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Feminism in Modern Japan: A Historical Review of Japanese Women’s Issues on Gender

By Polina Lukyantseva

Abstract

This study primarily illustrates the evolution of the feminist movement in Japan by comparing two waves of the feminist movement. Furthermore, this paper examines the development of gender roles and gender bias in modern Japanese patriarchal society. It also illustrates and explains traditional roles, Japanese ideologies, the system of Fu-you (Jap. 扶養), and modern trends in contemporary Japan. In this study, the following qualitative research methods were applied. A thorough historical context analysis was done to comprehend the social dynamics, issues, and specifics of feminism in Japan, and the principle of historicism was used to illuminate and compare the impact of the feminist movement. Furthermore, the study also examines how feminism developed after the Second World War up until the present.

Keywords: Feminism, Japan, Gender Equality, Social Issues, Contemporary Japan

Introduction

Japan has spent more than 150 years trying to address social issues (i.e., SDG 5). However, the problem of gender inequality remains unresolved. For instance, goal number five—gender equality—is colored red in the Sustainable Development Report for 2022 (SDG Index, 2022). It indicates that the country has had significant difficulties in achieving gender equality. Moreover, Japan was ranked 120 out of 156 countries (World Economic Forum, 2021) in the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR, 2021) and placed 120 (score 0.656) in the Gender Gap Index (GGI) submitted by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japan in 2022. In addition, Japan scored 0.12 in 2015 and 0.16 in 2016 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) in three categories: economic status, empowerment of women, and reproductive health. These numbers are better than in India or Africa (the rating varies from 0.53 to 0.66) but worse than in Canada or Europe (the rating varies from 0.1 to 0.7) (Our World in Data, 2019).

The fact that Japan is trying to solve such issues is apparent in present trends. At the UN General Assembly, former Prime Minister Abe emphasized Japan's intention to enhance its cooperation with the international community to support gender equality and women's empowerment (MOFA, 2021). The Gender Equality Bureau at the World Economic Forum (2022) stated that there is a need to eliminate the gender gap and promote women into management and leadership roles (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2022).

Although Japan has been showing a great intention to increase the gender equality index, some topics related to gender equality have not been fully acknowledged. For example, women's identity, sexuality, gender bias, gender inequality at work, and gender segregation in education are not adequately addressed or emphasized in contemporary Japan (Molony, 2000; Macie, 2003; Dales, 2009; Bullock, 2010; Tachibana, 2010). Hence, the primary goal of this

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2 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – Gender Equality
study is to examine how feminism emerged in Japan and analyze both its positive and negative outcomes.

**Literature Review: Gender, Feminism, and Japanese Society**

The history of the feminist movement in Japan has been a topic of interest in women’s studies and feminist research for many years. Both Asian and Western scholars repeatedly acknowledge a long history of feminism in Japan (Molony, 2000; Macie, 2003; Dales, 2009; Bullock, 2010; Tachibanaki, 2010), highlighting that the women's suffrage movement began even before the Second World War and reached its peak in the 1970s.

To study this topic, there is a need to do a close reading of the following works on the feminist movement in Japan. In *Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870-1925* (Molony, 2000), *Women's Activism and “Second Wave”: Feminism Transnational Histories* (Molony, 2017), *The Other Women's Lib* (Bullock, 2010), *Feminist Movement in Contemporary Japan* (Dales, 2009), and *Evolution of the Feminism Movement in Japan* (Matsui, 1990), these authors provide a basis for studying the history of feminism, the ideology of the movement, and its formation in modern society. *The Other Women's Lib* (Bullock, 2010) and *Feminist Movement in Contemporary Japan* (Dales, 2009) demonstrate how the second wave (the Liberation Movement) developed in a post-war society. It also illuminates the unique characteristics, formation, and influence of feminism on contemporary Japan.

On the other hand, *Evolution of the Feminism Movement in Japan* (Matsui, 1990) depicts and examines the development of the Japanese feminist movement and illustrates its main agenda. *The Space of Postwar History* (Isoda, 2000), however, displays high economic growth after the Second World War and analyzes how the post-war period transformed or changed people and their mindsets. Molony, Macie, Dales, and Bullock’s works, in which the history and critical steps in the development of feminism in Japan are illustrated, form the basis for studying the feminist movement, the suffrage movement, and gender inequality issues in the 20th and 21st century.

