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The American Impact on the Evolution of the Japanese Women's Rights Movement

By

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An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of America's influence on Japanese women's efforts to obtain equal rights. America's role in various Japanese women's rights groups and movements has been the subject of essays and theses in the past, yet the topic is generally centered specifically on the period during the American occupation following World War II in 1945. This paper aims to take a broader look at Japanese Women's Rights efforts before and after the war to garner a better understanding of the ways in which the American influence aided in the development of the movement. Japanese women have fought for their rights without the aid of American influence, yet the relationship between the two has had benefits for both parties.

The American presence within the Japanese Women's Rights movement is traceable back to early visits from the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in the nineteenth century. Although the primary purpose of the WCTU was to spread Christianity and the need for temperance worldwide, the group also brought with it feminist concepts in the form of rallying women together to utilize their voices to achieve political goals. After the WCTU, the American element is visible through the American Occupation after World War II in 1945, to the Women's Lib movement in the 1970s.

The sources for this research combine stories from women's rights activists' personal accounts to articles and theses from the twentieth century to present day. The arduous work and organization of Japanese women led and continues to lead towards gains for women's rights, but the American influence necessitates examination in the evolution and growth of the Japanese women's rights movements and efforts over the years.

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Introduction

The Japanese Women's Rights Movement experienced significant changes during the twentieth century, and the United States of America played a key role in the movement's growth. The WCTU's arrival in the nineteenth century marks the first noteworthy American effect on Japanese women's efforts to become political figures within their society. Japanese women worked towards gaining a voice in politics prior to American visitors, but the WCTU helped mobilize a sizable number of women to work towards a common goal. The occupation of Japan following their surrender in World War II, initiated in 1945, brought forth the most prevalent instance of American impact on Japanese women and their continued fight for women's rights. The time of the occupation saw Japanese women finally obtain suffrage after a prolonged struggle to receive the right, and the post-war constitution, written during the occupation, gave women more rights than they previously enjoyed through allowing women greater autonomy within marriages. The conclusion of the American occupation did not end the relationship between American and Japanese women's rights efforts as later women's rights movements demonstrate elements of American influence. The 1970s saw the birth of new women's movements in Japan and America through the Women's Lib movement that was present in both countries. Japanese women's right efforts existed prior to American involvement in the nineteenth century, yet the impact certainly is worth review in understanding the evolving nature of the movement over the years.

The research materials for this study are a combination of various sources that range from personal accounts to academic studies. The bulk of this research is a mixture of historical documents, transcripts, and autobiographies. One book of note is Beate Gordon's *The Only Woman in the Room: A Memoir* which provides excellent primary source material for Gordon's

influence on the Japanese constitution and the circumstances that led her to be present during the American occupation. The book *Reforming Japan: The Women's Christian Temperance Union in the Meiji Period* by Elizabeth Dorn Lublin proves an excellent resource on the formation and evolution of the WCTU in Japan. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism* provides insight into the current state of affairs for women's rights in Japan. The book is a collection of interviews the author conducted with various prominent women in the woman's rights movement in Japan from a wide variety of professions and lifestyles. *Japan: A Documentary History* by David J. Lu compiles a collection of translated Japanese documents with additional commentary from Lu which proved especially useful to this research. A mix of primary sources, documents relevant to women's rights efforts, and secondary sources such as books and articles create the foundation for the basis of this research.

The study of Japanese women's feminist and women's rights movements is a rather recent field of interest. Upon the review of articles and books dedicated to the study of the Japanese women's rights groups and movements, authors tend to recognize how understudied this field of history is with regards to other aspects of Japanese history. The common perception of Japanese women as demure, submissive figures often leads to the dismissal of the exploration of women's political and social activist groups and movements in Japan prior to the twenty-first century. There is an ongoing debate regarding the relevance of the study of Japanese women's rights due to the viewpoint that Japan has never truly experienced any significant women's rights movements. This belief stems in part from the way in which Japanese women often employ the use of grassroots activism rather than the formation of large organizations. While women's rights efforts in Japan have not received the visibility that their American counterparts have throughout the years, Japanese women came together on multiple occasions to campaign for their interests

such as their work with the WCTU and the fight for women's suffrage. Due to the lack of visibility for the women's movements, the Japanese women's rights movements and feminist efforts are not often highly publicized, yet there is sufficient evidence to support that Japanese women have organized to fight for their rights and to improve their role within their society that justifies the study of the movements and groups.

