received their first taste of politics as student activists. Given the significant student participation in the May Fourth Demonstrations, women's rights activities, and March 8 rallies, the student movement seemed a natural recruiting ground for Communist women's organizations and especially for future female leaders. There are indications, however, that female activism in the movement was not what the party women would have hoped, perhaps because of the small number of girls enrolled in higher education. In 1922, it is estimated that only 6.32 percent of the students in non-missionary schools were girls; by 1931, the figure of 11.7 percent is given for girls in colleges and universities.[73]

The Communists saw the female labor force as a fertile recruiting ground not only because of the number of women workers but also because of the oppression they suffered. The great number of women workers can be explained by the prevalence of light industry in China, the willingness of women to work for lower wages than men, and the large number of industries dealing with traditional "women's work" such as spinning and weaving.[74]

There were two peaks of action in the early Chinese labor movement. During the first in 1922, Helen Snow reports that there were all together more than one hundred strikes, in many of which, women participated. Many of the strikes failed because of the lack of working class leadership, the general deflation of the labor movement, and the necessity of organizing secretly. Then there was a period of retrenchment and underground activity preceding the second peak, beginning with the May 30th Movement in 1925 and continuing into 1926. Communist emphasis on workers continued throughout 1926 and early 1927 but the movement collapsed, as a result of Chiang Kai-shek's brutal "white terror" of 1927.[75]

The Chinese Communist Party then centered its action on the peasants in the 1930's and 1940s, although efforts to organize peasants had begun earlier. Women were organized into a separate women's union and often made up a quarter of the peasant organization's total membership.[76]

Thus, during the period of the Chinese Communist Party-Kuomintang Alliance, the Communists were developing independent power amongst students, workers and peasants—men as well as women. For the Chinese Communist Party and the Comintern, which

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[73]Florence Ayscough, *Chinese Women Yesterday and Today* (Boston, 1957), p. 84, cited by Leith, "Chinese Women"..., p. 55.

[74]Leith, "Chinese Women"..., p. 57.

[75]*Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

[76]*Ibid.*, p. 61.

controlled its party line, the choice was difficult: either to break with the Kuomintang entirely, facing the danger of being overpowered by it, or to keep working with it, hoping to split the factions within the party to the Communists' advantage. The decision was forced by the events of the year 1927, i.e., the anti-Communist attacks of Chiang Kai-shek, and on August 1st, when an uprising of Communist troops at Nanchang began the open civil war between the two parties.

As a result, the Communists were driven underground in the cities or forced into the countryside of South China. Mao Tse-tung, with his decimated force of about 800 men, sought sanctuary in the Chingkang mountains and established what was to be the first rural base area of the Chinese Communist party. (At this time, Mao was without power within the Chinese Communist Party, having been expelled from the Central Committee in November 1927.)

The Communists finally acquired a base on the border of Kiangsi province, controlling several pockets in other provinces besides the area around Juichin. In 1931, the Soviet Republic of China was established, referred to as a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." This was the first time that Mao Tse-tung's ideas on agrarian reform and marriage reform could be put into action on a systematic basis. The constitution was proclaimed by Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Provisional Government, at the First All-China Congress of Soviets (Juichin, November 7, 1931). His ideology of sexual equality and marriage reform was embodied in Article 11 of this Constitution:

> The Chinese Soviet Government guarantees the emancipation of women; it recognizes the freedom of marriage, and puts into operation measures defending women, enabling them gradually to attain the material basis required for their emancipation from the slavery of domestic work, and for participation in the social, economic, and political life of the country.[77]

Shortly thereafter, on December 1, 1931, the Marriage Regulations was passed by the Central Executive Committee as part of the implementation of Article 11 of the Constitution. However, after two years and four months, it was abolished by the Marriage Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic of April, 1934. By that time, the collapse of the Soviet Republic was virtually a certainty, there having been under severe military setbacks. The promulgation of the new Marriage Law despite these circumstances clearly demonstrates how important the subject was to them if not for the present, at least, for the future.[78]

It must be emphasized once again that both the Marriage Regulations of 1931 and the Marriage Law of 1934 were but one part, albeit an important one, of a policy which should be viewed in its

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[77]Fu, S.L., "The New Marriage Law of People's China," *Contemporary China* (Vol. I: 1955), ed. E. Stuart Kirby (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1956), p. 115.

[78]M.J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971), p. 48.

totality. Land reform played a crucial part in the marriage policy, but without the marriage policy the support for land reform would have suffered.[79]

In a material published during the Kiangsi Republic, there is evidence of strong efforts to get women to support land reform as a means of emancipating them from the bondage of the traditional family. How this policy was to be implemented in Kiangsi may be gathered from the following document, "Plan for Work Among the Women," drawn up by the Special Committee for Northern Kiangsi of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, dated March 3, 1931:

> Work among the women is part of our whole revolutionary work, it must be integrated into the whole work of our revolution. At present, our main task in the Soviet area is to develop [the means to] penetrate the broad masses of the workers and peasants, to overthrow the reactionary regime, to resist the attacks of the imperialists and the Kuomintang against the Red Army, and to struggle for the consolidation and expansion of the power of the Soviets. Therefore the most important task of the Women's Movement is to mobilize the broad masses of toiling women to join the revolution in order to keep abreast with the main task. Only the land reform, only the Soviet government can liquidate the feudal forces and liberate the women. We must make the women understand that only the extension and the consolidation of the Soviet area, and the intensification of the attacks on the enemy, can protect the interests gained and still to be gained by the women within the Soviet Area.[80]

Having thus identified the interests of the women with those of the revolution, the Committee enumerates the ways to mobilize them. First of all, the wives of poor peasants and landless laborers were to be mobilized "to win the victory in the land reform." In the second place,

> the Soviet political principles must be applied to the women, in order to abolish and destroy the legal norms of the old society, to oppose the relations of oppression and exploitation of the feudal family and to guarantee the participation of the masses of women in the political power by the exercise of their rights of election and being elected, to guarantee their economic independence and ownership of land. In the legal system: to guarantee their equality with the men, to further their acquisition of civil rights... In marriage: to guarantee their freedom of marriage. In labor: to guarantee that they will receive work and that their work will be protected by various kinds of regulations, like the establishment of creches... In all these problems, it is not enough to work by propaganda only, we must exert ourselves to speed up the realization of these objectives, but in this struggle we must have a unified working class.[81]

It seems that, at this time, the attitude of the regime towards the emancipation of women, of which freedom of marriage was part, was

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[79] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[80] *Ch'en Ch'eng Papers,* reel No. 4, document No. 008. 2411, 3047. c-1. The Hoover Library, quoted in Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy*..., p. 38.

[81] *Ibid.*

strongly focused on the effort to enlist the women into the revolutionary ranks, to recruit soldiers, political agitators, and informers from among their ranks so that they might participate directly in the armed struggle against the Government troops and perform underground work outside the Soviet areas. The accent was on the political and physical emancipation of the women, specially, of those women whose social and economic conditions brought them within the categories of people on which the Communist Party at that time concentrated: women of the rural and the urban proletariat. At this juncture the most urgent problem was the expansion, even the survival of the revolution. Marriage regulations, land reform regulations, labor regulations, the establishment of nurseries, were all measures introduced so as to enable the women to be fully mobilized in this struggle.[82]

How successfully the women were fully mobilized in this struggle during the Kiangsi period remains uncertain. Nonetheless, Women's Unions were formed in some villages, and in his report on the Chang-kang district in Kiangsi, Mao mentioned the district women's congresses and women's representations who were elected in each village to defend women's interests. However, he was critical of the way work was performed in the district, saying that too little was done to explain the point of it all to ordinary women.[83]

The deepest repercussions of the policies implemented during the Kiangsi period came as a direct result of marriage legislation. In spite of the great discretion exercised by the Chinese Communist Party, information disseminated in contemporary documents indicates that the Marriage Regulations caused a certain confusion in the Soviet zone especially during the period which immediately followed their publication. There were deviations both to the left and to the right, e.g., there was some moral corruption on the part of some cadres who interpreted freedom of marriage as sexual license;[84] and In certain localities not only did the authorities refuse to grant divorces, they even put the couples requesting them in prison.[85] The former deviations received more publicity which led to the commonly held belief that the Communists were sexually immoral.

Thus one of the most effective weapons used by the Kuomintang in its struggle against the Chinese Communist Party during the Kiangsi period was the allegation that the revolutionaries had completely destroyed morals, collectivized women and contributed to sexual chaos.[86] In 1934, among the forty-two anti-Communist slogans adopted

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[82]Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy*. . ., p. 40.

[83]Mao Tse-tung, "Investigation of Chang-kang district," quoted in Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 74.

[84]*Ch'en Ch'eng Papers,* cited by Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy*. . ., p. 39.

[85]"Report of the Provincial Soviet Government of Kiangsi" (November 1932), cited by Chi-hsi Hu, "The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet," *The China Quarterly* (July-September 1974), p. 484.

[86]Chi-hsi Hu, "Sexual Revolution". . ., p. 477.

by the nationalist authorities, five had to do with the theme of sexual morality. Thus, in the "white areas" of Kiangsi, wall posters appeared bearing the words, "The red bandits wish to destroy virtue: they practice free sex. They are savage beasts who abandon themselves to debauchery!" Or, "If women wish to preserve their chastity and enjoy familial happiness: they must take up arms to exterminate the red bandits!"[87]

These problems were candidly recognized by the Chinese Communists, especially the negative effects that these could have on the generally conservative peasants:

> The realization of the policy of the Party and the Soviet Government in the matter of marriage problems must be guaranteed. In practice we must start from the premise that both parties, husband and wife, serve the cause of the revolution. Therefore we must not only refrain from imposing limitations on the freedom of marriage since this would be contrary to Bolshevist principles, but we must resolutely oppose the idea of absolute freedom of marriage as it creates chaotic conditions in society and antagonizes the peasants and the Red Army. We must make it clear that the Central Committee never maintained absolute freedom of divorce either, because that would be an anarchistic practice. . .[88]

The difficulty lay in finding reasonable limitations to freedom of marriage and divorce in the face of the obvious abuse that was made of it, while doctrinaire objections against any imposition of limitations were still strong. Hence this curious struggle with the words "freedom" and "absolute freedom." According to the "Plan for Work among the Women", the ways of solving "marriage problems" were:

> 1. To guarantee freedom of marriage and divorce through the government.
>
> 2. The Soviet Government will handle all marriage problems through the law. Violators of the law will be punished according to the law.
>
> 3. However, it is not enough to solve these problems by means of the law only: we have to take recourse to propaganda and education. We must make the masses understand that the significance of liberation lies in the revolutionary war. The members of the Party and the Youth Organization must make this standpoint their own; they must become models for the masses and prevent and oppose anarchistic immoral behavior. This work of propaganda must be one of the most important tasks within as well as outside of the Party.
>
> 4. We must call on the masses to supervise and criticize the (morally) corrupt elements with a view to their eventual dismissal. Wherever allegations are made, the Party shall investigate the circumstances.
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> 5. When we raise the level of politics and culture, we shall be able to prevent morally loose behavior. Particular attention must be

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[87]"Report of the Association of the Masses of Kiangsi to Help in the Extermination of Bandits" (1934), microfilm belonging to Cornell University, pp. 41-42, quoted in Chi-hsi Hu, "Sexual Revolution". . ., p. 477.

[88]*Ch'en Ch'eng Papers*, quoted in Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy*. . ., p. 39.

paid to the wives of Red Army personnel; they must be encouraged to support the revolution and to sympathize with their husbands. Their morale must be raised and they must positively demonstrate revolutionary ardor. Such women should be absorbed into the entertainment units (for the army).

6. The custom of the foster daughter-in-law must be abolished by order of the Soviet Government. These girls ought to be liberated. We must make them join children's groups and the Young Pioneers. Merely preventing parents from taking in foster daughters-in-law, as was done in Western Kiangsi, is not sufficient.

7. In particular, in the village of Hunan, there are many families of soldiers of the White Army. The women must be organized to write or to speak with their husbands and to induce them not to serve with the war-lords against the Red Army and to persuade them to support the Soviet Government. We should also lead these women to participate in local revolutionary work and to attend the meetings of peasant women and women workers.[89]

Despite problems encountered in the field of marriage reform in Kiangsi, there is evidence that Mao Tse-tung was generally pleased with the progress that had been made. In the report which he presented to the Second National Soviet Congress, he declared that the system of marriage adopted by the Chinese Soviet Republic was "in conformity with human culture" and constituted one of the "great victories of the history of humanity.[90]

Less than six months after the New Marriage Law was promulgated, the Chinese Communists were forced to leave their Kiangsi base. Chiang Kai-shek had mounted his five "extermination" campaigns against the Communists, hoping to annihilate them by a total encirclement and economic blockade. After a series of difficult campaigns, the Government forces in 1934 captured the Kiangsi stronghold, forcing some one hunded thousand Communist army and government personnel to break through the Nationalist blockade and embark on their Long March. The Long March—which covered over five thousand miles on foot across eighteen mountain ranges and twenty-four rivers and took about a year to complete—was in fact a continuous campaign against the Government troops.

It has been estimated that only about fifty of those who went on the Long March were women.[91] Often the women were trained as guerilla fighters in those villages where there were skirmishes and where the men were absent. But women remained in the rear, producing for the revolution, not fighting for it. Even though women were allowed to join the People's Liberation Army, they were not allowed at the front and continued to perform sex-typed tasks, e.g., in communications or the public health corps, or in running supplies.[92]

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[89] *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

[90] "Collection of Documents of the Second National Congress of the Delegates of the Chinese Soviet Republic," Juichin, March 1934, p. 97, *Ch'en Ch'eng Collection*, reel 16, quoted in Chi-hsi Hu, "Sexual Revolution" . . ., p. 484.

[91] Janet Salaff and Judith Merkle, "Women and Revolution: The Lessons of the Soviet Union and China," *Women in China* . . ., p. 164.

[92] *Ibid.*

In October 1935, the Communists reached the area of Northern Shensi—or at least a small fraction of the original force did—and established themselves there. They made their headquarters in Yenan, where in the grottoes of the cliffs some 20,000 people lived and many facilities were organized, e.g., a military academy, hospitals and a college of art.

During the early years in the northwest, official policy on women showed no change from the days of the Kiangsi Soviet. The Soviet Marriage Law which was reprinted in Pao-an in 1936, remained in force.[93] But according to reports, the women were more difficult to mobilize in the conservative north. Footbinding, for example, was still the rule in rural Shensi and the peasant women found their big-footed "sisters" from Kiangsi very odd.[94]

The Communists' policies in effect during this so-called "Yenan Period" (1936-1945) were very much tempered by historical events, namely, the threat of Japanese agression. The Communists had earlier (1932) made a formal declaration of war against the Japanese but they were in no position to carry the declaration into effect. But once established in their northern base, and following the new Moscow line, they took recourse to a policy of propaganda calculated to form a national front of unity against Japanese aggression.[95] The united front propaganda, including slogans such as "Chinese do not fight Chinese," appealed strongly not only to leftist nationalists but also to the troops from Manchuria sent to annihilate the Communists. After the Sian incident in December 1936 (during which Chiang Kai-shek was taken prisoner by his own generals and held under arrest), a truce was agreed with the Nationalist Government in 1937 whereby the Communist occupied area was to become an autonomous region, called the Border Area of Shensi, Kansu and Ninghsia.

During the war with Japan, which started on July 7, 1937, the Communist armies engaged in guerilla warfare and established several further revolutionary bases between and behind the Japanese lines. In these regions, governments were organized on a united front basis under Communist control. Such areas were among others, the Border Area of Chin-Ch'a-Chi (parts of Shansi, Ch'ahar and Hopei) and Chin-Chi-Lu-Yu Border Area (parts of Shansi, Hopei, Shantung and Hunan).[96]

This period of the Japanese War—when the Communists worked together with the Nationalist Government—was a period of compromise. The Communists were willing to do so in order not to alienate themselves from the masses and to win over the intelligentsia. As part of the bargain, the Chinese Communist Party restricted its program of land reform and downplayed the activities of the women's

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[93]Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (London, 1939), p. 230, cited by Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 75.

[94]Helen Foster Snow, *Women in Modern China,* cited by Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 75.

[95]Conrad Brandt, *et al., A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (Harvard, 1952), p. 239, cited by Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy. . .*, p. 30.

[96]Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy. . .*, p. 30.

organizations. It stressed that the main role of the women's movement during the war was to organize women for productive activity.[97] The Chinese Communist Party also revised its policy towards marriage, particularly with regard to the freedom of divorce, and the marriage ordinance was revised to accord with the Civil Law of the Republic of China.[98] Thus, the Marriage Regulations of 1931 that was promulgated in the various areas under Communist influence, around and within the areas occupied by the Japanese Army, showed a certain restraint.

Another factor in this revision may have been that in the U.S.S.R., the attitude towards the family and its regulations had appreciably changed during this period and was not without influence in China. By the time the first legislation was promulgated in the Border Areas (April 1939), many changes had occurred, e.g., after 1936, a series of laws were enacted, attaching to divorce some inconveniences, such as making it more difficult and expensive. Also abortion was made a punishable offense.[99] Other decrees provided for better material aid to women in childbirth, establishing state assistance to parents of large families, extending the network of lying-in homes, nurseries and kindergartens.

In short, the stabilization of the family became the main theme of matrimonial policy in the U.S.S.R. and certain provisions in the Border Area legislations show strong evidence of the new Soviet influence.

The marriage legislation in the Border Areas, especially the divorce provisions, indicate a return to a more conservative policy. As indicated above, this was partly a concession to the united front policy and partly a result of the influence of the new family policy in the U.S.S.R. However, it may also be attributed to the Communists' experience in Kiangsi where their too radical policy negatively affected their success in mobilizing the peasants. This possibility is more plausible given the fact that the peasants in the North were known to be more conservative than in the South, especially the women, and they would have undoubtedly been antagonized by the type of propaganda which became widespread in Kiangsi, namely that Communism meant immorality.

As in the case of the Communists' experience in Kiangsi, there are very few statistics to indicate how thoroughly these marriage laws were implemented in their respective areas. One document, "Marriage problems in new China," indicates that in the liberated areas between January and June 1948, 64 percent of all civil cases were petitions for divorce, of which the great majority were brought by women.[100] Yet the new ideas were still far from being generally accepted. The other side of the picture was brought out in figures collected by the Women's Federation, which showed that of 464 cases where a women's death

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[97]Katie Curtain, "Women and the Chinese Revolution," *International Socialist Review* (March 1974), p. 25.

