

A Failed Mission in Liberation: Japanese Women's Enfranchisement and American Occupation

Malcom Ethan Johnson

Malcom Ethan Johnson is a junior at Berea college located: a small liberal arts college located in the foothills of Kentucky. He is a double major studying history and Asian studies who has had the fortune of spending his time at Berea college as a teacher's assistant in the history department. His current research interests include comparative feminist movements in East Asia, the effects of western colonization, and the cartographic spatiality of ethnographic accounts.

“The struggle that woman is now carrying on is far more far-reaching than any other; and, if no diversion occurs, it will finally surpass in fanaticism any war of religion or race.”¹ These powerful words, written by the Swedish author Ellen Key, would come to embody a steady push for gender equality in the twentieth century.² Born from the strong discourse of the nineteenth century, this female struggle—best defined as gender equality, or feminism—was a siren call heard around the world. Though the words feminist and feminism are French in conception, the movements they have come to describe have worked to annihilate the prejudices that established an inequality between the sexes around the globe.³ Each feminist movement was very much dictated by the social, political, and economic climate in which it operated. Often, leaders would look to their international counterparts—who were divided into socialist, liberal, conservative, and radical factions—to develop innovative methods and

1 Ellen Key, tr. Arthur Chater. *Love and Marriage* (New York, NY 1911), p. 214.

2 Key's definition of feminism and gender equality are especially important when considering the contrasting voices of prolific Japanese feminists, like Yosano Akiko.

3 Karen Offen offers an excellent treatment on the conceptions of feminism in Europe, tracing the concept all the way to its roots in the French Revolution of 1789. Her analysis delves into the strata of development and the varieties of European feminism that would have undoubtedly influenced Japanese women during the age of expansion and modernization in the Meiji Era.

ideas that would ultimately decide what it meant to be a woman. For some factions, characteristics of gender equality would be defined by a state that works to enable and protect the female ability to control reproductive rights, to earn a livelihood, exercise the right to divorce, and access to universal suffrage. For others, gender equality is rooted in the family as the primary political and social unit, and defined by an ethic of care, rather than an ethic of competition.

Japan is no different. During the early twentieth century, several factions of Japanese feminists were doing something very important for their movement: disagreeing. Their discourse, undoubtedly an echo of their feminist predecessors, created the Meiji New Women.⁴ While these women recognized the importance of becoming involved in the state to attain protections under the law, they mainly focused on attaining equality in a more practical sense: one in which men recognized women's contributions to their families and country. Thus, the New Women set out to challenge the tradition and convention that dictated those characteristics. However, because of a series of government fiat and a history of Confucian inspired subordination, they experienced very little social or political realization of their work. Indeed, the government's resistance and the stalwart traditions would prove strong barriers to the dissemination and acceptance of New Woman ideas. As social and political changes began to stagnate, though the New Women had crafted new and refashioned old arguments, a wholesale regime change, incited by the Fifteen Years War, would alter their discourse even further.⁵ This total war

- 4 "New Woman" is a very broad, internationally employed term that was first coined in the late nineteenth century. Largely, it describes a woman who was offering political discourse for defining womanhood in a rapidly modernizing world, regardless of which school of feminist thought she belonged to. Accordingly, the term became associated with the modern trappings of the Meiji Era and its women. As Dina Lowy explains in her work, *The Japanese New Woman*, these women set goals aimed around an ethic of care that grew from a heightened awareness of self, of gender distinctions, and of an enhanced sense of worth gained from becoming actively engaged in society. Certainly, these women sought to define womanhood by its modernity and its Japaneseness—a goal that demanded equal respect and recognition from their male countrymen.
- 5 The "Fifteen-Year War" is defined by the period of Japanese military aggression from the Manchurian Incident in 1931, to Japan's defeat during the Second World War in 1945. Making this distinction is important because the Pacific War, starting with the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese military in 1941, generally refers to the war between Japan and the US, but not to the war with the other Asian countries. The term Fifteen-Year War is used here in preference to "Second World War" or Pacific War because the focus of the discussion covers the period from 1931 to 1945 and is not limited to the narrower period of 1941 to 1945.

required all resources, both material and human, to be allocated in ways suited to the absolute purpose of the nation-state, thus everyday citizens became an element of the governmental project of controlling resources that prioritized production. One of those sources of production, not surprisingly, was centered on women's reproduction. Japanese feminists were aware of this move by the state, and began to change their arguments accordingly, effectively plotting a scenario that emphasized the importance of women as pillars of the state and participants in state activities, which thereby made women's contributions known to the national and local government authorities. This new message altered the New Women's discourse that sought to redefine womanhood in the early twentieth century, and ultimately shows that Japanese women were working to attain full citizenship long before American occupation. While the American democratization effort would grant women legislative rights, I would argue that, in spite of the work of these women, this foreign allocation meant that meaningful social change on the practical level never occurred.

