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JAPANESE WOMEN

A Book Review By Maud Russell



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THE LIBERATION PROCESS
FOR
JAPANESE WOMEN

A Book Review by Maud Russell

This issue of FAR EAST REPORTER calls attention to a recent book on Japan - "Social Change and the Individual: Japan Before and After Defeat in World War II" The author is Kazuko Tsurumi, Professor of Sociology and a member of the Institute of International Relations for Advanced Studies on Peace and Developments in Asia, Sophia University, Tokyo.

Of current interest to the American public - and especially to the Woman's Liberation Movement - are the two chapters on The Family and one on Textile Workers. This issue of Far East Reporter will confine its review to these three chapters.

The Liberation Process for Japanese Women

The two chapters on The Family are filled with vivid, grass roots material; personal documents, letters, diaries, autobiographies, writings in which women in urban and rural areas reveal their honest feelings, their questioning attitudes toward the imperial government and its propaganda, toward "patriotism", toward militarism, toward war. So detailed is Professor Tsurumi's recording of Japanese women's accounts of their reactions and experiences during and after the war that these two chapters could well be entitled "Japanese Women Want Peace".

Their experiences during the war and in postwar Japan are modernizing not only the living but also the thinking of Japanese women, now faced with and working on many of the personal and social problems that engage women of the West. Coming out of a traditional society they are in the process of redefining their role in the family and of becoming full participants in the society outside the home.

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Women Begin To Emerge From Their Traditional Family-Bound Role

Gone are the days when the basic structure of the family was described in traditional terms: "The primary orientation of the married couple was toward the production of children. The husband did not choose his wife nor she him...The wife was expected to care for her husband's household and raise his children....The wife was in the family to serve her husband's parents....She owed her husband complete obedience though she was expected to give priority to his parents' commands. Also, she was expected to promote the welfare of the family in any way required of her. Only as a remote and subsidiary consideration was she cast in the role of a companion of her husband, and any overt show of affection on his part for her was viewed as a definite breach of good taste." (pages 254-255)

The break-down of the old home-centered role of women and the transition to a community-oriented role for women was made easier by the fact that traditionally Japanese mothers had a closer relation with their children than with their husbands. In the extended family "The children are likely to be more effective agents of the ideological socialization of their mothers than is her husband." In the modern conjugal type of family the husband is more likely to be the more effective ideological socialization factor. (page 256)

Miss Tsurumi writes of a mother describing her youngest son, then thirteen years of age, with a deep affection she does not show in her description of her husband (as recorded on pages 256-268). The mother writes of her relations with her son on the eve of the bombing of Hiroshima: "Mother, "...Why do we have to have a war? I hope they will stop it immediately. Why can't we live in peace, with the Americans sending us Japanese what we need and the Japanese sending the Filipinos what they need? The whole world then can be one nation...Mother, there is something I cannot possibly understand. What on earth is the Emperor doing? Even if the Emperor wins the war, having made so many of his soldiers die, could he take the vast territory he might win to the other world when he himself dies? Even the Emperor couldn't help dying, and dying alone, could he? Why is it, then,

that he has not said, 'Stop the war'? I wonder why the the Japanese have to die for the sake of the Emperor? ...Am I an unpatriotic Japanese to think this way?" "I became worried about my son...So I said to him, 'Hiro, don't write what you really think, when you write your composition. What would you do if a policeman came to get you?'" The mother "suffered from discommunication with her husband until the last days of her thirty years of married life, while she enjoyed an almost perfect and mutual communication with her thirteen year-old son... She was much closer to her son in her emotional as well as intellectual life than to her husband." (pages 268-269)

Writing Circles

Writing circles play a freeing and creative part in this process of the changing role of women. "It was after 1951 when the San Francisco Peace Treaty was concluded and the military occupation came to an end, that circles began to emerge...Their activities cover a wide range..." Miss Tsurumi's study of circles is restricted to those oriented primarily toward writing, because it "is easier to trace the process of personality change in the members through their own writings than through other media." (page 213)

