

Women's movements in Japan: the intersection between everyday life and politics

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Abstract: This article discusses how women's movements in Japan function as political agents that change the political status quo. Japanese women's movements can be seen to comprise three groups: elite-initiated, feminist and non-feminist participatory. Despite differences in their outlook and attitudes, they share two common characteristics. First, their identities tend to be centred on motherhood. The language of motherhood has been a key idea behind Japanese women's mobilization. Second, their campaigns link women's demands with politics. Women's movements provide Japanese women, who are largely excluded from formal political processes, with an alternative channel for political participation. When they exercise practical influence on politics, they make effective use of channels both outside and inside formal political institutions, i.e. non-institutional and institutional channels. In the former case, the traditional style of Japan's policy-making makes political influence possible for the women. Use of institutional channels means electing female candidates to political office. Women's movement organizations provide those candidates with support for their election campaigns. It is clear that women's political involvement at the grassroots level has contributed not only to improving women's social conditions but also to developing a more democratic political system in Japan.

Keywords: feminist, non-feminist, motherhood, political agent, grassroots, democracy

Introduction

In a large sense . . . all political women, no matter how modest their degree of involvement or how carefully they may disguise their activism from any detractors, are agents of change.

(Pharr 1981: 14)

Despite its high level of development, Japan is a male-dominated society where women are still excluded from the public sphere. Indeed, as shown in Table 1,

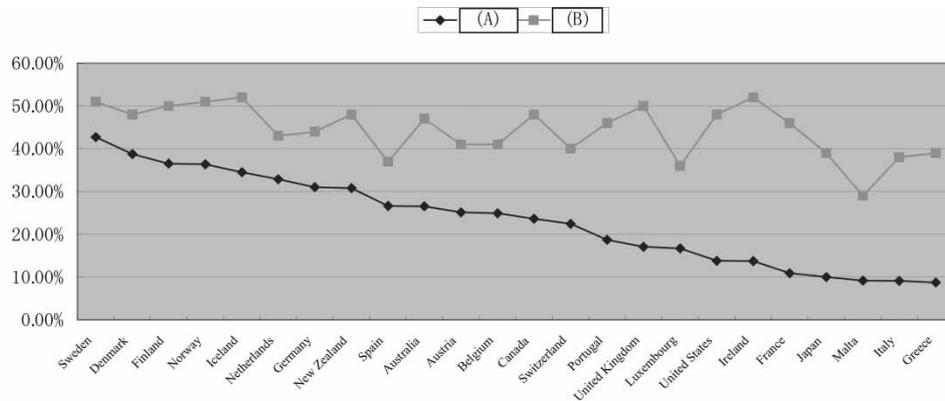
Table 1 The socio-economic and political position of Japanese women (women's share of managerial, professional and political posts, as % of total)

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	32nd of 173 countries
Labour-force participation	40.60% (1999)
Managerial position in workplace	9% (1998)
High-ranking civil servants in central government	1.30% (2000)
High-ranking civil servants in local government	3.40% (1998)
In the professions	
Judges	11.3% (2000)
Lawyers	11.3% (2000)
Medical doctors	15.6% (2000)
In national politics	
Upper House members	14.6% (July 2003)
Lower House members	7.4% (July 2003)
In local politics	
Governors	4 out of 47 (August '03)
Mayors	15 out of 3245 (July '03)
Assembly members	7% (December 2002)

Sources: mainly the Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, August 2003.

there is a large gap between socio-economic development and women's status in Japan: Japan's ranking in the Human Development Indexes (HDI) is ninth of 173 countries,¹ but only thirty-second on the Gender Empowerment Measures (GEM)² (Human Development Report Office 2002). The rate of Japanese women's participation in the labour force has been steadily increasing, reaching an average of 67 per cent among women aged 20–49 years (as of 1999) and following the trend in other advanced capitalist countries.³ However, the level of women's participation in politics remains low: the percentages of female members of the Lower House, the Upper House and local assemblies are only 7.4, 14.6 (July 2003) and 7 (December 2002), respectively. Japanese women's representation lags far behind that of their Western counterparts, and Japan's ranking in this respect is among the lowest group in the EU and other developed countries (see Figure 1).

Why are there so few women in Japanese legislative bodies? Iwanaga (1998) explains this in terms of political 'facilitators', or 'conditions and policies that facilitate opportunities for election of women to public office'. These are divided into two main categories: institutional and contextual facilitators. The former include legal, electoral and political facilitators, and the latter international, socio-economic, cultural and issue facilitators (ibid.: 5). He points out that, although international pressures such as the International Women's Year in 1975, the United Nations Decade for women from 1976 and women's conferences in Copenhagen



Notes

- (A) Seats in parliament held by women, as % of total (the latest data from the Human Development Report Office, 2002).
 (B) Female share of paid employment in industry and services, as % of total (the latest data from the UNIFEM, 2002).

Figure 1 Rates of women's participation in politics and labour force in the EU and other developed countries.

in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995 have forced the Japanese government to take the positive step of setting numerical goals to increase women's participation in policy-making, this has been realized to only to a limited extent owing to the weakness of electoral and political facilitators (ibid.: 10). In particular, he states that a proportional representation system would allow more female candidates to be elected than does a single-member district system in which plural candidates compete for one position. Furthermore, the high costs of election campaigns and the necessity for strong personal support organizations impede women from standing for elections (ibid.: 10–23). The male-dominated tradition in Japanese society deprives women of socio-cultural facilitators (ibid.: 24–8). Iwanaga concludes that the absence of some important facilitators and poor linkages between facilitators help to explain the slow increase in female political representation in Japan. He argues the case for 'a quota for elected officials or quotas for women on the parties' candidate lists' to increase the number of women politicians (ibid.: 33).