Operating under the aegis of American democracy, MacArthur's occupation administrators and constitutional drafters worked to create a Japan that epitomized American ideas of freedom, justice, and citizenship; and in many ways, they failed. Their work, which appeared to set a standard for democratization where both sexes held equal positions in society, actually used the old mediums of administrations to curtail any meaningful change in Japanese ideas of hierarchy. While American occupation forces regarded Japanese women's suffrage and women's visibility in the national election as a barometer by which to measure the overall improvement of life under occupation, this legislation never changed the underpinning ideas in Japanese society that so rigidly restricted the roles of women.⁶ Thus, American ideas of gender equality mainly took root in the revolution from above, but had very little impact on every day life of Japanese women. Though Japanese women have achieved forms of full equality through suffrage, property ownership, marriage, divorce, guardianship, education, and business operation, they hardly see those legal rights transformed into practical equality in their day-to-day lives. The challenge, then, for Japanese women was not one of gaining formal rights, as it is for many women around the world, but of gaining actual equality

6 Lisa Yoneyama, "Liberation under Siege: U.S. Military Occupation and Japanese Women's Enfranchisement", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Legal Borderlands: Law and the Construction of American Borders (Sep., 2005): p. 887.

in practice.⁷ I would argue that, in light of this ongoing struggle for practical equality for Japanese women, American ideas of gender equality had little impact on Japanese ideas of gender equality during the occupation period.

The New Japanese Woman: Creating Discourse for a Modernizing Nation

The day the mountains move has come.
 I speak, but no one believes me.
 For a time, the mountains have been asleep,
 But long ago they danced with fire.
 It doesn't matter if you believe this,
 My friends, as long as you believe:
 All the sleeping women
 Are now awake and moving.⁸

This poem, written by Yosano Akiko, appeared in the first issue of the Japanese women's magazine, *Seito*, in September of 1911. Yosano, an already famous poet and writer, penned these words to announce the reawakening of Japanese women across the island nation. This image of the new Japanese woman harkened to the feminine power of a distant past where women created classical works of literature, while simultaneously declaring the fresh eruption of contemporary female power and creativity. Remarkably, her work noted male skepticism of the new Japanese woman, and also hinted at the controversy that would ensue. Yosano's role in political discourse only began with this poem. In the well circulated magazine *Taiyo* (The Sun), Yosano wrote an opinion piece titled "Eliminating Overestimation of Motherhood," and waded head first into what Takeda Hiroko has called the "Motherhood-Protection and Abortion Debates"—controversial facets of the "woman problem," which had much of the country in tumult, and would come to define the New Woman. In this work, her point was twofold: that motherhood was not the only element of a woman's life, and, second, to criticize the idea of sexual division of labor. A mother, writer, artist, and activist, her voice came right

7 The accomplished scholar Iwao Sumiko explores this a great deal in her work "The Quiet Revolution: Japanese Women Today" published in the *Japan Foundation Newsletter* in 1991: (Issue XIX), 1-9.

8 Carole McCann, and Seung-kyung Kim. *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Routledge, 2013, 30.

up against western authors like Leo Tolstoy and Swedish feminist Ellen Key.⁹ Yosano's awoken women were the antithesis of their predecessors, who were depicted as complacent good mothers and wives. Instead, the New Women would challenge the tradition and convention that dictated a female's role in life, and would do so, most importantly, independent of Western ideas of gender equality.¹⁰

