

Lecture # 4

Women in East Asia

The millennial culture of China and the newer culture of Japan have been shaped by several religious traditions.

Confucianism and Taoism are native to China, while Buddhism, imported in the first Century C.E., soon was transformed and given a distinctly Chinese character.

recently, Chinese Communism, which one may call a quasi-religion, has been changing both Confucian based tradition and Marxism.

during its shorter historical course (dating from the 5th or 6th Cent. C.E.), Japan has adapted its archaic ideas into Shinto, adopted and adapted Buddhism, and created "new religions" designed for modern minds.

the constant core of East Asian culture has been Confucian ethics, because these have most shaped family life and government.

Even to distinguish different East Asian religions is misleading, for neither Chinese nor Japanese have thought in terms of separation or opposition among their different cultural ways.

there is a Chinese proverb, "in office a Confucian, in retirement a Taoist, in death a Buddhist."

Japanese often are married by a Shinto priest and buried in a Buddhist ceremony.

to claim centrality for Confucian thought is not to deny that it has interacted with several other visions.

Native Chinese views of women

Both Confucianism and Taosim draw on archaic, prehistoric beliefs.

there is evidence that these beliefs were shaped by a matriarchal social structure.

Chinese mythology speaks of a Great Ancestress who held sway first in her own right, and then as mother of the hero.

in addition, there are indications that before kingship became the rule, power was in the hands of a royal couple who shared political, domestic, and religious roles alike.

based on what we have seen in other cultures, this would suggest a Mother Goddess substratum in Chinese pre-history and a strong sense of the androgyne.

Later theory that nature is a composite of yin (female) and yang (male), as well as feminine overtones to the Tao (cosmic social way), may well be rooted in such a substratum.

What is certain is that the earliest formation of Chinese beliefs includes these notions of yin/yang and Tao.

it also includes animism (a reverence for spirits), and ancestor veneration.

Animism seems to stem from the Chinese strong feeling of dependence upon the uncontrollable forces that guide the world.

its tendency is to find everything to be alive; rocks, trees, rivers, and mountains have spirits, as surely as animals and humans.

mother earth is a literal title

Ancestor veneration--ritually honoring the dead, in order to secure blessings and avert evil--is but a dimension of animism, for the dead continue to be close by as spirits, while their bodies have returned to Mother Earth.

by the time of the legends on which Confucius (551-479 BCE) drew, male rule had become China's dominant political organization.

thus his heroes and villains are largely male.

^{No} [it is reported that he once found a version of the I Ching (book of divination) in which feminine power had priority over male, but this does not seem to have greatly influenced his interpretation of the past.]

rather,, the religious elements that Confucius did use to create his version of the ancients' Way stressed order and reserve, largely because this is what was needed in a warring time.

he claims never to have made up anything but been faithful to and loved the ancients.

For Confucius, the past was a golden age of harmony in the cosmos, among different peoples, between individuals and within the self.

the Tao reigned and yin and yang were in balance, nature was

at peace.

Confucius believed that to restore such harmony a society needed rulers who would embody and impose the old ethics.

Confucius never found a ruler who would put his principles into effect, so he contented himself with training young men to promise.

of women he is reported to have said, "closeness makes them hard to handle, distance makes them moody."

the Confucian ethics involved four concepts which I will briefly describe.

Li is correct behaviour and ritual protocol based on five relationships. ruler/subject, father/son, husband/wife, oldest son/youngest son, and elders/juniors. the last listed always owes respect to the first.

Hsiao is filial piety, which holds the five relationships together. by hsiao one serves one's parents in life and mourns and venerates them in death, honors ones ruler and shows deference to all superiors.

Jen is Confucius highest virtue and means human heartedness or simple goodness, love. it is what keeps the five relationships from becoming tyrannical or servile.

Tao means way, for Confucius it means the harmony that comes from social propriety, the graceful, (because attuned to nature) correctness, that the ancient heroes had discovered.

the China that took guidance from this master would be a

family-oriented, highly ordered, and status-conscious society, whose highest good was stable harmony.

of the three religious traditions in China the thought of Confucius was by far the most influential and misogynistic (women hating.)

as the husband/wife relationship epitomized it, women were simply inferior to men.

for instance, the Chinese society was rooted in ancestor veneration, no daughter could offer rites for her parents. Hence the saying: "the most excellent daughter is not worth a splay-footed son."

the poverty of many periods forced not a few parents to balance society's needs for future mothers against present excess of mouths to feed.

five sons to two daughters was the ratio often targeted and this led to endemic female infanticide.

moreover, if the girl-infant survived, she could be sold since she would have to leave home when married anyway.