The primary purpose of the WCTU was to spread Christianity and the need for temperance worldwide, yet the group grew over time to include a variety of issues in their mission. The group also brought with it feminist concepts in the form of the mobilization of women in a united front to utilize their voices in order to achieve political goals. The WCTU helped establish effective organization skills which ultimately led to the formation of a variety of women's activist groups that worked towards the achievement of political and social reforms for women within Japan. The WCTU also saw several members branch off from the group to carry their activist nature over into the fight for women's suffrage.

As Japanese women gathered to campaign for suffrage, many prominent leaders visited leading American suffragists in an effort to bolster the Japanese women's suffrage campaign. The challenge to obtain women's suffrage in Japan posed its own unique set of obstacles incomparable to American hurdles, but Japanese women found inspiration from the American women's efforts. Despite Japanese women's best efforts to gain women's suffrage, they failed to obtain the right to vote until the end of World War II once the American Occupation began in 1945. Along with the right to vote, women also gained the right to run for public office and received improved status within the institution of marriage through the new constitution drafted during the American Occupation.

The Women's Liberation movement, that began to operate in the 1970s, illustrated a new direction for Japanese women's rights activists through the pursuit of new political aims. Since the obtainment of suffrage and the power to hold political office in 1945, women's rights organizations and groups focused on issues such as sexual assault and improved resources for rape victims. The American Women's Liberation movement, which occurred around the same time in the 1970s, provided some inspiration for the Japanese women, but the specific issues that the two movements addressed differed due to the needs of the women based on the state of their country. Japanese broke out into a variety of grassroot groups to address the various issues that plagued Japanese women.

Japanese women's rights efforts continually evolve and change over time to work towards improving the issues that are most pertinent at any particular time. The American influence on the Japanese Women's Rights movements is the main focus of this research, yet the establishment of Japanese women's efforts to better their lot prior to American involvement is important to establish to understand the motivation behind the women who participate in the movement. Early efforts to allow women a place in the political sphere of Japan predate the arrival of any American influence and the ground gained by these early leaders laid the foundation for future successes for women's rights efforts. The improved social mobility of the Meiji period provided an environment that allowed women to campaign for their rights in a way they had not in the past, and this period made Japan a place where the Woman Christian Temperance Union could gain success.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Japan

The establishment of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Japan during the nineteenth century is one of the first major ways in which America influenced

Japanese women's rights efforts. Although the WCTU's focus was initially on achieving temperance and establishing Christian morals, as the movement progressed, the issue of suffrage and women's right to be active political players became core goals of the WCTU to work towards through their various branches. The WCTU formed in 1874 in Cleveland, Ohio with Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer elected as president, but Miss Frances E. Willard, elected corresponding secretary at the time, later became one of the most influential members and eventually the president in 1879.¹ The organization's guiding principle was to bring temperance to the United States due to the threat alcoholism posed to the ideal Christian family. As the WCTU gained traction in the United States, with wins in instilling temperance within their own communities, the leaders decided to expand the reach of their message by sending members worldwide. The opening of Japanese ports in 1858 allowed Japan to become a target for the WCTU's worldwide mission.

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1858 between Japan and America opened Japanese ports to American visitors, which gave way for Christian missionaries to reach Japan to spread their message. Article VIII of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce stated that "Americans in Japan shall be allowed the free exercise of their religion, and for this purpose shall have the right to erect suitable places of worship."² The article allowed American missionaries protection to lay down roots in Japan and evangelize the Japanese population. The expansion that Protestant Christianity experienced just between the years of 1882 to 1886 illustrates that Japan was a suitable county for the WCTU to pursue for membership. The number of Protestant church members "(approximately) [grew] from 4,987 to 28,065" within that span of four years according to noted Japanese historian Otis Cary.³ As missionary groups further settled in Japan and established places of worship, the WCTU planned to utilize this potential member base

through sending out a representative to set the stage for the creation of a Japanese WCTU. The WCTU took advantage of this time of exponential growth for Christian faith by sending one of their world traveling members to the Yokohama port. The first representative sent to Japan by the WCTU was Mary Clement Leavitt in the year of 1886.⁴ The arrival of Leavitt to Japan marked the beginning of a long relationship between the Worldwide WCTU and their Japanese counterpart.

