Cooperation over Conflict:
The Women's Movement and the State in Contemporary Japan

by

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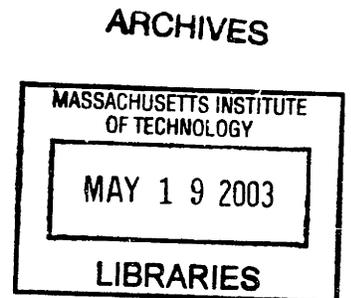
COOPERATION OVER CONFLICT:
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MIRIAM Y. MURASE

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ABSTRACT

Progress on women's equality in Japan is found to be constrained by state intervention in the women's movement. This intervention takes the form of regulations that limit the independence of women's group, as well as resources that aid and influence their activities. The result is a relationship between women and the state that is more cooperative than conflictual. For this reason, social change is necessarily slow, as it is achieved through constant consultation and compromise.

These findings were reached through an examination of women's organizations, women's centers, and women's policy in Japan. Data collected on 889 women's organizations shows a vibrant and diverse women's movement. But Japanese government policies make it difficult for grassroots civic groups to gain legal recognition and develop beyond part-time voluntary associations into full-time professional organizations. At the same time, the Japanese government actively intervenes to aid women's organizations by providing various resources, such as direct funding, government offices for women's policy, and public women's centers. Data collected on 623 women's centers and analysis of various women's programs show how the provision of these resources allow the government to influence the women's movement. In this way, cooperation between the state and women's movement is institutionalized, minimizing social conflict and slowing social change.

Thesis Supervisor: Richard J. Samuels

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Over the many years that I worked on this project, I often fantasized about reaching the end of the dissertation, and sitting down to write my acknowledgments. Finally, the moment has arrived.

First, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to my thesis committee. As my advisor, Dick Samuels was always available to give me feedback, whether he was in Japan, Italy, or the US. Elizabeth Wood provided much needed moral support, in addition to her expertise in women's studies. Rick Locke was kind enough to step in towards the end this project, and see it through to completion. My only regret is that Myron Weiner will not be physically present at my thesis defense, though his spiritual presence is in every page of my dissertation.

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Chapter One
Introduction

In Japan's northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido, the two-and-a-half mile long Nozuka tunnel connects the counties of Hitaka and Tokachi along national highway 236. For the ground-breaking ceremony in August of 1990, the mayors of surrounding towns, heads of prefectural counties, and representatives from the national government were all invited, except for one. Nagai Nobu was the first woman to head a prefectural county in Hokkaido, a post she had just taken a few months earlier. Even though Nagai headed the county of Hitaka where the tunnel would be located, she was not invited to the ground-breaking ceremony because of the belief that the presence of a woman would cause the mountain goddess to become jealous and incite accidents during construction. A male county official was invited in her place. But Nagai herself seemed unfazed. "I have not heard who will attend. I suppose the person who gets invited should be the person who attends," she was quoted as saying in the *Hokkaido Shimbun*, 5 August 1990.

Was this an isolated incident, reflecting the regional eccentricities of the less developed north? Apparently not. Five years later and a thousand miles south of Hokkaido in the city of Kagoshima, a seven member labor standards committee was to conduct a safety inspection of a tunnel under construction. The one female member of this committee was asked not to attend, again, for fear of causing accidents. Her reaction was also rather mild. According to the *Minami Nihon Shimbun*, 30 November 1995, she responded, "I was glad that times have changed so that I, as a woman, could become a (committee) member. This outcome is a little disappointing."

6

These stories epitomize the contradictions of gender inequality in Japan. In a wealthy, technologically advanced country of super highways and tunnels, superstitious beliefs about women receive official recognition. While women have made significant gains, serving as county officials or advisory committee members, there is quiet acceptance of the discrimination they face. How are patriarchal ideas maintained in such a modern country? Where is the outrage, organization, and mobilization of women against sex discrimination? These are the questions that led to this study of the women's movement in Japan, and the search for a political explanation for the persistence of gender inequality in Japan.

Japan's rise from the rubble and ashes of military defeat to become the second largest economy in the world has been hailed as nothing short of a miracle. Rapid economic growth and democratic institution building has transformed Japanese society in the postwar period. Yet, in the midst of massive, social, political, economic, and cultural change, gender inequality persists at remarkably high levels throughout Japanese society, in employment, education, and politics. This is not to say that the status of women in Japan has not undergone significant change, but rather the measurable gains in women's equality with men are strikingly small in proportion to the magnitude of change throughout the rest of Japanese society. And, compared with other countries, Japan consistently ranks at or near the bottom of the industrialized world on standard measures of gender equality.

The paradox of Japan's social, economic, and political progress against the persistence of gender inequality raises the question of why gender inequality in Japan remains so pronounced in the face of economic, demographic, and international indicators pointing in the direction of equality. This broad, general question has been studied from a variety of perspectives, with each discipline

7

formulating its own research question. For example, anthropologists ask how gender roles are prescribed by Japanese culture, while economists ask how labor market conditions contribute to gender inequality. From a political science perspective, the question is about power, specifically the power of Japanese women to lobby and influence the state on behalf of women's interests. Therefore, this dissertation asks, why have Japanese women failed to use their political power as citizens of a democracy to affect social change towards gender equality?

This question is broken down into a series of questions. First, are women in Japan organized as a political movement? Second, if so, are there institutional obstacles to their participation in the policy making process? Third, perhaps women are organized and have political access, but do not define their political interests in terms of equality with men. After examining these most basic political science questions, I have found a very vibrant and active women's movement in Japan that seeks equality and enjoys access to the policy making process. But what has slowed and controlled the pace and direction of social change on women's issues in Japan is a close relationship between the state and women's organizations maintained through state intervention in civil society. This intervention takes the form of regulations on interest groups, resources offered by the government, and institutions of policy making, all of which ensure a fundamentally cooperative relationship between women and the state.

Women's movements in all democracies struggle with the tension between access and autonomy in cultivating their relationship with the state. While access to government officials and political parties is crucial to achieving legislative goals, too much cooperation and compromise can lead to co-optation. On the other hand, autonomy from the state provides independence and legitimacy, but often at the expense of efficacy. Striking the right balance

between access and autonomy is a universal challenge for women's movements worldwide.

This dissertation argues that, in the case of Japan, the scale tips heavily on the side of access over autonomy for a large segment of the women's movement. While the number of small, independent women's groups in Japan has grown significantly in recent years, their influence in the policy making arena pales in comparison to long-established, resource-rich, national women's organizations with close ties to the government. These select groups enjoy access to state officials and resources, in a relationship with the state that is characterized as more cooperative than conflictual. This is not to say that Japanese women's groups always support government positions and policies. But the level of compromise, consultation, and cooperation between women's organizations and the state has meant that the process of social change towards a more gender equal society in Japan has been exceedingly measured and slow.

The close relationship between mainstream women's organizations and the state did not develop overnight or by accident. Historians have documented state intervention in women's social movements in Japan since the Meiji period (1868 - 1912), through World War II, and to the present (Sievers 1983; Bernstein 1991; Garon 1997). Following up on this body of historical work, this dissertation examines the relationship between the women's movement and the state in contemporary Japan. Specifically, the relationship is studied in the context of regulations, resources, and policy-making. Each context offers a separate widow through which to view interactions between the state and women's organizations. First, as all states regulate interest group activity to varying degrees, women's organizations and the laws that govern their activities in Japan will be examined. Second, this study looks at government supported women's centers as a unique institutional link between the women's movement and the

state. Finally, the process of making women's policy will be examined to provide a dynamic view of how women's organizations interact with state policy making institutions.

Through the analysis of women's groups, women's centers, and women's policy, this dissertation offers a political explanation for gender inequality in Japan. Although there is a large, interdisciplinary literature on the status of Japanese women, there are surprisingly few works that explicitly address political processes and institutions.[1] At the same time, there is growing body of comparative work on women's politics and policies across industrialized democracies (Ruggie 1984; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Sainsbury 1996). But Japan is conspicuously missing from these studies. The lack of politics in the Japanese studies literature on women, and the omission of Japan from comparative women's politics indicate that a political explanation is needed to provide a missing piece to the puzzle of gender inequality in Japan.

A Puzzling Case of Gender Inequality

Questions about the status of Japanese women arise because Japan represents an exceptional case of gender inequality. While no society has perfect equality between the sexes, there is much variation in levels of equality across countries. Therefore, the underlying goal of this project is not to explain the existence of inequality, but rather to identify factors that make some women more or less equal than others. Japan provides an excellent case study to examine this variation because women in Japan are measurably the "least equal" in the industrialized world, as comparative data will show. This high degree of

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[1] Pharr 1980 and LeBlanc 1999 are notable exceptions.

10

inequality is puzzling in light of theories that posit a relationship between economic development, political mobilization, and gender equality.

Economic Theory: Women and Development

Theories about women and economic development hold that there exists a curvilinear relationship between women's status and economic development (Boserup 1970; Gallin, Aronoff, and Ferguson 1989). Modernization Theory, which was prominent in the 1960s, first suggested a linear relationship between economic development and equality between the sexes. But empirical studies beginning in the 1970s showed that the process of industrialization leads to an initial decline in the status of women, before peaking in advanced stages of economic development. The explanation for this trend is that in simple, agrarian societies, men and women work side by side, doing equally back breaking work, though their tasks tend to differ. But during the early stages of industrialization, there is a distinct separation between home and work, as men typically work for wages in factories, while women perform unpaid domestic work. It is during this stage of development that women's economic autonomy declines. Nevertheless, as the economy matures from manufacturing to services, changes in the supply and demand of female labor bring women back into the paid labor force alongside men. Thus, after an initial decline, the status of women is held to be highest during the most advanced stages of economic development.

In some respects, the Japanese case supports this general theory. Key economic and demographic indicators show that Japan's level of economic development is comparable to the most technologically advanced, industrialized countries in the west. Like their western counterparts, Japan is a large, wealthy country with a service based economy (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Demographic Profile of Selected Countries

	Population (in millions) 2000	Per capita GDP ($) 2000	Percentage of Labor Force in 1990 - 1992		
			Agriculture	Industry	Services
Scandinavia					
Denmark	5.3	27,627	6	26	66
Norway	4.5	29,918	6	24	70
Sweden	8.8	24,277	3	28	69
G-7					
Canada	30.8	27,840	5	23	72
France	59.0	24,223	6	29	70
Germany	82.0	25,103	3	39	58
Italy	57.5	23,626	9	32	59
United Kingdom	59.4	23,509	2	28	70
United States	283.2	34,142	3	25	72
Japan	127.1	26,755	7	34	59
Asian "Tigers"					
Hong Kong	6.9	25,153	1	35	64
South Korea	46.7	17,380	17	36	47
Singapore	4.0	23,356	--	35	65
Other Asia					
China	1,275.1	3,976	73	14	13
Indonesia	212.1	3,043	56	14	30
Malaysia	22.2	9,068	26	28	46
Philippines	75.7	3,971	45	16	39
Thailand	62.8	6,402	67	11	22
Vietnam	78.1	1,996	68	8	24

Sources: United Nations Development Programme 1995, 2002.

Japanese people enjoy a high standard of living compared with the rest of the world. Japan has the longest female life expectancy of any country, and a very low rate of infant mortality. Mass communications is widespread, as nearly every household has access to television and newspapers (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Selected Measures of Development

	Average Life Expectancy 2000	Infant Mortality (per 1,000 births) 2000	Televisions (per 100 people) 1992	Daily Newspapers (copies per 100 people) 1992
Scandinavia				
Denmark	76	4	54	33
Norway	79	4	42	61
Sweden	80	3	47	51
G-7				
Canada	79	6	64	22
France	79	4	41	21
Germany	78	4	56	3
Italy	79	6	42	11
United Kingdom	78	6	44	38
United States	77	7	82	24
Japan	81	4	61	58
Asian "Tigers"				
Hong Kong	80	n/a	28	82
South Korea	75	5	21	41
Singapore	78	4	38	34
Other Asia				
China	71	32	3	n/a
Indonesia	66	35	6	2
Malaysia	73	8	15	12
Philippines	70	30	5	5
Thailand	70	25	11	7
Vietnam	68	30	4	1

Sources: United Nations Development Programme 1995, 2002.

As theory predicts, economic development has had a significant impact on the status of women, as evidenced by demographic trends. Like women in other wealthy industrialized countries, women in Japan are living long lives, having few children, receiving near universal primary and secondary education, and participating in the labor force in large numbers (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 Selected Measures of Female Development

	Female Life Expectancy 2000	Fertility Rate 2000	Female School Enrollment Rate* 1992 - 1997	Female Workforce Participation Rate (Age 15 and above) 2000
Scandinavia				
Denmark	79	1.7	112	62
Norway	82	1.8	106	59
Sweden	82	1.5	126	63
G-7				
Canada	82	1.6	103	60
France	82	1.7	108	49
Germany	81	1.3	102	48
Italy	82	1.2	96	38
United Kingdom	80	1.7	131	53
United States	80	2.0	99	59
Japan	84	1.4	103	51
Asian "Tigers"				
Hong Kong	82	1.2	84	51
South Korea	79	1.5	99	53
Singapore	80	1.6	81	50
Other Asia				
China	73	1.8	95	73
Indonesia	68	2.6	79	55
Malaysia	75	3.3	84	48
Philippines	71	3.6	n/a	50
Thailand	73	2.1	n/a	73
Vietnam	71	2.5	n/a	74

Sources: United Nations Development Programme 2002, United Nations 2000.
*In some cases, the ratio exceeds 100 percent because the combined primary and secondary enrollment ratio is defined as total first and second level enrollment of girls, regardless of age, divided by the population of girls of the age group which corresponds to these two levels of education.

These tables highlight the relationship between economic development and demographic change in the female population. As wealthy industrialized countries have moved away from agriculture and manufacturing towards a service based economy, the shift in the economic base has had two important consequences affecting the demand for female labor. First, as people from the countryside pour into urban areas, the rural reserve pool of labor dries up. Women represent an additional reservoir of untapped labor for employers to

14

turn to. Second, jobs in the service sector tend to involve less physical labor than jobs in manufacturing or agriculture. Physical differences that excluded women from many jobs become less relevant in the new knowledge intensive labor market. The decline of "blue-collar" factory jobs has been accompanied by the rise in "pink-collar" clerical jobs that require interpersonal communication, flexibility, and attention to detail, skills thought to be consistent with women's traditional roles as caregivers and nurturers.

On the supply side, economic development has brought about changes that have allowed women to meet the new demand for their labor. As Table 1.3 shows, women in wealthy, industrialized countries tend to live longer, have fewer children, and attain higher levels of education than women in developing countries. As the service sector expands, women have the time and skills necessary to take advantage of new opportunities in the job market.

These changes in the supply and demand of female labor appear to be fairly consistent throughout the industrialized world. A reasonable expectation is that these economic and demographic trends would lead to growing equality between the sexes, as women begin to go to school and work alongside men. In general, this movement towards women's equality is seen throughout the world. But, even among the wealthiest countries, there is significant variation in levels of gender equality across different measures. The one strikingly consistent finding is that Japan ranks at the bottom of the industrialized world on all basic measures (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4
Measures of Gender Equality

	Female Wages (as % male)[a] 1990 - 1999	Administrators and Managers (% women) 1985 – 1997	Female Enrollment in Higher Education (as % male)[b] 1992 - 1997	Percentage of Women in Parliament[c] 2002
Scandinavia				
Denmark	84	20	134	38.0
Norway	88	31	140	36.4
Sweden	91	59	142	42.7
G-7				
Canada	63	43	130	20.6
France	79	10	125	12.3
Germany	74	19	96	31.7
Italy	83	54	128	9.8
United Kingdom	74	33	122	17.9
United States	75	44	116	14.0
Japan	58	9	85	7.3
Asian "Tigers"				
Hong Kong	64	18	n/a	n/a
South Korea	55	4	63	5.9
Singapore	59	36	84	11.8
Other Asia				
China	59	12	57	21.8
Indonesia	n/a	17	53	8.0
Malaysia	63	16	n/a	10.4
Philippines	74	35	128	17.8
Thailand	68	21	118	9.2
Vietnam	91	n/a	79	27.3

Sources: United Nations 2000, International Labor Office various years, United Nations Development Programme 2001, 2002; Interparliamentary Union 2002.

[a] Ratio of female wages to male wages in manufacturing.

[b] Includes tertiary school age defined as 18 to 23 years. Values reported as female ratio as a percentage of male ratio.

[c] Percentage of women in the lower or single House as of August 2002.

On these standard measures of gender equality, Japan stands out as a highly unequal society. Among the industrialized democracies belonging to the Group of Seven (G-7), Japan has the largest wage gap between women and men, the lowest proportion of female managers, the largest gap between female and male enrollment in higher education, and the smallest share of parliamentary

seats held by women. In terms of equal wages, the most common measure of gender inequality, Japan does even worse than most of its Asian neighbors with less developed economies. Such a high degree of gender inequality in Japan runs counter to women's gains in health, education, and employment in the postwar period. These same demographic trends have led to uniformly higher levels of equality for women in the rest of the industrialized world, while Japan lags far behind. For these reasons, Japan represents an outlier case that merits close examination.

Political Theory: Development and Mobilization

At the very least, the Japanese case indicates that economic development is a necessary but not sufficient condition for gender equality. Changes in supply and demand of female labor alone do not guarantee gains for women's equality. The history of women's movements world-wide reveals that equality does not just happen. It must be fought for through political organization, mobilization, and struggle. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the Japanese case in light of theories that highlight the political mechanisms by which economic development leads to growing equality between the sexes.

Inglehart (1990) posits that as countries grow richer, citizens begin to adopt "post-materialist" values that go beyond economic issues such as employment, inflation, or economic growth, to include less immediate, more altruistic concerns, such as the environment, social welfare, or civil rights. There is evidence that Japan underwent such a change in values following its period of high speed economic growth. Richardson and Flanagan (1984) document a shift in policy priorities in Japan beginning in the early 1970s when the government dramatically increased spending on social security and welfare programs,

adopted a series of stringent anti-pollution laws, and expanded outlays on public works. It was also during this time, in 1975, that the United Nations inaugurated its Decade for Women, prompting Japan to join the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The requirements of this convention placed international pressure on Japan to adopt policies to promote equal treatment between the sexes by the end of the women's decade. But the resulting Equal Employment Opportunity Law, passed just in time to meet the 1985 deadline, was notable for its failure to ban sex discrimination in key areas of employment.[2]

Another theory that helps clarify the relationship between economic development and equality is Gurr's theory of relative deprivation (Gurr 1970). Gurr points out that popular protest arises when perceptions of actual circumstances do not meet expectations. The absolute level of oppression is less important than the relative deprivation people feel when they compare themselves with others. This theory may be used to explain the timing of second wave women's movements in the United States and West Europe in the 1970s. As these economies moved from manufacturing to services, many women began to enter the labor force, taking advantage of their increasing levels of education, decreasing number of children to care for, and advances in labor saving technology for housework. Working alongside men, women experienced rising expectations about their rights and opportunities, resulting in broad based political mobilization and government action. The proliferation of mass media

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[2] The EEOL of 1985 prohibits sex discrimination in training, education, benefits, retirement and dismissal. But in the areas of recruitment, job assignment, and promotion, employers are "obliged to endeavor" (*doryoku gimu*) not to discriminate against women. This obligation to endeavor carries no legal effect of enforcement. It was not until 1997 that the Diet passed two bills to amend the EEOL to prohibit sex discrimination in all hiring, promotion and retirement. The law took effect in April of 1999.

and global communications further fueled rising expectations as women could compare their situation with women in other countries. Japan has undergone similar demographic changes that accompany economic development, and Japanese women are well aware of their relative deprivation given Japan's advanced system of mass communications and the national movement of "internationalization," or *"kokusaika."* And yet for women in Japan, the rising expectations that economic development tends to produce has not resulted in mass political protest or rebellion.

Finally, a third theory suggests another intervening variable to specify the relationship between economic development and equality. Resource mobilization theory focuses on the organizational obstacles to forming and maintaining successful political movements (McCarthy 1973). To overcome the obstacles of large start-up costs and collective action problems, resources such as money, time, skills, leadership, networks, and alliances are critical for forming and maintaining broad based political organizations. For example, Freeman (1975) shows how women in the United States were able to draw upon extensive communication networks that were formed among college women during the student New Left movement in the 1960s. Similarly, Evans (1979) points to leadership and organizational skills that women learned through the civil rights movement which later proved to be a valuable resource for the women's movement. Because resources such as money, time, skills, and communication networks are more likely to be available to affluent women, it is not surprising that successful women's movements have been formed and maintained in the wealthy capitalist democracies. Nevertheless, for women in Japan, the availability of resources alone has not had a significant effect on improving gender equality relative to other countries.

All of these variables -- advanced economic development, sweeping demographic change, post-materialist values, relative deprivation, and resource mobilization -- point in the direction of equality for women in Japan. Yet, despite these forces for change, Japan lags significantly behind other industrialized countries in which these same variables helped raise the status of women relative to men. How do we account for Japan's deviation from the rest of the industrialized world? A rich, interdisciplinary literature on women in Japan provides valuable pieces to this puzzle.

Literature Review

Cultural Explanations

Perhaps the explanation for gender inequality in Japan which most immediately comes to mind is culture. Comparing Japan with other industrialized societies always raises the issue of East versus West, as Japan is the only non-western country among the world's richest nations. Any casual observer who visits Japan will soon notice distinct gender differentiation in social position and roles, and even in patterns of speech, behavior, and mannerisms.

Journalistic descriptions of women in Japan tend to focus on Japanese culture to account for the second class status of women in Japan, citing numerous examples of blatantly sexist but socially acceptable behavior on the part of both men and women (Taylor 1983, Condon 1985). Much attention has been given to distinct differences in language spoken by women versus men. Denigrating words and Chinese characters related to women reflect their subordinate position in society. And the manner of speech which is less direct and more

20

polite for women than men explicitly shows how gender differentiation permeates everyday life (Cherry 1989, Endo 1995).

Scholarly treatment of culture examines the status of women in Japanese society throughout history and in various contemporary settings. Historical studies point to religious and philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism, that penetrated institutions of power and influenced official policies towards women (Ackroyd 1959; Lebra, Paulson, and Powers 1976; Pharr 1977). Anthropological studies offer intricate views of culturally prescribed gender roles in the Japanese workplace (Kondo 1990, Roberts 1994), rural communities (Smith and Wiswell 1982; Lebra 1984), and urban middle class (Imamura 1987).

Taken together these cultural analyses of gender relations in Japan form textured layers of Geertz's thick description which inform this study on the politics of gender inequality in Japan. Nevertheless, culture is a dynamic, ever-changing force. And the challenge for women's movements has been to change cultural definitions of women's roles. Therefore, rather than treat culture as an independent variable to explain gender inequality in Japan, my approach views culture as a dependent variable, or the phenomenon to be explained. All countries have their own culturally prescribed gender roles. But in similarly situated countries, women are breaking out of these roles more effectively than women in Japan. What are the forces behind such cultural change? Unfortunately, cultural explanations do not lend themselves to understanding the economic imperatives or political movements that can actually change ideas, attitudes, and practices towards women long embedded in a given culture.

Economic Explanations

Human capital. To explain inequality, whether it be based on sex, race, or class, Liberal, Neo-classical schools of thought offer explanations based on human capital theory (Becker 1964, Mincer 1974). Focusing on the supply-side of labor, outcomes for individuals in the labor market are held to differ according to the investments they make in their marketable skills and knowledge. Regression analysis to predict wages, based on levels of education, training, experience and other variables, is the model of choice of human capital theorists. This model has been applied to explain wage disparities between men and women in Japan with mixed results (Hashimoto 1979, Yashiro 1980, Kawashima 1983, Osawa 1984, Hill 1992).

Human Capital theory is both intuitively and normatively appealing. Unlike cultural explanations, it generates testable hypotheses and relatively elegant statistical models. Also, measurable differences in education and training are less value-laden than observations about culture. The underlying assumption of Human Capital theory is that individuals have free choice, and therefore a certain amount of control, over their status in the labor market or society at large. This view is implicit in the defense of Japanese employers who argue that women choose their own low employment status by not investing in their length of service to the company, and instead choosing to quit work upon marriage or childbirth.

But the most damaging criticism of human capital theory is that it tends to assume an equal playing field where individuals compete freely based solely on their skills and effort. This assumption fails to recognize that individual choices take place within the context of available opportunities. If the labor market itself does not provide equal opportunities to Japanese men and women, it may be

22

rational for women to choose early retirement from a dead-end job and seek fulfillment in the domestic sphere. Therefore, we must also account for the playing field itself by examining the structure of the labor market, as well as social and political institutions that constrain the choices available to individual women.

Institutions. Three major works by western scholars examine the social and economic institutions that tilt the playing field against working women in Japan. American Sociologist Mary Brinton (1993) explains the role of Japanese women in the postwar Japanese economy in terms of the institutions of education, family and employment. She argues that women have had a dual-role in Japan's postwar economic miracle. They contribute directly by providing cheap, flexible labor, and indirectly by investing heavily in the human capital development of their husbands and sons, helping to make Japanese men among the most productive workers in the world. Brinton shows how this role was largely determined by particular institutional arrangements that were deliberately created to meet specific social and economic needs in the postwar period.

The Japanese employment system, which rewards continuous service to the same company, developed as the result of the severe shortage of skilled workers, along with a surplus of unskilled workers following World War II. Employers instituted the practice of lifetime employment and seniority wage increases to ensure a return on their investments in training. Brinton argues that, because women's years of work tend to be shorter than that of men, they were not viewed as a wise investment, and thereby became marginalized as part-time or temporary workers who could be laid off during economic downturns.

Brinton goes on to argue that Japanese institutions of education also contribute to the marginalization of women. The Japanese education system is highly competitive and extremely expensive. In the immediate postwar period,

23

the Japanese government chose to let the private sector meet the booming demand for higher education. The resulting high cost of college education has necessitated shrewd investment decisions by parents in their children's education. Particularly in Japan, where students are tracked from a very young age, decisions about human capital investments fall heavily on parents. A high proportion of Japanese parents expect to be supported by their children in their old age. Therefore, they have a direct interest in their children's future earnings.

These institutions of employment and education create incentives and constraints which shape the human capital investment decisions of individuals, particularly as parents. Given limited household resources along with an employment system that favors men over women, Brinton argues that it is rational for parents to invest more heavily in the human capital development of their sons than their daughters. In this way, the institutions of work, school, and family constrain the choices available to individual women.

British economist Alice Lam (1992) also offers an institutional explanation for the low status of female workers in Japan. Drawing upon internal labor market theory, Lam attributes sex discrimination in the Japanese labor market to the rules, procedures, and customs that govern hiring and promotion practices at large Japanese firms. According to the theory of internal labor markets, firm-specific training has become increasingly important, particularly in technologically driven industries. In order to ensure maximum return on their investment in training, employers create incentives for their most skilled workers to stay with the same firm, for example through seniority based wage increases and promotions. This "primary" sector is distinguished from the "secondary" sector of the labor market in which wages are lower and jobs less secure than in the primary sector. The result is a dual labor market (Doeringer 1971).

24

Lam argues that Japan represents an extreme case of internal labor markets, in which length of service is highly valued and rewarded within firms. Because women tend to leave the labor market to raise children, employers view them as a risky investment, and therefore discriminate against them. Lam's analysis, based on a case study of Seibu Department store before and after the passage of Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985, incorporates theories of gender into the theoretical framework of internal labor markets. She argues that sex discrimination is not simply an efficient strategy for employers to maximize returns on investments. Her case study shows how certain "gendered assumptions," or sexist attitudes play an important role in the employment practices of Japanese managers. Lam concludes that Japanese employers consciously exploit gender differentiation in society to support employment stratification in the workplace and to ensure a cheap, flexible pool of labor. Lam's analysis combines structure with culture, revealing a mutually reinforcing relationship.

Another British economist, Mary Saso (1990) examines why so many Japanese women are found in the secondary labour market, which includes employment in small firms, family enterprises, temporary, and part-time work. Her analysis emphasizes the additional responsibilities of housework and child rearing that weigh heavily on working women in all countries, but especially in Japan where surveys on time use show that men do practically no housework at all. This division of labour in the home helps explain the segregation of men, who form the core of primary internal labor markets, and women who are disproportionately found in the secondary labor market. The closed system of promoting from within firms shuts out women who wish to return to work after taking leave to raise children. The long, inflexible hours that companies demand from full-time regular employees are overwhelming for women who must work

25

an additional shift at home. The distinct duality between the rigidity and stability of internal labor markets versus the flexibility and instability of the secondary labor markets leave women with little choice. Household responsibilities, social pressures and economic imperatives push women towards secondary labor markets which are characterized by low wages and job insecurity. Nevertheless, Saso observes a gradual shift in Japanese employment practices away from internal labor markets to a more open, fluid, and flexible system in which women's choices between career and family will be less stark.

All of these works highlight key variables that help explain the high degree of gender inequality in Japan. Brinton emphasizes the role of institutions in constraining parental decisions. Lam points to employers' need for cheap flexible, female labor. Saso views the division of the labor in the home as the source of job segregation at work. Although they differ in approach and emphasis, what all three works have in common is that they trace the roots of gender inequality in Japan to economic imperatives.

Undoubtedly economics plays a key role in structuring gender relations in any society. And, as these works show, Japanese employers in particular have a vested interest in maintaining the secondary status of women in the labor market. Nevertheless, an exclusive focus on Japanese employment practices fails to recognize the countervailing force of politics against markets. Labor markets in industrialized democracies are not open fields on which employers are allowed to run rampant over workers. The state steps in as referee to ensure fair play by enforcing rules and regulations. Particularly in the area of women's employment, governments of industrialized countries have played an active role in promoting equal rights for women, often over the objections of employers. The economic explanation suggests that the labor market in Japan is an uneven playing field tilted in favor of Japanese employers at the expense of working

women. But where is the state as referee? Why have women themselves been unable to successfully challenge discriminatory practices and unfair play? A political explanation is needed to answer these questions.

Towards a Political Explanation

Sweeping social change in the area of equal rights, whether for women, ethnic minorities, or disadvantaged social classes, occurs through political struggle. Economic and demographic forces may determine the timing of change, and culture may shape the nature and direction of change, but the collective action of individuals organized and mobilized to challenge the status quo is always an essential part of the story. Particularly in the context of advanced industrial societies, examining the political activity of women is crucial to understanding differences in status across countries. All of the advanced capitalist economies are democracies in which citizens, women and men alike, are guaranteed a voice in government. But women's rights in these countries did not simply emerge as a result of changing demographics or increased wealth. Democratic rights were fought for and continue to be fought for by women themselves. To put it simply, politics matter.

There has been surprisingly little focus on politics as an explanation for the remarkably high degree of gender inequality in Japan. The literature on women and politics in Japan include Pharr's groundbreaking work on the social psychological processes behind the politicization of individual Japanese women (1980), and LeBlanc's ethnographic study of the political activities of Japanese housewives (1999). Aside from these two scholarly works, the literature consists mainly of general, descriptive overviews of women in Japan, which also cover

27

political participation (Iwao 1990; Gelb and Palley 1994; Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995; Morley 1999).

The Japanese language literature on women and politics is extensive, including many political biographies (Oku 1988; Moriyama 1990; Ichikawa 1992), collected historical documents (Ichikawa 1977; Chino 1996b; Suzuki 1996-97), and general accounts of women's political activities (Kubota 1995; Sakurai and Hayakawa 1998). However, there is little scholarly research done on gender within political science in Japan, with notable exceptions (Aoki 1991; Mikanagi 1999). A 1992 National Women's Education Center survey indicates a lack of support for women's studies within the field of political science in Japan (NWEC 1994b). The survey of 268 universities and junior colleges, showed that of the 512 women's studies courses reported, only one was offered in political science or economics, compared with 42 in history, and 37 in sociology. Also, Mikanagi reports that of the registered members of the Japan Political Science Association, less than 5 percent are women, compared with the 32 percent female membership of the American Political Science Association (1999: 20-21).

