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“The Waste of Society as Seen through Women’s Eyes”: waste, gender, and national belonging in Japan

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Conclusion

This reduction and separation [of waste] cannot be accomplished without the conscientious effort of every housewife [*katei fujin*]. From this perspective, we have determined to make every effort to solve Tokyo's garbage problem, and urged the city authorities to cooperate with women, and have undertaken a joint movement.

Ichikawa Fusae, 1933

... Even if [men] have awareness [of reducing waste] it's only women who are doing the activities themselves. ... Well, men who go as far as making ... this kind of thing their job, that's something. No, this won't become a job for us, you know. Because it's not like we're getting paid. But, it is in my consciousness.

Shōno Takako, recycling volunteer (interview by the author, April 1, 2015)

As this dissertation has demonstrated, waste has played a significant part in mediating the roles of women in the Japanese nation-state. Household waste, fundamentally linked to the “feminine” sphere of the home and the kitchen as well as to public sanitation – a fundamental aspect of municipal governance – creates a direct link between the housewife and the nation-state, as shown in Chapters 2 and 3. The state has frequently sought to use this connection to further specific policies – thrift campaigns during the Taishō period (see Garon 1997), garbage reduction in the 1930s (see Chapter 1), scrap collection during the war years (see Chapter 2), and more recently efforts by local governments to use volunteer groups and NPOs to carry out waste reduction education campaigns. Just as the Tokyo Women's League to Purify City Politics chose to cooperate with the Tokyo City Government to enact their garbage campaign, waste reduction and recycling activists today frequently turn to local governments for support in achieving their goals.

This similarity is strikingly apparent when we analyze the two quotations juxtaposed at the beginning of this chapter. Shōno Takako, the housewife founder of the volunteer waste reduction organization Tsukuba Recycle Market, recounted the circumstances that led to the group's creation in terms very similar to those used by the members of the Tokyo Women's League to Purify City Politics in explaining their decision to start the 1933 Tokyo Garbage Campaign. Mrs. Shōno, after going on a study

tour of Tsukuba's waste management facilities and seeing their sorry state firsthand, decided to do something to help.

Before, it [the Sanitation Center] was a really dirty place. So then I thought, I want to do something – what can I do on my own? And then you know, housewives probably can't do anything with things they don't need anymore except throw them away, right? They don't have much knowledge [about recycling]. So, on the other hand, what can be done with unwanted things... wouldn't it be good to open them to everyone? To show them at someplace like a market, and have them taken by people who want them? ...That was the start of the Recycle Market. (interview by the author, March 4, 2016)

Mrs. Shōno approached the problem from her position as a housewife, and came up with a solution that even housewives who “don't have much knowledge” (*chie wa amari motanai*) could help with. She got together a group of her housewife friends and together they requested approval from the Tsukuba city government, which was granted (although the city could not offer financial support).

Similarly, in 1933 the members of the Tokyo Women's League to Purify City Politics went on a study tour of the Tokyo city waste disposal facilities at Fukagawa, and were appalled at what they saw. After a lengthy description of the filthy conditions of the facility, the anonymous authors of a *Fusen* article about the League's study tour concluded: “[...] no matter what, we women must intervene. That is the conclusion of today's study tour” (*Fusen* 7-6 1933). Soon after their visit, the League members came up with a plan to raise awareness about garbage reduction and correct separation among the city's housewives, and presented their “proposal from the women's side” to the Tokyo municipal government. As described in Chapter 1, their proposal was accepted, and the women's garbage campaign was considered a great success as both an educational movement and the beginning of a cooperative relationship between publicly-minded women and the city government.