There is no doubt that institutional facilitators are important in increasing the number of women in legislative bodies, and democratic governments should support women by establishing formal institutions from above. However, at the same time women themselves need to enhance their influence on politics from below. Their participation in politics will remain superficial and they cannot exercise real power in politics unless they acquire abilities to make effective use of political rights. Some feminist scholars have demonstrated that women's movements play a crucial role in forcing governments to institutionalize women-friendly political systems and public policies⁴ (e.g. Stephenson 1995; Naples 1998; Jaquette

1998; Banaszak *et al.* 2003). Siim, in her comparative study of Britain, France and Denmark, identifies women's movements and voluntary organizations as an 'agency' which 'provides a link between an active, participatory citizenship and demands for equal civil, political and social rights' (2000: 2). She points out that, in Denmark, women's movements have contributed to shifts in Danish political institutions and social policies by stimulating women to participate actively in politics and the workplace (*ibid.*: 108–48).

Gelb and Palley (1996) analysed the successes of American second-wave feminist movements in public policy changes from 1974 to 1984, exploring how feminist groups exerted influence on the federal policy-making processes on four issues,⁵ including the establishment of new laws which secured for women equal opportunity and treatment with men. They found that success depended on four factors: first, successful feminist groups established broad-based support outside the feminist circle; second, they selected narrow issues that did not challenge fundamental values around which supporters' views were likely to be polarized; third, influential congresswomen actively paved the way for relevant bills to be passed; and, finally, the groups were capable of providing bureaucrats and members of Congress with technical expertise which was useful for drafting bills (*ibid.*).

There is therefore international evidence that women's movements can create an opportunity for the empowerment of women in politics, fostering socio-cultural facilitators and challenging traditional social norms of women's exclusion from formal politics. In this paper, I will shed light on the connection between Japanese women's movements and politics. In particular, I will examine how the collective activities of Japanese women mediate between their everyday lives and politics and the extent to which their activism has an impact on politics and society.

To date there have been few studies published in English that focus on Japanese women and politics, and most of those that do have emerged since the 1990s. The Upper House election of July 1989, when twenty-two women were newly voted into office, attracted scholarly attention to Japanese female politicians. In general, these studies support the view that formal Japanese politics has not been receptive to women. Iwai (1993), for example, analysed the political styles and behaviour of forty-six female Diet members who were in office in 1991 and found them to differ from their male colleagues in significant ways. Ogai (2001) and Mikanagi (2001) refer to gender-insensitive political institutions in Japan, while Aiuchi (2001) has done some case studies of female candidates' election campaigns where it was found that they faced much more severe struggles to win than their male counterparts. Another Mikanagi article (1998) focuses on the reform of Japanese employment policy in the 1980s to remove discrimination against women in the workplace and considers why Japanese policy-makers were reluctant to realize a woman-friendly employment policy. Hastings (1996) situates the events of 1989 in historical context and examines the political activities and experiences of female Diet members since 1946 to characterize their general political style. Ogai (1996) describes the first thirty-nine female members in the

post-war Diet as 'stars' of Japanese democratization. Stockwin (1994), on the other hand, focuses on a prominent female politician, Takako Doi, who, as its chairperson, led the Japan Socialist Party (JSP, the present Japan Social Democrat Party, SDP) to surprisingly good results in the Upper House election of 1989 and then served as the first female chair of the Lower House for one term from 1993. Stockwin traces her political career, clearly an exceptional case in Japanese politics, concentrating on her chairpersonship from 1986 to 1991. Instead of focussing on elites, Pharr (1981) draws attention to the political attitudes and consciousness of a wider group of Japanese women. Through detailed interviews with 100 female activists from more than fifty voluntary political groups, selected according to various criteria including major political parties, major organized interest groups, protest groups and social movements, she explores their roles in politics.

More recent studies in English focus on Japanese women's movements in terms of their political implications. An outstanding work is Mackie's book (2003) on feminist movements in historical perspective. Applying the two concepts of modernity and citizenship, she analyses feminists' struggles to create a new vision for society and to change the relationship between men and women from the nineteenth century to the present day. Three other studies concentrate on grassroots women's movements involved in active politics. First, LeBlanc has conducted detailed ethnographic research on the political involvement of a consumer movement group, the Life Club Cooperative Society (the Life Club, *Seikatsu Kurabu Seikyō*), in which she investigates the women's political world through her own concept of 'housewifely movements' (1999). Another study which is germane is that of Bouissou (2000), who examines the 'new civic movements in Japan' which emerged in the 1990s. Bouissou also focuses on the Life Club movement, portraying this women's group as an agent that breaks the routinized form of Japanese politics. A third study is my own on women's challenges to traditional social policy (Eto 2001b), in which I highlight the actual influence of women's movements on the policy-making process. I demonstrate women's contribution to social welfare reform for disabled elderly people, based on case studies of a group similar to the Life Club and another women's grassroots group.

In this paper, I attempt to elucidate the general characteristics of Japanese women's movements in terms of women's political involvement at the grassroots. Citing examples, I will illustrate some models of how women exercise real influence on politics institutionally and non-institutionally. First, I present the background to women's collective activism in Japan, stressing the importance of 'motherhood' as a central value of Japanese women; second, I consider why Japanese women have mobilized in the way that they have; and, third, I examine the way in which women have used organizations created by the movement to participate in the political process from which they have hitherto been excluded. I will argue that Japanese women are energetically involved in political activities at the grassroots level and, as a result, have not only improved the position of women in politics

and society from below, but also have gradually changed Japanese politics towards more openness and vitality.