Miss Tsurumi gives much historical detail about the traditional writing circles among children (pages 214-225) and points out that "the rise of writing circles among adults as a means of self-education was first stimulated by the publication of a collection of compositions written by high school students...in 1951." (page 214) "The postwar writing circles of adults inherited the pattern of socialization of school children." (page 225)

Political Interest Stimulated in a Women's Circle

"In 1954 there emerged in Tokyo a small writing circle called Hinata (meaning 'sunny'), consisting of some twenty women, mostly middle-class wives of salaried professionals. In March 1956 the Hinata group invited a professor of law to give a lecture. The members of this circle wished to study the new Constitution, since constitutional revision was one of the issues in the

coming election for the House of Commons. The lecture on the Constitution stimulated their interest in political issues...

"The mothers who wrote about their war experiences, being extremely sensitive to the effects of state-controlled education on themselves and on their children, became concerned about this attempted revision of the educational system. Some of the mothers began to read newspapers more intently than before, and some even joined mothers from other groups and PTA's in an effort to solicit signatures against the passage of the legislation. It was a new experience for these mothers to stand on the street and talk to strangers... And although the legislation was passed, this marked the beginning of their further participation in public affairs."(276)

Conflict Between Social Concern and Family Life

"Mrs. E., a woman of fifty, withdrew from the Hinata group, leaving behind a message which explained why she had to quit" - describing the chores at home which made her family happy. She wrote, 'While we enjoy our small happiness within the family, I get worried about what's happening outside of it. I know the latter generally counts more than the former. Still, it is difficult for me to push myself to participate in public affairs'." (page 277)

"Yasuko Awata, in her forties, a college graduate and a wife of a scholar, was one of the leaders of the Hinata group...and was quite caught up in the various campaigns on educational issues." She "admits that a conflict... similar to the one described by Mrs. E. existed among the rest of the members of the group, including herself..... 'Thus conflicts arose between our desire for 'small happiness' and our participation in public activities. Within us, housewives in the uptown residential section, there still persists deep attachment for 'small happiness' and 'happiness in a hidden corner' which has been inculcated in us through the traditional education for women to be

'good wives and wise mothers'. 'Even those of us who have come to think seriously about public affairs are still obsessed by it. Perhaps our inability to get over our obsession is due to the fact that we are in a position to live comfortably without going out of our own homes to participate in social activities. Sometimes our participation in social activities gets us into trouble and we feel we would be better off without public involvement. Of course, all the members of our circle...cherish 'small happiness'...On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to be immersed only in our own 'small happiness', we become worried and disturbed by the feeling that we are not fulfilling our duties. Then we are at a loss, not knowing how to manage this conflict. ...This unmanageable conflict within ourselves arose not only between our attachment to 'small happiness' as over against our participation in social affairs, but also out of our reassessment of what we had taken for granted as 'small happiness'. In any case, up until five years ago, we were all solely preoccupied by our own 'small happiness' as isolated individuals. But through our five years work in various groups, we came to get at least a wider perspective from which to re-examine what our 'small happiness' consists of."

"Three years after Mrs Awata wrote this essay she became involved in a big campaign for the expansion of senior schools facilities in Tokyo"...She "had a son entering senior high school just at that time," and thought it was her responsibility to cooperate with the mothers who had sons of her own son's age in solving this problem of the shortage of schools and their inadequate capacities. She joined a large organization called Citizens' Council...and she worked hard for it during practically the whole year."(page 278)

After the campaign was over Mrs Awata disengaged herself from public activities. First, "because she had encountered many unpleasantnesses and humiliations coming, not from the side of those against whom her campaign was directed, but from those she had expected to be her friends. It was easier to fight against suppression exercised by one's enemy, she felt, than to bear injustices done to her by her own friends.....The

second reason for her disengagement concerned her son.. Owing to involvement in activities outside of her family, "...she neglected her son who had been suffering from infantile asthma... Thus Mrs Awata was faced with the dilemma whether to stick with the ideal role of a mother as redefined by herself and her fellow mothers in the writing groups or to revert to the old concept of that role." (page 279)