Despite the many changes that Japan has undergone in the sixty years separating these events, these two women-led garbage reduction efforts have numerous parallels. Both began as efforts to resolve a municipal garbage problem from a housewife's perspective, using methods that would be easily accessible to women. In the case of the League's campaign in 1933, options for influencing the public consciousness were limited for women (even well-organized, well-educated, well-connected women like those in the League) who did not yet have the right to vote. Their campaign, organized by women and directed toward women, but using the clout and resources of the city government, was well-situated for attracting public attention, promoting both the city's garbage reduction goals and, implicitly, the legitimacy of women in public roles in close proximity to local government. Mrs. Shōno's grassroots

waste reduction effort, although less ambitious and smaller in scope, similarly relied on the support of the local government for its legitimacy. An institutional connection like the one Mrs. Shōno established with the Tsukuba city government is important for grassroots volunteer groups like Tsukuba Recycle Market, especially if they carry out events in public spaces. Mrs. Shōno recalled other grassroots flea markets and other events that failed because they failed to get the proper permits from the city – not because the city shut them down, but because there might be complaints from neighbors or passersby objecting to the unauthorized event, and city officials would have to ask the organizers to disband (interview by the author, January 31, 2018). The Tsukuba Recycle Market relies on their connection with the local government – without the connection of one city employee in the Environment Department whom she has known for many years, Mrs. Shōno explained, the group would not have been able to continue as long as it has.

On the other hand, this type of cooperative relationship with volunteers and citizen groups is also important for local governments. A senior official in the Tsukuba City Environment Department told me that raising awareness of garbage separation rules (especially when there are changes) is always a priority for his office, and they frequently rely on volunteers – whether members of NPOs or neighborhood associations – to help them distribute information and hold educational events (interview by the author, March 26, 2015). Promoting citizen participation and encouraging cooperation with citizen groups for the purpose of garbage reduction is also gaining popularity as official policy at the national level. In an interview, a senior manager in the Waste Management Research Center of the National Institute for Environmental Studies emphasized the role of citizens in efficient waste management – residents should be included in the decision-making process, and should study up on relevant issues in order to make an informed contribution. NPOs, he said, should take on a greater role in providing services, and local governments should encourage this in order to keep administrative costs down (interview by the author, May 20, 2015).

It is significant that the means by which women interested in resolving local garbage problems can achieve their goals have not changed much in over sixty years. Unlike the League members in 1933, Mrs. Shōno and her fellow housewives had the right to vote and to participate in politics at both the local and national levels. Despite this apparent freedom, however, significant barriers to women's entry into formal politics still exist. As LeBlanc (1999) explains, politics is seen as a man's realm; homemaking, seen as the proper realm for women, is conceived of as naturally apolitical. Mrs. Shōno, or Mrs. Terada, the founder of NPO Tsukuba Creative Recycle, might have attempted to resolve Tsukuba's garbage problems by campaigning for a seat on the city council based on the garbage issue. Alternatively, they might have directed their passion for waste reduction into a career in waste technology research, civil engineering, or public policy. However, for a variety of reasons shaped by history and enshrined in

contemporary social mores, these options were not readily accessible to them as women and housewives. Instead, they poured their energy and dedication into the unpaid, undervalued path of grassroots volunteer work. In an interview, Mrs. Shōno expressed this dynamic quite clearly, pointing out the difference between women and men with a passion for reducing waste:

Well, even if it's tough, there's nothing for it but to do it, right? But then it ends up being a woman's job. [...] It's mostly women. Men also have this feeling, but, actually, practically, they don't participate vigorously, proactively. [...] Because even if they have awareness [of reducing waste] it's only women who are doing the activities themselves. ... Well, men who go as far as making [...] this kind of thing their job, that's something. No, this won't become a job for us, you know. Because it's not like we're getting paid. (interview by the author, April 1, 2015)

Although she was proud of being a housewife and was diligent about her housewife duties (she left off her volunteer activities to return home every day by noon to prepare lunch for her retired husband and elderly mother), Mrs. Shōno was acutely aware of the inequalities between men and women that had limited her options in life. Numerous studies have shown that women's labor tends to be concentrated in sectors that are undervalued and under- or unpaid, and that sectors which increasingly employ women tend to become less valued over time (Fondas 1996, Reskin 1988). In the field of waste work, Fredericks (2009) describes the case of women trash workers in Dakar, who began their work as volunteers in the city's youth social movement; as these jobs became formalized, salaried, and more desirable, the women trash workers were laid off in great numbers to make way for men. In Japan, women formally employed in the waste management sector are extremely rare. As discussed in Chapter 3, although waste management is not tracked as a distinct field in Japanese labor statistics, jobs in fields associated with waste management such as garbage truck driver/waste collector, machinery operator at incineration or recycling facilities, or engineers, are overwhelmingly male-dominated (Statistical Handbook of Japan 2017). During my time researching waste management in Tsukuba City, the only women I encountered as professionals were administrative staff in the Environment Department of the City Office, or members of recycling and waste reduction volunteer organizations.