The New Woman Debates in the early twentieth century was not a spontaneous boiling over of repressed feminine power, but rather the culmination of decades of what came to be known as the "woman problem." This discussion penetrated all strata of society, spanning across government, schools, and media, and ultimately deciding the role of women in the family and across society. Initially, this conversation occupied the space of masculine power, but moved into the female realm in the 1910s, as women in Tokyo organized the feminist group Seitosha (Blue Stocking Society), and its journal, *Seito*. Women used this outlet as a medium for expression, as a testament to new female ideas and contributions, and to challenge old conceptions of femininity and gender norms.¹¹ Traditionally, the ability of Japanese women to challenge the status quo in such a work had been less viable than that of their male counterparts. *Seito* became increasingly radical and was the center of much criticism. After seven years of publication, the short lived society had created a climate that seemed to embody the New Women debate, and was ultimately stifled by the criticism they received from traditional women, who had a deeply personal understanding of womanhood, and the power of imperial censorship.¹² Yosano and other *Seito* women understood that challenging convention and custom in Meiji Japan was no easy task, and would require more than changing legislation or condemning chauvinistic masculinity.

The Blue Stocking Society was undoubtedly a reaction to the Ministry of Education's edict of 1910 that strictly limited women to a secondary position in society. A fusion of Confucian-inspired samurai values and Victorian ideas about the importance of monogamy and chastity, the essence of this edict

9 Takeda Hiroko, *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan*, 49.

10 Barbara Malony offers an in-depth analysis of the indigenous and imported conceptions of rights to argue that, though Japanese women were aware of international feminist movements, they ultimately refashioned imported ideas to suit their needs. See "Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 69, No. 4, (November, 2000), pp. 639-661.

11 Lowy, Dina. *The Japanese "New Woman": Images of Gender and Modernity*, 3.

12 Henshall, Kenneth. *Dimensions of Japanese Society: Gender, Margins and Mainstream*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 21-22.

stressed the superiority of men to women. This edict evolved from the Civil Code of 1898, which “established the institution of the household as the basic unit of Japanese society.”¹³ In the case of Japan, the household was essentially a corporate entity where the husband’s unwavering authority was solidified by female subordination. This widespread acceptance of a patriarchal household system ushered the reduction of female power in all dimensions of Japanese society. Under this system, the true marker of womanhood was defined by being a “good wife and wise mother.” As Baron Kikuchi, Minister of Education and president of both Kyoto and Tokyo Universities, wrote at the end of the Meiji period:

Our female education, then, is based on the assumption that women marry, and that its object is to fit girls to become “good wives and mothers.” The question naturally arises what constitutes a good wife and wise mother, and the answer to the question required a knowledge of the position of the wife and the mother in the household and the standing of women in society and her status in the state... [The] man goes outside to work to earn his living, to fulfill his duties to the State; it is his wife’s part to help him, for the common interests of the house, and as her share of the duty to the state, by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking over the household economy, and, above all, tending to the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner.¹⁴

This excerpt accurately reflects the prevailing ideas about the roles and responsibilities that women were expected to fulfill, as well as the ideas that underpinned both the edict of 1910 and the Civil Code of 1898. The emergence of the new woman, working to challenge convention and tradition, should have been a steady, prolonged ascent toward legislative equality. Instead, because of the chaos of American Occupation and the devastation of total war, the work of these women was never fully realized.

The work of the new woman in Meiji Japan, though relatively successful, was wracked with controversy and would have to adapt as total war swept the Asian continent. Before the Fifteen Years War, the work of Japanese feminist

13 Robert J. Smith. “Making Village Women into ‘Good Wives and Wise Mothers’ in Prewar Japan.” *Journal of Family History* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 1983), 72.

14 Dairoku, Kikuchi. “The Imperial Rescript on Education (1890).” *Japanese Education*. London: John Murray, 1909, 2-3.

organizations writ large encountered complicated developments that further softened the imposition of American conceptions of gender equality. Ultimately, the discourse they offered, embodied in the Motherhood Protection Debates and the Abortion Debates, would light the path for their successors, but would not effectively change preexisting ideas of gender equality in the nation.

Total War: Altering the New Woman Discourse

Attaining full legal rights for women has, historically, evolved from a binary approach: on the one hand lies an aspiration for full participation in the public realm, and on the other hand lies the aspiration for full female control in the domestic sphere.¹⁵ It was this binary approach that characterized the Japanese feminist movement in the early twentieth century, and the realization of one would, it seems, cause the other to abate. As Tomie Nokao argues in his work, the scenario Japanese feminists came up with during mobilization for total war was “aimed at increasing women’s awareness of their being pillars of the state, participating in state activities as responsible citizens, and thereby making women’s contributions to the state known to the national and local government authorities.”¹⁶ By making these contributions known, women leaders, like Ichikawa Fusae, began to assert that mother-child protection and other total war legislation was not a form of civil equality, but rather compensation from the state for fulfilling their public duty as mothers for producing the “future nation.”¹⁷ I would posit that contemporary historians can understand this adoption of opportunist strategies as an effect of the realization of Japanese feminists that the viability of a political movement in a time of war was, essentially, non-existent. It was during this time that feminists began to turn their narrative into an argument about the responsibility of women to provide for their country, rather than an argument that calls for full female