[98]Fu, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

[99]Gsovski, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

[100]Davin, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

(including murders and suicides) had been investigated, 40 percent had involved women who had wanted divorces but had been unable to get them.[101]

It has been suggested that during this period, a more careful handling of the divorce provisions became an economic necessity in the light of the fact that land reform was restricted with its negative effect on the economic status of women.[102] These two reforms, marriage reform and land reform, went hand-in-hand thus, making it extremely difficult for the Communist authorities to grant divorce in cases where the woman had no means of livelihood.

Perhaps for this reason or because of the fact that women in this part of China traditionally did not take part in agricultural work (they were responsible for only 5 percent of all farm work),[103] the Chinese Communists concentrated their efforts in getting women involved in other economic activities, namely cottage and cooperative handicrafts. The main effort went into getting women to spin and weave because, cut off from the centers of textile production by the Japanese occupation and the Kuomintang blockade, the liberated areas were very short of cloth.[104] Other supplementary occupations in which women began to play an important part included the production of vegetable oil, cured leather and paper.[105]

During the anti-Japanese war, women's activities were directed by the Women's Committee of the Central Committee. In 1945, the Preparatory Committee of the Women's Association of all the liberated areas was set up in Yenan with thirteen members.[106] During the same year, it is claimed that the various women associations in Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia and seven other liberated areas had 7,100,000 members. Great stress was laid on the importance of these associations as a way of mobilizing women, and women cadres who were said to have underestimated the importance of such work were criticized.[107]

At the end of the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Communists opened negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek. In August 1945, agreement was reached between a delegation of the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang Nationalists in Chungking. As a result, the Chinese Communist Party limited its program, including women's issues, to those acceptable to the Kuomintang liberals. But the division between the two parties was too deep for conciliation; the truce was short-lived. In 1946, the Kuomintang armies launched another offensive against the

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[101]*Ibid.*

[102]Meijer, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[103]J.L. Buck, *Land Utilization in China* (Nanking, 1937), p. 293; and *The Chinese Farm Economy* (Nanking, 1930), p. 235, cited by Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 75.

[104]*The Village Women's Production Movement in the Liberated Areas of China* (1949), cited by Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 78.

[105]Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 80.

[106]*Documents of the Women's Movement in the Liberated Areas of China* (Shanghai, 1949),.cited by Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 80.

[107]*Ibid.*

Communist bases in the North. After Chiang Kai-shek's attack, the Chinese Communist Party adopted a more radical program of social reform. Agrarian policy underwent a more radical change than the policy toward women, however. It was felt that too sudden and strong a campaign for women's rights would have alienated many peasants, including even many of the women themselves. In the words of the Central Committee's 1948 resolution on women's activities: "It must be recognized that this work to change the peasants' ideas and [ways] is a long and demanding job which cannot be hurried."[108]

Nevertheless, profoundly important changes occurred in the course of land reform as the first paragraph of the resolution acknowledged: "Women have become much more aware and enthusiastic, and consequently there has been a fundamental change in their political and economic status, and in their position in the family, and in society."[109]

It has been said that the women's movement in the liberated areas was not completely successful during the hectic years of the liberation war, but a great deal was accomplished. The following attests to these accomplishments:

> Women were organized to fight for their rights on a larger scale than ever before. In April 1949, the All-China Democratic Women's Federation was formed to give unified direction to the thousands of Women's Associations in the old liberated areas and to the new ones organized in village after village as the People's Liberation Army swept south. Millions of women learned to stand on their own feet economically, freeing themselves at least partially from their dependence on men. As they broke through the bonds which had tied them to their homes for centuries, their social and economic status began to change. Traditional attitudes toward women were crumbling. In the words of the 1948 Resolution they had "started on the road to complete liberation."[110]

The above passage takes note of the Women's Associations which were organized in each village as it was captured by the People's Liberation Army. This process to reform traditional attitudes among the people spelled the success of the Communists in gaining the support of the peasant women for the Eighth Route Army. Although women rarely took up arms in support of the Communists, their behind-the-scene support (making uniforms, providing food, etc.) was essential to the Communists' eventual victory.

The last revolutionary civil war was short and decisive. By the end of 1948, the Kúomintang had been driven out of the Northeast, and by the following Spring, the Communists "captured" an average of three cities a day. Thus the Communists succeeded in taking over the mainland and on October 1, 1949, MaoTse-tung proclaimed in Peking the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

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[108]*Ibid.*, p. 82.

[109]*Ibid.*

[110]Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 87.

Once the Communists officially came into power, they continued their radical program for the emancipation of women. Their goals were outlined in their first charter, the Common Program, adopted September 29, 1949, by the First Chinese People's Consultative Conference:

> The People's Republic of China shall abolish the feudal system which holds women in bondage. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational, and social life. Freedom of marriage for both women and men shall be put into effect (Article 6).[111]

When the Communist constitution replaced the Common Program as the basic law, the same principle was reaffirmed. The importance which the Communists attached to sexual equality and marriage reform is witnessed by the fact that the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China was the first civil legislation enacted by the Central People's Government after the establishment of the Republic.

III. THE 1950 MARRIAGE LAW AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE

Exactly seven months after Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, his new government promulgated the 1950 Marriage Law which radically changed the entire structure of the Chinese institution of marriage.[112] The most outstanding features of the 1950 Marriage Law are the provisions for the registration of marriage, the chapter legislating the "Rights and Duties of Husband and Wife" and the liberal divorce provisions. As all of these features had an enormous impact not only on the status of women but on the overall structure of Chinese society as well, it is important therefore to describe the changes implicit in the individual provisions of this law.

The first principle on which the Marriage Law is based is "the free choice of partners" and this is reiterated in Article 3: "Marriage is based upon the complete willingness of the two parties. Neither party shall use compulsion and no third party is allowed to interfere." This article contradicts the values that run through the entire framework of the Chinese family, one of them being the inherent belief in the institution of arranged marriage. In the words of an old Chinese saying, marriage came by the "command of the parents and the unctuous words of the go-betweens."[113] In one stroke, the old system based on parental authority in the choice of marriage partners was abolished. There followed a general breakdown in the traditional family which was

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[111]Fu, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[112]For a discussioin of the background and provisions of this law, see Sybilla Green Dorros, "The 1950 Marriage Law and Its Implications for Change," Part V of "Marriage Reform in the People's Republic of China," *Philippine Law Journal,* Vol. 51, No. 4 (September, 1976), pp. 366-377. Text of this law is included in Appendix VIII, pp. 422-427.

[113]Vermier Y. Chiu, "Marriage Laws of the Ch'ing Dynasty, the Republic of China and Communist China," *Contemporary China* (Vol. II: 1956-1957), ed. E. Stuart Kirby (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1958), p. 65. See also

based on the strict observance of hierarchy dominated by the eldest and by the male. Another consequence of this article was the decrease of intra-class marriages and subsequently there has been less class demarcation. Choice of marriage partners tends to be based on ideological compatibility rather than traditional similarities of family background.

The second principle on which the Marriage Law is based is monogamy which is spelled out in Article 2 in the provisions against bigamy and concubinage. [A concubine was an informal wife taken into the house with no formal wedding ceremony and thus with no ritualistic recognition or institutional guarantee for her security or the permanency of her position in the family.] The prohibition against concubinage, an institution that was used to assure the birth of a son drastically altered the ultimate end of the traditional marriage, namely the perpetuation of the patriarchal lineage. Even in today's China, the birth of a son is very often desired but, with the changes in the Marriage Law, the age-old character of the traditional family is undermined. No longer can a wife be denied by her husband just because she does not produce a son, nor can the husband acquire another woman for the sole purpose of begetting a son.

The other prohibition in Article 2 against child betrothal destroyed both early betrothals and the custom of "foster daughter-in-law." Prior to the 1950 Marriage Law, it was common practice in China to betroth a female child at an early age, often at birth, to an equally young boy. In some part of China, the custom was to betroth children even before they were born or to arrange for a girl to marry a boy still unborn.[114] In some cases, when the girl's family was unable to provide for her, she was transferred to the home of another family where she would live until her marriage, a practice known as "foster daughter-in-law," although in actual fact she was their daughter-in-law to be. At the time of the promulgation of the law any foster daughter-in-law who was not yet married was free to choose another husband or return to her own family if she so desired. However, if she was already married, she could remain married or, if she so desired, she could request a divorce which was processed according to the law.

Another prohibition included in Article 2 was against the interference in the re-marriage of widows. In traditional China, if a man's wife died, it was considered normal for him to take another wife or a concubine, whichever he desired, but the widowed woman rarely

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Book of Odes, No. 158:

How does one make an axe handle?
Without an axe it can not be done!
How does one marry a wife?
Without a go-between it can not be done!—

Quoted in Robert H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. tiu 1644 A.D.* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1961), p. 19.

[114]There is a story related to this custom which tells of a young woman who demanded divorce from her "husband" who was so young that she carried him to Court in her arms.—Quoted in M.J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971), p 89.

remarried except when her husband's family could not support her. Her status was not necessarily inferior, especially if she had borne sons, but she was nonetheless considered the "property" of her husband's family. This prohibition against interference in the re-marriage of widows thus reduced the in-laws' hold on the woman and she was free to leave her husband's family after his death.

The last prohibition in Article 2 against the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriages brought an end to the tradition of selling daughters which was common, particularly among the poor peasants.

In the traditional marriage system it was expected that the daughter-in-law would serve and look after her in-laws, especially her husband's parents. Since the parents had usually paid for their daughter-in-law, they expected to have complete control and authority over her. The bride price not only reduced the status of women within the given family but also made women "objects" which could be bought and sold at will. Thus, as in the case of the other prohibitions included in this article, this provision erased the notion that woman was but "property" either of her own family or, of her husband's.

Article 4 placed the marriage age for the man at twenty years, and for the woman at eighteen years. This came only two years following the Nationalist Civil Code but, because it was more uniformly enforced and also because of the prohibition mentioned earlier regarding child betrothal, this gave greater freedom to young people. It also affected the relationship between the married son and the daughter-in-law with the parents and the family. First of all, the son was more economically independent at twenty and was thus less tied to his family. And, secondly, the more mature daughter-in-law was not as easily mistreated by her in-laws. Thus the traditional age-hierarchy was further weakened and the position of the mother-in-law, in particular, was reduced.

Article 6, the registration of marriage, was of utmost importance in changing the status of women. Not only did it insure that the prohibitions mentioned above were upheld but it legalized the institution of marriage, taking it out of the family context and putting it under the jurisdiction of the state. Thus, in keeping with Communist ideology, marriage and family life were no longer private affairs but public concerns which could be influenced, or perhaps even manipulated according to the will of Communist leadership. As the emancipation of women was a primary goal of the latter, this stipulation on the registration of marriage was highly significant.

Chapter III, "Rights and Duties of Husband and Wife," undoubtedly had the most effect on the status of women and the overall structure of Chinese society. Article 7 stating that husband and wife are to enjoy "equal status in the home" completely destroys the centuries-old tradition of the supremacy of men over women. Although there are still obvious discrepancies between the duties of husband and wife with the latter still being primarily responsible for the household chores, the mistreatment and abuse of women was brought to an end or at least

minimized. This new equality of husband and wife also further reduced the position of the mother-in-law since her daughter-in-law was no longer inferior to her and to her son.

Article 8 strengthens the effects of the requirement for the registration of marriage. It encourages the transfer of the institution of marriage and the family from the private to the public domain in stipulating that husband and wife are not only duty bound to "love, respect, assist and look after each other" but also to strive jointly for the building up of the new society. The goals of marriage are thus expanded to include not only the welfare of the family but also that of the state. In addition, the perpetuation of the patriarchal lineage is no longer the paramount and over-riding purpose of marriage.

Articles 8 and 10 giving the woman the right of free choice of occupation and free participation in work or in social activities, and equal rights in the possession and management of family property respectively, was crucial in improving her status. Women were no longer forced to make their homes and their families the center of their universe. They were able to work, to become educated, and to be involved in community activities. It must be emphasized here that the setting up of communal mess-halls, nurseries and other facilities which gave the women opportunities to engage in work outside the home, as well as the propagation of birth control measures, were essential conditions in aiding women and in reinforcing the principles founded in the Marriage Law. In addition, the women for the first time was able to own, inherit and manage her own property which gave her a previously unknown freedom. She could no longer be controlled and dominated by her husband since she had economic independence.

The effect of having the right to use her own family name which was also provided for in this chapter had an important psychological value. It helped the woman retain her own identity. It also enabled the woman to maintain her ties with her own family which was not possible in traditional China where the woman, once married, was often prohibited from returning even for visits to her own family. This article thus enhanced the wife's position in the home since she, symbolically at least, retained her own identity and was not overshadowed by her husband's family.

Another symbolic contribution to the change in the status of women came with the popularization of the new, more intimate, form of address between spouses, *ai jen* (literally, lover). This term is used reciprocally, indicating a newly desired equality between spouses.[115]

Chapter IV, regarding the relations between parents and children, did not substantially change the status of women except that given the new equality of status within the home the mother perhaps acquired greater authority in matters of child-rearing and discipline. It should be noted that parents continue to play the dominant role in early child-rearing and discipline. Even after children enter nurseries and schools,

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[115]Martin King Whyte, "The Family," *China's Developmental Experience*, ed. Michael Oksenberg (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 181

the vast majority live with their families, spend many of their free hours in family activities, and continue to receive substantial parental training and discipline.

Included in this chapter is the provision prohibiting infanticide. This provision was directed primarily towards female babies since they were often considered an economic liability in traditional China and were done away with greater frequency than male babies. It is unlikely that this custom persisted with great frequency at the time of the drafting of the Marriage Law but it was obviously considered important enough to warrant mention in the Law. Moreover, with the propagation of birth control and abortion which made it unnecessary to bring unwanted children into the world, the inclusion of this prohibition is somewhat of an anachronism.

Chapters V, VI and VII dealt with divorce, maintenance and education of children after divorce, and property and maintenance after divorce, respectively. In traditional China, divorce was virtually unheard of and the woman who did seek a divorce was either severely mistreated by her husband and his family or was ostracized from the community if she returned to her parents' home. In addition, since she had no rights to take her children or belongings with her and since employment for women was rare especially in the rural areas, she would often be left destitute if she tried to break away from her husband's family. Moreover, given the traditional ban on the re-marriage of women—widowed or divorced—she had no hope of finding another husband. Thus the woman in traditional China had no recourse out of an unhappy marriage except for suicide.

The "Divorce Law" changed all of these. Now the woman is free to seek divorce without fear of recriminations from her husband, his or her family, or the community. If she gets divorced, she has the chance to retain custody of her children (decided by mutual agreement or by the people's court) and is entitled to receive financial support from her former husband for their maintenance and education. Moreover, the wife retains such property as belonged to her prior to her marriage; the other property is allocated by agreement or by the people's court. If after her divorce, the wife has not remarried and has maintenance difficulties, her husband is duty-bound to assist her. It must have been assumed by the drafters of the Marriage Law that women in the early years after its promulgation would have difficulties in supporting themselves so in effect the law favored women. This is the only place in the Marriage Law where, in applying the general principle of "the protection of the lawful interests of women and children," where it is biased in favor of the woman. Since the woman is now protected by law there is reason to believe that suicide is no longer the only means of escaping from an unhappy marriage and the incidence of suicide must have been substantially reduced as a result.

This new freedom of marriage and divorce embodied in the 1950 Marriage Law spelled not only the improvement of the status of women, but has also had repercussions on the Chinese family system. First, the husband-wife relationship has become the center of the new family,

with the married son's parents occupying only a peripheral position. Thus the generational hierarchy has been shattered. Second, the size of the family has also been diminished since many married couples now live on their own and tend to limit the number of their offspring. Third, as has been shown above, the solidarity of the family organization has been weakened given the new independence of the married children. Fourth, there has been a break-down in the traditional kinship system since the perpetuation of the patriarchal lineage is no longer as important as it was in the past. And, finally, the welfare of the family has been subordinated to the welfare of the larger society. Thus the family lost its traditional position as the core of the Chinese social system.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the 1950 Marriage Law has had wide-ranging effects on all aspects of Chinese society, most significantly on the status of Chinese women. In the twenty-five years since the establishment of the People's Republic of China their position has completely changed.

With the introduction of Western values to China at the end of the 1800's, attitudes towards women began to change, at least among certain members of the intelligentsia. However, except for the Anti-footbinding Edict of 1902, no legislation was introduced to change the status of Chinese women during the early 1900's. The first legal break-through came with the promulgation of the Nationalist Civil Code between the Spring of 1929 and December 1930. This Code embodied provisions for equality between the sexes and one may speculate that were it thoroughly implemented and enforced, it might have had the same effects as the 1950 Marriage Law. However, since this code was never effectively implemented, it could not be considered as having contributed significantly to advancing the women's cause.

What precipitated actual changes in the status of women in pre-Communist China came as a result of the so-called "women's movement." Unprecedented changes that took place during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century carried with them the impetus towards "family revolution" that came along the rising tide of nationalism during the course of the May Fourth Movement. For the first time, there was in China a perceptible women's movement integrated into the larger movement for social change that swept the country during this period.

After the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, the leaders of the Party gradually became aware of the need for Chinese women to play an active role in the revolution. Throughout their administration of the Kiangsi Soviet and in the Border Areas, the Chinese Communists' policy on women's status was consistently applied. The experience which they gained in these areas prior to 1949 was invaluable when the People's Republic of China was established.

The emancipation of women was a vital concern of the Chinese Communist Party, not only because women were needed to support and

carry out the Revolution but more importantly, because the Revolution demanded as one of its crucial programs, the abolition of the male-dominated and anti-women institutions of traditional China. Viewed in this light, improvement of women's status was always an integral part of the transformation of China instigated by the Chinese Communist Party so that the Land Reform Program, promulgated almost simultaneously with the Marriage Law, was intended to furnish women's economic independence without which they cannot reap the benefits of the Marriage Law. The 1950 Marriage Law represents the culmination of the Chinese Communists' experience with marriage reform in the "red areas" and the embodiment of their ideology of sexual equality. As was pointed out earlier, there are echoes of the U.S.S.R. Code, the Nationalist Code and the legislation of the Kiangsi Soviet and the Border Areas, but there is no doubt that the 1950 Marriage Law is unique and a highly revolutionary document.

It is not surprising then that as China underwent a period of tremendous social upheaval in the early 1950's, the masses of the Chinese people must have felt that the changes came too quickly. Even the women who had the most to gain from these changes showed some degree of resistance. It was inevitable that the magnitude and swiftness of these changes had disruptive effects on economic productivity and often resulted in violent conflicts among the Chinese people. Consequently the policy was re-adjusted during the subsequent years into a somewhat slower pace of induced changes.

