

JAPANESE WOMEN IN GRASSROOTS POLITICS:

Building a Gender Neutral Society from the Bottom-Up

ABSTRACT

The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women highlights the importance of equal participation of women in public life. Since the early 1960s, women in Japan have voted in elections at significantly higher rates than men. However, Japanese women's equal participation in policy formulation and decision-making lag far behind major democracies. Gender equality is stated under the Japanese constitution, but social practices are far from equal. There are no legal constraints on Japanese women's right to candidacy for public office, but they are far underrepresented in local and national elected assemblies. In 1999 an important landmark in the substantial progress toward gender equality took place when the Japanese government, for the first time, legally denounced the stereotyped division of roles on the basis of gender and described men and women as equal partners. An unprecedented number of legislation, policy changes, and organizational reform at the national level were introduced from this state-led initiation. In the same year, women's grassroots groups were rapidly moving beyond the reach of policy, organizational, and legal changes; they successfully conducted a major nationwide campaign for "More Women to Assemblies!" and increased the number of elected women representatives at the local level at an unprecedented rate. The purpose of this article is to assess the potential of increased women's political voices in Japan, which can be seen as an alternative way of solving the problems of political disengagement in the male dominated representative democracy. To this end,

the article will examine the point of departure in 1999 toward “gender free” society in Japan, with special emphasis on the importance of grassroots missions in changing the culturally and socially formed mind set of Japanese women.

Key words: gender equality, gender politics, grassroots politics, Japan, Japanese women, local elections.

Introduction

Representative democracy in post-WWII Japan is now at a crossroads: Japan’s voter turnout has been alarmingly low and the floating voters, who drift from party to party or between turnout and abstention at actual elections, have continued to increase. This is not necessarily a sign of widespread political apathy but can be a warning against the old politics of pork barrel, which has given favors to special interest groups in the past. Japan is now facing a time like no other in the history of modern Japan; there is an exceptional high demand for an alternative way of politics. Reformists or new political groups are expected to turn this opportunity into democracy-building. Forward-looking women’s groups in Japan are proposing an alternative form for political renewal.

In December 1945, the Japanese government, directed by General Douglas MacArthur, revised an election law for the House of Representatives, granting Japanese women 20 or over the right to suffrage and those of 25 or over the right to candidacy. Articles 14, 24, and 44 of the 1947 constitution, drafted by the U.S. Occupation authority, declared equality for all men and women. Yet equality of legal

opportunity alone still led to unequal rewards. The commitment to democracy must indeed be substantive rather than rhetorical.

Until as late as the early 1980s, LDP (Liberal Democratic Party/government party) politicians had been extremely reluctant to compromise the patriarchal notion that women should remain at home. Since 1975, when women's rights became an issue within the United Nations at the World Conference of the International Year of the Woman, international norms and standards institutionalized on women's rights began to cause discord with Japan's social and legal norms. By the mid-1990s, the United Nations increasingly strengthened its mechanisms on the protection of women's rights, which were ratified by member states including Japan. Equally important, it was around the time of the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995 that the political environment favored real gender reform. As described below, domestic actors, especially female leaders in party politics and women's groups, successfully incorporated the compliance to international norms on a national agenda and in policy-making.

The national government enacted the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society in 1999, which articulated, for the first time, a paradigm of gender-equal society and required the state to create institutional mechanisms promoting equal gender participation and gender equality. The most drastic changes of all were the resultant legal changes concerning women's rights in Japan which had been notorious for the absence of legal reforms. These sweeping changes within a few short years were not only restricted to the level of laws and policies, but also extended to grassroots movements. Many leaders in women's organizations believed that the promotion of gender equality

could be achieved only through changing the minds of Japanese women themselves. By the late 1990s, key women's organizations became increasingly participatory and action-oriented toward correcting unequal rewards for women. They were responding to UN calls for increasing the percentage of women assembly representatives at least to 30% so that they have an influence. As a result, the 1999 unified local elections created a record number of women challenging for seats in assemblies. It is broadly citizens-based independent candidates that occupied a key part of the movements to increase women's presence in politics.

The objective of this article is twofold. The first is to examine the nature of top-down affairs of state-led gender reform and to explain the circumstances under which the conservative party in power came to address gender equality as part of reforms in Japanese politics. The second is to examine bottom-up activities of grassroots organizations at the forefront of campaigns, which are organized to raise women's awareness and to change policy agendas for gender reform by increasing the number of women representatives in politics and decision-making. The key focus of this study is on the year 1999 when two watershed events simultaneously took place. One was a radical departure toward a sex-neutral model of society that began with the 1999 enactment of the Basic Law at the national level. The other was an unprecedented success of grassroots campaigns to increase shares of women's seats in the 1999 unified local elections. There are three basic factors that may cause women's under-representation in politics: a sense of discrimination against women candidates (Norris 1985, pp. 95-99; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997, ch 5), culturally and socially formed women's consciousness (Lee 1976; Pharr 1981, pp. 52-58; Randall 1982), and structural impediments such as

election systems. This article argues that changing the second factor, culturally and socially formed women's consciousness for political participation, is especially difficult in Japan and that grassroots organizations have played a crucial role in consciousness raising for Japanese women to become proactive in public life.

The core of this study lies in the examination of grassroots campaigns to increase the number of women representatives in the 1999 unified local elections. The examination of these campaigns is centered around women candidates who are not affiliated with any political party and who get their support for election campaigns from voluntary groups to attract voters in general. Why does this study focus on these particular candidates? Increased women representatives do not necessarily lead to the direct reflection of women's voices in politics. At a stage of agenda-setting, all women representatives tend to act together on a non-partisan basis for women issues such as day-care, maternity leave, and sexual harassment policies; however, women representatives are subject to a variety of political constraints when it comes to decision-making. Those women representatives affiliated with a political party may be influenced by the party ideology and the special interests of party support organizations, and those neighborhood/kinship-based women representatives may also be affected by their personal support groups. Although increased women representatives makes it easier to retain women issues on a political agenda and to occasionally make gender-related policies beyond partisan politics, it is broadly citizen-based women independents that have been the spearhead of gender reform at the local level.