This dearth of political science research on the status of women in Japan is regrettable, as the field offers useful theories for explaining gender inequality in terms of political power. From a political science perspective, the central research question is what has prohibited women in Japan from effectively exercising their political power to challenge their unequal status? Political science offers a set of hypothesis to address this question.

Dilemmas of Collective Action

The most basic proposition is that there is no women's movement in Japan. There are logical reasons to believe that a group as large and diverse as

28

women in Japan would have great difficulty organizing around a common cause. Theories of collective action point out the inherent obstacles to organizing such groups (Olson 1965). For example, a small cadre of committed women may push for equal rights which would ultimately benefit all women, regardless of whether or not they participated in the effort. Overcoming this "free rider" problem is a fundamental challenge faced by all organizations that attempt to bring together diffuse interests. Because the existence of a women's movement in Japan cannot be taken for granted, this dissertation will assess the extent to which women are politically organized in Japan.

Institutional Obstacles

A second hypothesis is that a women's movement does exist, but its access to the policy making process is constrained by Japan's political institutions. In one of the few comparative studies of women's political movements, Katzenstein and Mueller (1987) provide the framework for an institutional approach to understanding gender inequality in Japan. They begin with the notion that women across Europe and the United States have a common transformative agenda that challenges existing power relations between the sexes. Although they start with basically similar goals, feminist activists in each country operate through varying political structures and institutional arrangements, which lead to different outcomes for women across countries.

Japan was not included in Katzenstein and Mueller's comparative study. Nevertheless, the literature on protest politics in Japan identifies institutional and cultural barriers that work against broad based social movements. The general picture that emerges from this literature is of a ubiquitous unelected bureaucracy

29

at the center of the policy making process, leaving relatively narrow channels of access for ordinary citizens to voice their grievances. There is also a tendency for case by case, informal, personal mediation of conflict, as opposed to formal, legal, solutions based on general principles that may be broadly applied, and a preference for material compensation, concessions or "side payments" to individual protesters rather than symbolic, universal rulings. (Krauss, Rohlen, and Steinhoff 1984; Upham 1987; Pharr 1990).

The institutional prominence of an insulated bureaucracy and the cultural preference for flexible, case by case solutions over formal legal means represent formidable barriers to the lobbying efforts of a broad based women's movement. This well documented pattern of response to status based claims suggests that the Japanese system of conflict management may work to diffuse and delegitimize women's demands for equality. In other words, the problem is not the lack of a women's movement, but lack of access to political institutions and the policy making process.

Unique Preferences

A third hypothesis takes issue with institutional approach, in which interests for the same groups in different countries are necessarily held constant in order to test the effects of different institutional arrangements on policy outcomes. Such an approach fails to account for the possibility that women in Japan may define their interests differently from women in other countries. Rather than lacking organization or access, it may be that Japanese women simply do not want equality with men.

In a study of the consumer movement in Japan, Vogel (1999) presents a cautionary tale, warning against the assumption of interests derived from

30

economic theory. He draws the distinction between interests (taken from theory) and preferences (discovered through field research). Vogel's research finds that the interests of Japanese consumers, assumed to be lower prices, do not match their actual preferences, which emphasize quality, safety, and support for small business and farmers. The assumption of interests has led to the mistaken conclusion that Japanese consumers are politically weak when, in fact, Vogel shows that consumer groups (notably the Japan Housewives Association, *Shufuren*) have been remarkably successful at pushing for regulations on product safety, quality, and labeling.

Similarly in the case of women, interests derived from theory would suggest that women's economic interests lie with equal wages and equal opportunity. But many Japanese women openly question the value equality with Japanese men who are famous for spending long hours at work and devoting their lives to their companies, often at the expense of family life (Iwao 1993). They point to the special contribution women make in their roles as wives and mothers (Hasegawa 1984, Brinton 1993). This ambivalence towards equality is further evidenced by opinion surveys showing that a majority of Japanese women agree with the statement "The husband should be the breadwinner, and the wife should stay at home" (Tokyo Metropolitan Government 1994). Given these theoretical and empirical considerations, this dissertation will examine how Japanese women themselves define their political interests.

Civil Society

A final hypothesis is derived from a relatively new literature on civil society and social capital. Ever since Robert Putnam lamented that Americans are increasingly bowling alone, scholars have turned their attention to the role of

31

civic associations, such as bowling leagues or Parent Teacher Associations, in the functioning of democratic governments and industrialized economies. Countries in which grassroots organizations thrive are thought to be rich in social capital and trust, which contribute to a healthy democracy.

In 1998, Japan adopted a new law aimed at bolstering civil society. But non-profit organizations criticized the government for failing to provide tax benefits, such as income tax deductions for charitable donations. The civil society literature posits that such rules of civic engagement impact the ability of groups to carry out their goals. Therefore, it is possible that women's political efficacy is being hampered by the laws and institutions that govern civil society in general, and women's civic associations in particular.

Study Design

This set of hypotheses will be explored within three areas of analysis-- women's organizations, women's centers, and women's policy making. These areas were chosen for analysis because they provide a broad spectrum and represent key facets of women's politics in Japan. An examination of women's organizations and how they are regulated shows how Japan deals with universal issues of regulating interest group activity. A focus on women's centers brings to light an institution that is unique to Japan, as both a resource for women's groups and a portal for state involvement in the women's movement. Finally, a look at how women's organizations participate in the policy making process provides a dynamic view of how women exercise their political rights in Japan.

The dissertation is structured according to these three areas of analysis. Chapter Two begins with a broad overview of women's organizations in Japan. Using information from published directories and the extensive pamphlet and

newsletter collection at the National Women's Education Center, I have constructed a database of women's groups to determine the extent and content of women's organization in Japan. This database is used to examine the propositions that there is no women's movement in Japan, and that Japanese women do not want equality. Women's preferences are further explored through a review of opinion survey data. This chapter will also examine the regulatory environment in which women's groups operate to determine if Japanese policies regulating interest group activity represent institutional barriers to an effective women's movement.

Chapter Three focuses exclusively on women's centers in Japan. There are literally hundreds of women's centers throughout Japan. Their basic purpose is to provide meeting space and resources for women's groups. While similar institutions may exist in other countries, Japan is exceptional in its large number of designated women's centers, and the amount of government support provided to build and manage these centers. This institutional anomaly presents its own puzzle as to why such centers for women thrive in a country considered a laggard on gender equality. While the centers provide valuable resources to women's groups, they also serve as points of access for government officials to influence the women's movement. A comparison of the activities of women's organizations with programs offered at women's centers shows a significant difference between the interests of women's organizations and the agenda set by women's centers.

Chapter Four examines how women's policy is made in Japan, paying particular attention to points of access where women's organizations can exert their influence. The large role of the bureaucracy has been well established in the area of economic policy making, and the same holds true for women's policy. In recent years, the government has established divisions within various Ministries

to develop policies on gender equality. This effort is overseen by the office for Gender Equality within the Prime Minister's Office. As with government sponsored women's centers, the creation of gender equality divisions with the Japanese bureaucracy suggests a high degree of state support for the women's movement. But again, these offices are not neutral black boxes that translate women's demands into policy. They are state institutions with their own interests, and they act as gatekeepers for letting certain women's interests into the policy making process while keeping others out.

Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary and conclusion. After examining the proposed hypotheses through the universal, unique, and dynamic lenses of women's organizations, women's centers, and women's policy making, this dissertation reaches the following conclusions:

On the question of whether or not a women's movement exists in Japan, the answer is a resounding yes. Although their movement may not look and act like women's movements in other advanced industrialized democracies, women in Japan are active and organized around a wide variety of issues at the local, regional, and national levels. The magnitude and diversity of women's organization in Japan clearly indicates that Japanese women have overcome the dilemmas of collective action.

But do they have access to the policy making process? The answer is a qualified yes. Since the 1970s, the government has established various women's policy offices within the national bureaucracy and has put pressure on prefectural and local governments to follow suit. These offices represent institutionalized points of access for women's organizations to participate in the policy making process. But, in practice, this access is not equal, as a single peak association representing mainstream national women's organizations has gained a privileged position through its close ties with the government. The

34

institutional hypothesis posits a lack of access due to the closed nature of policy making within the unelected bureaucracy. But it is not a lack of access that has prevented progress on women's issues. It is rather too much access which allows the government to influence the women's movement as much as the women's movement influences government.

While Japanese women may have organization and access, the question remains--Do Japanese women want equality? Although there is much survey data showing women's ambivalence towards equality with men, these surveys viewed over time indicate significant changes in women's attitudes in the direction of equality. Moreover, an analysis of the types of women's groups in Japan reveals that a large segment of the women's movement is organized specifically around women's issues and equality, as opposed to homemaking or flower arranging.

Finally, the civil society hypothesis is correct in predicting the importance of regulations in shaping the women's movement. But the case of women in Japan reveals that state involvement goes well beyond laws and regulations. While the state does not support women's groups by granting them tax-exempts status, the state does provide valuable resources to women, particularly in the form of hundreds of public women's centers throughout Japan. These centers encourage women's civic participation by providing meeting space and programmed activities. But they also allow the government an active role in civil society, which could not be achieved by simply offering tax breaks. Women's centers are just one of many types of centers supported by the state to serve various segments of civil society. These include consumer centers, elderly welfare centers, youth centers and many more. In this way, women's centers reveal a pattern of state intervention in which support for civic associations takes

the form of resources that allow the state a degree of involvement and influence over civil society.

This Japanese approach to civil society has created a close relationship between women's organizations and state, based on regulations governing women's groups, state-supported women's centers, and women's policy offices at various levels of government. These institutionalized links between women and state aid the women's movement by providing official recognition, resources, and access. But these channels are a two-way street. While they allow women to access the government, they also allow the government to access the women's movement. This mutual access has meant that the relationship between women and the state in Japan has been less combative and conflictual than cooperative and collaborative. For this reason, social change is necessarily slow, as it is achieved through constant consultation and compromise. Access and recognition also come at the price of autonomy and independence. Groups that operate outside these institutionalized channels may maintain their autonomy, but their interests have little chance of making it onto the political agenda. In this way, state intervention in the women's movement has slowed and limited progress towards achieving gender equality in Japan.

Chapter Two
Women's Organizations in Japan

Popular images of Japanese women tend to include the neatly uniformed office lady cheerfully serving tea to her co-workers, or the industrious Japanese housewife, meticulously taking care of the home while closely supervising her children's education. They usually do not include the Pink Helmet Brigade surrounding government offices, chanting slogans to demand access to contraceptive pills, or the Housewives Association taking to the streets in their aprons with rice paddles raised in protest of rising consumer prices. Because the stereotype of the quiet, subservient Japanese woman is so ubiquitous, the complex and diverse reality of women's social activism in Japan tends to go unnoticed. While second wave feminism of the 1970s has received scholarly and popular attention in west Europe and the United States, the *uuman ribu* (women's lib) movement that emerged in Japan around the same time was largely ridiculed in the media as a poor imitation of women's activism abroad. These popular perceptions combined with Japan's poor international standing on measures of gender equality raise the questions, is there a women's movement in Japan? If so, what does it look like? And what has hampered its effectiveness?

This chapter addresses these questions by providing an overview and analysis of women's organizations in Japan. Using data collected from a large sample of women's groups, I will assess the extent to which women are organized in Japan. These data also reveal the types of issues that mobilize women to form groups. Based on this information combined with opinion survey data, I will explore the goals and preferences of organized women's groups. Finally, I will examine the laws that govern women's organizations and

interest groups generally to determine how Japan's regulatory environment constrains the ability to organize and mobilize an effective women's movement.

Is There a Women's Movement in Japan?

Although the question appears to be straightforward, it is not at all clear how one would determine whether or not a women's movement exists in Japan. Typically, it is assumed or asserted to exist and described in general terms, noting visible or successful campaigns organized by Japanese women, or pointing to individual, self-proclaimed feminist activists (Iwao 1993, Buckley 1994, Tanaka 1995). But social movements are rare and remarkable. And there are general theoretical considerations as well as specific historical and cultural patterns that render the emergence of a broad based women's movement in Japan to be unlikely.

Olson's classic theory of collective action first challenged the notion that organized groups form naturally or spontaneously based on the shared interests of individuals (1964). He questions the incentives to join groups, particularly for broad based interest groups, such as women. In this case, a small number of committed women may devote much of their time and resources to further the interests of women, so that all women benefit regardless of individual participation in the effort. Olson calls this the "free rider" problem. The diffuse nature of benefits to large groups means that organizations must overcome the free rider problem by providing selective benefits, such as newsletters or group discounts, only to group members. Because of the inherent difficulties of organizing broad based groups, we cannot simply assume that a women's movement exists in Japan.

38

While Olson's theory may be applied universally, empirical studies on protest in Japan reveal obstacles to social movements specific to Japan. According to this literature, the Japanese government's response to broad based protest systematically weakens the ability of protesters to sustain an effective social movement. Pharr (1990) documents how Japanese authorities engage in the "privatization of conflict," to keep protest outside of formal public venues, such as the courts, where universal rulings may be made and applied to future conflict. Instead, grievances are handled on a case by case basis, and authorities offer "preemptive concessions," to contain and diffuse protest before it can develop into a symbolic, broad based movement. Upham (1987) highlights the role of Japan's powerful and insular bureaucracy in this system of conflict management, which he calls "Bureaucratic Informalism." The approach is "bureaucratic" in that it allows Japan's elite bureaucracy to maintain control over the processes of social conflict and change by maximizing bureaucratic discretion and limiting judicial review. It is "informal" in that the bureaucracy prefers informal consultation and compromise over strict enforcement of rulings spelled out in the law. Finally, Steinhoff (1989) describes how grassroots protest movements in Japan are taken over by political parties to form a national protest cartel. She describes how, from the end of World War II to the 1970s, the Socialist and Communist parties attempted to corner the protest market, as they competed for support from labor unions, students, the Burakumin minority, and women. Since the 1970s, some groups have become so closely aligned with political parties that their protest activities have become institutionalized and ritualized. Farmers and shopkeepers tied to the conservative Liberal Democratic Party stage large rallies, while labor unions supporting the Socialist and Communist parties launch an annual spring offensive. Although these activities are mostly symbolic, Steinhoff argues that such ritual protest has gained social

legitimacy. As for groups without party ties, such as environmentalists and feminists, they fall outside the realm of institutionalized and ritualized protest and therefore tend to be marginalized and alienated. The overall picture that emerges from these works on protest movements in Japan shows the great difficulties involved in organizing and sustaining an effective women's movement. These obstacles stemming from Japan's particular approach to social protest combined with the universal dilemmas of collective action make it necessary to question the assumption that a women's movement in Japan exists at all.

The most obvious way to determine the existence of a women's movement is to examine the level of organization and mobilization among women in Japan. Although there are no comprehensive figures on the total number of women's organizations in Japan, published directories along with the pamphlet and newsletter collection of the National Women's Education Center provide a broad view of the scope and breadth of women's organizations in Japan. The main directories of women's organizations in Japan include the Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association's *Directory of National Women's Organizations*, published yearly and listing over one hundred national women's groups; Jojo kikaku's *Women's Handy Notebook*, published periodically and listing over three hundred local women's groups, businesses, and centers; and the Yokohama's Women's Forum's *Women's Networking*, published in 1991 and listing over six hundred women's groups.

In addition to these sources, the National Women's Education Center houses an extensive collection of materials from women's organizations throughout Japan. Their collection contains over 1,400 alphabetized files, carrying informational brochures, newsletters, flyers, and various other materials put out by women's organizations. Although NWEC does not actively

solicit these materials, women's groups using the center often distribute information about their organizations, while other groups send materials to NWEC to publicize their activities. According to Mori Michi of the NWEC Information Center, the library staff and volunteers began to sort, file, and catalog these materials beginning in 1987 (Mori 2000). They continue to maintain and develop this collection, filing all materials they receive related to women's organizations.

Although NWEC meticulously collects this valuable information on women's organizations, no one has attempted to systematically analyze the data contained in their extensive pamphlet collection. Therefore, I reviewed the contents of all 1,434 files, and recorded data on 534 organizations. Not all files produced useful data, as many contained information on one-time women's events, women's centers, or businesses. I then supplemented my database with the women's organizations listed in three published directories--the Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association's *Directory of National Women's Organizations* from 1998, Jojo kikaku's *Women's Handy Notebook* from 1998, and Shiba's *Directory of Various Types of National Organizations* from 1999.[1] Altogether, I compiled information on 889 women's organizations representing all regions of Japan (Table 2.1). A simple accounting based on the NWEC pamphlet collection along with the published directories yields a surprisingly large number of women's groups from a country perceived to have a weak, if any, women's movement.

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[1] The Yokohama Forum's *Women's Networking* was not included in my database because it has not been updated since it was first published in 1991, and its contents have already been analyzed by Khor 1999. I use Khor's findings as a basis of comparison for my own database.

Table 2.1
Regional Distribution of Women's Organizations Sample

Region	Number of Groups	Percentage of Sample	Percentage of Population
Hokkaido	22	2.5	4.5
Tohoku	39	4.4	7.8
Kanto	364	41.3	31.7
Chubu	83	9.4	17.1
Kinki	147	16.7	17.9
Chugoku	27	3.1	6.1
Shikoku	23	2.6	3.3
Kyushu	35	4	10.6
Okinawa	7	0.8	1
National Groups	135	15.3	
Unknown	7	0.8	
Total	882	100	100

Source: Population data from Yano Tsuneta Kinenkai (Tsuneta Yano Memorial Association). 2000. *Nihon Kokusei Zue* (The state of Japan pictorial data book.

Not only is there a large number of women's groups active throughout Japan, but many of these groups are highly organized and politically sophisticated, especially at the national level. Leading up to the United Nations designation of 1975 as International Women's Year, forty-one national women's organizations and labor unions came together at the International Women's Year Conference of Japan to form a coalition called the Liaison Group for the Implementation of Resolutions from the International Women's Year Conference of Japan (IWYLG). This coalition has grown to include fifty-two national women's groups with a combined membership of twenty-six million women or one-fifth the total population of Japan. The Liaison Group is active in

42

the international arena with its fundraising efforts on behalf of the United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), as well as in domestic politics as its holds hearings on women's policy issues and meets regularly with representatives from government ministries.

The large number of women's groups and their demonstrated ability to form national and international coalitions shows that, despite universal dilemmas of collective action and the particular obstacles to social protest in Japan, women have managed to come together to form broad-based organizations around common goals and interests. Therefore, the question of whether or not a women's movement exists in Japan can be answered empirically with a resounding yes. The question then becomes why has the women's movement failed to achieve gains in gender equality commensurate to Japan's economic development and comparable to women in other industrialized democracies.

Do Japanese Women Want Equality?

An alternative explanation for gender inequality in Japan is that the women's movement has not embraced equality as its primary goal. While there is evidence of widespread organization and mobilization among Japanese women, a women's movement is not necessarily a feminist movement. Women worldwide have long debated the substantive and strategic merits of demanding full equality with men against seeking recognition of the special contribution women make to society through their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Although the controversy over whether or not equality truly serves the interests of women is not unique to Japan, the ambivalence towards equality between the sexes is particularly apparent in both public debates and opinion survey data.

The issue of equality versus protection became the topic of widespread discussion leading up the passage of Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985. Much of the debate centered around female worker protections contained in the 1947 Labor Standards Law. These include restrictions on overtime and holiday work, prohibition of late night work and dangerous work, and guarantees for maternity and monthly menstrual leave. The justification for providing worker protections especially for women was to ensure that outside employment would not interfere with women's household duties. Nevertheless, many working women agreed with management's position that a legal guarantee of equal rights entails equal responsibilities, even if this means working a double shift at work and then at home. Other women sided with labor, arguing that such protections should not only be maintained for women, but extended to men to create a more humane work environment for everyone. The landmark equal employment legislation that passed in 1985 was a compromise between these two positions. Women were given a limited guarantee of equality in employment, in which sex discrimination was legally prohibited in training, benefits, retirement, and dismissal, but not in recruitment, hiring, job assignment, or promotion. Similarly, a compromise was reached on female worker protections, so that protections were eliminated for women in managerial positions but effectively maintained for ninety percent of the female workforce.

This debate over equality versus protection was by no means limited to the public policy arena, as prominent scholars also contributed to the discussion. In a leading intellectual magazine, *Chuo Koron*, Hasegawa Michiko, a professor of philosophy, sharply criticizes Japan's signing of the UN Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. She argues that the provisions contained in the convention are patently ethnocentric, reflecting western values which threaten the integrity of Japanese culture. She states that calls for equal employment legislation miss the point that women at home are actually working. Rather than privileging paid employment and demanding equality for women in the workplace, Hasegawa advocates the revaluation of housework on par with paid employment (Hasegawa 1984). In a similar vein, sociologist Mary Brinton (1993) argues that the indirect contribution women made to Japan's postwar economic miracle was the care and nurturing they provided for the human capital development of working men.

The goal of equality is most notably challenged in Iwao Sumiko's popular book on Japanese women. Iwao, a professor of psychology, is considered a leading expert on women's issues and is frequently a member of government advisory boards that consider policies relevant to women. In her book, she argues that women in Japan are more interested in their actual quality of life than the abstract principle of equality. Because Japanese men are notorious workaholics, she believe that equality with men would actually worsen the quality of life for women who value time with their families. She writes, "...in contrast to the central position it holds in the American women's movement, equality is not an issue in the forefront of the inconspicuous revolution going on among Japanese women." (Iwao 1993, 16).

Popular Opinion

The goal of equality for Japanese women is further placed in doubt by opinion survey data polling women's views on various issues related to gender equality. In 1992 the Women's Affairs Section of the Tokyo Metropolitan

Government conducted an international comparative survey on women's attitudes about sex discrimination, family life, employment, and civic participation. In nationwide surveys of eight countries, at least 1,000 women, aged 20 or older, were randomly selected and interviewed directly in their native language. Although the survey does not include a question that asks women for their views on equality, it reveals much about their attitudes towards gender equality nonetheless. It is likely that if Japanese women were asked directly if they want equality with men, they would overwhelmingly respond yes. But questions from this cross national survey provide a more accurate picture of women's views on equality because they place this abstract principle in the context of concrete issues, such as marriage, family, and work.

Two questions in particular reflect women's attitudes about equality. One question asks women about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement, "The husband should be the breadwinner, and the wife should stay at home." Another question asks women which approach they favor in the early training of children, "To teach a boy to behave like a boy and a girl to behave like a girl," or "To bring up both boys and girls pretty much in the same manner." The first question may be interpreted as a question about equality in marriage as it asks whether or not men and women should have separate roles. The second question reflects attitudes about equality in the upbringing of children. On both questions, Japanese women appear to be split over the issue of equality, with more than half agreeing on separate roles for men and women in marriage, and almost half believing that girls and boys should not be raised equally. But what is most interesting is how Japanese women compare with women in other countries in their responses to these questions, as shown below.

"The husband should be the breadwinner, and the wife should stay at home."

	Completely or Rather Agree	Completely or Rather Disagree	Don't Know
Japan	55.6	38.3	6.1
Korea	32.6	66.9	0.5
Philippines	66.5	33.4	0.1
United States	23.7	73.3	3.1
United Kingdom	20.3	78.8	0.9
France	22.4	76.0	1.6
Germany	24.8	70.9	4.3
Sweden	12.8	86.8	0.4

"In the early training of children, which do you feel is the best approach?"

	Teach a boy to behave like a boy and a girl to behave like a girl	Bring up both boys and girls in pretty much the same way	Can't say which	No Answer
Japan	45.6	38.8	15.6	0.0
Korea	55.2	42.2	1.6	0.8
Philippines	36.4	63.3	0.2	0.1
United States	28.2	66.4	3.6	1.7
United Kingdom	15.8	79.0	4.0	1.1
France	24.1	62.2	12.9	0.8
Germany	14.8	70.8	6.3	8.1
Sweden	6.3	89.2	2.8	1.7

Other survey questions also reveal attitudes that are relevant to how women define their interests. For example, the following survey item shows the extent to which marriage is viewed as contributing to women's happiness, and therefore being in women's interest.

"All things considered, women's happiness lies in marriage,
so it's better for women to marry"

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Japan	78.2	14.2	7.7
Korea	62.1	36.2	1.7
Philippines	74.4	25.3	0.3
United States	28.8	68.8	2.4
United Kingdom	37.0	60.5	2.4
France	51.8	46.4	1.7
Germany	40.9	52.6	6.4
Sweden	18.4	79.3	2.3

Furthermore, women's attitudes about work and family reflect priorities and preferences relevant to gender equality. The following survey item reveals beliefs about women's proper place in the workforce versus the home.

"Which of these statements comes closest to
the way you feel about women engaging in an occupation?"

	should not work at all	work until marriage	work until child-birth	continue working after child-birth	return to work after children are grown	Other	Don't Know
Japan	2.8	10.8	11.1	26.3	45.4	1.3	2.3
Korea	2.3	4.4	7.4	40.4	43.3	0.3	1.9
Philippines	3.3	14.7	15.3	36.4	29.9	0.2	0.2
US	2.9	1.6	7.6	34.0	41.5	8.1	4.4
UK	0.6	1.8	6.4	31.9	51.0	3.9	4.4
France	0.8	1.3	6.6	38.1	50.4	0.9	1.8
Germany	1.7	4.6	13.2	34.2	40.9	2.0	3.4
Sweden	0.0	0.6	2.5	75.5	15.0	4.2	2.2

The responses of Japanese women to these survey questions seem to reflect Japan's unusual position as the only non-western country among the world's wealthiest nations. Japanese women's attitudes seem to fall somewhere in between those of their developing Asian neighbors, who are closer in proximity and culture, and those of their European counterparts, who share their wealth and standard of living. Especially on the issue of marriage, Japanese women's attitudes diverge sharply with their European counterparts, though

they are somewhat closer to their Asian neighbors. A relatively high number of Japanese women agree that men and women should have separate roles in marriage. And, more than women in any other country, they believe their happiness depends on marriage. Furthermore, more than ten percent of Japanese women surveyed expressed the view that women should stop working after marriage. This proportion is much higher than that of all other countries, except the Philippines. While the effect of childbirth on women's equality is well known, it is perhaps less clear why marriage alone would prohibit women from continuing to work outside the home. In the Japanese case, the explanation probably lies with the attitudes of Japanese men who do practically no housework. A survey on time use and leisure activities shows that, on average, Japanese working women spend nearly three hours a day on housework, child-care, and shopping, while Japanese men, on average, spend only thirteen minutes a day on these activities (JIL 1994).

Moving Towards Equality

The public debates and opinion survey data show how many women in Japan openly question whether or not equality with men is truly in their best interests. But debates over equality versus protection or sameness versus difference are found in feminist discourse in many countries. The point is not that Japanese women are more or less ambivalent about equality than women in other countries, or that this debate is unique to Japan. The point is that the value of equality for women is openly debated and contested. But as the discussion over equality continues, public opinion has shown a gradual shift, and legislation has been strengthened in favor of gender equality.

While the opinion survey data viewed across countries show Japan's relative skepticism over equality, similar data examined over time shows a gradual yet consistent shift in the attitudes of Japanese women in favor of equality. Over the past quarter century, the Prime Minister's Office has periodically administered opinion surveys to thousands of women on a variety of issues, covering work, family, civic engagement, public policy, and sex discrimination. Two very similar questions, asked in slightly different ways, appear in nearly all of these surveys, allowing for comparisons of women's opinions over time.

Between 1976 and 2000, Japanese women have been asked in seven separate national surveys whether they agree or disagree with the notion "men should work, women should stay home." When this question was first asked of women in 1976, 49 percent agreed, while 40 percent disagreed, with the remaining responses unknown. But in subsequent years, the proportion of women expressing agreement has steadily declined while the proportion of women expressing disagreement has similarly increased. By 2000, only 21 percent of women surveyed agreed, and a full 53 percent disagreed, showing a clear shift in opinion on this issue (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1
Percentage of Responses to the Question, "Do you agree or disagree with the notion men should work, women should stay home?"
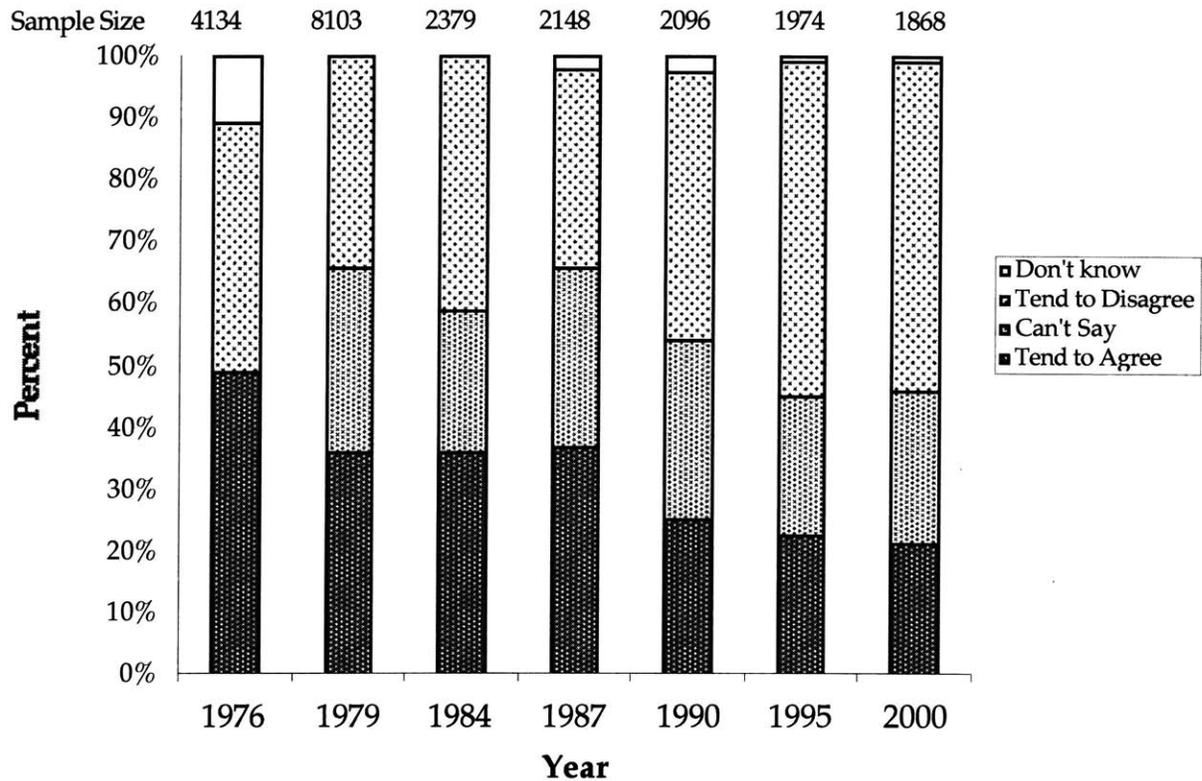
Source: Prime Minister's Office. *Fujin ni kansuru seron chosa* (Public opinion survey related to women). *Josei ni kansuru seron chosa. Danjo kyodo sankaku ni kansuru seron chosa.* Various years.

