ONE

INTRODUCTION

"In the beginning, women in truth were the sun. We were authentic human beings. Today, women are the moon. We live as dependents and simply reflect the light that emanates from another source. Our faces are pale blue, like the moon, like the sick." So wrote Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971) in the first issue of her magazine, *Seitō* (Bluestocking), in 1911.[1]

Indeed, it appears that women at the dawn of Japanese history were the "sun." The Sun Goddess (Amaterasu) was the founding deity of Japan and the ancestor of the imperial family. And yet Japan became a staunchly patriarchal society, with men compelling women to be subservient, submissive, self-effacing, and humble. Centuries of feudal rule by the warrior class had fixed the place of women in the society and in the family into a rigid mold.

With the end of the feudal Tokugawa rule and the advent of the new era following the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century, significant social, political, economic, and cultural changes began to take place. But improving the status of women was not on the agenda of the new government, as will be seen in the discussion below. In fact, it may have worsened with the new legalistic concepts that were adopted. There were, however, a growing number of women who began to fight for their rights. Some followed the path of moderation and worked for reforms within the framework of the new sociopolitical order. But many soon became disillusioned with the prospect of gaining equal rights with men under the new regime, which retained numerous aspects of the old order while establishing a new political order under the new elite, who were consolidating their political authority by marshaling military, bureaucratic, capitalistic, and

traditionalist forces. This situation drove a number of advocates of women's rights to embrace radical political philosophies, including socialism, anarchism, and communism.

The excerpts from memoirs, recollections, and essays translated and included here are from women who fought for equality and social justice from the early years of Meiji to the outbreak of the Pacific War. There were, of course, many others who fought for the feminine cause and also struggled to achieve social justice and economic well-being for the general populace. The memoirs included here were chosen not only because of the significant roles these women played in the reform movements in Japan before World War II but because they are especially candid and honest in revealing their innermost thoughts and feelings and in accounting for their personal actions and experiences. Traditional strictures and conventions would have required women to conceal their true thoughts and sentiments with a veneer of platitudes, clichés, and rhetoric, but these women discussed their thoughts and lives in a down-to-earth, unadorned manner, baring their souls without pretentiousness or cant. In this respect they present a refreshing contrast to the autobiographies and essays of the more traditional-minded women leaders who sought to provide moral guidance to women in the prewar years. These activist women were in a sense all iconoclasts who challenged the conventional customs and moral principles.

What they craved most were opportunities for self-fulfillment and the freedom and right to participate in the social, political, economic, and intellectual life of the society without being compelled to become "good wives and wise mothers." They generally rejected the traditional imperatives of the marital institution and believed that they should have the freedom to live with whomever they pleased without the sanction of society. In the course of their struggle to assert their individuality, achieve self-perfection, and win equality and justice for women, they, of necessity, gravitated toward men who were challenging the established order. Thus in the early Meiji years they joined hands with the advocates of "freedom and popular rights" (*jiyū minken*). But later when the early Meiji fighters for people's rights joined the ruling elite to build "a strong and rich nation" (*fukoku kyōhei*) at the expense of the well-being of the masses, many women activists joined the circle of budding socialists, communists, and anarchists to fight, not just for their personal fulfillment, but for social justice for the underprivileged members of the society as a whole. Thus, their

struggle came to be fused with the general socialist-communist struggle against the ruling elites and the entrenched economic interests.

In the course of their struggles these women displayed a remarkable degree of courage, determination, and idealism. They willingly endured privation, physical beatings, imprisonment, humiliation, sickness (most often tuberculosis), and even death. The triumph of the spirit over the fear of death is most strikingly revealed in the image of Kanno Sugako, diligently studying English by herself almost to the very moment she mounted the scaffold (see chapter 3 below). And the fiery spirit of independence is demonstrated by Kaneko Fumiko in tearing up the imperial reprieve that commuted her death sentence (chapter 4).

Although they were all fighting for the same cause, they were distinctive personalities. Some, like Kanno and Kaneko, driven to the edge in their fanatical determination to stand up against the established authorities, seemed to court death. Then there was Yamakawa Kikue, who was a rationalist (chapter 5); Tanno Setsu, the good Communist soldier to the end (chapter 6); Fukuda Hideko, whose life mirrors the transition from "popular rights" to socialism (chapter 2); Yamashiro, the idealist studying mathematics behind prison walls (chapter 7); Kutsumi Fusako, who became involved in the Sorge spy affair (chapter 5); and the young activists, Sakai Magara, Hashiura Haruko, and others, who organized the Sekirankai (Red Wave Society) and defied the authorities in joining the May Day parade in 1921 (chapter 5).