The motherhood tradition in Japanese women's movements

Contemporary Japanese women's movements can be categorized into three groups in terms of leadership and gender consciousness: elite-initiated, feminist and non-feminist participatory. An elite-initiated movement is a movement in which a few elite women spearhead campaigns and guide a large number of ordinary women. This kind of movement appears to follow the pattern of the pre-war feminist movement, and many early post-war groups were initiated by women who had been leaders in the days of the pre-war struggle.⁶ Although such movements certainly contributed to improving women's position in society and to democratizing political institutions (see Mackie 2003: 120–43), today their elite-initiated style can no longer attract the majority of Japanese women who have attained some degree of higher education themselves. The feminist movement came out of second-wave feminism in the 1970s and was influenced by Western radical feminism.⁷ The Japanese feminist movement has fought for the genuine emancipation of woman in society as well as for enhancement of women's rights (see *Kōdōsuru-kai Kirokushū Henshū-iinkai* 1999; Mackie 2003: 144–231) However, Japanese feminist groups, unlike their Western counterparts, did not mobilize many women (see Robins-Mowry 1983: 133–7; Buckley 1997: 343–57), and their causes attracted little public support (Ehara 1990: 15).

The final category is the non-feminist participatory movement, in which 'ordinary' women, whose names are unknown outside their own communities, initiate collective activities and share responsibility for campaigns. These women are not aware of gender questions such as sexual discrimination and social inequality, and they do not see themselves as 'feminists' even though their political activities contribute to improvement in women's circumstances. The non-feminist participatory movement has recruited more women to their causes than any other movement (Sakurai 1990; Sato 1994; Tanaka 1998). Moreover, their political activities grounded in mothers' concerns gain support from the wider society (Eto 2001b).

In trying to explain the rise of women's movements, Chafetz and Dworkin (1986) regard industrialization, urbanization and women's attainment of higher education as important factors that draw women into participating in social movements. They highlight the correlation between the increase in the number of married full-time working women and the increase in the mass mobilization of women by feminists, because these working women obviously become aware of inequality both in the workplace and at home through comparisons with their male colleagues and their husbands. Chafetz and Dworkin's account of what spurs feminist mobilization provides a clue to why feminism remains unpopular among Japanese women. While Japanese society has rapidly urbanized since the mid-1960s, with a concomitant increase in the number of middle-class households

and in women's educational attainment, women's labour-force participation was still quite low⁸ when the women's liberation movement reached its peak of activities in the 1970s, and, in particular, the proportion of married full-time working women lagged behind that in the West. As a result, Japanese women were scarcely conscious of the unfairness of the gender division of labour⁹ (Mikanagi 1999: 69).

Instead, the social and labour market conditions affecting Japanese women were conducive to their involvement in ameliorative movements, which developed at the grassroots level. It was non-working married women, the so-called housewives (*shufu*), who had the education to see social problems which arose from their everyday lives as political issues, but at the same time very few among them were particularly concerned about sexism in the workplace. After their children had reached their teens they had the spare time to join in problem-solving campaigns. Most activists in non-feminist participatory movements can be characterized thus. Some are employed in low-paid part-time jobs (Hasegawa 1991: 50; Sato 1994: 110; Watanabe 1995: 197), but their living expenses are supported largely by their husbands, whose incomes are above average (Kunihiro 1993: 233). At the same time, such women often regret having given up full-time jobs for marriage or childbirth, and they seek out activities to restore their self-respect (Watanabe 1995: 197). Social movements provide them with a space in which they can acquire an individual status distinct from their roles as wives and mothers. The satisfaction that they gain from collective activities rewards them for their unpaid labour. They find the experience of campaigning enjoyable because 'it resembled the social circles of their college years and was much more interesting than housework' (Kunihiro 1993: 232).

More fundamentally, the role of mother profoundly influences the grassroots activists' consciousness and attitudes towards their involvement in social movements. In explaining why activists of the anti-nuclear movement in Japan are mostly mothers, Sakurai (1990: 138) points out that mothers' fear of the fatal effect of nuclear power on their children provoked them into direct action. Indeed, it was the idea of motherhood that has drawn Japanese women into social movements in large numbers. In the mid-1960s, food containing artificial additives was becoming the norm. In 1968 a group of mothers in Tokyo who were anxious about food safety set up a cooperative society called the Life Club, which aimed at purchasing non-/low-additive food at reasonable prices in cooperation with their neighbours. The group introduced an innovative purchasing system that traded directly with producers. By the late 1990s Life Club organizations had been established in fifteen prefectures and had in total approximately 250,000 members (Tokyo Seikatsusha Nettowāku 1998: 2). The impetus for these ameliorative movements lies to a greater or lesser extent in the maternal role, which is dedicated to protecting children's lives and futures. At the same time, the status of the mother, whom society values for her self-sacrifice and altruism, also legitimizes women's involvement in such social movements. It is easier for Japanese

women to speak out as mothers than as women, since women themselves are still regarded as 'second-class citizens' whose voices are socially and politically neglected (Hasegawa 1991: 52).

Even radical Japanese feminists chose not to distance themselves from the influence of the maternal tradition (Ehara 2000: 87; Ueno 2002: 162–3). According to Aoki (1994: 217), the Group of Fighting Women (*Grūpu Tatakau Onnatachi*), a leading women's liberation group, condemned the early radical feminist endorsement of contraception as a measure to liberate women from their gender role on the grounds that this threatened to obliterate the maternal function. She interprets this as a reflection of ecological concerns harmonized with maternity that Japanese feminism has internalized, pointing out that the tradition of motherhood worship is simultaneously the basis for the ecological concerns of Japanese people. Moreover, contemporary feminist academics revived the 'motherhood debate' in which pre-war feminists had engaged some seventy years earlier. In the late 1910s, the 'motherhood protection debate' between Akiko Yosano and Raichō Hiratsuka had centred on the question of how much support the state should provide to mothers (see Mackie 1997: 86–9). The 1980s feminist debate on motherhood revolved around three issues: how motherhood should be valued; whether women's participation in the labour market could really liberate women; and how mothers could balance work and childrearing (see Ehara 1990: 11–21). This debate reveals that Japanese second-wave feminists, like their senior sisters, are still much drawn to issues of motherhood. In the West, in contrast, motherhood is often rejected as 'incompatible with female emancipation' (Koven and Michel 1993: 3), and maternalism is an easy target of criticism for its idealization of the mother-child relationship (e.g. Dietz 1985; Mouffe 1992). A deep-rooted tradition of maternalism, however, is not peculiar to Japan, but is also found in other East Asian countries which share similar cultural backgrounds (Sechiyama 1994).

