

Ateneo de Manila University

**Archium Ateneo**

---

Japanese Studies Program Faculty Publications

Japanese Studies Program

---

2022

## The Representation of Japanese Working Women and the Labor Standard Law of Japan – A Feminist Postcolonial Approach

Angela Louise C. Rosario

*Ateneo de Manila University*, [arosario@ateneo.edu](mailto:arosario@ateneo.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/japanese-studies-program-faculty>



Part of the [Japanese Studies Commons](#), [Labor History Commons](#), [Women's History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Custom Citation

Rosario, A.L.C. (2022). The representation of Japanese working women and the labor standard law of Japan – a feminist postcolonial approach. *SILVA IAPONICARUM*, 68, 44-72.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Japanese Studies Program at Archium Ateneo. It has been accepted for inclusion in Japanese Studies Program Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Archium Ateneo. For more information, please contact [oadrcw.ls@ateneo.edu](mailto:oadrcw.ls@ateneo.edu).

Angela Louise C. ROSARIO<sup>1</sup>  
ORCID: 0000-0001-9888-4163

## **The Representation of Japanese Working Women and the Labor Standard Law of Japan – a Feminist Postcolonial Approach**

### **ABSTRACT<sup>2</sup>**

Since the 1947 Constitution was drafted at the behest of the Allied General Headquarters led by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), it is only fitting to scrutinize the media directly under it. One of the policies that should have affected Japanese women's status is the Labor Standard Law. With this Law as a reference point, this paper anchors the SCAP's ideals for Japanese women in terms of labor whilst I look at the portrayal of Japanese women in the 1948 issues of *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, an unofficial military daily newspaper under the supervision of SCAP. Through the lens of feminist postcolonialism with power and propaganda as a framework, I posit that the images of working women published by *Pacific Stars and Stripes* reinforce the internal contradictions presented by Labor Standard Law, which are accompanied by vivid examples of colonial power plays and the exoticization of Japanese women.

**KEYWORDS:** Japanese Working Women, *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, SCAP, portrayal, newspaper, Labor Standard Law

---

<sup>1</sup> Angela Louise C. Rosario (she/her) is a first-year PhD student in the Cultural Studies in Asia program at the National University of Singapore. She took her MA in Japanese Studies at Ateneo de Manila University, where she conducted this research and worked as Part-time Lecturer. Contact: angelalouise.rosario@u.nus.edu or arosario@ateneo.edu.

<sup>2</sup> This paper was originally a part of the author's MA thesis which she presented at the 7th Biennial International e-Conference (JSA ASEAN) 15–17 December 2021. The author is first and foremost grateful to the Japanese Studies Program of the Ateneo de Manila University for funding the newspaper subscription fee (2019–2020) which gave access to the images included in this paper. The author also sends her thanks to Ms. Catharine Giordano, the Supervisory Archivist & Licensing and Permissions Representative of Stars and Stripes Central Office – Archives & Library, for granting permission to utilize the images included in this paper. The author is also indebted to the *Silva Iaponicarum* editorial board and anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and comments. The author did not declare any conflict of interest.

## Introduction

This paper analyzes how the Allied General Headquarters led by General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), the occupiers of Japan (1945–1952), portrayed Japanese women amongst themselves amidst their declaration of support for the emancipation of Japanese women, whereby they included women-targeted policies in the 1947 Constitution during the restructuring of Japan. This idea of emancipating Japanese women came with the belief that they were passive and caged (Yoneyama 2005). One of the policies included in the new constitution is the Labor Standard Law. Using this Law as a reference point, I anchor the SCAP’s ideals for Japanese women in terms of labor whilst analyzing the portrayal of Japanese working women in foreign-owned but locally-produced media.

The Labor Standard Law, also known as the Labor Standard Act, ensures the equality of the workplace in its inclusion of protective measures for male and female laborers and is considered “the most significant labor reform affecting Japanese working women” (Nomura 1978: 5). This law eventually became the foundation for future employment policies. During its implementation, SCAP<sup>3</sup> was also publishing the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, an unofficial daily U.S. military newspaper, in Tokyo, Japan. The newspaper still operates to this day.