Japan's Readiness for Gender Equality

One would expect that, given its high adult literacy rates and its high educational levels, Japan would be effectively raising women's consciousness and capabilities to participate actively in economic and political activities and take part in decision-making. Interestingly enough, according to an international survey, *Human Development Report 2005*, Japan ranks 11th (among 177 countries) with 0.943 of the Human Development Index (HDI) and 14th (among 140 countries) with 0.937 of the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI), but Japan drops to 43th place (among 80 countries) with 0.534 of the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (UNDP 2005).¹ Even worse, according to the data (as of February 2006) compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2006), Japan sinks further to 105th place on women's shares of seats in a lower or single house (9.0 per cent). Today, many developing countries, such as Rwanda (48.8 per cent), Pakistan (21.3 per cent) and the Philippines (15.7 per cent), far exceed Japan in terms of shares of women's seats in a lower or single house.

Japan's "Vision of Gender Equality: Creating New Values for the 21st Century," a public policy paper, which was submitted by the Council for Gender Equality² on July 30, 1996, argued that seeing gender issues as a simple matter of improving the status of women was not enough to ensure the realization of a gender-equal society, and proposed the idea of *danjo kyodo sankaku* (joint participation by men and women) referring to men's and women's rights to "participate on the basis of their individual character" but "not to be constrained by socially and culturally formed distinctions between men and women" (GEB 1996). In an address, delivered on June 16, 1997, to the Council for Gender Equality, then Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro stated, "it

is my belief that building a gender-equal society can be considered a form of social reform and that gender equality will be one of the pillars of ‘reform and creation’ in every field of society” (GEB 1997). At that time, Hashimoto held both the roles of prime minister as well as president of the LDP. Was this public statement heralded as a signal of the breakdown of LDP’s conservative value of women, family and gender roles? Was Japan really heading for such a participatory society?

Top-Down Affairs of State-Led Feminism: Institutional and Legal Changes

The year 1999 was a watershed in history of Japanese women in politics. The public policy paper, drafted by the Council, became the blueprint for a new law called the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society, which went into effect in June 1999. It marked a radical departure from the previous policy stance concerning women in Japan. Article 3 of this law states, “Formation of a Gender-Equal Society shall be promoted based on respect for the human rights of women and men, including: respect for the dignity of men and women as individuals; no gender-based discriminatory treatment of women or men; and the securing of opportunities for men and women to exercise their abilities as individuals” (GEB 1999). This opening article of the law proposes a “gender-free” society that does not reflect the stereotyped division of roles on the basis of gender but rather having as neutral an impact as possible on the selection of social activities by men and women as equal partners. The law was the first state-led attempt in Japan to incorporate gender feminism (prominent second-wave movements) into social policy and to seek a sex-neutral model of society. It requires the state to implement measures promoting equal gender participation and gender equality. Mainstream women’s groups in Japan had

been demanding state intervention for some time, as attested by their campaigns for laws mandating equal pay, for taxpayer-financed day care, for sexual harassment prevention, for a domestic violence prevention bill, for legalization of the oral-contraceptive pill, and for legislation against child pornography and sexual abuse. In recent years, the Japanese government has been dealing with new political issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, which had been normally regarded as personal matters outside the state reach in Japan. The government would now seem to admit that “The personal is political” or personal lives are also ruled by political forces, and thus state intervention into the personal realm is necessary for eliminating obstacles for women from achieving freedom and equal rights (Keohane 1981, pp. 91-96).

After decades of campaigning by Japanese reproductive rights advocates, the Japanese government finally legalized the oral contraceptive pill in June 1999 (Goto, Reich, and Aitken 1999). That same year, the Equal Employment Opportunities Law, which was revised especially to prevent sexual harassment at work, took effect. Employers now are under a legal obligation to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. In November 1999, the Anti-Child Sexual Abuse Law (Law for Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and for Protecting Children) also became effective (ECPAT 1999). It is important to note that this legislation reversed the responsibility of prostitution by targeting buyers’ illegal acts rather than sellers’ ones, in order to deter the sexual exploitation of women and children. Perhaps one of the most publicized changes in gender policy is the government initiative of public, mandatory long-term care insurance (LTCI), which started in April 2000 (Campbell and Ikegami 2000). This new program was quite a surprising initiative and a major departure from the past government’s policy in which

the family, particularly women, were the primary providers for the elderly care under the patriarchal notion. Under this expensive program, everyone age 65 or over is eligible for benefits of both institutional and community-based caregiving based on physical and mental disability, in six categories of need.³ The Japanese government has decisively shifted toward “socialization of care” for bedridden or frail older persons by transferring responsibility from women to the state. In view of the Japanese government, to this extent, the personal realm is no longer a separate one from which the state finds it expedient to stay out, but in fact needs to intervene to promote gender equality. This trend was embraced and strengthened by both the Law on Proscribing Stalking Behaviour and Assisting Victims (enacted in 2000) and Japan’s first comprehensive law against spousal violence, the Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims (passed in the Diet in April 2001). Over one hundred Spousal Violence Counselling and Support Centers are now operating across the nation. In December 2000, the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education was passed and the elimination of violence against women also became a national goal in the Japanese educational system. These institutional and legal changes of 1999 – 2000 represented a fundamental shift in Japanese government policy toward women’s issues, which were now incorporated under the slogan of *josei no jinzen* (women’s human rights). In the aggregate, these changes amounted to an astonishingly rapid expansion of gender policy.