Marry Clement Leavitt was “the first world-wide WCTU organizer,” and over the course of her travels, she visited 43 countries and established 86 WCTU societies.⁵ The arrival of Leavitt on June of 1886 was met with little fanfare, yet by the end of that same year, the first established group born from the WCTU’s principles was formally established on December 6, 1886.⁶ Protestant missionaries had already established churches in Japan before the WCTU came into play, which made the WCTU’s formation in Japan an easier process. Although Leavitt quickly settled in and helped form the Tokyo WCTU, by the end of her first year in Japan, the first few years were notably difficult in gaining a solid basis. The initial group originally struggled to establish their primary goals which were based on the WCTU’s principal teachings, yet they also aimed to be considerate of issues that were specific to Japan.

The first group of participants in the society was made up of women with strong convictions, so there was an internal struggle to define exactly what the group's priorities would be in Japan. The group struggled to decide originally between two passionate women—Yajima Kajiko and Sanaki Toyoju. Kajiko argued that the translation of Women’s Christian Temperance Union used to promote the group in Japan should focus on “*kinshu* (temperance),” while Toyoju argued that the focus should be broader such as “*kyōfū* (moral reform)” to cover issues outside of temperance such as prostitution and women’s rights within the political sphere.⁷ Toyoju’s

version won out, but the Tokyo WCTU still heavily focused their efforts on attempting to introduce temperance measures in Japan. Throughout the WCTU's life in Japan, arguments such as the aforementioned continually resurfaced and, from time to time, weakened the organization's strength. The various disagreements that arose led some women to form their own groups and organizations to focus on their visions. The splintering of group members led to the formation of groups that focused on specific missions, and it also eventually led to the creation of groups who focused specifically on women's rights such as suffrage and equal job opportunities.

The WCTU provided a solid foundation for some of the most prolific Japanese female feminists and political activists of the nineteenth century. Tomoko Seto highlights three such women in her article "Organizing' Meiji Women: The Role of the Japanese Chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union for Individual Activists, 1900-1905" by following the political careers of "charitable work activist Ushioda Chiseko (1844-1903); the journalist Hani Motoko (1873-1957); and the socialist Kanna Sugako (1881-1911)" through their work within the WCTU and beyond.⁸ Each woman began her work within the union, then branched out to pursue her own political and social goals. This represents only a small number of the women who found the organizational skills and motivation to move outside the boundaries of the WCTU to work towards further political goals. The WCTU itself took up the issue of suffrage in 1921 after meetings with prominent American suffragists.⁹ The goals of the group grew to include social rights that in turn would benefit the principles the WCTU fought to obtain from the beginning.

The WCTU helped bolster the effort for women to obtain more rights and opportunities in Japan's political sphere, and there was a notable increase in the number of women's rights

groups following the establishment of the WCTU in Japan. The period in which the WCTU formed in Japan was a time in which print media was becoming a popular method to spread political and social ideas. The popularity of modern press saw the creation of the Tokyo WCTU's monthly magazine in 1888 which was titled *Tokyo Woman's Moral Reform Magazine*.¹⁰ The magazine was an excellent platform for the women to spread their ideology, but they had to be creative in the way they wrote the magazine in order to follow regulations that were in place. Women's publishing was limited to magazines about "learning and the arts," and only men could discuss "social and political issues."¹¹ The group circumvented this by crediting two men for editing, publishing, and printing the book even though female members wrote most of the pieces in the magazine.

The organizational skills, rallying efforts, and the print publications that were a core part of the WCTU helped form a strong basis for Japanese women to create activist groups to work towards other goals. The original focus on "revision of the penal and civil codes and abolition of prostitution and concubinage, as well as temperance," grew to include suffrage as well in the 1920s.¹² The addition of suffrage to the group's political goals stemmed in part from visits with American suffragists. The value of the vote became clear to the group, and women's need to exercise the right to vote in order to reach their political aims became a new priority for Japanese women to campaign towards achieving. The Japanese WCTU, after a falling out during the time of war, reestablished ties with the World WCTU following the end of World War II. After the group came back together, "in 1968," the Japanese WCTU "hosted the world's union convention in Tokyo."¹³ This illustrates just how important the WCTU grew to be in Japan, and in turn, around the world due to its selection for the world's union convention. The Japanese WCTU established a staunch support group for women to come together and rally for rights they

believed in, and the group further granted Japanese women the enjoyment of international recognition for their efforts.