With this shift in policy the struggle to improve women's status was overshadowed in the early fifties by the struggle to improve economic conditions for all Chinese people. Nonetheless, even with this shift in emphasis, tremendous advances were made to achieve better conditions for women as a direct consequence of the introduction of the commune. For the commune freed the masses of women from the constraints of the home, their husbands and elders and enabled them to participate constructively in the agricultural life of the country. But in the late 1950's and early 1960's, whatever advances women achieved were arrested, and in some areas, even reversed by the revisionist line of Liu Shao-sh'i.

It was not until the launching of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the late 1960's that nationwide concern for the improvement in the status of women which was initiated during the Great Leap Forward was revived. The radical ideology of the Cultural Revolution gave new impetus to the political and economic mobilization of women all over China. There is no doubt that this mobilization of women under the impulse of the Cultural Revolution was successful, if not in removing, at least, in exposing to public censure the vestiges of anti-feminist attitudes and conditions current at that time. Indeed scores of Communists themselves were removed from office and were made to undergo "rehabilitation" precisely on the issue of how they stood on women's rights. Regardless, however, of the progress made during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution towards achieving a more egalitarian society, to the Chinese Com-

munist Party leadership, and especially to Chairman Mao, the present situation leaves much to be desired. In no uncertain terms Chairman Mao expressed concern over the pace, manner and direction of the Chinese revolution which to him has yet to achieve its ultimate goal of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." This apprehension on the part of Chairman Mao over the future of the Chinese Revolution which bewilders many Western sinologists does not, by any means, manifest lack of self-confidence nor does this betray a sense of insecurity on the part of the Chinese. Rather, more than the Chinese refusal to rest on their past laurels, this apprehension stems from the theory of "continuing revolution" inherent in Chinese Communist ideology. According to them the ultimate goals of the Revolution have yet to be reached which includes among others the fight for complete equality of the sexes.

The momentum of social, political, and economic reforms brought about by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has generated in the 1970's yet another phase in the women's movement. Again, instead of focusing exclusively on the plight of women, the issue is placed within the larger socio-cultural reform movement called the Anti-Confucius Campaign. In this most recent nation-wide campaign, no less than Confucius (the most influential Chinese philosopher in their five thousand years of civilization), is the target of attack. Apart from denouncing such Confucian teachings as elitism, hierarchical social structure based on wealth and privilege, the campaign is also directed against traditional Confucian attitudes about the inherent inferiority of women. It placed considerable emphasis on the reactionary nature of Confucian views of women. This is quite evident in many of their publications. The *Peking Review* for one, attest to the importance placed on weeding out the remnants of traditional prejudices on women and to inculcate in their place egalitarian ideals.[116]

After twenty-five years of intensive propaganda, from the first drive to implement the Marriage Law in May 1950 up to the present campaign against Confucius, the Communists have successfully improved the status of women and changed age-old attitudes from male domination to equality of the sexes. Still one can ask the question what the Chinese mean by "equality of the sexes." The importance which the Chinese Communist leadership attaches to the emancipation of women for both political and economic reasons has been discussed previously. But where does this emancipation lead to and what does the leadership expect of the "liberated" woman?

The answer to this can perhaps be found in the contemporary literature of the People's Republic of China which, as has been noted, often serves as a useful barometer of official policy. It is interesting to note that three of the most popular dramatic works in China today, "The Red Lantern," "The White-Haired Girl," and "The Red Detachment of

[116]Wen Fu, "Doctrine of Confucius and Mencius—The Shackle That Keeps Women in Bondage," *Peking Review*, No. 10 (March 8, 1974), and "Working Women's Struggle Against Confucianism in Chinese History," *Peking Review*, No. 10 (March 7, 1975), pp. 17-20.

Women," are all about women. However, they do not concern women's problems *per se* and are not placed in a contemporary setting. Instead they all take place in China sometime in the late 1920's to the early 1940's. Unlike the drama which emerged during the early years of the implementation of the Marriage Law which depicted some aspects of the Law such as the problems of arranged marriages, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, relations between husband and wife, and patriarchal authority, the themes of the more recent plays seem to be broader in scope. With the exception of the "White-Haired Girl" which portrays the traditional custom of the poor tenant peasant forced to sell his daughter to the landlord in order to pay his debts, there is no mention of those themes which predominated the literature of the 1950's.

Nonetheless, the message of these three works revolve around women whose characters seem to epitomize what the Communists would consider the "model" revolutionary female. These are women who fight against the injustices around them, whether they are affected directly as individuals or as a group, hence the women battle the landlord class or the Japanese soldiers. These works illustrate clearly what the Communists consider to be the fitting models of the ideal woman. All the heroines of the three plays are young, about seventeen years old, morally upright and are all heroic. Starting as innocent maidens and somewhat passive, they emerge through their struggles against oppressive forces as strong, independent, self-sacrificing revolutionaries. Perhaps it can be said here that the potrayal of these sterling characteristics of the heroines as models to be emulated is more important than the issues focused solely on the oppression of women.

How these characteristics of strength, independence, self-sacrifice and revolutionary spirit can be translated into the daily lives of the masses of Chinese women seem to be a major preoccupation as can be gleaned from the popular magazines and other publications. Besides fiction heroines, living models are often singled out for emulation. For example, Wang Hsiu-lan was lauded before the nation as an embodiment of Communist womanly virtue in the 1950's. She is typical of the organizational activists that the leadership still upholds. In this case, Wang Hsiu-lan held thirteen positions of responsibility all at the same time. Some of her positions that are mentioned show the range of her capabilities and responsibilities: Chairman of the Resident's Committee of Kungho Street, Chairman of the First Bricks Factor, People's Deputy of Anshan, Member of the Security Committee, propagandist of the party, Chairman of the Committee for the Elimination of illiteracy, propagandist of the Savings Department of the People's Bank, Member of the Executive Committee of the Anshan Municipal Women's Federation, Member of the Street Propaganda Committee, Deputy Director of the Sparetime Dramatic Club and Member of the Supervisory Committee of the Cooperative.[117]

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[117]Hsu Fang; "She Holds 13 Different Jobs!," *Women of China* (October 1, 1956), cited by Lowell Dittmer, "The Chinese Marriage Law of 1950: A Study of

In addition to her organizational ability, the "model" Chinese woman is expected to possess great physical strength. During the campaign to "emulate the People's Liberation Army" in the Cultural Revolution, both men and women were encouraged to model themselves on the selfless, dedicated revolutionary hero, Lei Feng,[118] for the Chinese feel that women are capable of developing the same characteristics as men, if not in actual physical strength, in developing their fullest physical capabilities.

Despite the tremendous advances which have been made in bringing about equality between the sexes in the last twenty-five years, it is obvious from the description of Chinese women in the 1970's that this equality is not yet complete. In fact, Mao Tse-tung himself admitted in the late 1960's that it was not yet possible to achieve complete equality between men and women.[119] He had found that sexist beliefs and values persist in the face of economic, social and political change. Mao then predicated that women will be truly equal only in the period of full communism.[120] It has been shown how the implementation of policies on sexual equality was influenced by the economic policies and conditions in China and how these two policies are invariably linked. Thus it may be hoped and expected that, with mechanization and industrialization in the countryside, the status and lives of the Chinese women will continue to improve.

The status of women in Chinese society will undoubtedly continue to change for the better in the future for the simple reason that they want it to be so. In the early years of women's emancipation only a handful of women were interested in changing their status but now this interest has become universal. The Chinese woman is longer "beginning to exist," as Mao Tse-tung stated in the mid-1960's; she does exist as a reality in Chinese society.

For all practical purposes, Chinese women today have achieved a high level of political, economic and social emancipation, one that would have been inconceivable in traditional China. The foundation for women's emancipation has thus been solidly established and it is now up to the Chinese women themselves to hold up their "half of the sky" in the continuing Chinese Revolution.

Elite Control and Social Change" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Chicago, 1967), p. 187.

[118]Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," *World Politics* (October 1973), pp. 73-74.

[119]Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 171.

[120]Leader, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

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THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN JAPAN: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Soon Man Rhim

The Position of Women in Traditional Japan

In pre-war times, the family as a unit, more than the individual, held a significant place in the Japanese society. The law reflected this state of affairs by granting the head of the Japanese family, the father, absolute authority over the other family members. Any one member of the family who defied the househead's authority was subjected to the law of "kandoo" (expulsion from the family)[1], the most feared of all punishments in old Japan.

In this patriarchal system, based on primogeniture, the eldest son, as the future head of the family, occupied a pre-eminent position. Among other things, he normally inherited the bulk of all family property. Naturally, it was his duty to care for the elderly parents and to look after the family line. Thus, if the male members of the traditional Japanese family were legally subject to the decisions of the household head in all important matters, it was even more true of the women in the family. A long-established custom in Japan, as in China and Korea, was that throughout her life a woman's duty was to follow three simple rules known as "three obediences": to her father when young, to her husband when married, and to her son when widowed.[2]

Within this family structure, sex differentiation and female inferiority were given emphasis from childbirth to adulthood. Thus, in the old practice, a female child was received with coldness by her parents "as to let her lie on the floor for three days". In contrast, a male child was given a soft cushioned bed and proper care. As they grow older, both boys and girls were made aware of the rule of separation between the sexes. Boys and girls were made to sit apart wherever they may be; girls were forbidden to touch men's belongings. This practice was so carried to its extreme that even in laundry, male and female clothing were not allowed to be hung on the same drying pole.[3] In other cases, a wife was made to observe the rule by walking behind her husband when going out with him.

Other more tragic conditions of women were seen in Japanese farming families. Here, the women were considered the least useful members of the family and during times of calamity or extreme poverty, the daughters were sacrificed for the sake of family survival. As Jack Seward pointed out in his observation:

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[1]R.P. Dore, *City Life In Japan: A Study of a Tokyo Ward* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1958), p. 101.

[2]Ernest W. Clement, *A Handbook of Modern Japan* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1907), p. 176 Cf. The West's Three K's: *Kinder* (children), *Kuche* (kitchen), and *Kirche* (church).

[3]Eisho Miyaki and Minobu Oi, *Nihan Joseisi* (The History of Japanese Women). (First rev. ed., Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobungkang, 1974), p. 144.

> The practice of *mabiki* or "weeding out" children, especially young girls at birth, was common for hundreds of years and is evidenced in the Japanese proverb, *"Ko wo suteru yabu ga aredo oya wo suteru yabu wa nai,"* or, "Although there is a bamboo grove where you can leave your babies to die, there is none where you can discard your parents".[4]

Such practice later aroused strong disapproval from many foreigners who then visited Japan that soon criticisms were heard. By the end of the 19th century however, the reformers listened to the reprobations of foreigners and only then was the practice of infanticide outlawed.

Other cases of preferential treatment for the family were seen in how the daughters were called upon to sacrifice their honor and enter brothels for the sake of saving their families. Once they were sold to brothel-owners, they were placed under long-term employment contracts and very rarely were they able to redeem their freedom. Jack Seward has further more to say about this:

> Japanese society recognized that these girls were innocent pawns in a struggle for survival. Their quiet acceptance of this fate, in fact, bespoke their willingness to abandon their personal dreams of having their own homes and families in order that their families might live. They were regarded with pity—and respect.[6]

They were still considered virtuous, because "filial piety", for the Japanese, was a higher virtue than "personal chastity".[7]

In marriage, a girl had no freedom to choose her mate. She was resigned to accept her parents' choice for her. In fact, early marriage was encouraged for the bride to adjust more easily to her new family's customs *(kafuu),* and be more oriented to her mother-in-law's instructions. "Submission to the mother-in-law's commands and clear absorption of her instructions were essential duties of the young bride".[8] Failure to learn the ways of the new family meant ostracism for the bride or a return to her original home. This practice became very common that it made a high divorce rate during the Meiji Period (1868-1912)[9].

In the case of better families, brides were given a copy of the marriage manual by Kaibara Ekken (a Confucian scholar of the fifteenth century) as part of her trousseau. The little book entitled *"Onna Daigaku"* (The Great Learning for Women), was written for the guidance of the new bride so that she might understand clearly what was expected of her. The book was popular to most parents of the upper

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[4]Jack Seward, *The Japanese* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 90-91.

[5]Jean-Francois Delassus, *The Japanese: A Critical Evaluation of the Character & Culture of a People,* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 116.

[6]Seward, *op. cit.,* p. 91.

[7]Clement, *op. cit.,* p. 179.

[8]Dore, *op. cit.,* p. 97.

[9]Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan's New Middle Class; The Salary Man and His Family in a Tokyo Suburb* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1968), p. 166.

class since it summed up clearly what they were to teach their daughters. Some of the moral instructions found in the text are as follows:

> "It is a girl's destiny, on reaching womanhood, to go to a new home, and to live in submission... Should her parents allow her to grow up self-willed, she will infallibly show herself capricious in her husband's house, and thus alienate his affection. The end of these domestic dissensions will be her dismissal from her husband's house and the covering of herself with ignominy.
>
> The only qualities that befit a woman are gentle obedience, chastity, mercy and quietness.
>
> A woman must consider her husband's home her own... However low and needy her husband's position may be, she must find no fault with him, but consider the poverty of the household [as that] which has pleased heaven to give her as the ordering of fate. Once married, she must never leave her husband's house.
>
> Never should a woman fail, night and morning, to pay her respects to her father-in-law and mother-in-law.
>
> A woman must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence. The great lifelong duty of a woman is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, she should be courteous, humble, and conciliatory... When the husband issues his instructions, the wife must never disobey them... She should look on her husband as if he were Heaven [him]self.
>
> The five worst infirmities that afflict the female are indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy, and silliness. It is from these that arises the inferiority of women to men. Women's nature is passive. As viewed from the standard of man's nature, the foolishness of a woman [lies in her failure] to understand the duties that are before her very eyes, [when she] perceives not the actions that will bring down blame upon her own enemy, estranging others and incurring their hatred... Such is the stupidity of her character, that it is incumbent upon her, in every particular, to distrust herself and to obey her husband.
>
> A woman should yield to her husband in the first place, and be herself content with the second place. It is necessary for her to avoid pride, even if there be in her actions aught deserving praise... to endure without anger and indignation the jeers of others, suffering such things with patience and humility."[10]

Thus, Kaibara's moral treatise became the ideal for girls in the traditional Japanese society. It made clear that a woman's pleasure and freedom did not come from asserting her independence but rather from learning to want to do what was required of her. In practice, the married woman was taught she could never fully repay her debt of gratitude she owed her husband, and thus, she was obliged to show her gratitude every day of her life. Whether she loved him or not was beside the point. She was to serve him like a slave would to her master. She was the first

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[10]Quoted in David and Vera Mace, *Marriage: East and West* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 72-74.

to rise in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. In the evening, her husband bathed first, the children next, and she last. She always had the last of everything even in food. From a western observation:

> "A Japanese, like a Grecian wife, was to her husband a faithful slave, 'something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse'; she was both a drudge and a plaything, to be cast aside as capriciously as a child throws away a toy."[11]

On the other hand, the Japanese husbands, took concubines other than their wives. They were never discreet about their affairs and often, they would even ask their concubines to live in the same house with their wives. The wife was simply to keep quiet and not to make any complaint. Any sign of jealousy was taken to mean disrespect or a display of bad manners. It was for this reason that as early as the wedding day, it was a common practice to place a wide, white headband on the bride's head called *"tsuno-kakushi"* or horn-hider. This symbolic rite was supposed to signify the hiding of the proverbial female horns of jealousy by the wife, a reminder that she was not to expect her husband to be faithful to her nor was she to be jealous of anything he did.

In the past, the Japanese wife constantly lived in fear of being divorced by her husband or be sent back to her parents under slight and flimsy pretexts. Her husband could easily divorce her by simply giving her the infamous *"mikudari-han"* (literally, "three-and-a-half lines"), a letter of notification of intent to divorce, only three-and-a-half lines in length. Later, all that was required was a trip to the ward or town office by the head of the family to obliterate the girl's name from the family register. "It was therefore possible for the girl's in-laws, at the slightest whim, to terminate her marriage."[13] More often than not, divorces were commonly initiated not by the husbands but by the mothers-in-law. Whenever trouble erupted between the man's wife and her mother-in-law, the wife was usually sacrificed. To the son, repudiation by his parents was far more serious than divorce from his wife. For the Japanese, the answer to the traditional question, 'whom should a husband save if his wife and mother were drowning?' was, 'his mother' because he could always get another wife. [14]

As in China and Korea, the following "seven reasons" were considered legitimate to warrant a divorce: 1) disobedience to father-in-law or mother-in-law; 2) barrenness; 3) lewdness; 4) jealousy; 5)leprosy or any such foul disease; 6) garrulousness and prattling; 7)stealing.[15] Thus, while it was easy for the Japanese men to rid themselves of their wives by divorce, it was virtually impossible for Japanese women to obtain separation. Moreover, if her husband

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[11]Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

[12]Pearl S. Buck, *The People of Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 77.

[13]Mace, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

[14]Vogel, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[15]Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

divorced her, her chances for another marriage was very slim. She then came to be called *"demodori"* (a girl who had gone and come back), and for this, she was rated "one notch above cripples and untouchables in the order of desirability".[16]

On adultery in old Japan, a strongly unfair treatment awaited the woman who committed the crime, even if her husband was guilty of the same. For example, if her husband proved unfaithful to her, she could not take legal action against him. On the other hand, if she was caught committing adultery, both she and her lover were to face the penalty of death or the wife was to be lynched by her husband.[17] On this double standard, Stephen and Ethel Longstreet made the following observation:

> He would often tell his wife of his pleasures outside the house and of the women with whom he copulated, away from her. A hedonist, greedy for his own gratifications, he was not to be berated for his vices. No wife would dare! Such was the old code, that she expected no fidelity, made no protest, for it was all too complex, contorted with tradition.[18]

In the case of death, prejudice against women was seen in the length of the mourning period required of the wife when her husband died. She was ordered by law to wear her mourning garments for thirteen months and to abstain from impurity for fifty days. On the other hand, in case of the wife's death, the husband was asked to mourn for only three months and abstinence for only twenty days was sufficient.[19]

Such was the discrimination against women in the social atmosphere of pre-war Japan. In marriage, divorce, and even in claims to property rights, women hardly existed as legal entities separate from their husbands. Attesting to this fact was the prevalence of Japanese proverbs hinting at women's inferiority:

"Onna wa mamono". (Women are demons.)

"Onna no saru-jie". (Woman's monkey-like wit.)