Some were accused of being sexually loose; others of being difficult and abrasive; still others of being docile slaves to their men, falling into the very trap that they were trying to escape, that is, from being treated merely as mistresses and housekeepers. Many were drawn into the radical political circle through their male relations or friends, but they were predisposed toward pursuing such a course, and once they entered that road, they turned out to be more determined and steadfast than a number of their male counterparts.

Taken together these women constitute a strong current in the history of modern Japanese social and political life. Until recently little attention was paid to their lives and the roles they played. The spotlight had been focused on the male activists. Many women, however, actively and from behind the scenes in Japan before World War II, played roles as significant as those of the male activists in laying the groundwork for the continuing struggle to extend human rights and ensure social justice for all members

of the society. So the stories they tell are more than accounts of their individual lives; they constitute an essential aspect of prewar Japanese social history, especially because they reveal the inner workings of the family, the social life, the economic life, the prison life of the turbulent century following the Meiji Restoration.

The Historical Background

The sociopolitical and cultural forces that these activists had to confront can be perceived by briefly surveying the historical background, which saw the status of women changing from that of relative equality with men to one of subordination and oppression. The practices and attitudes that developed in the feudal period persisted after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and posed formidable difficulties for women who aspired to win equality with men and develop their individuality.

In the early years of Japanese history the imperial throne was occupied frequently by women. The *History of Wei,* written in the third century A.D. in China, states that Japan in the second century was ruled over by a queen, Pimiku or Himeko. Legend has it that an empress, Jingū Kōgō, led a military expedition to Korea in the third century. The family system tended to be matriarchal. The husband went to live with the wife's family, and their children remained with their mother. Expressions of love between men and women were expressed freely in the *Man'yōshū,* a collection of poems compiled in the eighth century. And yet by the Heian period (794–1185) women were evidently beginning to be regarded as inferior to men.

What accounts for this changing status of women? In part it may have been influenced by the advent of Chinese thought and Buddhism, which occurred in the fifth and sixth centuries. Confucian China taught the doctrine of a hierarchical social order, distinguishing between "superior" and "inferior" persons, men and women, elder and younger persons. Buddhism taught that salvation was not possible for women. Not until the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and the rise of popular Buddhist sects did the concept of salvation for both sexes come to be preached in Japan.

The changes in the perception of women's status by the Heian period can be discerned in the literary masterpiece of this period, *The Tale of Genji,* written in the early eleventh century by Murasaki Shikibu (978–1016?), a lady-in-waiting at the imperial court. In this novel the hero,

Prince Genji, remarks, "But what was the good of trying to please women? If they were not fundamentally evil, they would not have been born women at all."[2] Undoubtedly the author was reflecting the thinking of men of her age, at a time when women writers like her were creating the golden age of Japanese literature.

With the ascendancy of the samurai class in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the condition of women seemed to have worsened considerably. As the struggle for land and power intensified, physical strength and martial skill came to be valued above all. The practice of inheritance steadily changed from the custom of dividing property among all the children to primogeniture, although in the Kamakura period daughters still had the right of inheritance, and a widowed mother controlled the family property.[3] Distinctions in speech between male and female members of the society grew more pronounced, and eventually Japanese developed into a language with one of the most finely and minutely differentiated styles of speech between men and women, with intricate levels of distinction between humble and honorific words, phrases, and speech patterns.

When the Tokugawa shogunate was established in the early seventeenth century, the founder, Ieyasu, set out to freeze the social order and establish a rigid hierarchical system. This entailed maintaining rigid distinctions between men and women, especially among the warrior class. For the samurai class, primogeniture was mandatory, and women were deprived of property rights. In this class the head of the family had absolute authority, including the power of life and death over family members. In sexual relations, the husband could be as promiscuous as he pleased, but if there was the slightest hint of infidelity on the part of the wife, she could be executed by her husband. Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), the most renowned of the Tokugawa playwrights, has a samurai's wife tell her daughter in one of his plays, "When you are alone with any other man—besides your husband—you are not to so much as lift your head and look at him."[4]