"Rearing marriages" was but a variant on this where the girl lived with her future in-laws. little wonder the common term for girls could be translated "slave-girl".

upper class women were not spared all this and in fact they had less freedom of movement than the rural poor who of necessity went to the well, the market, the laundry spot by the river.

C NO [for all chinese women, betrothal tended to mean seclusion or restriction, in good measure because Confucian ethics demanded premarital chastity and marital fidelity for females, or order to insure family stability and the orderly continuance of the lineage which in turn had to do with ancestor veneration.

in eras when Confucian ideas were strictist, it meant almost total segregation.]

marriage was solely for procreation--the wife a source of sons. she was not her husband's friend or confidant, he could get that from a courtesan or by other men.

as a result, few wives were educated. proverbial wisdom summed it up: "educating a daughter is like weeding someone else's field."

in a typical family, a woman was as much her mother-in-law's possession as her husband's.

both could scold and beat her at will.

knowing her husband's first loyalty always goes to his mother, she would quickly set herself to producing a son--her own source of future power.

since there was no place for her in her birth home, all property going to her brothers, she had to comply, wait and scheme.

typically then, the Chinese woman strove to bind her children, especially her sons, by a thousand emotional ties.

this became their oasis in the midst of strangers.

Confucian thought that discipline requires distance, encouraged

fathers to isolate themselves as soon as their children reached the age of six.

girls learned early, by caring for younger siblings, how to manipulate.

women could do some things to help her situation.

for example, throw a tantrum in a public gambling hall would make the husband unwelcome as it was bad luck.

by complaining to outsiders about a mean mother in law she could cause embarrassment making them mend their ways.

the problem is that this manipulative, indirect power was all Confucius allowed women so she had the unenviable choice of servant, shrew, or manipulator.

Taoists however, thought of nature's ways as feminine. the ideal attitude was wu wei which meant non-action and was a feminine trait, the yin.

this doesn't mean doing nothing, but cultivating the spirit of the valley which does not force things. like a tree which produces fruit without straining.

water, the valley, the infant and the female were all symbols of the Taoists

Taoists, unlike Chinese society in general, didn't see yin as subservient to yang but rather as a needed and equal opposite for balance and wholeness.

Taoists achieved one notable practical victory when they brought about the outlawing of female infanticide.

Religious Taoism did not do as philosophical taoism had in making women equal, but used them in tantric rites in which they were brought to orgasm over and over while the men held their semen and "sending it to the brain".

Women were to be kept ignorant of this lest they refuse to "cooperate"

the idea was by taking women's yin power and keeping his yang a man could eventually become a totally yang body and be immortal.

eventually under buddhist influence, religious taoists formed monasteries and allowed for celibacy, which tended to mean that women and yin became less necessary.

Chinese Buddhism and Modernity

Buddhism blended with Taoist and Confucian thought giving the sophisticated a profound metaphysics and explanation of reality.

unlike the Indians, the Chinese are life-affirming believing nature is not an illusion to escape but a harmony with which to blend. this greatly influenced Buddhist thought and culminated in Chan or Zen

Like philosophical Taoism, Buddhism furnished Chinese women some help against Confucian Misogynism.

by teaching that the Buddha-nature is present in all reality, for instance, it implied that equality is more basic than social difference.

to some extent the monastic code institutionalized sexual

equality so nunneries were established where women could live celibate lives centered on meditation and service. this was a real emancipation from slavish confinement to the roles of wife and mother, as well as many women's first chance to study.

tho the rule was strict nuns had more opportunities for peer support and friendship than did their sisters in the world.

Mahayana Buddhism was by far the most popular giving the people hope of being born into a paradise in which they could reach nirvana.

devotionally the Bodhisattva Kuan Yin became a personalized focus for much of asia. tho originally male,, China worshiped her almost entirely in her transposed, female form.

in effect, Kuan Yin became the goddess of mercy, object of the cult of half of Asia.

as late as the mid 1950's, Chinese women in Singapore invoked her in their work as mediums, asking that she help them locate and enter the souls of the deceased.

In summary, tho women had it better when Taoist or Buddhist thought was ascendent, Confucian ethics slowly hardened social norms, forcing women into greater seclusion, codifying proper relations between husband and wife, and effectively stamping out spontaneity in sexual interaction.

footbinding the quintessence of the Confucian attitude toward women, appears to have been introduced around the 10th cent. C.E.

It lasted until the middle of the 20th cent.

traditionally religious honor for a Chinese woman, flowed from accepting bondage.

if she was a fertile mother of sons she might in older age come into some power over her children and daughters-in-law and merit some mourning at death, tho not as much as for the father.

from the last decade of the 19th cent., an elite coalition of women--mostly urban intellectuals, artists, writers and students--began to agitate for change. they attacked footbinding, infanticide, and the sale of girl children.

they established schools for girls, newspapers and some possibilities of professional careers.

around Canton women formed sisterhoods and refused to marry, or if they did, refused to consummate it by various methods, such as staying at their natal home till menopause.