In the following works, *The New Paradox for Japanese Women: Greater Choice, Greater Inequality* (Tachibanaki, 2010), *How Far Have We Come in Gender Equality?* (Yamashita, 2018), *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan* (Kingston, 2019), *Overview: Gender and Human Rights* (Tsujimura, 2021), these authors apply qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate gender bias, gender inequality, gender-based violence, and other issues in contemporary Japan. Through various examples, such as the gender gap in the workplace, gender segregation in education, bias in Japanese lifestyle, career tracing at Japanese companies, and disparities in education, these scholars show the actual situation of women in the country.


Finally, online resources such as the SGD Index, Global Gender Gap Report, “Our World in Data,” and data submitted by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japan provided information, data, and statistics about the state of gender bias, inequality, and other issues in the world and the country.

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³ The phrase means “Good wife, wise mother.”
It is crucial to emphasize that all the scholars previously mentioned contributed significant knowledge about the paradigm of the feminist movement and its development in Japan; for instance, J. C. Bullock (2010) described either the first and second waves of feminism or their main agendas. They also clarified the unique aspects of feminism in Japan; for instance, K. Isoda (2000) examined the impact of the Ryosaikenbo on Japanese society. Additionally, these researchers described and illustrated the core idea of the Japanese family and clarified gender roles as well as studied the idea of femininity and masculinity in Japan.

Materials and Methods

First, a thorough historical context analysis (a qualitative research method) of B. Molony, V. Macie, J. Bullock, T. Tachibanaki, and J. Charleboisn was done to comprehend the dynamics and specifics of gender equality, feminism, and social issues in pre-war, post-war, and modern Japanese societies. Furthermore, the principle of historicism (another qualitative research method) helped illuminate and compare the impact of the feminist movement on the first and second waves, as well as underline and analyze how feminism developed after the Second World War, in the 70-s, in the 90-s, and in contemporary Japan. Each period was investigated separately and eventually compared with each other.

Finally, the data analysis and data interpretation research method from such resources as the SGD Index, Global Gender Gap Report, “Our World in Data,” and data submitted by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japan helped to organize or categorize data. It also was necessary to prove and validate the theories that have been outlined by B. Molony, V. Macie, J. Bullock, T. Tachibanaki, J. Charleboisn, and other scholars.

Discussion

The Development of the Feminist Movement in Japan

First, there is a need to briefly outline the history of the development of feminism in Japan and highlight its crucial points. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Western ideas of human rights spread throughout Japan. A half century later, in 1919, the New Women's Organization emerged. It was led by feminist and writer Hiratsuka Raicho (1886-1971), feminist Ichikawa Fusae (1893-1981), politician Oku Mumeo (1895-1997), and writer Yaeko Nogami (1885-1985). For the first time in Japanese history, these activists highlighted the importance of rethinking the position of women in Japanese society and their rights. It is necessary to underline that in Imperial Japan women were financially restricted, isolated from society, and prohibited from any political involvement or organization. They had to stay in the ie (Eng. Japanese house; Jap. 家) and were required to obey the following ideologies such as Ryosaikenbo (Eng. good wife and wise mother, Jap. 良妻賢母) before WWII. Kyoiku-no-haha (Eng. a wise mother who educates children, Jap. 教育の母), or Sengyo-shufu (Eng. Full-time housewife, Jap. 専業主婦) after WWII (Dales, 2009, pp. 14-15). Therefore, for the first activists such as Hiratsuka or Yosano, there was a highly significant need to achieve social reforms such as protection for the rights of mothers, such as the right to a maternity leave. Hiratsuka and other feminists promoted the economic independence of women. They also underlined the need for equal rights and voting rights. In addition, they began to fight against the patriarchy and raised the issue of women's health along with the complex economic and labor conditions for women (Dales, 2009, pp. 14-21; Lukyantseva, 2022, p.73). Hiratsuka and other feminists pointed out the need to legalize divorce for women whose husbands were infected with STDs. Although female and male activists supported this movement, their attempts to change Japanese patriarchal society failed because Japanese society was not ready for change at that time (Molony, 2000, pp. 639-661).

A few years later, in 1923-24, another group of female activists emerged. After the New Women's Organization failed, the Tokyo Federation of Women's Organization began to
advocate for women's rights again. In 1925, because of their vigorous activities, the following topics were brought up for discussion in Parliament, but were not fully resolved until the 1960s (Molony, 2000, pp. 639-661): allowing women the right to join political parties and associations; access to higher education for women; and allowing women to vote and become candidates for local office.

