

## Incorporating Gender Equality at the Local Level of Politics : A Preliminary Survey\*

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### Introduction

On June 23, 1999, the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (Law No. 78 of 1999) was enacted by the government of Japan to “clarify the basic concepts pertaining to the formation of a gender-equal society, to indicate the direction that should be taken, and to comprehensively and systematically promote measures by the State, local governments and citizens pertaining to the formation of a gender-equal society” (Gender Equality Bureau’s website). In 2000, the Basic Plan for Gender Equality was made public based on the reports, “The Basic Philosophy behind the Formulation of a Basic Plan for Gender Equality,” “Basic Measures Pertaining to Violence against Women,” and the results of “Women 2000.”

Corresponding to the steps taken by the national government and reflecting the general trend of Japanese government policy to promote bottom-up local initiatives, prefectural and local governments were encouraged to pass their own ordinances to implement the spirit of this act according to the conditions of the individual local communities. Thus, throughout the nation, both prefectural and municipal governments have been enacting these ordinances. As of July 2003, all but five prefectural governments had passed ordinances, some of which took effect as early as April 2000 (Gender Equality Bureau’s website). One hundred forty-two local governments followed suit, including even some whose prefectural governments had not yet passed such ordinances (Gender Equality Bureau’s website).

A close examination of the language of these ordinances reveals, however, that

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a backlash against the idea of gender equality has influenced the processes of enactment as well as implementation of these policies for gender-equality. For example, while the ordinances of the forerunners, such as Saitama Prefecture and Yamaguchi Prefecture, closely follow the language of the national Basic Law, those of the latecomers have been more likely to either refer to the masculine and feminine in the language of the ordinance, or to experience delays in the overall process of enactment due to disputes over the language.<sup>1)</sup>

The Toyonaka City Council had planned to pass the gender-equality ordinance in March 2003, but this was delayed until the fall of 2003.<sup>2)</sup> The record of the Toyonaka City Council meeting states that the introduction of the ordinance to the Council meeting was stopped by the mayor and by some of the council members and because they felt the ordinance was "lacking in common sense" (Toyonaka City Council, 2003a, 188).

In the following section, we will look at the development of the gender-equality policy of the City of Toyonaka as a case that parallels the developments at the national and prefectural levels to examine how the concept of gender equality is being incorporated at the level of local politics, and to evaluate the current situation from the viewpoint of the advancement of women in Japan, especially in the political sphere.

## 1. Policies Promoting Gender Equality in Toyonaka

Toyonaka is a typical suburban city with a population of about 400,000. It is composed of long-standing communities as well as "new towns" constructed during the 1960s and the 1970s. One of the main foci of city policies is human rights, as is evidenced by Toyonaka's declaration of itself as a "City Protecting Human Rights" which was adopted in 1983. Issues such as the integration of those who are physically challenged (integral schooling started in the early 1970s), those who have suffered social discrimination, as well as non-Japanese residents generally have been actively promoted.

However, despite these liberal tendencies in the city management, Toyonaka has not been among the municipalities leading the social advancement of women; rather, it has been a follower in the developments that have taken place at the international, national and prefectural levels. The International Year of Women in 1975, followed by the Decade of Women, worked as a catalyst to push unwilling government officials at the national level to deal with women's issues domestically

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1) The phrase in Tokyo's Ordinance, "while recognizing the difference between men and women," may be interpreted as acknowledgment of gender difference. The ordinance of another forerunner, Mie Prefecture, will be discussed later, even though it is free from this gender difference clause.

2) The ordinance was finally passed in October 2003.

as well. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified by Japan in 1985, and in response to the Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 adopted by the U.N. conference in 1985, Japan created in 1994, in the Cabinet, the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality. Following the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in 1995, "achievement of a 20% participation rate as early as possible before the end of FY2000" was set as a policy goal by the Headquarters in 1996, leading to the enactment of the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society.

The Osaka prefectural government followed this national move with its first action plan in 1981, and a second action plan in 1986 which led to the third action plan, or "Jump Plan," in 1991. The Jump Plan, revised in 1997 and called the "New Jump Plan" set 25% as the goal for the percentage of female commission members. A publicly-built, foundation-run women's center, the Dawn Center, was launched in 1994. In 1998, the Osaka Prefectural Commission for a Gender Equal Society was launched, which produced the Basic Concept of Gender Equal Ordinances in 2001. Meanwhile, in 2000, Osaka Prefecture elected Japan's first woman governor.