15 I use the term “domestic sphere” here to refer to production that happens inside the home. In the West, this tends to be referred to as the cult of domesticity, but that’s a major mischaracterization of the Japanese women’s movement. Historians Sharon Nolte and Sally Hastings make the distinction between the Western “cult of domesticity” and, what I’ve called the domestic sphere, which is also referred to as the Japanese “cult of productivity” very clear. For the purposes of this work, that distinction is less important than understanding the ways in which Japanese feminists altered their discourse to work with the total war regime, rather than against.

16 Tomie Naoko. “The Political Process of Establishing the Mother-Child Protection Law in Prewar Japan.” *Social Science Japan Journal* 8, no. 2 (2005): 241.

17 Ibid. 240.

enfranchisement.

Legislation under the total war regime was one of the biggest factors for altering the course of the work of Japanese feminists. As the government became more and more committed to crafting a population policy in the 1930s, their motivations were clear: total war had made reproduction a matter of national concern. As Takeda Hiroko argues, “the increase of the Japanese population statistically hit its pinnacle in 1926, and subsequently, the population trend turned in the direction of gradual decrease, with the fall in birth rates and the decrease in the juvenile population attracting particular attention after the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937.”¹⁸ This alarming phenomenon caused serious anxiety over human resources, particularly those needed for supporting total war. Perhaps the most pronounced concern for the government was the shortage of soldiers and new recruits for the workforce. These concerns fueled the Japanese population policy of the 1930s that introduced legislation for the growth of “population of good quality” in order to secure enough human resources for waging the war.¹⁹ These policies, however, were based on the exploitation of female bodies. Effectively, the total war regime commandeered the wombs of “good mothers” to maintain the war effort, which ultimately led to further legislation that consolidated and supported soldier production. These ideas were embodied, for militarists, in the Mother-Child Protections Act, which was connected to the discourse on the Motherhood Protection Debates of the Blue Stocking Society. The machismo of this legislation “reinforced the role of a paternalistic and patriarchal state in ‘protecting’ its women and children, and the nationalist and militarists project which circumscribed the meanings attached to motherhood.”²⁰ Thus, the incorporation of females into the nation-state was quite different from the course laid out by New Women, as Japanese womanhood became increasingly defined in means of war production.

The alteration of their course, however, proved to be a minor impediment on realizing full social and political rights. Undoubtedly, the most trying times for every Japanese inhabitant were yet to come. As New Women adjusted their discourse to challenge old patriarchal systems by channeling their power as producers for the state, the Total War Regime began to recognize their

18 Takeda Hiroko. *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan: Between Nation-state and Everyday Life*. Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies: 78.

19 Tomie Naoko. “The Political Process of Establishing the Mother-Child Protection Law in Prewar Japan.”: 242.

20 Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900–1937*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997): 162.

efforts. The chaos of occupation, however, would complete New Women's efforts in many ways. In an article featured in *The New York Times*, which was ironically titled "Democratic Rule Ordered in Japan," George Jones captures MacArthur's motivation for enfranchising women: "He urged the emancipation of Japanese women through the right to vote so that they might introduce a 'new concept of government directly subservient to the home.'"²¹ Indeed, Japanese women would take to the polls and elect new female leaders who would enact legislation on their behalf—all the while, the efforts of Japanese feminists would be sent into disarray as they had to set new goals, arrange new groups, and navigate new legislation. If gender equality were defined by a state that works to enable and protect the female ability to control reproductive rights, to earn a livelihood, exercise the right to divorce, and access to universal suffrage, then Japanese women had attained it. If, however, they sought gender equality is rooted in the family as the primary political and social unit, and defined it by an ethic of care, rather than an ethic of competition, then this immediate liberation would prove quite detrimental.