As a result, almost thirty years later in 1947, mainly due to the American occupation of Japan rather than changes in traditional Japanese society, women over the age of twenty were allowed to vote in elections (Dales, 2009, pp. 16-17; Lukyantseva, 2022, p. 73). On the other hand, the question of female labor, education, women's reproductive freedom, and abortion was still open and unresolved until the second half of the 1960s, when the Women's Liberation Movement emerged (Molony, 2000, pp. 639-661; Tachibanaki, 2010, pp. 123).

The Second Wave

Japanese society has not transformed that much since the 1960s-70s. The Ryosaikenbo ideology was replaced or altered by Sengyo-shufu (full-time housewife) in the 1960s-70s. Although the name was replaced, the idea remained the same. Dales (2009) explains that a revolution in the family was accompanied by rapid economic growth. The nuclear family model became dominant. Nevertheless, the patriarchal society had not changed at all. Society imposed two traditional roles on men and women: the full-time housewife for women and the role of a breadwinner for men. The breadwinner role was mainly represented through the image of a Japanese salaried worker (Jap. サラリーマン) (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 5-6; Lukyantseva, 2022, pp. 73-74).

It is necessary to highlight that the second wave was mainly revived by protests against the Vietnam War and US-Japan Security Treaty, not the gender-unequal society. Despite this, the movement influenced the formation of modern feminism. It positively affected protective laws (e.g., the Equal Employment Opportunity Act or the Parental Leave Act). Moreover, it also influenced the position and representation of Japanese women in society (Molony, 2000, pp. 639-661).

The second wave, or The Women's Liberation Movement, began in the 1960s. It was established by a small group of feminists and writers: Tanaka Mitsu (1945-), Chizuko Ueno (1948-), Minori Kitahara (1948-), and Hisako Matsui (1946-). However, they were later supported by many female activists and writers all over the country.

Both the first wave and The Women's Liberation Movement had much in common. For example, they both focused on denouncing discrimination against women in the family and society and fought for women's employment rights. As a result, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, two laws that significantly changed Japanese society were issued: The Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1985) and The Parental Leave Act (1992) (Mackie, 2009, pp. 164-168).

As opposed to the first wave, the main agenda of the Women's Liberation Movement was as follows: fighting against sexism, rethinking female sexuality, and highlighting the importance of women's right to control their bodies (abortion and consent for physical or sexual contact). On the contrary, the first wave of feminism focused on legal regulations such as electoral rights for women, improving labor conditions, and providing access to education for all women (Molony, 2000, pp. 639-661).

The Women's Liberation Movement spread the idea that Japanese women should obtain reproductive freedom and the right to choose whether they want children or not (Bullock, 2010, p.21; Mackie, 2009, pp. 164-168). They repeatedly highlighted the importance of legalizing

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4 These two laws gave Japanese women the opportunity to work, get promotions and have the same wages as their male colleagues. Moreover, women had the right to maternity leave.
abortions and tried to change the situation in the early 1950s. After 1948, the Japanese government frequently attempted to review the law and apply criminal offenses to women seeking abortions. For example, the prohibition of abortion has prevailed in the Penal Code in Japan. The other concern was the establishment of a counseling system. This system was supposed to indicate a proper age for marriage and having a first child for Japanese women. Firstly, activists illuminated the necessity for legalization and justification of abortion for economic reasons. Secondly, they supported The Eugenic Protection Law (1948). This law permitted abortions in certain exceptional circumstances (McCurry, 2021). Finally, they opposed the establishment of a counseling system. Activists proved that the Japanese patriarchal society (i.e., the government) tried to increase the birth rate through the control of women. Moreover, feminists also helped to remove eugenics-related discriminatory clauses (Bullock, 2010, p. 21; Mackie, 2009, pp. 164-168).

In conclusion, it is necessary to illuminate that all actions mentioned above have changed Japanese society in many ways, giving women rights to an education, decreased discrimination in the workplace, voting rights, reproductive rights, and the power to express and show their sexuality in society. Moreover, activists tried to change the traditional Japanese family structure, emphasizing that women may pursue careers and education equally with men.

Modern Japan: Workplace, Education, and Marriage

Now, it is necessary to analyze the impact of feminism. Although feminists achieved various goals and some significant and protective laws, such as The Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOL) and The Parental Leave Act (PLA), there remains a discrepancy between theory and practice.