The city of Toyonaka followed along in the wake of both of these developments. In 1983, the Toyonaka Conference to Promote Women's Positions was launched with twenty-six members (four men and twenty-two women) at the request of the mayor of Toyonaka, and in 1985, the city drew up "199 Proposals for the Women in Toyonaka" (Toyonaka City 1996, 93-123). The basic idea for the proposals was that not only the men's happiness as well as women's suffers under traditional gender roles, and thus, from the standpoint of all individuals, it is necessary to change those traditional gender roles (Toyonaka City, 1996, 100-101).

In 1984, the Toyonaka Commission on Women's Issues was launched for a two-year term with twenty members. This commission made six reports from 1986 through 1996 with the gist of each as follows :

- 1st (1986) : Proposed removing gendered role divisions and promoting consciousness-raising for the sake of male-female coexistence.
- 2nd (1988) : Proposed improving education and conditions for women's social advancement and cross-cutting compartmentalized office management to incorporate consideration of women's issues.
- 3rd (1990) : Proposed cross-cutting compartmentalized office management and implementation of policies in the areas of consciousness-raising, education, labor and welfare.
- 4th (1992) : Proposed policies for women in an aging society in the areas of education, consciousness-raising, labor, health, welfare and city infrastruc-

ture. Creation of a women's center was also recommended.

5th (1994) : Proposed the broadening of women's advancement in the policy and decision making processes.

6th (1996) : Proposed promotion of consciousness-raising policy free from gendered language and of working to make women's issues become issues that affect everyone, not just women; promotion of gender equality at work; expansion of scope to cover minority women, such as non-Japanese, disabled, or elderly women; improving gender equality at the City government, in terms of decision making opportunity, political appointments, or working conditions (hiring, training, and pay scales); and creation of an institution for gender equality.

Reflecting the proposals in those reports, the Basic Principles for Policies toward Women in Toyonaka (1990) and the Action Plan for Policies toward Women in Toyonaka (1992) were created to promote conditions beneficial to women. Based on the recommendations of the fourth and fifth reports, the Toyonaka Center for Gender Equality, or "STEP," was launched in 2000 and run by an independent foundation, the Toyonaka Foundation for Gender Equality Promotion, with the support of the City of Toyonaka.

In 1998, the Commission was requested to report on the Comprehensive Policy for Implementing Gender Equality in Toyonaka. The report was issued in 2002 and included recommendations on the contents of the proposed Gender-Equal Society Ordinance (Toyonaka Commission on Women's Issues, 2002, 11-19). The Commission's recommendations were posted on the City of Toyonaka's website and invited public comments.

After a number of these measures had already been taken, one member of the Toyonaka City Council made the following statement :

I understand that the City of Toyonaka regards the promotion of a gender-equal society (*danjo kyodo sankaku shakai*) as a matter completely different from the promotion of a gender-free ideology.<sup>3)</sup> From this point on, it will be important that people understand the fundamental concept of gender equality, as well as the very concept of gender (a concept with which the general public is not yet familiar), without mistakenly confusing the concepts of gender equality and gender-free ideology (Toyonaka City Council, 2002, 56).

This distinction between gender equality and "gender free" ideology is introduced rather abruptly as long as we read only his statement. But in a larger context, it reflected the questions and answers carried out at the national level a month before over "gender free" ideology conducted in reference to the

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3) This refers to the concept of something being completely free from reference to or assignment of gender, rather than just referring to equal treatment regardless of gender.

dispute over the language of Gender Equal Ordinance of the city of Chiba (enacted in September 2002). Interestingly, the argument in the Chiba City Council session referred to the language of the Ube (Yamaguchi) Gender Equality Ordinance (enacted in June 2002), which referred to the Gender Equality Ordinance (enacted in October 2000) of Mie Prefecture.

This chain reaction of debate was over the issue of whether incorporating gender-free ideology or including the masculine-feminine clause in the ordinance, an issue brought on by pressure imposed on the local political process by a nationwide movement critical of the basic idea of gender equality. This movement against gender-free expression was supported by such conservative groups as Nihon Kaigi (Japan Conference) which was launched in 1997 and Nihon Josei-no-Kai (Japan Women's Conference) established in November 2001 as the women's chapter of Nihon Kaigi, and which refers to itself as an association of women with common sense. Both see the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society as aiming at the de-gendering of Japanese society. Some critics of the gender-free society concept even use snails as the symbol of a gender-free society since there is no external difference between males and females. Thus, they claim, the gender-equal ordinances and policies by some municipalities are attempts to incorporate the gender-free ideology and turn us all into snails.