"Onna sannin yoreba yakamashii. (Three women together make a terrible clatter.)

"Onna wa sangai ni ie nashi". (A woman has no home in any of the three worlds.)[20]

"Shichinin no ko wo nasu tomo onna ni kokoro wo yurusu na! (Never trust a woman even though she has borne you seven children!)[21]

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[16]Seward, *op. cit.,* p. 85.

[17]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.,* p. 151.

[18]Stephen and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: City of the Senses* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970), p. 194.

[19]Clement, *op. cit.,* p. 98.

[20]In this respect Kurt Steiner explained: "Japanese women were. . . 'houseless in three worlds': while young and unmarried they belonged to their father's house, being subject to his will; they entered their husband's house upon marriage, pledged obedience to him and the head of his house; when the husband died, the oldest son usually became head of the house, and the widow was subject to his will." See his "The Revision of the Civil Code of Japan: Provisions Affecting the Family," *The Far Eastern Quarterly,* Vol. IX, No. 2, February 1950, p. 181.

[21]Seward, *op. cit.,* p. 84.

The Paradox in Tradition

In the beginning, Japan was a matriarchy. The legendary founder of the country was, in fact, not a god but a goddess—the Sun Goddess "Amateras-Omikami" (The Great Goddess Who Lights Up The Heaven). This symbolized the historic dependence of Japanese men upon women. In fact, during the ninth century and on to the Heian (Fujiwara) Period (794-1185), it was customary to see a matrilocal family wherein the husband moved in with his wife's family upon marriage. Thus, in history, we recount that eight empresses had reigned on the Imperial Throne of Japan. Among the most remarkable that ruled was the Empress Jingo for her martial valor and military exploits. As Seward wrote:

> About 200 A.D., the Empress Jingo, whose martial ways may have inspired our English word "jingoism", led Japan to its first successful foreign conquest (of part of Korea), a feat that no Japanese man was able to match for seventeen hundred years.[23]

During the thirteenth century, a few women also became legendary fighters and were immortalized in the popular Kamakura war tales. For example,

> The black-haired, fair-skinned Tomoe... was said to be a "match for a thousand warriors and fit to meet either God or devil". More than once, it was recorded, she had "taken the field, armed at all points, and won matchless renown in encounters with the bravest captains". In one fight, "when all the others had been slain or had fled, among the last seven, there rode Tomoe".[24]

From the above statement, we gather how the military role of women once gained them prestige as remarkably displayed in this account.

It is also significant to note that at the dawn of Japanese civilization, women played a key role in the development of artistic and intellectual life. From the 5th to the 12th centuries, life at the Imperial Court gravitated around women and their activities. Japanese literature was born from the pen of Japanese noblewomen. The first great work of Japanese literature, *"Genji Monogatari"* (The Tale of Genji), was written in early eleventh century by the brilliant woman novelist Murasaki Shikibu. This did not mean however, that she was the only prominent woman writer in her era. As Ivan Morris pointed out: "During the period of almost one hundred years that span the world of the Tale of Genji, almost every noteworthy author who wrote in Japan was a woman."[25]

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[22]Frank Gibney, "Those Exotic (Erotic) Japanese Women," *Cosmopolitan,* May 1975, p. 181.

[23]Seward, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

[24]Peter Swerdloff, et.al., *Human Behavior: Men and Women* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1975), p. 17.

[25]Quoted in Robert J. Lifton, "Woman as Knower: Some Psycho-historical Perspectives," in *The Woman In America,* Robert J. Lifton, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 29.

Lady Murasaki envisioned this fact when she wrote about the "sophisticated society" as a "world in which women not only moved as relative equals to men but even retained a certain superiority."[26] To this, one may well wonder what the women in those days particularly, the court ladies, thought of the condition of the irremediable inferiority of women in subsequent periods of Japanese history.

When then, was the beginning of the decline in the status of Japanese women? How did it occur?

According to Gibney, "as the unity of Imperial Kyoto was cracked, then shattered, and Japan plunged into a series of civil wars, so was the memory of the matriarchy."[27] It was at the beginning of the Muromachi Era (1333-1568) that Japan entered a period of worsening lawlessness and confusion. This was the time when the country descended into the second stage of feudalism and the government was unable to protect property. Landowners willed their estates to the single son strong enough to hold on to it, disinheriting daughters. As Gibney recounts:

> By the fifteenth century, the country was totally ruled by the principle of "might makes right". Woman retreated to a subordinate position within the home, but she built up the home, ultimately, as her castle, and men recognized it as her domain. The familiar pattern of the young wife coming to live with her husband's family, being tyrannized by her mother-in-law, has been justifiably a favorite of Japanese novelists.[28]

The inferiority of women began to be felt more palpably under the iron rule of the Tokugawa, a line of dictators who reigned for three centuries, from 1600 to 1868. During this period, "the government was ran partly on Confucian principles with many of its laws ethical in nature."[29] Confucian ideas on individual relationships in the family or in society had greater influence and impact on the rulers. One idea that appealed especially to the rulers was the emphasis on "the virtues of loyalty to one's superiors and filial piety."[30] As Confucianism controlled every aspect of socio-economic, political and cultural life in Tokugawa times, the lives of Japanese women became shackled by a Confucian moral code that required every female to obey her father when she was young, her husband after her marriage, and her son in widowhood. A woman was accounted to be "a creature born to obedience and to be basically inferior to man".[31] Later, Confucian moralists went so far as to proclaim women's defects: "intractability, bad temper, jealousy, slanderousness, and stupidity."[32]

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[26]Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

[27]*Ibid.*

[28]*Ibid.*

[29]John F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 2.

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]Cf. Mace, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

[32]Quoted in Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

It should be made clear however that during the Tokugawa regime, the idea of male dominance had been more deeply implanted by Buddhism rather than Confucianism. "Buddhism continued as before to be the dominant religion, overshadowing, and at times, assimilating the native Shinto."[33] It taught that woman was "the personification of all evil."[34] For the Buddhists, a woman was "a creature with the look of an angel on its countenance, but with a diabolical spirit in its inmost heart."[35] This was born out of the impression that "women were fundamentally more prone to sin than men, and that their only path to expiation lay in total subservience to the male element."[36] Thus, the Japanese women throughout the Tokugawa period were ordered to look up to their husbands as if they were lords and they were to be obeyed with fear and trembling. This began the enslavement of Japanese women within the feudalistic system of Tokugawa society.

It should be mentioned however that there were considerable differences in the subjection of women among the various classes in the Tokugawa society. There were the fixed and rigid class lines, the highest of which was the *samurai* (the warriors), followed by the peasantry, and lastly by the townsmen, artisans, and merchants. There were also two *pariah* classes: the *eta* and the *hinin.* The former was a hereditary caste performing several of the menial occupations that were taboo to the orthodox Buddhists such as slaughter of animals, execution of criminals, tanning and working of leather, and manufacture of footwear. The *hinin* was ascribed to individuals who had lost caste and thus, became beggars or criminals. Eventually, by the early Meiji Period (1868-1912). Both classes were abolished as legal entities in the antifeudal decrees. The samurai, the peasants, the townsmen, and the *eta* later became known as commoners.[37] It must be noted at this point that in the two lower classes (i.e., the peasants and the townsmen, the artisans and merchants), subordination of women was not as rigid as in the middle and upper classes. As Professor Chamberlain, who taught in Japan in the latter part of the 19th century, wrote:

> The peasant women, the wives of artisans and small traders, have more liberty and a relatively higher position than the great ladies of the land. In these lower classes, the wife shares not only her husband's toil, but his counsels; and if she happens to have the better head of the two, she it is who will keep the purse and govern the family.[38]

Based on the above observation, it can be surmised that the family's economy somehow affected the women's activities in the old

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[33]Embree, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[34]Quoted in Mace, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[35]*Ibid.*

[36]Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

[37]Herschel Webb, *An Introduction to Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 95-96. For further detailed discussion of the social classes of Tokugawa society, see Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, (New York: World Publishing, 1946), pp. 61-66.

[38]Basil H. Chamberlain, *Japanese Things* (Ruttand, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1974), p. 508.

Japan during the Tokugawa regime. An exception to this were the wealthy merchants who, although looked upon as the lowest class, emulated the highest *samurai* even in the matter of female subjection.

Such considerable differences in the treatment of women among the various classes of the Tokugawa society bore no special cases exempt from rule nor was there a difference in the degree of respectability toward women. The degree of liberty among women in the lower classes was greater only in terms of participation in menial activities but they were no more respectable than the others. This was due to the fact that the idea of female inferiority was deeply embedded in the consciousness of the whole Tokugawa society.

Women in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) and After

In 1867, the Tokugawa government fell and political power was returned to the Imperial Throne. Feudalism was abolished and the monarchy restored. In 1889, the emperor gave his people a constitution. The government abolished the *samurai* and the *eta* (untouchable) classes.

The era of the "Meiji" (Enlightened Government) sought modernization for all phases of the national life. The government accomplished industrialization and achieved military preparedness with great speed and efficiency. The most modern techniques in transportation and agriculture were established. In addition, education in modernized schools was made compulsory. "Ninety-eight per cent of the children were in school by the end of the Meiji period, a percentage considerably higher than that in the United States."[39]Schools for women were established in the seventies and eighties. Soon women gained legal rights to head households, inherit property, and initiate divorce actions.

Educational advantages for Japanese girls very largely increased. In 1885, for example, there were 600 students in nine girls' high schools, and in 1912, the total number of student population increased to 74,816 in 297 girls' high schools. These schools however simply offered vocational training. They were mainly structured "to educate young girls to become good housewives to their husbands, good mothers to their children".[41] They emphasized mostly the cultivation of such arts as flower arrangement, the playing of musical instruments, and the performance of the tea ceremony. Quite naturally, the education for girls was fittingly designed to exclude women from male activities.[42]

Just as Kaibara's "Onna Daigaku" (The Greater Learning for Women) was the standard text for female education under the Tokugawa regime, so, too, the Meiji Era (1868-1912) had its own "Shin

[39]Buck, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[40]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

[41]*Ibid.*

[42]Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

(New) Onna-Daigaku" by Mr. Fukuzawa, the famous educator. While showing the untennableness of the teaching of Kaibara's chauvinistic "Onna-Daigaku", Mr. Fukuzawa did not rush to the opposite extreme. He argued that women should not attempt to imitate men since they had their own spheres of activity and had to keep to them. As to education for girls, he stressed the necessity of giving them a thorough drilling in household duties. In relation to this, the "Sekai-no-Nihon" (The World's Japan) reviewed:

> They should have a knowledge of cooking; they should be taught how to make the most of money, how to manage servants, etc. Next to these things, he [Mr. Fukuzawa] attaches great importance to their being instructed in the laws of health. Among other subjects, botany is to be recommended as specially suited to the female mind. He further argues that women should be taught Economy and Law. He thinks that a knowledge of these subjects will tend to develop their general intelligence, and save them from becoming the creatures of emotion.[43]

Thus, higher education for women tended to concentrate on the acquisition of such accomplishments mentioned above. It is however, true that there was constant pressure for the entry of women into the professions which had been opened to them in the West. As R.P. Dore said:

> It achieved some considerable success; more intellectual and vocational higher educational institutions for women were founded; and medicine, school-teaching and nursing were fairly opened to them.[44]

Thus, in 1900, the English Normal School intended primarily to train young women to be efficient English teachers was established. The founder of the said school was Miss Umeko Tsuda, an exemplary product of the period in so far as being the type of "the new woman" at the time. (Miss Tsuda, at the age of eight, was the youngest of the first group of Japanese girls sent to the United States in 1871 to be educated there. Since her return to Japan, she tried to elevate the condition of Japanese women by founding a school primarily for them.)[45] Later, the Tokyo Woman's Medical School was opened and in 1912, this was developed into a full-fledged college for medicine and dentistry.[46] In 1901, another important institution for Japanese women was opened in Tokyo called the University for Women. This was founded "...to educate women to become good housewives as well as good mothers, and to cultivate the spirit of the *samurai* home."[47] On the whole, one can say that professional education for women was limited to home economics, music, art, education, medicine, and literature.

In view of these facts, it is clear that despite the popularization of education among women, not much progress was made accessible

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[43]Quoted in Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[44]Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[45]Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

[46]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-244.

[47]*Ibid.*, p. 243.

to them. Education for them was still devised to orient them to a subordinate position. Furthermore, women were taught not to assert for independence nor claim equality with men. In other words, it was not the purpose of education during the Meiji Period to liberate women and recognize them as respectable individual persons.[48] This concept prevailed even until after the Second World War.

With the institution of the new Civil Code however, legal rights for women to head households, inherit property, and initiate divorce actions were effected. Nevertheless, tradition or the unwritten law (which had always been the real basis of the family system) continued to dominate the social system of Japan. In fact, inheritance of property and succession to headship by women were shunned although their occurrence were not entirely absent. As to divorce, no legal provision was made for the husband or the wife to support the divorced spouse.

The inferior position of the married woman in Japanese life and law was clearly seen in a family situation known as *"shoshi"*, i.e., 'recognized illegitimate children'. Here, a man who had a child by a woman other than his wife and personally acknowledged by him automatically creates responsibility for the legal wife to accept the child *("shoshi")* as her own. She had no choice but to accept the responsibility as stipulated in Article 728.[49] As Kurt Steiner remarks:

> Thus adultery on the side of the husband, committed with an unmarried woman, was not only free of any sanctions of civil or criminal law—a status which encouraged the not uncommon practice of keeping a mistress—but the offspring could legally be forced upon the wife as if it were her own.[50]

Thus, despite the legal provisions for women's rights embodied in the new Civil Code, the inferior status of women remained unchanged.

With the onset of industrialization, employment opportunities for women also improved. For instance, weaving which used to be done by women in the home was later transferred to factories with modern machinery, thus, creating an increase in the demand for female workers. This was also true in cotton mills, match factories, tobacco shops, and many other such places of work. Employment was also opened to them in printing offices, in telephone exchange posts, in post offices, and railway ticket stations. Likewise, in hospitals and schools, Japanese young women were finding their sphere.

Such development however, affected only a small percentage of the nation thus making the majority of women dependent on male support. According to a 1914 survey, the women earned only 65% of the men's wage in the textile industry.[51] These girls had to pay for their room and board and for their working clothes, while the rest of their

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[48]*Ibid.*, p. 241.

[49]Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

[50]Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

[51]Yasuko Ito, *Sergo Nihon Josei si* (The History of Post-War Japanese Women), (Tokyo: Otzukishoten, 1974), p. 14.

savings were used for their transportation fares when vacationing to their respective hometowns. In most of their employment offices, working conditions were very poor. In the textile industry, for example, the workers were mostly young single girls who came from far away homes and were housed by employers in unhealthy small dormitories. They were forced to work 12 hours a day with only 30 to 40 minutes break period. Their private lives were closely watched by their supervisors, this including the inspection of letters sent to them. The purpose of such harrassment was to prevent them from escaping.[52]

In both artistic and literary fields, many Japanese women displayed their skill. Yet, the Japanese chauvinist culture hardly respected them. According to Frank Gibney:

> When the newspaper *Hochi Shibun* daringly hired a few women writers in the early 1900's, the editors kept quiet about it. "If it were known that women were the authors of the paragraphs read by the general readers"—it was explained—"silly prejudices would destroy the effect of the writing."[53]

Under these circumstances, a women's liberation movement began to emerge in Japan. It was, however, literally a struggle with its own heroines and standard-bearers. For instance, in September 1911, a literary association called *"Seitosha"* (or Blue Stocking) was born. Under the courageous leadership of Hirajuka Raicho, the association was launched to liberate women through the propagation of women's literature. In the first publication of *Seito,* the organ of the association, Hirajuka Raicho stated the following in its foreword:

> Originally, a woman was indeed like the sun and a free person in her own right. Now, a woman is like the moon. She lives depending on others and shines with the help of [an]other light. She is the moon, pale like a sick person.[54]

Such a moving remark drew sympathy from many women who were discontented with their own contemporary situation. This led to an increased demand for the magazine from the reading public. Although the magazine published only a thousand copies at the start, the circulation increased to three thousand copies in a year's time. In its subsequent publication, more articles featured women and problems concerning them. Hirajuka herself stated:

> The women in Japan wished to destroy the old moral code as well as the laws that were made by men for their own convenience.[55]

The later issues of *Seito,* especially the 1913 February and March issues of the said magazine, created an overwhelming controversy in Japan that its sale was prohibited by the authorities. The Japanese government felt that such agitations by the women's liberation

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[52]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.,* p. 215.

[53]Gibney, *op. cit.,* p. 181.

[54]Quoted in Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.,* p. 229.

[55]Ito, *op. cit.,* p. 12.

movement threatened the foundation of the traditional family system in Japan.[56] Under such a policy of suppression, one teacher was expelled from her school for having subscribed to the *Seito.*[57]

When the founder of the magazine, Hirajuka, married, another women's liberation activist named Ito succeeded her. However, because of government pressure, she was not able to continue the publication of the magazine. Thus, the magazine ceased publication in February 1916.

Later, in 1923, the government began its drive to sweep off activism in the country as part of the national security measure. All social activists were arrested. Ito, Hirajuka's successor for the defunct *Seito,* then married a man from the anarchist political movement, and for being active in the women's movement, she found herself blacklisted. Much later, the couple was reported to have been massacred by the military police.[58]

Such a move however did not silence the reformers. In fact, it raised mass protests before lawyers and publicists. Many of the reformists attacked the Civil Code of 1898 for still upholding the ideals of the old family system. They, then, urged "the liberalization of the family laws", and demanded "greater [liberty for] the individual, [freedom] from family control, and an enhancement of the position of women vis-a-vis that of men."[59] However, the reformers' efforts came to naught because of the strong reaction of the traditionalists.

In 1918, a rice riot was started by housewives who lived in fishing villages and in what used to be *eta* communities.[60] With the support of many housewives in various cities and localities, the riot spread through to the other vicinities and gained many sympathizers. In 1919, an Emergency Legal Commission of Enquiry was established to study the cause of social unrest and to make recommendations therefrom. In 1925 and 1927, the commission's recommendations were published. Accordingly, the commission recommended the following:

> The powers of the househead were to be lessened, parental control over marriage reduced, and the independence of women to be somewhat enhanced.[61]

These recommendations however were never implemented as the Army gradually gained power in the thirties. The voices of the reformers were silenced. The emphasis on traditional moral customs under the militarists once again relegated the women into the background.

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[56]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.,* p. 231.

[57]Ito, *loc. cit.*

[58]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.,* p. 232.

[59]Dore, *op. cit.,* p. 118.