The Great American Coup

The dawn has slowly begun to break in the Land of the Rising Sun for Japan's most depressed class—the patient, plodding Japanese women. For uncounted generations the Japanese woman has tramped along the muddy roads three paces behind her lord and master. Now all of a sudden, and mostly through the insistence of the Allied occupation authorities, she has become a member of Japan, vested with the power to vote, choose her government, organize meetings as she feels like it and express her thoughts without fear of the secret police—even, possibly, by a stretch of extreme imagination, talk back to her husband.²²

As Lindesay Parrott, Tokyo Bureau Chief for the *New York Times*, commented in a series of articles: the occupation forces had instituted revolutionary changes for the Japanese women. While his observation was undoubtedly accurate, the implications of this revolutionary act were yet to

21 George E. Jones "Democratic Rule Ordered in Japan." *New York Times*. October 12, 1945.

22 Lindesay Parrott. "Now a Japanese Woman Can Be a Cop: She Likes the Idea, Too, and Is Looking about for Many More Similar Opportunities. Now a Japanese Woman Can Be a Cop." *New York Times*. June 2, 1946, sec. The New York Times Magazine.

be understood. Parrott's observation is an especially poignant reminder that much of the West had believed that only through the power of democratization could this "depressed class," regardless of their aspirations, achieve suffrage and other constitutional rights. General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers²³ during the six years of occupation, was not immune to such thought. Accordingly, he named the enfranchisement of women, and their full integration into society as number one on his list of "Five Great Reforms," which he presented in a late afternoon meeting with Japan's new Premier, Baron Kijuro Shidehara. Within days, the Japanese government would comply with MacArthur's demands.²⁴ With American powers dominating the political scene, the progress that Japanese feminists were making under the total war regime and the aims of their struggle would be realized, oddly enough, to their detriment.

Mire Koikari, associate professor of Women's Studies at the University of Hawaii, has argued: "Like Japanese women's suffrage, the constitutional revision including the Japanese Equal Rights Amendment was initiated from above, that is, by American occupiers in the Government Section with little involvement of Japanese."²⁵ This revolution from above, or the democratic imposition by occupation forces, didn't reach too far beyond SCAP's documents and the new Japanese constitution. The drafters, while granting suffrage, did not fundamentally change Japanese hierarchical conceptions of gender. This is largely because of the failure of a sustainable grassroots movement that would empower Japanese women to become the pillars of the state, for which they had been fighting so diligently for decades. Barbara Molony discusses an instant during a visit from women in the Civil Information and Education Section,²⁶ who were responsible for instituting gender democracy in postwar Japan, that embodies this sentiment quite well. In the village that the CI&ES visited, an elderly woman, upon hearing that the Americans were urging Japanese women to exercise "'the rights benevolently bestowed on them by the Americans,' indignantly demanded how the Americans could ignore the

23 Hereafter, I will refer to General MacArthur and his team as SCAP: an acronym for the full title.

24 Burton, Crane "New Laws to Free Japanese Women: Statutes to be Changed to Fit New Constitution." *New York Times*. August 23, 1946.

25 Mire Koikari, "Exporting Democracy? American Women, "Feminist Reforms," and Politics of Imperialism in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952" *A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2002): 30.

26 Hereafter referred to as CI&ES.

efforts of Ichikawa Fusae, one of the most prolific Japanese feminists of the total war period, and her colleagues to gain the vote for women.”²⁷ Indeed, American occupiers were largely ignorant to the work of Japanese feminists before their arrival, crippling the power of the revolutionary fiat from SCAP.

Perhaps the only viable opportunity that Japanese women would have to realize a practical implementation of gender equality under American occupation was those same low-ranking female soldiers of CI&ES; after all, it was they who were trying to organize a grassroots mobilization of women in the name of democracy. Encouraging the leaders of women’s groups to run for office was a cornerstone of the CI&ES’s work, and would be the ultimate signifier or the success of the American democratization effort. For these American female officers, this encouragement took the form of “educating” the Japanese women in the school of democracy. Mire Koikari explains the scope of the education effort: “The CI&E created information centers and libraries, showed motion pictures, broadcast radio programs, and offered numerous workshops and lectures. Through these mediums, the Americans tried to inject into the Japanese the American ideal of democracy.”²⁸ For democracy to be successful, American leadership considered it paramount to “give the Japanese an opportunity to discard those of their past ways which made them a menace to the rest of the world and to establish democratic principles in all spheres of political, economic and cultural life.”²⁹ With their mission clearly dictated by SCAP, the women of CI&ES sat out to liberate what they had perceived to be a stifled, weak, and ignorant Japanese woman—a misguided and erroneous mission that would ignore the work of New Women, and, ultimately fall short of Macarthur’s idyllic vision of American democratization.

