

## The Roles of University Women in a Changing Japanese Society

Kimi Hara\*

It may not be too much to say that the position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level. Never in the history of mankind has the status of women been more drastically altered than in the 20th century which has survived two world wars. The reformation of the status of women took place almost all over the world both in the countries under the communistic and democratic systems. In *The Status of Women in the Soviet Union* <sup>(1)</sup> it is stated as follows: "Without the emancipation of women, who compose half of the population, without bringing them into equal participation with men in social and productive work and in state administration, it would have been impossible to realize socialist democracy, and to carry out the far-reaching national economic plans, which required the full utilization of all the country's productive forces."

In India <sup>(2)</sup> where womanhood had been highly respected by tradition the doors of all educational institutions, services and lines of employment have been thrown open for competent women since the independence of the country. They have women doctors, lawyers, engineers, statesmen, office administrators, secretaries, clerks, musicians and artists and even have a woman Governor of an important province, who may be mentioned among the wisest and most honoured administrators in their country. No less remarkable transformation was brought about to the status of Japanese women with the termination of World War II. Article 14 of the New Constitution promulgated on November 3, 1946 reads as follows: "All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of

---

\* Assistant Professor of Educational Sociology

race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.” However, when one considers this article, one may wonder why it took so many centuries to institute such obvious social legislation.

Baber <sup>(3)</sup>, observing the progress of women in Japan, writes with some reservation, “Theoretically sex equality is basic to democracy, but even Western democracies of long standing have been slow in translating its theory into practice. Is it any wonder, therefore, that in a new democracy such as Japan’s the realization of actual sex equality should lag so far behind the law?” It seems that sex equality has been achieved better and faster in communistic countries than in democratic ones because raising the status of women in the Soviet Union, for instance, was considered by the Party a vital political task <sup>(4)</sup>. Some Japanese social critic says that unless the social system is reformed, it is impossible to fully accomplish the emancipation of women in Japan <sup>(5)</sup>.

Here it might be appropriate to examine the question of sex equality in relation to freedom of the individual which, as well as equality, is basic to human existence regardless of ideologies. To what extent is individual freedom respected in a communistic country where equality has been achieved? Of course, an interpretation of the meaning of freedom may differ between the communistic and non-communistic countries. In the former, in order to carry out the national economic plans, individual freedom is subservient to the aims of the state, while in the latter “the freedom of each individual must be equally maintained as long as it does not infringe upon the freedom of others” <sup>(6)</sup>. Therefore the emancipation of women must be considered in terms of both freedom and equality which must be held in dialectic relation.

At the same time this question can also be viewed in terms of ends and means. In a communistic country achievement of the national economic plans requires the full utilization of all the country’s productive forces including those of the women. Therefore, the emancipation of women was realized as a means to achieve the

ends of the state. On the other hand, in a democratic country where “the recognition of the dignity of man is the first premise of democratic thought”<sup>(7)</sup>, the emancipation of women was brought about not as a means to achieve the ends of the state, but as an end in itself.

It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to compare the conditions of women in the countries of different ideologies. The author attempts to deal with the roles of women college graduates in relation to the present status of women in Japan.

Since education frees the human spirit and serves as an escalator in the social structure, the status of women cannot be improved without the advancement of education. Of course, the quality of education counts more than the quantity, yet there has been a steady increase in the number of women who graduated from college in post-war Japan<sup>(8)</sup>.

Table 1 Graduates of Colleges and Universities

Year	Senior College				Junior College			
	Male	Female	%		Male	Female	%	
1951	46,860	4,340	91.5	8.5	5,731	4,562	55.6	44.4
1952	92,418	8,404	91.6	8.4	8,576	8,824	49.3	50.7
1953	76,585	10,844	87.7	12.3	11,660	12,243	48.7	51.3
1954	83,501	14,006	85.6	14.4	12,873	15,534	45.3	54.7
1955	92,304	15,550	85.3	14.7	13,018	18,099	41.8	58.2
1956	97,427	16,180	84.7	15.3	12,204	19,699	38.2	61.8
1957	99,462	16,549	85.7	14.3	10,459	20,637	33.6	66.4
1958	102,439	15,514	86.8	13.2	9,447	19,750	32.2	67.8

In 1951 the ratio of male and female graduates of 4-year colleges and universities was 11 to 1, while in 1958 the female ratio was increased to 6.5 to 1. If we consider graduates of junior colleges, from 1951 to 1953, the male and female ratio was almost 1 to 1, while the female graduates of junior colleges have shown a marked increase since 1954, the number being twice that of the male graduates for the last few years. Therefore, if graduates of junior colleges

are included, the male and female ratio of graduates of all colleges and universities in 1958 was 3.5 to 1.

