

論文

Japanese Women Activist Leaders and Global Networks: A Brief Study of Matsui Yayori

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Abstract

Oppression of women continues in most contemporary societies. However, there is recognition that more inclusive societies and communities are necessary for equity and the rights of women in many countries. Women in areas such as Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia have taken advantage of global changes to jointly campaign for such things as better work conditions and equal rights for all women and LGBT citizens. International opportunities for women to network outside their home countries through women's organizations have provided new spaces and facilitated activism. This paper examines ways women activists have been creating and utilizing networks to influence social change. It particularly examines the Japanese woman activist Matsui Yayori's work as an activist leader. She created organizations in which women in Japan and other countries cooperated to achieve goals through strong networks to improve systems of oppression. She is an example of a woman activist leader who addressed daily issues of some of the most vulnerable members of global societies, most often, marginalized women and children. Learning about women activist leaders such as Matsui Yayori is a way to begin to consider what kinds of leaders the world needs for contemporary societies.

Keywords: Matsui Yayori, women, activist leader, transnational networks

Introduction

Japanese women have carried out activities to influence change and gain political, economic and social rights. However, as they broadened their knowledge about feminism and activism, they reached out to sources of information abroad and began to exchange ideas with activists overseas. These efforts helped them to connect with worldwide networks. Interacting with women in other countries has helped motivate Japanese

women to continue working for changes in various ways. These efforts are slowly changing images of social justice and empowering women in Japan. In spite of these efforts, women remain marginalized politically, socially and economically. The result is that academic studies of Japanese women's leadership in Japan is still in the early stages. This paper examines ways women activists have been creating and utilizing networks to influence social change. Moreover, it will explore one Japanese woman activist, Matsui Yayori and her

work as an activist leader.

Theoretical Framework

Oppression of women continues in most contemporary societies. However, there is recognition that more inclusive societies and communities are necessary for equity, better rights and integration of women in many countries. Molony (2016) points out that political and economic woes and violence have greatly affected women's lives. As a result, feminists in areas such as Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia have taken advantage of global changes to jointly campaign for such things as better work conditions and equal rights for all women and LGBT citizens. International opportunities for women to network outside their home countries through women's organizations have provided new spaces and facilitated activism (Molony, 2016; Naples, 2002). Examining the women moving in these spaces and activist leaders of social change is more imperative now than ever.

Marginalization of Japanese Women

The Japanese government passed the 2015 Female Empowerment Law requiring Japanese corporations and government organizations to increase the number of female executives. This trend to increase the numbers of women in power has led to a significant steppingstone in Japan. However, in practice, according to the gender gap shown in world rankings, Japan continues to rank near the bottom. It ranked 121 out of 153 countries in 2020, partly due to its low number of women executives and government leaders (OECD, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2020).

According to Bishop (2012), the lack of influential women in political parties and trade unions has led to more focus on issues and less attention to equal rights and support for women. However, feminist activities in Japan have increased due to United Nations interventions and

participation in international women's conferences. This activism has led to increased awareness among the general population of gender equality issues (Bishop, 2012, p. 173). As a result, more women have gradually been elected to public offices. Bishop asserts the marginalization of women in politics has meant that women who are active in politics are freer to act more independently, possibly because they have less to lose and more to gain from resulting changes.

For Japanese women, this freedom is partly because they tend to create networks around women's organizations. This allows women activists to pursue feminist agendas. They also provide spaces for women to socialize, build individual identities, and recruit additional members with similar activism interests (Bishop, 2012, p. 178). Bishop adds that before participation in international women's conferences, women's groups focused on changing inequality related to issues affecting women, such as sex discrimination and multiple oppressions.

According to *Minority Women Will Change the World* (IMADR, 2009), Japanese women activists' burgeoning interests in multiple oppressions was influenced by interactions with women outside Japan. Participation in the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century in New York in 2000, helped raise consciousness of multiple oppressions among Japanese women activists. Women activists read publications they gathered and realized there were continuing gaps between Japan's adoption of international human rights treaties and actual improvement of women's and marginalized people's rights in Japan. Over 6,000 Japanese women participated in the Beijing Conference and took advantage of the experiences to push governments to adopt favorable policies for women. Afterwards, many women activists formed groups to work for change through independent research and protest actions.