Women Question National Policies

"Mrs Kawasaki, in her late fifties, is the wife of a local civil servant and the mother of six children. Throughout the war her second son, who was in the Military Preparatory School, had the strong conviction that Japan could win the war. She had never doubted herself that Japan would be victorious, and so she was completely stunned by the news of the unconditional surrender. On April 10, 1946, for the first time in her life, she cast a ballot at the election of members of Parliament. 'Previously I had absolutely trusted the government and never dreamed of criticizing it. However, since Japan's defeat we have been exposed to the fact that the Government had lied to us so blatantly that it compelled me to change my mind about the government one hundred and eighty degrees. I made up my mind on my own accord to choose a candidate who would truly represent our feeling that we should never fight again. Thus I voted for a Socialist Party candidate.' The feeling that she had been deceived served as the turning point of her ideological posture from support of the war policy of the government to the search for peace. Her initial move toward peace was expressed in her venture to vote for the Socialist Party. During the days of the acute shortage of food immediately after the war, she took her children to stay with her husband's brother, who was a farmer. There she helped with the farm work." A baby born there died three days after birth. "Her bereavement over the loss of her baby became associated in her mind with the hard life she had to lead because of the war and made her more determined than ever to search for peace." (page 280)

In 1953 Mrs Kawasaki joined an educational program

for parents in the school where her fourth son was in the fourth grade, and she elected chairman of the program which was called Mothers' Class. In June 1955 she attended the first Mothers Congress, held in Nagasaki. A visit with a group of women to a twenty-four year old victim of the atomic bomb led to the formation of a writing circle of wives of fishermen, day laborers and salaried men to help the victims of the bomb. Mrs Kawasaki served as secretary to the group. (p 281)

Experience With The Local Bureau of Investigation

"Toward the end of 1956 she (Mrs Kawasaki) was visited by a stranger who introduced himself as a member of the staff of the local bureau of investigation, who then enquired what they discussed at the regular meetings of her writing group. He said, 'It is all right for you to study. But you ought not to go so far as to discuss who makes war...' I was flabbergasted but at the next moment I got angry. 'The war' is the name of the devil for us. Is it not our legitimate right to wish that it will never happen again? If there is anyone who tries to make a war, that one is the enemy of us all. Why do we have to abstain from discussing such matters and from enquiring into the truth of the matter? I could not understand what he was really driving at... Being encouraged by many of our friends I wrote a letter to the editors of a major newspaper, entitled 'We are free to discuss'. It caused greater excitement than we expected and we received many letters of endorsement and encouragement. The local newspaper also took up the matter which developed into such a public stir that the chief bureau of investigation admitted it had gone too far'." (281-282)

"The unpleasant encounter with the bureau of investigation did not discourage her commitment to the cause of peace. On the contrary, it drove her into activities involving even greater risks. In the following year, for instance, she attended the meeting to Study Education For Peace held under the auspices of the City Teachers Union. After the meeting she joined a demonstration for peace. 'I marched arm in arm with my eldest daughter, who became a high school teacher, that year, joining the line of the teachers whom we knew. It was the

splendid first experience of demonstration in my life as in the life of my eldest daughter. I felt, pulsating from the arms linked with those of our friends, the great sense of solidarity with the people with whom we share the common cause'." (page 282)

Questioning The Imperial War Policy

"Mrs. Kawaski changed her ideological posture once "at the time of the termination of the war and she never returned again to her previous stance.... It is characteristic of her writing to emphasize the step by step influence of her children on her and not to mention her husband's doings and thinkings....The second son is mentioned most often. It is he who was converted from commitment to the war policy of the militarists to the cause of peace after the war. He was sick in bed when the demonstration opposing the Security Treaty (with the United States...ed) was staged in 1960. He told his mother, 'Although I cannot join the demonstration, I have given my signature to protest against the Security Treaty.' The eldest daughter encouraged her mother to join a peace demonstration. The daughter later married her brother's class-mate at Tokyo University, who was active in the peace movements. Her fourth son, now a student at Kyoto University, is very active in protest demonstrations against the American atomic submarines that have called at Japanese harbors. It was, then, the constant encouragement and support of these children that led her to declare years after the termination of the war: 'We shall never let our sons, all the sons in Japan, go to the war!'" (p 283)