Marriages were arranged by the parents, and daughters were given no voice in the matter. The husband could readily divorce his wife, whereas the wife had to endure hardships and abuses with patience and self-abnegation, devoting herself to the well-being of her husband and her in-laws. The ideal behavior for the samurai woman was prescribed by a Confucian scholar, Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714), in his *Onna Daigaku* (Great Learning for Women). He asserted that "from her earliest youth, a girl

should observe the line of demarcation separating women from men, and never, even for an instant, should she be allowed to see or hear the slightest impropriety." The wife must serve her husband as faithfully as her husband serves the feudal lord, Ekken argued, because "a woman has no particular lord. She must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence." In her daily life she must "rise early in the morning, and at night go late to rest." As for the character of women, he averred that "the five worst maladies that afflict the female are indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy, and silliness. Without any doubt, these five maladies infest seven or eight out of every ten women, and it is from these that arises the inferiority of women to men. Such is the stupidity of her character that it is incumbent on her, in every particular, to distrust herself and to obey her husband."[5] A widow, of course, was not to remarry but to continue to serve her dead husband's parents. These ideas may not have been followed to the letter, even in the Tokugawa period, but they guided the thought and behavior of women to such an extent that they persisted into the twentieth century.

The Tokugawa townspeople did not subscribe to the rigid code of the samurai. Ihara Saikaku (1642–93), who wrote about the life of the townspeople, believed that it was natural for the husband and wife to show affection toward each other. He pointed out that among the townspeople a widow could remarry without any stigma being attached to her. Some townspeople believed that the relationship between husband and wife, not father and son, as the Confucians taught, was the cardinal human relationship. "The way of humanity originated with husband and wife," they asserted.[6] Primogeniture was not the norm among the townspeople. Parents could divide their property among their children as they pleased. Saikaku believed that the eldest son should get the largest share, but that the other children must also be given a share of the family property. In the later years of the Tokugawa period, the townspeople began to emulate the samurai, especially as the distinction between the wealthy merchants and the samurai was becoming blurred.[7]

The mores that influenced the peasants were not the more humane ways of the townspeople but those of the samurai, although the peasants' social relations were nowhere as rigid as those of the samurai. The wife worked just as hard as her husband in the field and harder at home, so her value as a partner was undisputed. Often authority in the household was shared by husband and wife. The family seal was seen as the emblem of

the husband's authority while the rice scooper was the wife's symbol of authority. But publicly the husband's authority was regarded as supreme. A husband who was henpecked was an object of pity and ridicule. The ruling class exhorted the peasants to keep their women in line. The shogunate's injunction stated, "The husband must work in the fields, the wife must work at the loom. Both must do night work. However good-looking a wife may be, if she neglects her household duties by drinking tea or sightseeing or rambling on the hillsides, she must be divorced."[8] The peasantry, however, did not adhere strictly to the samurai class's practice of primogeniture.

Even after the Tokugawa era ended and Japan entered the "modern" age, feudalistic attitudes persisted. Nitobe Inazō, a Christian educator, wrote at about the turn of the twentieth century that feudal woman's "surrender of herself to the good of her husband, home and family was as willing and honorable as the man's self-surrender to the good of his lord and country. Self-renunciation, without which no life enigma can be solved, is the keynote of the loyalty of man as well as the domesticity of woman."[9]

Status of Women after the Meiji Restoration

With the arrival of the new era of Meiji there was an initial rush to adopt Western things and practices. But the status of women hardly changed. Even though traditional attitudes remained unchanged, however, for a brief period in early Meiji it appeared as if progressive ideas might change the mode of thinking and way of life of the society, because a number of people began advocating the adoption of Western liberal concepts and practices. A handful even championed the cause of women. Among the most influential "Westernizers" of Meiji Japan was Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901). From the outset of his career as a publicist and proponent of Westernism he called for equality between the sexes. In one of his most influential works, *Gakumon no Susume* (Encouragement of Learning), he wrote, "Men are human beings, so are women." The family system, he asserted, should be built on the relationship between husband and wife, not on that of father and son as taught by the Confucians. "The great foundation of human relations," he argued, "consists of husband and wife. The relationship between husband and wife emerged before that of parents and children or brothers and sisters." "Marriage being a partnership of

equals," he averred, "women should have the same rights as men to run the household, own property, get a divorce, remarry, and so on." Because women are just as intelligent as men, girls should be given the same upbringing and education as boys, he asserted.[10]