At this point, it may be helpful to look at some of the arguments supporting the insertion of the masculine-feminine clause in the ordinances, starting with the Mie Prefecture ordinance. One example of the logic used was explaining the differences between men and women as an expression of Japanese tradition and culture that has evolved over thousands of years. It argued that the beauty of Japan's gendered language, clothing, and behavior have been praised by other countries, and thus should not be destroyed by a homogenizing ideology, especially one imposed by the government as an ordinance (Mie Prefectural Council 2000, 125). Another example of the logic used was that men or women may feel a sense of internal satisfaction just from being men or women. Some women who espoused these views said that women find pleasure in just being women and bringing up children and that men's masculinity is not at odds with the happiness of women (Mie Prefectural Council 2000, 125). One prefectural official stressed that the ordinance would not deny individuals their masculinity or femininity on an individual basis (Mie Prefectural Council 2000, 149). The ordinance was finally passed without the insertion of the masculine-feminine clause.

In the case of the city of Ube, there was an argument parallel to that of Mie Prefecture. One question was raised in opposition to the idea that being courageous, gentle, or tough does not reflect gender difference but only individual difference. One of the city council members questioned why it was wrong to

regard gentleness as a female characteristic (Ube City Council 2002, 205).

Japanese cultural tradition and Ube's regional characteristics were used to support the inclusion of masculinity, femininity, recognition for housewives and the role of the family as basic principles. Some members of the commission drafting the ordinance argued that the inclusion of such language went against the goal of ordinance, since the definition of masculine and feminine shift over time and these terms are not included in the national law or in Yamaguchi Prefecture's Ordinance.

But the inclusion of the language was supported on the basis that it would make the ordinance "plain and familiar" to the general public and by guaranteeing that the ordinance would not deny masculinity or femininity over individual dignity. The clause recognizing housewives supported the idea that each family member, including housewives, should be recognized for their role in the family (Ube City Council 2002, 222). Thus, in the end, the masculine-feminine clause was incorporated in Section 1, and recognition of housewives was incorporated in Section 4 of Article 3.

In the case of Chiba City, there was a flip-flop—the masculine-feminine clause was added to the draft without any further discussion after the Commission submitted it, and in response to criticism from the public against the inclusion, the clause was taken out, again without any discussion. The argument supporting the inclusion of the clause again relied on the historical and cultural traditions that advocate different behaviors for men and women, symbolized by the terms "masculine" and "feminine" (Chiba City Council 2002).

The attempt to insert the masculine-feminine clause in the Chiba City case was easily defeated, but this was not true in the case of Chiba Prefecture. The Gender Equality Ordinance was supposed to have passed in September 2002, but was delayed in both December 2002 and February 2003, and finally failed due to the ending of the term. The cause for the delay was the very question of the insertion of the masculine-feminine clause in place of terms such as "sexual self-determination" and "individual, regardless of sexual differences" (Chiba Prefecture Council 2003).

If we accept the definition of gender as socially constructed and imposed differences, rather than as an inherent and unchanging characteristic, then reference to masculinity and femininity goes against the spirit of gender equality. The fact that "gender-free" is seen as a threatening, radical idea and that "gender equality" and "gender-free" are widely regarded as being the same thing shows how confused we are regarding the concept and usage of gender. The government's official stance is that "gender-free" is a term created in Japan and not commonly used in English-speaking societies, and that its policy is strictly aimed at a "gender equal" society, not a "gender free" society (statement by

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Bando, Committee on Cabinet 2002, 5).

## 2. Interpretations of Gender

All of this confusion goes hand in hand with the fact that the very term “gender” and other related terms are still unfamiliar among the general public, even among women. A survey conducted by Osaka Prefecture in 1999 reveals the following :

Terms Heard/Seen Before	(%)	
	Female	Male
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	39.6	35.2
Domestic Violence	32.0	24.5
Gender	12.4	7.2
Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society	10.2	16.0
None of the above	32.4	38.7

Source : Osaka Prefecture (1999, 94).