The other way in which this question appears is slightly more specific and allows for a more specific answer. In other years, women were asked for their views on the statement, "The husband should work, while the wife protects the home." Respondents were allowed to express a slightly wider range of opinions than in the previously cited question, so the results are somewhat different. But the overall trend over time is the same, as women's attitudes increasingly reflect a rejection of traditional roles. Between 1981 and 1997, the proportion of women who agree or tend to agree with this statement declined from 70 percent to 58

percent. And the proportion of women who disagree or tend to disagree
increased from 23 percent to 38 percent (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2
Percentage of Responses to the Statement "The husband should work, while the
wife protects the home."
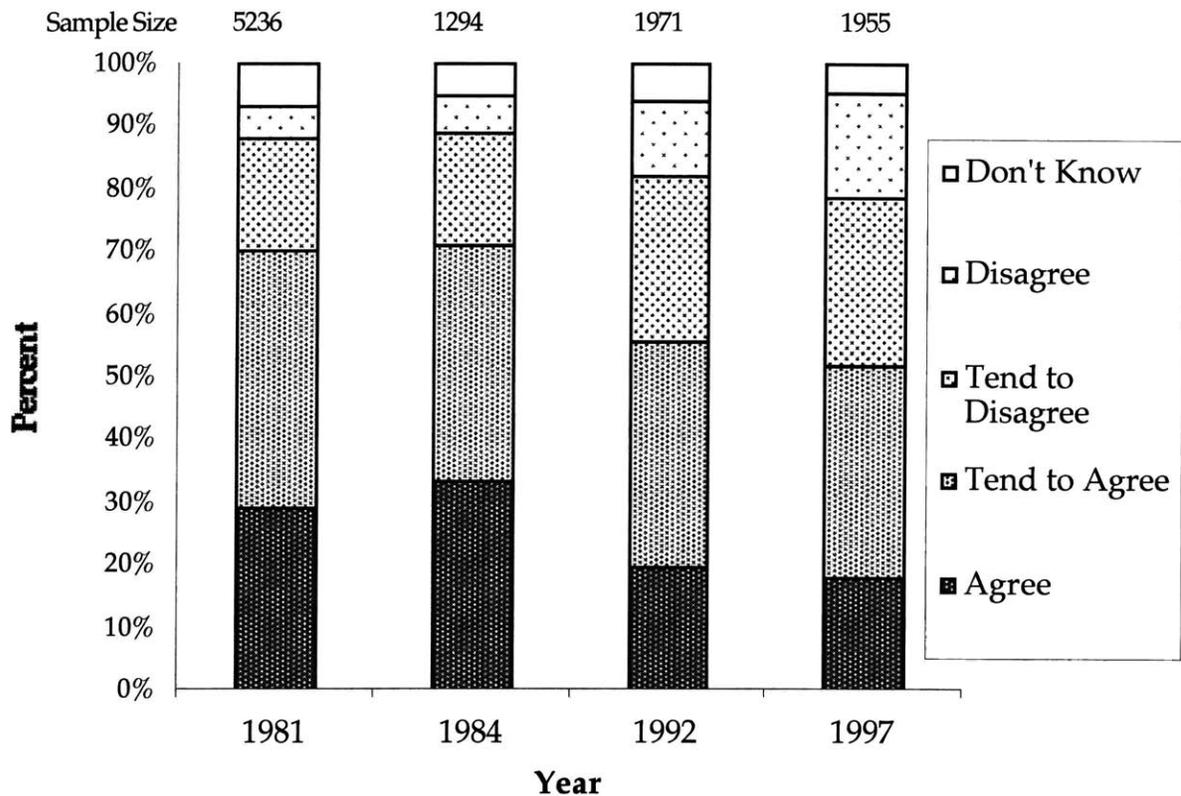
Source: Prime Minister's Office. Various years. *Fujin ni kansuru seron chosa*
(Public opinion survey related to women). *Fujin mondai ni kansuru kokusai hikaku
chosa kekka hokokusho. Danjo byodo ni kansuru seron chosa. Danjo kyodo sankaku shakai
ni kansuru seron chosa.*

The attitudinal shift among women has coincided with legislative changes
giving working women stronger guarantees of equality, though at the expense
of worker protections. The original version of the Equal Employment
Opportunity Law, passed in 1985, reflected a compromise between the right to
equality and demands for protection. Instead of an outright ban on sex
discrimination in employment, the law "obliged" employers to treat women and

men on an equal basis in recruitment, hiring, job assignment, and promotions. Sex discrimination was only legally prohibited in training, benefits, dismissal, and retirement. But in these areas of employment, the law simply affirmed earlier court rulings. On the other hand, female worker protections, such as restrictions on overtime, holiday work, and dangerous work, were retained for the vast majority of working women, and maternity leave was extended.[2]

If the 1985 law represents a balance between equality and protection, the 1997 revisions heavily tilt the scale in favor of equality. Under the amended law, employers are now prohibited from discriminating against women in the areas of employment under which they were originally "obliged to endeavor" not to discriminate. Thus, the prohibition provision now covers recruitment, hiring, job assignment, and promotion. To strengthen enforcement, the Diet added a provision that allows the Ministry of Labor to publicly identify companies that refuse to comply with the law. Rather than requiring that both employers and workers agree to arbitration, the government authority may intervene based on one side's complaint. The new law also mentions sexual harassment for the first time, and includes a general call to employers to adopt preventative measures. In concurrent legislation, the Diet revised the Labor Standards Law to eliminate female worker protections for all working women, not just those in high ranking positions. The only remaining protection is an annual limit of 360 hours of overtime, which now covers both men and women. For women with family responsibilities, the old limit of 150 hours will apply for an interim period of three years. All of these revisions went into effect as of April 1999.

Based on available evidence, the question of whether or not women in Japan want equality with men is difficult to answer, as debates continue and

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[2] For more on Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1985, see Lam 1992 and Upham 1987.

public opinion changes. But over the past quarter century, since the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year, the trend in Japan, both in public opinion and legislation, has been towards the goal of gender equality. In addition to public debates, opinion surveys, and legislative action, the activities of women's organizations reveal the diverse goals of the women's movement in Japan, and a strong support for gender equality.

Women's Organizations: A Feminist Movement?

Even more telling than what Japanese women think is what they do. While opinion survey data may reveal women's passive attitudes about equality, their efforts to organize and mobilize civic groups show their active participation on issues that are most important to them. What are the issues that form the basis of the women's movement in Japan? To what extent do women's groups support the goal of equality? Is the women's movement necessarily a feminist movement?

To answer these questions, I examined the activities of 889 women's organizations, and coded the subject area for each group, according to thirteen general categories, which are further broken down into 62 specific subcategories.[3] For groups engaged in activities in more than one issue area, I recorded multiple issue areas. But for the sake of clarity, the following analysis is based on the primary issue area of each group. The results show that the

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[3] The subject area code sheet used for this analysis is taken from a survey of women's centers conducted by the National Women's Education Center (NWEC 1994). I chose to use this code sheet because the inclusion of so many subcategories allows for a detailed examination of the activities of women's groups. Using the same code sheet as the NWEC survey of women's centers also allows me to compare the activities of women's groups in my database with the activities that take place at women's centers. The results of this comparison are reported in Chapter 3. For a list of all 62 subcategories, see appendix A.

Japanese women's movement is active on a wide range of issues, but is largely organized around women's issues and general social issues.

Of the thirteen general categories describing the issues taken up by women's groups, "Women's Issues" and "Social Issues" overwhelming dominate, with these two categories accounting for over half the women's organizations in my sample. "Women's Issues," are the main concern of 31 percent , while "Social Issues" are the focus of 21 percent of the groups. The next largest category is "Labor" at 10 percent, followed by "Social Participation at 8 percent. "Health," "Home Education," and "Family," each represent 5 percent of women's organizations. "Welfare," "Culture," "General Education," "Letters and Science," "Gay Lesbian," and "Other" each recorded less than 5 percent of women's organizations active on these issues (Figure 2.3).
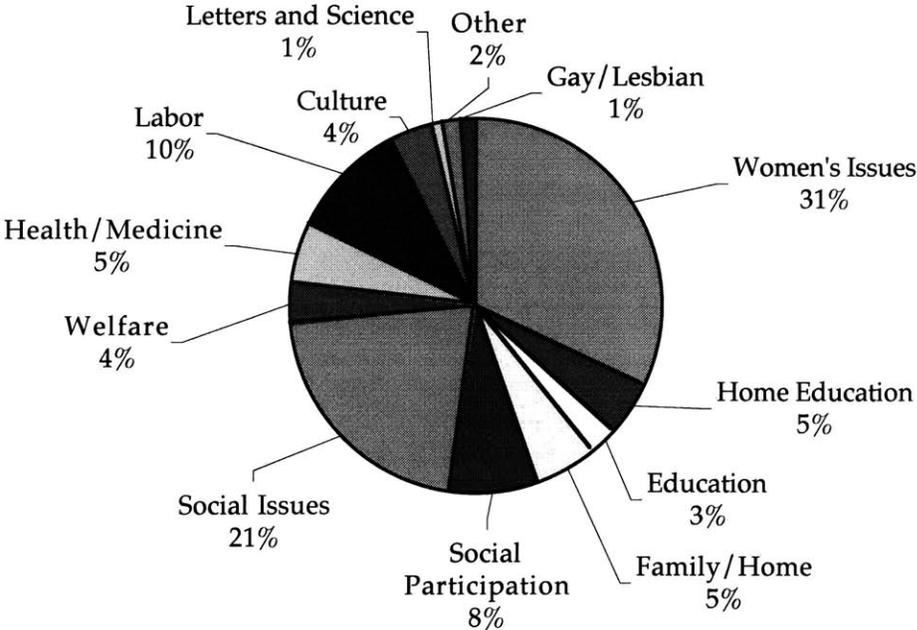
Figure 2.3
Percentage Breakdown of Women's Groups by Primary Issue Area (N=889)

The two categories accounting for over half the women's groups in my sample are made up of more specific subcategories, which provide sharper focus on the issues of greatest concern to women in Japan. Out of my sample of 889 women's groups, 283, or roughly 32 percent, were organized around women's issues. These 283 groups are further broken down into six subcategories. These are "general women's issues," "women's studies," "women's education," "women's administration," "women's history," and "other women's issues" (Figure 2.4). Over a third of the groups were concerned with general women's issues. But even more groups fell under the catch-all "other." The large number of groups assigned "other women's issues" indicates that my original code sheet was inadequate at capturing the specific women's issues concerning many women's organizations. A closer look at the 118 groups that fall under this category shows a large number of groups lobbying for the legalized use of separate surnames for married couples, and groups offering counseling, shelter, and other services related to domestic violence.
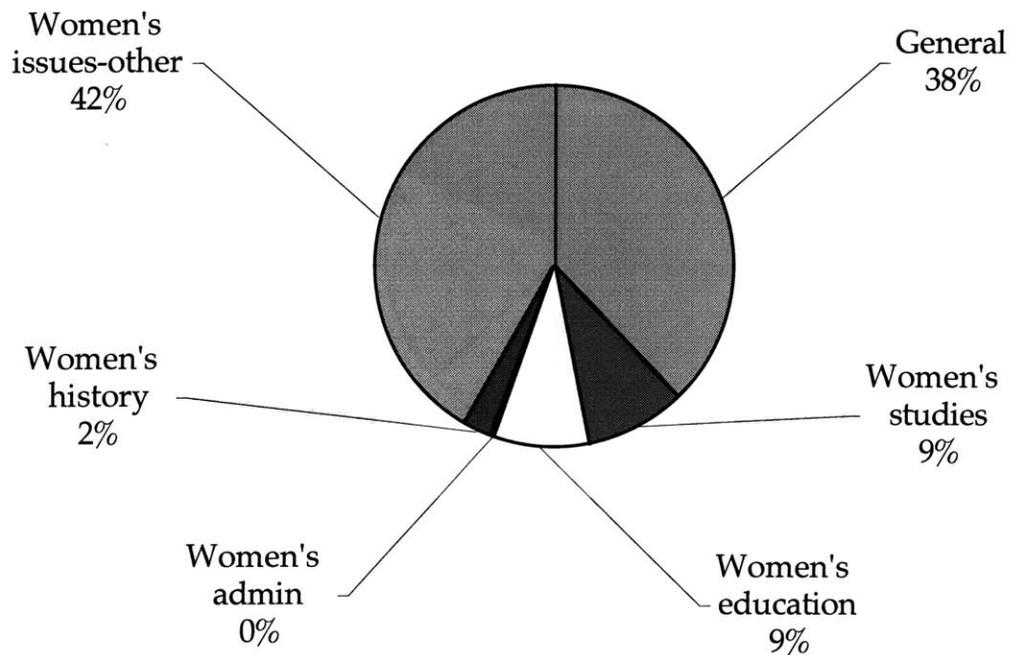
Figure 2.4
Percentage Breakdown of Women's Issues by Subcategory (N=283)

The general category "Social Issues," accounting for 21 percent of the sample, consists of "general social issues," "international understanding and exchange," "consumer advocacy," "environmental protection," "human rights," and "other social issues" (Figure 2.5). Nearly half of the 187 groups organized around social issues are concerned with promoting international exchange. Many of these groups are made up of women volunteers helping international exchange students studying in Japan. Other groups promote friendship with foreign residents or offer free Japanese language lessons. Some groups collect cash or goods, such as used clothing and housewares, to send overseas.
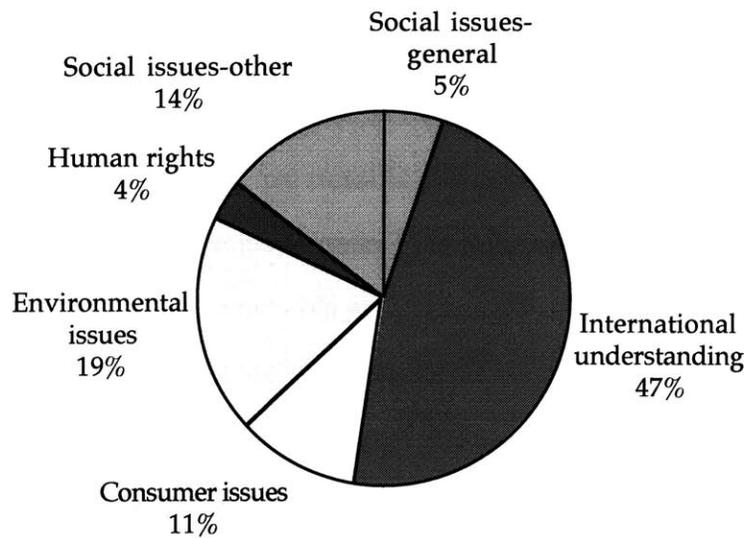
Figure 2.5
Percentage Breakdown of Social Issues by Subcategory (N=187)

After women's issues and social issues, the general category with the largest number of groups is "Labor" with 10 percent, followed by "Social Participation" with 8 percent. Of the 93 women's groups organized around labor issues, about half deal with general issues concerning working women, while the other half falls under "other labor issues." These other groups are mostly made up of women's professional associations and groups supporting female entrepreneurs, while some are organized around the issue of sexual harassment. The general category "Social Participation" includes 70 women's groups, half of which are concerned with political participation. Most of the remaining groups in this general category are involved in general social participation and volunteer activities.

The rest of the general categories, "Health," "Home Education," "Family," "Welfare," "Culture," "General Education," "Letters and Science," "Gay Lesbian" and "Other" each represent 5 percent or less of the women's groups in my sample. Although these general categories do not register a large percentage of women's groups, two subcategories are notable for containing relatively large numbers of groups. Under "Home Education," the subcategory "childrearing and home education" includes 40 women's groups. And under "Health," the subcategory "other health or medicine" represents 37 women's groups. These are mostly support groups for women with various medical conditions or substance abuse problems. And some groups are concerned with reproductive rights.

Overall, this analysis of the issues concerning women's organizations in Japan shows active participation in a wide range of issues that both affirm and challenge women's traditional roles. Nevertheless, nearly a full third of the groups in my sample are women's organizations with women's agendas. Typically, the groups assigned to this category explicitly state gender equality a goal of their organization. Given the vocal debates over equality and public opinion supporting traditional gender roles, it would be reasonable to expect the women's movement to be fairly split between groups organizing for women's equality and groups formed around issues related to home and family, or interests in traditional arts, such as flower arranging or tea ceremony. But home and family issues and cultural activities make up only small slivers of the pie. By far, the largest piece goes to women's issues, showing strong support for gender equality within the women's movement in Japan.

Another significant finding is that an overwhelming majority of women's groups in Japan are organized around issues in the public sphere, namely women's issues, social issues, labor, and social participation. Far fewer women's

59

groups are organized around private sphere concerns, such as family and home, home education, or cultural activities. What this imbalance shows is that women in Japan are going public with their private concerns and grievances. Rather than turning inwards and forming support groups to cope with the status quo, the vast majority of women's groups are going out into their communities to try to affect social change. In this way, the women's movement in Japan is a transformational social movement.

Katzenstein first identified the transformational character of feminist movements regardless of national origin (1987). While recognizing wide ideological and organizational variation within and across countries, she argues that all feminist movements share a theoretical core, which is "...the unifying ideological embrace of a political goal that seeks to change a world that relegates women to a subordinated political, economic, and social status" (5). Feminist movements are transformational in that they seek the total transformation of society, encompassing all facets of daily life, including economics, family, education, sexuality, and politics.

The transformative nature of feminism is also recognized in Khor's assessment of the extent to which women's activism in Japan is feminist (1999). Her definition of feminism includes "a commitment that is pro-woman, political, and socially transformational" (641). After examining the activities of 590 women's organizations, Khor finds that one-half of the groups in her sample meet her criteria as feminist organizations. Yet even as she performs this analysis, Khor critiques the whole exercise of determining whether feminism exists outside of western capitalist democracies. The more meaningful line of inquiry for Khor is to identify and understand the characteristics of feminism found in a particular cultural, historical, and national context. In the Japanese case, she argues that feminism is characterized by a holistic cultural critique and

woman-centeredness. Rather than treat gender inequality as a separate issue, Japanese feminists often place women's issues in the context of a larger critique of a capitalist system built up around the single minded pursuit of economic growth, often at the expense of social welfare, environmental concerns, or human rights. This critique of cultural values lends itself to a woman-centered approach that asserts a unique woman's perspective, and seeks to have female values recognized and legitimized as an alternative to the male-dominated status quo.

Khor's data comes from one published directory of women's organizations, *Women's Networking* compiled by the Yokohama Women's Forum. This source was not included in my database of 889 women's groups, but it provides a useful basis of comparison for my analysis. Because different subject categories were used, it is not possible to directly compare our results. Nevertheless, my analysis of women's organizations generally confirms Khor's conclusion that the women's movement in Japan can be characterized as feminist, according to her broad definition. My findings also confirm Khor's observation that women's activism in Japan tends to be woman-centered, though I did not find many groups engaged in the holistic cultural critique that Khor describes.

To determine the extent to which the women's movement in Japan is feminist, Khor sets out a broad definition of feminism, which "consists in a recognition of women as an oppressed group and of gender inequality which is produced by structural and ideological processes; an endeavor to improving women's collective status, living conditions, opportunities, power, and self-esteem; and/or a commitment that is pro-woman, political, and socially transformational" (641). While half of the groups in Khor's sample meet this criteria, about one-third of the groups in my sample reliably fit this definition, as

they explicitly embrace gender equality as a goal and seek to improve the status of women through collective action. An additional 40 percent of my sample partially meet Khor's criteria by taking up a variety of social issues, supporting women's employment, and encouraging civic participation. Although gender equality may or may not be central to the cause of these groups, they have, nonetheless, banded together as women to transform society in a particular area. Taken together, this overwhelming majority of women's organizations seeking social change in the public sphere makes clear that much of the women's movement in Japan is indeed a socially transformative feminist movement.

Khor's observation of a woman-centered approach to activism also finds support in my data on women's organizations. This notion that women possess a unique perspective and play a special role in society is especially evident in the areas of social issues and welfare. By far the social issue that engages the most groups in my sample is international understanding and exchange. The large number of women's groups involved in this area is not surprising, given the increasing number of foreign students and workers in Japan, and the growing awareness of international issues in the age of globalization. These issues are also relatively safe and agreeable. Only a few groups in my sample deal with controversial issues, such as the rights of abused Asian women who come to Japan to work in hostess clubs, or to marry Japanese men in rural areas. Instead, nearly all of these women's groups remain within the framework of women's traditional roles, as nurturing, sympathetic, caregivers, promoting friendship and understanding between peoples of different cultures. Similarly, on environmental issues and consumer issues, women's groups tend to stress their concerns for clean air or safe food as mothers protecting the health and safety of their families. Although welfare comprised only 4 percent of the groups in my

sample, most are involved in elderly and disabled care, again emphasizing the role of women as care givers.

The prevalence of women's activism in areas consistent with culturally prescribed roles may raise questions about the extent to which the women's movement in Japan is truly feminist. But feminism encompasses a variety of organizational forms, political strategies, and ideological perspectives even within a single country. Given this diversity of feminisms, and the need to avoid the imposition of a single ethnocentric standard, a broad definition of feminism is appropriate for making this determination, particularly for non-western countries. The one common denominator identified by Katzenstein and acknowledged by Khor is the transformational character of feminist movements. A woman-centered feminism seeks nothing less than the total transformation of society, as it offers an alternative approach to social issues based on women's values and perspectives. So while many women's organizations in Japan operate within culturally prescribed roles, they are, nonetheless, part of a feminist movement that is reshaping Japanese society to recognize and value the unique contributions of women.

Structural Constraints on Women's Organizations

Given the poor standing of Japanese women on measures of gender equality, it is rather surprising to find such an active and diverse feminist movement in Japan. But the presence of feminist activism by itself does not guarantee social change. All social movements, whether organized by women, ethnic minorities, or social classes, must work within the context of national political institutions that impact their effectiveness. For example, in some

countries, democratic political institutions staunchly safeguard freedom of expression and assembly, which encourages groups to form and express shared grievances. While in other countries, the state limits dissent to keep social order, so the activities of organized groups are sharply curtailed or rendered ineffective. Therefore, regardless of the strength and size of the movement itself, the political context in which it operates can largely determine its success or failure. In the case of the women in Japan, a broad based movement consists of many women's organizations working on a variety of issues, with the largest segment committed to promoting gender equality. As the absence of a women's movement or a lack of commitment to equality does not explain Japanese women's relative lack of success at improving their international standing on gender equality, an alternative explanation lies with the institutional context in which the women's movement makes its demands for equality.

The Non-profit Sector in Japan

Women's organizations are just a small part of Japan's growing movement of civic associations forming the *Dai San Sekuta*, or Third Sector, operating alongside government and business. Much attention has been focused on volunteer activity in Japan since the Kobe Earthquake in 1995, which killed over five-thousand people and left hundreds of thousands homeless. During this time of crisis, the central government was criticized as ineffective and slow to respond. Meanwhile, an estimated one million volunteers spontaneously mobilized to fill the void left by government. Since then, the Ministry of Education has created a national database of volunteer opportunities that can be accessed through the internet. And, over the past decade, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications has facilitated individual charitable contributions through two programs that allow depositors to donate designated portions of

their postal savings accounts to international voluntary aid groups or domestic disaster relief efforts. Most recently, in 1998, the Diet adopted legislation, known as the NPO Law, which makes it easier for non-profit organizations to receive legal recognition than under a cumbersome existing system dating back to 1896.

Yet, despite the recent surge of interest in volunteer activity and government efforts to bolster civil society, Japan's third sector is still relatively weak when compared to other industrialized democracies. Salamon and Anheier (1996) compare nonprofit sector employment as the percentage of total employment for eight countries, and find Japan's 2.5 percent below the eight country average of 3.3 percent, and far below the United States' 6.9 percent (Figure 2.6).
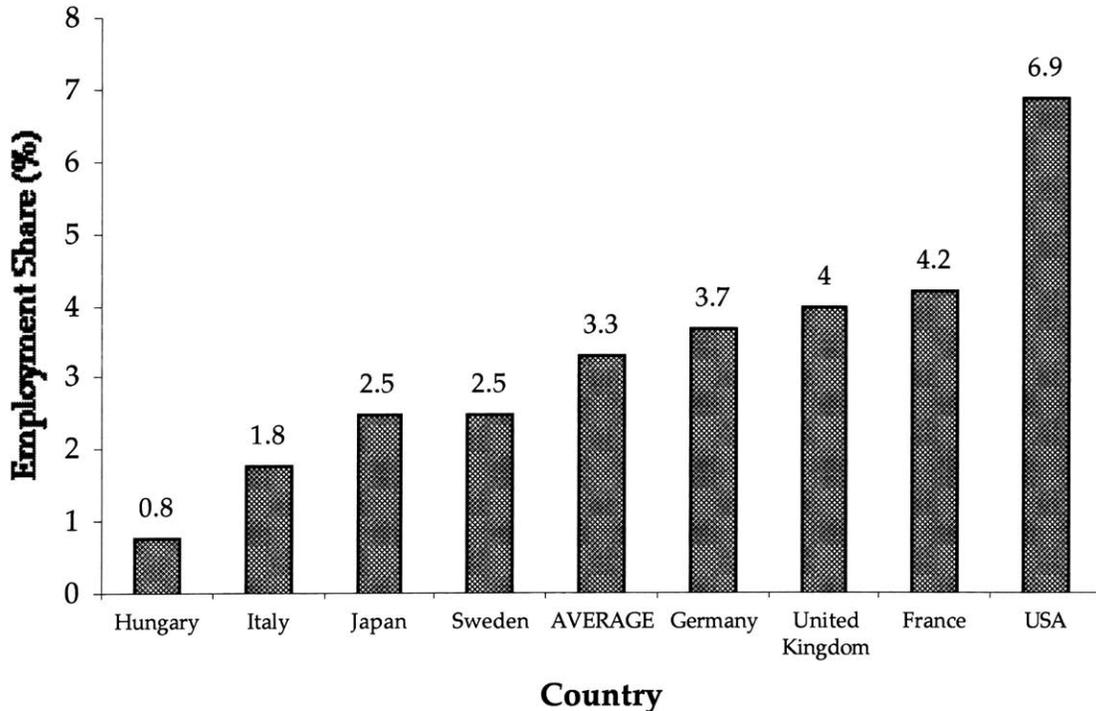
Figure 2.6
Non-profit Sector Employment as a Percentage of Total Employment
Source: Salamon and Anheier 1996.

In terms of the number of officially registered voluntary or charitable organizations, Japan differs from other wealthy countries by an order of magnitude. The 26 thousand legally recognized public interest corporations in Japan pale in comparison to the over one million nonprofit organizations that receive tax-exempt status in the Untied States, or the hundreds of thousands of registered associations found in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2
Number of Registered Nonprofit Organizations in Five Countries

Country	Population (millions)	Number of registered nonprofit organizations (thousands)
United States	275	1,130
France	59	500 - 700
Germany	82	180 - 250
United Kingdom	59	170
Japan	127	25

Source: UNDP 1995. Salamon and Anheier 1997.

Because the definition of non-profit organization differs across countries, only a very rough comparison is possible. Nevertheless, the striking difference between Japan and its western counterparts raises questions about the obstacles to the development of Japan's nonprofit sector. Salamon and Anheier (1996) offer one clue in their comparison of the sources of nonprofit revenue of eight countries (Figure 2.7). Only one percent of nonprofit revenue in Japan comes from private giving, amounting to the smallest proportion among the eight countries compared. Unlike other industrialized countries, Japanese law does

66

not allow for tax deductions on individual charitable contributions, except in limited specified cases. Without such incentives, nonprofit organizations in Japan are hampered in their fundraising efforts, and must rely on membership or service fees and public funds to remain in operation.
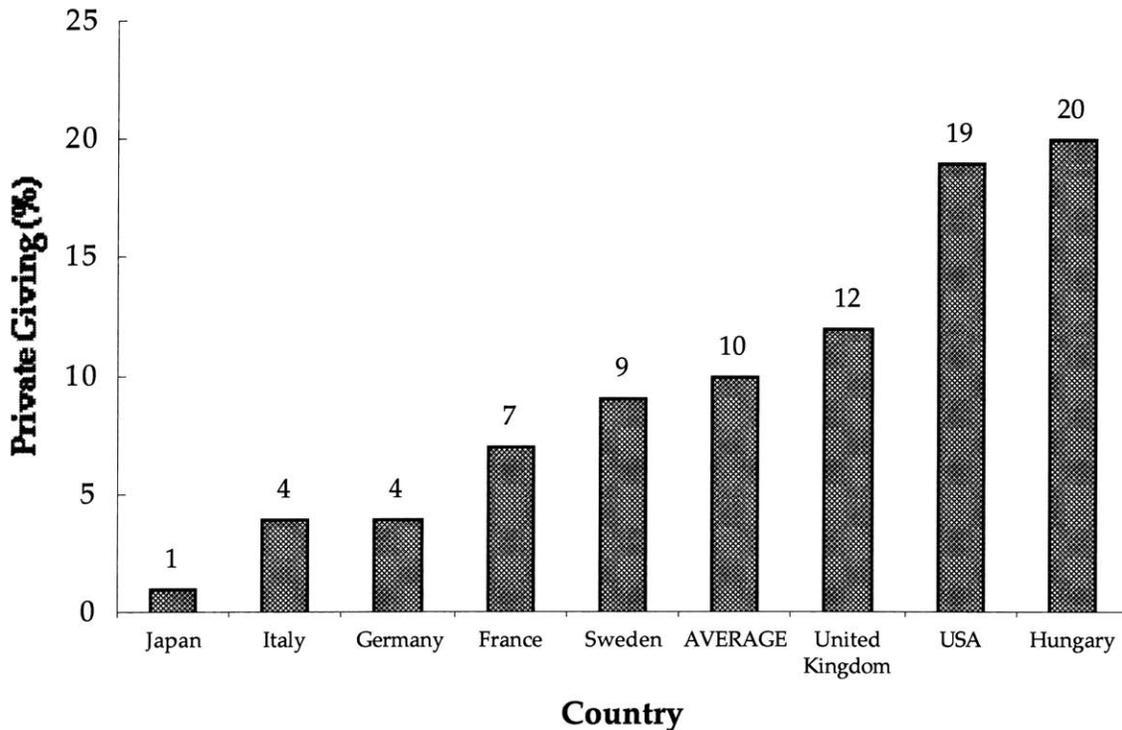
Figure 2.7
Private Giving as a Percentage of Nonprofit Funding by Country
Source: Salamon and Anheier 1996.

Because women's civic organizations must work within the context of the rules and regulations that govern the nonprofit sector in Japan, it is important to understand how these legal constraints impact the ability of women's groups to mobilize an effective social movement. The exact proportion of the nonprofit sector made up of women's groups is difficult to ascertain, but a survey of over four thousand unregistered civic groups, conducted by the Economic Planning Agency (1997), shows 1.6 percent of the groups surveyed report their primary

activity as women's issues. Significantly, this figure goes up to 9.5 percent when groups are allowed to list multiple activities, revealing the large number of women's groups involved in social issues, such as promoting international understanding, in addition to women's issues. But as part of Japan's growing nonprofit sector, women's groups face a number of obstacles, many of which can be traced back to a system of legal recognition for nonprofit public interest corporations, set forth in 1896 through provisions in the Meiji Era Civil Code. In addition to lacking incentives for independent fundraising, this system maximizes bureaucratic discretion over the nonprofit sector, and makes it extremely difficult for civic organizations to gain legal corporate status along with its benefits.

Regulations on Public Interest Corporations (*Koeki Hojin*)

Under Japanese law, individual citizens are born with certain basic rights, such as the right to own property or enter into contracts. But when citizens band together to form a group, the group does not automatically have the legal rights of individuals. Instead, the group must meet certain legal requirements and apply to the government for official recognition as a "hojin," which literally translates to legal person. Once approved as a legal person, the group acquires individuals rights, which allow the group to purchase property, rent office space, open bank accounts, or employ workers under the group name. Without legal person status, activities such as these have to be performed under the name of a responsible individual acting on behalf of the group.

There are many types of organizations with legal person status, and they are governed by separate laws depending on their function. The most basic law prescribing the process by which groups are granted legal recognition is the Civil

Code of 1896. Article 34 addresses associations and foundations that serve the public good without a profit motive. These are known as public interest corporations (*koeki hojin*). Article 35 covers profit-making organizations, including joint-stock companies and other private businesses. Other statutes apply to a variety of nonprofit organizations that are separate from public interest corporations under Article 34. These include social welfare providers, private schools, religious associations, and hospitals. While a broad definition applies to all of these nonprofit organizations, the term public interest corporation (*koeki hojin*) generally refers to public interest associations (*shadan hojin*) and public interest foundations (*zaidan hojin*), as governed by Article 34 of the Civil Code. Public interest associations are membership organizations formed to serve the public good, while public interest foundations are based on endowed funds that are used for charitable purposes. In 2000, there were 12,872 public interest associations and 18,482 public interest foundations, for a total of 26,354 public interest corporations registered with the government (Prime Minister's Office 2000).