Even as short a time ago as the early 1980s, the Japanese government, although not actively pursuing, tacitly recognized the division of roles on the basis of gender by not promoting equal gender participation (Ichikawa 1980, p. 9).⁴ Why did the Japanese government make the abrupt shift of gender policy when it did?

At a general level, policy expansion is a reflection of government's response to increased needs. Japan's population is expected to peak at 128 million in 2006 and then face a period of decline. Japan's population (by 2014, over 25 per cent will be above 65 years of age) is aging much faster than any other major OECD country's population; the fertility rate has continued to drop, recording 1.29 in 2004 (MIAC 2006). It is obvious that, due to the declining work-capable population, women's participation in the labor market needs to be promoted and utilized to sustain Japan's healthy economy. These figures indicate increasing need for new gender policy, but they are changing in a constant pace over time, while the institutional and legal changes in gender policy are quite abrupt. Although demographic changes or other shifts in need may set parameters for government action in a long term policy-stance change, they are not direct determinants of the abrupt changes.

We also need to look at factors within the political system as well as the political environment such as demographic shifts, in order to explain the abrupt changes (e.g., Helco 1974). In this respect, differences in beliefs held by leaders and policy makers may also determine policy output. By the late 1990s, some senior LDP began to argue that the old patriarchal ideal of the full-time housewife and mother would no longer be an available option for Japan's future. LDP Labor Minister Okano Yutaka stated, "the so-called *shoshika* (low birth rate phenomenon), which means the coming decline in the working population, is one of the biggest problems we have to deal with (HOC 1997)". Prime Minister Hashimoto argued further, "in *shoshika*'s progress, it is a very important task to allow working women to fully display their ability (HOR 1997)". Despite the rhetorical intent of these statements, other LDP conservatives

still did not seem to recognize the need for real substantial change. Former Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro, for example, reportedly said that women who grow old without having children would deserve no state aid; and another senior LDP lawmaker Ota Seiichi remarked that men who participated in gang rapes were closer to normal than those who put off marriage (*Japan Times*, July 2, 2003). Highly entrenched sexism, as demonstrated by these statements, indicates that leaders' basic belief and value structures would not change dramatically in a short period. Although there is lack of survey data indicating changes in national leaders' perception over gender issues, it is highly unlikely that these changes are the ultimate cause of the 1999 institutional and legal changes in gender policy.

Party politics often works in favour of specific constituencies, ideologies, declared policies and programs which may result in specific policy outputs. One dimension of party politics relevant to this study is that the government party may take over coalition partners' platform to remain in power. The House of Representative election, held in the fall of 1996, allowed the conservative LDP to restore momentum but not yet to regain its own majority. To maintain power, the LDP gave priority to the LDP-SDP (Social Democratic Party)-Sakigake (New Party Harbinger) coalition (e.g., *Yomiuri Shinbun*, May 17, 1998).⁵ In October 1996, Prime Minister Hashimoto managed a three-party accord with both the SDP and the Sakigake under which the two junior partners would not contribute cabinet members to the administration but instead would provide their out-of-cabinet support. Both the SDP and the Sakigake were headed by female leaders, Doi Takako and Domoto Akiko respectively, who, in return for cooperation outside the cabinet, successfully included the passage of major legislation on gender equality into the accord (Shindo 2004, pp. 252-53; Osawa 2005, p. 159). Chairperson Domoto confirmed this course of events by saying, "If Ms. Doi

and I had not been the party leader, none of them (establishing the mechanisms of gender-equality promotion) would have come true (*Fujin Tenbo*, April 1998).”

Promoting gender equality is also a distinctive process. Another source feeding this process is found in the peculiar role of international norms and foreign pressure (Gurowitz 1999; Chan-Tiberghien 2004). The World Conference of the International Year of the Woman in 1975 was certainly a turning-point at which the question of the status of women was brought to the public agenda in Japan (Yamashita 1993; Shindo 2004, pp. 212-13). In response to the World Plan of Action advised by the United Nations, the Miki Takeo cabinet established the first “national machinery”: the Headquarters for the Planning and Promotion of Policies Relating to Women (headed by the Prime Minister), the Office for Women’s Affairs in the Prime Minister’s Office, and the Advisory Council to the Prime Minister on Planning and Promotion of Women’s Affairs. In 1980 the Japanese government signed the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The concern for its international reputation persuaded Japan to follow suit by signing it, which was accordingly implemented into domestic law: the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law, the 1984 revised Nationality Law, and the 1989 introduction of compulsory home economics education for both girls and boys.⁶ The compliance of international norms by states does not diffuse automatically (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse-Kappen and Sikkink 1999). The Japanese government has been highly sensitive to the accusation that Japan is not internationalized enough to be an advanced nation, and thus more vulnerable to pressures invoking international standards (Gurowitz 1999). Since the ratification of this Convention in 1985, Japan has dutifully submitted its periodic reports to the UN, in a bid to demonstrate its ability to implement international standards domestically. Through this mechanism of

required reporting, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has continued to hold the Japanese government accountable for its discrimination-related reform. A series of Japanese reform-oriented reactions directed toward foreign observers laid the foundation for the first Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society.