*Pacific Stars and Stripes* brings news regarding activities within the Far East to SCAP’s personnel and their families and thus has the capacity to showcase SCAP’s framing of Japanese women. I also used this newspaper as the primary visual material in my previous study (Rosario 2022), where I discussed in length the portrayal of Japanese housewives vis-à-vis the supposed emancipation of women by SCAP. There, I argued the importance of looking at the depiction of Japanese women through the lens of SCAP as the institution behind the laws that claimed to improve the status of Japanese women. I found that, due to the ongoing shift from emancipation propaganda to domesticity propaganda at that time, the portrayal of Japanese housewives showed contradictions. The newspaper portrayed them as voters and as working wives. However, at the same time, “many images depict[ed] the housewives’ nurturing and subservient side, and reinforce their passivity, obscuring other narratives of women in the country” (Rosario 2022: 1). None of the images inferred that a housewife belonged in any traditional male occupation. Thus, analyzing the visual representation of women in a

---

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, SCAP is used to refer to the Allied General Headquarters, which includes Supreme Commander General MacArthur unless stated otherwise.

locally produced paper owned by Japan's foreign occupiers is relevant in expanding gender studies on how women are historically viewed and positioned in society.

However, focusing only on housewives gives a narrow image of the newspaper's overall representation of Japanese women. Hence, in this paper, I attempt to go beyond housewives and include *all* Japanese working women that are portrayed in *Pacific Stars and Stripes* whilst considering the existence of the Labor Standard Law. I also extend the analysis of gender dynamics and power among Japanese working women and the West. The extension of this discussion allows for a more holistic approach to how SCAP saw and represented working women. I reiterate the significance of focusing on the newspaper's issues during 1948 because of the implementation of the 1947 Constitution and the shift and transition of SCAP propaganda from liberty to domesticity due to the brewing Cold War (Rosario 2022). However, instead of limiting the scope of data to *Pacific Stars and Stripes*'s images and captions, featured articles of Japanese working women are also included as a form of data to provide more context. The data encompasses 91 images of Japanese working women and nine featured articles wherein I apply discourse analysis. Employing a feminist postcolonial approach, I argue that despite the existence of the Labor Standard Law and numerous images of Japanese working women, they are still often portrayed as characters of nurture, subservience, and inferiority, most especially in terms of power and gender dynamics.

Meanwhile, literature on the Standard Labor Law is relatively scarce and has either scrutinized the contents or the effects of the Law on Japanese women (Nomura 1978; Toyoda 2007; Geddes 1977) or only mentions the Law, preferring to jump immediately to the newer Equal Employment Opportunity Act passed in 1985 (Marfording 1996).

In addition, literature pertaining to the visual portrayal of Japanese women during the Allied Occupation Period also exists. These scholarly works have primarily utilized locally owned and locally produced visual materials. Matsuda (2012) zeroes on the presentation of democracy in Japanese magazines in relation to its presentation of American women as the ideal models for Japanese women. Ochiai (1997) analyzes Japanese women's dominant portrayals in Japanese magazines during different periods. Rosenberger (1996) also touches on the representation of Japanese women but relates it to the SCAP policies – very similar to this paper and my earlier work (Rosario 2022). Focusing on the 1980s and 1990s, Rosenberger (1996) contends that the state (policies) and media (portrayal of Japanese women) often do not mirror nor reinforce each other. Japanese media, specifically

magazines, did not necessarily embody the goal of the state because they are two different entities. Aside from these scholarly works, only Yoneyama (2005) looks at Japanese women during the Allied Occupation from the point of view of Western materials – specifically mainland U.S. media. Yoneyama (2005) argues that the portrayal of these materials helped establish to the world that the U.S. was the savior of Japanese women and served as a guide for Japan. Therefore, another significance of this paper is its contribution to the limited literature on Standard Labor Law and enriching existing works on the visual representation of Japanese women. This paper is divided into six parts. The first part introduces the background of the study, the existing literature, the scope, and the significance of the topic. The second part focuses on the lens and approach employed in the analysis. The third part fleshes out the discrepancies present in the content of the Labor Standard Law. The fourth part tackles the analysis proper of the images. The fifth part extends the fourth part and includes an analysis of articles featuring Japanese women. Finally, the last part concludes the argument of the paper.