The process of establishing a public interest corporation is cumbersome and lengthy. Under the Civil Code, organizations must receive approval from the "competent authorities" (*shumu kancho*), which, in practice, are national government ministries or prefectural government offices. The appropriate competent authority is determined by the goals and activities of the organization, so that a group that administers scholarships would seek approval from the Ministry of Education, or a group that provides social services to the elderly would apply to the Ministry of Welfare. However, it is not always clear which government office is the appropriate competent authority, and in cases where the activities of an organization are related to more than one Ministry, jurisdiction may be held jointly.

To form a public interest association, an organization must have members, a director or leader, and articles of association governing the group. For a public interest foundation, a group must have the necessary funds or assets, a director or leader, and articles of association. Although there is no set requirement for the funds necessary to establish a public interest corporation, a group must generally have 300 million yen (nearly 3 million dollars) to set up a foundation, and 10 million yen (around 100 thousand dollars) in yearly membership dues for an association (Kumashiro 1998). Also, the Civil Code dictates the organizational structure of public interest corporations, requiring that there be a Director (*riji*) who represents the organizations as its head, and a Supervisor (*kanji*) that oversees the administrative work of the director and the finances of the organization. All public interest associations must hold a yearly general meeting of their membership for administrative planning. If a public interest association wishes to change its articles of association, it must have its members' approval by a three-quarters vote, as well as the permission of the competent authority.

But even after meeting all of these requirements and submitting the necessary paperwork to the proper authorities, the establishment of a public interest corporation is far from guaranteed, as there is wide bureaucratic discretion in the approval process. Without clear or uniform criteria, the competent government authorities decide whether or not the proposed organization meets the requirement of serving the public interest. The final decision cannot be challenged in court, and the interpretation of "public interest" changes according to the times. For example, Japan has golf courses that are designated public interest corporations because at one time they were considered to serve the public interest, though not any longer. Bureaucratic oversight continues after approval is granted, as public interest corporations

must submit budget and activity reports to the competent authorities before and after every fiscal year. The competent authorities have the power to revoke legal status for noncompliance with regulations, though in most cases government approval is semi-permanent.

With so much bureaucratic involvement, it is not surprising that there is a widespread perception that public interest corporations are mostly extensions of government agencies. The term "nonprofit sector" usually connotes citizen activity that is independent of government or business. But in Japan, nonprofit public interest corporations have the image of being quasi-governmental organizations, and in many cases they are. Almost one-third of public interest corporations are administrative proxies (*gyosei daikokei*), meaning their establishment and management are paid for by the government, and oftentimes they are headed by former government bureaucrats. These quasi-governmental organizations provide an ideal landing spot for *amakudari*, or descent from heaven, in which high ranking bureaucrats take comfortable and lucrative positions outside of government upon retirement. Among public interest corporations under the jurisdiction of national government ministries or agencies, 31 percent were headed by former government bureaucrats in 1998 (Yamauchi 1999). Another function of government sponsored public interest corporations is that they allow ministries to get around government reform guidelines that set ceilings on staff allotment within in each ministry. Nonprofit organizations are created to perform government functions without appearing to increase the size of government (Yamamoto 1998).

Bureaucratic involvement in the nonprofit sector extends even further through a tax system that favors a relatively small number of organizations designated by the government. As in other industrialized democracies, registered nonprofit groups in Japan receive special tax consideration. Public

interest corporations are only taxed on income derived from profitable activities, such as selling goods or renting space, as defined by the tax code. On this income, they are taxed at the rate of 22 percent, which is lower than the 30 percent income tax rate paid by for-profit organizations, such as private companies. In special cases, public interest corporations receive additional benefits through income tax deductions for individuals or corporations that make charitable contributions to them.

Under the Japanese tax system, an individual donor is allowed income tax deductions for charitable contributions to three types of institutions--national or local governments, organizations chosen by the Ministry of Finance for designated contributions (*shitei kifukin*), or Special Public Interest Promoting Corporations (*tokutei koeki zoshin hojin*).[4] When a donation is made to one of these three types of recipients, the individual donor may deduct the amount contributed up to 25 percent of her yearly income, minus ten thousand yen. Corporate donors may deduct the full amount given to national or local governments and organizations approved by the Ministry of Finance for designated contributions.

But in practice, these tax incentives for private donations are limited to a relatively small number of nonprofit organizations. In 1996, only 704 organizations were approved by the Ministry of Finance for designated contributions, mostly in the fields of social welfare and education. Similarly, there were only 822 public interest corporations that qualified as Special Public Interest Promoting Corporations (Yamauchi 1999). Therefore, out of a total of

[4] To increase support for nonprofit organizations, the government created a fourth category, Recognized Special Public Interest Corporation (*nintei tokutei hieiri katsudo hojin*), in October of 2001. While this measure widens eligibility for tax benefits, nonprofit organizations seeking this special status must receive approval from the head of the National Tax Administration Agency. Data on the number of nonprofit organizations that qualify for tax benefits under this new category are not yet available.

26,089 public interest corporations, only 1,526, or less than 6 percent, were designated by the government as qualified recipients of individual tax deductible contributions. For the remaining 84 percent, there are no tax incentives for individuals to make charitable contributions to them, though corporations receive a relatively small tax break on donations to these groups.

Japan's complex system of granting legal recognition to public interest corporations has led to a two-tiered nonprofit sector of registered and unregistered organizations. While there are some 26 thousand registered nonprofit public interest corporations, the Economic Planning Agency estimates that there are over half a million nonprofit public interest organizations that are not registered with the government and do not have legal person status (Amenomori 1997). These unregistered groups may be free of government scrutiny and intervention, but their independence comes at the expense of income tax benefits and legal rights that facilitate the maintenance and development of nonprofit organizations. An examination of my sample of 889 women's groups further shows how these two segments of the nonprofit sector differ, and reveals significant legal and structural obstacles facing the women's movement in Japan.

Women's Organizations as Public Interest Corporations

Within the women's movement, there is an observable difference between unregistered, independent nonprofit women's groups and government approved women's public interest corporations. The first obvious difference is the number of organizations. In my sample of 889 women's groups, only 41 identify themselves as public interest corporations. Although fewer in number, these organizations appear to be significantly richer in resources than their

unregistered counterparts. While data on budgets and staff were not available for my sample, the inequality in resources became apparent simply by viewing the pamphlets, newsletters, flyers and other materials produced by public interest corporations versus unregistered nonprofit groups. Literature collected from the public interest corporations in my sample reflect a relatively high degree of professionalism, typically including a glossy informational brochure, listing an office location and full-time staff. In contrast, materials collected from independent nonprofit women's groups are often hand written, and contact information lists phone numbers of individual members as opposed to a permanent office location.

The forty-one women's public interest corporations in my sample address a variety of issue areas, but they share a fairly conservative approach to improving the lives of women. These include well known international organizations, such as the Girl Scouts of Japan, the Soroptimist Japan Foundation, the Japanese Christian Temperance Union, and the Japan Association of University Women. They also include the alumnae associations of the two oldest women's universities in Japan, along with two consumer advocacy organizations, and large professional associations for nurses, midwives, secretaries, piano teachers and women in agriculture. Arts and culture are represented by public interest corporations formed around traditional Japanese handicrafts, folk art, flower arranging, and koto (a Japanese string instrument). Only two foundations in my sample are devoted to promoting women's employment, and one association is organized around family planning. Motherhood and family life are supported by several organizations, including the Mothers and Students' Association, the Japan Family Welfare Association, the Better Homes Association, a home economics research

institute, and two research groups developed to infant and childhood development.

The largest subset of public interest corporations in my sample includes regional women's organizations sponsored by local governments. Typically, a prefectural or city government establishes a nonprofit foundation to manage a public women's center. These centers sponsor lectures, workshops, and other programs for women, and provide meeting space and other resources, such as libraries, computers, and newsletters. The public interest foundations organized around women's centers tend to be managed jointly by government and civilian personnel. For example, the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women has a non-governmental representative as its president, but a city official as its managing director. Their board of trustees and advisors is made up of a mix of people from government, business, academia, and the nonprofit sector. Similarly, the Osaka City Women's Foundation is headed by the deputy mayor of Osaka City, along with a vice-director general who is not a city official.

These regional women's foundations demonstrate the distinction between non-profit organizations (NPOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Japan, in contrast to the often interchangeable use of these terms in the United Sates. As public interest corporations, regional women's foundations are, by definition, not for profit. But they are closely tied to the government through their establishment and management. The striking disparity in resources between government sponsored public interest corporations and unregistered, non-governmental, non-profit women's groups suggests a trade-off between access and autonomy. While women's organizations affiliated with the government have access to state resources and officials, their autonomy in decision making and agenda setting may be compromised by their reliance on government funding and staff. The imbalances created by Japan's two-tiered

nonprofit sector has led to recent legislative reform which offers an alternative system of legal certification for non-profit groups.

The NPO Law of 1998

In order to encourage volunteerism and bolster civil society, Japanese law-makers adopted the Law to Promote Non-profit Activities, better known as the NPO Law, in 1998.[5] The aim of the law is to make it easier for civic groups to gain legal recognition than under the existing system governing public interest corporations. To this end, the new law clarifies and streamlines the process by which government authorities grant organized groups legal person status (*hojinkaku*), giving groups the same basic rights as individuals, such as the right to enter into contracts or own property.

Under the NPO law, civic groups with ten or more members are eligible to apply for legal person status. Their activities must fall under twelve general categories, including social welfare, environment, culture and arts, international cooperation, and gender equality. There are some restrictions on religious and political activities and violent groups are excluded from certification. Despite opposition within the Diet, a provision was adopted to allow certified groups to be made up entirely of non-Japanese citizens. Groups are not subject to any minimum requirement on foundation assets or yearly membership dues. The governor's office of the prefecture in which the group operates has jurisdiction over the group. In cases where a group is active in more than one prefecture, jurisdiction is with the Economic Planning Agency. Groups must provide yearly reports to the government authorities with jurisdiction. If there are no reports for three years, the group will lose certification.

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[5] For a detailed account of the passage of the NPO Law, see Pekkanen 2000.

In contrast to the bureaucratic discretion that governs public interest corporations, the rules and requirements for legal certification are clearly specified in the NPO Law. In principle, legal status is granted to all groups that meet the legal criteria and submit their application to the proper authorities. In cases where certification is denied, a written explanation must be provided. Unlike public interest corporations, groups that are denied legal status under the NPO Law may contest the decision in court.

The new NPO Law goes a long way towards simplifying and clarifying the process of legal certification for organized groups in Japan. Having legal person status provides groups with individual rights, helping them conduct their day to day business, such as setting up phone service, purchasing supplies, or hiring staff. But, aside from these basic rights, there are few tangible benefits to gaining legal status under the NPO Law. The most glaring weakness is that the law fails to provide any significant tax advantage to newly registered nonprofit groups. The issue of income tax deductions for charitable contributions was hotly debated throughout the drafting and passage of the bill, and will undoubtedly be the main issue of discussion for future legislation. But groups that register for legal status under the NPO Law are not much better off in terms of tax treatment than groups that do not register.

Also, while the NPO law is designed to keep bureaucratic intervention at a minimum, groups seeking legal status must still submit to significant government regulation and oversight. For example, the law dictates the leadership structure of nonprofit groups, requiring three or more directors and at least one supervisor. The law further stipulates that only one-third or fewer of these officials can be paid because a fully paid leadership staff would detract from the nonprofit nature of the group. There are also restrictions on the number of people from the same family that can hold leadership positions. Certified groups

must conduct a general meeting of their membership at least once a year, and, by law, the purpose of the meeting must be announced at least five days in advance of the meeting. Decision-making must be equitable in principle, so that members' votes cannot be based on their monetary contributions to the group. While all of these regulations appear reasonable and well-intentioned, they demonstrate the government's urge to micromanage the very organizations that are supposed to function independent of government.

With so few tangible benefits at the cost of so much government regulation, it is no wonder that the response of the nonprofit sector has been lukewarm at best. According to a report by the Economic Planning Agency, only 12 percent of the 4,152 unregistered civic associations surveyed felt the need for legal person status (EPA 1997). But social change often takes place incrementally in Japan. Since the Civil Code of 1896 first established public interest corporations, it has taken over one hundred years before the adoption of major new legislation for the nonprofit sector. So it remains to be seen how the NPO Law will ultimately impact the nascent volunteer movement in Japan.

Obstacles Facing the Women's Movement in Japan

Like women in all countries, women in Japan face numerous obstacles to organizing an effective social movement. Identifying and understanding the main political obstacles to their struggle for equality is a key objective of this dissertation. To this end, this chapter has explored three hypotheses that offer political explanations for Japan's low international standing on gender equality.

The first hypothesis is that there is no women's movement in Japan. This hypothesis is put to rest by the large number and wide variety of highly organized women's groups active throughout the country. The second

78

hypothesis is that there is a women's movement, but it rejects equality between the sexes as a goal. While opinion surveys show some ambivalence over equality, women's attitudes are gradually shifting in support of gender equality. More importantly, a large segment of the women's movement explicitly embraces equality as its goal. These groups, combined with the large number of women's groups taking up a range of social issues, form the core of a diverse women's movement with a transformative agenda. As so many of these women's organizations seek nothing less than the total transformation of Japanese society, the women's movement in Japan should be recognized as a feminist movement.

With the existence of a broad-based, diverse, feminist movement confirmed, the question then becomes what is holding this movement back? The answer can be found in the legal and regulatory environment in which the women's movement operates. For over one hundred years, the Civil Code of 1896 has been the basis of a vague and complex system of legal certification for non-profit public interest corporations, leaving government officials with wide bureaucratic discretion and control. The independence of the non-profit sector in Japan is further limited by the lack of tax incentives for individual charitable contributions to non-profit organizations. The high degree of government involvement, combined with the difficulties of fundraising, has stunted the development of an independent and professional non-profit sector in Japan. Because the certification process is so cumbersome and requires a large amount of resources, the vast majority of non-profit civic groups in Japan are not registered with the government, and operate outside the system governing public interest corporations. Without recognition as legal persons, these groups face many difficulties in their day to day operations, as they lack basic individuals rights, such as the right to own property or enter into contracts.

Yet, despite these obstacles, the number of unregistered grassroots organizations has increased dramatically in recent years, prompting new legislation to create a clear and simple process by which non-profit groups can obtain legal person status. Although the explicit goal of the legislation is to strengthen an independent non-profit sector, the new system of legal certification still calls for government regulation in areas as basic as leadership structure, decision making rules, and yearly meetings. It is striking that even as the government sets out to minimize state intervention in the non-profit sector, it cannot resist imposing a certain amount of uniformity on the disparate and diverse groups that are driving Japan's newly emerging civil society.

As the women's movement makes up a key part of the growing non-profit sector, it is subject to this pattern of state regulation and intervention. Like all non-profit organizations, women's groups are divided between registered public interest corporations and unregistered non-profit organizations. Under the hundred year old system of certification, government bureaucrats have granted conservative, resource-rich organizations legal person standing, while leaving most grass-roots women's groups to operate without the rights of legal persons and without even the limited tax benefits given to registered public interest corporations. In this way, the state controlled system of legal certification and the lack of tax incentives to support non-profit fundraising have created a regulatory environment that is hardly conducive to the development of an independent and professionalized women's movement. Women's organizations that have the resources to support full-time staff and permanent office space tend to be connected to the government, while independent, unregistered grass-roots women's groups tend to operate on a shoe-string budget and rely entirely on volunteers. It is not yet clear how the new system of legal certification will impact the women's movement, but without any

significant tax benefits, the NPO law may not provide enough incentive for non-profits groups to register with the government.

While government regulations on the non-profit sector have created numerous obstacles to the women's movement, there is another side to state intervention in civil society--one which seeks to support and aid women's organizations. Both regulation and support achieve the same purpose of allowing the state a degree of influence and control over the women's movement. With one hand, the state constrains the ability of women's groups to raise their own funds and set their own rules. But with the other hand, the state provides them with resources and access through various policies, programs, and projects. The most striking example of state intervention in support of the women's movement is the vast network of public women's centers, which is explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Three
Women's Centers in Japan

Japan's National Women's Education Center (NWEC) spreads out across nearly 35 acres in Saitama prefecture, just outside of Tokyo. Its facilities include a conference center, administrative office building, library, cafeteria, swimming pool, gymnasium, tennis courts, gift shop, and lodgings to accommodate over three-hundred guests. The center is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, and almost all the full-time staff are civil servants. They conduct research, publish studies, host conferences, and run on-line databases on women's issues. Their facilities are used by women's groups and other civic organizations year round for meetings, workshops, and other activities. Although NWEC is the only national center, and by far the largest, it is one of several hundred women's centers found throughout Japan.

From an American perspective, women's centers are an unusual institution that have no obvious counterpart in the United States. Although they may differ in size. location, budget, and administration, women's centers are essentially a designated, physical space that serve as a base for women's social, political, and cultural activities. In 2000, there were close to 800 women's centers in Japan. Some are exclusively for the use of women, though most are open to both women and men. A vast majority of these centers are supported financially or administratively by municipal or prefectural governments. Only about ten percent of women's centers are built and managed entirely by private groups (National Council of Women's Centers 1998). Most are either built and managed by the government, or built by the government and managed by private citizens or legally recognized foundations (*hojin*). In addition to providing meeting space for women's groups, almost all .enters sponsor their own programs, such as

lectures, courses, exercise, research or counseling. They usually have a small staff of government or civilian workers, and some centers have volunteers.

For a country considered a laggard among industrialized counties on the promotion of women's rights, publicly supported women's centers present a paradox. By all accounts, the Japanese government has been slow to adopt and enforce aggressive policies on behalf of women. Yet, the government provides tremendous resources and support for women's organizations in the form of these women's centers. In this chapter, I will explore this paradox through an examination of women's centers and their relationship to women's organizations and the state. First, I will review the one hundred year history of women's centers in Japan. I will then provide an explanation for the proliferation of public women's centers based on international events and domestic institutional constraints. Finally, I will examine the issue agenda of women's centers by analyzing the content of their programs, and comparing them with the issue agendas of women's organizations.

History of Women's Centers

The one hundred year history of Japan's women's centers reflects the country's development through various stages of modernization, nationalism, de-centralization, and public administration. Shikuma Atsuko, former Director of the Japan Women's Social Education Association, divides the history of women's centers into five distinct stages of development (Shikuma et al. 1990: 167). The first "creation" stage begins at the turn of the century and includes a small number of women's centers built in the prewar years. The second stage, covering World War II, sees the establishment of women's centers for government controlled women's groups. The postwar years represent a third

stage in which American Occupation policies of de-centralization encourage the rise of regional women's centers. The UN declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year marks the beginning of the fourth stage, characterized by the proliferation of publicly built and managed women's centers. Finally, the fifth stage, and current trend is towards large-scale, multi-purpose women's centers.

Earliest Women's Centers

The first women's centers in Japan were established in the early 1900s, during a period of rapid industrialization and growing western influence. Given this historical backdrop, it is perhaps not surprising that the earliest women's centers were actually foreign imports, founded by international organizations with funding from abroad.

The oldest women's center, built in 1900, belongs to the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union (JWCTU) (*Nihon Kirisutokyo Fujin Kyofukai*), a branch of the American anti-alcohol and anti-prostitution organization that sent missionaries around the world at the turn of the century.[1] The center, called House of Love (*Jiaikan*), was built primarily as a shelter for former prostitutes. According to regulations adopted in 1899, the purpose of the center was to direct women in their transition from prostitution to "the right path." To this end, women were given lessons on cooking, cleaning, sewing, knitting, and laundry, as well as math, reading, and calligraphy. Whatever wages women earned, were turned over to the center's staff to keep until they were deemed reformed. To use the center, women had to have two certified sponsors (presumably WCTU members), and go through a three-month trial period (*Fujin Shimpo* 1899: 25). While small donations were collected from within Japan for building the center,

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[1] Tyrrell (1991) provides a history of WCTU's overseas missionary activities.

the largest donation of $500 came from a foundation in the United States. American involvement extended into management, as the center was headed by an American, and run by Japanese staff (JWCTU 1986: 149,250). In 1907, the Japan WCTU opened the Osaka Women's Home (*Osaka Fujin Houmu*), as the first branch of their organization to serve women in western Japan (255).

Fifteen years after the first Japan WCTU center was built, the Tokyo Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) established its center under similar circumstances of western influence and funding. The Tokyo YWCA center evolved primarily from the need for female student housing in Tokyo. At the time of the Tokyo YWCA's founding in 1905, women's education was on the rise. Between 1900 and 1905, the number of girls' high schools nearly doubled from 52 to 100, and the number of girls enrolled increased sharply from 12,000 to 31,900. By 1910, there were 193 girls' high schools with 56,200 students (Nihon YWCA 1987: 45). With nearly all of these schools concentrated in the Tokyo area, a lack of accommodations became a significant barrier to education for girls from the countryside.

The Tokyo YWCA sought to build student dormitories as a practical way to increase access to education. An international fundraising campaign was led by Caroline McDonald, a Canadian woman who was the first secretary general of the Japan YWCA. In 1908, the Tokyo YWCA opened its first student boarding house, followed by another built three years later. A large donation from students of Vassar College provided funds for the Tokyo YWCA's main women's center built in 1915 (46-47).

Unlike the student dormitories, this new building was a bona fide women's center in that it not only housed female students, but also provided meeting and office space for the Japan YWCA, as well as educational and recreational programs for women. The original three-story building burned

down in the Great Kanto Earthquake and Fire in 1923. When it was re-opened in 1929, it was transformed into a six-story building with a basement, gymnasium, swimming pool, meeting rooms, youth hostel, and cafeteria (Tokyo YWCA 1985: 7).

These first women's centers served as the base of activities for a new class of urban, educated, Christian women, as industrialization saw the emergence of the full-time housewife in Japan. But these women represented only a small segment of the female population. And these centers could not have been established without international funding and personnel. Because of their unique circumstances, the first women's centers failed to start a national trend.

Even the burgeoning feminist movement of the Taisho period (1912-1926), could not muster the resources necessary to build their ideal women's center. In 1920, feminist luminaries Hiratsuka Raicho, Ichikawa Fusae, and Oku Mumeo founded the New Woman's Association (NWA). While their main goal was women's suffrage, their founding declaration includes plans to build a women's center that would house offices, public meeting space, classrooms, lodgings, a cafeteria, recreational facilities, and library (Shin Fujin Kyokai 1977: 161)[2] Ultimately, this plan was not realized, as NWA disbanded just three years after its founding, due to personality clashes among its leaders, and charges of bourgeois elitism from a growing socialist women's movement (Tokuza 1999: 168-178).

Nevertheless, Oku Mumeo went on to establish women's centers, though perhaps not as grand as than the one originally envisioned. Just months after the dissolution of NWA, Oku founded the Working Women's Publishing House

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[2] Shikuma (1995: 29) points out that when the New Woman's Society was formed in 1920, the Tokyo YWCA's center had been in operation for five years. She speculates that the New Woman Society's desire for a women's center was directly inspired by the Tokyo YWCA and Japan WCTU centers.

(*Shokugyo Fujinsha*), that produced the monthly journal Women's Movement (*Fujin Undo*). Through this organization led by Oku, the first women's centers by and for Japanese women were established.

In 1930, Oku was presented with an opportunity to use a large two story building in a downtown factory district of Tokyo.[3] Oku and her publishing house colleagues took this opportunity to create a women's settlement house, which they called *Fujin Setsurumento*, that served the needs of mostly poor, working women and children. Within two years, the settlement had established a day nursery, overnight lodgings, women's night school offering lessons on housework and sewing, children's club, mothers' consumer organization, classes on everything from feminism to knitting, counseling services for health, employment, and family planning, and a monthly publication. The settlement was supported by income from the publishing house along with personal donations and volunteer efforts. Young women from the countryside would come to live and work at the settlement for two or three months at a time. Well-known scholars and artists, who were friends of Oku, came to give lectures (Nakamura 1980: 119-122).

While Oku and her colleagues in Tokyo focused their efforts on the Women's Settlement, the Osaka branch of the Working Women's Publishing House opened the first Working Women's House (*Hataraku Fujin no Ie*) in 1933. While this house served as a dormitory for young working women from the countryside, it also provided marriage, employment, and health advice, sponsored various lectures, and promoted consumer activism. The Tokyo branch soon followed suit by starting its own Working Women's House in 1935,

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[3] A friend of Oku's offered to let her use the building when his organization's plans for the building fell through. Oku describes the offer as "words that fell to her from the heavens." (Oku 1988: 115).

which was eventually followed by branches in Fukui, Nagoya, and Kyoto. (Oku 1988: 139-151).

Women's Centers during World War II

Although women's centers sought to create a safe haven for women, they were not shielded from the wave of militarism sweeping the country. In 1941, the Working Women's Publishing House ceased publication of its journal under pressure from government censors. The government also forced an end to family planning services at the Women's Settlement as part its policies ordering women to "Give birth and multiply" (*"Umeyo Fuyaseyo"*). The settlement had actually served the war effort by housing war widows and their children. But as the war grew more intense, the center was evacuated, taken over by the Railway Ministry, and eventually destroyed during the Tokyo air raids. Both the Tokyo and Osaka Working Women's Houses were similarly destroyed during the war. As Oku writes in her autobiography, "One by one, the buildings I struggled alongside with for so long are extinguished and gone." (Oku 1988: 151-163).

Ironically, a major women's center that survived the war was actually a product of the war. The Japan Women's Center (*Nihon Joshi Kaikan*) was built in 1937 for the Greater Japan Federated Women's Association (*Dai Nihon Rengo Fujinkai*), an organization established by the Ministry of Education in 1930. The purpose of the organization was to promote "household education" (*katei kyoiku*), and "household living improvement" (*katei seikatsu kaizen*). The Ministry's official order states that, though both parents should be involved in household education, women have a particularly large and weighty responsibility. Therefore, raising the consciousness of women is the principal aim (Monbudaijin 1996: 5). Through lectures, workshops, and educational films,

the Federated Women's Association taught married women to conserve scarce household goods, such as sugar and milk. Like all wartime organizations, the association was vertically structured, mobilizing women at the local, prefectural, and national level. Within a year of its founding, there were close to thirty prefectural branches throughout the county (Chino 1996a: 15).

In 1933, the association was joined by the Greater Japan Female Youth Group (*Dai Nihon Joshi Seinendan*) in a fundraising drive to build a women's center. With donations collected combined with grants from the Imperial Household, the Japan Women's Center was built in Tokyo in 1937. The center housed the Household Science Research Center (*Katei Kagaku Kenkyujo*), and throughout the war years, served as a base of operations for promoting home economics, conservation, and rationalization. While the Greater Japan Federated Women's Association became consolidated under the Greater Japan Women's Association (*Dai Nihon Fujinkai*) in 1943, the Japan Women's Center became part of the Greater Japan Women's Social Education Association (*Dai Nihon Joshi Shakai Kyoikukai*). With the end of the war, the center was taken over by the Allied Occupation in 1945, and was not returned to the Japan Women's Social Education Association until 1966 (JAWE 1991).[4]

Postwar Women's Centers

The end of World War II marks the beginning of the rise of regional women's centers in Japan. As Allied Occupation policies sought to break-up centralized, integrated wartime women's associations, regional women's groups

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[4] The Greater Japan Women's Social Education Association (*Dai Nihon Joshi Shakai Kyoikukai*) changed its name to Japan Women's Social Education Association (*Nihon Joshi Shakai Kyoikukai*) in 1972. The organization translates its own name into English as Japan Association for Women's Education (JAWE).

(*Chiiki Fujin Dantai*) grew in strength and numbers. By the end of the Occupation in 1952, a Ministry of Education survey counted 14,751 regional women's groups with about six-and-a-half million members, or approximately 28.4 percent of the female voting age population at that time. By 1960, the number of groups reached 23,918 with nearly 7.8 million members (Zen Chifuren 1965: 20, 23-24). These groups were made up primarily of housewives, organized around consumer issues in response to severe shortages of food and other household necessities following the war.

Initially, the Occupation's General Headquarters (GHQ), worked with Social Education Sections of prefectural governments to support regional women's groups. One newspaper, in 1950, called regional women's groups the key to democratization of women's organizations (Zen Chifuren 1965: 23-24). Occupation policies of decentralization and democratization took aim at established patterns of centralized, hierarchical organizations based on regional or residential affiliation. Particularly during the war, women's organizations in Japan were formed in a pyramid structure with a national association at the top, supported by regional or prefectural blocs, with city, town, or village groups forming the base. Occupation forces attempted to break apart this structure by urging women to loosen their provincial ties, and form groups or clubs across villages and towns based on common goals and interests.

But despite Occupation efforts towards de-centralization, regional women's groups within each prefecture began banding together, so that by 1952, prefectural federations of regional women's groups had been formed in 39 out of 47 prefectures (Zenchifuren 1965: 38). While Occupation authorities allowed prefectural organizations, they drew the line at a national organization. Many prefectural federations opposed this policy, and in 1952, just as the American Occupation came to an end, regional women's groups formed the

National Federation of Regional Women's Groups (*Zenkoku Chiiki Fujin Dantai Kyogikai*).[5]

Garon (1997) documents the close relationship between the state and regional women's groups in the postwar period, particularly in government campaigns to promote savings and decrease consumption (185-195). As further evidence of the re-emergence of state involvement in women's organizations, a yearly Ministry of Education survey documents government funding of regional women's groups to administer specific programs. Throughout the 1960s, regional women's groups received about a third of their total funding from the government, primarily at the prefectural level (Table 3.1). In return for this funding, regional women's groups carried out a variety of programs related to women's education, including leadership and administrative training for women's groups, consumer education, workshops on childrearing, and research projects usually involving surveys of women (Ministry of Education 1960-71).

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[5] This decision was by no means unanimous, as many members believed it was too soon after the war, and too close to the structure of wartime women's associations. Initially, only 19 of the 39 prefectural federations joined the national organization, though eventually, they all joined (Zen Chifuren 1965: 37-38, Shikuma et al. 1996: 80-82).

Table 3.1
Regional Women's Groups: Percentage of Total Funding Received from
Government Sources

Year	% funding from National Government	% funding from Prefectural Government
1960	1	31
1961	9.8	15.3
1962	5.5	25.4
1963	9	22.1
1964	4	30
1965	10.8	25
1966	7.6	24.6
1967	7.7	32
1968	6.5	25.7
1969	4.8	21.7

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Education Bureau. Various Years. *Fujin Kyoiku no Genjo* (The Present State of Women's Education). This table represents every year this data was published under this title.[6]

At the time, prefectural governments viewed regional women's groups as representative of all women, and therefore justified the use of public funds to support them. (Nakamura et al. 1995: 34-35, Shikuma et al. 1996: 82-84). In fact, regional women's groups did represent a majority of women's organizations throughout the 1960s (Table 3.2). But this still left many other women's groups without the benefit of government funding. A Ministry of Education report from 1961 reveals this funding imbalance (Table 3.3).[7] While 86 percent of regional women's groups received prefectural funding, less than 20 percent of other groups received such funding. These non-regional women's groups are further distinguished between those with and without central organizations. Of

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[6] Beginning in 1972, the Ministry of Education continued to publish an annual report on women's education using a different format, under the new title *Fujin Kyoiki oyobi Kateikyoiku ni kan suru Shisaku no Genjo* (The Present State of Policies Related to Women's Education and Home Education). The Ministry of Education discontinued this annual report in 1992.)
[7] While Ministry of Education annual reports tend to be uniform in the data reported, this information on government funding to groups other than regional women's groups does not appear in subsequent reports.

the women's groups with central organizations, 23 percent received prefectural funding, but this figure drops to 11 percent of those groups without a central organization (Ministry of Education 1961: 53). Although data are only available for 1961, it reveals a hierarchy of women's organizations in which prefectural governments favored regional women's groups, followed by groups with central organizations, and lastly independent women's groups with no central organization. Oddly enough, this is just the type of group that American Occupation authorities had hoped to cultivate in Japan.