[60]As discussed earlier, the Meiji Reformation of 1868 emancipated the outcasts theoretically, but barriers which separated them from the people who were above them were slow in coming down. Even today true social equality for the former *eta* is much more difficult to achieve. For example, intermarriage with *eta* is still frowned upon by Japanese of other classes.

[61]Dore, *loc. cit.*

The New Woman in the Post-War Japan

Change in the status of Japanese women has become more specially evident only during the post-war period. Their legal rights have broadened since then. The new Constitution of Japan (which was passed in 1946) provided for equality under the law and respectability of individuals. Other laws were passed abolishing discrimination between the sexes in conformity with the provisions of the said Constitution. Older women (20 years and above) were given the right to vote and to be elected to public office. Thus, in the same year (1946), approximately 67% of the women electorate casted their ballots, and 39 out of the 89 women candidates were elected to the National Diet. According to an official report on the women's participation in the elections at that time,

> Since then, through the elections of members of the House of Representatives, of the House of Councilors, and of the local assemblies, the voting rate of women has always been over 60%.[62]

Lately, however, there has been a decrease in the number of women candidates participating in both house and local elections. For example, in 1973, the number of women in the House of Representatives declined from 39 in 1946 to only 7, even as the House itself grew from 466 members to 491.[63] As of 1977, women representation remained low with only six women in the House of Representatives, and a little more in number in the House of Councilors. No explanation however has been given for the steep decline in women's participation.

Education, on the other hand, took the form of *coeducation* where both boys and girls combined in a class for formal learning. The popularity of coeducation became so influential that 85 per cent out of every one hundred public educational institutions in Japan are now *coed.*[64] This has given the girls more chances to get a higher education. Thus, girls almost equal boys in number as they move from junior highschool to senior highschool. Today, the percentage of women and men going to college is almost equal. Most girls however go to two-year junior colleges to study home economics, literature, and teacher training while the men fill up the four-year universities. Statistics show that in 1971, only 18.5 per cent of the four-year university students were female while in the junior colleges 83.2 per cent of the students were women.[65] This goes to show that in the Japanese society, there is still the common notion that junior colleges are the "finishing schools" for girls who, eventually are to become mothers and housewives.

Yet, with the introduction of better education for women, better quality employment has also been opened to them. Many more

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[62]Japan: Its Land, People, and Culture, compiled by Japanese National Commission for UNESCO (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1958), p. 229.

[63]William H. Horbis, *Japan Today: People, Places, Power.* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1975), p. 35.

[64]Delassus, *op. cit.,* p. 127.

[65]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.,* p. 261.

women have pursued their careers to professionalism because of this advancement in the national outlook of Japan.

> Thanks partly to increased educational opportunities and partly to the labor shortage in Japan. Women have become doctors, bureaucrats, professors, and businesswomen in numbers; their mothers, not to mention their grandmothers, would have thought fantastic.[66]

The entry of women into various kinds of occupations started during World War II when they were called to replace the working men summoned to the colors. After the war, however, more and more women began to take additional jobs. In 1948, the total number of working women reached about 3,000,000 and in 1970, it grew to about 10,960,000, then composing 33.2% of the total employment.[67] In 1976, the female population of the labor force reached 19,960,000, which was 38% of the country's labor force.[68]

During the ten years from 1960 to 1970, a most remarkable increase in the number of working women took place in the manufacturing industries, in the personal service industries, and in the wholesale and retail trades. This was also true in banking institutions, insurance, and real estate. Statistics in 1974 showed that more than 80% of working women concentrated in manufacturing, personal services, and in the wholesale and retail trades.[69] It should be noted at this point that before 1950, as in pre-war times, majority of the Japanese working women were engaged in agriculture and in forestry. With the growth of Japan's economy beginning 1955, the number of working women in agriculture and forestry greatly declined. In 1974, only 17% of working women remained in these industries.[70]

Today, Japanese women hold professional and technical jobs. Many of them have become teachers, doctors and pharmacists. Many others are in such fields as mass communications, advertising, foreign trade, and even science technology. New opportunities have recently been opened to them where only men used to occupy positions of authority. For instance, Midori Sato operates a detective agency that employs thirty people including her own husband. She is so well thought of that the Imperial Palace asked her to investigate the background of a young woman whom Crown Prince Akihito wanted to marry. Mrs. Sato received the order with approval.[71]

In 1974, Aiko Noda became the first woman to sit on Japan's High Court [equivalent to the United States' Court of Appeals]. Reflecting on her status, she stated:

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[66]Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

[67]Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

[68]*Fujinrodo no Chizujo* (The Actual Condition of Working Women), edited by Bureau of Women and Minors, Ministry of Labor (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1975), p. 5.

[69]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[70]*Ibid.*, p. 6.

[71]*The New York Times*, June 17, 1974, p. 36.

> Perhaps twenty years ago I was a pioneer. But these days, things are different and there are fewer obstacles for women.[72]

While there are a few other jobs that remain closed to women, the barriers to them are gradually disappearing as in Aiko Noda's case. However, it might be well to note that women constitute only 8% of doctors, half of 1% of lawyers, and 1% of civil servants in managerial jobs. They comprise half the elementary school teachers, but only 1% of all elementary school principals. Moreover, despite the law of equal pay for equal work, the pay for Japanese women averages only one-half that of men, and men get all the choice positions. [73]

In discussing today's Japanese women in employment, we cannot help but think of the traditional Japanese society, in which a girl from a good family would rarely have been permitted to work before marriage. Nowadays, work outside the home is the norm even for well-to-do girls. As Paul F. Langer points out:

> They are eager to escape the restrictions of the home, have fun and gain sophistication—and perhaps, a husband—through employment in one of Japan's modern, large-scale enterprises. Such girls are swelling the ranks of what the Japanese call 'BG' (an abbreviation of the Japanese-coined words 'business girl', meaning a girl working in a business enterprise). Smartly dressed and made up, they set the style in the larger cities today.[74]

Thus, as we can see, today's Japanese society has shed off its prejudice against the working women.

The position of Japanese women in marriage has also been liberalized since the war. Since 1947 the principle of equality between the sexes has been established in relation to freedom of marriage and divorce, property and inheritance rights, parental rights, and so forth. By law, parents may not force their children into marriage against their wishes. Parental consent is no longer required for marriage over the age of twenty, and below that age, the consent of one parent will suffice.

Divorce, on the other hand, is no longer a unilateral act of the husband. According to the new Code, infidelity by the husband, not only by the wife, can be a ground for judicial divorce. Women can now therefore obtain a divorce as easily as men. Alimony as well as other forms of settlement are now as commonplace as they are in the United States.

As for inheritance to property, equal division between children of both sexes has become the basis for partition, with a reserved portion for the surviving spouse. The new provision also removes from the husband his previous power to restrict his wife's exercise of property rights. It has also abolished the *"shoshi"*, (illegitimate children of the husband which the old Code required the legal wife to recognize as her

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[72]Quoted in *ibid.*

[73]Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[74]Paul F. Langer, *Japan: Yesterday and Today*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 175.

own). Husbands and wives now cooperate together and determine their place of residence by mutual consent. Where once, only the father was the sole authority under the law, parents now share authority in the upbringing and education of their children. The new Code eliminates the position of the househead and his power over other family members.[75]

Aside from the legal changes discussed thus far, there is no discrimination between the sexes regarding freedom of assembly, association, and speech. Japanese women have begun to organize themselves into political, religious, and economic groupings such as, the Housewive's Federation, the League of Women Voters, YWCA, WCTU (the Women's Christian Temperance Union), the Council Regional Women's Clubs, the Council Widow's Organization, etc. Today, "two thirds of the female population belong to some kind of an active women's association,"[76] and their collective voices are heeded to an extent undreamed of in pre-war days.

All these changes have proclaimed the equality of the sexes in matters pertaining to marriage and the family as provided for in the new laws. Yet, it is hardly believed that the emancipation of Japanese women can be realized by a mere change in the laws. To this, Kurt Steiner comments:

> . . . a system that is as strongly entrenched in the past and has as far-reaching ramifications as the Japanese family system cannot be altered by the strike of the pen of any lawmaker.[77]

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the enactment of the new laws has had considerable effect in elevating the status of Japanese women.

In addition to the legal protection and safeguards afforded to women, technological changes have also freed the Japanese housewife from much drudgery which used to keep her busy in the house all day. The introduction of modern house appliances has given her more free time. Electrical appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines have minimized the time spent on shopping and laundering. Television has been of tremendous support in the emancipation of Japanese women.

On the whole, the increase in social mobility associated with urbanization has weakened the traditional extended family concept—"the elaborate, many-generationed structure of siblings and in-laws and adopted sons, of 'main families' and 'branch families' ruled by *paterfamilias* on the principles of unbroken family line and inheritance by the eldest son".[78] Consequently, many young couples are now setting up

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[75]Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 119. For a summary of these legal changes, see Steiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-184.

[76]Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

[77]Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[78]Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

their own nuclear family—a family comprising of the married couple and their children. Thus, in 1965, it has been observed that the average number of persons in a household was 4.05 but this decreased to 3.7 in 1972.[79] This change brought about by the nuclear family set-up has not only liberated the Japanese housewife from the harshness of her mother-in-law but also facilitated her in the management of her household duties.

The government, on the other hand, has introduced family planning in the country and encouraged couples to practice birth control. Thus, in more recent years, the birth rate in Japan has only been about 17 per 1,000, one of the lowest in the world.[80] As one foreign observer notes:

> Nowadays, a great many Japanese women have themselves sterilized after their first or second child. The pill is gaining ground, and consequently, abortions are becoming less frequent. This wholesale acceptance of birth control, unique in world history, has been so successful that the government, faced with a possible depletion of the national work force, is considering a change of policy.[81]

Because of the many changes in the Japanese life structure, Japan's social values have also altered. Relations between the sexes have unquestionably become far freer than they had been. Men sometimes do the dishes, and it is commonplace to see young couples stroll hand-in-hand through city streets, a thing unheard of in the past. Young boys and girls gather in coffee shops for long hours. They roar noisily around town on motorcycles. Many young Japanese women, too, are no longer wearing the kimono but jeans. In fact, the latter has become an integral part of the Japanese lifestyle.[82] Among other things, the women have increasingly become open about their sexual lives and often, they bring up their sexual problems without inhibition. Many women's magazines have taken the liberty to publish articles and surveys on sex and the young girl. One such magazine which became popular throughout Japan is the *Fujin-Korong*. It published such articles as "What is Sexual Freedom?", "Women Can Love Many Men At the Same Time", "The Reason for Recommending Wife-Swapping", "Happy Divorce I Have Experienced", etc.[83] Today, modern Japanese girls jokingly summarize the qualifications of an eligible boyfriend in a cynical phrase: *"Iye tsuki, car tsuki, baba nuki"*, (with a house, with a car, without an old lady).[84] The modern Japanese wife, too, has gained control of the household finances. In fact, she has become the target of the consumer-marketing man. As Frank Gibney puts it:

> She controls most of the money. Today, in almost ninety per cent of Japanese households, the husband brings home his monthly pay

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[79] *Time*, June 5, 1972, p. 40.

[80] Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] *The New York Times*, June 8, 1976, p. 29.

[83] Cf. *Fujin-korong* (The Woman's Public Opinion), May 1976.

[84] *Time*, June 5, 1972, p. 40.

> envelope and turns it over to the wife. She doles out his pocket money, decides about purchases, and does most of the buying.[85]

All these changes have somehow shocked those of the older generation who vividly remember Japanese women to be withdrawn, silent, subdued. Representative of this contemptuous feeling toward the new Japanese woman is the impression best described by Shoichi Yokoi, the Japanese Imperial Army corporal who lived in a cave in Guam for 28 years, and only emerged from that hiding place in January, 1972. *Time* magazine reported on this as follows:

> Youth is not the only group that Yokoi finds dismally altered. Women, he rages, have become "monsters". Virtue has "all but gone from them", and so has gentleness—"they screech like apes". In Tokyo, right after his return from Guam, he saw a woman who proved typical of many [modern] Japanese females. "She was in what is known as a mini. Her hair was dyed red, her fingernails were painted, and her eyes were so shadowed in purple that she looked like a ghost. She was everything I didn't dream about in the jungle."

The magazine went further as to say:

> What he did dream of was the kind of girl he knew before he was shipped off to war: "Then women were everything that made life blissful for men—virtuous, obedient to commands from menfolk, lovely to look at, gentle and retiring.[86]

The Tenacity of Old Custom

After the war, nothing in Japan has changed so much as the woman. Yet, the position of women in Japan especially in villages and rural towns, continue to follow tradition and its norms. The husband is still supreme in his house. The wife never calls her husband by his first name but addresses him with the honorable title due him as "Sir". The father, as head of the household is served first at meals. In the family bath, the husband and then the sons have absolute priority at the pinewood bathtub or at the ceramic basin. In turn, the father receives with a nod the deep bows of his family.

According to an American's observation, there are still many practices in Japan which make the women rank second to men. For example, when her husband receives guests in their home, the wife, most of the time, eats in the kitchen. In this respect, an American described his own experience as follows:

> Within five days after first reaching Japan, I was guest for dinner in a Japanese house at which the wife did not feel entitled to eat with the men, talked animatedly with her husband but said "yes" to his every remark, and trotted rather than walked back and forth to the kitchen.[87]

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[85]Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

[86]*Time*, September 18, 1972, p. 67.

[87]Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

The same American cautioned American women newly arriving in Japan that "if they board elevators first, as is the custom at home, they bump into men who are boarding first as is the custom in Japan."[88] Thus, it is common practice in Japan for a woman to step back to allow her husband to go first, and even in buses, she would be the one to let him take the last empty seat on the subway.

Discrimination In Employment

While it is true that the Japanese working women today enjoy legal protection and other safeguards, one can still witness residual forms of discrimination in many employment firms. This can be observed not only in the area of salary or finance but also in more subtle patterns which include relegating women to serving tea and waiting on men in various ways. As Horbis explained:

> The most scandalous evasion is the "thirty and out" custom, whereby employers fire white-collar women at that age or earlier on such grounds as that girls are just "office flowers" whose job (as one feminist puts it) is "to meet guests, to be charming and young, and to pour the tea."[89]

It is not surprising then that women rarely move on to senior jobs and are often denied promotions equal to that of men. In another occasion, a small group of lawyers and feminists were recently pressing for the dismissal of a law school dean for his statement that women lawyers should get out of the legal profession and stay home. Judging from reports filed with the investigating committee by four professor-judges, male chauvinism indeed continue to prevail even in career practice:

A: "I dont like girls to study because girls who like to study are not charming. That is my personal opinion."

B: "I think it is better for women to become housewives and mothers than to become businesswomen, because to marry and have children is a very valuable task. I recommend that women not be lawyers. It is the traditional Japanese system."

C: "If a woman requires maternity leave, her male colleagues have to work harder, so men judges don't welcome women lawyers as judges. If women have the will to achieve difficult tasks, they should study harder and have more ability than men."[90]

The Divorce Constraint

On the matter of divorce, the technicalities are very simple. If the couple agrees on the divorce, they just march down to their local ward office and submit a form that has been signed by two adult witnesses. The cost is minimal. However, the social stigma it carries brings a kind of humiliation or "loss of face" to the divorcees. This is true in Japan more than in anywhere else. For this reason, the divorce rate in Japan is

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[88]*Ibid.*

[89]*Ibid.*, p. 36.

[90]Quoted in *Paterson News,* October 27, 1976, p. 13.

lower (one out of ten) than that of the United States (one out of three).[91] Of course, divorced women can still make their way in Japanese society. But it is very difficult in Japan where male prerogatives are still all pervasive. It "is thus liable to discourage all but the most unhappily married or the strongest in character."[92]

The marriage factor

Love marriages in modern day Japan are gaining in popularity. The Imperial family itself set an example in this respect. Crown Prince Akihito reportedly first met Michiko, the lady who later became his wife, at a tennis court in a fashionable mountain resort near Tokyo. Despite existing social barriers at the time for romance between two persons of different social class levels, love bloomed between them which later led to marriage plans. Akihito succeeded in marrying the woman he loved despite opposition from court conservatives.[93]

In most cases, however, marriages in Japan (roughly two out of three)[94] are still arranged by the families. Many Japanese men marry the woman their parents have chosen for them and for this reason, they are prone to keep family and romantic love separate, as was the case in the traditional Japanese society. Thus, it has become commonly accepted for Japanese men to fulfill their romantic love through their relationships with other women. The Japanese women, on the other hand, are simply forced to put up with the still existing double standard.

The suppression of prostitution

Another indicator of the women's status in Japan can be seen in the vicissitudes of prostitution (one of the Japanese words for which is *baishun,* or "selling spring"). Historically, the brothels in which the Japanese girls worked were mostly concentrated in the regulated areas throughout the country. These were often surrounded by walls or moats, like Tobita in Osaka and Yoshiwara in Tokyo. Yoshiwara became the most famous in Japan and lasted from the early 1600's until its end by government decree on the first day of April, 1958.

> In its heyday, it was a city within a city, with fine shops and all the sources of supply and service it needed to function as a municipal entity. Called the Fuyajo (the castle that knows no night), it closed its gates at midnight, which was the hour of curfew, but the revelers trapped within merely continued their bacchanalia until the gates were opened again at six o'clock the following morning.[95]

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[91]Horbis, *op. cit.,* p. 34.

[92]*The New York Times,* May 6, 1975, p. 44.

[93]*The New York Times Magazine,* September 26, 1971, p. 64.

[94]Delassus, *op. cit.,* p. 127. Today there has been also an amalgamation of old tradition (arranged marriage) and modern custom (love marriage). Son or daughter falls in love and then he or she asks parents' consent or approval. If they consent, then marriage takes place.

[95]Seward, *op. cit.,* p. 91. For a detailed discussion on Yoshiwara in Tokyo, see Longstreet, *op. cit.,* pp. 9-225.

The prostitutes confined to the environs of Yoshiwara were almost similar to the birds in the cage. They could leave Yoshiwara for only two reasons: "to visit dying parents or, in a group, to see the cherry blossoms in Ueno, which betokens the importance of cherry-blossom viewing in the Japanese scheme of things".[96]

As the status of women was rising after the Second World War, Japanese wives began to cry out against money spent on geisha parties, bar girls, and whores.[97] A vocal minority of Japanese housewives demanded that the government take steps to abolish legalized prostitution, including, of course, Yoshiwara. In 1949, laws were already introduced to abolish Yoshiwara and all places like it but it was only in 1958 that prostitution was forbidden and finally abolished.