First, as it was mentioned above, the second wave initiated the issuance of EEOL. This law theoretically controlled discrimination against women, prohibited pay or promotion bias, regulated overtime work, and prohibited night work or heavy and dangerous physical labor (Tachibanaki, 2010, p. 26-27). On the other hand, Tachibanaki (2010) highlighted that in many cases in Japan laws might be strict but implementation is usually lax (p. 26).

For instance, the data below shows that, in practice, EEOL did not and does not regulate many aspects. According to the Gender Wage Gap for 2020, Japan has a wage gap of 22.5% (Statista Research Department, 2022). Figure 1 compares Japan to Belgium and Sweden which are two countries considered to have nearly optimal scores. Moreover, Tsujimura (2021) indicates that in 2021 the average wage for women was only 72% of what men earned (p. 55). In addition, in Japan only 14.7% of women hold leadership positions and the average income of women is 43.7% lower than the average income of men (World Economic Forum, 2021; OECD, 2020). Hence, it can be assumed that although The Women's Liberation Movement provided the necessary tools (EEOL and PLA) to regulate gender segregation, gender dissemination, and gender bias at work, the reality of today’s Japanese society differs from their goals.
The other significant problem in Japan is the combination of the old Japanese ideology, marginalization of women at work, general segregation at work, and the system *Fu-you* (Eng. dependency, Jap. 扶養). Tachibana (2010), analyzing the employment rate and the gender gap in the industry, explains that many women still work in the two sectors of services or wholesale industries. Moreover, the gender gap is evident in occupational choice. More female workers prefer or feel they must choose clerical work. Meanwhile, most men are represented as managing employees in executive, managerial, and supervisory positions (Tachibana, 2010, pp. 13-19). It can be assumed that women’s choices are influenced by the marginalization of female workers. For example, Tachibana (2010) explains that there is a belief that men focus more on careers because they usually support the household. Therefore, positions such as managing employees are deemed to be more suitable for men than clerical work. Moreover, Inagaki and Harding (2018) indicate that Japanese companies are more reluctant to employ female workers because they might quit after giving birth.

Second, the idea that women should not work in male-dominated fields is still prevalent in Japanese businesses. For example, it was indicated that in the 21st century, 52 to 64% of Japanese companies hired only women for clerical work (Tachibana, 2010, p. 24). It means more than 50% of Japanese companies hired only women for office work, displaying how they undervalue women and completely disregard men as office workers. Moreover, some Japanese companies still think that complex jobs require sophisticated skills that women do not have (Tachibana, 2010, pp. 24-25).

Finally, it can be assumed that there is a connection between higher education and future academic choices (university, department, etc.), such as humanities or social studies for women. Those academic choices of majors might have an impact on the proportion of women in leadership roles. Furthermore, it can cause gender segregation at work (Tachibana, 2010, p. 61). Tachibana (2010) highlights that “the difference in the academic courses and majors” is the other significant factor that causes gender disbalance in the workplace in Japan and the gender gap in occupational choices (pp. 24-25).

On the other hand, the system *Fu-you* that discourages women from working full-time does not work well in improving the situation either. *Fu-you*, which can be loosely translated into English as a “supporting system or economic support,” puts wives and children in a

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**Figure 1: The Gender Wage Gap**

![Bar chart showing the gender wage gap in Japan, Belgium, and Sweden.]

Source: Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2022
dependent position. This system forces women to work only as part-timers (non-regular workers), so the men (so-called breadwinners) do not need to pay extra taxes (Kuruma, 2020). It was applied in post-war Japanese society to assist families where the other spouse remained at home. This household was primarily maintained by men in a period of high economic growth in Japan. At that time, postwar society, which mainly focused on supporting the country and developing its economy, did not consider female workers as a significant part of a working society. The whole responsibility was put on the shoulders of the male population or the husbands, while wives were required to help them at home. This system became a necessary part of Japanese culture in post-war Japan. However, it should be highlighted that it still exists, and many families consider it the only way to run a household today. The correlation between the system Fu-you and the development of feminism shows that the number of employed women increased by approximately 3.4 million in 9 years. On the other hand, in 2022 50.8% of women worked as part-timers, thus continuing the system Fu-you (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2022).

It is necessary to focus on gender segregation in education and women's participation in research. Globally the share of women in higher education and research decreases after graduate school, but what is most important is that the number drops off abruptly after a Ph.D. degree. It falls from women as 53% of undergraduate and graduate school graduates to 43% of Ph.D. graduates, then falls off almost double to 28% of researchers after a Ph.D. level (UNESCO, 2015).