In the circle of men interested in liberalizing Japan there were others who shared Fukuzawa's views on women. Among them was the first minister of education under the cabinet system established in 1885, Mori Arinori (1847–89). In one of the journals that the "Westernizers" published in the 1870s Mori wrote a series of articles condemning the practice of concubinage. "The relation between man and wife is the fundamental of human morals," he wrote. "Just relations between husband and wife," he observed, "are not in the least practiced under our national customs. In truth, the husband is entirely the master of the slave, and the wife is no different from a chattel."[11] He suggested that a marriage contract be signed defining the rights and obligations of both parties. When he married he followed his own proposal and did sign such a contract. A younger liberal thinker and prominent advocate of people's rights, Ueki Emori (1857–92), also advocated granting equal political rights to women and abolition of the public brothels. But regarding the latter, he seemed to see no contradiction in his call for banning the institution and his patronage of it.[12] Among other early advocates of women's rights were the converts to Christianity. They were particularly concerned about the practice of concubinage and the institution of public brothels.

In the 1870s a movement emerged to compel the Meiji government to share political power. This movement for "freedom and popular rights" was led by those who resented being locked out of the power structure by the new oligarchs; it was not meant to extend the franchise to the masses or to women. But it became something of a grass-roots movement, and a number of women joined the movement in hopes of gaining equal rights for women.

Granting suffrage to women was not remotely in the minds of the ruling elites. In fact they set out to prohibit women from taking part in any political activity. In 1882 the government forbade women to make political speeches and in 1890 made it illegal for women to participate in any political activities whatsoever. Women were even forbidden to listen to political speeches. The Police Security Regulations of 1900 reinforced these strictures. Article 5 of the regulations prohibited women from forming any political organization whatever.[13]

In 1871 the Meiji government began drafting a civil code. The men assigned the task turned to the French civil code for their model, and they invited a French jurist, Gustave Boissanade, to assist in drafting the code. This draft made the nuclear family the legal family unit, rather than the extended family. The rights of the wife were recognized, and no provisions were made to give legal authority to the head of the extended family. The opponents charged that it was patterned too closely after the French code and did not take into consideration traditional Japanese mores and institutions. Although the *genrōin* (council of elder statesmen) gave its approval, the opponents managed to prevent enactment of the code.[14] The government then drafted a code that was more conservative. This code was adopted and enacted in 1898.

This, the Meiji Civil Code, gave the head of the extended family (which included his married sons and their families, his unmarried sons and daughters, as well as his unmarried brothers and sisters) virtually absolute authority. Now that traditional class distinctions were no longer legally recognized, the legal provisions encompassed all classes. The rights of women of all social classes were restricted, in line with traditional samurai practice. The more liberal practices that prevailed among the Tokugawa townspeople were eliminated. For example, primogeniture was now mandated for all classes. The head of the extended household was given the right to control the family property, determine the place of residence of each household member, and approve or disapprove marriages and divorces.

The wife was treated as a minor and was placed under the absolute authority of the household head and of her own husband. One of the provisions held that "cripples and disabled persons and wives cannot undertake any legal action."[15] Needless to say, the wife was without any property rights. Before the Meiji period the wife retained her own family name even after marriage, but the Meiji civil code required her to take her husband's family name, unless she was the only or the eldest daughter of a family without sons. In this case the husband married into her family. A son could not marry without the consent of the father until he was thirty, and a daughter could not do so until she was twenty-five. But the consent of the household head was required regardless of age.[16]

Among the practices that the reformers, led by the Christians, sought to eliminate were de facto polygamy and public brothels. The legal code of 1870 had given legal recognition to concubines. Not until 1882 was the

practice of including concubines in the family register ended. Husbands could commit adultery with impunity (unless the woman happened to be someone else's wife), whereas wives committing adultery were punished severely.

Brothel districts were a legacy from the Tokugawa period. The brothel quarters of the major cities, like the Yoshiwara in Tokyo, were touted as glamorous centers of hedonism, despite the fact that the inmates were hapless daughters of impoverished peasants who were forced to sell them to the brothels. As the urban population grew while agrarian poverty persisted, the number of girls being sent into the brothels increased steadily. In 1904 there were 43,134 inmates in public brothels; in 1924 there were 52,325.[17] Despite the "modernization" of Japan, the institution of public brothels survived until the end of World War II.