Oddly enough, according to the Anti-Prostitution Law, it was a crime for a woman to sell her body, and yet it was not a crime for a man to pay for the pleasures it offers him. In 1966, therefore, Japanese women tried to correct this oversight. They worked for the passage of a bill that would make it illegal for a man to buy the services of a prostitute or even to ask anyone to help find such a woman. Nevertheless, the bill was vetoed, mainly for the reason that Japan's male lawmakers were in no mood to consider any extension of the Anti-Prostitution Law.[98]

The abolition of Japan's red-light districts did not eliminate the prostitutes. Most of the former prostitutes worked "underground", rendering their services in the guise of masseuses, girl guides, Turkish bath attendants, waitresses, cabaret hostesses, and models at nude-posing studios. Today those who work with pimps find themselves slaves to masters more heartless and demanding than any Yoshiwara brothel-keeper.

The degradation of Japanese women in the past was also seen in the aspect of tourism. Accordingly, she was an entertainment guide to Japanese night life. This created an impression about modern Japanese girls available to the tourist who thinks of himself as a sensualist:

> Japanese woman is a national treasure. At her best, she is a living art form... and much too good to be true. But she is true... Japan puts armies of young women to work in factories and offices, but it also employs thousands more like lilies of the field, neither to toil nor spin, but mainly to gladden the heart and beautify the scene.[99]

This sounds outrageous to those who regard and treat women as human beings.

Japanese men on the other hand, with their history of exploitation of women in previous years have not gotten over their hedonism that they seek satisfaction elsewhere, even outside their own country,

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[96]Seward, *loc. cit.*

[97]It should be noted that unlike a prostitute, a geisha and a bar girl do not usually earn their living by sexual favors.

[98]Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[99]Quoted in Longstreet, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

especially the neighboring countries. Of course, sightseeing could be one prevalent motive for the Japanese when touring Europe or the United States, especially where groups include both husbands and wives. Nevertheless, many groups who go to nearby countries in Asia are mostly made up of men. In this case the motive of their desire to travel is aptly phrased in "a little wander plus a lot of lust".[100]

A description of Japanese tourists written by a Japanese newspaperman in Bangkok, Thailand states:

> ...group tour-guides [lead them] there, with flags held high, commonly march their platoons into bordellos and crisply call out the numbers of rooms to which each man has been assigned.[101]

In South Korea, Japanese men seek out *kisaeng* (Korean counterpart of the Japanese *geisha)* parties. Some indignant girls from a Christian Women's University went so far as to stage a demonstration at the Kimpo Airport in Seoul against Japanese *kisaeng* tourism. Their placards made this appeal:

> Morals are corrupted and personalities degraded just to earn foreign currency... Stop the prostitution tours that are turning our fatherland into a red-light district for Japanese men.[102]

Their protest was soon taken up by women in Japan who staged a similar demonstration at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. The Japanese women carried placards "pleading with the 'sex animals' to 'feel ashamed,' and to cease and desist from 'prostitution sightseeing.' "[103] Despite this joint Korean-Japanese women's struggle, the same malpractices are still going on.

Considering these facts, Japanese men still seem to think it their privilege to have sex outside the home. Pearl Buck who is well versed in Japanese culture, ruefully observed: "The Japanese man has not yet learned to enjoy woman as a human being."[104]

Thus, it is obvious that the supremacy of the male still holds in all areas of Japanese life.

Conclusion

The tradition of male dominance did not always prevail in old Japan. There had also been clear-cut matriarchal overtones at times in the distant past. The Japanese women also once played important roles in various fields of their society based on a matriarchal system. Their privileged status however declined throughout the Feudalistic Age which lasted until Japan decided to open her doors to the outer world

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[100]Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

[101]*Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

[102]Sekai, ed., *Letters from South Korea,* trans. by David L. Swain (New York: IDOC/North America, 1976), p. 86.

[103]Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

[104]Buck, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

in the middle of the 19th century. Then she began to emerge as one of the modern nations since the middle of the last century yet her women were still placed in the lowest position of society.

It was only after World War II that Japanese women were liberated legally and spiritually from the old bondage of the family system. For the first time in history, Japan allowed her women to know and to enjoy their human rights. With the legal promulgation of the new Constitution and new civil laws, women are now guaranteed the right to participate in various activities in their society on an equal basis with men. Although their numbers are still small, women now play important roles in many fields.

Yet realistically speaking, old attitudes die hard. The customs of the centuries and inherent traditions cannot be changed easily by Western example or by constitutional decrees or amendment to labor laws. Tradition has placed it on women to be just as mothers and wives and this has so far been a formidable block to the big and radical liberation movement. It is also true that today's Japanese women are slowly becoming more aware of their disfavored status. This self-awareness however, should be considered a hopeful sign that the Japanese women may, in the future, eventually liberate themselves. The passions that sparked the American feminist movement in the recent past may yet have to be seen in Japan.

THE CHANGING FEMALE LABOUR FORCE IN SINGAPORE

Cheng Siok-Hwa

Introduction

The data used in this study are taken from the two Population Censuses held in 1957 and 1970, the Sample Household Survey conducted in 1966, and the annual Labour Force Survey conducted in 1974 to 1976.[1] In all these sources the labour force approach was utilized to identify and collect the labour force statistics, thus providing comparability among all the series of data included in this paper. Briefly, in this approach all persons aged 10 and over were asked to state whether they were working and, if not, whether they were actively looking for work during the reference week. Those returned as working or as not working but looking for work during the reference week were included in the economically active population. Those who were working constituted the employed and those who were not working but looking for work, the unemployed. The former group included persons who were actually working as well as persons who had jobs but were absent from work during the reference week because of sickness, leave, strike, bad weather, etc. and would be returning to work in good time. The unemployed group comprised persons who had worked previously and were looking for a job as well as those who had never worked before and were looking for a job for the first time.

In attempting to evaluate the changes in the female labour force, it is important to bear in mind that the pool of manpower available in a country for the production of goods and services is determined by a variety of demographic, social and economic factors. The size of the total population and its composition with respect to sex and age set the maximum limits to the number of persons who can participate in economic activities. Other factors such as the race composition of the population, the degree of urbanization, the proportion of married women, and traditional attitudes towards working women and working children have a considerable influence on the proportion of the population that will, in practice, be represented in the labour force. Among the more important economic factors are the industrial pattern of the economy, the mode and organization of production, and income per head of population. By and large, demographic factors are the major determinants of the size of the male labour force since by convention and for economic reasons nearly all men are engaged in some form of gainful work from the time they reach adulthood until retirement age. On the other hand, socio-economic factors seem to have a more varying influence on the size of the female labour force.

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[1]The reports containing these data are (a) S.C. Chua, *State of Singapore: Report on the Census of Population 1957,* Singapore: Government Press, 1964, (b) P. Arumainathan, *Singapore: Report on the Census of Population, 1970,* Vols. I and II, Singapore: Department of Statistics, 1973, (c) Ministry of National Development, *Singapore Sample Household Survey,* 1966 Singapore: Government Printer, 1967, and (d) Ministry of Labour, *Report on the Labour Force Survey of Singapore, 1974-1976,* Singapore: Government Printer, 1977.

General Trends

The female labour force in Singapore has been particularly affected by the double-digit economic growth rates registered in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Average annual GNP growth rates for the years 1966 to 1973 was 13 percent at constant 1968 prices. The recent world recession caused by the oil crisis did not adversely affect the economy of Singapore as much as those of some countries since modest growth rates of 6.3 percent in 1974 and 3.9 percent in 1975 were recorded. Economic recovery in late 1975 continued into 1976 which managed to register a growth rate of 6.8 percent. However, economic performance in recent years has only a minor effect on the female labour force which has by now undergone radical changes brought about by the high growth rates of the earlier years through mainly development of the manufacturing sector. It was this particular development strategy that provided great employment opportunities to women workers, enhanced in some ways by the introduction of national service for boys in 1968 which kept boys aged about 18 to 21 temporarily out of the labour market. In fact, just prior to the oil crisis the economy had experienced a critical shortage of labour which was solved partly by various measures encouraging more women to work and partly by utilizing immigrant labour from Peninsular Malaysia.

The above points should be borne in mind in interpreting the general trends in the female labour force presented in Table 1. The proportion of women in the labour force increased slowly during the nine years from 18.0 percent in 1957 to 23.1 percent in 1966, after which it increased somewhat faster to 25.8 percent in 1970. In the next four years the proportion of women increased even faster to reach the peak of 32.2 percent in 1974. The retrenchment of some women workers from mainly the textile and electronics factories during the worst recessionary year caused the proportion to dip to 30.2 percent in 1975. As the

Table 1

Distribution of total and female population aged 10 years and over by economic activity status, 1957-1976

Activity status	*1957*	*1966*	*1970*	*1974*	*1975*	*1976*
Economically active						
Both sexes	480,267	576,666	726,676	858,393	878,977	910,929
Females	86,470	133,174	187,453	276,094	263,772	286,433
% female	18.0	23.1	25.8	32.2	30.2	31.4
Economically inactive						
Both sexes	428,838	785,555	831,842	910,213	910,423	946,004
Females	362,617	540,315	573,903	605,173	627,715	633,888
%female	75.1	68.8	69.0	66.5	67.5	67.0

economy recovered the proportion went up again to 31.4 percent in 1976. The upward trend over the long-term is clear enough. In fact, between 1957 and 1976, the number of women in the labour force increased by 231 percent whereas the number of men increased by only 59 percent. At the same time, the proportion of women among the economically inactive population declined from 75.1 percent in 1957 to 68.8 percent in 1966, around which figure it hovered by a couple of percentage points in subsequent years.

Participation by Age

From Table 2 it can be seen that the female labour force is made up of a large proportion of young women. The younger age groups increased in importance over the years while at the same time the older age groups decreased proportionately. This is partly a reflection of the comparatively young population in Singapore.

Table 2

Distribution of female labour force by broad age group, 1957-1976

Age group	*1957*		*1966*		*1970*		*1976*	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
10—19	18,765	21.7	29,221	21.9	55,621	29.7	65,586	22.9
20—29	21,856	25.3	45,038	33.8	74,279	39.6	135,151	47.2
30—39	14,392	16.6	22,412	16.8	25,954	13.8	41,017	14.3
40—49	17,429	20.2	15,725	11.8	14,943	8.0	25,895	9.0
50 & over	14,028	16.2	20,778	15.6	16,656	8.9	18,784	6.6
Total	86,470	100.0	133,174	100.0	187,453	100.0	286,433	100.0

The most important age group is the 20-29 age group which accounted for about a quarter of the female labour force in 1957, and increased its proportion steadily and by 1976 accounted for almost half. The two age groups under the age of 30 accounted for an increasing proportion of the female labour force beginning with 47.0 percent in 1957, rising to 55.7 percent in 1966, 69.3 percent in 1970 and 70.1 percent in 1976. The youthfulness of the female labour force reflects the greater tendency to work or to look for work among the young females on the one hand and the greater availability of jobs for younger women on the other.

The trend towards increasing female participation in the labour force is again brought out in Table 3 which shows that in 1957 19.3 percent of all females aged 10 years and over were economically active. The proportion rose to 19.8 percent in 1966, 24.6 percent in 1970, and 31.1 percent in 1976.

On the whole, the age groups below the age of 40, except for the first age group of 10-14 years comprising mainly of schoolgirls, experienced increases in economic participation rates during the years under consideration. But the age groups over the age of 40 experienced a decline in participation rates, usually reaching a low point in 1970 before rising again in 1976, except for the age groups between 50 and 64 years which did not recover in 1976. The rise in participation rates is most marked in the 20-24 age group where the rates rose by almost three times from 1957 to 1976, that is, from 22.9 percent to 67.4 percent.

Table 3

Age-specific female activity rates, 1957-1976

Age group	*1957*	*1966*	*1970*	*1976*
10 — 14	5.2	1.9	2.8	1.8
15 — 19	23.4	25.5	43.0	42.2
20 — 24	22.9	40.9	53.6	67.4
25 — 29	16.5	25.9	30.8	48.2
30 — 34	17.3	21.0	22.7	32.9
35 — 39	20.8	19.2	19.3	29.1
40 — 44	26.3	21.9	17.8	26.6
45 — 49	30.1	20.4	17.5	20.6
50 — 54	28.8	24.4	17.5	17.3
55 — 59	24.7	23.2	16.2	12.1
60 — 64	17.1	18.5	13.4	11.1
65 — 69	10.5	11:7	9.8	12.0
70 — 74	4.7	6.4	5.7	5.7
75 & over	2.1	1.9	2.1	3.8
Total	19.3	19.8	24.6	31.1

In 1957, the most active age group was the 45-49 age group, whereas in the three later years under study the emphasis shifted to the 20-24 age group. In 1957 (see Figure 1) the age-specific activity rates show a bimodial structure with the first peak at the 15-19 age group, and the second and higher peak at the 45-49 age group, and a dip in between reaching its lowest point at the 25-29 age group. This bimodial characteristic became less obvious in 1966 when the 20-24 age group peak was higher than the later peak at the 50-54 age group. The 1970 graph shows a sharp rise to a high peak at the 20-24 age group and a sharp fall to the 30-34 age group after which the fall was more gradual; the later second peak, however, was no longer present. In 1976 the 20-24 age group rose to an even higher peak, followed by a sharp fall at first and then a gradual fall.

Several inferences may be drawn from a close examination of Table 3 and Figure 1. Firstly, there is a rapidly rising tendency for

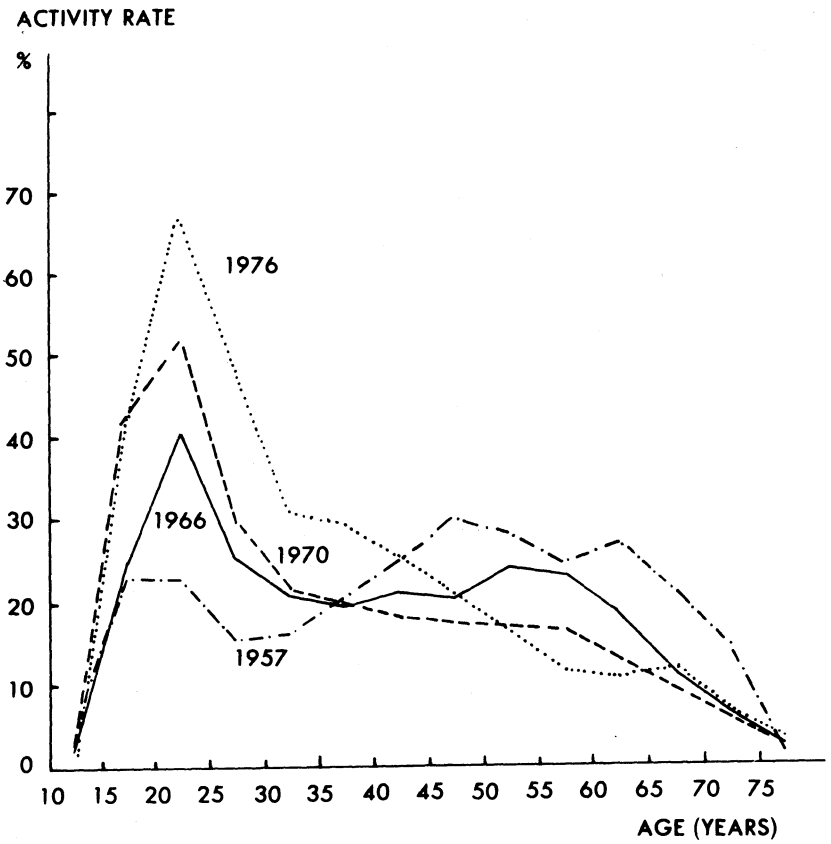

Figure 1: Age-specific female activity rates, 1957-1976 (Based on table 3)

young women to seek employment immediately after stopping formal education but significant numbers withdraw on getting married or on becoming mothers. Secondly, women of all age groups from 15 years to 34 years of age are increasingly engaged in work or looking for work. Thirdly, the tendency to return to work, or to start work, by older women became less evident from 1957 to 1966 and was no longer discernible in 1970 and in 1976. Perhaps this is due to a change in the economy from a more backward, trade-centered, less developed economy where age is of less consequence, to a more industrialized, higher-technology economy where the vast majority of job opportunities for girls lie in the relatively new textile and electronics factories which prefer young single girls who could be housed in dormitories and paid low wages. Younger women are also preferred in shops, offices and hotels so that job opportunities for older women, unless well-qualified and with relevant experience, are quite limited. Participation rates for older

women from about 40 to 49 years of age declined from 1957 to 1970 but rose in 1976. Women in their fifties had steadily declining participation rates, while the rates of still older women did not vary very much. The increase in overall participation rates for women in recent years is due therefore to the very rapid increase in activity rates of the younger women.

Participation by Marital Status

It is to be noted from Table 4 that there has always been more single than married women in the labour force. Single women in the labour force outnumbered married women by 12.4 percent in 1957, 52.7 percent in 1966 and 157.3 percent in 1970 when there were about 2½ times more single than married economically active women. The gap narrowed between 1970 and 1976 when the number of single women was about double that of married women in the labour force.

The proportion of single women to total female labour force rose

Table 4

Distribution of female labour force by marital status, 1957-1976

Marital status	*1957*	*1966*	*1970*	*1976*
			Number	
Single	37,465	69,076	125,570	183,756
Married	33,326	45,239	48,812	91,693
Widowed	14,875	15,749	11,029	9,392
Divorced	774	3,110	2,042	1,592
Total	86,470	133,174	187,453	286,433
			Percent	
Single	43.3	51.9	67.0	64.2
Married	38.5	34.0	26.0	32.0
Widowed	17.2	11.9	5.9	3.3
Divorced	0.9	2.3	1.1	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
			Activity Rate	
Single	24.8	23.4	35.6	42.4
Married	14.0	15.3	14.7	21.6
Widowed	25.8	20.8	15.5	15.6
Divorced	46.5	49.5	47.6	53.6
Total	19.3	19.8	24.6	31.1

from 43.3 percent in 1957 to 51.9 percent in 1966 and 67.0 percent in 1970, after which it fell slightly to 64.2 percent. On the other hand, while economically active married women increased numerically, their proportion to the female labour force fell from 38.5 percent in 1957 to 34.0 percent in 1966 and 26.0 percent in 1970, but rose to 32.0 percent in 1976. The proportion of widows decreased steadily from 17.2 percent in 1957 to 3.3 percent in 1976 while the proportion of divorces remained insignificant throughout.