Kuan-yin was the model for they believed she had been a princess with no husband to claim her, no mother-in-law to control her and no children to impede her.

even in the late 1950's, emigrees from Canton were preserving their life-style and sisterhoods in Singapore.

Menstrual blood is considered a pollutant thus women are barred from high festivals.

with birth a woman is unclean for 40 days if a girl and 30 if

a boy.

mothers will be punished after death for having produced pollution such as in one fantasy, having menstrual blood as their only drink and clots as their only food.

only the sacrifice of being a "good" mother can balance this

Reform movements tried to change laws concerning women but not till the Communist Revolution in 1949 did any real change come.

most of rural china continued to believe the proverbial wisdom that "Noodles are not rice and women are not human beings."

Mao gave the women's question high priority and the marriage law of 1950 gutted the old Confucian-based system, abolishing bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal, dowries, and interference with the remarriage of widows.

it stood behind the free choice of marital partners, monogamy, equal divorce rights for both sexes and equal rights to child custody.

to the party's bafflement, female protest was vehement and the suicide rates soared.

young women lacked the courage to face down parents who ignored the new law and older women panicked at the idea of raising children to be independent. the party realized marriage reform was a long term task.

land reform found enthusiasm among women. in traditional china, a woman could not own land, but the Agrarian Reform Law of

1952 gave every poor peasant regardless of sex, a plot of land.

now a girls birth was not bad luck as each had a plot of land in their name. and a daughter in law could no longer be a work horse.

this was a major reason women rallied to the new regime.

moreover, political skills learned through years of uterine politics won women leadership roles in many village cells, and women's groups formed to alert authorities whenever old male dominance threatened to reassert itself.

the Party, understandably, has not been able to remove all stereotypes and prejudice. some cadre leaders routinely give men more work-points than women and thus more pay, which hurts womens morale, but, there are many directives for child care centers, care of nursing, pregnant or older women, paid maternity leave, etc. which is helpful to women.

read articles next page →

to an outsider, finally, there is the basic question whether, freed from what Mao called her four ropes (feudal oppression, clan oppression, religious oppression, male oppression) the Chinese woman now will have to live in bondage to the thought-controls of communism.

however, there is no question she is better off than she ever was under the traditional chinese views.

Traditional Japanese views of women

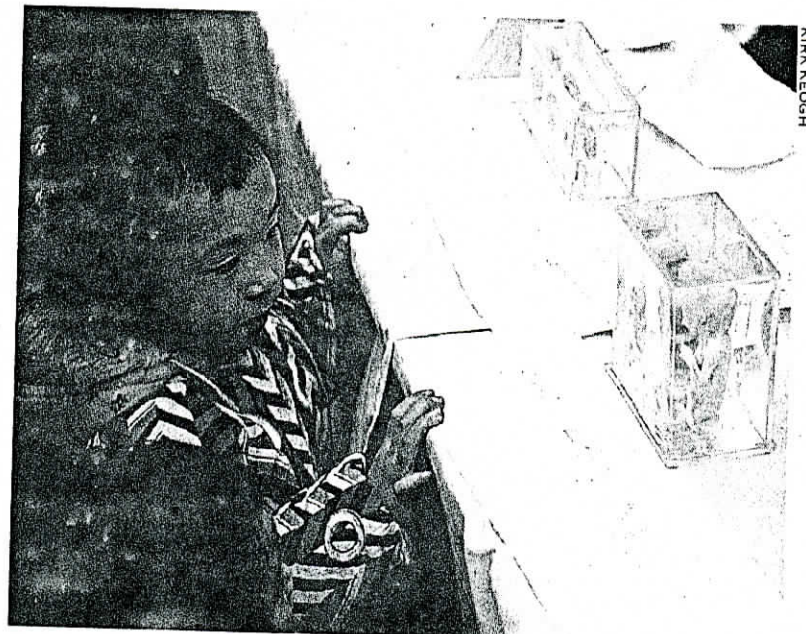
the origins of the Japanese people and their indigenous

Asia: Discarding Daughters

There are many ways to kill baby girls. Feeding them poisonous oleander berries, smothering them in their after-birth or just not feeding them are among the ancient methods still in use in some rural parts of Asia, where baby boys have always been preferred. Nowadays technology also plays a role: fetal testing procedures, such as amniocentesis and sonograms, are employed by women in China, Korea, India and elsewhere to detect the sex of a fetus. Many mothers will abort a female. "Over the past century science has only quickened the pace of the death of the female child, from the born to the unborn stage," says Meenu Sondhi, an amniocentesis re-

searcher at Delhi University. Those permitted to be born may not survive into adulthood because of deliberate neglect.