With great insight, Parrott was very careful not to trumpet SCAP’s achievement as a top-down victory for American democracy. In an interview with Parrott, one of the most prolific Japanese feminists of the time, Ichikawa Fusae, introduced American readers to the long history of the Japanese women’s suffrage movement. In this interview, Ichikawa asserted that, regardless of American occupation, Japanese women would have achieved full citizenship

27 Barbara Molony. “Women’s Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925”:
661.

28 Koikari, Mire. “Exporting Democracy? American Women, ‘Feminist Reforms,’ and Politics of Imperialism in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (2002): 33.

29 “Mission and Accomplishments of the Occupation in the CIE Fields,” October 1, 1949, SCAP Records, box 5246, file Staff Studies.

in due time, primarily as a result of their efforts in the war. She continued, “It is the hope and belief of Japanese feminists that in this new situation the ancient feudal custom which kept women in bondage will simply and quietly be permitted to lapse by mutual consent without further comment.”³⁰ It was this sentiment that many Japanese feminists shared as they saw American Occupation as a new era of their struggle. In many ways, their hopes were never achieved.

The End of an Era

While American legislation opened the door for Japanese women to achieve gender equality, the failure to empower Japanese women during occupation led to a weak transmission of American ideas of gender equality, and no practical realization of gender equality in Japan. In spite of the work of New Women, the immediate realization of their efforts meant that meaningful social change on the practical level never occurred. While MacArthur’s occupation administrators and constitutional drafters worked to create a Japan that epitomized American ideas of freedom, justice, and citizenship, in many ways, they failed. Thus, in light of this ongoing struggle for practical equality for Japanese women, American ideas of gender equality had little impact on Japanese ideas of gender equality during the occupation period. The New women would challenge the tradition and convention that dictated a female’s role in life through the Motherhood Protection Debates and the Abortion Debates, which would light the path for their successors, but would not effectively change preexisting ideas of gender equality in the nation. As I have argued, these debates in the early twentieth century were not a spontaneous boiling over of repressed feminine power, but rather the culmination of decades of what came to be known as the “woman problem.” Yosano and other Seito women understood that challenging convention and custom in Meiji Japan was no easy task, and would require more than changing legislation or condemning chauvinistic masculinity. Instead, because of the disruptive force of total war, the work of these women was never fully realized.

In the thralls of the war, Japanese feminists adopted opportunist strategies upon the realization that the viability of a political movement in a time of war was, essentially, non-existent. It was during this time that feminists began to

30 Parrott, Lindsay. “Out of Feudalism: Japan’s Women: Under Allied Pressure They Have Suddenly Been Granted a New Place and a New Role in Their Country’s Life.” *New York Times*. October 28, 1945, sec. The New York Times Magazine.

turn their narrative into an argument about the responsibility of women to provide for their country, rather than an argument that calls for full female enfranchisement. The legislation enacted under the total war regime, and the demands of the war were two of the biggest factors for altering the course of the work of Japanese feminists. With women voicing their role in society, especially for contributions to the war production, they increasingly pressured the total war regime to grant them rights under the Meiji Constitution. But, with the end of the war, and the devastation of national resources, American occupiers, much to the detriment of their social equality, granted women full enfranchisement. This was largely due to the ignorance of low ranking female officers who were charged with educating Japanese women in the school of democracy. Compounding their ignorance, these American occupiers were largely uninformed about the work of Japanese feminists before their arrival, crippling the power of the revolutionary fiat from SCAP. While it was the hope and belief of Japanese feminists that “the ancient feudal custom which kept women in bondage” would simply and quietly lapse by mutual consent, the American occupation did not inspire such a silent slipping away. Understanding the deeply rooted historical context of the occupation era tells contemporary scholars a great deal about gender inequity in Japan. From Yosano’s journal, with words scribbled a century ago now, she outlines the hopes for Japanese women that American Occupation could not realize:

Far from such vague ideals as “wise mother and good wife” or the “protection of motherhood,” ... these conditions amount to the sort of thoroughgoing individualism, personalism, and humanism, in which all persons can enjoy life equally and harmoniously, without bias or inequality.³¹

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