The logic behind mobilizing Japanese women

Japanese women have obtained formal political equality with men, but, in reality, as I noted above, their level of political participation is much lower than that of men. The main obstacle to women's political advancement is a political system steeped in male values and culture. The mindset that politics is men's business is still prevalent in Japanese society (Iwai 1993: 104). The reason for this is that it was men who engaged in politics long before women's suffrage was approved, and it was men who founded political institutions based on their own inclinations. In other words, political activities today are conducted in accordance with norms defined by men. The typical working style of Diet members, for example, consists in devoting their entire lives to involvement in ongoing Diet sessions, on the one hand, and maintaining their constituency bases for the next election, on the other, both at the expense of their personal lives. This is possible only if their partners take full charge of the personal lives for which they have no time, and is a pattern

that is incompatible with an ordinary woman's life. Women as political latecomers are also not used to the male-defined conventions of and thinking behind political practices.

The male-oriented political community dampens women's desire to become politicians, and the established men's networks in politics do not give opportunities to female candidates even if women wish to stand for elections. Both the government and political parties in Japan have not yet undertaken any positive steps to lessen the political disadvantage women suffer, in contrast to many EU countries and some Asian countries¹⁰ which have recently introduced quota or parity systems to increase female candidates in elections (Tsujimura 2003: 9). Given the current situation, it is no wonder that no rise in the number of women politicians has yet occurred in Japan. In general, male policy-makers are indifferent to feminist issues, and thus far the Japanese policy-making community had been so geared to the pursuit of economic growth that it has scarcely taken women's issues into serious consideration. The issues that Japanese women organized around went beyond the promotion of material production to demanding improvements in their everyday lives, women's social standing and the environment. The rigidity in policy-making has forced Japanese women to make their claims through collective activities which have developed outside established political institutions.

A single-issue group, for example, called the Women's Association for Improving Care for the Elderly (WAICE, *Kōrei Shakai o Yokusuru Josei no Kai*), which was set up in 1983 to campaign against traditional family roles concerning care for elderly relatives, championed the adoption of a new social policy to support family caretakers. WAICE asserted that the heavy burdens of family caretakers, in particular female family members, disrupted their daily lives, and, as a result of its effective campaigns, a new law was enacted in 1997 (Eto 2001a, 2001b). A feminist group called the Women's Association for Activism (WAA, *Kōdōsuru Onnatachi no Kai*), which was founded in 1975 and dissolved in 1996, played an important role in introducing the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO) in 1985 (*Kōdōsuru-kai Kirokushū Henshū-iinkai* 1999: 126–37). It also succeeded in preventing an amendment to the Eugenic Protection Law that would have made the economic grounds for having an abortion more restrictive (*ibid.*: 176–90).

Their direct action may be regarded as a kind of 'interest group pluralism', but they should be distinguished from pressure groups in the purpose behind their activism and behavioural pattern. Whereas conventional pressure groups, which are typically represented by powerful established vocational groups such as business executives and medical professionals, simply seek to gain a share of the material rewards generated from public policies through putting pressure on the government, the women's groups, whose activities aim at social reform and the creation of new values, are not only aware of new problems that the government has overlooked, but also they propose alternatives to extant government policies. Furthermore, they do not circumvent the formal political system; rather, they attach much importance to the channel of representative political institutions to

realize their proposals, making an effort to get more female assembly members elected.

In addition to their influence on social policy-making, the Life Club groups play a significant role in encouraging women to get into politics. They launched a local election campaign to win assembly seats in 1977. Moreover, feminists recently set up action groups to recruit female candidates to stand for elections. A group called Women in a New World, International Network (WINWIN, Uinuin), which was founded by six influential feminists in 1999,¹¹ aims to support female candidates for national assembly and gubernatorial elections through providing a part of their campaign funding.¹² In the last five years, small-scale groups initiated by grassroots feminist activists to support female candidates for local assembly elections have increasingly emerged in many local regions.¹³ These groups are generally called 'backup schools', about which more later. In these ways, the autonomous organizations of women do function as political agents to produce female politicians.

The scope of women's political involvement

Some Japanese women's organizations have in fact succeeded in exercising a practical influence on politics, as I mentioned above. Their collective activities provide Japanese women with a channel to political involvement in two ways: by incorporating women's ideas into policy-making outside formal political institutions and by sending female representatives to legislative bodies through institutionalized means. On the one hand, the customs of the Japanese policy-making process make the informal channel of political influence accessible to the women. Recent changes in the conventions of Japanese policy-making, above all, spur the women's groups to gain access to the core of the policy-making process. On the other hand, when the women launch their colleagues into political circles, the organizations provide them with support for election campaigns. I will now discuss how women exert leverage on politics through these two channels, the non-institutional and the institutional.

Non-institutional channels

The process of formulating social policy in the central government usually begins within the ministries competent in the areas concerned. Bureaucrats draw up a draft bill, often inviting experts to gather new or alternative ideas through formal meetings or informal interviews. The draft is then forwarded to an advisory council for deliberation. The advisory council is composed of two groups, namely, representatives of interest groups which are affected by the bill and experts in the field whose responsibility it is to examine the technical features of the bill. This process aims to balance differing objectives among the various interest groups as well as to endorse the bureaucrat-initiated draft. Once the advisory

council has completed its deliberation, the draft is fleshed out with compromises between opposing interests and then is passed on to the ruling party. The ruling party makes further attempts to effect concessions between the powerful pressure groups and the relevant ministries. Following approval of the text by the ruling party, the cabinet submits the bill to the Diet (Eto 2000: 25). As many observers of Japan's politics have noted, the crucial impetus to policy formulation, then, comes from the bureaucrats, yet the advisory council also plays an important role in incorporating alternative formulations into the draft at the same time.