Among the early fighters against this institution was Yajima Kajiko (1833–1925), a Christian educator who formed the Fujin Kyōfūkai (Women's Moral Reform Society) in 1886 to carry out her campaign against public brothels and male promiscuity. In Gunma prefecture (in the Kantō region) anti-brothel reformers succeeded in getting the prefectural assembly to ban public brothels in 1882. The law was enacted in 1888, making Gunma the only prefecture without public brothels before 1947, when the national legislature banned them.[18]

The Salvation Army, led by Yamamuro Gumpei (1872–1940), played an active role in the movement to eliminate public brothels and free the inmates who had been sold to these houses. Despite occasional successes in helping some inmates to gain their freedom,[19] the movement to ban the practice proved futile, and thousands of young girls in their teens continued to be sent to the brothels. In the 1930s when there was a serious famine in northern Japan, of the 467 girls and women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four in one village, 110 were sent to the urban brothels as indentured prostitutes. They were bound by contract to serve from four to six years in return for payments to their parents of about 150 yen (at that time the yen was worth about twenty to twenty-five cents in U.S. currency).[20] Many young girls from the southern regions of Japan were sold to serve in brothels in Southeast Asia. In Singapore alone it is estimated that in about 1910 there were from 3,500 to 5,000 Japanese women in the brothels.[21]

The move to provide educational opportunities for girls started simultaneously with the onset of the liberal reform movement, or the so-called

movement to "enlighten and civilize" the country. Fukuzawa Yukichi was a forceful spokesman for this cause. "In matters of learning," he argued, "there should be no difference between men and women."[22] Prior to the proclamation of the Education Act of 1872 the Department of Education submitted to the Council of State a document advocating universal education and asserted that "in the way of mankind, there is no distinction between men and women. There is no reason why girls cannot be educated as well as boys. Girls are the mothers of tomorrow. They are to become the educators of children. For this reason the education of girls is of utmost importance."[23]

Although the ideal of equal education was proclaimed in 1872, its implementation progressed at a snail's pace. In 1876, 46 percent of the boys of school age, but only 16 percent of the girls, were in school.[24] The figure did not approach 50 percent until the end of the nineteenth century. (This at a time when compulsory elementary education was required for only three years. It was not extended to four years until 1900. Finally, in 1907 it was extended to six years and remained so until the end of World War II.) Girls in rural areas in particular were kept out of school because farm families saw female education as a waste of time. Such an attitude prevailed among members of the middle class too. Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–96), a prominent writer of the Meiji era, was a daughter of a low-level government official. She was not allowed to complete elementary school because her mother believed that "it is harmful for a girl to get too much education."[25] Not until the first decade of the twentieth century did the rate of attendance increase. By the end of that decade attendance had jumped to about 96 percent.[26]

Government officials were aware of the importance of universal education for nationalistic ends. The wars with China and Russia, and the rapid industrial expansion at the turn of the century, caused greater emphasis to be placed on education. But government leaders did not believe that boys and girls should get the same education. They adhered to the traditional notion of keeping the sexes apart. In 1879 the government decreed that boys and girls beyond the elementary school level must attend separate schools. The purpose of women's education was to prepare them, not to become professional women, but to become "good wives and wise mothers." That is, girls were to be educated primarily to perform their duties in the household. For that reason the education of girls beyond the elementary level was neglected. In 1895 there were only thirty-seven "higher"

schools for girls, that is, schools above the primary level. These were operated mainly by missionaries.[27] Not until 1911 was a college for women established.

In defining the goals of high school education the Ministry of Education stated in 1899 that the purpose of higher education for girls was "to foster characteristics that will make them develop into wise mothers and good wives. For this reason elegant and refined manners, and docility and modesty are qualities that must be fostered."[28]

The domestic arts were stressed in the education of girls. About 20 percent of the subjects taught fell in the category of home economics, sewing, and handicrafts. Foreign languages and mathematics were only one-third of what was taught in boys' schools, and science was one-half.[29] Also ideals that were reminiscent of Kaibara Ekken's teachings were emphasized in textbooks on moral education. One of the lessons in a morals text issued in 1900 said:

> Girls must be gentle and graceful in all things. In their conduct and manner of speech, they must not be harsh. While remaining gentle, however, they must have inner strength in order not to be easily swayed by others. Loquacity and jealousy are defects common among women, so care must be taken to guard against these faults. When a girl marries she must serve her husband and his parents faithfully, guide and educate her children, be kind to her servants, be frugal in all things, and work for the family's prosperity. Once she marries, she must look upon her husband's home as her own, rise early in the morning, go to bed late, and devote all her thoughts to household affairs. She must assist her husband, and whatever misfortune befalls the family she must not abandon it.[30]

These same ideals were inculcated into the girls at home. Ishimoto Shizue (1897–), who was one of the first women to be elected to the Diet after the end of World War II, wrote in her autobiography:

> Consciously or unconsciously, my mother taught her daughter to crush her desires and ambitions, and trained her to be ready to submerge her individuality in her husband's personality and his family's united temper. Girls were to study first of all how to please their husband's parents with absolute obedience. Mother never thought it possible that I should become a good companion, discussing social

problems or politics with my husband or reading books with him. Marriage for the Japanese girl meant losing individual freedom.[31]

In the educational journals issued for teachers' reference traditional Confucian ideals were emphasized. For instance, one article published in 1887 stated: "The difference between day and night results from the concord of yin and yang. The four seasons are also the result of this concord. . . . The male is yang and the female is yin. Consequently, it is only natural that women should remain in the house and be docile. Who in the world would doubt this truth?"[32]

Well-bred women were not expected to take employment outside the home. Yamada Waka, who was regarded as a public counselor of women in the 1920s and 1930s, remarked in 1919, "I am opposed to women's entering professional fields, because it is unnatural. Men and women have deep-rooted relations. I do not approve of theories about women which treat women separately from men."[33]

Lower-class girls were employed on a large scale in a host of menial jobs, especially in the textile plants and other factories that sprang into existence as Japan embarked on the road to industrialization. Large numbers of young girls were recruited from the rural areas and put to work in these factories. At the turn of the twentieth century 90 percent of the workers in weaving sheds and silk filatures and 80 percent of the operatives in the cotton-spinning mills were women. In 1897, 49 percent of the workers in these factories were girls less than twenty years of age, and 13 percent were younger than fourteen. Most were indentured servants whose parents had been given a relatively insignificant sum of money in return for their daughters' labor in these plants. The girls were housed in dormitories under strict control. The pay was low, and working conditions were poor. The girls were required to work long hours, and often they were punished physically if they violated the rules set by the employers. The poor food and living conditions and the harsh working conditions contributed to the deterioration of the workers' health, and many contracted tuberculosis and beriberi.[34] Protests against these conditions began to break out, but they proved to be futile. The first strike by women workers occurred in 1885 in a silk filature in Kōfu city in central Japan. Other strikes followed, but any move to organize labor unions was swiftly suppressed by the authorities.[35] Union organizers, including women organizers, became more active in the twentieth century.

Hard as life was for the girls who were sent into the silk filatures and textile plants, the girls and women left behind in the rural villages had to labor long hours in backbreaking work. Unlike the women who went to work in the cities, farm women hardly got a glimpse of the tantalizing products of the West. Life for them was dull, arduous, and Spartan. The feudal mores of obedience and self-denial had deep roots in the villages and persisted well into the twentieth century.

Because they had to labor as hard as men on a meager diet, farm women aged early and ended up with bent backs, hands marked with deep cracks and calluses, and faces wrinkled and withered. One old woman who grew up in a mountain village in central Japan recalled, "In the old days we used to put a big pot of tea on the fire, and the whole family would ladle the tea out and pour it on sorghum powder. That was our staple."[36] One woman who, as a young girl, saw her friends leave for the factories remarked, "I stayed behind without friends and burned the hillside to open up farmland to grow grass and millet. I used to walk five miles along a mountain road covered with snow up to my hips and with a sack of rice and a box of flour on my back. I worked beside six men and raised six children."[37]

For the farm women there was no escape, though a number of them were involved in tenant disputes that began to break out in the 1920s. But for the most part they endured the arduous work, poverty, and social imperatives that prevented them from developing their minds and spirits, as some of the urban, middle-class women could do.