Specifically, in Japan, according to Tachibanaki (2010), a higher percentage of men than women attend universities (p. 26). Moreover, Yamashita (2018) explains that in Japan in 2016, the rate of women entering undergraduate school was 48.2% while their entrance rate for graduate school was only 5.9% (See Figure 2) (p. 55). Furthermore, referring to the work of Tsujimura (2021) in Overview: Gender and Human Rights, in 2020, there was a nearly equal number of high school enrollment with girls at 95.7% and boys at 95.3%. The number of women declines in undergraduate universities with women at 50.9% and men at 57.7%. The percent who go to graduate school is also unequal: 5.6% of women and 14.2% of men. Tachibanaki (2010) attributes this drop to the following reasons: the high cost of tuition, the Japanese system of finding a job right after getting a bachelor's degree, gender bias in education, gender segregation, and the use of education services as an advantage in finding a partner for future marriage (pp. 68-69).

Furthermore, Tsujimura (2021) indicates that following global statistics, the majority of girls in Japan preferred humanities, nursing science, pharmacy, and social studies over science programs (pp. 284-285). For example, Yamashita (2018) explains that there is a significant gender difference in specializations. Among undergraduate female students, 67.5% of the students in pharmaceutics and nursing were women, 65.4% of the students in literature and philology were women, while only 27% of science students were women (pp. 53-65). Moreover, according to the Gender Equality Bureau (UNESCO, 2015) in May 2022, women accounted for only 27.8% of science students and 15.7% of engineering students, but women are 91.3% of healthcare students and 59% of education majors. On the contrary, men are 72.2% of science majors and 84.3% of engineering majors, but men account for only 8.7% of healthcare majors and 41% of education majors (See Figure 3) (UNESCO, 2015).

This data shows a remarkable gender-based division in Japanese education among students. Career choice is primarily dictated by gender. Japanese men and women tend to choose fields typically associated with their gender. Therefore, a low proportion of female undergraduate students are observed in science (Tachibanaki, 2009, p. 26; Yamashita, 2018, pp. 53-65).

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5 Article 1 of the Health Insurance Law
It can be assumed that gender segregation in Japanese education can be dictated by Japanese ideologies (Ryosaikenbo or Sengyo-shufu) or the stereotype that girls are better in the social sciences. Kumagi and Zang (2020) highlight that “the gender stereotype is deeply rooted in Japanese society, and often it affects the choice of career of young women over their paths of growth and development” (p. 7). Moreover, Tachibanaki (2010) pointed out that fields such as law, economics, and business management have not been popular among young Japanese women.

Finally, it is crucial to bring awareness to the interconnection between the significantly lower percentage of women than men in higher education and the small number of female researchers in academia. Additionally, the popularity of such professions as pharmacist or nurse does not necessarily require a master's degree and might cause a low rate of female researchers too. Moreover, the drop in higher education might be driven by women’s choice to focus on work or marriage rather than education.6

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6 For example, according to sociological studies, in 1983 almost half of Japanese men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four agreed with the statement that men should work and women should do the housework (Bullock, 2010).
Feminism in Contemporary Japan: The Perception of Women’s Role throughout History

First, there is a significant need to understand how the image of Japanese women has been transformed throughout time. Therefore, it is essential to start the analysis from the 1940s when women became engaged in the social life of Japan. During the Second World War, some women worked in factories and mines. However, unlike Russia, the United States, and other countries, Japan was reluctant to employ married women (Isoda, 2000).

Later in the 1950s, almost immediately after the end of the Second World War, the ideology of the Mother\(^7\) raising the nation became predominant. Mainly due to this ideology and the American occupation of Japan, the role of Japanese women changed. Women had a national role. However, the dominant post-war gender paradigm persisted, which required women to stay at home and take care of the family and men to work.