This policy-making community had been established with an exclusive membership during the ascendancy of the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) – for thirty-eight years from 1955 to 1993 – and it was fairly closed to women. However, the emergence of an anti-LDP coalition government composed of eight parties in 1993 destabilized the established policy-making community. Although the LDP returned to power as a member of a three-party coalition – which included the SDP – in 1994, liberal coalition government continued until 1996. Under these circumstances, the influence of powerful conservative Diet members in the LDP decreased, and new LDP members of the liberal group and non-LDP Diet members with fresh ideas invited new groups to join the advisory councils (Eto 2000: 39–41). Since then, membership of the policy-making community has become more open to people beyond the typical line-up of the previous councils, including women. The Japanese government, meanwhile, began to make an effort to increase female advisory council members in response to international pressure that Japan must raise the number of women participants in policy-making.

Another change in Japanese policy-making occurred in the bureaucracy. Since the early 1990s, bureaucrats have frequently been under attack for their involvement in such vices as bribery, favourable treatment of their clients and concealment of vital medical information from the general public, resulting in a decline in public trust. In order to restore public confidence in the bureaucracy, bureaucrats attempted to communicate with ordinary citizens and integrate popular opinion into the drafts of some bills. Examples of such measures included public forums to debate policies and the solicitation of comments from the public by e-mail. These measures provided opportunities for those with aspirations, who did not have any chance of participating in advisory councils or any connection with policy-makers, to get their ideas into a draft bill.

The nation-wide women's groups, including some influential figures, effectively utilize such policy-making measures in lobbying for their causes. WAICE presents a typical instance of this type. In 1997 the Japanese government established a new policy of caring for the disabled elderly to reduce the heavy burdens on their family members, called the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) Law. Three professional women belonging to WAICE had been invited to discussion meetings sponsored by the Welfare Ministry when bureaucrats started investigating the possibility of reforming previous policies in 1989.¹⁴ Two of these women were appointed members of the advisory council for deliberating the draft of the bill in 1995.¹⁵

The government chose these women not because of their membership in WAICE but because of their prominent professional positions, i.e. as a well-known commentator, a university professor and journalist. However, the women articulated opinions which had been formed in WAICE. In advisory council discussion, they strongly opposed a move to award cash benefits to family caretakers, which had been proposed by some other committee members. The two asserted that such cash payments would militate against reducing the heavy burdens placed on domestic caretakers. This reflected the view of WAICE. The proposal to offer cash benefits was eventually withdrawn (Eto 2000: 30).

Feminist influence on policies to remedy gender bias operates similarly. In recent years, the Japanese government has enacted a series of woman-friendly laws: the amended EEOL in 1997 to strengthen women's equal treatment with men in the labour market; the Basic Law for Equal Participation of Both Sexes in the Public Sphere in 1999; and the Protection against Domestic Violence Law in 2000. Leading feminists with professional credentials¹⁶ – lawyers, university professors – participated in meetings in the relevant ministries and advisory councils, and were thus able to put forward concrete proposals for revision of the bills concerned (Kōdōsuru-kai Kirokushū Henshū-iinkai 1999: 102–37). Although some of these women had been attached to the WAA before its dissolution and their input was obviously feminist in nature, their ideas did not represent views peculiar to particular feminist organizations but their own independent opinions.

Grassroots activists, by contrast, scarcely enjoyed such opportunities, but they might make use of the public commitment measures of ministries. Indeed, non-feminist participatory groups have succeeded in communicating with the bureaucrats responsible for drafting bills. The Life Club's enterprise to provide better welfare services drew the attention of some bureaucrats who were drafting the LTCI bill. Some members of the group who had become especially critical of the poor quality of publicly provided care for the elderly suggested producing the kind of welfare services that they hoped they themselves could obtain when they became old, and, consequently, the group set up a welfare enterprise on a non-profit basis in 1985. This welfare enterprise was different from public services in allowing the limited operation of market forces to produce a higher quality of service at lower cost. In this way, the group was able to expand its welfare enterprise. The idea that social welfare services could be managed through market incentives became important in social policy debates in the 1980s, but this group was the first organization to succeed in putting the idea into practice (Eto 2002: 197–9). Bureaucrats held informal interviews with the enterprise's members in 1994 when they were exploring a new service provision form of the LTCI bill. Subsequently, in 1996, two core members of the enterprise were invited to address the public forum and outline the benefits of their system (Eto 2001b: 243–4). Their idea of welfare services run partly by market incentives has been built into the LTCI, which allows the profit-making sector to provide care services.

The Life Club also contributed to environmentally friendly policy. When a new law for the promotion of recycling such usable rubbish as empty cans and bottles was under discussion, bureaucrats working on the issue approached the members who had pioneered the method of waste disposal in which different types of rubbish were separated for recycling. The bureaucrats attended meetings and gatherings sponsored by the group to hear the women's opinions about the framework of a new policy. According to Yorimoto (1998: 104–25), however, not all the women's opinions were realized in the new law because the bureaucrats who had already completed the draft bill were more interested in getting the women's support for it than in making further revisions. Nonetheless, the new recycling system had been inspired by the women's previous efforts, which had been made long before the bureaucrats became aware of its importance, and, in reality, the bureaucrats referred to the women's experience to formulate the draft (*ibid.*).