Studies show that female children in India and Bangladesh are breast-fed for a shorter period and given less nourishing



FEMALE FETUSES ON DISPLAY

meals than males. In rural China when food is scarce, anthropologists report, girls are more likely to suffer from chronic malnutrition than their brothers.

The demographic impact is dramatic: in South Korea, where fetal testing to determine sex is common, male births exceed female births by 14%, in contrast to a worldwide average of 5%. In Guangdong province, the China news agency Xinhua reported, 500,000 bachelors are approaching middle age without hopes of marrying, because they outnumber women ages 30 to 45 by more than 10 to 1. Alarmed by such imbalances, some governments have taken steps to limit the use of amniocentesis as a prelude to female feticide. Asian nations also hoped to influence parents by designating 1990 the Year of the Girl Child. ■

Condolences, It's a Girl

China's one-child-per-couple policy has inflamed the ancient preference for sons

By **SANDRA BURTON** BEIJING

The letter from a Chinese woman to her American friend reflected her torment and tears. "I told you I wish a baby girl, because nothing can compare with one's love of a baby, especially mother and daughter," she wrote in broken English. Instead of bringing joy, however, the birth of a daughter was destroying her family. "My husband wants to divorce me," she continued. "When he knew the baby was a girl, he left quickly." Reluctant to blame only her husband, she pointed to her in-laws. "He is the only boy, so his having a son is more important for his parents," she explained. "Although he had been hoping for a boy, I never thought he would act like this."

Old attitudes die hard in a society that has been a bastion of male chauvinism for 22 centuries. Until a few decades ago, the drowning of infant girls was tolerated in poor rural areas as an economic necessity. A girl was just another mouth to feed, another dowry to pay, a temporary family member who would eventually leave to serve her husband's kin. A boy, on the other hand, meant more muscle for the farm work, someone to care for aged parents and burn offerings to ancestors.

The Communists sought to change all that in 1949 by freeing women from the household, putting them to work in fields and factories and giving them the right to inherit property. Suddenly a girl could have positive economic value. Still, feudal

tradition has resisted change in many regions, and the government's draconian one-child-per-couple population policy, begun in 1979, has inflamed age-old prejudices against females. Rural and minority families routinely lie, cheat or pay fines in order to try a second pregnancy in the hope of having a son. And female infanticide—plus its modern variation, the misuse of amniocentesis to identify female fetuses in order to abort them—continues. The problem is so extensive that government campaigns urge parents to "Love your daughter" and allow girl babies to live.

Even in enlightened circles, condolences are in order for a couple whose newborn is a girl. Over dinner in the Beijing apartment of a liberal-party cadre, a young guest proudly passes around color photos of her infant son, lying spread-eagled on a blanket, his genitals prominently displayed. Seated beside her, the new mother of a baby girl looks on in wistful silence. She carries no pictures. Jiang Junsheng, a senior engineer in a Beijing auto-parts factory, says he wasn't upset when his only child, a daughter, was born, but "my mother did not like it." That's an understatement, says his wife Chen Yiyun, 50, a well-known sociologist. "His mother would not take care of our daughter," she says. "Yet when my husband's brother had a boy, she showered him with attention."

Social observers believe a daughter's lot will improve as women become more valuable to China's growing economy and as the one-child policy eventually makes every scion—male and female—precious to parents. Chen's own daughter Jiang Xu, 19, reflects changing attitudes when she expresses her preference for a daughter: "To have a boy means happiness for a moment. To have a girl means a lifetime of good fortune." ■

religion, Shinto or the way of the Kami, is obscure.

Shinto was the name given the Japanese religion after 552 C. E. to distinguish it from the newly arrived Buddhists.

Shinto, in brief, is based on feelings of Awe that the Japanese experienced when they were in the presence of anything unusual, inspiringly beautiful, or frightening.

the result was a profusion of Kami, awe-ful presences in strange stones, mountainous caves, rulers, high trees, some animals, and even people.

women who could also be kami, were frequently the kamis' contact.

these women (shamanesses) are found from earliest Japanese history down to the present. most Japanese Shamanesses were women, usually blind who were involved in nature worship, fertility rites, ancestor veneration, purification rites, divination and so on--all centered on contacting the Kami--so the shamaness had a varied career.

during neolithic times, (4000 BCE or earlier) fertility was the main concern. there are many figurines of pregnant women and their name "yamagata" (mountainlike) shows they may be linked to folk beliefs of today that say the mountains help with human birth or re-birth.

the early religious complex probably blended elements of Great Goddess veneration, concern for fertility, animism and taboos such as fear of blood (menstrual).

when Shinto and Buddhism had mingled centuries later, monastic ascetics would undergo rather shamanistic trials in the mountains, culminating in a ceremonial entering of the Great Womb.

this hall was hung with red and white clots which represented the Great mothers blood vessels. the ritual ended with the initiate running wildly down the mountain, emitting loud cries which were as infants' first screams of new life.

further, there is considerable evidence that early Japan was politically a matriarchy.