This stark gender division in professional waste work is indicative of the ideal roles for men and women, ideals linked to citizenship and national belonging in Japan. As many scholars have pointed out, the legacy of *ryōsai kenbo*, the good wife and wise mother ideal, casts a long shadow even in present day Japan (Uno 1993, Holloway 2010). Becoming a housewife remains the aspirational ideal for Japanese women, just as becoming a fulltime, salaried office worker remains the ideal for men (Goldstein-Gidoni 2017). To the extent that a woman or man fails to achieve this ideal – women by not getting married or

having children, men by failing to achieve stable employment – they may be marginalized, disdained or pitied by those around them. Mackie (2002) describes the Japanese “archetypal citizen” as “male, heterosexual, white-collar worker” (Mackie 2002, 202), and analyzes how diverging from this archetype on each axis leads to increasing marginalization. In the case of women, she notes that women’s lack of access to economic opportunities and political networks results in their marginalization:

Assumptions about women's place in the private sphere and men's place in the public sphere are reinforced by state institutions, policies, and practices which are implicated in the shaping of gender and class relations. Industry policy is generally seen to be 'gender-blind,' but the lack of policies to redress labour market inequalities relegates women to the most vulnerable positions. Women who are in marginal positions in the labour market are less likely to receive the social prestige which goes with participation in a fulltime, white-collar career position, will have correspondingly restricted networks, and may thus be marginalised in political discussions. (Mackie 2002, 205)

In this conceptualization, Mackie implies that women who were to participate in fulltime, white-collar career positions and have access to the corresponding networks would be less marginalized in political discussions, but the actual treatment of Japanese women who have attained this status in politics or business does not bear this out. Women who adhere more closely to the male archetype of the fulltime, salaried white-collar worker tend to be *more* marginalized politically and socially (if not economically). The rare women in upper management at large Japanese firms are frequently viewed as unlikeable and untrustworthy by both women and men employees:

The absence of women with authority in firms also influences female subordinates’ view of women in positions of authority as untrustworthy, rather than seeing them as role models or mentors. Some young women workers in cosmetics companies accepted gendered stereotypes, contrasting female bosses’ ostensibly “hysterical” and emotional treatment of workers with male bosses’ paternalistic and rational attitudes toward them. (Nemoto 2017)

As LeBlanc (1999) points out, Japanese women in politics often trade on their housewife identity, motherhood, or other traditionally feminine characteristics in their campaigns. Their participation in formal politics must be predicated on these feminine roles because in Japan, female citizenship is rooted in the housewife identity, linked to the ever-evolving good wife, wise mother ideal. (However, as LeBlanc notes, these tactics are not always successful because the ideal housewife is publicly apolitical.)

Good citizenship, for a Japanese woman, means prioritizing the household, caring for a husband and children, and sometimes engaging in apolitical social activities for the good of the community.

Hage (1998) differentiates between citizenship and national belonging by emphasizing that national belonging is a spectrum, not a binary:

One of the most sociologically unhelpful aspects of the usage of the formal conception of citizenship to refer to national belonging is that the either (a national)/or (not) logic it embodies, and which is uncritically taken on board by so many analysts, does not allow us to capture all the subtleties of the *differential modalities of national belonging* as they are experienced within society. (Hage 1998: 51)