Table 3.2
Percentage of Women's Organizations that are Regional Women's Groups

Year	Total Number of Women's Groups	% that are Regional Women's Groups
1960	43,220	63.6
1961	34,095	66.5
1962	37,569	54.4
1963	34.177	58.4
1964	33.136	58.9
1965	31,290	62.3
1966	33,114	56.1
1967	32,143	56.4
1968	39,074	62.1
1969	35,446	52.6

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Education Bureau. Various Years. *Fujin Kyoiku no Genjo* (The Present State of Women's Education). This table represents every year this data was published under this title.

Table 3.3
Prefectural Funding of Groups by Type of Group

	Total	Regional	non-regional w/central organization	non-regional w/o central organization
number of groups	34.094	22,687	7,550	3,858
groups with funding	21,646	19,467	1,743	436
percentage	63	86	23	11

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Education Bureau. 1961.

The relationship between regional women's groups and the state was further cemented at the prefectural level through prefectural women's centers. As a sign of the growing prominence of regional women's groups, prefectural governments helped them build women's centers, often at the same site of prefectural government offices. Generally, a prefectural federation of regional women's groups would raise funds to build a center, then the prefecture would provide additional aid, often in the form of land.

When the national federation was founded in 1952, only six of the thirty-nine prefectural federations were based in women's centers (Zen Chifuren 1965: 38-40). By 1964, a survey by the National Federation of Regional Women's Groups showed 33 prefectural women's centers affiliated with regional women's groups. Of the 25 centers responding to the survey, 23 reported that the director of the center was also the president or former president of the prefectural federation of regional women's groups. In over half the centers, all leadership positions were held by leaders of regional women's groups (Zenchifuren 1964).

Meanwhile, the National Federation of Regional Women's Groups began to make plans to build its own women's center, beginning around 1967. Utilizing its extensive regional networks, the National Federation succeeded in its fundraising campaign, which enabled the establishment of the National Women's Center (*Zenkoku Fujin Kaikan*) in 1971. This center housed the office of their Tokyo regional affiliate, and provided lodgings for members from the countryside who had contributed much to the fundraising effort. As the consumer movement in Japan was in full swing, many voiced the need for a product testing room. But the national government had already stepped in to fill this need through the establishment of National Living Centers which were fully equipped with such facilities. This type of government involvement left the

National Women's Center searching for a niche. Ironically, they found it through a government program. The center soon came to administer a telephone consumer information service for the Ministry of Agriculture (Shikuma et al. 1996: 88-89).

Another important national women's center from this period is the Housewives Center (*Shufu Kaikan*), founded in 1956. Although Oku Mumeo's women's settlement and working women's houses were destroyed by the war, she continued her efforts to organize women. In 1948, she started the Housewives' Association (*Shufuren*), which grew to become the most powerful consumer group in Japan. Much like the National Federation of Regional Women's Groups, the Housewives' Association mobilized around issues of daily life, such as rice and miso distribution, electricity costs, and the quality of matches. As the movement grew, the organization borrowed various meeting spaces in churches, business offices, and school classrooms. But with meeting locations constantly changing, many found it difficult to participate. Out of this experience, women began to envision their ideal space, where they could meet regularly, buy food for their families, seek counseling, and stay overnight when visiting from the countryside (Nakamura et al. 1995: 32-34).

A year after the Housewives' Association was founded, Oku announced plans to build a center to serve as their base of operations. It took seven years to raise the necessary funds, as Oku traveled all over Japan collecting individual donations of 20 yen. When the Housewives' Association Center (*Shufu Kaikan*) opened in 1956, it housed a product testing room, a consumer complaint window, and a family planning center. In keeping with their emphasis on the concerns of daily living, they offered courses on cooking and house cleaning, in addition to consumer education seminars. Like regional women's centers, they

also rented out space for weddings as a source of income (Shikuma et al. 1996: 86-88).

In the fall of 1956, the Housewives' Association Center hosted the first national conference of women's centers. About thirty people attended, representing women's centers at the prefectural, city, and town levels, from all over Japan. Most represented centers that had already been established, while others sought advice about building new centers (*Shufu Tayori* 1956: 4). This first meeting became the start of the annual National Conference of Women's Centers (*Zenkoku Fujin Kaikan Kyogikai*), and a national organization. The National Council of Women's Centers is currently based at the Housewives' Association Center.

Finally, in this period, a well known national women's center which deserves mention is the Women's Suffrage Center (*Fusen Kaikan*). This center was built in 1946 under the leadership of pioneer suffragist Ichikawa Fusae. It served as a base for the New Japan League of Women (*Shin Nihon Fujin Domei*), an organization founded by Ichikawa in 1945, which later became the League of Women Voters of Japan (*Nihon Fujin Yukensha Domei*). Funding for the original building came from individual contributions, but when the center was rebuilt in 1962, Ichikawa reluctantly sought funding from business interests to supplement other fundraising efforts. Nevertheless, the Women's Suffrage Center prides itself on its general policy of not accepting funds from government or business (Shikuma, et al. 1997:77-78). The center continues its voter education activities and currently serves as headquarters for the International Women's Year Liaison Group (*Kokusai Fujinnen Renrakukai*), a coalition of over fifty national women's organizations formed around the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Overall, these early postwar years are characterized by a gradual reemergence of state involvement in women's centers. During this period, women's centers were primarily established through the efforts of women themselves, through painstaking fundraising campaigns in which they sold items such as towels, thread, or notebooks. Most of the revenue to support the centers came from renting out office space, providing overnight accommodations, and holding weddings. And centers were staffed by private citizens as opposed to government bureaucrats.

Nevertheless, the line between private and public becomes blurred, particularly at the prefectural level where the government provided resources and recognition to regional women's groups. Although centers belonging to regional women's groups were technically considered private institutions, they were identified simply as prefectural women's centers, as opposed to centers belonging to any particular organization. For example, a center in Shiga prefecture is called Shiga Prefecture Women's Center, even though it was entirely staffed by members of the Shiga Prefecture Federation of Regional Women's Groups. Because the women's centers of these postwar years carried the prefectural name, and were often built on prefecture owned land at the site of government offices, at the very least, they have the appearance of public institutions, despite their designation as privately established and privately managed centers.

This confusion reflects a prevailing tension of this period between American Occupation policies to sever ties between women and the state, and the long tradition of state intervention in the women's movement. While initially, grassroots regional women's groups seemed consistent with the goals of decentralization and democratization, it was not long before they formed centralized organizations resembling pre-war and wartime patterns. Similarly,

with women's centers, the drive to build a space especially for women came from grassroots fundraising efforts. But when these efforts fell short, it was only natural for the government to step in. This tendency towards state involvement in women's organizations was only temporarily halted by American Occupation policies. And as the occupation ended and faded further into the past, women and the state were eventually reunited through hundreds of women's centers built by the state beginning in the 1970s.

Public Women's Centers

The United Nation's designation of 1975 as International Women's Year, and the UN Decade for Women that followed ushered in a period of tremendous growth in the number of women's centers built in Japan and the role they play in the women's movement. A national survey of women's centers shows only 81 centers established before 1975, about one-third of which are private. By far, the largest number of women's centers were established in the ten years marking the UN Decade for women, with 184 women's centers reporting their year of establishment between 1975 and 1985. Close to 95 percent of the centers founded during these years were established by the government. This trend continued in the 1990s so that about 80 percent of women's centers in Japan were established by the government. There are currently close to 800 public and private women's centers throughout Japan (National Council of Women's Centers 1998).

Although in the vast majority of cases, funding and administration of women's centers comes from prefectural and local government bodies, the impetus for state involvement in women's centers originates in the national bureaucracy. By all accounts, the movement towards public women's centers

began with the Ministry of Education's establishment of the National Women's Education Center (NWEC) in 1977. The Ministry first began to recognize the value of women's centers to women's education in the early 1960s when a section on prefectural women's centers became a part of their annual survey of women's education (Shikuma 1990: 65). In 1971, the Ministry initiated a study on the establishment of a national women's center, and formed a sixteen member committee of Ministry of Education representatives, heads of prefectural women's centers and education boards, professors, and heads of other social education institutions. The committee met ten times between 1971 and 1973, and submitted a report complete with diagrams and dimensions (Fujin Kyoiku Kaikan Chosa 1972). In 1974, the Ministry of Education began appropriating funds to build a national women's center, which eventually cost approximately six-and-a-half billion yen (or sixty million dollars at the current exchange rate of 105 yen to the dollar).[8] A ground-breaking ceremony was held in 1975 to coincide with the UN declared International Women's Year. The National Women's Education Center was officially opened in 1977.

The start of the UN Decade for Women and the establishment of the first national women's center marks the beginning of the Ministry of Education's full-scale involvement in building, managing, and overseeing women's centers throughout Japan. As part of its Outline for the Distribution of Funds for the Maintenance of Public Social Education Institutions issued in 1976, the Ministry stipulated that funding be provided to prefectural and local governments for the building and maintenance of women's centers in the 47 prefectures and cities with populations above 300,000. The outline further specifies how large centers should be in square meters, and the kind of facilities they should include, such as

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[8] This figure includes all funds appropriated for building NWEC between fiscal years 1971 and 1978, including funds for preparatory research (Ministry of Education 1992: 106-107).

conference rooms and information resource rooms.[9] Funding for public

women's centers begin to appear in annual national budget figures for women's

education starting in fiscal year 1978 (Ministry of Education 1992: 104-109).

Meanwhile, other Ministries became involved in women's centers. While

working women's centers had been around since the 1950s, the Ministry of

Labor began to actively promote their establishment through prefectural and

local governments in 1974. In principle, all cities with populations over 50,000

should have working women's centers to address problems of working women

in the workplace and in the home, and to provide a place for recreation and

learning. The Ministry of Agriculture also followed suit. Between 1977 and 1985,

the Ministry promoted the establishment of rural women's centers to provide a

place for information exchange and learning for women in rural areas. These

centers are primarily managed by local governments and Japan Agricultural

Cooperatives (*Nogyo Kodo Kumiai*)

As the net result of these efforts by the Ministries of Education, Labor, and

Agriculture Japan currently has 239 women's education centers, 228 working

women's centers, and 305 rural women's centers, most of which were

established by the government. According to the National Council of Women's

Centers, Japan and Korea are the only countries in the world in which women's

centers are primarily funded by the government (National Council of Women's

Centers 1998: 12).

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[9] For an abridged version of this Ministry of Education Policy Outline, see
Shikuma 1990: 86-87).

Although there is much diversity among the nearly 800 women's centers in Japan, it is possible to get a general picture of these centers through data provided by the National Council of Women's Centers (1998, 1999) and the National Women's Education Center's (NWEC 1994a).[10] The National Council of Women's Centers defines women's centers broadly as centers that promote the advancement of women, and serve as a base for the activities of women's groups. Generally, these include women's education centers, working women's centers, and rural women's centers. The large-scale surveys conducted by these two organizations report the following characteristics of women's centers in contemporary Japan.

The geographical distribution of women's centers in Japan is fairly even according to regional population (Table 3.4). About half the centers are stand alone buildings, while the other half are housed alongside other facilities, such as general education centers, welfare centers, and public halls. A majority of women's centers have facilities for research, conferences, library resources, advice, childcare, and cooking. Nearly all the centers have paid staff, with an average of six to seven workers. The average annual budget for a women's center is a little over 50 million yen, or close to 500 thousand dollars at the current exchange rate. But there are notable differences between the three types of centers, with women's education centers having an average annual budget close to five times higher than that of working women's centers, which in turn is

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[10] These two surveys represent the most comprehensive data currently available on women's centers in Japan. The 1994 NWEC publication reports the survey responses of women's centers, but does not provide any data analysis. Therefore, the findings reported from this survey come from my own analysis of the data. The 1998 report by the National Conference of Women's Centers contains survey responses of individual centers, and data analysis which I cite directly from this publication, unless otherwise indicated.

nearly ten times higher than the average annual budget for rural women's centers (Table 3.5).

Table 3.4
Regional Distribution of Women's Centers (N=448)

Region	Population(%)	Centers (%)
Hokkaido	4.5	5.6
Tohoku	7.8	10.3
Kanto	31.7	20.1
Chubu	17.1	21.4
Kinki	17.9	12.1
Chugoku	6.1	7.1
Shikoku	3.3	4.9
Kyushu	10.6	18.5
Okinawa	1.0	N/A

Sources: National Council of Women's Centers. 1998. *Josei Kanren Shisetsu ni kan suru Sogo Chosa* (Comprehensive survey of facilities for women). Yano Tsuneta Kinenkai (Tsuneta Yano Memorial Foundation). 2000. *Nihon Kokusei Zue* (The state of Japan pictorial data book). Tokyo: Kokuseisha.

Table 3.5
Women's Centers' Average Annual Budget (in 10,000 yen)

Type of Center	All (N=448)	Women's Education (N=178)	Working Women (N=196)	Rural Women (N=74)
Avg. Annual Budget	5,080.8	10,602.1	2,159.7	230.6

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1998.

The main function of women's centers is serve as a base for women's civic and social participation. While centers provide space for women's groups to use

for their own purposes, almost all women's centers offer their own programs, mostly in the form of classes or lectures (Table 3.6). Centers are also engaged in information gathering and dissemination, advising, support for citizen activities and exchange, and survey and research.

Table 3.6
Percentage of Women's Centers Engaged in Activities (N=448)

study/ learning	info. gathering	advising	civic group support	survey/ research	none of the above
87.7	55.8	53.8	51.3	16.5	6.9

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1998.

Women's centers are classified as public, private, or mixed according to their establishment and management. (Table 3.7). "Publicly Established and Publicly Managed" (*Kosetsu, Koei*) means that the center is established and managed by the government at the national, prefectural, or city level by an executive office, board of education, or other public body. "Publicly Established and Privately Managed" (*Kosetsu, Minei*), means that the center was established by the government as described above, but is managed by a legally recognized foundation (*zaidan hojin, shadan hojin*), or other private group. Finally, "Privately Established and Privately Managed" means that the center is established and managed by a legal foundation or other private group.

103

Table 3.7
Women's Centers by Type and Public/Private Establishment and Management
(N=423)

Classification	Women's Education	Working Women	Rural Women	Total
Public establish Public manage	86	160	46	292
Public establish Private manage	56	24	14	94
Private establish Private manage	32	1	4	37

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1998.

According to these classifications, a vast majority of women's centers are
public institutions in that they are both established and managed by the
government. The level of government responsible for establishing women's
centers is most commonly the municipality, followed by the prefecture, and, in
only a few cases, the national government (Table 3.8). Management of women's
centers most often falls within the executive office of the prefectural governor or
city mayor, followed by the head of the board of education at the prefectural or
local level, and legally recognized foundations (Table 3.9).

Table 3.8 Establishing Entity of Women's Centers (N=623)

Establishing Entity	Number	Percentage
Country	3	0.5
Prefecture	79	12.7
Appointed City*	23	3.7
Municipality	391	62.8
Union	7	1.1
Foundation	110	17.7
Individual	1	0.2
Other	9	1.4

Source: National Women's Education Centre. 1994. *Josei kanren shisetsu no genjo* (The current state of facilities for women). Data analysis is my own.
*Appointed City refers to specially designated cities with populations over 500,000 that are allowed to take on functions usually performed by the prefectural government.

Table 3.9 Managing Entity of Women's Centers (N=623)

Managing Entity	Number	Percentage
Ministry of Education	2	0.3
Board of Education	137	22.0
Executive Office	270	43.3
Union	13	2.1
Foundation	135	21.7
Individual	1	0.2
Other	65	10.4

Source: NWEC 1994a. Data analysis is my own.

The average number of people that use each women's center per year is 39,206. But usage differs significantly among the three types of centers (Table

3.10). Not surprisingly, the vast majority of users are women at 82 percent.

Two-thirds of women's centers place conditions on the use of their facilities.

While conditions vary widely, the most common are the prohibition on activities

that are for profit, political, or religious, though it is unclear how these conditions

are defined and enforced.

Table 3.10
Average Number of Users per Year at Each Center by Type of Women's Center
(N=448)

All	Women's Education	Working Women	Rural Women
39,206	08,868	26,622	2,839

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1998.

Current Trends and Issues

The final stage in the history of women's centers in Japan is marked by

the trend towards large-scale women's centers, and debates over public versus

private management. Japan's most modern, high-profile women's centers are

exemplified by such leading centers as the Yokohama Women's Forum, Tokyo

Women's Plaza, Osaka Dawn Center, and Move-Kitakyushu Women's Center.

These centers stand out among Japan's women's centers in that they have

considerably more physical space, facilities, staff, activities, and users than other

women's centers.

While all of these centers were established by the government, they are

managed through legally recognized foundations, signifying a trend towards

public establishment and private management. But, in reality, the distinction

between public and private is not as clear as the term *kosetsu minei* suggests. A

key issue in this arrangement is staffing. In publicly established, publicly managed women's centers, regular full-time staff are typically civil servants, who are sometimes supplemented by specialists outside the civil service, or part-time workers. But the core of the staff are government workers subject to the civil service employment system. In the case of publicly established, privately managed women's centers, the prefecture or city government that established the center will usually assign civil servant employees as workers on-loan (*shukko shokuin*) to the women's center. The number of civil servants working in privately managed women's centers varies from center to center. But overall, about two-thirds of publicly established, privately managed women's education centers surveyed report having at least one worker on-loan from the government, with 13.5 percent reporting between ten and nineteen such workers on staff (National Council of Women's Centers 1998: 58).

There are pros and cons to having women's centers staffed by civil servants. From the government's perspective, the purpose of sending public employees to privately managed women's centers is to loan out the government's expertise in management and administration of public institutions. There is also the issue of accountability. As taxpayer money is used to build women's centers, the government must be sure that they are being run efficiently. But, while civil servants may have general administrative skills, they do not necessarily possess specific knowledge about or even interest in women's issues.

In a typical case, for example, in which a city establishes a women's center, the city will assign staff to that center from their pool of civil servants who may be assigned to any number of the city's public institutions, including libraries, museums, and town halls. Civil servants usually spend up to three years at one

workplace before being transferred to the next, moving their way up through seniority over their lifetime of government employment.

The close connection between women's centers and the civil service probably explains the rather surprising finding that half of the 623 women's centers surveyed in 1994 were headed by men (NWEC 1994a). A more recent survey of women's centers shows little change, with slightly more men than women heading women's centers. This survey also shows that women's education centers are much more likely to be headed by women than working women's centers or rural women's centers, suggesting that women within the education civil service have greater opportunities than their counterparts in labor or agriculture (Table 3.11). The men who head women's centers tend to be relatively high-ranking civil servants who have worked long enough to earn the position of head of a public institution, whether it be a library, museum or women's center. Although efforts are made to assign women to these posts, the emphasis is on general managerial and administrative skills that can be applied equally effectively in running public facilities, regardless of their purpose or populations they serve.

Table 3.11
Heads of Women's Centers by Gender and Type of Center (N=443)

	Women	Men	Unclear	Unreported*
Total	161	172	12	98
Women's Education Ctr	96	45	4	33
Working Women's Ctr	63	112	7	11
Rural Women's Ctr	2	15	1	54

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1998. Data analysis is my own.
*Unreported includes centers that do not have a director or center head.

Leaders within the women's movement express concern over the need to develop specialists in the area of women's studies (Shikuma et al. 1999) They point out that the usual three year assignment to a women's center does not allow enough time for civil servants to gain expertise on women's issues. On the other hand, the system brings in people who may otherwise never set foot in a women's center. The hope is that through their work experience at a women's center, civil servants will develop an awareness of gender issues that they will take to their next public post. Whatever the pros or cons, it is unlikely that women's centers will see the administrative efficiency of Japan's civil service replaced by the passionate commitment of feminist activists, so long as women's centers remain primarily institutions of the state.

Why Women's Centers?

In order to understand the proliferation and institutionalization of public women's centers in Japan, it is necessary to examine the international context and domestic institutions that shaped their development in the 1970s. The establishment and maintenance of women's centers is an important part of Japan's policy response to the United Nations designation of 1975 as International Women's Year, followed by the UN Decade for Women. While Japan could have responded to international pressure through any number of policy alternatives, the decision to build centers for women has a historical precedent in youth centers and other institutions that are part of a long tradition of social education (*shakai kyoiku*) in Japan.

The International Context

In December of 1972, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution proclaiming 1975 as International Women's Year. At the first International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975, the adoption of a World Plan of Action set forth guidelines for governments of individual countries to develop their own National Plan of Action and National Machinery to implement legislation to end discrimination against women. The UN General Assembly endorsed the World Plan of Action, and further declared the United Nations Decade for Women from 1976 to 1985. At the second World Conference in Copenhagen in 1980, 75 countries signed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including Japan.

This period coincides with Japan's self-conscious efforts to raise its international stature after two decades of remarkable economic growth. Amidst stereotypes of Geisha and Madame Butterfly, along with dismal statistics on the status of women, it became increasingly important for Japan to demonstrate a commitment to women's equality in order to improve its image abroad. As a participant of the International Women's Year Conference and signatory of CEDAW, Japan was obliged to develop goals and strategies towards ending sex discrimination, and to submit periodic progress reports for international scrutiny and appraisal.

In response to these requirements, Japan created the Headquarters for the Planning and Promotion of Women's Issues (*Fujin Mondai Kikaku Suishin Honbu*) within the Prime Minister's Office to head its "national machinery" for the implementation of Japan's National Plan of Action (*Kokunai Kodo Keikaku*). The original plan identifies five issue areas, and outlines basic strategies to improve

the status of women in each area. These include law and legislation, women's participation in society, maternal health and protection, welfare of the elderly, and international cooperation. The outline for promoting women's participation in society contains a section indicating that women's centers would be an integral part of Japan's national strategy to support women's continuing education (Fujin Honbu 1977:5).

With Japan's official entry into the international arena of women's rights, the Ministry of Education made efforts to ensure that construction would begin on the National Women's Education Center in time to commemorate International Women's Year (Ohno et al. 1998: 175). Also, the center's opening in 1977 happily coincided with the adoption of Japan's National Plan of Action. The establishment of the national women's center was followed by the proliferation of women's centers nationwide, some of which were part of a Plan of Action for Women adopted at the prefectural or municipal level. The large, impressive, national women's center, along with hundreds of regional and local centers, served as visible evidence to the world that the Japanese government was devoting attention and resources to women's issues.

The Domestic Institutional Context

While international influence explains the timing of government actions on behalf of women, the choice of strategy to build women's centers was shaped by domestic institutional factors. Japan's system of social education provided a pre-existing conceptual and administrative framework that could simply be extended to women. The model and justification for building the National Women Education Center was the National Youth Center, built in 1959, and followed by the founding of hundreds of regional and local youth centers.

Certainly, from an international perspective, Japan's policy response of building women's centers is unusual, if not unique. But within Japan, women's centers are just one of many different types of centers established by the government in response to new social issues and demands.

In terms of Japanese education policy, social education basically covers learning that takes place outside of formal schooling. The Fundamental Law of Education, adopted in 1947, defines social education as "education that takes place in the home, workplace, or other areas in society." Two years later, The Law of Social Education, spelled out the responsibilities of national and local governments in the area of social education, and charged local boards of education with the establishment of public citizens' halls, libraries, and museums.

As part of a series of social education laws that followed, the Law for the Promotion of Youth Classes was adopted in 1953. This law gave government support to youth classes already in operation, mostly in rural areas, to provide educational opportunities to teenagers who were not pursuing secondary or higher education. These alternative schools for youth had been established in 1926, and became compulsory in 1939, as part of government efforts to organize and control its youth during the war. At the end of the war, they were shut down by the Occupation forces. But with the end of the occupation in 1952, the Japanese government was ready to revive its role in the social education of its youth.

In 1959, the Ministry of Education established the first national youth center (*Kokuritsu Chuo Seinen no Ie*), followed by a dozen more national centers, and hundreds of prefectural and local public youth centers. By 1993, there were 410 public youth centers throughout Japan (Somucho 1994: 23). The official purpose of youth centers is described by four basic goals. 1) To cultivate the spirit of discipline, cooperation, friendship and service, 2) To develop self-

112

sufficiency, a sense of responsibility, and ability, 3) To increase mutual solidarity, love for one's homeland and fatherland, and to foster the spirit of international understanding, and 4) To design the advancement of education, purification of sentiment, and reinforcement of physical strength (11). Instilling these values in the nation's young people is part of the Ministry of Education's overall mission of social education. And youth centers are an essential tool for carrying out these goals.

Within this context, it is not surprising that the Japanese government responded to pressure on women's rights by establishing centers for women. By the early 1970s there were already around a hundred women's centers, many of which were founded and run by private groups. But the nationwide network of public youth centers provided a precedent and model for the government to get actively involved in promoting women's centers as part of its social education function.

Improving the status of women became framed as a social education issue when the Social Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education coordinated the establishment of the National Women's Education Center. Women's education centers were then added to the list of social education facilities under the Ministry of Education, which currently includes public citizens' halls, libraries, museums, youth and children's centers, as well as women's centers (Table 3.12). Because there was already an administrative infrastructure built up around social education, the establishment of women's centers was a logical national strategy for Japanese policy makers as they faced international and domestic pressure to take action on behalf of women.

Table 3.12
Ministry of Education Social Education Facilities

Type of Facility	Number of Facilities
Public Citizen's Hall	17,819
Library	2,396
Museum	985
Youth Center	409
Children's Nature Center	304
Women's Center	225
Culture Hall	1,549

Source: Ministry of Education 1996.

This strategy of building centers in response to political issues is not unique to the Ministry of Education. As previously mentioned, the Ministry of Labor sponsors working women's centers, while the Ministry of Agriculture oversees rural women's centers. Nor are women and youth the only populations that public centers serve. The Ministry of Labor also administers close to one thousand athletic facilities, specifically to serve workers of small-to-medium sized enterprises and rural manufacturing industries. The Ministry of Agriculture oversees a variety of centers designed to serve the needs of agricultural workers, youth, and women living in rural areas. Other Ministries also have their own network of facilities, such as the Ministry of Health and Welfare's mother and child health centers, or the Ministry of International and Trade and Industry's consumer centers. Even the Defense Agency has centers to improve living standards for local residents in areas where Defense Agency's facilities are located (Table 3.13).

Table 3.13
Examples of Government Supported Centers and Facilities

Ministry or Agency	Type of Facility/Center	Number
Welfare	Public Health	851
	Senior Welfare	1,826
	Senior Relaxation	3,605
	Children's Center	3,739
	Mother Child Health	654
	Dowa Welfare*	1,167
Agriculture	Farm Environment	457
	Rural Youth	168
	Structural Improvement	2,703
	Agricultural Meeting	1,351
Fisheries Agency	Fishing Village	248
Forestry Agency	Forestry Meeting	414
International Trade	Communities Near	
and Industry (MITI)	Power Stations	620
	Consumer Awareness	217
Economic Planning		
Agency	Citizen's Living	N/A
Transportation	Youth Hostels	465
	Youth Travel Village	80
	Tourist Recreation	30
	Garden City Centers in	
Home Affairs	Planned Communities	45
	Community	
	Development	134
National Land Agency	Senior Community	145

	Community	184
	Island Development	81
Defense Agency	Community	259
	Senior Welfare	40
	Special Meeting Places	21
	Learning Centers	567
	Health Consultation	32

Source: Miura et. al 1992. Data on number of facilities are mostly from the mid to late 1980s.

*Dowa refers to a class of people designated as outcasts during the Edo period (1600-1867), who still experience discrimination in Japan today.

The Japanese government is often criticized for not doing enough to support its emerging civil society, specifically for not providing non-governmental organizations with tax-exempt status as in the United States. But the vast network of public centers serving diverse populations provides valuable resources for Japan's civil society in the form of physical meeting and activity space, and in many cases staff assistance and educational programs. Bolstering civil society through public centers represents a policy strategy that is particularly suited to Japan's strong state, because it allows the government more access and control than simply giving organized groups a special tax status. Unlike tax breaks, which would allow groups to do as they please with their additional resources, public centers give state authorities a degree of agenda-setting power by staffing centers with government workers, and offering their own educational programs to targeted constituencies. In this way, public centers represent a portal for state intervention in civil society.

Issue Agendas at Women's Centers

An important purpose of women's centers is to serve as a vehicle for
women's groups to further their own interests and activities. But as state
institutions, public women's centers are hardly neutral, empty, vessels filled up
by the organized interests of society. Most have their own staff, and run their
own programs, which reflect conscious choices about which issues to address
and which to ignore. And examination of the contents of programs at women's
centers reveals their issue agenda. Since women's centers primarily exist to
serve women's groups, the issues they address should correspond to issues
taken up by the women's movement. But an analysis of the issue content of
women's organizations in Japan shows a disconnect between the issue agenda at
women's centers and the issue agenda of women's groups. This difference
raises the question of who sets the agenda at women's centers, which is explored
through an examination of program administration, staff, and government
relations at women's centers.

Program Content Analysis

The 1994 NWEC survey of 623 women's centers sheds light on the issue
content of activities that take place at women's centers. These activities include
on-going or short courses, one-time lecture meetings, exhibitions or displays,
and research studies. Over three-quarters of the centers surveyed report
offering courses, and nearly as many offer one-time lecture meetings. A little
less than half of women's centers house exhibitions or displays, and almost one-
fifth of the centers carry out research studies.

For each of these four types of activities, the survey asked centers to report on issue content, according to a code sheet that lists sixty-one different subjects ranging from women's studies, to environmental issues, to natural science (See appendix for the complete code sheet). These sixty-one subjects are grouped into eleven general subject categories. For example, the general category "Women's Issues" includes the subjects "General Women's Issues," "Women's Studies/Liberation Ideology," "Women's Education," "Women's Administration," "Women's History," and "Other Women's Issues." Also, the general category "Family and Home" includes the subjects "Living Standards," "Food, Clothing, and Shelter," "Leisure," and "Other Family and Home." Because most centers offer a number of different programs over the course of a year, they were asked to report up to five subjects covered within each type of activity.

Using these survey data, I analyzed the issue content of courses, lectures, exhibitions, and research at women's centers. I counted all of the subjects reported within each type of activity to determine which issues were most frequently addressed through women's centers' programs (Table 3.14). For courses offered at women's centers, "Family and Home" subjects are addressed most often, followed by "Arts and Culture," then "Women's Issues." "Family and Home" subjects are also the most common topic of one-time lecture meetings, followed by "Women's Issues, and "Social Issues." Exhibitions overwhelmingly revolve around "Arts and Culture," with some attention given to "Family and Home" and "Social Participation." In the area of research, the most frequent topic is "Women's Issues," followed by "Family and Home."

Table 3.14 Issue Content of Programs at Women's Centers[11]

Issue Category	(%) Courses (N=1,882)	(%) Lectures (N=1,298)	(%) Exhibitions (N=657)	(%) Research (N=117)
Women's Issues	13.8	16.6	5.3	**29.9**
Home Education	6.9	7.5	0.6	9.4
Education	2.8	2.6	2.7	8.5
Family/Home	**19.1**	**22.0**	11.0	20.5
Soc. Participation	8.3	8.5	7.3	9.4
Social Issues	4.9	9.5	6.1	6.0
Welfare	5.3	5.9	1.8	3.4
Health/Medicine	11.7	8.5	2.7	1.7
Labor	7.0	5.9	1.2	1.7
Arts & Culture	15.5	7.6	**54.2**	0.9
Letters & Science	4.4	5.2	6.1	5.1
Other	0.4	0.2	0.9	3.4

Source: NWEC 1994a. Data analysis is my own.

A more recent survey by the National Council of Women's Centers confirms the emphasis on issues related to family and home, as well as arts and culture at women's centers. In their 1998 survey of 448 women's centers, 393 centers report offering learning and study programs. They also report the issue content of these programs according to a code sheet that lists eighteen different subject areas. While this code sheet is not the same one used in the NWEC survey, both code sheets cover the same general subject areas. Another difference is the way in which the data is reported. The National Council survey

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[11] N represents the total number of subjects reported by 623 women's centers for each type of activity. Each Center was asked to report up to five different subjects covered in their programs over the course of the previous year.

reports the percentage of centers that offer one or more study programs for each subject category. Therefore, the unit of analysis is the women's center itself. In my analysis of issue content, I counted all the subjects reported by each women's centers to account for the fact that most centers offer a number of programs addressing different issues.