Women's Global Activist Networks

Bishop (2012) points out that many women's activist groups realized that Japan's globalization and high degree of involvement in international organizations could be advantageous for women. Participation in international events sparked interest in working at both domestic and international levels to create networks to bring about change. This phenomenon is similar to what women in other countries have been doing and is a natural progression as the world becomes increasingly interconnected.

Numerous academic works have been written about women activist networks. Some focus on local activism, while others focus on global networks. Sandell (2011) describes non-Western regional women who created various international networks. From the 1930s, non-Western women cooperated with Western women to improve women's rights. At the time, many women had country-specific concerns and issues. They supported each other while they worked on problems specific to their home countries.

However, some women have encountered difficulties because of their marginalized group identities. Women activists who have attempted to influence change from the margins faced barriers. Besides barriers due to their gender, Arab and Muslim women in Australia have encountered resistance to their ideas due to ethnic stereotypes and hostile attacks on their communities (Povey, 2009). Povey argues that the Australian government has de-humanized and marginalized Islamic followers presenting their communities as dangers to White Christian Australians. The resulting conflict overshadows Muslims' attempts to increase awareness of such things as poverty and survival of their communities. Povey's example is merely one story among many of marginalized women activists in various countries.

Social activism exists all over the world. However, growth of global women's networks is one benefit of an increasingly global society. Keck

and Sikkink (1998) explain how activist networks can stimulate change. They indicate that dedicated advocacy, particularly transnationally, has resulted in progress in the areas of human rights, women's rights, and environmental issues. When domestic activists fail to convince governments to address their concerns, they often seek international allies to help them exert pressure from the outside (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 12). Horn (2013) adds,

Women's movements may form short- or long-term alliances with other social movements in the context of campaigns, uprisings and protests or as part of general solidarity and seeking a common cause. Positive results can emerge from such alliances, although women's movements sometimes face the challenge of reciprocal solidarity — where women's movement actors often stand 'side by side' with broader movements, other social movement actors will not always step up in defense of women's movement agendas" (p. 3).

Francisca de Haan et al. (2013) explain that global interconnectedness and complex relations necessitate diverse views of not only gender but also non-Western approaches. They point out that while Western women led a kind of "international sisterhood" from the late 1800s, women in Latin America, Asia, and Europe advanced women's rights at the international level as well. According to the Gender and Social Movements Overview Report (Horn, 2013), social movements are inherently progressive and "are forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands," (p. 1). Social activism stimulates and strengthens networks for future activism.

Increased international opportunities for women to meet greatly motivated women to advocate for changes in their own communities while creating networks to influence change beyond country borders. Naples (2002) describes how women's groups have used UN conferences to connect with

other women globally. This has resulted in a transnational women's movement that encompasses local concerns on an international stage (p. 276). Women from Egypt and Zambia were inspired by the Mexico (1975), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) world conferences to organize and legally practice activism. Naples explains how international Conferences on Women offered opportunities for women activists worldwide to exchange knowledge and stories. They provided spaces for women to learn from each other and create strategies to fight problems such as poverty, sexual abuse, militarization, and religious fundamentalism while showcasing their leadership for the world (Naples, 2002, p. 277-278).

Importance of Women's Leadership

According to Helmrich (2016), a leader is a person who inspires people to support and achieve certain goals with others. This definition is general and includes not only formal corporations and governments but also informal organizations and communities. In addition, Helmrich's definition recognizes the fact that societies consist of leaders and followers interacting in diverse ways to achieve goals (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2014).