There is also a generational gap in the recognition rates of the terms. The word “gender” is highly recognized among younger women (19.5%, 16.1%, and 17.9% among women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, respectively), while older women have had much less exposure to it (5.6% and 3.9% among women in their 50s and 60s, respectively). Interestingly, the recognition of the newly-enacted Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society shows just the opposite—the highest recognition rate is found among women in their 60s (18.2%), while women in their 20s are the least interested in it (1.2%).

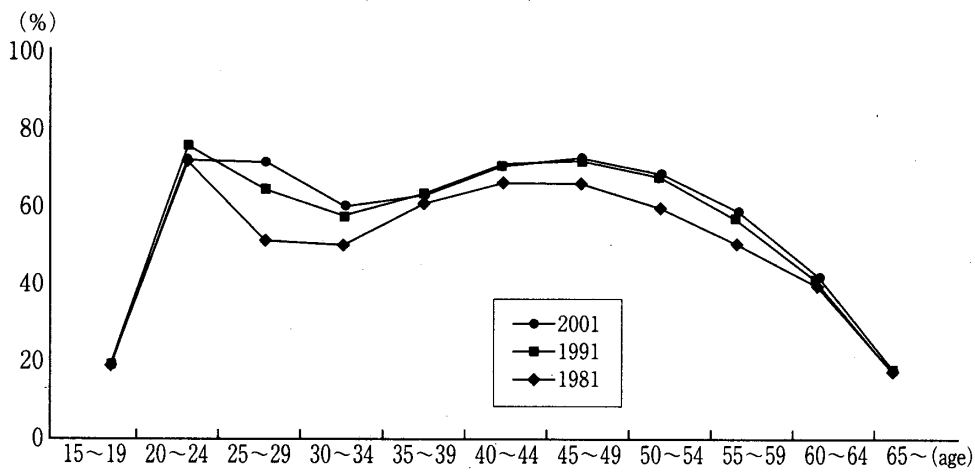
Statistics showing such low recognition rates of gender and gender-related terms are discouraging for many local governments that have been involved in consciousness-raising programs and public relations efforts. One staff member at a women’s center said that it is easy to relate to individuals who are interested in gender-related matters and to provide information to them, but there has been no particularly effective way so far to relate to those who are not interested, and the search for a potentially effective way is underway (Yamamoto interview).

It is not just that the term “gender” is unfamiliar to the general public, but rather that the overall structure of society which is still based on gendered divisions is unconsciously accepted by quite a large portion of the population, including women. The gendered division of roles, “men go to work and women take care of the family,” is supported by 40.7% of women and 59.7% of men, some of whom said they strongly agreed and some of whom said they somewhat

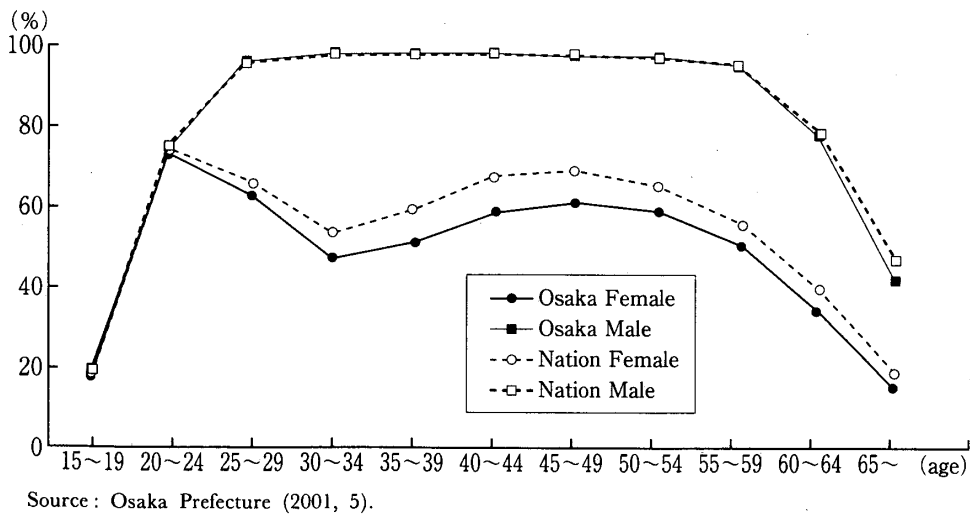
agreed (Osaka Prefecture 1999, 31). A similar survey done by Toyonaka in 1993 found that the number of women supporting gendered role divisions declined from 42.7% to 39.7%, but still remains substantial. A 2000 survey found that 58.2% of men (19.5% strongly) believe in gendered role divisions (Toyonaka City 1993; 2000).<sup>4)</sup>

The persisting acceptance of gendered division of roles at the local, prefectural, and national levels reflects the actual condition of the gendered labor market, namely the phenomenon of the M-curve.