Despite these differences in data collection and reporting, the 1998 National Council survey is useful for providing up-to-date information on the issue content of study programs at women's centers. Their data supports my finding that programs at women's centers most frequently address issues related to home and family, and arts and culture, such as tea ceremony and flower arranging (Table 3.15). Over 70 percent of women's centers that offer study programs address "Household Living," followed by 67 percent that support "Hobbies," 59 percent that cover "Family Issues," and 49 percent that offer study programs on "Women's Issues," which is the same proportion of centers that have programs on "Sports."

Table 3.15
Percentage of Women's Centers that Offer Study Programs on Various Subjects
(N=393)

Subject (Description)	Centers (%)
Household Living (Cooking, Sewing, Daily Living)	71.8
Hobbies (Music, Art, Calligraphy, Crafts, Flower Arranging, Tea Ceremony)	67.2
Family Issues (Child Rearing, Elderly Care, Home Education)	58.8
Women's Issues (Women's History, Studies, Gender Roles, Life Stages)	48.9

Sports   48.6
(Sports, Recreation)

Skills Development   46.6
(Word Processing, Personal Computers)

Health   44.8
(Mental Health, Women's Bodies, Reproductive Health/Rights)

Employment Support   43.5
(Career Advancement, Re-employment, Business Start-up)

Male Enlightenment   39.7
(Teaching Men to Be Self-Sufficient in the Home, Men's Studies)

Social and Welfare Issues   39.4
(Human Rights, Environment, Consumer Issues)

Self Development   35.4
(Support for Self Transformation, Independence)

Civic Group Support   26.5
(Organizing and Managing Groups, Fundraising)

Women's Film Screening   20.4
(Film, Video, Concerts Related to Women's Issues)

International Programs   19.8
(Women and Development, Foreign Women in Japan)

Participation in Decision Making   17.6
(Participation in Politics, Workplace, Community)

Leadership Development   16.3
(For administrators and women's groups)

Self Expression   15.8
(Video Making, Newsletter Publishing, Performance Arts)

Other   9.4

Unclear, No Response   1.3

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1998.

Women's Centers versus Women's Groups

As the primary purpose of women's centers is to serve as a base of activities for women's groups, it is reasonable to expect women's centers' programs to address issues that are most important to women's groups. But this is not the case. In addition to analyzing the issue content of programs at women's centers reported in the NWEC survey, I analyzed the issue content of 889 women's organizations, using the same code sheet to allow for comparison.[12] The comparison shows clear differences between the issues addressed at women's centers and issues supported by women's organizations (Table 3.16). Not surprisingly, the largest proportion of women's groups are organized around women's issues. Nearly one-third address subjects that fall within the general category "Women's Issues," (which includes women's studies, women's education, women's administration, women's history, and other women's issues). An additional 20 percent of women's groups are organized around social issues. The general category of "Social Issues" includes the sub-categories "international understanding," "consumer advocacy," "environmental protection," "human rights," and "other social issues." Altogether over half of the women's groups in my sample were organized around women's issues or social issues. Only 5 percent addressed family and home issues, compared with 20 percent of women's centers' courses and 23 percent of lectures on family and home. While it would be unrealistic to expect that programs at women's centers to perfectly mirror the interests of women's

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[12] This sample of Japanese women's organizations was constructed from the collection of pamphlets, newsletters, and other materials gathered from women's groups nationwide and maintained at the information center of the National Women's Education Center. The pamphlet collection was supplemented by three published directories of women's organizations. See Chapter 2 for a complete explanation of how this data was collected and analyzed.

groups, the distinct differences reflected in this comparison are rather surprising, given that women's centers are established primarily to serve women's groups.

Table 3.16
Distribution of Issues of Women's Centers' Programs Compared with Women's Groups

Issue Category	(%) WC Courses (N=1,882)	(%) WC Lectures (N=1,298)	(%) Women's Groups (N=889)
Women's Issues	13.8	16.6	**31.8**
Home Education	6.9	7.5	4.8
Education	2.8	2.6	2.6
Family/Home	**19.1**	**22.0**	5.1
Soc. Participation	8.3	8.5	7.9
Social Issues	4.9	9.5	21.0
Welfare	5.3	5.9	3.8
Health/Medicine	11.7	8.5	5.1
Labor	7.0	5.9	10.5
Arts & Culture	15.5	7.6	3.6
Letters & Science	4.4	5.2	0.7
Other	0.4	0.2	3.1

Sources: NWEC 1994. Data analysis is my own. Data on women's groups come from my own survey of women's groups. See Chapter 2 for a complete explanation of how the data was collected and analyzed.

Agenda Setting

This surprising finding raises the question of how programs at women's centers are developed and administered. In other words, who sets the agenda at

women's centers? A 1999 National Council of Women's Centers survey sheds light on this question. This survey follows up on the 1998 survey of 448 women's centers, and focuses specifically on study and learning programs. Only women's education centers are surveyed for a sample size of 166 centers, which does not include working women's centers or rural women's centers. This limitation biases the sample somewhat, as women's education centers tend to focus more on women's issues and less on family and home issues than other types of centers.[13] Nevertheless, within these parameters, the survey contains useful information on program administration, staff, and government involvement, providing insight into how the issue agenda is set at women's centers.

Nearly two-thirds of the centers surveyed report cooperation with outside organizations in the planning and administration of their study programs. Outside organizations include civic groups, businesses, and public bodies, such as local government offices for women's policy or boards of education (Table 3.17). Cooperation takes many forms, but the most popular methods are advertising and recruiting participants, followed by planning, and borrowing meeting space (Table 3.18). These responses show that most women's education centers seek outside input and help for its programs. But that still leaves over one-third of women's centers in which all planning and management of programs is done internally. Who is in charge of determining the content of these programs?

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[13] When the sample is broken down by type of center, the percentage of women's education centers that offers study programs in women's issues is 78.5, compared with 33.5 for working women's centers, and 9.1 for rural women's centers. Also, on the topic of household living, only 40.5 percent of women's education centers offer such programs, compared with 94.8 percent of working women's centers, and 84.1 percent of rural women's centers (National Council of Women's Centers 1998: 87).

Table 3.17
Examples of Outside Organizations that Cooperate with Women's Centers in Planning or Administering Study Programs

Government	Business	Civic Groups
Local government women's policy office	NTT	Divorce and domestic violence self-help
Public and private schools	Suntory	Women's groups
Boards of education	Fujitsu	Volunteer groups
National Women's Education Center	Law Offices	Various NGOs

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1999.

Table 3.18
Forms of Cooperation between Outside Organizations and Women's Centers in Planning or Administering Study Programs (N=192)

Form of Cooperation	Percent
Assistance with Advertising and Recruiting Participants	46.9
Planning and Design	44.3
Providing Meeting Space	42.3
Sending an Instructor	32.8
Complete Cooperation in All Aspects of the Program	25.5
Providing Financial Resources	24.0
Providing Equipment	19.8
Providing Technical Expertise	10.9
Other	9.4

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1999.

The survey also provides some basic information on staff people in charge of programs at women's centers. Most are women, making up about a 65 percent, with men holding about 28 percent of these posts, and the rest undetermined. By age, almost one-third are in their 40s, indicating that it is a relatively high position. But the most interesting finding is that 57 percent of program directors report 3 years or less experience in their post. This lack of experience is more prevalent at public women's centers, that are staffed by civil servants, than at private women's centers. At private centers only 25 percent of program directors reported 3 years or less experience, compared with 60 percent for publicly established, privately run centers, and 68 percent for publicly established and publicly run centers. This finding suggests that the people charged with running programs at public women's centers do not have many years to develop expertise before being transferred to another post within the civil service. It is likely that the short-term nature of program staff makes it difficult for women's centers to keep up with changing interests and demands of women's organizations. Therefore, an institutionalized lack of expertise may help explain the disconnect between the content of women's centers' programs and the issues embraced by women's groups.

Finally, to what extent are government offices involved in programs at women's centers? The survey asked specifically about the role of local government offices charged with women's policy in the planning and administration of study programs at women's education centers. Most centers reported some form of involvement by women's policy offices, with less than one-third reporting "no particular role sharing," or "mostly no relationship." While very few centers administer programs directly proposed and planned by women's policy offices, many centers administer programs jointly, or have regular meetings with women's policy offices regarding programs (Table 3.19).

These findings reveal yet another layer of government involvement in women's centers. In addition to building centers, and staffing them with civil servants, government officials are involved in developing programs at women's centers through women's policy offices. In this way, the Japanese government is able exercise agenda-setting power at women's centers, not only through civil servants acting as program staff, but also through direct input from women's policy offices of local governments.

Table 3.19
Relationship Between Women's Centers and Local Government Women's Policy Offices (N=166, multiple responses)

Description of Relationship	Percent
Have Regular Meetings	30.1
Have Programs Jointly Planned and Administered	28.3
No Particular Role Sharing	17.5
Mostly No Relationship	12.0
Mainly Administer Programs of the Women's Policy Office	6.6
Other	23.5
Unclear or No Response	10.2

Source: National Council of Women's Centers 1999.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that women's centers provide valuable resources and services to the women's movement in Japan. In a country in which the equivalent of half the population of the United States lives on land the size of Montana, the physical space set aside for women is itself a precious commodity. Staff provide knowledge and expertise, if not on women's issues, then on administrative and management skills learned through the civil service. Most importantly, women's centers facilitate civic participation by offering an easily accessible point of entry for women to get involved in women's issues and activities, simply by stopping by their local women's center.

But these benefits come at a cost. As state institutions, public women's centers are not neutral ground. They have their own interests and agendas that tend to differ from the issue agendas of women's organizations. By accepting the resources offered at women's centers and participating in the programs they sponsor, women's groups run the risk of compromising their autonomy and control over the definition of their interests. Certainly family and home issues and arts and culture are important to Japanese women. But, as my survey of women's groups shows, they are most interested in women's issues and social issues, which are not proportionately reflected in women's centers' programs.

The National Council of Women's Centers acknowledges the issue of autonomy raised by publicly funded women's centers. But they support a public-private partnership, noting the belief that women's rights are human rights so public funds should be used to promote the advancement of women. Most significantly, they point out that without the tax relief given to non-profit organizations in western countries, non-profit groups in Japan have to rely on

whatever public support they can get (National Council of Women's Centers 1998: 12).

In this way, public centers and non-profit regulations represent two-sides of the same coin. While the non-profit sector in Japan does not enjoy the same tax privileges of its western counterparts, it benefits from an array of public centers serving various groups throughout society. Offering meeting space, programs, and staff assistance to local groups gives the state much more influence over the civil society than simply offering them tax breaks. This approach gives the state access to all corners of civil society, in every city, town, or village in which a public center is located.

This combination of non-profit regulations and public center resources has created a close relationship between women's organizations and the state. With few alternatives, women's groups have come to rely on government resources, and in turn, the government is able to gain a foothold in the women's movement from where it can promote its interests and agenda. The partnership that has developed between women and state is more than a natural or cultural affinity. It is based on clear incentives and concrete institutions that encourage cooperation, rather than confrontation.

Finally, in addressing the larger question of why gender inequality in Japan remains so pronounced, this examination of women's centers shows how state intervention in civil society keeps the women's movement in check. Regulations that hamper financial independence, and resources offered at public women's centers bind women's organizations closely to the state. While this closeness may spare Japan the conflict and convulsions of feminist activists taking to the streets, it can also temper and mute legitimate demands, thereby slowing progress towards gender equality. In addition to regulations and

resources, the relationship between women and the state is further cemented by policies and policy making, to which the next chapter turns.

Chapter Four
Women's Policy and Policy Making

A wide and diverse array of women's organizations with access to hundreds of public women's centers forms a vibrant women's movement in Japan. But, while the existence of a women's movement may be a necessary condition for progress towards gender equality, it is by no means sufficient. Without a forum in which to be heard, the voice of the women's movement falls on deaf ears, no matter how loud or unified. Therefore, in order to understand the politics of gender inequality, it is necessary, not only to assess the strength and resources of women's organizations, but also to examine the policy making institutions that take in or shut out their political demands.

Japan scholars have long noted the central role of the unelected, insulated bureaucracy in the policy making process (Johnson 1982, Pempel 1982, Upham 1987, Krauss 1989). More recent studies vigorously attack the thesis of bureaucratic dominance, emphasizing the power of politicians (Ramsayer and Rosenbluth 1993, McCubbins and Noble 1995). This long standing debate raises questions about how women's policy is made in Japan, particularly about the openness and accountability of the process.

This chapter examines the institutions of women's policy making in Japan. First, I address the question of women's access to policy making by describing Japan's elaborate women's policy infrastructure within the national bureaucracy as well as at the prefectural and local levels. I then explore how these policy making institutions affect women's interest group politics by favoring certain types of organizations over others. Finally, the question of women's access to policy making is turned around to show how policy makers gain access to women's organizations through a variety of public funding programs.

Institutions of Women's Policy Making

Historical Background

The end of World War II marks the beginning of a new era for women's rights in Japan. Following Japan's surrender, the American Occupation oversaw the implementation of far-reaching reforms, including women's suffrage and the adoption of a new Constitution guaranteeing equality of the sexes. As part of an overall effort to educate women about their new democratic rights and responsibilities, occupation officials chose the newly formed Ministry of Labor to be charged with improving the status of women. Historically, women's issues had been firmly established under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. But the wartime activities of this ministry in organizing and mobilizing women on behalf of the war effort left it tainted in the eyes of occupation reformers. The newly created Ministry of Labor had no such history, so it became a key institution for women's policy, with "the promotion of the status of women" explicitly written into its founding law (Shikuma et al. 1996: 77-78).

The Bureau for Women and Youth was set up within the ministry and soon became the focal point for the formulation and implementation of women's labor policy. Eventually, Women and Youth branch offices of the Ministry of Labor were established in all forty-seven prefectures. The Bureau for Women and Youth later became the Women's Bureau, and continued to be a key institution of women's labor policy throughout the postwar period. Since the reorganization of Japan's central government in 2001, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Health and Welfare have been combined. Within the new Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the Women's Bureau no longer exists.

Under the new government structure, women's labor policy is overseen by the Equal Employment, Children and Families Bureau. In addition to women's labor, this bureau deals with harmonizing work and family, part-time and home employment, family welfare, childrearing, day care, and maternal and child health issues.

While the American Occupation favored the Ministry of Labor for implementing women's policy, the historically close ties between women and the Ministry of Education proved too strong to sever. This relationship has remained strong throughout the postwar period, supported by the programs and policies of the Social Education Bureau within the Ministry of Education. The 1947 Basic Law on Education not only spells out principles for governing formal education in the schools, but also states that national and local governments should be active in the area of informal education, including education in the home and workplace. These areas of learning are defined as "social education," which is distinct from school education, and overseen by the Social Education Bureau. In 1961, a Women's Education Division was established within this bureau.

Because women as mothers are seen as the primary, if not sole, providers of children's education outside the classroom and in the home, the Social Education Bureau has been actively involved in promoting women's education, particularly concerning family and household issues. One of the first projects following the war was to commission "motherhood classes" to be administered at the local level. These classes existed before the war and offered lessons in childrearing, housework, and hobbies such as flower arranging. In 1946, 1,060 classes were held for 233,968 participants (Ministry of Education 1965). But in that same year, under American Occupation pressure, these classes were opened up to all parents, not just mothers, and the following year, the program was

expanded to cover the cultural education of all adults and renamed "social education classes."

At the same time, educational programs targeted specifically towards women continued, particularly at the prefectural level. After 1947, women's education classes became their own separate program, and prefectural budgets for women's social education increased. In 1956, 230 women's education classes became part of the Ministry of Education's regular budget and were administered at the prefectural level on an experimental basis. The number of classes commissioned by the Ministry increased dramatically over the years, so that by 1963 they totaled 1,581 (Ministry of Education 1965).

The Ministry of Education was also active in organizing national conferences around women's education. In 1951, it sponsored the first national conference for prefectural women's education administrators, which continued on a yearly basis. Beginning in 1953, the ministry sponsored four regional conferences to be held yearly to discuss women's social education. For the first ten years, these conferences focused mainly on developing procedures and building institutions to systematically provide social education to women. But the topic of discussion eventually shifted towards the substance and content of classes.

Out of these discussions, the Ministry of Education developed a uniform curriculum for women's social education. Basically, classes were designed to address four main facets of women's lives. Civic education was provided to encourage women to become good citizens within their local communities, their country, and the world. Classes on children's education were given to support women in their role as mothers. Instruction in household management and home economics aided women in their duties as housewives. And, finally, classes on working life were offered to working women.

Leaders of women's organizations had always participated in these conferences sponsored by the Ministry of Education. But beginning in 1960, the ministry established a separate conference especially for representatives of women's groups. The purpose of this meeting was for women's groups at the prefectural level to discuss their activities, procedures, and management.

As Japan's postwar economic recovery entered a period of high-speed growth in the late 1950s and 60s, budgets for women's social education programs increased dramatically. A year after the end of World War II, the Ministry of Education allocated less than 100 thousand yen for women's education conferences, research, and motherhood classes. Ten years later, the budget had grown to close to 5 million yen. By 1965, over 100 million yen were being spent on women's education, with 63 percent going to women's social education classes, 19 percent to promoting women's education, 10 percent to women's groups, 6 percent to research on women's education, and 2 percent for other activities. This sum is in addition to the nearly 100 million yen budgeted for women's programs on childrearing and education in the home (Ministry of Education 1965).

The involvement of the Social Education Bureau in women's education policy reflects the Japanese government's active role in informal education in the home, in addition to formal education in the schools. This approach views women as the teachers of social education in their role as mothers. The commitment to social education and central role of women in this endeavor help explain the close connection between the Ministry of Education and women, despite the early reservations of American Occupation authorities. The Social Education Bureau has since been renamed the Lifelong Learning Bureau, but it continues to serve as a key institution of women's policy through its Gender Equality Division.

In addition to the Ministries of Labor and Education, the Ministry of Agriculture has an office dedicated to women's policy issues. The Women and Life Division was established in 1990, within the Bureau of Farming, Sericulture, and Horticulture of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. As an increasing number of Japanese women leave the countryside for the city, this division was created to improve the quality of life for women in rural, mountain, and fishing villages. Its programs are designed to address problems of health, household economy, farm management, and to promote the role of women in decision making, for example, as members or officials of agricultural cooperatives. Since the government reorganization of 2001, rural women's issues have been taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture's Bureau of Management, Division for Women Employed in Agriculture, in the Section to Promote Policies Aimed at Women and the Elderly.

Although its short history and limited mandate make it less pivotal to women's policy making than its counterparts in the Ministries of Labor or Education, the Ministry of Agriculture's women's policy division deserves mention because, out of the twelve ministries that currently make up Japan's national government, there are just three that have offices specifically designated to address women's issues. Historically, the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Labor, the Women's Education Division in the Social Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education, and, to a lesser extent, the Women and Life Division of the Ministry of Agriculture have all been important sites for developing and implementing women's policy. But beginning in the mid-1970s, the Japanese government has undertaken an effort to centralize women's policy making within the Prime Minister's Office.

136

Current Structure

Since the United Nation's Declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year, the Japanese government has created a number of new institutions to address women's policy issues. These institutions were formed in response to guidelines issued at World Conferences on Women urging governments of participating countries to establish a "national machinery," defined as "a single body or complex organized system of bodies, often under different authorities, but recognized by the government as the institution dealing with the promotion of the status of women" (Council on Gender Equality 1996). This national machinery, developed over the past 25 years, represents a shift away from a ministry by ministry approach towards a centralized infrastructure for addressing women's policy issues. While individual ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, remain active on women's issues, the center of women's policy making has been officially placed under the Prime Minister within the Cabinet Office (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

National Machinery for the Promotion of Gender Equality
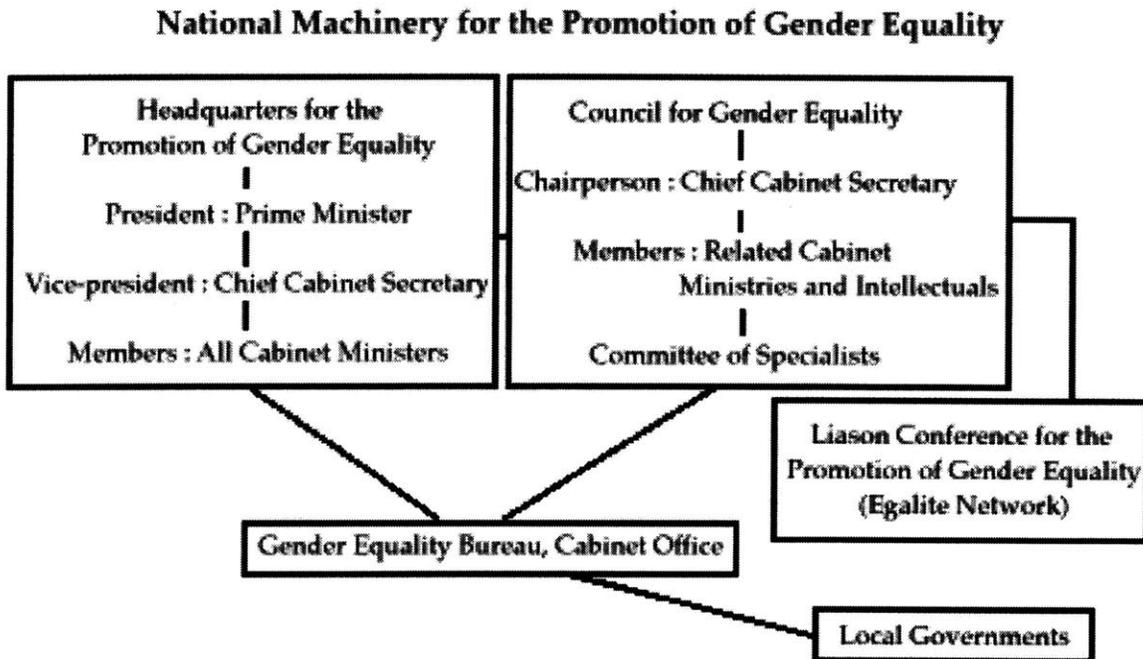
Source: Gender Equality Bureau website. http://www. 8.cao.go.jp/danjyo

Soon after the First World Conference of the International Women's Year held in Mexico City in 1975, Japan established, within the Prime Minister's Office, the Headquarters for the Planning and Promoting of Policies Relating to Women, with the Prime Minister acting as President, the Chief Cabinet Secretary as Vice-President, and Vice-Ministers of ten ministries and agencies serving as members. The government also appointed the Advisory Council on Women's Affairs made up of 33 representatives from the public to serve as advisors to the Headquarters. The administrative work of the Headquarters was to be carried out by the newly created Office for Women's Affairs.

Since their establishment, these institutions, making up Japan's national machinery for the advancement of women have been gradually elevated within

the structure of government. In 1986, the membership of the Headquarters was expanded to include the Vice-Ministers of all 22 ministries and agencies. In 1994, the Headquarters officially became part of the Cabinet. But rather than have a separate ministry for women's affairs, all cabinet ministers serve as members of the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality, with the Prime Minister acting as President, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary serving as Vice President as well as Minister of Gender Equality. Each ministry and agency designates an administrative body within their organization to be charged with gender equality issues. For example, the Ministry of Education's Division of Gender Equality Learning serves this purpose. A less obvious example is the Defense Agency's designation of its Second Personnel Division to address gender equality issues, and to assist the agency's representative to the Cabinet Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

The Japanese government has also made significant changes to the institutions that support the efforts of the Cabinet Headquarters. As part of the 1994 reforms, the Advisory Council on Women's Affairs was restructured and renamed the Advisory Council for Gender Equality. In its current form, the Council for Gender Equality is made up of a maximum of 25 members, with at least 40 percent of each sex represented. They are appointed by the Prime Minister for a two year term, and are charged with advising the Prime Minister and Cabinet on policies to promote gender equality. Members include government ministry and agency officials as well as representatives from the public, such as academics and leaders of women's groups. Additionally, in 1994, the Office of Women's Affairs became the Office of Gender Equality. This office has since been elevated to a full-fledged Cabinet Bureau. The Bureau of Gender Equality is charged with the day to day administrative work of the Cabinet Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality. It is staffed by full-time

civil servants, and organized by specific duties, which include research and data collection, coordinating regional government activities, international exchange, consulting with politicians and political parties, working with women's organizations, and disseminating information by publishing a newsletter *Egalite* and maintaining a website.

Finally, to further encourage public participation in women's policy making, the Liaison Conference for the Promotion of Gender Equality (or Egalite Network) was established in 1996. This branch of the national machinery is made up of 80 representatives of women's groups, business leaders, media personalities, and educators to widen public access and input to government action on women's issues. Although largely symbolic, this institutional link between policy makers and non-governmental organizations represents an unusual level of openness and cooperation for traditionally insulated Japanese bureaucrats.

National Plan of Action

In addition to the establishment of a national machinery for the advancement of women, the World Conferences on Women have urged participating countries to develop their own "National Plan of Action" as a blueprint for national strategies to achieve a gender equal society. Following the First World Conference in 1975, the Japanese government adopted a National Plan of Action in 1977. Formulating this plan was the first major task of the newly formed Headquarters for the Planning and Promoting of Policies Relating to Women under the Prime Minister's Office. The plan lays out basic principles and goals for guiding women's policy development over the next ten years. It calls for raising the status of women under the legal system, promoting women's

equal participation in all fields, respecting mothers and protecting their health, ensuring stability and security in old age, and advancing international cooperation.

In the years that followed, the National Plan of Action underwent a series of revisions to comply with guidelines issued at subsequent World Conferences on Women. In 1985, the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women was held in Nairobi, Kenya. In addition to reviewing progress made over the previous decade, participants of this conference adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to serve as guidelines for the implementation of concrete measures by national governments. As the ten-year term of Japan's original National Plan of Action expired in 1987, the Headquarters for Women's Policies authored the "New National Plan of Action Towards the Year 2000," in accordance with the Nairobi directives. This new plan was again revised in 1991, as the United Nations Economic and Social Council issued recommendations after its review of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing, China, a Platform for Action was adopted to identify critical areas of concern to women, and to call upon national governments to develop a plan for addressing these issues by the end of 1996. In December of 1996, Japan fulfilled its obligation by issuing a new version of its National Plan of Action entitled "Plan for Gender Equality Year 2000." This plan is largely based on the recommendations of the Council on Gender Equality, contained in the report *Vision of Gender Equality--Creating New Values for the 21st Century*, and submitted to the Prime Minister in July of 1996.

The resulting National Plan of Action is divided into three parts. Part One lays out the basic philosophy behind the plan, and defines a gender equal society

141

as "a society in which both women and men are guaranteed equal opportunity to participate voluntarily in activities in all fields, and receive equal political, economic, social, and cultural benefits, while taking equal responsibility" (Office of Gender Equality 1996). Part Two outlines the basic direction and concrete measures of the plan. The issues addressed are women's participation in government, gender consciousness raising, women's employment, outreach to rural women, reconciling work and family life, care for senior citizens, violence against women, women and the media, health and reproductive rights, women's education, and women's contribution to global society. Part Three describes measures for the implementation of the plan, which include regular monitoring of progress, information collection and dissemination, and strengthening the national machinery for the advancement of women. In accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, this plan was to be implemented by the year 2000.

Japan's National Plan of Action has come a long way since its original inception in 1977. From five basic issue areas, the plan has grown considerably in subsequent versions, with the most recent plan addressing eleven issue areas for women. Also, changes in the language of the plan over a twenty year period reveal a shift in focus from "equality between men and women" (*danjo byodo*) to "men and women's joint participation" (*danjo kyodo sankaku*). Japanese government documents published in English translate both terms as "gender equality," but the subtle difference between the two terms may reflect an ambivalence towards literal equality between the sexes that is prevalent in Japan's discourse on gender relations.[1]

The development of Japan's plan of action has been spurred by guidelines adopted at UN sponsored World Conferences on Women, showing Japan to be

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[1] For more on this discourse, see Chapter Two's section on public debates over equality.

remarkably responsive to international pressure on women's issues. Although the plan contains mostly general principles rather than specific measures, it provides a blueprint for action and standards by which to measure Japan's progress towards gender equality. Most recently, the National Plan of Action proved to be important in laying the groundwork for landmark legislation.

Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society

Shortly after the legislature passed a law to officially establish the Council on Gender Equality in 1997, the Prime Minister asked the advisory council to recommend measures to promote the realization of a gender equal society as part of an overall inquiry into formulating legislation. A year later, the Council came out with its report, which was followed by two months of public comment. From mid-June until the end of July of 1998, the advisory council held public hearings in six cities across Japan, and solicited a total of 3,611 written comments. Based on this feedback, the council issued its final report in November. The following February, a bill was brought before the Diet, and was quickly adopted. In June of 1999, the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society went into effect.

A Basic Law is distinguished from other types of legislation in that it provides a general, comprehensive, framework for future laws to be enacted to address specific issues. For example, Japan's Basic Law on Education of 1947 contains an Article stating that educational activities in the home, workplace, and other areas outside of formal schooling should be encouraged by national and local governments by providing public facilities, such as libraries, museums, and public halls. Based on this general principle, specific laws were subsequently adopted, including the Social Education Law in 1949, the Public Library Law in 1950, and the Museum Law in 1951. In this way, one general article of a basic law

spawned a series of laws, each addressing concrete issues while adhering to the spirit of the original basic law.

The Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society is similarly general in its provisions, with the expectation that specific measures will be adopted in the future. Following its preamble, the law is divided into three sections. The first twelve articles include the purpose, definitions, and general provisions advocating respect for human rights, attention to gender socialization, equality in public and private sector decision making, consideration for family life, and international cooperation. These articles also state that the promotion of a gender equal society should be pursued by the state, local government, individual citizens, and legislative measures. And the government must submit an annual progress report to the Diet. The second section of the Basic Law provides guidelines for actions to be taken towards the formation of a gender equality society. Articles 13 through 20 include a mandate for the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Council for Gender Equality to develop a Basic Plan for Gender Equality, which should contain comprehensive, long-term policy recommendations. This section of the law also directs prefectural and municipal governments to formulate their own plans for gender equality. There are also provisions to initiate a public awareness campaign, develop a system for processing complaints of gender bias, conduct relevant research, and promote international exchange. The final section, Articles 21 through 26, address the Council for Gender Equality. These Articles stipulate the duties, organization, and the terms of service for council members in their role as advisors to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet on gender issues. Overall, the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society is not very long or detailed, but it represents a foundation on which to build specific, concrete policy measures to address gender inequality in Japan.

As mandated by the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society, the Cabinet approved the government's Basic Plan for Gender Equality in December of 2000. The Basic Plan is the latest version of Japan's National Plan of Action, so it builds upon the previous Plan for Gender Equality 2000. The structure of the two plans are identical. First, the plan lays out its basic philosophy. Second, it outlines policy objectives for eleven women's issue areas. Finally, the plan describes measures for implementation, which include strengthening existing institutions of women's policy making, collecting and disseminating data and information, and supporting the efforts of regional and local governments as well as non-governmental organizations.

The eleven issues areas addressed by the Basic Plan are identical to those stated in the Plan for Gender Equality 2000. These are women's participation in government, gender consciousness raising, women's employment, outreach to rural women, reconciling work and family life, care for senior citizens, violence against women, women and the media, health and reproductive rights, women's education, and women's contribution to global society. For each of these issue areas, the Basic Plan charts out a basic policy direction for the decade ending in 2010, then outlines concrete policy measures to be implemented by 2005. For example, one of the long-term goals of the Basic Plan is to increase women's participation in policy making. The basic policy direction for the next ten years includes efforts to increase the number of women on government advisory councils which are instrumental to the formulation of policy in Japan. A concrete measure proposed for the next five years is to set a goal of 30 percent women on each advisory council, and to monitor, analyze, and make public progress towards this goal. In this way, the Basic Plan represents a step forward since the

passage of the Basic Law in that it begins to set out a course of action for achieving the goals spelled out by the Basic Law. Nevertheless, the policy measures contained in the Basic Plan are only recommendations, which must be followed-up by actual legislation to have any meaningful impact.