Equally important, as policy issues related to the status of women were spanning the boundaries of bureaucratic jurisdictions causing “turf wars” among such ministries as labor, welfare and justice, those SDP and Sakigake leaders made a significant contribution by constraining Japan’s strong bureaucracy over gender policy (e.g., *Asahi Shinbun*, May 31, 1998; Shindo 2004, pp. 247-48). Female leaders in party politics and their support groups successfully retain the compliance to international norms on a national agenda and in policy-making (Chan-Tiberghien 2004, ch. 8; Shindo 2004, pp. 200-264). In September 1996, the Council for Gender Equality submitted to Prime Minister Hashimoto the radical policy paper, the Vision of Gender Equality, which was heavily influenced by the Beijing Conference, setting the tone for the passage of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society.⁷

Building a Gender Neutral Society from the Bottom-Up: Changing Women’s Beliefs

The principle of gender equality has been legislatively established by the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society and other laws. Traditional beliefs and expectations for gender roles, which were deeply-rooted in Japanese society, have also gradually changed in recent years. Government surveys indicate a steady decline in the ratio of those interviewed who “fully” or “weakly” support the idea that “the man should

work outside and the woman should remain at home” from 73 per cent in 1979, 58 per cent in 1997, to 45 per cent in 2004.⁸ Even in 1991, 66 per cent of respondents (64.3 per cent of the female respondents and 68.1 per cent of the male respondents) supported the necessity of increased women elected-representatives (PR 1991). Yet, as described before, women’s share of seats in Japan was extremely low. Although a sense of discrimination against both women in general and women candidates declined significantly, the number of women representatives did not increase correspondingly. Such weak relationships are also found in other countries, such as Australia, Britain, and the United States (Darcy and Schramm 1977; Vallace 1979; Kelley and McAllister 1983).

Japan’s electoral system as a structural constraint may also influence the low rate of women holding office. Some scholars have demonstrated that larger electoral district systems are in favour of women candidates to win seats (e.g., Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1987), while others argue that a proportional representation system better increases the chances of winning women’s seats than a single-member district system (e.g., Norris 1985, pp. 96-99; Gelb 1989, p. 155).⁹ In the first post-WWII election of 1946, when Japanese women for the first time were able to exercise the right to vote, 39 women were elected under a large constituency system (i.e., 2 to 14 seats in each district) to the House of Representatives. In the following year, Japan introduced a new system for the lower house, medium-sized multi-member districts (i.e., 3 to 5 seats in each district) with single non-transferable votes; under this system, women’s seats declined immediately to 15 in the 1947 election and, by the 1986 election, dropped further to a low of 7 seats. By 1993 the 38-year rule of the LDP ended, and Japan reformed its electoral system to small-sized single-member districts combined with a proportional representation system. In the subsequent 1996 election, women’s

seats increased to 23, with 16 of them were proportionally elected. Japan's experience at national elections would seem to support those links found in the above-mentioned literature. Nonetheless, local elections in Japan suggest otherwise. Elections for local assemblies have been organized under a large constituency system (i.e., 1 to 18 seats in each district for prefectural and designated city assemblies, and a large number of seats in a single district covering the whole area for city/ward/town/village assemblies).¹⁰ Women's share of seats for local assemblies, contrary to the claimed link between women representatives and a larger constituency, remained extremely low and stagnant until the 1983 unified local election, being smaller than that for the lower house until 1985 (i.e., 1.7 per cent for local assemblies and 1.6 per cent for the lower house in 1986).¹¹ Interesting enough, women public office holders at the local level increased rather rapidly in the late 1990s.¹² The structural election system is highly unlikely to be a primary factor for having induced the sudden rise of women representatives. The factors we have considered so far for explaining the low share of women's seats are related to public opinion and election systems. It is useful to also investigate the critical factors affecting women's consciousness, such as those that change their awareness of and willingness to incorporate women's voices into policy formulation and decision-making processes.

In this respect, women's campaigns for local elections in recent years illustrate how a network of Japanese women raised their political awareness and successfully increased the number of women representatives. As Figure-1 illustrates, the year 1999 was also a turning-point at the grassroots level. In simultaneous local elections, held in April 1999, a total of 2,381 women were elected for local assemblies (in prefectures, cities, towns, and villages), with the percentage of women increasing from 4.9 per cent to 6.2 per cent. In the 1999 unified local elections, for the first time

ever, nearly 20 per cent (cf. 14.3 per cent in 1998) of the 972 representatives in 23 Special Wards assemblies of Tokyo were female; equally significant, the number of women elected to prefectural assemblies soared by a stunning 70 per cent from the previous 1995 elections. The 1999 unified local elections were also something of a political milestone; women were elected to local assemblies in all the 10 prefectures which had never before had any women representatives.¹³ As discussed below, the campaigns of women candidates and their support groups and networks gained a lot of attention in the media and raised public awareness of gender equality among the general public.

In 1992 a women's group, the Alliance of Feminist Representatives, was formed by non-partisan elected representatives and those who wished to send more elected women to local and national assemblies, launching a campaign for advocating the quota system to increase the ratio of women representatives to at least the 30 per cent level. Then Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Member Mitsui Mariko and other initial members, while inspired by proposals at UN women's conferences, considered the minimum percentage as the threshold for becoming a critical mass whose presence could not be ignored in assemblies (Mitsui and et al. 1999). In 1994 the Alliance investigated the state of women representatives finding that there were no women representatives in 58 per cent of about 3,300 local assemblies, especially 70 per cent of 2,571 town/village assemblies (Mitsui and et al. 1999, p. 7). Accordingly, a project called "Eliminate Zero-Women Representatives Assembly" was launched in 1997 demanding political groups and parties for women candidates in electoral districts where winnable.