Chinese traders visiting Japan around 200 C.E. found that a number of the clan-states were ruled by women.

they were referred to as priestesses or sorceresses--persons of shamanistic power especially needed in times of crises.

often shamanes-queens cultivated a remoteness and power to bewitch the people thus increasing her influence.

the early shamanesses played an important cultural role like many women in villages today seized by a Kami, they would express themselves in poetry.

many of the early Japanese poems were written by women. and their quality suggests that they were well educated.

this changed following the first serious contacts with China.

the Japanese were so impressed by Chinese culture that they took to Confucian ethics wholeheartedly.

this in turn led to a depreciation of women, and by the

second half of the 8th cent CE it was thought unseemly for a woman to rule.

from that time only severe crises opened political influence to women for brief periods, and by the 15th cent. women had largely lost all their civil rights.

much of this change in women's status is reflected in literature depicting two medieval views--that of court lady, and that of the ideal female samurai ("warrior knight")

many of the court ladies were gifted writers for most the sophisticated literature of this period (10th and 11th Cent.) was almost entirely the work of women.

the reason seems to be that men largely limited themselves to clumsy imitations of Chinese models (women were thought incapable of mastering Chinese)

there were many voluminous diaries kept by these court ladies which, tho the women were supposed to be secluded, show court intrigue, nighttime trysts, etc.

in the tale of Genji by Lady Murasaki, which is probably the world's first novel, the picture is that of ladies at the center of the mannered, erotic court life.

upper class life tended to push Japanese women to channel their creative energies into art.

cut off from political power, and too leisured to find motherhood all-absorbing, they contributed strongly to Japanese aesthetics.

The first histories of Japan written in the early 8th cent. to enhance the ruling family and prove that Japanese culture was as venerable as Chinese should have given women stronger, or at least more political, role models.

these accounts begin with creation myths in which a divine primal couple give birth to the Japanese Islands, and to Amaterasu the Sun Goddess.

she in turn becomes the divine ancestress of the imperial family, which makes Japan singular, if not unique--a land thinking itself directly descended from a Goddess.

early queens clearly reflected Amaterasu's aura, and the Shinto emblems of royal power related later kings to her patronage.

later myths display seeds of later sexism (when the first couple produces a defective offspring, it is because she violated proper protocol: "it is not proper for the woman to speak first")

but they more powerfully reveal that women's circumscription in classical times was a fall from their early proximity to divinity and power.

the next 700 years (from about 1200 to 1900 or so) was an age of feudalism in which local lords and the samurai who lived and died for them dominated Japanese culture.

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the next 700 years (from about 1200 to 1900 or so) was an age of feudalism in which local lords and the samurai who lived and died for them dominated Japanese culture.

this was fertile soil for the Confucian obsession with hierarchy, rank and protocol, and from this interaction there emerged the unwritten code known as Bushido "way of the warrior."

unlike their European counterpart, they did not link chivalry with an ideal glorification of women.

the Samurai were too single-minded in their desire to terrorize the enemy.

the samurai were annealed to absolute loyalty to their lords and brother warriors which rendered them largely unable to relate to women.

the curious result was that the bushido ideal for women made them a blend of amazon and domestic slave.

first they were urged to overcome female frailty and match males' fortitude.

many young girls were trained to suppress their emotions and steel themselves for the possibility of suicide.

they were even taught how to insert the sword or knife and

how after insertion, to tie one's lower limbs together so as to be modest even in death.

if a samurai warriors' love for a girl was threatening his loyalty to his lord, then they were to free him by killing themselves or, in one story, a girl disfigures herself to bring her samurai to his senses.

second, the bushido woman's fortitude largely went into serving her lord .

she annihilated herself for her husband, as he annihilated himself for his lord.

a Lady Kumano left alone with 2 young sons, finding her husbands side had lost, went to the extreme of killing them (after due explanation) in order to preserve the household from the stain of her being violated by the approaching enemy.

the sons understood, said goodbye to their absent father and deceased ancestors, and were dispatched by her motherly sword. then, assisted by a faithful retainer, she herself fell upon the suicide sword.

Bushido stocism has shaped the Japanese well into the 20th cent, being a part of the explanation of kami-kazi ("gods" wind") pilots in WW II.

while confucianism underlay the bushido ideas, Zen Buddhism often furnished the self-control to live them out.