Japanese Women's Fight for Suffrage

Japanese women gained suffrage following Japan's surrender in World War II in 1945, yet Japanese women had been campaigning for their right to vote for many years prior to that moment in time which is worth examination. From the beginning of the twentieth century leading up to the World Wars, Japanese women created a suffrage movement that was uniquely their own but American influence can be seen throughout. As Japanese women fought to be able to vote, prominent suffragist leaders took trips to America to meet with the suffragist leaders in the states to gather information to take back with them to Japan. The American suffragists they met with included suffragist staples such as Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt amongst other principal figures within the movement. The prominence of American influence can be seen through the rather sizeable number of Japanese suffragist leaders who made efforts to visit America in the 1920's "such as Ichikawa Fusae, Tanaka Takako, Kawai Michi, Ishimoto Shidzue, and Kubushiro Ochimi."¹⁴ These conversations between American and Japanese suffragists opened up a new avenue for women from both countries to learn from each other and work together towards similar goals.

Ichikawa Fusae arrived in America in the summer of 1920 and met with Carrie Chapman Catt who inspired Fusae to take lessons from the American suffragists back home to Japan. Fusae's main objective became to "educate Japanese women politically while at the same time striving for women's rights."¹⁵ Japanese women as a whole needed to understand how important their political rights were to their everyday lives. Although there were significant numbers of women's rights groups and out-spoken activists in the twentieth century, they were still in a

minority when compared to the population of women in Japan. The groups tirelessly worked to gain the support of a greater number of Japanese women to see their goals to fruition. On December 13, 1924, the “*Fujin Sanseiken Kakutoku Kisei Dōmeikai* (later the *Fusen Kakutoku Dōmei* [FKD] or Woman’s Suffrage Alliance)” formed to create a cohesive group to work towards women’s suffrage and sponsor bills towards those aims.¹⁶ The group ultimately chose a neutral political stance to zero in on the fight for women’s suffrage rather than get tangled up in choosing any one political side. The lack of devotion to a political party hurt the FKD, but the group was still able to push their agenda forward.

The campaign efforts by women within the FKD and other women’s rights groups allowed for an advance to be made in the fight for suffrage, and on 1925, the Hamaguchi bill “passed in the House of Commons, but was rejected by Peers.”¹⁷ The Hamaguchi bill would have allowed women to vote if it had passed, but the limitations on the right to vote made many women’s rights activists denounce the bill altogether. The language of the “bill permitted women to vote in city, town, and village elections only, and to hold local office with the consent of their husbands.”¹⁸ The bill also sought to set the voting age at twenty-five for women while lowering the age to twenty for men.¹⁹ The women’s suffragist groups wanted full suffrage, and they generally did not favor the passage of this bill because of its many limitations. While the feminist groups found the bill to be conservative in the rights it afforded to women, the bill failed to pass and make it into law due to the belief by those in the Diet that it was too progressive. Despite the Hamaguchi’s bills conservatism in its allocation of voting rights to women, and the fact that it ultimately failed to pass and become law, the bill’s initial success demonstrated that Japan was on its way towards achieving women’s suffrage.

The time after the failure of the Hamaguchi bill saw renewed efforts by women's groups to campaign for true women's suffrage. Although the breakout of war stalled the group's work towards obtaining their goal, by the end of World War II in 1945, Fusae gathered together forty women "to form the *Sengo Taisaku Fujin Inikai* (Women's Postwar Policy Committee)" to ensure the inclusion of women's suffrage upon the creation of a new constitution.²⁰ One aim of the group was to achieve women's suffrage before the occupying forces had a chance to forcibly impose the right for women to vote through the drafting of a new constitution. The women who had fought for so many years to see suffrage achieved for Japanese women wanted the win to be on their own terms rather than by the coercion of the occupying American force. The November of 1945 saw the creation of a suffrage bill that passed that following December. The Revised Election Law "gave both men and women suffrage at the age of 20 and allowed them to run for office at the age of 25."²¹ There is continuing debate as to whether the choice to grant suffrage was the true wish of the Diet, or if the bill passed simply due to the pressure of the occupying force to grant suffrage for women.