In considering women's direct influence on local politics, it should be noted that the advisory councils of local governments are much more accessible to grassroots activists than those of the central government. As in the central government, in the local policy-making process, programmes of drafting policy are centred on local civil servants and the framework of a programme is mostly determined in advisory councils. However, the membership of local advisory councils is somewhat different from the central as it consists of representatives of three groups, namely, interest groups related to a policy, experts and ordinary citizens. Local governments select citizen members from among those who have applied in response to public advertisements, and, since not many people apply, women have a very good chance of becoming citizen members.

Institutional channels

The Life Club achieves more notable success in politics than any other women's movement in Japan. Although it is still undeveloped in rural regions, in urban areas its representatives have become a political force to be reckoned with in local assemblies. The Life Club is an organization composed mainly of 'housewives'. What made those housewives politically conscious?

In 1977, a core male activist of the Life Club proposed sending their own representatives to local assemblies.¹⁷ He was dissatisfied with the domination of Japanese politics by a small number of 'professional' politicians who ignored the demands and expectations of the public, and believed that ordinary citizens must take an active part in democratic politics. He believed the Life Club's successful campaigns for social reform could be readily extended into politics. In response to his proposal, a female member of the group stood for election to the Tokyo Metropolitan assembly, but she failed to be elected. There were two reasons for this failure. First, many members did not understand why they needed to get seats in assemblies and still thought that politics was not their business, so that they

were not enthusiastic about her campaign. Second, the campaign itself was not effectively run.¹⁸

This lesson might indeed have been a stimulus to the women's serious commitment to local politics, but their basic motivation in getting into politics was their eventual realization that their social reform activities were severely limited by their lack of contact with local law-makers. Many branches of the Life Club had pressed the relevant municipal assemblies to introduce new measures for food safety and environmental protection. In Tokyo, a branch backed by 17,207 signatures urged its municipal assembly to ban artificial food additives from school lunches, another branch submitted petitions with 5,500 signatures for the introduction of measures to reduce waste, and seven branches in Kanagawa Prefecture managed to collect an impressive total of 220,000 signatures to present each assembly in the prefecture with a proposal to reduce the use of synthetic detergents as the chemicals they contained were polluting local rivers. However, the assemblies concerned not only rejected the proposals, but also made no serious effort even to discuss them (Watanabe 1995: 183; Tokyo Seikatsusha Nettowāku 1998: 26). Those members of the Life Club who had listened to the debates in the assemblies were disappointed that most of the assembly members did not appear to understand their proposals at all (Kanagawa Nettowāku Undō 1998: 8).

The consciousness of the Life Club members was raised by their sense of outrage that 'the assembly members whose job was to represent citizens had completely ignored the demands of so many citizens' (Tokyo Seikatsusha Nettowāku 1998: 28). They strongly believed that 'the assemblies needed to have representatives who would work not for the interests of small lobbies in successive bids for re-election, but serve the needs of the wider majority' (Kanagawa Nettowāku Undō 1998: 8). They concluded that they would be suitable representatives of these citizens, because their activities at the Life Club made them familiar with the average citizen's everyday life, and they could express the demands of the public in the assemblies. In other words, they realized that their lives would not improve unless they themselves stood up for their demands. Their first electoral victory came in 1979, and further victories in local assembly elections were to follow. At present, Life Club groups have sent more than 100 members as their own representatives to local assemblies (Tokyo Seikatsusha Nettowāku 1998: 12-14).¹⁹

Municipality-based groups known as the Network (Nettwāku) played a leading role in the Life Club's local election campaigns. The Network was, in a sense, a task force of women who not only intended to organize election campaigns but also aspired to become local politicians themselves.²⁰ While each Network carried out its election activities independently at the municipal level, the headquarters coordinated the political goals of all the Networks so as to be consistent with the Life Club's objectives. The Network groups organized a competition among their members to select candidates for municipal assemblies. Those intending to become candidates had to put together a policy presentation, and the women who gave the most convincing presentation would be selected to run as candidates.

The candidates could make specific commitments to their constituencies, as long as their pledges fitted the general electoral strategy elaborated by the headquarters in consultation with Life Club members. Candidates for the prefectural assembly (in Tokyo, the metropolitan assembly) were selected from among people recommended by all the Network groups, following the same kind of competition used to select municipal assembly candidates. Once their candidates started campaigning for election, the Life Club organization provided them with material assistance and lent them its all-out support (Tokyo Seikatsusha *Nettowāku* 1998: 29; Kanagawa *Nettowāku Undō* 1998: 9–11).

The Network's members aim to revive local politics, which have become divorced from the expectations of many citizens, by invigorating popular political commitment. Japanese local governments have for a long time been financially dependent on the central government. For this reason, it has always been important for local politicians to build a friendly relationship with the central political elite in the ruling party. Local assembly members support the Diet members of the ruling party in their campaigns to be elected by local constituencies, while the Diet members reward the local politicians for their support by allotting generous financial support for the municipal budget. During the period of high economic growth, these financial resources were spent on improvements to the local infrastructure, and this brought benefits to the local economy. However, most of the necessary work had already been done. Local people began to see the development of better social services as more useful to them than further construction projects. People in urban areas were especially keen to find solutions to such problems as inadequate child care and care for the disabled. Despite the new public mood, however, local assemblies continued to attach importance to public works projects of marginal value (Eto 2001a: 28–31).

Why were local people unable to reform such dysfunctional assemblies and make them respond to their own needs? The main obstacle was often the difficulty of finding those who would go into politics but who were not part of established political networks. Even in municipal election campaigns, it is necessary to obtain a vast amount of money and to have powerful allies. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the candidates will be elected, and, if they fail, they may lose their livelihood, because they have to give up their jobs in order to stand for the election in the first place. Ordinary people could neither raise enough money to run successful election campaigns nor afford to take these kinds of risks. These factors have contributed to the persistent dominance of the local assemblies by politicians with vested interests.