Women in Modern Japan

by the end of the 19th century, the samurai ideal had given way to the merchants and Japan was on the road to modernization.

today most Japanese men have shifted their allegiance to business and the female role was that of the geisha--the woman dedicated to this new lord's pleasure.

a geisha, far from being a simple prostitute, was often an accomplished entertainer and hostess.

she often studies for years at music, poetry and etiquette.

tho some geishas provided sexual favors, the central part of their trade was to comfort, amuse, and relax their clients.

at home, a man sees his woman as something functional: mother of his children, manager of his household, an appliance necessary for a normal family life.

in the quarters where the geishas entertain, woman becomes the sympathetic listener, the ego-prop, the graceful amuser, distracter, adornment.

the beginnings of this schism in women's image becomes clear in the Tokugawa literature (this ended in 1868 when the emperor was re-installed)

the clash between duty and feelings--wife and geisha.

in present day Japan, the institution of the geisha is not only a potential emotional clash, but also a barrier to women's advance in the business world, because Japanese business firms still paternalistically subsidize all-male gatherings at geisha houses.

this is where informa, often real, business is conducted this means female employees are left out.

the Japanese business world has little place for women except as clerks and secretaries.

marriage existed, not for the enrichment of spouses, but to provide for the ancestral "house" or line--to make more heirs.

this house was patrilinear (since the 15th Cent. girls had been excluded from inheriting), and the hapless bride who didn't conceive quickly could be sent home.

industrialization before the war brought a number of changes. younger sons more regularly moved out seeking work and this produced more nuclear family situations.

most marriages were still arranged but the partners tended to gain more say.

it is still estimated today that about 50% of marriages are arranged.

women began moving into the new corporations, largely as clerks and typists, from the 1920's on, and for many this meant a modest degree of financial independence.

some confucian rigidities relaxed and the moga (a japanese flapper) adorned the dance halls and cafes.

however, most of these were closed by the militarists in the 1930's for they found such behavior and the freedom for women "un-Japanese."

the occupation following WW II was a great force for change.

MacArthur pushed for women's legal right to vote, enjoy equal educational opportunities and be full civic partners or citizens.

women returned to the business world in force, but still to jobs at the bottom rungs.

tho women are now 50% of the 34% who go to college, society still expects them to settle down to marriage and a family.

holding a job is just a halfway house between graduation and wedding.

In the rural areas change comes harder.

now girls in rural areas have more opportunities leagally for education and careers, but family pressure to marry and take on the hard, workd of farming is intense.

one girl told researchers that her happiest days had been the "green spring period," before marriage bore down on her.

once married, rural Japanese women are in the Confucian situation described for China: domination by their mothers-in law, with the additional threat that they may be shipped home if they don't quickly conceive.

girl babies, tho, are welcomed, anything for fertility.

however, boys come first, as all girls discover. they are fed second, walk to school behind their brothers, etc.

this second rate status makes rural girls rather cunning. they become practiced at punishing boys w/o exposing themselves to criticism. like hiding his hat and then offering to help find it.

it.

researchers found that boys, for all their outward willfulness and arrogance, were turned into rather dependent personalities by their mothers pampering.

this is the likely basis for the tendency of Japanese males to regard their wives not as equals, but as surrogate mothers--providers of physical comfort.

religiously, rural Japan never lost the impact and presence of the Shamanesses.

working in the blend of Shinto and Buddhism these women still function as mediums and diviners.

the shamanesses used to travel in bands of five or six going around the villages where they would tell fortunes, pray for the sick, contact the dead, purify homes and so on.

the authorities put an end to their traveling because they resented their influence and even defamed them as prostitutes.

however, many remote areas still have their practicing shamanesses.

in the Tohoku area of Honshu blind girls are still regularly apprenticed to shamanesses for 3 to 5 years training to learn the art of trance, divination, and contacting the spirit world, as well as to learn traditional ballads and folklore.

after a symbolic death and resurrection experience they will begin their practice. some even become specialists in one given

area.

over the centuries, this tradition has had great cultural impact in the rural areas.

the wandering bands seem to have created or developed such arts as ballad singing, poetry recitation, and even religious painting.

these were originally for the purpose of teaching the people their folk traditions, but they have been linked to such institutions as the Kabuki theater, and the Bunraku and Joruri puppet shows.

there is more than a little irony in this for classical Japanese theater barred women from the stage.

Female Shamanism lingers on in the New religions of Japan, most of which have been founded by women.

most date from after the second world war, but some, like Tenriko come from the early 19th cent. and are still very viable.

usually the leaders--many of them women--have suffered great physical or emotional trauma that has been healed by a religious vision.

the new groups are designed to help others share in this vision, healing and peace.

after the war, the situation was so depressed that millions took to the new religions' messages

some of the prominent women have been credible holy people, a few have been social reformers, others have been charlatans, but all have owed not a little of their effectiveness to the tradition that women often have special access to the kami.

overall, however, Japanese women have been expected not to upset male predominance.

during the occupation a man who had an assertive wife might well hear "poor fellow, he married a MacArthur."

article - next 2 pages

Who Needs Equality?