The efforts made by Japanese women to obtain suffrage spanned a great length of time as notable leaders like Ichikawa Fusae and other followers of the movement worked to advance the Japanese political scene to recognize women's ability to contribute in politics. The creation of the Hamaguchi bill in 1925 illustrated that the view of women's right to vote and serve in political office was beginning to change; although the bill was still limiting women's ability to act as fully realized political players. The position of women within Japan had improved in some ways, but the obtainment of women's suffrage and the right to serve in office took a while to achieve. Due to the delay in granting suffrage until the occupation took place, the role that the

American occupation played in getting women's suffrage enacted is hard to discredit. General MacArthur "has been generally credited with extending voting rights to Japanese women."²²

The United States Occupation

The United States Occupation in 1945 is one of the most notable instances of direct American impact on Japanese women's lives through the obtainment of the right to vote, and Article 24 of the MacArthur constitution which gave women more freedom within marriage. The constitution designed during the occupation included more rights for Japanese women than any that preceded the document despite activists' best efforts prior to the arrival of the American military in 1945. As the occupation began, women also finally won the right to vote, which had been the focus of many women's rights groups for years prior to the occupation. The exploration of the occupation and the ways it advanced Japanese women's rights is highly important for this research, yet the fact that this was a military occupation cannot be overlooked. The advancements for women's rights was certainly a win for Japanese women, yet these reforms occurred under the influence of an invasive force. The American occupiers implemented the reforms in a way to help the Japanese move forward rather than to assist the Japanese women who already had been working towards women's rights. The exploration of the American Occupation is important, but the recognition of the tireless work from Japanese activists must not be understated.

The road to women's suffrage was well-travelled before the American occupation began, yet the right was never quite achieved prior to the arrival of America. The Japanese women's rights activists worked towards the obtainment of suffrage for many years, yet the American occupation was the catalyst for Japanese women to finally gain greater rights. The Hamaguchi bill and other efforts after it that failed to pass were unable to see women gain the right to vote,

but the year of the American occupation finally saw women gain suffrage. Aside from suffrage, women also gained more privileges due to Article 24 that directly addressed women and their rights to be seen as equals within a marriage.

The drafting of a new constitution during the occupation was one of the major components of the United States' purpose in Japan. General MacArthur and his staff saw themselves as a democratizing force that would bring Japan into modern times. The occupying force viewed themselves as racially and socially superior beings on all fronts. General MacArthur stated the following with regards to Japan as a "pupil" to American ideology:

"Measured by the standard of modern civilization, [Japan] would be like a boy of 12 compared with [America's] development of 45 years. Like any tuitionary period, they were susceptible to following new models, new ideas. You can implant basic concepts there. They were still close enough to origin to be elastic and acceptable to new concepts."²³

General MacArthur clearly viewed the American occupation as the needed element for change in women's position to vote and run for public office. He saw America's, and importantly his own, presence as the sole reason for the advancement of Japanese women. American occupiers generally were dismissive of Japanese women as fully realized people despite their efforts to better their position in society. The American occupiers saw themselves as saviors to Japanese women, and the discourse surrounding the discussion of Japanese women followed this ideology: "Western superiority and non-Western inferiority."²⁴ General MacArthur, on reflection of the occupation, wrote that "of all the reforms accomplished by the occupation in Japan, none was more heartwarming to me than the change in the status of women."²⁵ The American discourse surrounding the advancement of Japanese women was dismissive of the dedicated work of

Japanese women who fought continuously for their rights prior to the American occupation in 1945.

Then twenty-two-year-old Beate Sirota Gordon, whose primary purpose within the occupation was that of a translator, received the task of drafting the articles in the constitution that directly related to women's rights issues. The choice for Gordon to be the contributor for these articles is of particular interest not simply because she was a woman but also for her general lack of experience in the complex world of politics. Gordon herself admitted that "all [she] knew of such matters came straight from [her] high school social studies classes," which makes the selection of her for the important task of establishing better rights for women rather questionable.²⁶ The choice for Gordon to draft the sections for Japanese women's rights was due in part to her experience with Japan—she spent her childhood there with her musician father—but the primary reason appears to simply be because she was a woman who was present and available.

Gordon found herself grouped within the Civil Rights Committee for the constitutional drafting, and the head of the committee, Colonel Roest, stated the following to Gordon: "You're a woman; why don't you write the women's section?"²⁷ This comment Gordon received illustrates how dismissive the constitution writers were about women's rights. While Gordon took the responsibility with great honor and thoroughly researched the best options, the choice of an unqualified young woman who was there to be a translator demonstrates a general lack of care for the women's portion of the constitution. Despite Gordon's lack of qualifications, the Article that she created gave married women greater autonomy within their marriages. The article below denotes Gordon's greatest contribution to the constitution:

“ARTICLE 24. Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes, and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis.