In all four years single women had higher economic participation rates than married women. The rates for single women, after a slight fall from 1957 to 1966, rose from 23.4 percent in 1966 to 42.4 percent in 1976 but that of married women fluctuated around 14 to 15 percent in the three earlier years before rising to 21.6 percent in 1976. The activity rates for widows decreased steadily. This may be linked to the declining female participation rates at older ages. The rates for divorces, a numerically insignificant group however, hovered around 50 percent.

Table 5 shows the distribution of the economically active females by broad age group and marital status. The data show that in 1966, 1970, and 1976, single women greatly outnumbered married women in the age groups below the age of 30, but in the age groups above the age of 30, married women predominated.

In 1966, 88.7 percent of the economically active single women were below the age of 30; in 1970, 91.5 percent; in 1976, 92.4 percent. Economically active married women below the age of 30 also increased in importance from 26.6 percent in 1966 to 29.5 percent in 1970 and 33.3 percent in 1976. Again the increasingly youthful nature of the female labour force is indicated.

Table 6 presents age-specific female activity rates by marital status for 1966, 1970 and 1976. Comparable figures for 1957 are not available. Economic activity rates for single women are much higher than those for married women for every age group for all three years. Married women are such less economically active because of a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it is generally taken for granted that a married woman's first duty is to her family and home. It is only when these can be taken care of by suitable substitutes or by alternative arrangements that she may consider working or continuing to work. She may not work if her husband does not want her to either because he feels that it reflects unfavourably on his own earning capacity or that it inconveniences him in one way or another. Generally speaking, husbands in Singapore, as in most Asian societies, are expected to do far less housework than in western countries. In rich and poor homes alike the usual practice is for women to be entirely responsible for the household chores either directly or indirectly through servants, while the men are seldom expected to take part in a normal day's housework. At the same time, men generally occupy a more dominant position in the family than is the case in western societies due to the greater prevalence of traditional values and practices. As a result, there is less

Table 5

Distribution of female labour force by broad age group and marital status, 1966-1976

Age group	Single		Married	
	Number	%	Number	%
			1966	
10 — 19	28,832	41.7	385	0.9
20 — 29	32,461	47.0	11,632	25.7
30 — 39	3,659	5.3	15,806	34.9
40 — 49	1,427	2.1	10,096	22.3
50 & over	2,697	3.9	7,320	16.2
Total	69,076	100.0	45,239	100.0
			1970	
10 — 19	55,073	43.9	522	1.1
20 — 29	59,792	47.6	13,888	18.7
30 — 39	6,113	4.9	17,612	36.1
40 — 49	1,570	1.3	9,923	20.3
50 & over	3,022	2.4	6,867	14.3
Total	125,570	100.0	48,812	100.0
			1976	
10 — 19	64,843	35.3	743	0.8
20 — 29	104,853	57.1	29,768	32.5
30 — 39	9,922	5.4	29,344	32.0
40 — 49	1,963	1.1	20,854	22.7
50 & over	2,175	1.2	10,984	12.0
Total	183,756	100.0	91,693	100.0

willingness on the part of the men to put up with the inconvenience of having working wives and with the need to be involved in some housework on a regular basis.

Women with small children cannot work unless they can get grandmothers, other relatives, servants, or workers in creches and nurseries to substitute for them. If the substitute proves to be unsatisfactory, the woman may have to stop working. Women with little formal education and no marketable skill often give up their jobs on marriage or upon the arrival of children as the pay they get does not compensate sufficiently for the drudgery and the extra effort required to continue working. Occasionally, at the other end of the social scale, wives of men prominent in the government, the professions or business, may not

work because they are required to take part in a variety of social functions and recreational activities involving their husbands. Besides, in such cases there is less need for the additional income.

Despite these obstacles to working, the economic participation rates of married women have increased quite markedly especially for the younger age groups. Between 1966 and 1976, all age groups below the age of 50 showed increases. At the earlier ages, the increases may be attributed to increasing participation by married women who have yet to have their first child. Other factors contributing to the rise in the participation rates are the higher levels of formal education attained by women in recent years, the trend towards a smaller family size, the increasing use of labour-saving appliances, the widespread use and availability of processed and pre-cooked food and the greater desire for the additional income to raise the family's standard of living.

Table 6

Female age-specific activity rates by marital status, 1966-1976

Age group	*Single*			*Married*		
	1966	*1970*	*1976*	*1966*	*1970*	*1976*
10 — 14	2.0	2.8	1.8	—	6.0	—
15 — 19	26.6	44.7	42.6	6.5	8.9	22.6
20 — 24	63.6	75.1	83.2	12.1	14.1	28.0
25 — 29	64.6	73.5	85.0	15.1	17.8	28.9
30 — 34	62.3	66.7	80.8	16.5	17.0	25.0
35 — 39	51.4	62.4	66.7	15.1	15.3	25.4
40 — 44	58.4	56.2	65.7	17.1	14.2	24.1
45 — 49	73.1	59.8	66.7	15.9	13.6	18.0
50 — 54	77.8	64.6	45.5	17.9	13.1	15.0
55 — 59	57.8	57.5	56.3	16.9	11.9	10.7
60 — 64	48.7	45.7	64.7	12.7	9.8	8.4
65 — 69	28.7	30.3	39.9	8.6	7.7	8.5
70 — 74	23.1	21.1	14.3	7.7	4.5	8.3
75 & over	14.4	11.2	36.4	4.8	2.9	1.0
Total	23.4	35.6	42.4	15.3	14.7	22.6

Married women in advanced countries tend to join the labour force after finishing school but to leave it in droves following marriage or the arrival of the first child. Large numbers of these women then rejoin the labour force or enter it for the first time after a period of about 10 to 15 years when the children have become quite independent.[2] This

[2]Evelyne Sullerot, *Women, Society and Change*, London: World University Library, 1971, pp. 91-97.

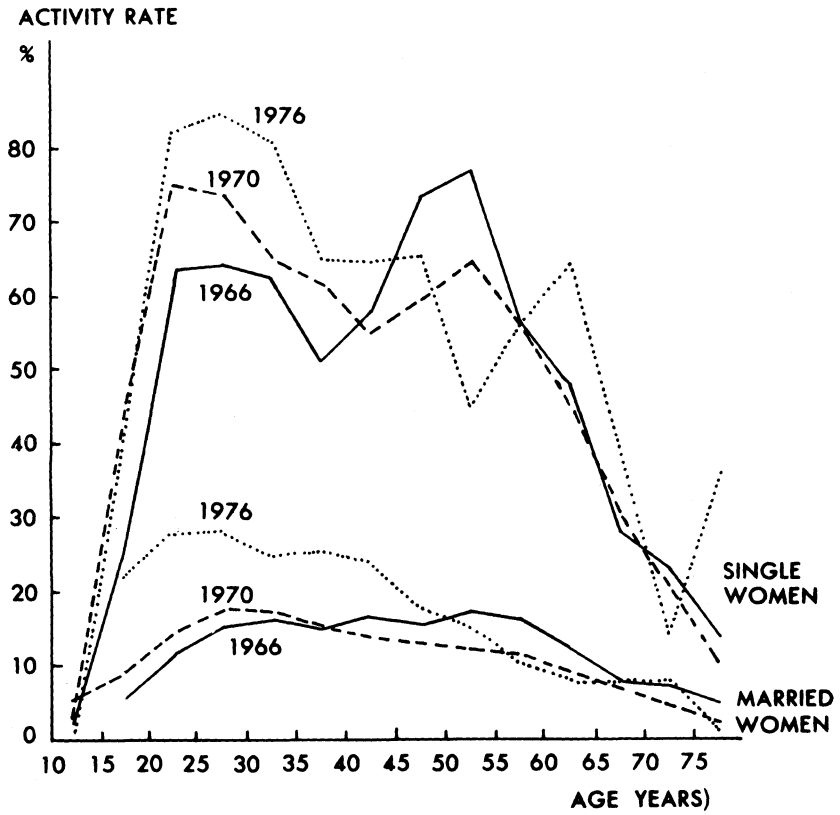

Figure 2: Age-specific female activity rates by marital status, 1966, 1970, and 1976 (Based on table 6)

behavioural pattern is not noticeable among married women in Singapore. Although there is a trend towards greater participation at the younger ages before the arrival of the first and subsequent children, there is no marked withdrawal from the labour force, only a gradual withdrawal, as can be seen for 1970 and 1976 but not for 1966. There is no re-entry in large numbers either. In Singapore, women often do not have to give up their jobs on the arrival of children because of the availability of domestic servants. Though domestic service is increasingly disliked and avoided as a means of earning a living by the least educated and qualified younger women who still can get jobs in factories, offices and shops, this is not the case with the poorly qualified older women who, however, must still resort to domestic service to earn a living. Besides full-time domestic help, there is also a big pool of part-time help. Grandmothers and other relatives, government-run creches and privately-run day-time and full-time care centres all play a part in enabling mothers to continue working. As a result married women in Singapore do not leave the labour force as soon as the first baby is expected as a matter of course, but leave it at various

points in the life of the family when substitutes prove to be either unsatisfactory or not available.

These changes in the pattern of family life may occur as a result of the arrival of the first baby, or an additional baby, illness in the family, departure of substitutes, and inability to arrive at a satisfactory re-arrangement, or the need to supervise school-age children more closely with regard to school work and leisure activities. Other reasons for married women quitting the labour force may lie outside the family such as dissatisfaction with working life. The gradual decline in participation rates among married women in Singapore therefore reflects a greater variety of reasons leading to withdrawal from the labour force instead of one predominant factor—the arrival of the first baby—which leads to a sharp fall in participation rates in countries where substitutes are far less available.

The lack of re-entry into the labour force in large numbers in later years may be associated with the paucity of jobs for older women and for women who have stopped working for some time. There are no retraining schemes for older women either by the government or by the private sector. Part-time jobs with hours arranged in such a way as to fit in with domestic and family duties are hard to come by. Most of the new job opportunities in factories, shops, hotels and offices are meant for young girls who sometimes live in dormitories and work long hours or in shifts. Older women are at a disadvantage when competing with younger women for most of the available jobs. Earlier retirement age for women in certain occupations, such as retirement at age 45 for some categories of teachers, also militate against re-entry into the labour force.

Another reason for the lack of re-entry into the labour force at older ages is related to the observation that the age at which children leave the parental home is much higher in Singapore than in western countries. Adult children normally live with their parents, contributing fairly substantially to household expenses on becoming employed, and generally do not leave till marriage or the arrival of their children when they will then set up their own nuclear families. There is thus a greater need for the mother to stay home and keep house, while, at the same time, since the children contribute to the family income, there is less need for the mother to seek outside employment.

Single women, free from the responsibilities faced by married women, are more economically active. But the peculiarity of the economic activity rates of single women as revealed in Figure 2 is the bimodial graphs for all three years. For 1966, the dip in the activity rates occurred in the 35-39 age group; for 1970, 40-44 age group; and for 1976, 50-54 age group. The main reason for the dip, I think, is the severe disruption in education and training caused by the Japanese Occupation. This inference is drawn because the dip is experienced by approximately the same group of women who were born in the late 1920's and were of secondary-school age during the 1942-45 Japanese Occupation period. Due to the disruption caused by the Occupation, many women were deprived of a secondary or post secondary

education and therefore were unable or, found it very difficult to obtain higher-level employment. The age groups below and above this age cohort were also affected but not to the same extent. But this leads to the question of why married women were not similarly affected. There was a corresponding but very slight dip in the participation rates of married women in 1966 but not in 1970 and 1976. Perhaps this is because the participation rates were so low for married women especially of the older age groups in 1970 and 1976 that the effect of the Occupation was no longer discernible.

The second peak may also be due to the re-entry of some older single women who joined the labour force after the death of a parent or parents either through the necessity to earn a living or through release from nursing and housekeeping duties.

Participation by Literacy

Table 7 presents data on female economic participation rates in relation to literacy for the population census years 1957 and 1970. Participation rates did not seem to be much influenced by literacy one way or the other in 1957 since literate and illiterate women had the very similar activity rates of 19.0 and 19.5 percent, respectively. In fact, illiterate women had a slight edge over literate ones. But in 1970, after a period of rapid economic growth, literate women showed a much higher level of economic participation. Between 1957 and 1970, the participation rates for illiterate women declined from 19.5 percent to 15.6 percent while rates for literate women rose from 19.0 to 30.6 percent. However, due to the steady rise in school enrolment for girls in the last few decades, younger women tend to be more literate than older ones. The higher activity rates for literate women are therefore also an indication of the higher activity rates of younger women.

Table 7

Females aged 10 years & over and female labour force by literacy, 1957 and 1970

Literacy	*Female Population*		*Female labour force*		*Activity rates*	
	1957	*1970*	*1957*	*1970*	*1957*	*1970*
Total	449,087	761,356	86,470	187,453	19.3	24.6
Not literate	296,271	304,143	57,797	47,560	19.5	15.6
Literate	150,892	457,213	28,625	139,893	19.0	30.6
Literate in English	62,265	216,994	14,630	75,756	23.5	34.9
Literate in languages other than English	88,627	240,219	13,995	64,139	15.8	26.7

The rates for females literate in English were higher in both years than the rates for females in languages other than English. The most economically active group were the females literate in English. This reflects the greater job opportunities available to this group.

Table 8 illustates the relationship between economic activity status and highest qualification attained. Between 1966 and 1977, there was a change in the composition of the female labour force in terms of educational qualifications following a rise in educational attainments of the entire female population aged 10 years and over. The first two categories of 'never attended school' and 'no qualifications' together accounted for 71.8 percent in 1966 but fell to 50.1 percent in 1976.

Table 8

Females aged 10 years & over and female labour force by highest qualification attained, 1966 and 1976

Highest qualification attained	*Female population*		*Female labour force*		*Activity rates*
	No.	%	*No.*	%	
		1966			
Never attended school	269,928	40.1	48,568	36.5	18.0
No qualifications	213,627	31.7	29,214	21.9	9.9
Primary and post primary	145,079	21.5	27,165	20.4	18.7
Secondary and post secondary	37,098	5.5	21,664	16.3	58.4
Tertiary	7,755	1.2	6,561	4.9	84.6
Qualifications not elsewhere classified	2	0.0	2	0.0	—
Total	673,487	100.0	133,174	100.0	19.8
		1976			
Never attended school	288,874	31.4	52,055	18.2	18.0
No qualifications	171,711	18.7	27,487	9.6	16.0
Primary and post primary	262,343	28.5	73,916	25.8	28.2
Secondary and post secondary	185,932	20.2	125,547	43.8	67.5
Tertiary	10,347	1.1	7,110	2.5	68.7
Qualifications not elsewhere classified	1,114	0.1	318	0.1	—
Total	920,321	100.0	286,433	100.0	31.1

Among the economically active females, these two categories registered an even greater fall from 58.4 percent in 1966 to 27.8 percent in 1976. The economically active females with the next two categories of 'primary and post primary' and 'secondary and post secondary' qualifications rose from 36.7 percent in 1966 to 69.6 percent in 1976. The only category which went against the trend was the group with tertiary qualifications which declined from 4.9 percent in 1966 to 2.5 percent in 1976 among the economically active females. One major cause of this decline is the increasing difficulty of getting domestic servants and baby *amahs* (servants specializing in the care of babies and small children) due to the diminishing supply as younger women tend to enter domestic service only as a last resort. Another contributing factor is the declining popularity of the extended family system in which grandparents help in looking after the children and keeping house.[3]

As in other countries, women in Singapore tend to be more economically active if they have undergone some formal education, with the exception that females with 'no qualifications' were less active than females who had 'never attended school'. The latter came from the poorest homes and many worked out of sheer economic necessity. Table 8 shows clearly that the activity rates rose with each higher level of qualification attained for both 1966 and 1976 until the highest rate of 84.6 percent was reached in 1966 and 68.7 percent in 1976 for those who had obtained tertiary qualifications.

Participation by Race

Table 9 shows the distribution of the female labour force by race. while the Chinese females have the highest economic participation rates in all the four years under consideration, Malays have shown the greatest increase, followed closely by the Indians during the period 1957 to 1976. In that period economically active Chinese females increased by 198 percent; Malay females by 869 percent; Indian females by 853 percent. These high percentage increases show the remarkable strides made by Malay and Indian in becoming economically active particularly between 1970 and 1976.

The lower rates of economic participation by Malay and Indian women compared with Chinese women may be attributed to the more conservative attitudes and practices of the two communities especially with regard to what they consider are the proper roles and functions of women. For all three major communities in Singapore tradition dictates that a woman's place is in the home except in circumstances of dire economic necessity. This traditional attitude is reinforced by religious injunctions and practices to a great extent among the Malays and Indians, but religion is less effective in upholding this aspect of

[3]The percentage of persons living in extended households (i.e. with more than one family nucleus) fell from 22.1 percent in 1957 to 20.6 percent in 1970, while, at the same time, the percentage of persons living in nuclear households rose from 70.0 to 75.0 percent. *Report on the Census of Population 1970, Singapore*, Singapore: Department of Statistics, 1973, Vol. 1, p. 207.

tradition among the Chinese. As a result Chinese women are on the whole much less tradition-bound and more open to the forces of industrialization and modernization.

Table 9

Distribution of female labour force by race 1957-1976

Race	*1957*	*1966*	*1970*	*1976*
		Number		
Chinese	78,103	122,195	162,658	232,840
Malays	3,629	4,949	14,941	35,181
Indians	1,542	2,731	6,465	14,698
Others	3,196	3,305	3,389	3,714
Total	86,470	133,180	187,453	286,433
		Percent female		
Chinese	22.6	26.4	28.7	32.5
Malays	6.3	9.4	17.1	29.2
Indians	2.4	6.1	11.0	25.2
Others	23.1	20.9	23.0	23.3
Total	18.0	23.1	25.8	31.4
		Activity rate		
Chinese	21.8	22.2	20.8	32.4
Malays	6.3	6.8	9.8	26.6
Indians	7.1	8.1	11.2	28.6
Others	27.2	19.3	18.4	21.9
Total	19.3	19.8	18.5	31.1

The much lower activity rates of Malay and Indian women in the earlier years are due also to the greater difficulty encountered by these women in seeking employment compared with the Chinese who form the majority ethnic group in Singapore[4] and who dominate locally-owned or locally-managed enterprises, in particular, the smaller business establishments. It is only in recent years that job opportunities in the larger establishments, which tend to have a multi-racial labour force whether foreign-owned or locally-owned, have multiplied and in the process increased the access to employment for all ethnic groups.

[4]The racial composition of Singapore's 2.3 million people is 76 percent Chinese, 15 percent Malay and 7 percent Indian.