In 1994 the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Foundation inaugurated a training program, the Promotion Center for Women's Political Participation, which offered two courses, one for providing the practical knowledge of running for elections and the other as political education for women.¹⁴ The program neither recommended nor supported specific political ideologies and parties but helped independents who had lack of *sanban* (three foundations): family support, organized support groups, and financial resources. In that year, 93 women enrolled in this program; in the following 1995 unified local elections, 36 of these participants ran for election and 24 won (IFMF, p.11).¹⁵ This idea of providing training to prospective candidates diffused among grassroots groups across the nation, and such training programs became called *bakku-appu sukuru* (backup schools). In 1996 the Women and Politics Information Center, Kansai started a "Women to Assemblies" backup school. By 1998, grassroots groups that were organizing backup schools existed in 17 out of 47 prefectures; in 2003 such grassroots groups were active in 24 prefectures (*Fujin Tembo*, March 1998; Kubo 2006; Yamaguchi 2006). Although there was some variation on their activities, they all shared common features: no affiliation with any political party; commitment to women's political participation; and financing with internal funds (e.g., membership fees).

Local governments also developed a scheme called *josei kaigi* (women's simulation assembly), which was designed to promote activities for women to participate in local decision-making and to send more women to assemblies. Despite the local government's scheme, it was actually women's groups that initially requested the local administration to hold simulation assemblies on a regular basis, and existing assembly-women also proposed the inclusion of simulation assembly in local gender equality policy (Ogai 2003, p. 117). Participants were openly recruited or

recommended by groups, and the number of participants was usually equal to the total number of seats of the real assembly. The simulation assembly was one-day or a half-day event, but participants were invited to attend several preparatory meetings and training sessions, which, for example, run for 100 days in Toyama prefecture. The number of local governments that held simulation assemblies was only 10 in 1996 but by 1999 had risen to 48, and increased further to 116 in 2002 (Ogai 2003, p. 116). In 1998 Yamanashi prefecture, for example, implemented a simulation assembly program as part of its gender equality policy called “Yamanashi Human Plan 21,” and in the 1999 unified local elections, 6 out of 22 simulation assembly participants ran and were elected to Yamanashi’s local assemblies which had not had any women representatives before (Ogai 2003, p. 118).

Networks to support backup schools and simulation assemblies were also organized. In 1996 Higuchi Keiko, Domoto Akiko and others (Diet women, local assembly-women, scholars, journalists, activists, and housewives), acknowledging that information available in the existing mass media was limited in the field of women’s issues, launched an information exchange nationwide network, the JJ Net (*JJ-Net News*, August 10, 1996). This network issued a regular newsletter called *the JJ-Net News*, and also provided and shared information with each other through fax and emails. By 1998 the JJ Net became an ICT-based instantaneous information provider, which the members increasingly used for election campaigns and policy-making (Domoto 2005). As of 2005, the JJ Net had over 1,000 registered members. In 1999 former Education Minister Akamatsu Yoshiko, journalist Shimomura Mitsuko and four other women leaders established the organization WIN WIN as a membership network of support and fund-raising to increase women’s presence in political processes. This network was modelled after EMILY’s List, which started in the

United States to assist in increasing the number of women representatives of the Democratic Party. As of 2000, WIN WIN had 861 members (*JJ-Net News*, March 2, 2001). Each member designated a specific candidate of her own choice from the WIN WIN's recommendation list, and supported the chosen candidate with a donation of 10,000 yen or more. The women candidates whom the WIN WIN committee unanimously recommended were included in the recommendation lists at major local and national elections (*JJ-Net News*, March 2, 2001). The first recommended candidate, Ota Fusae, won in the 2000 Osaka gubernatorial election and became Japan's first woman governor. It is important to note here that these networks operated on a non-partisan basis but with a strong sense of mission to promote gender equality policy.

In the 1999 unified local elections, the above-mentioned support groups and networks developed an impressive election campaign, the Women and Politics Campaign 1999. This was a brain child of the Eliminate Zero-Women Representatives Assembly campaign, which was initiated by the Alliance of Feminist Representatives. In September 1998 the Alliance designated a person (in principle, an independent representative) in charge of this campaign in all of the 47 prefectures. Campaign participants took simultaneous actions throughout the nation: holding press conferences calling for "more women to assemblies" and public demonstrations in front of each prefectural office for this purpose (WPCO 1999; Mitsui et al. 1999, p. 7). This campaign highlighted the public profile of female politicians, attracted the interests of the mass media, and raised public awareness of the necessity of increasing the number of women representatives, while urging promising women to run for election (WPCO 1999). Some argue that in the 1999 elections there were no media-value producing focuses other than "more women to assemblies" so that the

nationwide campaign was able to maintain the visibility of this issue throughout the campaign period (Iwamoto 2001). As a result of these 1999 elections, women were successfully elected to prefectural assemblies in all of the 10 prefectures (Akita, Ehime, Iwate, Nagasaki, Niigata, Oita, Shimane, Tokushima, Tottori, and Toyama) in which women had never before been represented.

Even more impressive was that in the 1999 unified local elections, 45 female candidates of the Tokyo Citizens' Network ran and all were elected in 32 cities/wards of Tokyo; and a member of the Tokyo Citizens' Network, Uehara Kimiko, won a mayoral election in Kunitachi City, Tokyo and became Tokyo's first female mayor. In the 2001 election for the Tokyo Metropolitan assembly, 6 female candidates of the Network ran and all were successfully elected. In the 2003 unified local elections, 52 female candidates of the Network ran and 47 were elected in cities/wards of Tokyo. The Citizens' Network was followed by local groups throughout Japan and grew into 109 local networks across the nation (Hokkaido, Iwate, Tochigi, Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Nagano, and Fukuoka); in the 2003 unified elections, 107 out of 164 female Citizens' Network candidates won seats in local assemblies of Tokyo (45 per cent), Kanagawa (28 per cent), Chiba (15 per cent), and three other prefectures (IFMA 2003; TCN 2004).