Since the enactment of the Basic Law in 1999, the one area in which the Basic Law and the Basic Plan have led to the adoption of new legislation is domestic violence. One of the eleven issue areas addressed by the Basic Plan is violence against women. The Plan stresses the importance of raising public awareness of the issue, and thoroughly recognizing violence against women as a crime punishable by law. It also calls for creating an environment in which victims of violence can find support and counseling.

This general policy direction contained in the Basic Plan coincided with efforts already underway by the Council on Gender Equality. In 1997, the Prime Minister charged the council with making basic policy recommendations for addressing violence against women. In response, the council held hearings with experts and relevant ministries and agencies, and conducted a nationwide survey of 3,405 adults, 1,773 of whom were women. This survey found that 4.6 percent of women suffer from life-threatening violence at the hands of their husbands or partners (Council on Gender Equality 2000). The council's report was issued in July of 2000, and within one year, the Diet had adopted the Law on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and Protection of Victims. The law empowers district courts to issue restraining orders on spouses or partners shown to be physically violent. A maximum one year prison sentence or a fine of up to one million yen may be imposed for failure to comply. The law also calls for prefectural governments to support shelters for victims of domestic violence. The provisions for domestic violence shelters go into effect in April of 2002, with all other parts of the law going into effect in October of 2001.

Japan's recently adopted law against domestic violence demonstrates how the largely symbolic Basic Law and Basic Plan for gender equality has the potential to bring about substantive legislation. The Basic Law provides the official mandate for legislative action on women's issues. The Basic Plan sets the agenda for women's policy by identifying the main issues to be addressed, and charting out the basic policy direction for these issues. The Law on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and Protection of Victims is the first of many laws that must be passed in order to flesh out the skeletal framework provided by the Basic Law and Basic Plan.

Given the general consensus around the prevention of violence against women, the passage of the domestic violence law proceded relatively quickly in an otherwise slow and incremental process. It remains to be seen how effective Japan's approach to women's policy making will be when the issues become more contentious and controversial. For example, the Council on Gender Equality is re-visiting the issue of separate surnames for married couples, which in the past has failed to be legalized. But with the development of a national machinery for women's policy making, there is, at least, an institutional infrastructure for addressing women's policy concerns. This infrastructure at the national policy making level extends down to the prefectural and local levels as well.

Prefectural and Local Institutions

Throughout the development of Japan's national machinery for women's policy, prefectural and local governments have established their own institutions which mirror those of the central government. These institutions include prefectural and local government offices charged with coordinating women's

policy, advisory councils made up of members of the public, and plans of action to be implemented at the prefectural and local levels. The Basic Law of 1999 and the Basic Plan of 2000 call on local governments to adopt policies that correspond to national measures for gender equality. Because the central government mandates local efforts, they tend to be uniform across prefectures and cities, and closely resemble programs and policies adopted at the national level.

Since 1988, all 47 prefectures and 12 designated cities have established government offices charged with planning and coordinating women's policy. These offices exist at varying levels of importance within the hierarchy of Japanese bureaucracy. According to this well-established system, bureaus (*kyoku*) are the largest sub-division of government ministries or agencies, followed by divisions (*bu*), which are again divided into sections (*ka*), which may be further specialized by offices (*shitsu*). For example, at the national level, the body charged with the day to day administrative work of the Prime Minister's Headquarters for Gender Equality started out as the Office for Women's Affairs, but was eventually elevated to the Bureau of Gender Equality, indicating an increase in staff, resources, and stature.

Similarly, at the prefectural level, the administrative offices charged with women's policy fit into this bureaucratic structure, though at various levels across prefectures. For example, the prefecture of Tochigi has a Women and Youth section within their Living Environment Division. But neighboring Gunma Prefecture has a Women's Policy Office within the Prefectural Citizens' Living Section of the Living Environment Division. Of the 59 prefectures and designated cities, 24 have offices for women's administration, 34 have sections, 1 has a full division, but none has a whole bureau dedicated to women's policy issues (Prime Minister's Office 2000b).

The budgets of these women's administration offices vary. In 1997, Tokyo had the largest annual budget of over 1.5 billion yen (roughly $13 million at 120 yen to the dollar). Akita prefecture spent the least, with a budget slightly over 20 million yen (about $170 thousand). The average annual budget across the 47 prefectures was about 227 million yen (around $2 million) (Prime Minister's Office 1997).

In addition to administrative units charged with women's policy, all prefectures and designated cities have administrative liaison councils based on the central government model. At the national level, the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality is headed by the Prime Minister and made up of all Cabinet Ministers in order to coordinate the efforts of various ministries on behalf of women's policy issues. Similarly, at the prefectural level, the administrative liaison councils tend to be headed by the governor or vice-governor and made up of representatives from various administrative divisions within the prefectural government. These councils meet once or twice a year to discuss and coordinate women's policy initiatives.

Two other national institutions for women's policy have been adopted at the prefectural and city level. All prefectural governments and designated cities have developed their own Plan of Action for promoting gender equality. One of the key issues at this level of government is increasing the number of women on prefectural government advisory councils and within the civil service. Prefectural and city governments have also established their own outside advisory councils modeled after the national Council on Gender Equality. Like their national counterpart, these councils tend to be made up of professors, journalists, and representatives of civic groups, with both women and men serving as members.

Within each prefecture, there have also been efforts to develop women's policy measures at the city, ward, town, and village level. But these efforts have been far less successful than at the prefectural level. As of 1997, less than 12 percent of cities, wards, towns, and villages had adopted a local Plan of Action for gender equality, as urged by the central government. Notable exceptions are Tokyo and Osaka with 70 to 80 percent of their localities having plans, and Saitama and Kanagawa at over 50 percent. Nevertheless, Japan's overall women's policy infrastructure is impressive for its breadth, spanning across all Cabinet Ministries of the central government, and for its depth, reaching down to sub-national levels of government to the prefectures, designated cities, and, to a lesser extent, the cities, wards, towns, and villages. At the national level, the Headquarters on the Promotion of Gender Equality, headed by the Prime Minister and made up of all Cabinet members, ensures that policy makers at the highest level of government are at least symbolically involved in efforts to promote the status of women. Rather than establish a separate Ministry for Women's Affairs, as some countries have done, Japan's approach has been to have all existing ministries and agencies designate an administrative unit to be charged with women's policy issues for that ministry or agency. While individual cabinet ministers may lack expertise on women's issues, the Council for Gender Equality, made up of scholars, business people, and civic leaders, serves as an advisory body to the headquarters. This advisory council, in turn, receives input from the general public through the Liaison Conference for the Promotion of Gender Equality (Egalite Network) representing 80 national organizations. All of these efforts are supported and coordinated by the Cabinet Ministry's Bureau of Gender Equality which is the administrative unit that provides the staff and resources for carrying out the day to day operations of the Headquarters and the Council. Finally, the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society,

along with the Basic Plan for Gender Equality establish the general principles and guidelines for the developing women's policy on a wide range of issues. All of these national institutions of women's policy making have been adopted at the prefectural and designated city levels, and are just starting to reach local governments.

Over the past 25 years, Japan has developed this very elaborate infrastructure for addressing women's policy issues. Spurred by commitments made at International Women's Conferences, the Japanese government has established a national machinery of government institutions, along with a national plan of action. With this system in place, there is no question that women's issues have made it onto the political agenda in Japan. According to Ohno Teruko, Director General of the National Women's Education Center, with the cabinet level Bureau for Gender Equality in place, the exchange of information and the amount of policy input and feedback may be highest for women, compared with other civic groups (Ohno 2001).

The extraordinary set of political institutions specifically dedicated to promoting women's policy makes the lack of progress on gender equality even more puzzling in the Japanese case. With national and sub-national government institutions in place, guided by legislation and official plans of action, it would seem that women's organizations would be poised to generate sweeping policy change. But, while all of these institutions of women's policy making provide multiple points of access, the question remains: access for whom?

Uneven Access to Policy Making

The establishment of numerous institutions for women's policy shows that the Japanese government has gone to great lengths to allow for political

151

input from women's organizations. Nevertheless, these institutions are, by no means, neutral black boxes that take in women's' input and turn out women's policy. In practice, the particular way in which political institutions are structured creates inherent biases that make them more or less accessible to different types of organizations. In the Japanese case, the centralized, hierarchical structure of women's policy making fits together with a highly centralized federation of national women's organizations that has gained a privileged position among women's interest groups by virtue of its representational coverage and political connections.

International Women's Year Liaison Group

The same international events that prodded the Japanese government to adopt institutions of women's policy making also mobilized women's groups to adopt new organizational forms. To commemorate the United Nations' declaration of International Women's Year, a national women's conference was held in Japan in November of 1975. Forty-one national women's organizations participated in this conference and formed an alliance called the Liaison Group for the Implementation of Resolutions from the International Women's Year Conference of Japan, or International Women's Year Liaison Group (IWYLG). In accordance with the main themes of International Women's Year, the IWYLG's stated goals are equality, development, and peace.

Throughout the UN Decade for Women, the IWYLG organized national women's conferences in Japan to coincide with World Conferences for Women. Forty-eight national women's organizations participated in the 1980 Japan Conference, and 51 groups met at the 1985 conference. Currently, the IWYG is

made up of 49 national women's organizations, which continue to convene a nation-wide women's conference every five years.

The organizations that make up the IWYLG are prominent, long-standing, mainstream women's groups, including the Housewives Association, Mothers Congress, Japan Women's Temperance Union, Girl Scouts of Japan, plus numerous professional and labor associations. The IWYLG reports the combined membership of all of its participating organizations as 23 million, which is roughly equivalent to one-third the female population in Japan. However, it does not account for overlapping memberships of individual women belonging to multiple associations.

The most important activity of the IWYLG is to submit proposals to the government in response to women's policy issues. Typically, when a relevant issue arises, the IWYLG first holds a study group, then meets with government officials to receive information and a formal explanation of the policy proposal. The IWYLG then submits a brief, formal document to the relevant ministry or advisory council stating their policy position and demands.

Since its founding in 1975, the IWYLG have been active on a number of important policy issues, including changes to Japan's nationality law, so that Japanese nationality is not determined only by the father's bloodline but also the mother, and naturalization requirements for foreigners married to Japanese are the same for women and men. The liaison group was also involved in the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. On the education front, the group lobbied to change the requirement that only girls take home economics in school, so that both boys and girls now take these courses.

Over the years, what began as a loose federation of women's groups has become increasingly structured and organized. The IWYLG has alternating leadership and yearly membership dues. Member groups must be national

organizations, with a responsible representative. They must have rules, and regulations, and be approved for membership by unanimous consent of participating groups. The liaison group is based at the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association's Women's Suffrage Center, where it maintains an office and part-time paid staff. Although the IWYLG operates by unanimous consent in principle, not all member groups are always in agreement. Groups that disagree with the liaison group may have their names removed from any formal documents stating the policy position of the IWYLG. Also, as the number of relevant women's policy issues have increased, separate conferences have been organized in addition to the national conference held every five years. Funding for the national conference comes from participating organizations, the sale of publications, and donations which are mostly from individuals.

Preferential Access

A huge membership base with national representation, along with politically well-placed leadership, has given the IWYLG a privileged position in the policy making process. By claiming a representational monopoly over women's political interests, the IWYLG has gained government recognition as the voice of the women's movement. In return, the government need only hear from a single, centralized organization, thus making the process of incorporating women's input into public policy much more manageable than dealing with a cacophony of demands from numerous women's groups.

This mutually beneficial relationship between the IWYLG and the government resembles political arrangements between the state and peak associations representing labor and capital, which spawned a whole literature on "corporatism" in the 1970s. Although this model of interest intermediation is

154

primarily associated with class organizations in northern and western Europe, the concepts have been applied widely to non-economic interest groups (Schmitter 1979, Offe 1981) and non-European settings (Pempel and Tsunekawa 1979).

Essentially, corporatism describes a political system in which the state grants a single, dominant, interest association special status and access to decision making in exchange for compliance, restraint, and support for government policies. According to this literature, such arrangements evolved as governments became more active and interest groups multiplied, leading to system overload and problems of "ungovernability." In theory, corporatism offers a way for governments to manage their overloaded agendas by dealing with a large but single organization that can claim to represent an entire interest category, such as labor, consumers, or women. Policy discussions between state officials and representatives of peak associations often take place behind closed doors, thus bypassing the usual cumbersome process of adopting legislation through parliament. In return for this privileged access to policy making, the leadership of key interest associations are supposed to ensure that their members support government policies, or at the very least, keep political protest within designated, legal channels and out of the streets.

While corporatist theory has long fallen out of fashion, some of its concepts and critiques are useful for understanding the relationship between the IWYLG and the government in Japan. Like the peak associations of labor and capital described in the corporatist literature, the IWYLG enjoys wide coverage as a federation of national women's organizations, as well as high density, purporting to represent a large portion of the female population of Japan. While not created by the state, the liaison group was organized under the leadership of pioneer suffragist and Diet member Ichikawa Fusae, whose position in

155

government gave the association instant credibility and political access. With such a large membership base and close political connections, the IWYLG has been able to gain a practical representational monopoly over women's interests in the national policy making process.

The special status of this women's peak association has been established through regular channels of communication with government officials on policy issues affecting women. Typically, when a relevant policy issue arises, ministry officials meet with representatives from the IWYLG to exchange information and receive input on policy proposals. Meetings are also held at government offices for the benefit of IWYLG members to hear the policy positions of each of the major political parties. The political clout of the liaison group is also demonstrated by the presence of high ranking government officials at its national conferences, including the Prime Minister and Chief Cabinet Secretary.

The connection between the IWYLG and the government has been further institutionalized through the creation of the Liaison Conference for the Promotion of Gender Equality, or Egalite Network. This arm of the government's national machinery for women's policy making was created in 1996 to ensure public input on policy matters. The Egalite Network is comprised of eighty prominent citizens, including professors, journalists, lawyers, and representatives of business and civic groups. Not surprisingly, there is a high degree of overlapping membership between the government's Egalite Network and the IWYLG. Out of the 28 women's groups represented on the Egalite Network, 23 are members of the IWYLG.

The privileged political position of the International Women's Year Liaison Group reveals an inherent bias within Japan's institutions of women's policy making. Rather than offer an open market place in which all women's interest groups can make their demands and compete for influence, the Japanese system

156

favors the consolidation of many women's interests into a single peak association. Like the government's women's policy making apparatus, the IWYLG has a centralized, hierarchical structure and a focus on national policy issues. As they developed in tandem over the past 25 years, the liaison group and the government's national machinery have established multiple channels of communication with each other, thereby creating a cooperative and efficient system of incorporating women's input into public policy.

While this system has achieved a level of "governability" over potentially contentious relations between the state and women, critiques of European corporatism have raised important questions about such arrangements. For example, how inclusive are these peak associations, and which interests do they represent? In the case of Japan's International Women's Year Liaison Group, only large, long-standing, national organizations are represented. Small, grassroots, local women's groups are not included in this peak association. Also, because Japan's institutions of women's policy making are so heavily centralized at the national level, there are few points of access for local women's groups.

As for the interests represented by the IWYLG, the member organizations are all mainstream, national associations that seek to improve the status of women through established political channels and incremental change. The decidedly conservative tone of the liaison group was originally set by founder Ichikawa Fusae when she called for the exclusion of women's organizations which focus solely on women's liberation or sex discrimination. She expressed concern that there would be a gap between these feminist organizations and other member organizations with a more general focus, such a consumer groups, that view women's issues as just one part of its activities (Shikuma, et al. 1997: 86). Ichikawa's preference for subsuming women's issues under other causes is reflected in the large number of IWYLG member organizations that

157

represent women as consumers, voters, Christians, workers, or farmers, as opposed to feminists.

Given the centralized, hierarchical structure of Japan's institutions of women's policy making, the formation of a peak association provides an efficient way for women to gain access to the policy making process. By combining the memberships of numerous national organizations, and claiming to speak for millions of women, the IWYLG is guaranteed a spot at the bargaining table with policy makers. Nevertheless, the granting of a representational monopoly to a single organization, no matter how large, inevitably means that some groups are left out. In the Japanese case, it is the grassroots, local women's groups that lack political access. Also, in its effort to gain ever wider coverage and represent even more women, the IWYLG's interests become increasingly diffuse, and its demands watered down. The resulting lowest common denominator tends to be general and symbolic as opposed to specific and substantive. While Japan's elaborate national machinery for women's policy offers institutionalized points of access to women's organizations, this access is uneven, favoring large, national associations with general or moderate political goals.

Two-way Access Through Women's Policy

Although Japanese laws regulating interest group activity have been shown to hamper the ability of grassroots organizations to raise funds and professionalize their activities, other government policies have directly aided women's groups, albeit at the price of autonomy. In addition to providing physical space and resources through public women's centers, the Japanese government has long supported select women's groups through various funding programs administered by the Ministry of Education. These programs

158

are consistent with a pattern of state involvement in the women's movement that offers access, aid, and resources to women's groups, but, at the same time, discourages their independent development.

Women's Groups and Social Education

Following the end of World War II, Japan adopted its Basic Law on Education, which contains the basis for government support of social education programs. Article 7 of the Basic Law states that educational activities in the home, workplace, and other places in society should be encouraged by national and local government. The law makes clear that the government is responsible not only for providing classroom instruction for its citizens, but also for encouraging on-going education outside the classroom, through the provision of community centers, youth and adult education courses, libraries, museums and other educational facilities.

In 1949, the Social Education Law was adopted to define the social education responsibilities of national and local government bodies, based on the principles set out by the Basic Law on Education. Chapter 3 of the Social Education Law addresses the government's relationship with non-governmental organizations whose main purpose is to carry out programs related to social education. Originally, Article 13 prohibited government subsidies to these types of voluntary associations, in accordance with American Occupation efforts to cut ties between the state and civic groups that were mobilized so effectively during the war. But most social education organizations found it difficult to survive without government sponsorship, and continued to seek assistance and cooperation from local government authorities. In 1959, seven years after the end of the American Occupation, the Social Education Law was amended to

allow government subsidies to social education organizations (Shimbori and Kishimoto 1975).

Women's groups were included under the law's broad definition of social education organizations. Therefore, many women's groups benefited from the amended Social Education Law, especially regional women's groups which were the dominant form of women's organization in the immediate postwar period. Beginning in 1960, a year after the law was amended, Ministry of Education budget records show how the government provided funding to select women's organizations to carry out social education programs on subjects ranging from personal hygiene to public morality. These subsidies created a strong financial incentive for women's groups to administer programs consistent with the government's social education agenda, and, in effect, to serve as government sub-contractors. In this way, public funding of women's organizations represents an important avenue of access and influence between the government and the women's movement.

Regional Women's Groups

By far, the leading beneficiary of government aid to women's groups has been regional women's associations. Throughout the 1960s, the Ministry of Education gave these groups over 90 million yen in aid to carry out various social education programs (Table 4.1). The groups receiving this aid were almost entirely regional women's associations at the prefectural level. Typically, each prefecture's regional women's group would receive funds for one major project or program a year. Beginning in 1966, two or three national organizations also received funding each year.

Table 4.1
Yearly Budget for Government Subsidized Programs for Women's Social
Education, 1960-1969

Year	Budget (unit=1,000 yen)	Number of groups receiving aid
1960	N/A	38
1961	8,000	48
1962	8.960	45
1963	10,260	46
1964	11,650	46
1965	10,086	45
1966	9,780	48
1967	12,600	49
1968	11,800	48
1969	10,329	44

Source: Ministry of Education. 1960-1969. *Fujin kyoiku no genjo* (*The present state of women's education*). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

The substance of these subsidized programs reveals the government's goals for the social education of women during this period (Figure 4.2). Strengthening the management and leadership skills of women was an important priority for the government, as leaders of women's groups would be needed to help educate and mobilize women at the grassroots level for various state sponsored campaigns. In terms of substantive issues, household management, including consumer education, and child and youth education were the most prevalent topics addressed by government funded programs. On such issues vital to the state's social education mission, the government was able to reach women in all corners of the country by utilizing the networks and resources of regional women's groups.

Figure 4.2
Substance of Government Subsidized Women's Programs, 1960-1969
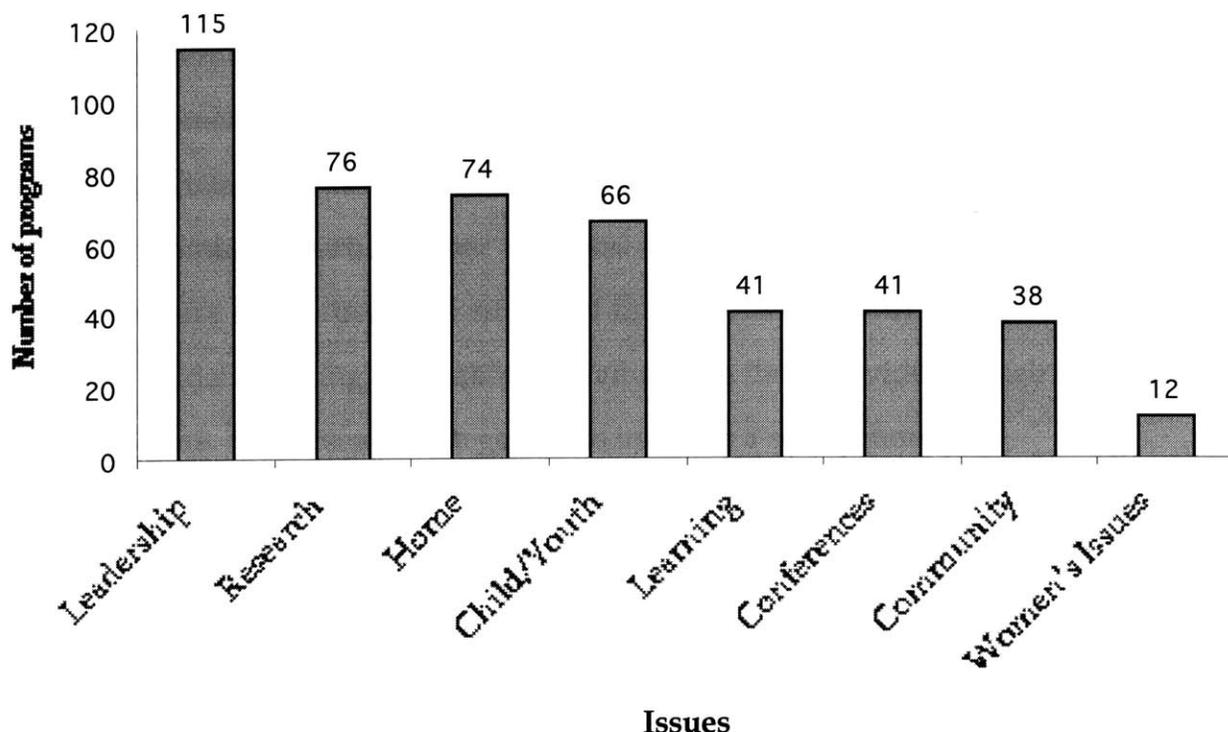
Issues

Source: Ministry of Education. 1960-1969. *Fujin kyoiku no genjo* (*The present state of women's education*). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

The largest number of funded programs were designed to teach leadership and management skills for organizing and maintaining women's associations. For example, in 1966, Tochigi Prefecture's Regional Women's Association requested funding for the second of five planned annual leadership training workshops for Tochigi women leaders based at women's centers. The proposed workshop would have roughly 150 participants, including 100 for general leadership education and 58 for specialized technical training. The subjects covered would include "leadership and the character of women's groups," "learning activities and social activities," "education and the home," "household planning and consumer economics," and "specialized technical training for social education--a course on projection technology." The total cost of

162

this workshop was estimated at 475,850 yen, 200,000 of which was paid for by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education 1966).

The government also subsidized numerous research projects carried out by regional women's groups. Almost all of these projects involved some type of survey research, usually asking women about household management, child rearing, or community participation. A typical example is Saga Prefecture's regional women's association 1965 survey of three thousand mothers of junior high school students asking them about the education they provide for their children at home. The research category also includes a small number of subsidies granted to regional women's groups to put out publications.

Educational programs dealing with household management also received a substantial amount of the government aid. These programs approached basic concerns such as food, clothing, and shelter from a seemingly scientific perspective, exhorting housewives to economize and rationalize their household activities. Some regional women's groups held "kitchen conferences," to teach women how to improve their diet and prepare nutritional meals for their families. Many programs emphasized consumer education, teaching women about food and product safety, as well as how to manage the household budget. One example is the 1961 "Ishikawa prefecture realization of daily life improvement exhibition and presentation." Through "daily living classrooms" in three locations, over a nine day period, this program reached over three thousand women, with the goal of "promoting a new life movement, based on new knowledge and technical research on the household management of clothing, food, and shelter" (Ministry of Education 1961).

A related and almost equally popular subject for government subsidized programs was child and youth home education. While some of these programs provided for informal discussion and counseling on childrearing, most involved

research based workshops and study groups on effective home education methods. For example, in 1965, Yamagata prefecture's regional women's group received government aid to hold their "Home Education Study Activities and Research Conference" in twenty-two locations with over four thousand participants. Based on survey data collected on the actual condition of infants in Yamagata, each local conference was to "...investigate how to capture and put into practice the special character of early childhood education" (Ministry of Education 1965).

Other less frequently funded programs involved women's learning, conferences, and community activities. Women's learning programs were usually prefecture-wide study sessions or reading groups on a variety of topics, such as literature, history, and art. Women's conferences were mostly to bring together regional women's groups within a single prefecture to discuss a number of general women's issues. Community activity programs encouraged women to become active on behalf of such causes as traffic safety, neighborhood beautification, and pollution control. Also, many of these programs mobilized women to participate in public morality campaigns. For example, the Hiroshima prefecture regional women's association held the "Women's General Meeting for Uplifting Public Morality" in 1966. According to the stated purpose of the program, "Sudden economic and social development accompanied by the remarkable growth of material civilization has led to the neglect of public morality and the spiritual side of life. This conference is convened in order to heighten women's consciousness of public morality, and to deepen the recognition of their practical role in raising children in the home and leading a conscientious existence in society." In addition to this central general meeting, there were regional workshops held in six different locations, the establishment of a model district, and year-round activities, including a poster campaign. The

total cost of this program was 838 thousand yen, of which 220 thousand was provided by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education 1966). Such public morality campaigns were most prominent in 1964 as a number of regional women's associations linked efforts to uplift public morality with preparations for the Tokyo Olympics (Ministry of Education 1964).

Finally, the smallest category of programs funded by the government is labeled generally as "women's issues." These include educational programs on women's suffrage and politics, human rights, and women's labor. While these issues go to the very heart of women's movements today, they received surprisingly little attention from regional women's groups and their government subsidized programs in Japan throughout the 1960s.

Based on the overall content analysis of government funded programs during this period, it appears that the highest priority was given to laying the groundwork for women's organization. By subsidizing women's leadership and management training programs and funding survey research on women, the Ministry of Education supported the development of a fledgling women's movement that could eventually be mobilized on behalf government campaigns. Also, as Japan entered a period of high-speed economic growth accompanied by urbanization, a growing middle-class, and the rise of the nuclear family, the Japanese housewife was clearly the target of most of the government funded programs throughout the 1960s. These programs emphasized a pseudo-scientific approach to household management, nutrition, and child rearing. Women's traditional roles were also affirmed by programs promoting community participation, especially as the pillars of public morality in the wake of Japan's growing materialism. At this stage, women's rights, politics, and labor received scant attention from government subsidized programs, as the Ministry of Education and regional women's groups worked closely together to promote

a social education agenda that viewed women primarily as caretakers of the home.

Regional women's groups continued to receive government funding throughout the 1970s. Ministry of Education budget data from 1972 to 1982 show funding to women's organizations related to social education provided by Prefectural and large city boards of education (Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Table 4.2
Board of Education Aid to Regional Women's Associations by Type of Funding, 1972-1982

Year	Aid in 1,000 yen (% of total)	Percentage Grants	Percentage Commission	Percentage Joint Sponsor
1972	59,215 (94)	67.7	27.4	5.9
1973	77,552 (92)	69.2	18.3	12.5
1974	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1975	83,226 (92)	73.1	21.3	5.6
1976	75,696 (93)	72.4	23.9	3.7
1977	81,081 (94)	77.7	19.1	3.2
1978	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1979	159,810 (94)	56.2	41.7	2.1
1980	158,908 (90)	54.2	43.7	2.1
1981	132,843 (86)	66.7	30	3.3
1982	138,351 (93)	65.5	32.3	2.2

Source: Ministry of Education. 1972-1982. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo (The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education).* Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

Table 4.3
Board of Education Aid to Other (Non-regional) Women's Organizations by
Type of Funding, 1972-1982

Year	Aid in 1,000 yen (% of total)	Percentage Grants	Percentage Commission	Percentage Joint Sponsor
1972	3,748 (6)	80.4	17.6	2
1973	7,119 (8)	81.6	12.3	6.1
1974	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1975	7,412 (8)	86.1	10.8	3.1
1976	5,515 (7)	80.6	18.9	0.5
1977	5,419 (6)	87.6	11.8	0.6
1978	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1979	9,405 (6)	50	44.8	5.7
1980	17,161 (10)	76.7	19.7	3.6
1981	21,017 (14)	92.9	6.3	0.8
1982	10,706 (7)	89	10.1	0.6

Source: Ministry of Education. 1972-1982. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo* (*The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education*). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

While the data available do not contain information about the substance of programs which were funded, they do reveal two notable trends in government funding to women's organizations. First, the vast majority of funds went to regional women's associations, which typically received over 90 percent of the total aid available from prefectural and city Boards of Education. Second, the amount of aid is broken down into three distinct forms of funding. The way in which aid was given varies by the amount of government involvement in the process. A majority of government funding was in the form of outright grants which women's groups used for administrative costs and programs or projects of their own design. A second form of funding that became increasingly common over the years was commissioned programs, in which women's organizations administered programs paid for by the government. The least common form of funding was jointly sponsored programs in which the

167

government and women's groups administered programs together. Throughout the 1970s, regional women's associations differed from other women's groups, not only in the amount of government funding they received, but also in the type of funding. Commissioned programs and joint sponsorship were more common in the case of regional women's groups than other groups, suggesting a higher degree of cooperation and a closer relationship with the government.

National Women's Organizations

In addition to regional women's associations, the government has also provided aid to national women's organizations. According to a Ministry of Education report, "The Ministry of Education provides public funding, advice, and guidance in response to requests, while respecting the independence of these groups. The aid given supports part of the necessary expenses for programs administered by organizations that have social and public meaning" (Ministry of Education 1981: 30). Under this aid program, the Ministry of Education gave a total of 421 million yen, or an average of 26 million yen a year to national women's organizations between 1971 and 1987. As stipulated, the aid was used to fund specific programs deemed to have social value, including leadership training workshops, overseas study tours, national conferences, and survey research projects.

What is most remarkable about this program is that the same organizations received this limited funding year after year. In the thirteen years for which the data are available, the same eight national women's organizations were the beneficiaries of this program (Table 4.4). At the same time, the number of women's groups belonging to national organizations swelled from less than

168

five thousand in 1971 to almost thirty-five thousand in 1987. Yet despite the growing number of national women's organizations, the same handful of groups were chosen by the government to receive public funding.

Table 4.4
National Women's Organizations Receiving Government Aid, 1973-1986[2]

National Organization	Years funded
1. National Federation of Regional Women's Organizations	1973-1986
2. Japanese Association of University Women	1973-1986
3. International Women's Education Association	1973-1986
4. National Council of Women's Centers	1974-1986
5. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Japan Section	1977-1986
6. National Federation of Designated Cities' Women's Organizations	1977-1986
7. Japan Association for Women's Education	1976-1977, 1981-1986
8. Shuyodan (youth and home education organization)	1984-1986

Source: Ministry of Education. 1974-1987. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo (The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education).* Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

Women's Volunteer Activities

Giving money directly to women's groups is one way in which the Japanese government has involved itself in the development of the women's movement. Yet another, more subtle, method of influencing women's civic participation is found in government efforts to promote women's volunteer activities. Over the past thirty years and continuing today, the Ministry of Education has promoted women's volunteerism by administering education and outreach programs, and later funding programs proposed by non-governmental

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[2] Excluding 1975 as data were not available for that year.

organizations to further women's social participation. While thousands of women have been prompted to volunteer in their communities, these government programs have by no means been neutral on women's role in civil society. Rather than simply promote volunteerism on behalf of any individually chosen cause, the government encourages women's participation in certain types of activities. The direction in which women's civic participation has been guided is evident in the content of educational programs sponsored by the government from the mid-1970s through the 1980s, and volunteer efforts that received government funding in the 1990s.