In their work *Diversity and Leadership*, (2014), Chin and Tremble argue that contemporary society necessitates inclusion of diversity components in leadership. They point out that marginalized leaders are underrepresented in leadership literature that rarely addresses diversity in spite of an increasingly global world and recognition of cross-cultural interactions and work relations. Leadership theorists have recognized the need to move beyond cultures and redefine effective leadership. However, women are one example of how marginalization in political and corporate spheres continue to view successful political and economic women leaders as anomalies rather than typical (Reynolds, 2019). Chin and Tremble, (2014) suggest that leadership is co-created through leader-member (follower) interactions. They contend

that a diverse population of followers in diverse workplaces makes it imperative that theories of leadership expand to understanding how leadership is perceived, enacted, and evaluated in various ways. Furthermore, models should be inclusive and diverse to consider the perspectives of those not typically in positions of leadership and perspectives of people who shape and influence the roles of leadership within social and organizational contexts in which leadership occurs (Chin & Tremble, 2014). Moreover, they assert that diversity leadership includes not only who leaders are but also what part of their identities they exert and experiences that have helped create those identities. For leaders from marginalized groups, this often includes experiences of oppression and inequity (Chin & Tremble, p. 17).

Woman Activist Leader

One influential woman activist leader in Japan was Matsui Yayori. Many who knew her described Matsui as a human bridge between Japanese women and women worldwide through her global activist networks (Yun, 2003; Mikanagi, 2004). The Association for Research on the Impacts of War and Military Bases on Women's Human Rights (2014) and others have written about Matsui's inspiration to take up activism. Matsui was one of the initial female journalists to work for a large Japanese newspaper company, the *Asahi Shimbun*. She connected with women internationally, helping to create women's organizations and feminist networks that continue to strive today (Mikanagi, 2004; The Association for Research on the Impacts of War and Military Bases on Women's Human Rights, 2014).

One woman hypothesized that perhaps Matsui's growing up in a Christian family of members who had experienced persecution influenced her. Matsui was also influenced by her father who was an anti-war activist. He was a priest who had witnessed Japanese imperial army atrocities, and

his activism motivated her to be interest in human rights (Matsui, 2003; Mikanagi, 2004). Matsui's own experiences of discrimination as an Asian woman while studying in France and the United States also contributed to her awareness of oppression and social justice issues. In her autobiography, Matsui (2003) wrote of her experiences living in the US while attending university. She saw American men holding doors open for women and exhibiting other polite behavior. However, she was shocked to see widespread discrimination against African Americans and Asians during the American segregation era. She also experienced racism due to her Asian heritage while studying and working in France as a babysitter. She decided to return to Japan, and stopped in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and the Philippines to see more of the world. These stops enabled her to see the suffering of Asian people caused by Western colonization and Japanese militarism (Matui, p. 41).

While working as a journalist at the *Asahi Shimbun's* Asia bureau, she interviewed many women in Asian countries. Matsui (1987) explained that she had a desire to "encounter the grass-roots of as many countries in Asia as possible" (p. 5). She wanted to fill the information gap that existed regarding women in Asian countries outside Japan. As a result, she discovered that women in Bangladesh faced hardships such as poverty, malnutrition and disease. Women she encountered in Malaysia and the Philippines worked under poor conditions and experienced severe poverty. Many migrant workers in Singapore and Hong

Kong were women who worked in harsh conditions to survive. She met women in India and Nepal who were living under oppressive conditions in patriarchal families and societies. She also learned about slaves and sex slaves, those who have been labeled comfort women, from Korea and Thailand. Table 1 summarizes the social issues she learned and wrote about.

Contrary to viewing the difficulties experienced by women in Asian countries outside Japan as unique problems, she saw their similarities to those experienced by women in Japan. Her awareness of the experiences of marginalized people, including her own as a woman, influenced her strategy to encourage Japanese women to learn about the situation of women in other countries while examining their own Japan. Matsui argued it was necessary for victims to be aware of their own victimizing and for voices of both sides, victimizer and victim, to be heard. She saw that many women in the world suffered 3-fold oppressions; economic, political and military control (Matsui, 1987, 1989). Upon hearing many Asian women's stories, she realized that Japanese women had also experienced the same problems in the past or were still experiencing them in some way. Additionally, she discovered that many of the difficulties women in other countries faced were directly or indirectly related to Japanese government or corporate actions in those countries. For example, the Japanese government's actions during World War II led to the military using Korean and Thai women as sex slaves (Huang, 2012; Matsui, 2001;

Table 1 Social issues Matsui Yayori researched and discussed

Social Issues Encountered	Countries the women she encountered were from	Found many commonalities with past and present situation of women in Japan.
Poverty, malnutrition, disease	Bangladesh	
Poor work conditions, poverty	Malaysia, the Philippines	Many situations influenced Directly and indirectly by Japanese actions (government & corporations)
Slaves of slaves, sex slaves	Thailand, Korea	
Migrant workers	Singapore, Hong Kong	
Patriarchy and the family	India, Nepal	

Yamazaki, 1996). Japanese women had also been forced to work as sex slaves (Morita, 2017; Onozawa & Kitahara, 2017).