In respect to patterns of their constituency, there are clear differences between assembly-men and women. It can be argued that there are three types of local assembly members: neighborhood/kinship-based representatives, progressive party-supported representatives, and broadly citizens-based independent representatives (Kasuga 2000). Those representatives who belong to the first type often run as independents even though they may be affiliated to the Liberal Democratic Party

(conservative party). Those representatives in the second category are likely to be a party member of one of the progressive parties: Japan Communist Party, Democratic Party, Clean Government Party and Social Democratic Party. The third-type representatives get support for election campaigns from voluntary groups to attract the non-organizational vote and the floating vote. Those types are not mutually exclusive (e.g., party affiliated representatives may partly depend on neighborhood associations for collecting votes, etc.). As of 2002, the breakdown of these three types of representatives by gender is as follows: assembly-men – the neighbourhood/kinship type (67.1 per cent), the progressive party-affiliated type (14.8 per cent), the broadly citizens-based type (18.1 per cent); and assembly-women – the neighbourhood/kinship type (25.9 per cent), the progressive party-affiliated type (44.4 per cent), the broadly citizens-based type (29.7 per cent).¹⁶ It is characteristic of women representatives that, as compared with male representatives, nearly 45 per cent of those female are party-affiliated and the number of neighborhood/kinship-based ones is far smaller, while the number of broadly citizens-based independents is much larger than men and on the increase.

The Case of the Tokyo Citizens' Network : Alternative Political Participation

In town/village assemblies, as Figure -1 shows, until 1986 women representatives accounted for less than 1 per cent. The results of 1999's simultaneous local elections indicated a rapid increase in the number of women representatives in those assemblies, from 2.7 per cent in the 1995's simultaneous local elections to 4.2 per cent. Nonetheless, nearly 60 per cent of 1,702 town/village assembly-women were conservative independents who were elected primarily by both blood-tie relations and

a shared territorial bond of neighbourhood organizations, while about 40 per cent of those assembly-women were affiliated with a progressive political party (IFMA 1999). Less than 1 per cent of those assembly-women were Citizens' Network activists or progressive independents who were elected by citizens' networks and coalitions of support to incorporate citizens' voices into policy formulation and decision-making processes (IFMA 1999). Not surprisingly, 85 per cent of Citizens' Net assembly-women concentrated on municipal assemblies in urban areas (IFMA 1999).

How did the Citizens' Network emerge in urban areas? The origin of the Tokyo Citizens' Network dates back to the 1968 creation of a consumers' cooperative organization, the Life Club Cooperative Society, which began to operate in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo. This organization was originally a collective buyer of safe goods and services at reasonable prices and designed to protect consumers' interest by directly connecting consumers with producers. By 1989 it had grown into the federation of the Life Club Cooperative Society, based in 13 prefectures across the nation.

In the 1970s, producer-oriented government policies were causing a wide range of social problems, such as industrial pollution and food safety, mounting for Japanese society. Being a responsible consumer through co-op activities made it difficult for its members to accept the established order of political priorities that were so geared toward pursuit of producers' interests. However, the Life Club Cooperative Club, while being a mere service provider to its members, experienced feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability, and began to recognize the necessity of advocacy activities (Nakamura 2006). In March 1977 one of the Club founders, Iwane Kunio, proposed the Representative Authorization Campaign by saying, "the Life Club is not

only an organization for purchasing goods, but also a place where we create independent citizens in a community and democratic society” (TCN 2003_a, p. 5). This proposal led to the 1977 establishment of a political organization called the Group Citizens, which was the predecessor of the Citizens’ Network. At this stage, the service provider of mutual support based on self-help developed into the political involvement of women.

In July 1977 those women, who had participated in the Life Club Cooperative Society, for the first time, recruited their own women candidates to challenge incumbents in the Nerima district for a Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election. This challenge was unsuccessful, yet grew into the “Representative Authorization Campaign,” which aimed to recruit women who would represent citizens’ voices in assemblies. In 1979, for the first time, the Group Citizens successfully sent a woman representative to the Nerima Ward Assembly, and in 1988 it was renamed the Citizens’ Network.¹⁷

The rotation system aimed not to produce women representatives but rather to create citizens for political change.

Citizens’ Network members have served on a rotation basis for local assemblies as representatives. The Citizens’ Network has been implementing term limits for their assembly-women to a maximum number of three terms or 12 years in office. In the 2003 unified local elections, Tokyo Citizens’ Network came to share the view that “the selection of our candidates is still based on the principle of three terms limit or 12 years, but two terms limit or 8 years are more desirable” (TCN 2004, p.53). This rotation system, which was set up in 1990, is designed to avoid the professionalization of representatives that tends to create individual vested interests in long terms, and to

also allow as many members as possible to experience the roles of representatives at local assemblies (TCN 2003_a, p. 1; TCN 2004, p. 46). As described below, the Citizens' Network has been working for assembly-women on the establishment of a support mechanism, which will help unexperienced and less qualified citizens to act as representatives. The Citizens' Network claims that the ultimate objective of the rotation system is to empower individual citizens through their representative experience (TCN 2003_a, p. 1). In Citizens' Network's view, this system is an alternative way of political engagement which is encouraged as a means of eliminating the distance between citizens and policy-making (Nakamura 2006). At the local level, traditionally the salient feature of Japanese politics is based on personal networks in which voters develop a clientelistic relationship with elected representatives. Voters trade electoral support for personal favors. This traditional engagement is less likely to promote citizens' participation in decision-making. On the other hand, the rotation system is expected to incorporate citizens' voices into policy formulation and decision-making processes.