In prewar Japan women were not admitted to most of the national universities, but they were limited to "semmongakko"<sup>(9)</sup> or to women's higher normal schools. In 1940 the number of women students enrolled in those higher educational institutions was 24,000 and the number enrolled in the universities of the old system was only 200, while in 1958 the number of women students enrolled in graduate schools was 900, in 4-year colleges and universities was 71,000 and in junior colleges 44,803. The increase within 18 years was about 5 times<sup>(10)</sup>.

Table 2 Number of Female Graduates

Year	Graduates Junior H. S.	Graduates Senior H. S.	Graduates Colleges & Univ.
1951	825,993	217,265	4,340
1952	858,892	233,653	8,404
1953	753,681	282,833	10,844
1954	817,882	300,325	14,006
1955	920,955	324,363	15,550
1956	982,428	315,690	16,180
1957	933,958	344,599	16,549
1958	973,930	387,660	15,514

Although there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women who graduated from college, the number is extremely limited compared with that of those who finished junior high school (compulsory education). As Table 3 shows, those who finished junior high school in 1951 were supposed to graduate from senior high school in 1954, and from college in 1958. Therefore if the number of graduates of junior high school in 1951 is compared with that of college graduates in 1958, only one out of 53 girls of the age group had the privilege of completing a 4-year college education. If we include the graduates of junior college, the number will be increased to one out of 23.

In the U.S.A. roughly 60 per cent of those entering college are

men and 40 per cent are women, and this ratio is about the same for college graduates<sup>(11)</sup>. Of the 470,000 degrees granted in 1959, 390,000 were bachelor's and first professional degrees (e. g., the M. D. degree), 70,700 were master's and second professional degrees, and 9,300 were doctoral degrees.<sup>(12)</sup> There were 3.4 million persons (of all ages) in college in 1959; this includes about 35 per cent of the eighteen-to twenty-one-year-old age group.<sup>(13)</sup> In summary, one out of three of the age group seeks college education and one out of six completes it. The male and female ratio is approximately 3 to 2. This is still a far-reaching goal for the Japanese women to attain.

Although one of the basic assumptions in a democratic society is to provide people of all levels with opportunities to develop individual potentialities to the fullest, women's higher education in Japan is still restricted to a selected few who are supposed to be the future leaders in a democratic society. Then what responsibilities must the privileged women assume toward the less privileged? What are the aspirations of the women who have had higher education? What is the attitude of society toward the educated women? What are some of the obstacles which still exist in the elevation of women's status?

Recently various studies have been published abroad: Judith Hubback in Great Britain<sup>(14)</sup>, Department of Labor in Canada<sup>(15)</sup>, U.S. Department of Labor<sup>(16)</sup>, Radcliffe Committee<sup>(17)</sup>, and Alice K. Leopold<sup>(18)</sup>. These studies mainly deal with women college graduates in relation to their marriage and career discussing the compatibility of home and work and their opinions and value of college education. A similar study<sup>(19)</sup> was carried out in Japan three years ago under the sponsorship of the Institute for Democratic Education aided by the Japanese Association of University Women. Questionnaires were sent to 4970 women graduates of 26 colleges and universities ranging in age from 25 to 55, who were married and had working experience. Out of 4970 questionnaires, 2071 were found to be valid. The study reveals that these women are very

eager to pursue "the double-track career pattern," which is, according to Super, "the pattern of the woman who goes to work after completing her education, marries and continues with a double career of working and homemaking<sup>(20)</sup>." Only 12% of them are unemployed, but 67% of the unemployed wish to work again, if offered a favored position. Some of the chief reasons why they work are as follows:

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| (1) in order to lead a better life         | 55.8% |
| (2) because the job is interesting         | 51.6% |
| (3) in order to render services to society | 49.2% |

With respect to their home life 81.5% of 2071 women live with their husbands, 14.4% lost their husbands, 2.6% are separated on account of the location of work and other reasons. Divorce is only 1.4%. This divorce rate is much lower than the nationwide rate, which was 3.6% in 1958. The degree of satisfaction as to the compatibility of home and profession is as follows:

- |   |       |         |
|---|-------|---------|
| Extremely happy                             | 19.8% |         |
| Quite satisfied                             | 46.4% |         |
| Reluctantly continuing the job              |       | } 16.3% |
| Wishing to quit the job as soon as possible |       |         |

As is clear, 66.2% of these women are happy and successful in following the double-track career pattern in spite of many obstacles. It might be interesting to see their responses to the traditional idea of "women going back to the home". They are, as expected, overwhelmingly against this idea. Only 10.4% of them answered that they were in favor of it. Since the writer wanted to know the reactions of the younger generation to the same question, senior women in 6 colleges and universities in Tokyo were surveyed in October 1959. Those who declared "No" were 25.1%, while in the study sponsored by the Institute for Democratic Education, 70.7% answered in the negative. Nearly half of them could not say either "Yes" or "No". It means that most of them have had no definite design of life for their future. It might not be proper to

Table 3 Responses of Senior Women in 6 Colleges and Universities in Tokyo to "Women Must Go Back to the Home"

Response	N	%
Yes	23	8.8
Conditional Yes	11	4.2
Neutral	105	40.5
No	65	25.1
Conditional No	10	4.2
N. A.	45	17.2
Total	259	100.0

compare these two studies, but the younger generation, as revealed in this study, is less career-minded than the women in the other study. According to Leopold <sup>(21)</sup>, "The career-minded graduates equaled about one-fourth of the women graduates in 1955 and about one-fifth in 1956 and 1957." These three nationwide surveys of women college graduates in the U.S.A. show a slight decrease in "career-mindedness" of women.

Setsu Tanino, Chief of the Women's and Minors' Bureau, points out a few crucial problems of employment which Japanese women college graduates are facing <sup>(22)</sup>. Out of 49 companies and agencies which were surveyed by the Women's and Minors' Bureau in 1960 only 2 of them said that they were ready to employ women college graduates. Business companies and banks are generally unwilling to employ women college graduates with equal pay with men. They hire women with less education . . . graduates of senior high school or junior college. According to Mrs. Tanino who was the deputy representative to the United Nations, Japan is far behind other countries in terms of the employment of women. Another problem is that of discrimination against women in salary scales and promotion, chiefly because men do not like being supervised by women. The third problem she raises is marriage and child-rearing, which have been taken up by the Committee on the Status

of Women in the United Nations. In order to protect married women in employment, the Committee considers democratization of family, improvement of working conditions and establishment of the social security system vitally important. Finally, she insists upon the need of exploring new fields of work suitable for women by means of upgrading women's education.

In this paper an attempt is being made to discuss the roles of college-educated women in Japanese society which has been undergoing profound changes. According to Frank <sup>(23)</sup>, "a role is always a circular, reciprocal relationship," such as husband-wife, parent-child or teacher-pupil, in which each member of a role relationship must respond reciprocally so that each of the pair can perform his defined role. There are various roles which women college graduates must assume in the family, in occupation and in society. The family, as discussed by Talcott Parsons <sup>(24)</sup>, has become a highly specialized, but the most important socializing agency in terms of mutual emotional attachments. Particularly in Japan where the relations between the family members have been (or are being) radically altered, we cannot overemphasize the significance of the role which is played by an educated woman as wife and mother in the family by use of her highly cultivated heart and mind. By and large, it is true that democracy starts with the family.