When she interviewed Japanese corporate managers working in Asian countries and brought up various issues caused by or worsened by Japanese companies' actions, she was dismayed to find them disinterested. Some managers even expressed the opinions that it was a problem of the people and host government or that it could not be helped (Matsui, 2003). She also found that Japanese women were ignorant of social issues, particularly of the situation of women in other countries. Matsui realized that she could use her work as a journalist to increase awareness of difficulties people in other Asian countries were experiencing. She could also highlight links between women in Japan and other countries and the way the Japanese government and corporations influenced the situation of people outside Japan. Moreover, at a time when women's issues still were not considered important or were invisible due to being integrated in men's issues, Matsui was able to bring attention to the situation of women in not only other Asian countries, but also in Japan.

Before passing away, Matsui was effective in mobilizing women in transnational social movements. She and the organizations she was involved in forced governments to examine war responsibilities for forced laborers, "comfort women," and military violence against women. She founded three organizations; the Asian Women's Association, Asian Women in Solidarity, and the Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW-NET) organizations. Through these organizations, she encouraged Japanese women and women in other Asian countries to exchange information and work together to find ways to improve the situation for women globally. "She worked hard for peace and reconciliation with other Asian victims of Japan's aggression" (Yamane, 2010, p. 28). Through working in these

organizations and Matsui's influence, many women activists still carry on her work.

Conclusion

Matsui Yayori's work shows how women use global networks to influence change. Through details of her life story, we can see how she connected with women in other countries and Japan to create activist networks. She used these networks and organizations to encourage like-minded women with similar experiences of oppression to join together. Working together in coalitions globally can be more effective than working through smaller networks in one's own country since oppressions are systemic problems that often need political and government influences to affect change. Governments are often sensitive to international pressure so that attention from outside and within is more affective in bringing about change. The UN Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination put pressure on many countries, including the Japanese government, to address gender inequalities. Japanese governments have been sensitive to outside pressures, and international pressure has been a catalyst for many changes in Japan (Fumimura-Fanselow & Kameda, 1995; Mackie, 2003).

Like many women from other countries, Matsui and other Japanese women participated in international conferences for women. They attended UN Women's International Conferences. They also organized and participated in International Women's Day (March 8) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) activities. These events have provided space for women to connect, and learn about similar issues facing women in other countries. It also gives them a venue to exchange ideas on how to manage and solve problems. Finally, meeting other women who are interested in their plights and actively working to overcome oppression, is an energizing and

empowering experience. Marginalized women in Japan have been taking advantage of these global networks as ways to empower women in Japan to create social change.

The willingness to take on the role of creating more awareness of oppressions and finding creative ways to end them leads to purpose. Actively making connections and working towards fulfilling those goals is one of the characteristics of leadership. As Chin and Tremble (2014) argue, diverse leadership styles involve the identity and experiences of leaders, often including experiences of marginalization and oppression. Women's experiences of marginalization influence their diverse leadership. Matsui's knowledge of oppression and experiences of discrimination in France and the United States made her keenly aware of discrimination and oppression. Those experiences enabled her to examine society and interactions more closely. Finding commonalities between the situations and oppressions women in Asia were forced to live under made her realize that gathering allies and networking could lead to improvements for more women in more countries. Her leadership is representative of Helmrich's (2004) and Chin and Tremble's (2014) concepts of leadership. She created organizations in which leaders and followers interacted in various ways to achieve goals while providing a strong network that inspired many women activists to continue working with other global activists. Examining issues such as economic, political and environmental issues is important. However, to ensure a more just and equitable world, leaders who address the daily issues the most vulnerable members of societies face, most often marginalized women and children, are imperative. Learning about and getting inspiration from women activist leaders such as Matsui Yayori is one way to begin to consider what kinds of leaders the world needs for contemporary societies.

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