Interestingly, two post-war ideologies that men should be at work and women should be Sengyo-shufu, Kyōiku-no-haha, or Ryosaikenbo were mainly dictated by the need for men to work to support the country and for women to provide a healthy environment at home and raise children. These ideologies still exist in various forms in Japan today. For example, Charlebois (2014) indicates that the model Kyōitu-no-haha (Jap. 教育の母) was influential in modern Japan (pp. 5-6). Other scholars writing about contemporary Japan mentioned similar models and identical ideas in their works as well (Lebra, 1974; Holloway, 2000; Dales, 2009; Charlebois, 2014). The good wife and wise mother (Ryosaikenbo) concept was later transformed into the housewife concept of Sengyo-shufu which remains dominant in Japan along with Ryosaikenbo (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 5-15) and is deeply ingrained as a traditional image of decent Japanese women. Japanese women, either in postwar or contemporary Japanese society, were valued primarily as good wives and wise mothers whose essential tasks were to educate and raise children and/or take care of the family and men to work.

Secondly, discussing the major trends in the 1950s-70s as well as in contemporary Japan, it is necessary to illuminate that Japanese society has constantly been enforcing severe gender stereotypes on men's and women's roles. For example, Bullock (2010) and Charlebois (2014) pointed out the belief that women should engage in housework rather than social work (e.g., as full-time regular workers). Bullock explained this by providing an example from Japanese history. The high economic growth from 1955 to 1973 forced women to take full responsibility for domestic life (2010, pp. 14-18). Moreover, Charlebois (2014) also discussed the same social issue in his work (pp. 5-15). Addressing the ideology of the wise mother and good wife, he highlighted the necessity for women to focus on household duties rather than careers. On top of it, he explained the problem of gender roles separation in Japanese society and the ideology of masculinity and femininity. For example, he clarified that the word salaryman (Jap. サラリーマン) implies masculinity in Japanese culture (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 1-5).

On the other hand, according to Charlebois, femininity is mainly associated with the term “caregiver” as it describes both a role in the family and a role as an OL (office lady or secretary) at work (Charlebois, 2014, pp.8-12). OL work requires women to focus on sorting mail, planning transportation costs for male colleagues, or serving coffee. Many Japanese women drew a parallel between OLs and housewives, naming those working women “office wives.” This phenomenon clearly indicates the gendered aspects of this profession (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 8-12).

Finally, it can be said that since the words salaryman and caregiver are used to define how women’s and men's roles should be seen in the Japanese heterosexual society, women and men must automatically choose these roles and behave accordingly. Objectively, this ideology was dictated by the need for men to focus entirely on work rather than household chores. However,

\(^7\) A collective image in Japanese culture
when we speak about contemporary Japan, such doctrines (precisely, among the middle class, upper-middle-class, and upper class) highlight an inability to adapt to modern European trends.

Furthermore, Charlebois pointed out that women from lower classes (even though, in many cases, they would love to become Sengyo-shufu) in modern Japan are/were forced to work. However, they are/were likely to earn less than men (2014, pp. 8-12). Kingston, in his book Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan, explains that in contemporary Japan, both partners tend to work because they need income. However, women are forced to work in relatively poorly paid conditions as part-time employees. The reason is they need to stay in the system Fu-you which forces women to work as part-timers in order not to exceed the required amount of money per year (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 8-15).

Third, speaking of education, higher education, and its connection with employment in the 1950s-70s and contemporary Japan, it is necessary to underline two controversial trends. First, it can be assumed that there is a positive trend in getting a higher education (especially among middle-class women). For example, the percentage of young women attending high school increased rapidly from 3.0% in 1960 to 11.2% in 1970, showing that Japanese women were seeking more education. However, on the other hand, the ideology of being economically dependent on their husband remains dominant (Matsui, 1990; Hsiao Chuan, 1996; Bullock, 2010). Women often see marriage as an “escape route in contemporary Japan,” which means not working as a full-time worker or focusing on higher education such as a master’s degree (Charlebois, 2014, pp. 2-15).

Alluding to the willingness or unwillingness of Japanese people to change this ideology, it is necessary to point out that society assumes that women should primarily take care of their family and husbands (Allison, 1991; Kim, 2007; Suzuki, 2007; Holloway, 2010). For example, the Fu-you system involves women being included as dependents on a husband’s insurance and obliges women not to earn more than a certain amount per year, which results in Japanese women only doing part-time work (Kingston, 2019). This system prevents women from focusing on their careers and requires them to be entirely financially dependent on their husbands. On the other hand, the long waiting list for childcare, inadequate support, and inflexible employment policies also derail women’s careers (Kingston, 2019). On top of it, according to statistics in Current Status and Challenges of Gender Equality in Japan, in 2021 only 13% of men took childcare leave (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2022). It shows that even if two spouses want to pursue careers, women must give up a career in most cases (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2022).