**Women in the Labor Force by Age Group**



**Comparison of Osaka Prefecture and the National Labor Force**



4) A similar survey by the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office conducted in 2002 shows lower numbers for both: 36.8% among women and 46.5% among men (The Gender Equality



As is obvious from the comparison, female workers in Osaka Prefecture show a stronger M-curve than the national average, and the curve is even stronger among the female workers in Toyonaka (3% less than that of Osaka ; Toyonaka City 2002). This relative tendency can be explained by the fact that Osaka Prefecture is more urban and the ratio of single-income families tends to be higher than the national average. Toyonaka, located in Osaka Prefecture, is in a similar situation. This does not mean, however, that women currently outside of the labor market would not be at all interested in working if certain conditions were met. The same survey by Toyonaka found that less than 10% of housewives with children of elementary school-age or younger say they have no intention of working, while closer to 20% of housewives with older children remain outside the labor market by choice (Toyonaka City 2002).

How the dignity of housewives as individuals should be recognized was also made a focus of the argument over the language of the ordinance. Those who supported the insertion of the masculinity-femininity clause also supported recognition in the ordinance of the role of the housewife in the family, thus consolidating the gendered division of roles, or the M-curve labor situation, in the name of tradition and culture.

### **3. Politics and Gender Policy**

While most of the general public remains outside the disputes over gender policy, committed groups at both ends of the ideological spectrum are developing nationwide movements. The movement supporting a gender-free society mostly consists of groups concerned with women's issues, and only the Communist Party is siding with them politically. The movement against a gender free society makes women an important pivot for culture, tradition, and nationalism—a move supported by the LDP and other strongly conservative groups and one which often goes hand in hand with militarism, anti-foreign sentiment, and Shintoism with the Imperial family at the center (See Japan Conference, <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/>).

Such movements even try to use electoral politics to support their side, as can be seen on the website of the Osaka Chapter of the Japan Conference :

- Be on guard against the male-female joint participation policy which repudiates masculinity and femininity, the family, and housewives and through which the government is trying to interfere with individual thought and conscience.
- Bring the common sense of the people to the local government and council in order to stop the movement for a radical ordinance for a gender-equal society

(<http://www.simcommunity.com/sc/jog/nipponkaigi/main/>).

In these arguments over the language of the ordinance, only Chiba City eliminated the language of masculinity and femininity, while the others agreed to insert the masculinity-femininity clause into their ordinances, even though the final report from the commission working on the ordinance language did not include such a clause, and argued against the clause as going against the spirit of the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society.

Without going into a detailed analysis of the debate over each ordinance, it is not possible to give a total picture of electoral politics-gender policy relations. However, the composition of the city councils or prefectural councils may give some idea.

Female/Total Ratio of Chiba City Council Members by Party		Female/Total Ratio of Chiba Prefectural Council Members by Party	
LDP	0/21	LDP	0/71
Satsuki-kai (Rengo)	2/11	Komei	1/7
Komei	2/8	Democrat	1/5
Citizens' Network	7/7	Communist	1/4
Communist	2/6	Kenmin Club	0/3
21Century	2/2	Social Democrat	3/3
Independent	1/1	Citizens' Network	2/3
		Others	2/2

The totally opposite outcome of the Gender Equality Ordinances between Chiba City and Chiba Prefecture is largely due to the distribution of seats by party, namely the predominance of the LDP at the prefectural level, many of whose representatives are from rural districts. It is also interesting to see the lack of female voices among the conservative parties. While the Citizen's Network at the city level and the Social Democrats at the prefectural level have 100% female representation, the LDP at both levels shows 0%. The average ratios of female representation are 29.6% at the city level and 10.2% at the prefectural level.