Under the rotation system, in the local elections of April 2003, twenty-one Tokyo Citizens' Network assembly-women retired and thirty new Tokyo Citizens' Network assembly-women were elected (TCN 2004, p. 45). The Network acknowledges that they must assume responsibility for ensuring quality and continuity of the representatives' work. To hand down the trust and experience, which former assembly-women had accumulated, to the next generation, they set up the Citizen Thinktank - People Town Institute in 1998 (Nakamura 2006). The primary members of the Institute are former assembly-women. Through the activities of the Institute, these women have undertaken investigations/research for solving community

problems and helped incumbents draft alternative policy proposals. Among its major activities, the Institute has organized training workshops for increasing assembly-member-initiated policies and ordinances, conducted a wide range of surveys on the implementation of a new social welfare system for the elderly (the LTCI), and acted as a third party evaluator, authorized by the Tokyo Metropolitan government, for holding welfare providers accountable to users (TCN 2004, p. 44).¹⁸

Former Citizens' Network assembly-women recognize the existence of serious barriers to the development of the rotation system for creating empowered citizens. Under the compulsory government-operated pension membership of local assemblies, assembly-members who stay in office for only two terms or under are required to surrender the full benefits of their assembly-member pension. In fact, some Citizens' Network assembly-women, such as Fukushi Keiko, withdrew from Tokyo Citizens' Network after serving the maximum terms and continued to serve as assembly-members beyond the three-term limit. They subsequently became eligible for their full pension benefits. Another barrier is that regular employed women find it extremely difficult to return to their previous careers after serving on the rotation system as assembly-women. Some argue that most Citizens' Network members are housewives so that they do not have to work for a living as representatives (Iwamoto 2001, p. 27). To further increase the number of Citizens' Network assembly-women, the Network needs, while being instrumental in raising employed women's awareness and encouraging their political participation, to reform such Network strategies as the rotation system, to ensure continued success.¹⁹

Assembly women's intermediary role in coordinating a meeting of policy consultation between citizens and the metropolitan administration.

The voting group of Citizens' Network assembly-women has organized and coordinated a series of conferences for negotiations between the Tokyo Metropolitan administration and citizens. In this process, these assembly-women have provided citizens with a standing forum whereby interested citizens could propose their preferred policies by utilizing the assembly members' right of investigation and policy proposal. Following up on the results of these conferences, Citizens' Network representatives then take action for citizens' preferences and wishes.

In October 1994 the first "Citizens-Administration Conference" was held, and since then it has regularly taken place once or twice a year. A citizens' working party was formed to prepare documents and strategies for each conference, while Citizens' Network assembly-women contacted the relevant metropolitan departments and provided expertise and information to interested citizens. These assembly-women admit that it is not easy for a wide range of social groups to make a concerted effort toward a policy proposal, but argue that they find it worthwhile to at least contribute to agenda-setting and development of interest articulation in their community (TCN 2004, p. 12; Nakamura 2006). There are a number of achievements from these conferences where it is clear that the general public has recognized these efforts as useful in building a liveable community. Their 2001 conference, for example, led to the establishment of two Tokyo Metropolitan government guidelines: the 2003 Chemical Material Guidelines Applied to Children (Indoor Air Quality) and the 2004 Chemical Material Guidelines Applied to Children (Food Safety) (TCN 2004, p. 13). Before the development of these guidelines, there had existed relevant guidelines for

adults only. Another example is the issue of domestic violence which was dealt with at the 2004 conference. The Tokyo Citizens' Network successfully persuaded six relevant metropolitan departments and three political parties to participate in this conference. The Tokyo Metropolitan government has made combating domestic violence a large program of its welfare section, including establishing a consulting hotline for victims, financial support for shelters for victims, and education for abusive men (TCN 2004, pp. 12-13).

Assembly women's intermediary role in facilitating the establishment of collaboration among the non-profit sector, the administration, and the business sector.

The Tokyo Citizens' Network also adopted the issue of collaboration between non-profit organizations (NPOs) and the Tokyo Metropolitan government at the 2002 conference where government officials for the first time directly exchanged information with citizens who had participated in NPO activities (TCN 2004, p. 13; TCN 2003_b, p.19). In 2003, to improve the equality of community life and revitalize the local economy, two intermediary organizations were created by the Network: the Community Fund – Town Future and the Tokyo Community Power Bank (Tokyo CPB) (Community Fund 2006). The mission of the first organization is to provide citizens with know-how to open a community enterprise: fund-raising, marketing, management skills, and partnership with the public sector. The second one has been loaning funds, which were invested by interested individuals and organizations, to citizens' enterprises that are expected to contribute to local communities. One of the successful NPOs, which have been supported by the Network, is Ecomesse which has promoted the creation of a recycle system in communities for preserving the environment. To this end, it runs nine second-hand shops in Tokyo, which have

generated funds, along with membership fees and donations. Through its schemes, this NPO has donated solar panels and batteries to public facilities and supported a variety of tree-planting movements (Ecomesse 2006).

Election campaigns carried out only by individual citizens' donations and volunteers.

In Japan, like other democracies, corruption occurs when politicians search for funds in return for personal favors. In the early 1990s, the political crisis that the ruling LDP was facing centered around a series of scandals involving payments to politicians for their huge election funds. The Tokyo Citizens' Network makes it a rule to fund its political activities with citizens' voluntary donations. In its view, Tokyo Citizens' Network assembly-women are not an exceptional case, but one of individual citizens who donate according to their income to the Network and participate in political activities (TCN 2004, p. 53). Given its view that assemblies' seats belong to individual citizens, acting as an assembly-member is seen as a political role played by ordinary citizens. To this end, the Tokyo Citizens' Network concludes an agreement, "Representative Authorization Contract" with its assembly-members who receive a contracted portion of their income and donate the rest to the Network. The assembly-members' donation supports Citizens' Network activities, along with Network membership fees and citizens' voluntary donations. The Tokyo Citizens' Network is committed to a high standard of transparency and accountability by regularly and publicly stating its revenue and expenditure flows (Nakamura 2006).