College education for women in Japan is still for a selected few. Since these few women have had their potentialities developed, it is natural that they wish to use their abilities not only for their own families but also for society. Of course, there are "many differences in life patterns and social roles of men and women," as mentioned by Mueller <sup>(25)</sup>, because masculine and feminine roles are determined socially as well as biologically. We cannot expect every woman college graduate to hold a job. However, it is hoped that intelligent young women, instead of being contented with stopgap jobs, can channel their capabilities, toward both fulfilment of their individual aspirations and maximum service to



society. The Japanese society itself is full of uncertainties facing adults as well as young people. This is a result of industrialization and urbanization in the economic aspect, and of democratization in the social and political aspect. One of the prevailing attitudes of the Japanese people, as analyzed by Reischauer <sup>(26)</sup>, may be described as a lack of self-confidence. He says, "The Japanese still have not recovered their self-confidence after their catastrophic attempt to carve out an empire and they are content to leave to us the worries of solving the world's problems." Today nothing is more needed than developing leadership in order to give a clear sense of direction and consciousness of values to people who feel confused in this complex world. It is said that privileges easily won are often taken for granted. Unless efforts are constantly made on the part of women, particularly those privileged with higher educational opportunities, with a deep sense of social responsibilities and high aspiration to strive for a peaceful world, they cannot make democracy a living reality.

1. Bilshai, V. *The Status of Women in the Soviet Union*, p.5. Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957.
2. Madhavananda, Swami and Ramesh Majumdar. *Great Women of India*, p.114. Calcutta, Sri Gouranga Press Ltd., 1953.
3. Baber, Ray E. *Youth Looks at Marriage and the Family*, p.12. Tokyo, International Christian University, 1958.
4. Bilshai, *The Status of Women in the Soviet Union*, p.39.
5. Tanaka, Sumiko. "Fujin Kaiho no Kabe," (Walls Blocking Emancipation of Women) *Shiso*, December 1958.
6. Kojima, Gunzo. *The Philosophical Foundations for Democratic Education in Japan*, p.31. Tokyo, International Christian University, 1959.
7. *Ibid.* p.28.
8. Mombusho (Ministry of Education). *Gakko Kihonchosa Hōkokusho*. (Report on Basic Survey of Schools), 1959.
9. "Semmongakko." Under the multiple-track educational system, this institution consisted of three or four years of specialized (vocational, technical or commercial) training before the university level. This

- institution did not easily continue to the university level.
10. Hara, Kimi. "Sengo ni okeru Josei no Shakaiteki Chii no Henka ni Kansuru Kenkyu," (Changes in the Status of Women in Postwar Japan) p.198, *ICU Educational Studies* 6, March 1960.
  11. Havighurst, Robert J. and Bernice L. Neugarten. *Society and Education*, p.243. Boston, Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1957.
  12. Axt, Richard G. "Higher Education," in Eli Ginzberg, ed., *Values and Ideals of American Youth*, p.88. New York, Columbia University Press, 1961.
  13. *Ibid.* p.86.
  14. Hubback, Judith. *Wives Who Went to College*. London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1957.
  15. Department of Labor, Canada. *Survey of Married Women Working for Pay*, 1958.
  16. U.S. Department of Labor. *College Women Go to Work*, 1956.
  17. Radcliffe Committee. *Graduate Education for Women*, 1956.
  18. Leopold, Alice K. "Today's Women College Graduates", *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, pp.280-84. December 1959.
  19. Yoshida, Noboru *et al.* *Joshi no Kōtōkyōiku to Shokugyō oyobi Katei no Mondai* (Women's Higher Institution, Profession and Home), Tokyo, Institute for Democratic Education, 1961.
  20. Super, Donald E. *The Psychology of Careers*, p.77. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957.
  21. Leopold. *op. cit.*, p.283.
  22. Tanino, Setsu. "Daigaku de no Fujin ga Tōmenshiteiru Shokuba no Shomondai" (Problems of Employment Women College Graduates Face), *Minshu Kyoiku* (Democratic Education) 2, April 1961.
  23. Frank, Lawrence K. "Some Aspects of the Changing Roles of Teachers", *Educational Horizons*, p.126. Winter 1959.
  24. Parsons, Talcott. "A Sociologist's View", in Eli Ginzberg, *Values and Ideals of American Youth*, p.274.
  25. Mueller, Kate H. *Educating Women for a Changing World*, p.9. Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 1954.
  26. Reischauer, Edwin O. "Outlook for the Future," in Elizabeth and Victor A. Velen, ed., *The New Japan*, p.195. New York, The H. W. Wilson Co., 1958.