It was the members of the Network groups who were able to break out of this vicious circle. They had the advantage of the organizational assistance and support of the Life Club. Middle-class housewives would rarely lose their livelihood even if they failed to get elected. More importantly, since the housewives spent all their time in their communities, they had a particular awareness of the needs of these areas (Shinohara 1971: 128–42). The Network representatives' term of office

was limited to three terms (four years per term) so that their political style would remain distinct from typical local politicians who often occupied assembly seats for several decades. They attached great importance to the connection between their everyday lives and their politics. Thus their representatives tabled motions in local assemblies on such issues as food safety, river purification, recycling of waste and improvements in social services (Watanabe 1995: 203). An outstanding aspect of all their proposals was that the Life Club's everyday activities ensured their feasibility: the project groups had had previous experience in these areas, which allowed the Life Club's assembly members to draw up detailed and workable policy proposals.²¹

In contrast to the Life Club, WINWIN backs female candidates from outside the group for elections. As I noted previously, women are excluded from the entrenched networks of male politicians. Thus WINWIN concentrates on the provision of campaign funds for female candidates who lack money and an established base of supporters. A recommendation committee consisting of thirteen members takes responsibility for selecting those women whom WINWIN will support on the basis of written submissions from and interviews with prospective candidates. The crucial criteria for selection as a recommended candidate are gender-consciousness and a commitment to improving the conditions of women. Party preference or affiliation is irrelevant. Selected candidates secure funding for their campaigns according to their popularity among the members: members decide to whom they donate money from the recommended candidates' list, and, as a result, some candidates get more money than others.²² WINWIN also helps its recommended candidates run their campaigns effectively by sending socially influential members to make campaign speeches on their behalf and asking regular members who live in the constituencies of these candidates to form support groups. So far, the group has supported twelve candidates for the Upper House, six for the Lower House and five for gubernatorial elections, and, as of August 2004, ten candidates for the Upper House, four for the Lower House and three for governorships had won election. The group extended its support to local assembly candidates in April 2003, and has already backed nineteen candidates, of whom three for prefectural assemblies and one for a municipal council have been elected.

My final example of the institutional channel is the 'back-up school' groups which work for an increase in female local assembly members. Similar to WINWIN, they support any female candidate in so far as she is determined to work for improvement in women's everyday lives. Rather than providing money, their activities instead aim to provide candidates with the knowledge and expertise that will enable them to be elected. Based on the assumption that ordinary people know next to nothing about local election procedures, the groups give trainees a series of lectures to provide them with essential information. In the lectures, newly elected women speak about their successful campaigns. That is why these groups are called 'schools'. The women's groups which support female candidates

obviously open the way to break through male-dominated politics, whatever their specific strategies are. It is the women's movement which transforms 'private' women into 'political' citizens.

Towards a dialogue between feminists and non-feminists

In the political activities of the feminist movement as well as the elite-initiated movement, socially influential activists play a key role by attracting media attention to publicize their causes and being appointees of advisory council committees. The non-feminist participatory movement, in contrast, makes good use of its mass membership and its 'natural' political activities which are derived from the everyday experience shared by the membership and hence enable all members to take part in decision-making. This participatory style is a factor in winning support from the public. As some feminist scholars suggest (e.g. Gelb 1989; Gelb and Palley 1996; Squires 1999), however, the participatory style of women's movements limits their nation-wide political influence, and more visible and professional leadership is required to put pressure on the central government and/or to send their representatives to the Diet. Indeed, the Life Club movement has been successful only in local politics. WAICE appears to have resolved this dilemma. Although the group is led by some well-known professional members who have access to the media and policy-making community, ordinary members are also active in setting the group's agendas and they participate autonomously in its decision-making. This equal relationship between the leading members and ordinary members comes from a bottom-up style of decision-making based on small group discussion, similar to that of the Life Club.

Feminists' campaigns are necessary to realize or promote woman-friendly policies and political institutions. However, non-working married women who constitute the main part of Japanese women's movements are remote from feminist concerns. Non-working housewives are often isolated from the public sphere, and cannot understand women's real situation in the workplace. Some feminists, therefore, criticized housewife activists for their identities as wives and mothers (e.g. Sasakura 1990: 250; Kanai 1994: 63–5). This was because the feminists feared that the 'women's rationality' on which the housewife activists based their campaigns negated the primary object of feminism. Yet I would argue that the housewife activists' experiences of managing their organizations and of running campaigns exposed them to the fact that women do endure many forms of unfair treatment. They became better informed about the serious problems women faced in the workplace through working with or talking to working women (Sato 1995: 164). Women who were previously indifferent to feminist issues began to realize that they had been distanced from women who were victims of discrimination in the workplace and in society, and they became able to speak out for a common cause with working women (ibid.: 163–5). Their growing gender consciousness encourages them to begin a 'dialogue with feminists' (Amano 1997: 284–6), and

this promises to reduce the distance between feminists and the female activists who do not identify themselves as feminists.

Conclusion

I have categorized women's movements in Japan into three groups. Although they differ in their activity pattern and ideological orientation, they have similarly internalized a motherhood tradition. This is a reflection of Japanese society, where women are socially respected not for their womanhood but for their motherhood. Maternalism has profoundly penetrated Japanese women's consciousness and expectations, and even radical feminists are subject to its influence.

A major reason for women's under-representation in legislative bodies is that political institutions reflecting the entrenched culture and values of men impede women, who are political latecomers, from participating in politics. Since neither the government nor the political parties of Japan have yet adopted positive actions to compensate for the disadvantages of the latecomers, women are still excluded from the policy-making community. In this respect, Japanese women's movements link women's demands with politics. They exercise practical influence inside and outside the formal political institutions. When they utilize a non-institutional channel, their activities are facilitated by the custom of Japanese policy-making in which bureaucrats take the initiative in drafting a bill, and advisory councils then have some influence in revising it. Recent changes in the process have brought about more opportunities for women seeking to engage in the policy-making process. As a result, they have succeeded in putting their ideas into some new policies. Women attach importance to institutional channels as well. Indeed, the Life Club movement has sent its own representatives to local legislative bodies, while WINWIN has contributed to the successful election campaigns of several female candidates for national, prefectural and local office.