With regard to the choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce, and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes.”²⁸

Gordon seriously pushed for detailed constitutional rights that would guarantee welfare resources for women and children, but the rest of the constitutional drafters chose to only keep a small portion of Gordon’s proposals. The article that Gordon drafted did realize its purpose to provide Japanese women with rights they previously did not have through her contribution to the Japanese constitution.

The American occupation ultimately did see through the gain of women’s suffrage, a chance to serve in political offices, and greater rights within marriages for Japanese women. The constitution no longer dictated women to be possessions of their husbands, and they could serve in political offices without needing their husband’s approval. Ichikawa Fusae had the following to say about the American role in the advancement of Japanese women’s rights: “Without the Occupation or the defeat of Japan, the realization of the Japanese women’s constitutional rights would not have been achieved so quickly.”²⁹ Fusae notably highlights that women’s rights would not have been obtained as quickly without the American occupation even though she was one of the prominent Japanese suffragist fighters before the occupation began. The challenging work of many activist groups and the changing attitude of political figures prior to the arrival of the American occupying force makes it within reason to believe that the right to vote for Japanese

women was soon to be won even without the forced presence of the American occupation. The process would certainly have taken more time, but Japanese women were on their way to obtaining suffrage on their own right.

Women's Liberation Movement

The 1970s in Japan, much like the United States, saw a new form of women's rights activism—often in the form of grassroots activism. A demonstration on October 21, 1970, heralded in the new era of feminism. Women took to the streets in Tokyo with posters and banners that asked the following questions:

“What Is Womanliness?’ ‘Lets’ Examine Our Feminine Consciousness!’ ‘Mother, Are You Really Happy with Your Married Life?’ ‘What Do Women Mean to Men? What Do Men Mean to Women?’ and ‘A Housewife and a Prostitute are Racoons in the Same Den.’”³⁰

The 1970s movement saw women change the course of their questions and aims due to the attainment of suffrage and constitutional rights during the American occupation. One of the purposes of the new movement was to get Japanese women to recognize that they do suffer from “sexual discrimination,” and that they can work together to change that.³¹ The new Japanese women's movement originally did not adopt the term Women's Liberation or Women's Lib due to the fact members did not want to draw association with the Women's Lib movement in the United States because of ridicule the movement received from Japanese media and Japanese people at large. Japanese media “focused on isolated events [such] as bra-burning ceremonies and the violent protest at the Miss America pageant” to paint the American Women's Lib movement in a poor light for the Japanese population.³² Despite the efforts made by Japanese media to discredit Women's Lib, in 1972 the “first conference was held in the name of ‘lib’”

which came to define the new era of women's rights activists in Japan.³³ The focus came to be on the importance of advancing rights for women outside of simply obtaining votes and more favorable job prospects to include issues such as sex and sexuality. A major focus with the new wave of Japanese women's rights activists is present in the idea of "[s]exual self-determination."³⁴ The movement worked to allow women the right to embrace and define their own sexuality. Matsuri Yayori, herself a founding member of a Women's Lib group, noted that the new wave of women's rights groups in the 1970s focused on challenging their male-centric society that routinely discounted women's issues as non-important.³⁵ The Women's Lib movement illustrated the evolution of the Japanese women's efforts to campaign for rights that changed due to time. The way in which the women worked to obtain these rights was often through the use of grassroots networks and the formation of a variety of sub-groups.

As the twentieth century wore on, Japanese women's rights efforts began to change as current issues became the focus of the women's goals. The obtainment of primary goals that the early Japanese women's rights movements set out for themselves such as suffrage and constitutional equality resulted in the movement losing its momentum and guiding force.³⁶ This opened the door for a new wave of Japanese women to step in and continue the fight for women's rights in a different era. The new wave saw "some engaged in consciousness-raising in an attempt to understand the politics of everyday life and everyday relationships" while "others became activists and addressed demands for reform to the government, private companies and the institutions of the mass media."³⁷ Active Japanese feminist, Chizuko Ueno, highlights the fact that people often gloss over the efforts of Japanese women activists due to the nature of their networking at the grassroots level. The grassroots networkers' visibility within Japan and globally is minimal which makes them appear "simply invisible" to people who do not actively search

them out.³⁸ There are numerous grassroots groups that target different elements of women's rights activism.