Although "good" families regarded sending their daughters out to work as demeaning, more women began to enter a variety of occupations and professions during the Taishō era (1912–26). Teaching at the elementary school level was one profession open to women. But they were restricted primarily to teaching the lower grades. In fact, a resolution of the Japanese Educators' Association stipulated that women teachers be restricted to the first two years of elementary school.[38] Not until 1931 was a woman appointed principal of an elementary school.[39] Because teachers were held in high esteem by the society rooted in Confucianism, however, once women entered this field, even as elementary school teachers, they were held in high regard by the general populace. Here, unlike women in other occupations, women teachers who got married were not automatically dismissed from their jobs.

Medicine was the other profession in which Japanese women moved ahead more rapidly than women in America. The entry of women into the

medical professional in Japan was a hard-won right, which a few determined pioneers captured in early Meiji. Takahashi Mizuko (1852–1927) was one of the first women to fight for the right to enter the medical profession. She wanted to become a doctor, but because the government did not grant medical licenses to women, she first became a midwife. Then in 1884, because of the petitions submitted by Takahashi and a few other women, government officials decided to recognize women doctors. She applied for admission to a medical school but was denied admission. She then stationed herself by the front gate of another school for three days and three nights to see the president and finally persuaded him to admit her. She literally worked her way through medical school, passed the licensing examination in 1887, and became one of the first female doctors in Japan. Other determined souls, like Yoshioka Yayoi (1871–1959), who established the first medical preparatory school for women in 1900, followed Takahashi's example. The graduates of Yoshioka's school, however, could not practice medicine until 1912, because only graduates of medical schools certified by the government were allowed to take the national medical examination. The government refused to certify her school until 1912. By 1928 over eight hundred students had enrolled in her college.[40] In the 1970s about 10 percent of the doctors and 10 percent of the dentists in Japan were women, a much higher percentage than in the United States.[41]

Women distinguished themselves also in literature and in the cultural fields, particularly in the theater and in motion pictures. More women came to be employed in modern stores and in business offices, but only in low-level positions. They were paid from one-half to two-thirds the salary that men received. The practice of dispensing with their services once they got married was the norm—a practice that persisted well past World War II.

More women in large cities began to wear Western garments, but in 1925 a survey taken in the heart of Tokyo showed that whereas 67 percent of the men wore Western suits, 99 percent of the women were clothed in traditional Japanese kimono.[42] But in the 1920s at the height of "Taishō democracy" young "swingers" of the big cities, known as *mobo* (modern boy) and *moga* (modern girl), emerged. They defied the traditional ways and embraced Western music, dance, and movies, and emulated the lifestyles of the young people of the West. But even though they were influenced by the romantic actions they encountered on the silver screen, they were not permitted to engage in romantic love themselves or marry boys

and girls of their own choosing. As a result, double suicides by young lovers became almost a fad in the 1920s and 1930s.

The rising level of literacy among women, and their growing interest in cultural and social affairs, were reflected in the increase in the number of women's magazines that came to be published. Many of them were designed primarily to entertain the readers. Although the emphasis was on "good housekeeping" types of articles, others catered to the growing sophistication of the women whose social and political consciousness had been aroused.

The high point of the feminist movement in Japan in the years before World War II was reached during the 1920s, but its origin can be traced back to the early years of Meiji.

From Liberalism to Radicalism

The historically rooted inequities, the social, political, and economic burdens placed on the lower classes as the Meiji leaders launched Japan on the path of modernization in order to build a "rich and powerful nation," the arrival of Western liberalism with its emphasis on freedom, equality, justice, and individual rights, and the ensuing advent of socialism, communism, and anarchism touched off numerous reform movements in the Meiji period. The more radical by-products of these movements forcefully challenged the established order of things in the Taishō era. Among the activists were a number of women. Their number was small, to be sure, but their commitment was firm, and many gave their lives to the cause.

From the outset of the Meiji era a handful of courageous women took part in movements to extend the rights of the people. In the so-called popular-rights (*minken*) movement, we find women activists like Kusunose Kita (1836–1920), Kishida Toshiko (1863–1901), and Fukuda Hideko (1867–1927) fighting for equal political rights for women.

In 1878 Kusunose challenged the authorities in her home prefecture in Tosa in Shikoku Island for denying her the right to vote in the local assembly election despite the fact that she, as head of the household, was required to pay taxes. At this time the Meiji government had allowed women to be household heads. In April 1878 at the governors' conference a proposal was submitted to grant women household heads, who were property holders and taxpayers, the right to vote in prefectural assembly