"Now that the war has come to an end with Japan's defeat and women are encouraged to speak up, those mothers who lost their sons to the war are able to say in public, 'For what purpose did I have to let my son die, now I really wonder' and 'We certainly have been deceived'." (pages 258-259)

"Speaking out in public about their sufferings during the war is a first step toward redefinition of their roles." (page 259)

A Recognition of Ignorance

One mother wrote, "'We are responsible for the making of the war because we were ignorant enough to obey our leaders blindly and to be induced to cooperate wholeheartedly with them.'" (page 272) Another mother wrote that 'Many of us had conflicting attitudes within ourselves. As loyal subjects of the Emperor, we thought it was prestigious to send our sons and husbands to war. But at the same time and at the bottom of our hearts we did not want them to go. Why, then, did we let our love for our sons and husbands succumb to our sense of loyalty to our country?....School education nurtured the mind to accept the wars that the government had made ever since the Sino-Japanese War. The high school children today do not know this shameful history of our school education...It was the education that produced ignorant mothers'." (pages 272-273)

"By reflecting upon and writing about their war experiences the members of the writing circle in Tokyo came to realize that they were ignorant and that their ignorance was the result of the state-controlled education imposed upon Japanese students since the Meiji period." (page 273)

"The recognition of ignorance by the women has two aspects; first, ignorance about the war and, second, ignorance about postwar education." (For instance, children now study, in social studies, the new Constitution which many pre-war-educated mothers never read - and hence feel a gap between themselves and their modern-educated children.) "Both types of ignorance pertain primarily to their roles as mothers and are related to their love for their children. It is this recognition of their own ignorance and its defunction that primarily motivates these mothers to join various extra-familial groups and organizations in order to expand their perspective. And it is participation in multiple group activities that helps them redefine their roles." (page 275)

Farmers' Wives Start Modern Cooperatives

"There has been a noticeable change in the role of

farmers' wives in the postwar era, especially during the 1960's. Hard working as they were, peasants' wives before the war served only as part of the labor force and did not have any say in the planning and management of agricultural production." (page 284)

Owing to the shortage of men (male farmers shifted to other occupations because they found they could not make both ends meet by farming) cooperative farming was developed - by women! It was a difficult process; it involved a change from the old form of cooperative farming which was practiced in the busy season only and was based on the extended family system (consisting of main and branch relatives) to the new cooperative system, with mutual aid on a year-round basis and involving a group of non-relatives. In the old cooperative system the head man of the main family decided about the organization and the working conditions of labor. In the new cooperative system it is the wives who have the greatest voice in determining not only their own wages, but even the men's. Miss Tsurumi details the struggle that brought women to this new status, showing how "women play a major part in promoting cooperation in farm management and production." (page 288)

Bookkeeping Movement Among Farm Women

A "bookkeeping movement aimed at cultivating the habit of modern bookkeeping among women" was started in the agricultural cooperatives, where women learn to keep separate and itemized accounts on household expenditures, on the one hand, and the costs of production and income from the farm, on the other hand. "This bookkeeping practice has enabled women to grasp the facts of domestic life and farm work for the first time in terms of figures. It also has encouraged them to turn farming into a planned economy. They have come to draw up budgets for future family spending, and in order to meet increased levels of expenditure, have devised new schemes for diversified farming, instead of repeating the traditional patterns of crop rotation.

"The bookkeeping movement promoted under the leadership of the Women's Section of the National Associat-

ion of Farmers' Cooperatives is unique in that it has fostered open communication among women living in the same hamlet. Five to ten women in a hamlet gather once a month to compare one another's books to make monthly tabulations of their own costs of living and to discuss how to eliminate waste and improve their financial situation."