Industrial Pattern

Table 10 shows the distribution of employed females by major industries. In all three years more than 60 percent of employed females were in two sectors of industry, viz. manufacturing and community, social and personal services. But there was a marked shift from the latter which accounted for 47.0 percent in 1957 and 38.5 percent in 1970 to manufacturing which accounted for 35.0 percent in 1976. In 1976, community, social and personal services took second place after dropping to 25.6 percent and commerce third with 22.6 percent. This reflects the rapid industrialization of Singapore between 1957 and 1976 during which women, especially young girls, were employed in the proliferating factories manufacturing 'fabricated metal products, machinery and equipment,' (mainly electronics components) which accounted for 46.2 percent of all females employed in manufacturing in 1976 and in 'textile, wearing apparel and leather industries' which accounted for 27.0 percent. The greatest increase was therefore registered by manufacturing. Smaller increases were made in 'commerce,' 'finance, insurance and business services' and 'transport and communications.' Declines in proportion but not in number were recorded in 'community, social and personal services' and 'construction.' 'Agriculture, forestry and fishing' declined proportionately as well as absolutely.

Table 10

Female labour force by industry, 1957-1976

Industry	*1957*		*1970*		*1976*	
	Number	%	*Number*	%	*Number*	%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	9,819	11.7	4,796	3.1	4,723	1.7
Mining and quarrying	165	0.2	205	0.1	478	0.2
Manufacturing	16,301	19.4	48,121	31.3	94,611	35.0
Electricity, gas and water	77	—	533	0.4	743	0.3
Construction	1,761	2.1	2,817	1.8	3,874	1.4
Commerce	13,246	15.7	28,986	18.9	60,969	22.6
Transport and communications	1,112	1.3	3,943	2.6	15,123	5.6
Finance, insurance and business services	2,013	2.4	5,305	3.5	20,588	7.6
Community, social and personal services	39,551	47.0	58,843	38.5	68,610	25.4
Activities not adequately defined	165	0.2	63	—	371	0.1
Total	84,210	100.0	153,612	100.0	270,090	100.0

Occupational Pattern

Table 11 shows the distribution of female workers among the major occupational groups in 1957 and 1976. In 1957, the category with the largest number of female workers were 'service workers' but in 1976 the emphasis shifted to 'production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers' of which 33.2 percent were electrical fitters and related electrical and electronics workers, and 21.2 percent were 'tailors, dressmakers, sewers, upholsterers and related workers.' The predominant position of this group in 1976 is related to the importance of the manufacturing sector. In 1957, this group was second in importance.

Table 11

Female labour force by major occupational group, 1957 and 1976

Occupation	*1957*			*1976*		
	Number	*%*	*Percent female*	*Number*	*%*	*Percent female*
Professional, technical and related workers	8,328	9.9	34.5	32,952	12.2	37.9
Administrative and managerial workers	259	0.3	3.3	1,910	0.7	6.9
Clerical and related workers	5,616	6.7	10.3	73,014	27.0	53.1
Sales workers	8,630	10.2	10.0	32,581	12.1	23.9
Service workers	30,112	35.7	42.3	41,920	15.5	45.2
Agricultural and animal husbandry workers and fishermen	10,057	11.9	27.1	5,094	1.9	21.2
Production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers	21,098	25.1	11.6	81,823	30.3	26.3
Workers not classified by occupation	110	0.2	1.2	796	0.3	1.5
Total	84,210	100.0	17.8	270,090	100.0	31.0

In 1976, the second in importance was the 'clerical and related workers' group which accounted for 27.0 percent of all female workers. Of this group 22.6 percent were 'stenographers, typists and card-and-tape-punching machine operators' and 21.3 percent were 'bookkeepers, financial records clerks, cashiers and related workers.' This group accounted for only 6.7 percent of female workers in 1957.

Men outnumbered women in all occupational groups in 1957 but in 1976, there was one occupational group where women outnumbered

men, i.e., 'clerical and related workers.' This group includes the telephone and telegraph operators, stenographers, typists and teletypists, machine operators and receptionists who hold jobs generally regarded as "women's work."

In 1957, the highest proportion of female to total workers was accounted for by 'service workers' followed by 'professional, technical and related workers' but the highest proportion of female to total workers in 1976 was accounted for by 'clerical and related workes' followed by 'service workers'. The female proportion increased for all occupational groups except that of 'agricultural and animal husbandry workers and fishermen.' The greatest increase in the proportion of women between 1957 and 1976 occurred in the 'clerical and related workers' group.

Table 12 gives the occupational sub-groups with more than 2,000 female workers each in 1957, and sub-groups with more than 10,000 female workers each in 1976. Together the enumerated sub-groups accounted for 65.8 percent of all female workers in 1957 and 49.9 percent in 1976. Though women continued to converge on jobs traditionally regarded as "women's work", this convergence was becoming less marked. In 1957, the largest group comprised of workers in 'domestic service, hospitals, hotels, clubs, restaurants, etc'., which accounted for 30.3 percent of all female workers. But if only 'amahs, cooks and chefs' are considered, the number is 23,172 which is 27.5 percent of all female workers. This is still a significantly high figure.

As in other countries, until recently, the majority of women who were obliged to work in order to make a living, had to work as domestic servants. Other job opportunities were few especially since Singapore does not have a large agricultural sector. Most of the women were not well educated and were untrained. But with industrialization and modernization job opportunities in other occupations became increasingly available, in particular, in the industrial and commercial sectors. At the same time, literacy rates for women rose as did the level of educational attainment. By the late 1960's, about half of the pupils in primary and secondary schools were girls while about a quarter of the students in the institutions of tertiary education (the University of Singapore, Nanyang University, the Singapore Polytechnic and the Teacher's Training College) were girls. In 1976 the proportion of girls to the total student population in the four institutions and Ngee Ann Technical College rose to one-third.[5]

It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of working women in domestic service did not rise despite a trebling of the female labour force from 1957 to 1976. In 1957, female 'amahs, cooks and chefs' accounted for 27.5 percent of the female labour force but in 1976 'domestic service workers' accounted for only 6.0 percent. These two categories are not strictly comparable, however. Chefs are not included

[5]Cheng Siok-Hwa, "Singapore women: legal status, educational attainment, and employment patterns," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, April 1977, p. 363.

Table 12

Employed females by selected occupations (2 digits) in which there were more than 2,000 female workers in 1957 and more than 10,000 female workers in 1976

Selected occupations (2 digits)	*Number*	*% of total employed*	*Percent female*
		1957	
1 Workers in domestic service, hospitals, hotels, clubs, restaurants, etc.	25,545	30.3	54.7
2 Owners and other workers on small-holdings and market gardens	8,584	10.2	35.3
3 Tailors, dressmakers and related workers	4,882	5.8	46.3
4 Teachers	4,525	5.4	46.8
5 Hawkers and street vendors	4,040	4.8	14.0
6 Salesmen and shop assistants	2,953	3.5	9.8
7 Stenographers, personal secretaries and typists	2,458	2.9	52.9
8 Nurses and midwives	2,402	2.9	76.4
Total	55,389	65.8	35.0
		1976	
1 Salesmen, shop assistants and related workers	26,176	10.4	30.9
2 Electrical fitters and related electrical and electronics workers	27,168	10.1	64.5
3 Tailors, dressmakers, sewers, upholsterers and related workers	17,405	6.4	77.9
4 Stenographers, typists and card-and-tape-punching machine operators	16,503	6.1	91.5
5 Domestic service workers	16,237	6.0	97.8
6 Bookkeepers, financial records clerks, cashiers and related workers	15,547	5.8	58.8
7 Teachers	13,743	5.1	57.7
Total	134,779	49.9	56.0

Note: The classification systems used for the two years are slightly different.

in 'domestic service workers' but the number of female chefs is very small. 'Domestic service workers' as presently defined was first used in the 1970 Census which enumerated 22,968 such persons of whom 21,826 were females. Between 1970 and 1976 the number declined from 21,826 to 16,237 females or from 14.2 percent of the female labour force to 6.0 percent. The decrease is even more marked among the men who numbered 1,142 in 1970, and only 371 in 1976.

The next largest number of female workers in 1957 were 'owners and other workers on smallholdings and market gardens.' With industrialization and urbanization, this category has lost much of its importance.

In 1976, the largest number was accounted for by 'salesmen, shop assistants and related workers' and a close second by 'electrical fitters and related electrical and electronics workers' both sub-groups reflecting the importance of the commercial and industrial sectors in female employment in recent times.

In 1957, females outnumbered males in only 3 out of the 8 selected occupational sub-groups with more than 2,000 females workers each. In 1976, females outnumbered males in all except one of the 7 occupations with more than 10,000 female workers each. Though 65.8 percent of the total female labour force was working in the listed occupations, women accounted for only 35.0 percent of the work force in these occupations in 1957. In 1976, about half of the women were found in occupations where women accounted for 56.0 percent of the work force.

In 1976, most of the occupations which attracted large numbers of women were predominantly filled with women. In other words, men were not attracted to these occupations to the same extent. Of particular interest as "female ghettos" are 'domestic service workers' in which females accounted for 97.8 percent and 'stenographers, typists and card-and-tape-punching machine operators' in which females accounted for 91.5 percent. It can be seen from the Table that women converged on jobs which did not attract men to the same extent. The implications are bound to be significant for it has been observed in other countries that wages and salaries in female-intensive occupations tend to be depressed in relation to the general wage structure.[6]

Unemployment

Unemployment for females rose from 1957 to 1970 but dropped in 1976. It can be seen from Table 13 that female unemployment rates were higher than male unemployment rates for all four years under consideration. The female proportion of the unemployed rose from 21.5 percent in 1957 to over 40 percent for the three later years. These percentages were higher than the female proportion of the labour force (see Table 1), for example, in 1976, females accounted for 31.4 percent of the labour force but comprised 40.4 percent of the unemployed. The higher unemployment rates for women are particularly noticeable for the 'never previously worked' category of females who accounted for an increasing proportion of all unemployed persons in this category. This can be interpreted to mean that there was greater difficulty in getting

[6]It is interesting to note that doctors in the Soviet Union, where about three-quarters of the medical practitioners are women, receive mediocre pay and are accorded a lower status in society than doctors in western countries where the vast majority of medical practitioners are women and where they enjoy considerable pay and prestige. Evelyne Sullerot, *Women, Society and Change*, London: World University Library, 1971, pp. 151-154.

jobs by female entrants into the labour market than males seeking jobs for the first time. Except for 1957, there were more unemployed female new entrants into the labour market than unemployed females who had previous working experience. Women with no previous working experience therefore faced the most difficulty in getting employment.

Table 13

Unemployment by sex and by 'previously worked' and 'never previously worked' groups, 1957-1976

Year	Unemployment rates		Unemployed females		Previously worked		Never previously worked	
	Female	Male	Number	% female	Number	% female	Number	% female
1957	6.2	5.0	5,392	21.5	3,132	18.8	2,260	27.1
1966	15.8	7.1	21,096	40.1	6,118	25.6	14,978	52.0
1970	18.1	7.8	33,841	44.7	23,520	29.7	23,920	56.5
1976	5.7	3.9	16,343	40.4	7,429	28.5	8,915	61.8

Income

In relation to wages there is no law which stipulates equal pay for work of equal value without sex discrimination. But since 1962, women employed in the civil service have enjoyed equal pay as their male counterparts doing similar jobs. This is also true of statutory bodies, institutions of higher learning and some of the bigger firms. But, on the whole, in the private sector, women do not get equal pay.

Table 14 shows the distribution of male and female workers by gross monthly income for 1974, 1975 and 1976. Comparable data for earlier years are not available. Table 14 shows that women earn very much less than men. With regard to percentage distribution of women among the different income categories, the largest proportion of male workers earned $200-399 per month but the largest proportion of female workers earned the lowest category of less than $200 per month. For this lowest category there is a noticeable percentage decline for both males and females with the latter registering a more significant drop from 60.8 percent in 1974 to 43.2 percent in 1976. Despite this drop it is still clear that women earned far lower incomes compared with men.

The last column reveals that almost half of all workers in the lowest category of incomes were females—47.5 percent in 1974 and 1975 and 49.1 percent in 1976. The proportion of female workers earning $200-399 per month rose from 23.0 percent in 1974 to 23.9 percent in 1975 and 28.6 percent in 1976. Increases were also made in the female proportion of workers earning incomes of $800-999 per month and incomes of $1,000-1,499 per month. For the highest category of $1,500 and over the female proportion rose from 6.4 percent in 1974 to 7.4 percent in 1975 but fell to 6.0 percent in 1976. For this highest category of

incomes, therefore, 94 percent of the workers in 1976 were men and only 6 percent were women.

Table 14

Employed persons by gross monthly income and sex, 1974-76

Gross monthly income (in U.S. $)	Male		Female		Percent female
	Number	%	Number	%	
		1974			
Under 200	175,224	31.2	159,343	60.8	47.6
200 — 399	234,959	41.8	70,226	26.8	23.0
400 — 599	78,045	13.9	20,252	7.7	20.6
600 — 799	27,245	4.8	6,799	2.6	20.0
800 — 999	13,647	2.4	2,283	0.9	10.4
1,000 — 1,499	20,932	3.7	2,428	0.9	10.4
1,500 & over	12,141	2.2	826	0.3	6.4
Total	526,193	100.0	262,156	100.0	31.8
		1975			
Under 200	138,109	23.5	125,283	50.7	47.6
200 — 399	270,915	46.2	85,073	34.4	23.9
400 — 599	90,215	15.4	19,699	8.0	17.9
600 — 799	29,711	5.1	8,659	3.5	22.6
800 — 999	25,099	2.6	3,518	1.4	18.9
1,000 — 1,499	22,242	3.8	3,139	1.3	12.4
1,500 & over	20,240	3.5	1,624	0.7	7.4
Total	586,531	100.0	246,995	100.0	29.6
		1976			
Under 200	121,142	20.2	116,791	43.2	49.1
200 — 399	261,706	43.6	104,852	38.8	28.6
400 — 599	113,289	18.9	24,886	9.2	18.0
600 — 799	39,903	6.6	10,984	4.1	21.6
800 — 999	18,254	3.0	5,784	2.1	24.1
1,000 — 1,499	24,462	4.1	5,412	2.0	18.1
1,500 & over	21,597	3.6	1,380	0.5	6.0
Total	600,353	100.0	270,090	100.0	31.0

Over the three years, women seemed to be worse off since the female proportion of the lowest category had increased while the female proportion of the highest category had declined. But the female proportion of all income categories over $800 per month in fact rose from 10.6 percent in 1974 to 12.6 percent in 1975 and 16.4 percent in 1976, and the female proportion of all income categories over $600 per

month rose from 14.3 percent in 1974 to 16.3 percent in 1975 and 18.4 percent in 1976. In comparison with male workers, therefore, female workers are very slowly narrowing the difference.[7] There is still a very long way to go, however.

The main reasons for the lower incomes earned by women as a group compared with men are: lower levels of education and training attained; fewer years of working experience; lower pay scales compared with male counterparts doing similar work; very low wages in certain jobs with exclusively or predominantly women workers such as domestic service and nursing; shorter working hours;[8] and obstacles women faced at point of entry into certain jobs, promotions while on the job, and opportunities for training and acquiring additional qualifications and experience.

Conclusion

Female labour force participation in Singapore is moving towards the patterns prevalent in the more industrially advanced countries. This is to be expected with increasing industrialization promoted in no small way by a government which places economic development very high on its list of priorities. There is every likelihood of further increases in the overall female participation rates as it has yet to reach the levels attained by some of the more advanced countries. Calculated as a percentage of the total population (not of the population ten years and above, as has been done in this paper) female economic activity rates, as given by the *ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1975,* are: Singapore—25.1 percent (1974); Hong Kong—28.8 percent (1971); the United States—33.1 percent (1974); Japan—35.7 percent (1974). Though the figures are not strictly comparable due to the use of different dates and differing definitions of economic activity, there is no doubt that the Singapore rate still has some way to go.

The already high participation rates of younger women will be further accentuated as it becomes an even more generally accepted practice for young girls to work on completing their formal education. Other factors are a higher level of educational attainment and further development of the economy. Participation rates of older women will also rise as the difference in educational attainment becomes less marked between the older and younger women, and as job opportunities for older women become increasingly available through successive reductions in the number of women reaching 20 years of age, following the steady fall in the number of births from a peak of 62,495 in 1958 to 39,948 in 1975.[9] The declining fertility in recent years will also lead to an increase in participation rates as smaller families become the norm.

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[7]Saw Swee-Hock, "Wage indices for Singapore", *Securities Industry Review,* Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1975.

[8]In 1976, while 50.6 percent of male workers worked 45 or more hours per week, only 40.6 percent of the female workers did so. Calculated from statistics given in *Report on the Labour Force Survey of Singapore, 1976,* Singapore: Ministry of Labour, November, 1976, p. 101.

[9]Republic of Singapore, *Report on the Registration of Births and Deaths and Marriages,* 1975, Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 31.

With the passing years the dip caused by the Japanese Occupation in the activity rates of single women will disappear. On the other hand, based on the experience in developed countries, a dip in the activity rates of married women will appear. With the diminishing supply of domestic servants and the declining popularity of the extended family, more and more married women will have to leave the labour force on the arrival of the first baby. Though many government-operated creches and privately-run nurseries will be set up, provision of such facilities on a massive scale is unlikely in a non-totalitarian state such as Singapore. However, the availability and popularity of such facilities will undoubtedly influence the extent to which mothers will refrain from withdrawing from the labour force.

Again based on experience in advanced countries, one would expect older married women to join or rejoin the labour force after an absence of 10 to 15 years. But re-entry would be on a much smaller scale because of the greater prevalence of traditional ideas and attitudes which give women with families less opportunity as well as less need to work outside the home.

With regard to the racial differences in female labour force participation rates, the trend is towards a narrowing of the differences but the Chinese females will continue to lead, followed by the Indians and the Malays. The reason lies in the prevalence and strength of traditional attitudes based largely on religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and the relatively greater difficulty in getting jobs by Malay and Indian women on the other.

In the foreseeable future women will still be found mainly in occupations which have been termed "women's jobs" or jobs suited to women. This is due to stereotyped ideas of what constitutes a man's job and what constitutes a woman's job. Also certain training facilities such as those for certain classes of technicians, are open only to boys. But the trend towards a greater dispersion of the female labour force is already discernible so that the concentration on a few occupations will become less marked. Together with this trend will be the trend towards a gradual narrowing of the wage differentials between the sexes, as has been inferred earlier from the wage data for 1974 to 1976. But the differentials will remain for as long as men are accorded the higher social status which they have enjoyed in Asian societies for so long in the past.

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