Beginning in 1971, the Ministry of Education commissioned the boards of education in twelve large cities to conduct research towards developing policy measures to promote women's volunteer activity. Over a three year period, these cities conducted a number of surveys, studies, and analyses which became the basis of the Ministry of Education's Women's Volunteer Activity Promotion Program, which began in 1976. In its inaugural year, this program was implemented in sixty cities, towns, and villages throughout Japan, with a total of 3,200 participants. At its peak in 1983, over ten thousand women in 225 localities participated in this program (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5
Women's Volunteer Activity Program, 1976-1990

Year	Budget (unit=1,000 yen)	Number of Localities	Number of Participants
1976	60,200	60	3,200
1977	67,200	119	5,800
1978	65,520	163	8,000
1979	65,520	188	8,500
1980	65,520	208	8,500
1981	65,520	221	9,200
1982	62,712	234	10,000
1983	59,904	225	10,600
1984	53,914	212	9,100
1985	48,485	219	8,800
1986	43,740	216	8,400
1987	39,240	216	8,000
1988	35,280	190	7,300
1989	33,086	166	7,200
1990	30,741	138	7,500

Source: Ministry of Education. 1972-1991. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo* (*The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education*). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

The Women's Volunteer Activity Promotion Program was made up of two components--course instruction and volunteer dispatch. First, women enrolled in an instructional course that included a basic course and a specialized course. The basic course covered "the meaning of volunteerism" and "ways in which women should participate in society." The specialized course, provided "technical knowledge necessary according to the substance of the volunteer activity." On average, the entire course involved about thirty hours of instruction. After successfully completing the course, women were sent to various sites to offer their services. These sites included education and welfare facilities, individual residences, non-profit organizations, libraries, and others. On average, each program participant was dispatched to volunteer sites four to five times (Ministry of Education 1972-1991).

What is most remarkable about this program is that it did not simply promote women's community service in and of itself. Rather it was fairly specific about the areas in which women should volunteer. Both the course instruction and volunteer dispatch components of the program were explicitly designed to train and send women to serve children, youth, senior citizens, disabled people, and cultural institutions (Table 4.6). The specialized course instruction covered topics which prepared women to volunteer in these designated areas. For example, women learned about early childhood development, recreational activities for children and youth, caring for the elderly and disabled, and cultural preservation. On average, each locality offered volunteer dispatch programs in three to four of these five subject areas. Between 1976 and 1989, dispatch programs were most common in the area of the elderly, followed by cultural activities, children, youth, and the disabled (Table 4.7).

Table 4.6
Content of Women's Volunteer Activities Promoted by the Government

Area of Activity	Examples of Volunteer Activity
Children	Providing daycare for young mothers attending classes, Reading outloud to children, Providing advice on childrearing, Leading children's play, Puppet theater, Emergency safety measures.
Youth	Leading children's groups, Regional cooking instruction, Leading recreational activities, Directing reading activities, Individual counseling, Guiding latch-key children.
Elderly	Home visits for nursing care or talking, Companionship, Facility visits for nursing care, Leading recreational activities,

172

Learning advice.

Disabled   Home visits for nursing care,
                  Facility visits for nursing care,
                  Braille, sign language, and voice library,
                  Leading recreational activities.

Culture   Preservation of cultural assets,
                  Regional forestation and beautification,
                  Library maintenance and reading activities,
                  Presenting audio and visual teaching materials,
                  Interaction with foreigners,
                  Transmission of native folk songs and artifacts,
                  Advice on women's courses.

Source: Ministry of Education. 1985. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo (The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education)*. Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

Table 4.7
Number of Volunteer Dispatch Programs by Subject Area, 1976-1989

Year	Children	Youth	Elderly	Disabled	Culture
1976	46	37	40	24	26
1977	70	62	76	43	62
1978	112	69	127	76	113
1979	105	98	184	72	129
1980	119	79	211	82	150
1981	135	95	202	88	137
1982	162	132	253	113	189
1983	153	106	227	88	137
1984	169	141	222	101	1b5
1985	134	101	204	90	129
1986	123	67	165	94	142
1987	111	39	177	72	157
1988	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1989	62	24	79	40	19
Total	**1,501**	**1,050**	**2,167**	**983**	**1,601**

Source: Ministry of Education. 1977-1990. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo* (*The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education*). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

Between 1976 and 1990, the Ministry of Education conducted three follow-up surveys of participants who completed the Women's Volunteer Activity Promotion Program. These studies found that about 65 to 70 percent of participants continued their volunteer activities after completing the program. The surveys also compared the types of volunteer activities program graduates went on to pursue with the types of activities they had been offered through the

174

program (Figure 4.3). The numbers are remarkably similar in all three years of the study, indicating that the program succeeded not only in mobilizing women to become volunteers in general, but also in directing women's civic participation towards specific sectors of society.

Figure 4.3
Comparison of the Types of Volunteer Activities Offered in the Program with Types of Volunteer Activities Pursued by Program Graduates (figures below refer to % of total)

	Children	Youth	Elderly	Disabled	Culture	
1980	18.6	12.3	32.9	12.8	23.4	n=641 programs
1981	19.7	12.2	30.8	14.7	22.6	n=9803 people

	Children	Youth	Elderly	Disabled	Culture	
1983	20.2	14	30	11.6	24.2	n=757 programs
1984	13.5	20.3	32	12.1	22.1	n=13799 people

	Children	Youth	Elderly	Disabled	Culture	
1986	20.8	11.3	28	15.9	24	n=591 programs
1987	21.4	12.8	29.5	8.9	27.4	n=16291 people

Source: Ministry of Education. 1988. *Fujin kyoiku oyobi katei kyoiku ni kansuru shisaku no genjo* (*The present state of policies relating to women's education and home education*). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Social Education.

Note: Data represent comparisons between the percentage of programs offered for each subject area with the percentage of women who volunteered in the same area the following year.

175

Beginning in 1990, the Ministry of Education implemented its Special Promotion Program to Support Women's Social Participation. According to the Ministry's outline of the program, its purpose is to "...make use of women's talents, and contribute to the advancement of women's education, by promoting model instructional or practical programs, centered around women's organizations, for various forms of social participation" (Ministry of Education 1999: 1). In practice, the program provides funding to women's organizations to administer their own programs to promote women's social participation. National and regional women's organizations may apply for this funding by submitting a proposal to the Ministry of Education. A Ministry appointed executive committee selects groups to receive funding, and provides guidance and advice in the implementation of all programs. According to one prominent member of the executive committee, the program represents the formation of a partnership between government and non-government organizations (Ministry of Education 1999: 5).

From 1990 to 1998, this program to support women's social participation funded a total of 210 women's organizations nationwide at a cost of close to 552 million yen (or approximately $4.6 million at an exchange rate of 120 yen to the dollar) (Table 4.8). The content of these programs varies, though a large proportion involve *chiiki zukuri*, or regional development (Table 4.9). The top two categories of funded programs are "regional development by the hands of women" and "home and regional development." In this context, regional development includes activities designed to improve or strengthen local communities, such as organizing traditional festivals, erecting signs that point out buildings of historical significance, or publishing and distributing hiking maps of the area. The "home and regional development" category includes activities that link community improvement with family needs, such as creating

open play space for children. Taken together, these two categories represent almost one-third of all the programs that received government funding through the women's social participation program. Also notable are the number of programs that fall under the categories "gender equality consciousness reform" and "environmental issues." While a relatively large number of gender equality programs received funding, over half of these are clustered over a two year period from 1996 to 1997. In contrast, programs related to environmental issues consistently received funding every year from 1990 to 1998. These trends suggest that government support for programs that directly address gender equality has not been as consistent as for other issues, and may be largely dependent on current events or executive committee personnel from year to year.

Table 4.8 Special Promotion Program to Support Women's Social Participation, 1990-1998

Year	Budget (unit=10k yen)	No. of Groups Funded
1990	5,000	22
1991	6,200	24
1992	6,200	22
1993	6,405	25
1994	6,405	24
1995	6,405	22
1996	6,405	29
1997	6,405	26
1998	5,749	16
Total	55,174	210

Source: Ministry of Education. 1999. *Kaze wo okosu josei tachi: Josei no shakai sanka shien tokubetsu suishin jigyo hokokusho, Heisei 2 nendo - Heisei 10 nendo* (*Women making wind: Report on the special promotion program to support women's social*

177

participation, 1990 - 1998). Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Lifelong Learning, Division of Gender Equality.

Table 4.9
Content of Programs Funded under the Special Promotion Program to Support Women's Social Participation, 1990-1998

Content	Number of Programs
Regional Development by the Hands of Women	40
Home and Regional Development	29
Gender Equality Consciousness Reform	29
Environmental Issues	27
Women's Lifelong Learning	18
Internationalization	17
Facing the Aging Society	11
Consumer Education	10
Nurturing Personal Character	9
Improving the Status of Women	9
Information Age	4
Demonstrating Women's Scientific and Technical Talent	2
Women's Enterprise/Non-profit Organizations	2
Developing Networks	2
Total	210

Source: Ministry of Education. 1999. *Kaze wo okosu josei tachi: Josei no shakai sanka shien tokubetsu suishin jigyo hokokusho, Heisei 2 nendo - Heisei 10 nendo (Women making wind: Report on the special promotion program to support women's social participation, 1990 - 1998)*. Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Bureau of Lifelong Learning, Division of Gender Equality.

The programs described in this section demonstrate the variety of ways in which the government is involved with the women's movement in Japan. Public aid to women's organizations takes the form of direct grants, commissioned programs, and jointly sponsored activities. The groups receiving aid may be national, regional, or local, and the aid may be administered by national executive committees, prefectural governments, or boards of education. The government supports the women's movement directly by giving money to women's organizations, and indirectly by sponsoring programs to promote women's civic participation.

While the different programs vary in their goals or administration, they express a consistent view of the role of women in civil society. Content analyses of various government funded programs for women show that women are encouraged to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers through rational and economical household management, and well-researched methods of childrearing. Women's community activities are largely an extension of this caretaker role, as women are directed towards helping children, youth, the elderly, and disabled. Even into the 1990s, government funded programs emphasize regional development "by the hands of women," suggesting that women offer a special contribution to the community as women.

What is most remarkable about these government programs for women is not so much the message they contain but the fact that they contain a message at all. As a matter of public policy, civic participation may be encouraged in any number of ways. But the Japanese pattern of state intervention in civil society is especially bold in that the government not only asks women to become active in their communities, but also tells them where and how to become active.

Access versus Autonomy

The Japanese government has made great strides to institutionalize channels of access to women's policy making. Through an elaborate national machinery headed by the Prime Minister and including all Cabinet members, guided by the principles of a Basic Law on Gender Equality as well as a legally required government Plan of Action, Japan's central government offers an unprecedented level of public input to policy making at the highest level. This access is surprising for two reasons. First, the Japanese policy making process is often depicted as insulated from interest group pressure due to the large role

played by an unelected bureaucracy. Second, Japan's low standing on measures of gender equality suggests that women have been shut out of political processes that would allow them to affect social change.

But the issue of access is not a simple yes or no question. While there are political channels available for women's input on policy issues, access to these channels is not equal for all women's groups. Furthermore, access is a two-way street, allowing government to influence women, just as women influence government.

The centralized, hierarchical structure of Japan's institutions of women's policy making is mirrored by the centralized, hierarchical organization of women's groups into a single peak association. With its huge membership and national coverage, this women's organization has gained a practical representational monopoly over women's interests. Because the peak association is made up exclusively of national organizations, small, local, grassroots women's groups are not represented. The broad based women's organizations that are included tend to represent overlapping and sometimes competing interests of women as consumers, farmers, or mothers, thus tempering and diluting a feminist political agenda.

And just as some women's organizations have institutionalized avenues through which to influence public policy, a number of public policies and programs gives the government an institutionalized means of influencing women's organizations. From the 1960s continuing to the present, the Ministry of Education has provided funding to select women's organizations to promote state social education interests. Because children's education in the home is a large part of the Japanese definition of social education, great emphasis is placed on women's role as mothers in many government funded programs. While programs to encourage women's social participation could be designed in more

content neutral ways, the Japanese government does not hesitate to direct women's role in civil society.

In this way, women's policy and policy-making follow the same pattern found in the government's management of women's organizations and women's centers. Rather than adopt across-the-board tax incentives for non-profit organizations, the Japanese government does little to aid independent fund-raising efforts of civic associations. Instead, the government offers funding to select groups that ser. e the state's social education agenda. Similarly, public women's centers are not simply empty, neutral spaces offered freely to women's organizations. They are staffed by civil servants who offer government sponsored programs. As with women's organizations and women's centers, the Japanese approach to women's policy maximizes state involvement and discretion, and promotes a close and cooperative relationship between the government and women's organizations. While select women's organizations enjoy access to the highest levels of government, the government maintains access to women's organizations, first, by limiting their ability to operate and raise funds independently, then, by offering aid and resources to groups that share the government's vision of women's place in Japanese society. In sum, access is granted at the price of autonomy.

Chapter Five
Conclusion

The contradictions between Japan's ancient traditions and modern society are fittingly captured by its Imperial family which serves as a symbol of the nation. This venerable institution is believed to date back more that 2,600 years to the creation of the islands of Japan by the mythological Sun Goddess Ameterasu. By this account, Japan's Chrysanthemum Throne is the oldest continuous royal dynasty in the world.

Into this cloistered world of archaic religious ritual and obscure honorific language entered a modern woman in 1993, when Crown Prince Naruhito married Owada Masako, a multi-lingual, Harvard educated, Foreign Ministry diplomat. Their marriage raised expectations that the new princess would take an active role to promote worthy causes and serve as a visible role model. Instead, Princess Masako seemed to vanish from public view, appearing only occasionally at sporting events or local charities, always a few steps behind the Crown Prince. Gradually, the focus of the media and the public shifted away from how Princess Masako might revitalize the monarchy to when she would produce its heir.

The women's movement in Japan is similarly plagued by unfulfilled expectations. Despite many forces of change, old ways prevail to keep women just a few steps behind men. And like the princess herself, the women's movement is hardly seen or heard by the general public, either in Japan or abroad. It is a decidedly quiet movement that pursues political goals largely through cooperation and consultation, as opposed to conflict or confrontation. While this observation is consistent with prevalent beliefs about the overriding value of harmony in Japanese culture, there are legal and political institutions

that promote cooperation and contain conflict between the Japanese government and the women's movement. This dissertation identifies and analyzes these institutions that create a system of incentives and disincentives, in which the government hinders the development of an independent, professionalized women's movement, while helping certain women's organizations with political and material resources. In this way, conflict is managed and cooperation is institutionalized through state intervention in the women's movement.

Summary of Findings

This dissertation began with the puzzle of gender inequality in Japan. Despite achieving the highest levels of economic and technological development, Japan ranks significantly behind other industrialized countries on basic measures of gender equality. As in other wealthy countries, women in Japan have steadily increased their levels of education, workforce participation, and life expectancy, while decreasing the number of children they have. While these demographic trends are associated with growing equality between the sexes, Japanese women remain at the bottom of the industrialized world as measured by wage disparities, occupational segregation, higher educational attainment, and electoral representation. Therefore, this dissertation asks why is gender inequality in Japan so pervasive, despite economic, demographic, and international trends towards growing equality between the sexes.

A review of the literature shows that cultural explanations and economic explanations provide valuable pieces to the puzzle. But a political explanation is missing from the literature on gender inequality in Japan. From a political science perspective the question of gender inequality becomes a question of

183

power. As Japan is a constitutional democracy, women as citizens have the right to influence public policy and the distribution of non-market resources. But what prevents women in Japan from effectively using the political process to achieve gender equality? A series of hypotheses guides this inquiry.

Is There a Women's Movement in Japan?

The first hypothesis is that there is no women's movement in Japan. While images of women staging rallies, marches, and bra burnings are familiar in the west, many people find it difficult to picture Japanese women taking to the streets in protest.[1] But popular perceptions aside, universal collective action problems inherent in organizing broad based social movements, in addition Japan's specific history of diffusing and deflecting protest activity call into question the existence of a women's movement in Japan.

Nevertheless, this dissertation finds that a broad, diverse, and active women's movement does indeed exist in Japan, despite such obstacles. A review of published directories combined with an original survey of the National Women's Education Center's pamphlet and newsletter collection yielded data on close to nine hundred women's organizations, active in all regions of Japan. These organizations range from small, grassroots women's groups, meeting at individual residences and producing hand-written, photo-copied flyers to a highly professionalized federation of national women's organizations with a combined membership of 26 million women. The large number of women's groups and the level of organization they have achieved provide sufficient evidence of a thriving women's movement in Japan.

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[1] When I tell people my dissertation topic is the women's movement in Japan, a typical response is "should be a short dissertation!"

Do Japanese Women Want Equality?

Having established that a women's movement exists in Japan, a second hypothesis questions the assumption that Japanese women have mobilized this social movement for the purpose of attaining equality with men. Public debates and popular opinion show widespread skepticism over whether or not it is truly in the best interest of women, or Japanese society as a whole, for women and men to fulfill equal or identical roles. As an alternative to the gender equality model, prominent Japanese scholars and many opinion surveys express support for the notion that women should be recognized for the special contribution they make to society as women, particularly in their roles as care givers, nurturers, wives and mothers.

Such debates over equality versus difference are by no means unique to Japan. And while a healthy level of skepticism over equality exists in Japanese public opinion, there is strong evidence of support for gender equality within the women's movement. An analysis of the activities of 889 women's organizations shows that a majority of these groups are organized around women's issues and social issues. Women's issues include general efforts to promote gender equality, as well as specific women's concerns, such as legalizing separate surnames for married women or raising awareness about domestic violence. The social issues women's groups are organized around include international exchange, consumer advocacy, environmental protection, and human rights. Only a small proportion of the groups in this sample are organized around issues concerning women's traditional roles, such as family, home education, welfare, or culture.

The content of women's organizational activities shows that the women's movement in Japan is primarily made up of groups that either explicitly embrace

gender equality as their goal, or actively promote causes outside the traditional women's sphere of home and family. This finding indicates that, at least within the organized women's movement, there is widespread support for furthering equality between the sexes, as opposed to valuing women's differences from men.

The diversity and complexity of the women's movement in Japan means that there is no simple answer the question, do Japanese women want equality. Overall, the evidence suggests that women do indeed want equality, but equality on their own terms. Rather that simply being accepted into male-dominated institutions, Japanese women seek to change these institutions themselves by contributing their perspective and experience on an equal basis with men.

Do Women Have Political Access?

Even if a women's movement exists in Japan, and even if this movement actively seeks equality, it is possible that women's political organizations have little impact due to a closed political system that minimizes public access to the policy making process. According to this hypothesis, unelected bureaucrats within the various national ministries play a central role in formulating public policy in Japan. Therefore, women lack clear points of access through which to express their input on policy decisions, no matter how organized their movement or how strong their demands.

The question of whether or not women in Japan have political access is answered with a qualified yes. While the government has set up an impressive national machinery dedicated to women's policy making, in practice, these institutions are not equally accessible to all women's groups. Instead, the women's policy making process has developed into a system that resembles

corporatist arrangements in which the state grants a representational monopoly to a single peak association in exchange for cooperation and compliance with government policies.

Over the past 25 years, women's political access in Japan has been centralized and institutionalized, largely as a result of commitments made by the government at international women's conferences since the United Nations declaration of International Women's Year in 1975. At the national level, Japan has established the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality, with the Prime Minister acting as president and all Cabinet Ministers serving as members. Each national ministry and agency must have an administrative division that is charged with gender equality issues. This requirement applies equally across the national bureaucracy, including even Japan's Defense Agency. The Headquarters is supported by the Bureau the Gender Equality, a cabinet level office that is staffed by full-time civil servants and charged with the day to day administrative and policy work of the Headquarters. This structure is further buttressed by a government appointed advisory council of outside experts, as well as a network of non-governmental organizations that provide input on women's policy issues. These institutions of women's policy making have gradually been adopted by prefectural and local governments which have established their own administrative offices and advisory councils charged with women's policy.

As the government built up its national machinery for women's policy, mainstream, national women's organizations formed a peak association which mirrors the government's centralized, hierarchical structure. This single organization has gained a practical representational monopoly over women's interests by virtue of its huge membership base and strategic political connections. Over the years, the government has established regular channels of

187

communication with this federation of women's organizations, thus developing

an efficient and manageable way to incorporate women's input to policy

making. Nevertheless, this system excludes the interests of local, grassroots

women's groups, as only national women's organizations are represented by the

peak association. Furthermore, there is a historical bias against the inclusion of

strictly feminist women's organizations, and a tendency to view women's

interests as a sub-set of consumer, religious, professional, or other interests. As a

result, any overtly feminist demands are muted as the peak association seeks the

lowest common denominator among its member organizations' multiple

competing interests. Although the Japanese government has gone to great

lengths to institutionalize women's access to policy making, this access is

controlled and limited to maximize cooperation and minimize conflict.

Does the Government Have Access to the Women's Movement?

While women's organizations have institutionalized channels of access to

the government, the government uses these same channels to access and

influence the women's movement. This two-way street has enabled a close and

cooperative relationship to develop between mainstream women's

organizations and the government. But the government's involvement and

influence has constrained the development of an independent women's

movement that would be more likely to challenge government authority on

gender issues than a women's movement that depends on government

recognition and resources.

A burgeoning literature of comparative research on associational

democracy, social capital, and civil society reflects a growing scholarly interest in

civic associations and the understudied non-governmental, non-profit "third

sector," which exists alongside the public government sector and the private business sector. An analysis of Japan's system of regulating third sector activity shows how government policies in this area have curtailed the development of an independent, professionalized women's movement, while creating dependence on government approval and support.

For over one hundred years, the non-profit sector in Japan was regulated by the Meiji Era Civil Code dating back to 1896. Under this system, public interest associations and foundations seek government recognition as legal entities in order to gain basic rights necessary to conduct business, including the right to own property or enter into contracts. Government recognition also gives civic groups limited income tax relief, and, in special cases, tax deductions for charitable contributions made to the group. In practice, government bureaucrats have wide discretion over the approval process, and public interest groups that receive legal status tend to have huge monetary resources or close government ties.

My own sample of 889 women's organizations shows how this regulatory system impacts the women's movement. First, only a small number of women's groups are legally recognized by the government as public interest associations or foundations. But those that have legal status tend to be large, resource-rich, and professionalized, often having paid staff and permanent office space. Second, women's groups officially recognized by the government tend to be organized around conservative, general, or relatively non-controversial issues, such as women's education, the arts, and family life. Finally, many women's public interest corporations are regional women's organizations sponsored by prefectural or local governments.

Overall, the effect of the Civil Code system has been to constrain the development of an independent, professionalized women's movement in Japan.

Although a broad-based women's movement has emerged, despite the vague and complex laws governing civic associations, the movement is segmented between a small number of well-endowed, well-connected women's organizations with legal status and the vast majority of women's groups that must operate without legal status, tax benefits, or government support. In this way, the bureaucratic discretion involved in granting and denying legal status to women's organizations has allowed government officials a hand at shaping the women's movement for over one hundred years.

To address the basic problems of the Civil Code system, Japan recently adopted the Law to Promote Nonprofit Activities, which clarifies and simplifies the process by which civic groups obtain legal status. Under the new system, groups gain approval for legal status fairly easily, but they must submit to government regulation and oversight without receiving significant tax benefits. Without such tangible benefits, the new law remains largely symbolic, leaving the women's movement to operate within a regulatory environment that promotes mutual access and influence between the government and women's organizations, but hinders the development of an autonomous women's movement in Japan.

State Intervention in the Women's Movement

The puzzling lack of progress towards gender equality in Japan cannot be explained by the absence of a women's movement, or a lack of interest in equality on the part of women, or the complete denial of access to the policy making process. Regulations on civil society are found to inhibit the development of an effective women's movement. But understanding the impact of these regulations is just the first step towards uncovering a whole

institutionalized system that facilitates a cooperative and interdependent relationship between the government and women's organizations.

First, regulations on non-profit organizations make it difficult for women's groups to independently raise funds needed to establish their own office space or professional personnel. Second, the government steps in to fill the void by providing women's groups with physical space and staff assistance through government sponsored women's centers. The government provides additional resources to women's groups through a variety of direct and indirect funding programs. Finally, select women's groups are given access to policy making through a number of government institutions. In this way, the government gains a foothold in the women's movement in exchange for resources and access.

The lack of tax-exempt status for non-profit organizations is a key point emphasized in the literature on civil society in Japan. Without such tax benefits and incentives found in other industrialized democracies, civic associations in Japan, including women's groups, are at a disadvantage in their ability to raise funds needed to hire full-time staff, establish permanent office space, publish quality newsletters, and generally maintain effective and professional organizations. While this observation helps explain some of the weakness of the women's movement in Japan, it only tells half the story. With one hand, the government sets out regulations that limit the ability to women's groups to independently raise funds and develop professional organizations. But, with the other hand, the government offers women's groups access and resources that help them maintain their organizations, while at the same time, allowing government input and access to the women's movement. By focusing on what the government fails to provide, the literature on civil society in Japan misses

what the government does provide, and more importantly, how the provision of resources allows the government to influence civil society.

The most impressive form of government support for women's organizations is found in the hundreds of public women's centers found throughout Japan. Through these centers, the government provides a physical space set aside for women, where they can meet, take classes, access library resources, participate in recreational activities, receive counseling and other services. While nearly all women's centers are open to the public, they are not simply neutral spaces for women's groups to fill with their own activities and agendas. Instead, women's centers offer their own programs, reflecting their own definition of women's interests.

An analysis of activities at over six hundred women's centers shows that the courses and lectures they sponsor most frequently address family and home issues, with women's issues and social issues receiving less attention. Also, many activities at women's centers revolve around cultural activities, such as flower arranging and tea ceremony. When the issue content of the activities sponsored by women's centers is compared with the activities of the 889 women's groups in my sample, a distinct disconnect becomes apparent, as women's organizations are far more interested in women's issues and social issues than family and home issues or arts and culture. Yet, government bureaucrats that staff most public women's centers design programs for women that fail to reflect the interests of the women's organizations they are supposed to serve. Instead, their programs promote a separate agenda defined by government officials.

State intervention in the women's movement is also accomplished through a variety of programs that provide government aid to select women's organizations. Since the early 1960s, the Ministry of Education has been funding women's organizations as part of its social education mission. Not surprisingly,

the groups and projects that receive government aid reflect a particular point of view that is consistent with the government's social education agenda for women.

Throughout the 1960s, regional women's associations received the bulk of government aid to carry out specific social education projects. Content analysis of the programs that received funding shows that, during this decade, the government focused on developing a fledging postwar women's movement by subsidizing women's leadership and management training programs, along with survey research on women's daily living. At the same time, the government funded many programs aimed at Japanese housewives to promote pseudo-scientific methods of household management and childrearing. Also, in an era of rapid economic growth, urbanization, and growing materialism, women were encouraged to participate in the communities to uphold "public morality." Comparatively, projects involving women's rights, political participation, or workforce participation received very little public funding during this time.

Beginning the in the 1970s, the government implemented programs to promote women's volunteer activities. Again, the same bold pattern of state intervention in the women's movement emerges. Through these programs, the government does not simply encourage volunteerism in general, but goes a step further to encourage women's volunteerism in particular sectors of society. In the 1970s and 80s, government funded programs directed women's volunteer activities towards children, youth, the elderly, and disabled, to utilize women's unique capacity for nurturing and care giving. Women were also assigned to volunteer in the area of cultural preservation and promotion, which is also consistent with traditional feminine roles. Throughout the 1990s, government funded programs to promote women's social participation have emphasized

community development "by the hands of women," again relying on women's unique ability to link community improvement with the needs of families.

The observation that the Japanese government makes assumptions about unique female perspectives or women's special talents is less relevant than the fact that these assumptions inform the content of government aid to women's organizations at all. Rather than simply provide funding to worthy organizations to use at their own discretion, the government funds specific programs that promote particular goals for women. Similarly, the government could fund education and outreach programs to promote women's volunteer activities on behalf of individually chosen causes. But instead, the government directs volunteer activities towards areas deemed most appropriate for women. In this way, state intervention in the women's movement involves support in exchange for influence.

This relationship has been built up over many years going back to the World War II, in which women's organizations were so effectively enlisted and organized by the government to contribute to the war effort. Although women's groups have gained considerable independence compared to the total government control experienced during the war, the government's historic tendency to actively intervene in the women's movement remains strong. What the relationship between the government and the women's movement in Japan demonstrates above all is the trade-off between access and autonomy. In accepting access to resources and power, women's organizations open up two-way channels of influence, which the Japanese government uses to promote its own social and political agenda. This system of cooperation and collaboration between women's organizations and the government may have spared Japan the social strife of women taking to the streets in mass protest. But the alternative has been slow, deliberative, and incremental change that has left

Japanese women with the dubious distinction of being the least equal in the industrialized world.

A Happy Ending

The future of the women's movement in Japan will be filled with many new challenges as well as old obstacles, as the country continues to face economic stagnation, an aging population, declining birthrates, increasing unemployment and crime, and political corruption. But if there are parallels between the story of Princess Masako and the women's movement in Japan, there is reason to be hopeful. After eight years of marriage and a heartbreaking miscarriage, Crown Princess Masako gave birth to a baby girl, Princess Toshinomiya Aiko. The entire country rejoiced, despite current law which stipulates that only male descendants of the Imperial family may occupy the throne. The long awaited royal birth has sparked debate over Japan's succession law, with public opinion polls showing overwhelming support for allowing an Empress to grace the throne. Perhaps history will show that Princess Masako's most subversive, feminist act was to give birth to a baby girl. By embracing the most traditional of female roles, she may, in her own quiet way, revolutionize the oldest continuous monarchy in the world, and bring Japan a step closer to equality.

Appendix A: Subject Code Sheet

This is a translation of the code sheet used to report the content of programs at women's centers in the 1994 NWEC survey of 623 women's centers. Respondents were asked to report up to five different subjects from this code sheet that were addressed by various programs at their centers. I used this same code sheet to determine the issue content of 889 women's organizations in Japan.

90101 general women's issues
90102 women's studies/women's liberation thought
90103 women's education
90104 women's administration
90105 women's history
90199 women's issues/women's education other

90201 child and home education
90202 mind-body development
90299 home education other

90301 general education (excluding women's education and home education)
90302 school education
90303 social education
90304 lifelong education
90399 education other

90401 family/home
90402 living standards
90403 food/clothing/shelter
90404 leisure
90499 family/home living other

90501 general social participation/regional activities
90502 political participation
90503 volunteer activity
90504 women's association/group activity
90505 PTA activity
90506 youth activities
90599 social participation other

90601 general social issues
90602 international understanding/international exchange
90603 consumer issues
90604 environmental issues
90605 human rights
90699 social issues other

90701 general welfare
90702 childcare
90703 elderly issues

90704 disabled issues
90799 welfare other

90801 general health
90802 health and hygiene
90803 medical treatment
90804 sports/recreation
90899 health/medicine other

90901 labor
90902 self development
90903 qualifications/credential acquisition
90999 labor other

91001 arts/painting/crafts
91002 flim/photography
91003 music
91004 drama
91005 general hobbies (flower arrangement, tea ceremony, etc.)
91099 culture other

91101 literature
91102 philosophy/thought/religion/psychology
91103 history
91104 manners and customs/cultural assets
91105 politics/economics/law
91106 natural science/technology
91107 information
91199 literature, society, natural science other

91299 other

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