Among the diverse groups that formed in the 1970s were the "Group to Protest Sexist Court Judgements Against Working Women and Unmarried Women; The Group Against Sex Tours to Korea for Japanese Men; [and] the Group Supporting Abortion and the Contraceptive Bill."³⁹ The variety of subjects the Women's Lib movement chose to address lent itself to the development of many sub-groups to properly address a variety of issues within the country. The topic of sexual assault grew to be a principal element of women's rights activists due to the way rape had often been regarded as the victim's problem. Activist groups wanted to change the way rape was discussed and viewed in order to place the blame squarely on the perpetrator instead of the victim. The efforts have "brought about the paradigm change of converting rape from a shame on a victim to a crime of an offender in the Confucian society."⁴⁰ Women began to raise the issue of violence against women within the 1980's "with the establishment of the Rape Assistance Center."⁴¹

Along with addressing issues of sexual assault, the Women's Lib movement included women that did not identify as heterosexual. There are "[o]ver twenty grassroots groups and newsletters for lesbian/bisexual women in the Tokyo area."⁴² The growth of groups focusing on often undiscussed topics highlights how far the fight for Japanese women's rights has come from the movement's beginning, but there is still much to gain through additional work. A key topic of interest with the new wave of Japanese women's rights activists is the idea of embracing different sexualities and working for visibility in popular culture and the political sphere. The Japanese movement, with the integration of issues such as sexual identity and sexual assault issues, mirrors in many ways the American movement. The Japanese women's movement

continues to grow and evolve overtime to accommodate new goals and ambitions, and the same can be said for the women's rights movement in the United States. Although the two have varied primary interests and differences in how they campaign for their goals, the similarities are certainly of note due to the past relationship America and Japan have with regards to Japanese women's rights efforts.

Conclusion

The American component within Japanese women's rights movements played an influential factor in the movements' advancement to be a more visible and active force in Japan. Japanese women worked towards gender equality before America was a component, but through the study of Japanese women's organizations, grassroots collectives, and women's rights activists' groups, the role of America in the movement's evolution is evident. The role American influence should not be overstated, yet the American element is certainly worth acknowledgement and further study. The role of American influence was one of support in their efforts to obtain a better standing within their society and political arena.

The work of the WCTU to provide organized efforts to fight for temperance and spread Christian values inspired members to branch out and form their own groups to campaign for rights they believed were fundamental for all women. The goals of the WCTU grew to include the right to vote and the right to hold a political office. The focus of the WCTU changed over time to match increasing interest to include more social, moral, and political values over the course of its establishment. While the struggle to diminish the use of alcohol in Japan was an ever-present element of the movement, the fight for women to have access to political arenas and the right to vote became an area of focus as well.

The case for women's suffrage in Japan is one prominent example of the influence of America in the effort for women to gain more rights as suffrage was not obtained until America occupied the country.⁴³ The exploration of the American presence in the movement is not meant to diminish the Japanese women's own women's rights efforts, but to highlight the ways in which the two worked together to obtain more rights for women through rallying women together and forming groups and organizations that fought and continue to fight for Japanese women's advancement. Japanese women's roles within society are an essential element of Japanese history, and the use of the American impact on the movement provides a solid foundation on which to study the Japanese women's rights movements' changes through the early twentieth century and into present day. Although the progress for Japanese women with regards to suffrage and the ability to have a political presence is noteworthy, Japanese women continue to come together in hopes to better their prospects within the workplace and political sphere.

Ueno Chizuko sufficiently summed up the Japanese women's rights movements in the following quote: "Feminism did exist, has existed, and will exist in Japan."⁴⁴ The way Japanese women work towards their rights may not coincide perfectly with America and other countries around the world, yet they have worked towards bettering their prospects for many years. The formation of groups such as *Fujin Sanseiken Kakutoku Kisei Dōmeikai* (*Fusen Kakutoku Dōmei*), The New Women's Group, and the WLF group illustrate just a segment of the many groups of Japanese women who fought for access to equal social and political rights. The Women's Lib movement and the many groups that spawned from that time illustrate that Japanese women will continue to work towards equality.