Japanese women's groups, however, are not homogeneous. There has been a communication gap between feminists and non-feminist activists in the Japanese women's movement. The impetus to the political involvement of non-feminist activists was their sense of themselves as wives and mothers, and their perceived gender roles have been the basis of their campaigns. This 'feminine' characteristic was a target of feminist attack. But the gender-consciousness of the non-feminist activists has been gradually raised and they have increasingly become sensitive to other gender issues. Their budding feminist outlook may well prove conducive to dialogue between them and the feminists. If so, the intersecting voices among a variety of women's groups will become a further facilitator to promote the political representation of Japanese women.

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Notes

1. The HDI is compiled from three indicators: longevity measured by life expectancy; educational attainment; and standard of living measured by real GDP per capita (PPPS).
2. The GEM assesses the female share in professional jobs, managerial employment and politics.
3. Women's labour-force participation in Japan forms a so-called M-shaped curve when graphed: the participation rate of women in the 20–4 age group is the highest at 72.4 per cent; it declines among women aged 25–34, with the lowest rate at 56.7 per cent in the 30–34 age group. The participation rate of women aged 45–49 then constitutes a second peak at 71.8 per cent (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office in Japan 2001).
4. I define a women's movement as a kind of social movement which is initiated by women and of which the majority of participants are women. A social movement can be defined, following Tarrow, as the 'sequence of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames' and which 'develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents' (1998: 2). In another book, he adds to this definition: social movements are 'public, collective, episodic interactions among makers of claims when (1) at least some of the interaction adopts non-institutional forms, (2) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims, and (3) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants' (Tarrow 2000: 275).
5. The four issues were the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Retirement Equity Act of 1984.
6. For example, Fusae Ichikawa, Shigeri Yamataka and Muneo Oku.
7. Adopting Dehlerup's (1986: 6) broad definition, I identify feminism as a doctrine and social movement whose primary goal is to remove the discrimination against and oppression of women and to change the male domination of society. In the West, as is well known, feminism is divided into two waves. The first wave, in the nineteenth century, is called the women's rights movement and was based on liberalism, while the second wave, in the 1970s, was ideologically led by radical feminism and was manifested in the women's liberation movement. Radical feminism is characterized by its refusal to accept the traditional [Western] definition of 'woman' (Crow 2000: 2) or established norms of sexual relations between men and women in the private sphere.
8. Japanese women's labour-force participation in 1975 as a proportion of the overall female population aged 15 years and older was 45.9 per cent, and rose approximately 5 points to 50.1 per cent in 1990 (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office in Japan 2001).
9. Mikanagi (1999: 69) offers two other reasons for feminism's lack of impact: first, many women regarded women's liberation activists as 'deviants' because the mass media often presented their actions in a distorted way; and, second, the movement became obsessed with internal power struggles. However, media dissemination of an exaggerated image of women's liberation was common in Western countries, too. In the Japanese case, the low rate of full-time working mothers should be seen as the most important explanation.
10. For example, South Korea introduced a quota system to increase female candidates by over 30 per cent on proportional representation electoral lists, and a political party in Malaysia takes positive action to recruit young female candidates.

11. Six feminists are: Ryōko Akamatsu, a former Minister of Education; Aiko Ohgawara, business executive; Ruri Kawashima, Director of the Japan Society; Mitsuko Shimomura, journalist; Yōko Hayashi, lawyer; and Yoriko Meguro, Professor of Sophia University.
12. WINWIN was inspired by EMILY's List in the United State. EMILY's List, the EMILY of which is an acronym for 'Early Money Is Like Yeast', is the largest organization to provide election campaign funding for female Democrat candidates for congressional seats. The information about WINWIN is based on its newsletters Nos1-41 and its website, <http://www.winwinjp.org>.
13. Interview with Teruyo Amari, a reporter for the feminist newsletter *femme politique*, on 19 June 2003.
14. The three women are: Keiko Higuchi, commentator; Takako Sodei, Professor of Ochanomizu Women's University; and Yukiko Okuma, journalist.
15. These two are Higuchi and Sodei.
16. Their names are listed in the records of the proceedings of relevant advisory councils. The records can be found on the website of the Gender Equality Office, Cabinet Office, www.gender.go.jp.
17. A few male left-wing activists supported a group of women in setting up the Life Club, and these male members ran the organization in its early years. Thus it was pointed out that practical power over the group was actually held by men (Sato 1995: 166). However, nowadays, female members, who had gained experience and acquired a great deal of expertise, hold real power in the movement, taking responsibility for all its activities (Ito 1995: 233-4).
18. Interview on 23 June 1999 with Atsuko Ikeda, a core member of the Life Club in Tokyo, who served three terms in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly.
19. The local government system in Japan is a two-tiered structure comprising prefectures and municipalities. Local governments function with a governor of the prefecture or a mayor of the municipality in charge of the executive, and with an assembly as the legislature. The assembly members as well as the governor and the mayor are elected by adult residents once every four years. Most of the Life Club groups' assembly members belong to municipal councils; at the prefectural level, they have only three Tokyo metropolitan and four Kanagawa prefectural assembly members as of 2001.
20. There are twenty-one Network groups with a total membership of 2,500 in Tokyo and seventeen Network groups with a total membership of 3,400 in Kanagawa.
21. Interview with Atsuko Ikeda on 12 October 1999.
22. Interview on 19 June 2003 with Yoko Harada, a member in charge of WINWIN's secretariat,

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