"Mrs Yakushiji writes, 'At first the idea of making one's family budget public was repugnant to many of us. As we went along, however, we gradually overcame our sense of resistance and realized how fortunate we were to be able to discuss our problems together in a group of friends. We discussed how to dissolve antagonism between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law over money matters. We also talked about various problems that we had hitherto suffered alone. Our discussion developed from private affairs to social problems, and thus our house-keeping account books served as a very useful means of opening our eyes to larger problems than just domestic affairs. Had we been left to ourselves we could not have made monthly tabulations. It was the group that enabled us to break through the hard crust of conventionalism and to improve our living.'" (pages 289 and 290)

"Thinking in terms of figures and numbers has thus been introduced into the life of a farmer's wife, contributing to turn her previously non-rational way of thinking and acting into predominantly rational modes of thought and action." (page 288)

"The trend for wives to become independent and responsible farmers has given rise to some changes within and without the family...change in the status of women owing to their emergent position as full-fledged independent farmers. One of the changes is that women have become interested in group studies on scientific farming and have begun to have their way not only on matters of farming but also on various public affairs in the village. One woman said, 'Previously I made foolish mistakes while I obeyed what my husband told me to do. Since I came to attend the study group and have studied on my own, my husband has begun to listen to

me, Not only that, he began to consult with me on planting plans." (page 290)

Not only was there a change in the lives of individual women but "the group bookkeeping movement that is developing among agrarian women contributes toward overcoming competitive attitudes among families and cultivating a spirit of cooperation and collectivism." (page 290)

Female Textile Workers

In Chapter Seven Miss Tsurumi devotes twenty pages to describing "the general circumstances within which female textile workers lived in the postwar period" and "the impact of factory life on workers of agrarian origin." In the prewar period these female workers were generally members of at least two groups - their families and the company where they worked. In the postwar period other group affiliations were added: their union and their writing groups. Thus these female textile workers were exposed to four different socializing agencies - their families, management, their labor union and their circle." (page 227)

Miss Tsurumi examines in detail the postwar conditions of female workers and the effect of the new postwar agencies - labor union and writing circles - as described by the workers themselves. They became aware of the poverty of their tenant-farmer fathers...of the hard-working and restricted lives of their mothers, of their own semi-slave wages (much of which had to be remitted to their peasant families.) "In her role as a daughter of peasants, a female worker was not expected to be a fully economically independent person. Her earnings were not considered to belong entirely to her but were regarded as an integral part of the total family income." (page 229) These factory women became aware of the subsidiary role assigned to them in their labor unions. "Although the majority of workers in the textile industry were women, very few women are elected to be officers in their union." (page 232)

In a wool factory near Osaka there emerged a writing circle some fifty women and three men. Most of

the young women had come from villages after graduating from high school. "Those who had finished school around 1950 had been exposed to two conflicting ideologies. They had been indoctrinated with militarism in the primary schools during the war and with democratic principles in high school after the war. When they entered the factory they were exposed to the kind of conflicting demands from management, from the labor union, and from their own parents...How to meet these conflicting demands and how to cope with the discrepancies between what they learned in high school and what they actually encountered in the factory were difficult problems for these girls.....

In their circle they began to write about their own families...the common theme of these writings was the necessity of making remittances to their families. Michiko Tanaka, who had finished only compulsory education and whose family of seven owned less than two acres of land, wrote, 'With the help of the remittances I have been sending home since April my younger sister entered senior high school. To tell the truth, I did not want to send money home. Who wants to sacrifice herself by sending money to her family when she herself cannot afford even to buy the book she wanted? However, my determination not to send money home was undermined when I went back there during the New Year holidays. In our home I found the tatami (sleeping) mats as worn out as ever, the kitchen, which we had planned to remodel, left as it always had been, and the sliding screens, with their paper torn and patched. I saw nothing but signs of poverty in our home, and that made me promise our parents that I would send them a monthly remittance'." (pages 233-234)

"These girls, who had received a postwar education and had learned that each individual has fundamental human rights, including the right to one's own earnings, could not acquiesce in the traditionally prescribed role of a daughter duty-bound to support her poor peasant parents. Besides, their labor union's definition of a living wage showed that they could not live on what they earned, even without sending money home.....The women workers learned, as members of the union, that ideally

they were independent of their parents and their parents of them. Actually, however, as members of peasant families, they knew that their parents were poor and that they had to help them.