Japanese women's rights efforts existed prior to American intervention, but the establishment of the WCTU in Japan and visits with American suffragists helped inform the way women organized their efforts. The WCTU's influence represents the earliest example of an American presence, and the occupation of Japan at the end of World War II follows later as a large-scale intervention in women's rights. The role of America within the Japanese women's rights efforts was one of support with the WCTU and direct action with the occupying force after World War II. The demanding work and organization of Japanese women led and continues to lead towards gains for women's rights, but American influence played a role in the evolution and growth of Japanese women's rights efforts.

Endnotes

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- ¹ "Early History," History, *Woman's Christian Temperance Union*, <https://www.wctu.org/history.html>.
- ² David J. Lu, *Japan: A Documentary History* (New York: East Gate, 1997), 290.
- ³ Elizabeth Dorn Lublin, *Reforming Japan: The Women's Christian Temperance Union in the Meiji Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 44.
- ⁴ Lublin, *Reforming Japan*, 23.
- ⁵ Elizabeth Putnam Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers: The Story of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (Evanston, IL: National Woman's Christian Temperance Union Publishing House, 1924), Location 1361.
- ⁶ Elizabeth Dorn Lublin, *Reforming Japan*, 32.
- ⁷ Lublin, 48.
- ⁸ Tomoko Seto, "'Organizing' Meiji Women: The Role of the Japanese Chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union for Individual Activists, 1900–1905," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 6 (2017), 976.
- ⁹ Sharon H. Nolte, "Women's Rights and Society's Needs: Japan's 1931 Suffrage Bill," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 4 (1986), 692.
- ¹⁰ Elizabeth Dorn Lublin, *Reforming Japan*, 44.
- ¹¹ Lublin, 41.
- ¹² Sharon H. Nolte, "Women's Rights and Society's Needs," 692.
- ¹³ Elizabeth Dorn Lublin, *Reforming Japan*, 172.
- ¹⁴ Sharon H. Nolte, "Women's Rights and Society's Needs," 692.
- ¹⁵ Dee Ann Vavich, "The Japanese Woman's Movement: Ichikawa Fusae, a Pioneer in Woman's Suffrage," *Monumenta Nipponica* 22, no. 3-4 (1967), 414.
- ¹⁶ Vavich, 415.
- ¹⁷ Sharon H. Nolte, "Women's Rights and Society's Needs," 691.
- ¹⁸ Nolte, 690.
- ¹⁹ Nolte, 691.
- ²⁰ Dee Ann Vavich, "The Japanese Woman's Movement," 414.
- ²¹ Vavich, 425.
- ²² Vavich, 426.
- ²³ Mire Koikari, "Exporting Democracy?" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (2002), 24.
- ²⁴ Koikari, 32.
- ²⁵ David J. Lu, *Japan: A Documentary History* (New York: East Gate, 1997), 482.
- ²⁶ Beate Gordon. *The Only Woman in the Room* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997), 23.
- ²⁷ Gordon, 106.
- ²⁸ David J. Lu, *Japan: A Documentary History*, 290.
- ²⁹ Dee Ann Vavich, "The Japanese Woman's Movement," 426.
- ³⁰ Kazuko Tanaka, "The New Feminist Movement in Japan, 1970-1990," *Japanese Women New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future* (New York: The City University of New York, 1995), 343.
- ³¹ Tanaka, 343.
- ³² Sandra Buckley. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997) 12-13.
- ³³ Ueno Chizuko, "The Making of a History of Feminism in Japan." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 2 (1996), 170.
- ³⁴ Hara Minako, "Lesbians and Sexual Self-Determination," *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 129.
- ³⁵ Kitazawa Yoko, Matsuri Yayori, and Yunomae Tomoko, "The Women's Movement: Progress and Obstacles," *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 25.
- ³⁶ Kazuko Tanaka, "The New Feminist Movement," 344.
- ³⁷ Vera C. Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.
- ³⁸ Ueno Chizuko. "The Making of a History," 173.
- ³⁹ Kazuko Tanaka, "The New Feminist Movement," 347.
- ⁴⁰ Ueno Chizuko, "The Making of a History," 175.
- ⁴¹ Kitazawa Yoko, Matsuri Yayori, and Yunomae Tomoko, "The Women's Movement: Progress and Obstacles," *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 25.

⁴² Hara Minako, "Lesbians and Sexual Self-Determination," 129.

⁴³ Taki Fujita, "Women and Politics in Japan," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 375 (1968), 92.

⁴⁴ Ueno Chizuko, "The Making of a History," 172.

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