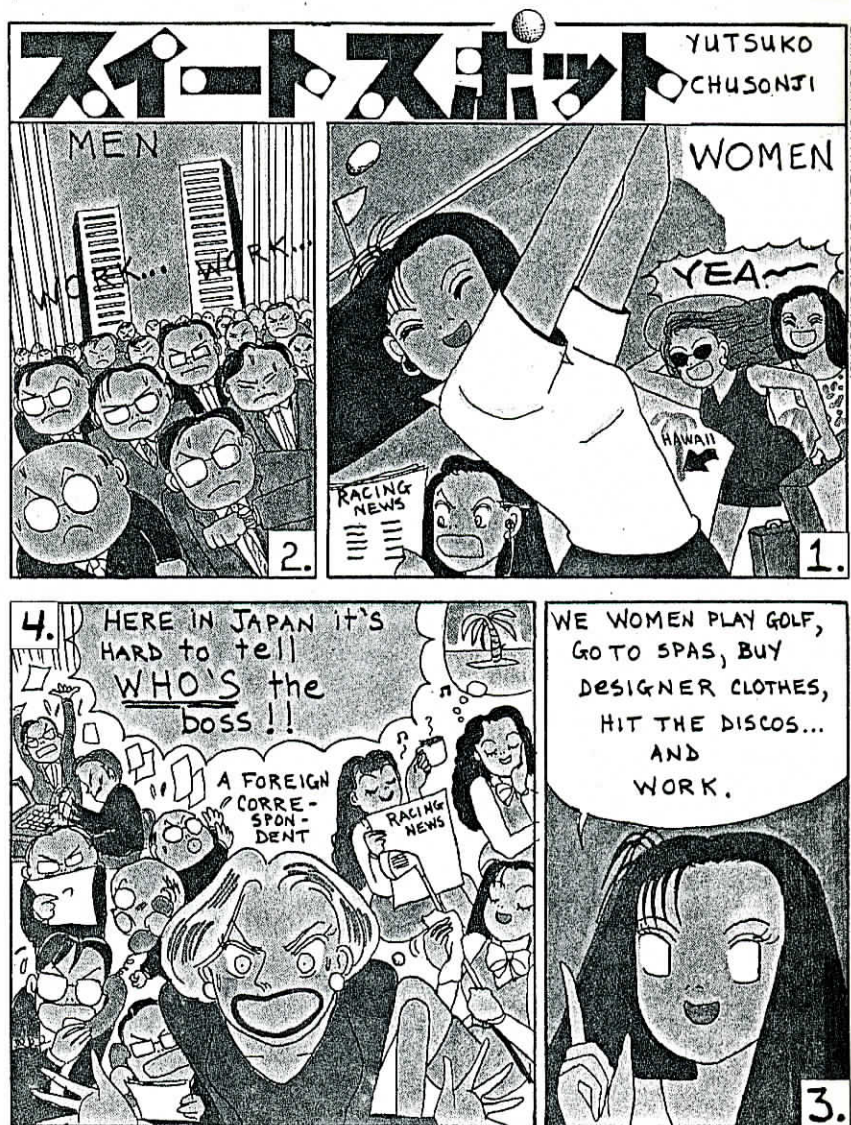
Not Japanese women, if it means leading
the dreary lives of their men

For a few months last year, it appeared as if a new wave of feminism was sweeping Japan, raising a clamorous challenge to age-old male authority. It began when housewives, enraged by a new tax, swarmed to political rallies, urging that a "voice from the kitchen" reach the male-dominated government. Socialist Takako Doi, the first woman in Japanese history to lead a major political party, inspired an unprecedented number of women to run for the Diet's upper house, and they grabbed a record number of seats. Prime Minister Sousuke Uno resigned in disgrace after a former geisha he had patronized broke her profession's code of silence to denounce him as too small-minded a man to lead the country. His successor rushed to appoint two women to his Cabinet. The press seized upon the opportunity to rave about the dawning of *Onna no Jidai* (the Era of Women).

But one year later, the dawn seems to have darkened. The women Cabinet members have been replaced by men. The rallies have evaporated. Enthusiasts of *Onna no Jidai*, it seems, spoke too soon.

Though Japanese women are among the best-educated women in the world, they are, by Western standards, second-class citizens in their own country. Traditional values discourage women from appearing outspoken or independent-minded and demoralize those who try to climb the political or business hierarchies. Only one-fourth of major Japanese corporations have any women at all in the middle-management or higher ranks. In government, women constitute less than 1% of management-level bureaucrats and about 6% of the 764 Diet members. The average woman's annual income amounts to only half that of a man's. Why, then, aren't Japanese women angry? Why aren't they marching en masse for equality? Why didn't they stoke the spark of *Onna no Jidai*?