A similar tendency can be seen in the Mie Prefectural Council. At the time of the adoption of the ordinance, there was only one woman out of 51 members (that has now increased to two).<sup>5)</sup> Even though the ordinance was passed without the inclusion of the masculine-feminine clause, the very fact that the pro-inclusion arguments attracted little criticism during the sessions shows the lack of fair representation in the gender policy.

In the case of Toyonaka, there are only five female members out of thirty-six

5) Incidentally, even the titles formally used for the Mie Prefectural Council members differ between men and women: san is used for women and kun for men.

City Council members (only four until the 2003 election), making the voice opposing gender equality larger than that of the general public. During one session, a council member criticized the library collections of STEP as being influenced by gender-free ideology which might be misleading to the public, and suggested that, therefore, those collections be removed (Toyonaka City Council 2002, 56).

STEP, however, is not run directly by the city government but indirectly through a foundation, with an independent decision making board consisting of sixteen members (ten among them are female). Even though only one opposing argument was made by a single female member against the masculinity-femininity argument and the attack on gender-free ideology and the rest did not challenge the argument, the influence of the difference among the City Council members in terms of their understanding of gender-related issues on the activities of STEP is weak due to the nature of STEP's management (Yamamoto interview).

The Dawn Center of Osaka Prefecture is also run by a foundation, as was the Tokyo Women's Plaza established in 1992, until Governor Ishihara abolished the foundation and moved the Plaza under the direct control of the Tokyo Metropolitan government in 2001. Although these women's centers, either directly or indirectly, depend on the governmental funding and are thus subject to political decisions, the relative distance between electoral politics and gender policies can be appreciated as these centers carry out a longer term projects influencing the public. This may work as long as the executive branch supports gender-equal policies, and such a buffer is needed unless the electoral politics can bring out enough voices to influence the discussions in the local, prefectural and national legislatures.

#### **4. Politics and the Conditions of Women in Japan**

The Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office of Japan released the "FY2002 Annual Report on the State of the Formation of a Gender-Equal Society" in June 2003. Among the indicators studied was political participation by Japanese women. The figures show that for nearly half a century, Japanese electoral politics had virtually shut out women, and it has been only recently that growth has been seen in the number of female candidates as well as in winners in the national elections.

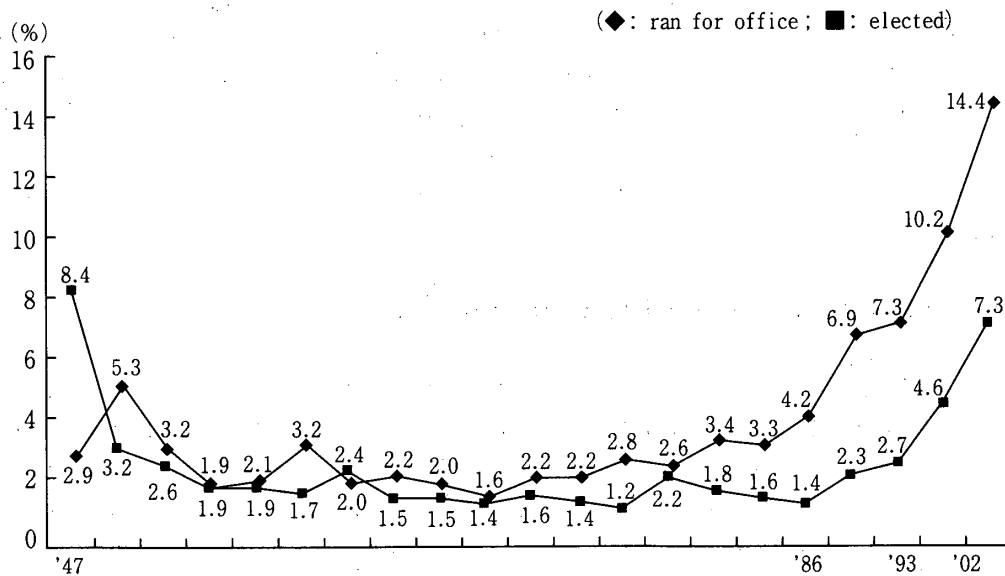
Numerous factors have played a role in creating changes in the situation of women and politics in Japan, ranging from such a broad factors as the sea change in the international political situation resulting from the ending of the ideological binary, to much narrower but significant factors as the continuous decline in the birth rate leading to a smaller population cohort supporting an increasingly larger

older population.