Conclusion

In post-WWII Japan, state authority strategically concentrated key resources, including legal authority, political legitimacy, fiscal resources, organizations, information and expertise, on the national level. The local community was linked to these state resources through local *yuryokusha* (influential men). These influential politicians used their access to state benefits as a way of assisting their personal supporters. They provided the access to special interests and voters supported them for re-election in return. The allocation of those resources was devoted to creating rivalries among influential men. The political process was seen as rivalries between influential men at every level of the ascending hierarchy of power and influence. There was little incentive to make decisions for the common good, but rather for special or sectional interests.

By 1975, however, a phase of state expansion ended; the Japanese government began to resort to deficit financing as stagnant tax revenues combined with political pressure for increased public services. The concentration of resources at the national level was no longer an effective strategy for meeting political demand and solving social problems. It was increasingly needed to direct scarce resources toward those most in need rather than to special interests. Japanese women's groups challenged the men-dominated competitive allocation of resources and attempted to replace it with equitable resource allocation. They welcomed state interventions on gender issues for creating a gender free society, but understood that the real solution of gender issues would be beyond this top-down state reach. In the early 1990s, Japanese women's networks and coalitions became informed and active in sending more women to

assemblies and parliament, and in the late 1990s, they began to form partnerships, and to mobilize resources, from across society.

There have been significant changes at the local level, especially in urban areas. Women representatives not only have held chief executives and city departments accountable to their performance, but also facilitated direct exchanges between the administration and individual citizens in agenda-setting, policy formation, implementation, and evaluation. They have been developing a form of stakeholders' political participation alternative to vertical patron-client relationships. Women's organizations, such as the Citizens' Network, are spreading a governance form of societal-centered coordination spanning the boundaries of the government and voluntary sectors, which is alternative to a system of local government. This coordination is designed to deliver services through resource exchanges of information, expertise and money among government and societal stakeholders. The impact of these women's horizontal partnership initiatives on Japanese politics at the nationwide systemic level has yet to be seen, but the success of these partnerships in urban areas remains encouraging.

Notes

1. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed these indices: the HDI is a composite index which measure the degree of human capabilities with the three basic criteria of “healthy lifestyle allowing longevity,” “knowledge” and “average living standard,”; the GDI also indicates the degree of human capabilities but deducts disparities between men and women as a penalty; and the GEM evaluates the degree of women’s capabilities to participate in economic and political activities, with specific measurements including the ratio of income earned by women, the ratio of women specialists and managers, and the ratio of women parliamentarians.

2. The council was established in June 1994 by a government ordinance; it investigates and deliberates subjects in relation to the establishment of a gender-equal society according to the prime minister’s request for advice and submits its opinion to the prime minister.

3. Half of its financing is covered by mandatory insurance premiums paid by those aged 40 or over. The LTCI provides universal coverage for all the elderly in need of care, regardless of income or family situation.

4. In the early 1980s, LDP’s policy guidelines, for example, still stated, “Children shall be brought up at home. The elderly shall be looked after at home.”

5. The LDP-SDP-Sakigake coalition government began in June 1994 under the leadership of then SDP Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi. The Murayama government lasted until January 1996, when a new cabinet was formed under LDP

President Hashimoto. In June 1998 both the SDP and Sakigake decided to withdraw from the ruling alliance.

6. In 1984 the Nationality Law was revised to grant Japanese nationality on birth when the father or mother has Japanese nationality while abolishing the principle of “paternal blood” only.

7. See, for example, part II, 4(1), which defines violence against women as a human right violation.

8. Adopted from surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office on May 1979 (8,239 respondents), September 1997 (3,574 respondents), and November 2004 (3,502 respondents).

9. A single-member district tends to produce the phenomenon of “incumbency advantage” (Welch and Studlar 1990), facilitate a standard candidate, that is, a middle-aged man from a middle income family (Vallance 1984, p. 308), and cause a direct confrontation among candidates for winning a single seat.

10. It is characteristic of local assembly members in post WWII Japan that independents accounted for 30 to 40 per cent in local assemblies. It is thus unrealistic to introduce a party-based proportional representation system at the local level.

11. It is important to note that the single non-transferable vote is used in the large-sized multi-member districts at Japan's local elections and thus the findings in Britain and the United States cannot be directly applied to those in Japan.

12. The figures in this section are provided by Local Administration Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and Secretariat, House of Representatives.

13. The figures in this section are provided by Local Administration Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

14. The Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Foundation was established in 1962 to "provide political education for women, propagate ideal and fine elections, and build the foundation of Japan's democracy."

15. It is also important to mention that in 1993 then Japan New Party Diet Woman En Yoriko launched a series of lectures called "Politics School for Women" given by non-partisan well-known politicians.

16. Adopted from a nationwide survey of 17,062 assembly-members' respondents conducted during February to April 2002 by Kasuga Masashi and Takeyasu Hideko.

17. This section is largely based on author's interview with Tokyo Citizens' Network Secretary-General, Nakamura Eiko, April 26, 2006.

18. In 2003 only 139 ordinance bills were proposed by assembly-members at all the 47 prefectural assemblies; by contrast, 3,235 ordinance bills were initiated by prefectural governors. In March 2004, after attending the training workshops, Tokyo Citizens' Network assembly-women along with residents were able to draft and pass an Underground Water Preservation Ordinance at the Koganei City Assembly.

19. This section is largely based on author's interview with Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association Secretary-General, Kubo Kimiko, April 20, 2006 and with Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association Executive Director, Yamaguchi Mitsuko, April 21, 2006.

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