The fact of the matter is that equality with men is not a particularly appealing prospect to most Japanese women right now. Educated young women, those most likely to lead a revolution, tend to see their male peers as dull corporate drones. Women, meanwhile, with comparatively freer schedules, have more time to cultivate



SWEET SPOT CELEBRATES FEMALE FUN

their interests. As a result, there is a growing perception gap between the sexes. A much discussed phenomenon known as Narita divorce illustrates the problem: upon arriving back home at Tokyo's Narita Airport, fresh from their honeymoons, many worldly young women, shocked to have discovered the narrow-mindedness and dependency of their new bridegrooms, promptly dump them.

Yutsuko Chusonji is the author of a best-selling comic-book series called *Sweet Spot*, which pokes fun at workaholic men and salutes the leisurely attitudes of young female

workers. Rushing out of their offices in the evening to practice golf and go shopping, "these women savor only the tastiest portion of life," explains Chusonji, 28. "Men don't realize that it isn't worth it to work more than necessary. Women see that, so they don't want to become career women."

Indeed, while a 1985 law bans sex discrimination and requires Japanese companies to offer females the same opportunities available to males, few women choose to apply for career-track jobs. Most opt to work as assistants to men. "I could work in the career track if I wanted to, but I'm not that interested in banking, and I certainly don't want to do it all my life," says a 26-year-old bank employee from Tokyo. Typically, a woman will leave her job after the birth of her first child and later resume a part-time career or pursue hobbies or community work.

Being a housewife is nothing to be ashamed of in Japan. Because most husbands leave their salaries and children entirely in the hands of their wives, women have wide-ranging responsibilities. It was not always thus. Traditionally, wives and children blindly obeyed the father as ruler of the roost. But postwar economic growth toppled fathers from that lofty post by imposing longer work hours that kept them from home. At the same time, modern appliances freed women from household drudgery. "Housewives can pursue their interests in a carefree manner, while men have to worry about supporting their wives and children," says Makiko Katagiri, 32, a college-educated housewife who plays volleyball once a week and runs the PTA at her children's nursery school.

The father's status has so declined that mental-health experts speak of a new male affliction: *kitaku kyofu sho*, or a "fear of returning home syndrome." A popular television commercial for an insecticide spray shows a father waking up one day to find he has turned into a cockroach. The ad warns housewives, "If you see a large cockroach, it might be your husband. Please check before you exterminate." Even men will sometimes admit that their privileged status in society isn't all roses. "Women know how to enjoy themselves more than men do," says a mid-level executive of a major Japanese auto company. "Men are too tired. We're all about to collapse." Those women who do try to join the professional ranks must not only match the

men hour for hour but also be prepared to do continuous battle with skeptical views of their aspirations to be more than lovely but low-level "office flowers." Some companies endorse traditional expectations that women will resign when they get married. Toyota Motor Corp., for instance, gives women who do so a special "farewell money gift" of up to three months' salary. And Japanese companies are just awakening to the concept of sexual harassment. Many women complain that their managers attribute successful business deals by women to their feminine wiles rather than their work skills.

Would-be career women face equally great obstacles at home, where men feel no obligation to pitch in. A 1986 government survey of dual-career couples found that men devote only eight minutes of a workday to household chores and child rearing,

compared with 3½ hours for their wives. Younger men increasingly take out the garbage and play with their children on weekends but still leave most household affairs to their wives. A 33-year-old banker typically relies on his wife to lay out his clothes each morning. But, he adds, "I select the necktie."

Raising children is another major hurdle, since day-care centers usually run for only eight hours and baby-sitters are expensive. No wonder many women with careers are not married. A 1989 Labor Ministry survey found that 60% of management-level women are single, and 36% are childless.

But things are bound to change. Japan faces a huge labor shortage, and companies cannot ignore the female labor pool. Eager to ease the tight market, the Labor Ministry recently developed a training program spe-

cifically for women who want to return to work. At the same time, the government is urging men to shorten their work hours and cultivate outside interests in order to improve the quality of their lives.

But none of this can be realized unless men ease the load on women by learning how to take care of themselves. "In Japan the women's issue is really a men's issue," says Sachiko Nakajima, a deputy director at the National Personnel Authority, which oversees public employees. Kanagawa prefecture, southwest of Tokyo, shares her view. A 1988 prefectural-office newsletter published a test to gauge male self-reliance, asking, Do you know where your suits, neckties, socks and underwear are kept? Have you ever used a washing machine? Can you name more than three friends of your children? Only when more men answer yes to these questions can *Onna no Jidai* become a reality. ■