In the end, it is necessary to highlight a slight shift toward gender equality in contemporary Japan. However, it is also evident that old patriarchal traditions are firmly entrenched in society. For example, the marginalization of women in the workplace, a significantly low percentage of full-time working women, the rate of childcare leave, and the existence of the system Fu-you do not improve the situation. Therefore, it can be concluded that Japan needs to follow western trends to empower and support both women and men in their career choices, education choices, and roles in society and family.

Results

The following results were found during this study:

1. Since 1947, women over the age of twenty had been given the right to vote in elections, primarily due to the American occupation of Japan rather than improvements and changes in traditional society (Dales, 2009, pp. 16-17; Lukyantseva, 2022, p.73). However, until the second half of the 1960s, when the Women’s Liberation Movement followed the lead of the women's suffrage movement and established the core aspects of Japanese feminism, the issues of female labor, education, women's reproductive freedom, and abortion remained open and unresolved (Molony, 2000, pp. 639-661; Tachibanaki, 2010, pp. 123).
2. It was shown that although the Women's Liberation Movement gave essential tools (EEOL and PLA) to manage gender segregation and gender bias at work, the reality differs significantly. For example, the system *Fu-you* as well as traditional ideas that women cannot perform sophisticated work or women’s marginalization are one of the leading causes of companies' reluctance to hire female employees. It can also be considered the main reason for the gender pay gap and occupational gender segregation in modern Japan.

3. The research highlighted a direct parallel between the old post-war system *Fu-you*, which remains dominant in contemporary Japan, and the tendency of women to work as part-timers.

4. The research showed that even though almost equal numbers of men and women enroll in undergraduate programs, the proportion of female students who go on to higher education declines dramatically. It has a direct connection to the problem of gender bias in Japanese education. Additionally, women's choices to prioritize their careers or marriage over their education affect the situation too.

5. Although feminism emerged and spread in Japan simultaneously with feminism in Russia, the US, and Europe, Japanese women did not fully support it (and still do not). 64.8% of women In Japan (Sato, 2021) neither pursue a career nor further education; maintaining a household and a family remain dominant goals for women. This phenomenon has a close connection to Japanese customs. For many women, it is not feminism that provides the chance to live, work, and study, but a successful marriage and complete or partial economic dependence on a husband that remains a solution (Lebra, 1974; Molony, 2000; Holloway, 2000; Dales 2009; Charlebois, 2014).

6. In the post-war society, Japanese women were primarily valued as good wives and wise mothers whose primary responsibilities were to educate and raise children or/and take care of husbands and houses. However, this model still exists and, to some extent, is dominant in contemporary Japan.

7. It was illustrated that the system *Fu-you* from the post-war society continues today among the middle class, upper-middle-class, and upper class. Due to the difficult economic situation, a significant number of families chose *Fu-you* and the Japanese traditional practical model over the Western one.

According to Sato, 64.8% of women and 63% of men agree with the following statement: “husbands at work, women at home” (Sato, 2021; Gender Equality Bureau, 2022). From the data above, it can be concluded that modern Japanese society is experiencing gender inequality and facing an urgent need for a solution. However, it can also be assumed that more than half of Japanese men and women agree with patriarchal roles, which makes the whole situation regarding gender equality more challenging.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Japanese women have primarily succeeded in promoting feminism; they have access to education despite facing several problems in achieving their goals. Moreover, there are strong and exceptional women in business and culture. In addition, it should be emphasized that part of Japanese society is aware of the need for women to pursue their careers. For example, there is the cultural idea that women, in fact, might be the future saviors of Japan. It illuminates the importance of women working to support the family and the country through paying taxes.

Moreover, some organizations assist with new entrepreneurship projects for female CEOs. For instance, Startup Lady Japan encourages women to start their businesses and highlights the problem of gender inequality in Japan. It is reasonable to assume that after a few years, society will experience a series of changes and progress toward gender equality (Lukyantseva, 2022, p. 74).

Finally, it is necessary to highlight a slight shift toward gender equality in contemporary Japan. However, it is also evident that old patriarchal traditions are firmly entrenched in
society. For example, the marginalization of women in the workplace, the disproportionately represented percentage of working women, the rate of childcare leave, and the existence of the system *Fu-you* do not improve the situation. Therefore, it is essential for Japan to find its own way where feminism, women's empowerment, and old Japanese traditions can coexist and evolve simultaneously without harming or interfering with each other.

**References**


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