It should be noted that in all kinds of positions, the ratio of women has constantly increased, and the increase accelerated around 1990, in the context of the end of the Cold War. The categories in which the advancement of women has been the fastest are appointed offices such as commission members at the national level (25%), those at the prefectural level or ordinance-designated city<sup>6)</sup> level (25.8%), and Cabinet Ministers (22.2%) (Gender Equality Bureau 2003, 48, 50). While the ratio of women among newly assigned career bureaucrats (16.6%) is increasing, that in the top positions still lags far behind (1.4%) (Gender Equality Bureau 2003, 18, 47).

While the ratio of women among elected officials has shown a constant increase, the degree has varied depending on level and region. Even among the national positions, the number of female members of the House of Councilors is growing faster than that of the House of Representatives. It should be noted that the House of Councilors is less prestigious and uses the proportional representation system, and in it, each party tends to favor the women candidates on the party roster in order to appeal to voters with its female-friendly attitude.

#### Female Candidates for the House of Representatives



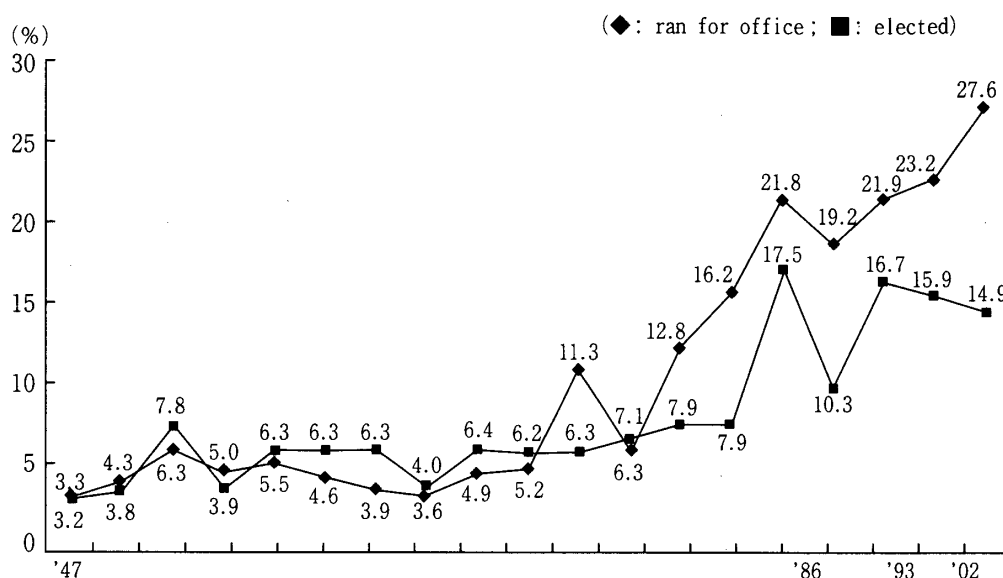
Source: The Gender Equality Bureau (2003, 46).

The year 2003 happens to be a year in which various local elections are being held. On April 13, 10 gubernatorial elections, 33 prefectural council and 12 special

6) Ordinance-designated cities are those with population beyond 500 thousand, and are given special privileges, such as setting wards, which ordinary cities do not enjoy.

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**Female Candidates for the House of Councilors**



Source : The Gender Equality Bureau (2003, 46).

city council elections were conducted. As a result, in Hokkaido, the fourth female governor was elected, and 164 female prefectural council members and 134 ordinance-designated city council members were elected, marking a record high for female elected officials at the local level.

On April 26, the remaining local elections were conducted, and the results shown by party affiliation are as follows.

**Successful Candidates for City Councils by Parties** (April 27, 2003)

	Total	Female	% of Female
LDP	814	16	2.0
Democrat	292	20	6.9
Komei	1,140	305	26.8
Liberal	11	0	0
Communist	940	366	38.9
Social Democrat	239	37	15.5
Other	92	60	65.4
Independent	6,718	432	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,246</b>	<b>1,236</b>	<b>12.1</b>

Source : Asahi Newspaper (April 29, 2003).

Compared with the House of Representatives, where female members still remain at the level of 7.3 percent, local politics in Japan at the municipal level show a similar trend as in American politics: there are more female representatives at the local level than national. But, at both the prefectural and town/village

levels, the national legislatures have far more representation by women, contrary to the American case. As for mayors, only three female candidates were elected, bringing the total to six female mayors nationwide.