One of these differential modalities is the distinction between “‘national belonging’ (those who are part of the national community), and ‘governmental belonging’ (those who are seen to have a ‘natural’ role in the management of the nation)” (Mackie 2002, 201). Mackie (2002), following Hage, argues that “citizenship is not a simple matter of a binary distinction between citizens and noncitizens, but rather a constellation of features which determine one's position on a spectrum of citizenship” (Mackie 2002, 201). Mackie argues that in Japan this spectrum is a vertical hierarchy with the male, white-collar worker at the top; the citizenship of others is diminished and marginalized to the extent that they deviate from this ideal. In contrast, I find it more useful to consider national belonging in Japan in terms of a gendered binary of ideals: the white-collar worker for men, and the full-time housewife for women. This binary is still hierarchical in that the ideal masculine citizen has access to political and economic capital, while the ideal feminine citizen does not; in Hage’s terms, both women and men possess national belonging, but only men have access to governmental belonging. However, it is a gendered binary rather than a singular hierarchy with men at the top because the pinnacle of citizenship for women and men is not the same. For a man, success in politics or business increases his standing in the national community and affirms his national belonging. For a woman, on the other hand, success in a white-collar career may result in increasing marginalization; her national belonging is called into question and her standing as a female citizen is diminished. A 2014 incident in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly demonstrates this amply. Shiomura Ayaka, a woman assembly member from the Your Party (Minna no Tō) political party, was addressing the assembly on the topic of the lack of public support for mothers and children in Tokyo when a male colleague, later identified as a member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, interrupted her by saying “Before you make accusations like that, you should hurry and get married yourself.” A second heckler (also from the LDP) chimed in with “Hey, why don’t you give birth to a baby yourself?” The interruptions were met with laughter from the majority male assembly (Osaki 2014). Although

Shiomura had attained the same level of political success as her male colleagues in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, her political opinions (ironically, or aptly, regarding the institutional barriers discouraging women from becoming mothers) were belittled and dismissed because of her failure to achieve the ideal of female citizenship as a wife and mother.

This dissertation has analyzed the gendered nature of national belonging in Japan through the lens of waste by examining several relevant cases in modern history and in the present day. Chapter 1 discussed the 1933 garbage campaign (*gomi undō*) initiated by members of the League for Women's Suffrage, focusing on the ways in which the League leveraged garbage as a municipal problem into a social movement as a conscious political strategy, employing and transforming discourses about women to promote their goal of elevating the status of women in public life. For the city, collaboration with the women's group in the garbage movement not only helped to resolve the underlying problem by increasing citizens' awareness of correct waste separation, it also deflected public attention away from the city's responsibility for the lingering smoke problem in Fukagawa. This case highlights the myriad ways "waste" can be employed as a political and discursive tool, as well as the active role of the women's group in attempting to transform one basis for women's national belonging – cleaning and housekeeping – into a reason for women to access governmental belonging. Chapter 2 explored the shifting discourses and policies surrounding women's national belonging during the Asia-Pacific War by analyzing women's wartime waste reduction and scrap collection campaigns, both those initiated by women and those organized by state entities. These wartime waste campaigns reveal the contradictions – the state's desire to maintain the family system versus the necessity of deploying women's labor outside the home – and complexities – different groups of women had different motivations and aims that affected their decisions to cooperate with the state's wartime policies as well as the ways they chose to effect this cooperation – of both the wartime state's policies toward women and women's status in and relationship with the nation-state. Chapter 3 examined Japan's present-day municipal waste management system through a case study of Tsukuba City, with a focus on the ways that household waste work contributes to a binary system of gendered national belonging. My ethnographic fieldwork in Tsukuba showed that household waste work is still overwhelmingly performed by women, and is linked to the housewife ideal. Managing household waste is one of the most visible forms of housework as part of the public role of housewife, and, to the extent that the housewife is seen as the ideal form of Japanese womanhood, performing housekeeping tasks such as waste separation, can be seen as an expression of national belonging or citizenship for Japanese women. Chapter 4 discussed two volunteer waste reduction organizations in Tsukuba with whom I conducted interviews and participant observation studies. These volunteer activities, largely performed by women, are also linked to the housewife identity and can be seen as

gendered expressions of citizenship for women. Together, these cases reveal the complex ways that waste has mediated women's gendered national belonging historically and in the present day.