"Through writing and discussion in the circle, each girl came to realize that her own family was not the only poor one, and that almost all the other girls' families were poor also, and that the problem of remittances was therefore common to all of them. They realized that it was the poverty of the peasant that created the conflict between the ideal role of a member of the labor union and the actual role of a daughter of a peasant family." (pages 235-236)

"They knew that most of them would eventually return to villages to be peasant wives. They felt that the only way for them to cope with the problem of poverty in the agrarian villages was through a redefinition of the role of a wife and a mother of an agrarian family. In order to achieve such a redefinition, they thought it was necessary to know concretely what was involved in their traditional role. And the best method of learning was to study the lives of their own mothers. Thus they agreed to write the biographies of their own mothers. Forty one biographies were collected and mimeographed... entitled My Mother, in March 1953. Shortly thereafter some members of the circle read an essay written by a historian, Tadashi Kshimoda, who pointed out the importance of the mothers in the modern history of China and Korea. He also described the deeper influence his 'feudal' and self-sacrificing mother exerted upon him and his work, compared with that of his 'progressive' and self-centered father who had modern ideas. And he concluded, 'The work and action of sons is always maintained by the sacrifice and sufferings of their mothers.' Inspired by this essay and other essays written by historians about this time... the leader of the circle suggested that the biographies of their peasant mothers might become a partial documentary basis for a history of common Japanese women. This time about ninety women and a few men participated. Those who had already written biographies expanded and

revised their writings by interviewing their mothers when they returned home for a vacation or by asking mothers questions by letters. Thus a History of of Mothers was produced toward the end of the same year." (pages 236-237)

"When the mothers' biographies were read and compared by the circle members, it was clear that there were some common themes in their mothers' lives. They were all more or less unhappy. The sources of their unhappiness were the existing structure of agricultural production and distribution, the war...and the extended family system under which the wife had to live with her parents-in-law...The most important, from the point of view of the girls was that...their mothers' marriages had been arranged by their parents and were not based on love of the partner....The daughters sympathized with their unhappy mothers and had tremendous respect for their perseverance in the face of their hardships, but, since their attitude of absolute obedience to the parents, their parents-in-law, and their husbands had brought them unhappiness, they began to try not to be so blindly submissive to their superiors. Because their mothers' attitude of resignation kept them perpetually poor, they began to search for a better way of coping with their environment." (pages 238-239)

"One of the women workers said, 'Our mothers worked hard and persevered in resignation to their fate. We shall inherit from them their propensity for hard work, and their perseverance, but we shall use them to improve our lot instead of succumbing to it'." (Page 244)

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Far East Reporter

POSTSCRIPT

The material in these three chapters of the book, "Social Change and the Individual: Japan Before and After Defeat in World War II" by Kazuko Tsurumi reveals Japanese women as seeing themselves in a new and modern light. They see themselves as individuals with independent rights but fulfilling themselves in community groups and public concerns rather than in exclusively personal and family relations.

Although Japan has had a male-dominated society, the focus of women's concern over society's injustices, private and public, is noticeably not anti-male; rather, their concern is strikingly focused on the nature of the society in which they live.

Women's liberation is a process that is accelerating all over the world. There are varying stages in this process, conditioned by the nature of the society in which women find themselves. In socialist societies, as in China, economically, politically and culturally, the goal of liberation is furthered, and not blocked. In capitalist societies the nature of that society still allows for exploitation of people, men as well as women. In countries now in the process of changing their pre-industrial society to modern industrial society women (and men) are having the experience of living in aspects of both the old and the new, with the added advantage of living in a period when socialist countries already exist. Hence, in these countries, the process of liberation for all - men and women - may be far more rapid than has been true in the capitalist countries. The germ of this acceleration is already at work in Japan.

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