How this advancement of women in the political field is viewed by the public can be seen from the following survey on political advantages.

**Opinion Survey : Who has advantage in politics ?**

	<b>Men</b>	strong	some	<b>Both equal</b>	<b>Women</b>	some	strong	<b>DK</b>
Nov. 1992	<b>78.0</b>	37.9	40.1	<b>13.1</b>	<b>1.2</b>	1.0	0.2	<b>7.7</b>
July 1995	<b>67.1</b>	22.7	44.4	<b>22.4</b>	<b>1.5</b>	1.5	0	<b>9.0</b>
Feb. 2000	<b>72.0</b>	29.2	42.8	<b>19.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	0.9	0.2	<b>7.9</b>
2002	<b>72.4</b>	30.2	42.2	<b>18.8</b>	<b>2.1</b>	1.8	0.3	<b>6.6</b>
Metropolitan	<b>76.4</b>	32.2	44.1	<b>16.9</b>	<b>1.4</b>	1.2	0.1	<b>5.3</b>
Tokyo	<b>74.9</b>	32.9	42.0	<b>17.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>	0.9	0.5	<b>6.4</b>
Special Cities	<b>77.0</b>	32.0	45.0	<b>16.8</b>	<b>1.4</b>	1.4	-	<b>4.9</b>
Medium cities	<b>72.7</b>	32.1	40.7	<b>19.5</b>	<b>2.2</b>	1.8	0.4	<b>5.6</b>
Small cities	<b>73.4</b>	29.2	44.2	<b>18.0</b>	<b>1.6</b>	1.5	0.1	<b>7.0</b>
Town/Village	<b>67.5</b>	26.1	41.4	<b>20.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>	2.7	0.4	<b>9.3</b>
Female	<b>76.7</b>	34.3	42.4	<b>14.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>	1.2	0.2	<b>7.9</b>
Male	<b>67.3</b>	25.2	42.1	<b>24.6</b>	<b>3.0</b>	2.6	0.4	<b>5.1</b>

Source : The Cabinet Office (2002).

A survey by Osaka Prefecture asking why women are not equally included in the political decision-making process found the following reasons given by women and men, showing the gendered gap in perception of the same phenomenon.

**Reasons for Slow Women's Advancement in Policy Making**

(plural responses, %)

	Female	Male
Male advantage in management	59.1	60.4
Gendered attitude toward role divisions	31.5	24.8
Women don't take the initiative enough	29.0	24.8
Lack of supporting network	25.1	21.4
Lack of skill development opportunities	24.3	26.4
Lack of family support	24.1	16.4

Source : Osaka Prefecture (1999, 110).

It is interesting to see where the perceptions of women and men differ regarding the reasons for women's slow advancement. While women are more sensitive than men toward gendered attitudes about the division of roles and suffer from a lack of family support, they are also critical of themselves, stating that women do not take the initiative enough, and this in turn may be the product of a

gendered view of women as followers.

The slow speed with which the gendered division of roles in societies changes, makes it even more important to work toward gender-free role divisions. The numerous reversals to the moves toward gender equality made in the name of tradition and culture, thus, are a warning that the Gender Equal Society Ordinances could end up as toothless, meaningless ordinances because of the conservative backlash.

## Discussion

Although people's lives are lived mostly at the local level, the media and public attention tends to focus on the national political level. Many of the political decisions at the local level are made without attracting much public attention. Even though the widespread use of the internet and faxes has enabled broader and faster input of public commentary and has improved the level of awareness, matters related to concepts such as gender still tend to go without notice.

The present case of the Gender Equal Society Ordinances is among the developments which have attracted little attention. While interested groups on the conservative side use all kinds of pressure through the local council members and executive offices, those supporting gender equal policies have few resources with which to fight back, especially in the legislature where their voices are under-represented.

The strategy of dividing women into two camps, one of which fights against a gender free society by presenting it as a threat to women is similar to that used to defeat the ERA in the United States. The fundamental task, it seems, is to make the concept of gender more widely understood among the population at large, not just among certain interested individuals, and thus make the issue a critical one to every member of the society. This task, moreover, is increasingly situated at the level of local politics, as Japan's politics moves toward greater local initiatives rather than remaining to be controlled top-down from the center.

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