### **1. Feminist Postcolonialism: Dynamics of Gender and Power**

Because the images are derived from the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, the portrayal of Japanese women naturally comes from the perspective of the West. Inevitably, there are times that Japanese and Western figures are together in one image – with Japanese women having subordinate roles. Therefore, we need to understand how the West constructs its general perspective towards Japanese women and the gender dynamics and power that come with it.

According to Joan Wallach Scott, gender has been one of the ways whereby “political power has been conceived, legitimated, and criticized” (Scott 1986: 1073). Thus, in the analysis of these images, and keeping in mind the power dynamics in gender, I borrow the Feminist Postcolonial Theory to situate SCAP’s historical approach to gender as a preeminent institution and contextualize *Pacific Stars and Stripes*’s portrayal of Japanese women. To further understand this approach, I attempt to analyze it in this section.

First, there is the concept of Orientalism. Edward Said (1978) argues that the West, specifically Europe, tends to see Eastern nations, called the Orient, as a monolithic uncivilized group. The West also sets the definition and label for these nations based on its perception and “understanding” of the Eastern culture despite its outsider status. Thus, the Orient is more often than not described as “exotic, the mysterious, the profound, [and] the seminal” (Said 1978: 51). This could be likened to SCAP’s treatment of Japanese women

as they belong to two distinct categories (race and gender) considered inferior by the colonizer and patriarchal West. SCAP sees Japanese women's plight in Japan as backward but also treats Japanese women with fascination and exoticization. SCAP framed (and saw) it as a mission to help Japanese women (Shibusawa 2006). American women became perfect models for Japanese women to emulate. This relationship between Orientalism and femininity is expounded by Chizuko Ueno (1997: 4), where she states that orientalism "...is a discourse of power, another name given to colonialism which constructs 'the other' as the inferior" and adds: "'woman' is another name given to a land to be conquered". In binary terms, "[w]omen are to men as the Orient [East] is the Occident [West]; and the difference attributed to them as distinctive feature defines their 'otherness'" (Ueno 1997: 3).

Orientalism became the basis of postcolonial theory, except that postcolonialism critiques the representations of the Other – "woman, native, ethnic minority, the Orient" (Burney 2012: 42), which, in the case of this paper, is the Japanese women. Shehla Burney (2012: 42–44) defines postcolonial theory as "concerned with the aftermath of colonialism", and that it "does not simply imply 'after the end of colonialism' but also 'after the era of colonialism started'", and is thus used in many ways, such as "deconstructing how identity is politicized and how the postcolonial subject is created through hegemonic Western lenses". Chandra Mohanty (2003: 67) similarly defines a postcolonial relationship in which "legal, economic, religious and familial structures are treated as a *phenomena* to be judged by western standards"<sup>4</sup>. For example, Western feminism is considered an exemplar. Others are inferior. While Western feminism is not one entity, Mohanty argues that Western feminism treats third-world women, such as Japanese women, as one monolithic oppressed group.

Through this theory, it becomes possible to fully scrutinize the dynamics of gender and power from the lens of *Pacific Stars and Stripes* when analyzing the images that portray Japanese working women (and other present figures).

## 2. Labor Standard Law

Below is a discussion concerning the Labor Standard Law and the purpose of its contents, which will anchor SCAP's goals in the analysis while briefly tracing its historical relationship to Japanese women's labor.

Even before World War I, one of the few available jobs for women was in a textile factory. Despite the economic prosperity textile factories brought to Japan, working conditions proved difficult and sometimes dangerous

---

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis by Mohanty.

(Macnaughtan 2005). The only law that catered to women's labor at that time was known as the Factory Law or Factory Act of 1911, which provided special labor protection for women and children, creating legal gender division in labor (Nomura 1978; Macnaughtan 2005). One of its provisions was disallowing women and children to work at night. According to Helen Macnaughtan (2005: 7), it played a significant role in the "motherhood protection" discourse and gender equality discourse in Japan. Therefore, the Labor Standard Law is considered an extension of the Factory Act of 1911 (Maucnaughtan 2005).

To understand some of the provisions included in Labor Standard Law, I list some of the most important articles. Article 3 of the Law states *equal treatment between men and women*, while Article 4 states equal wages for men and women<sup>5</sup>. There is also Article 62, which bans women's participation in the night shift. Articles 63 and 64 prohibit women from working in dangerous occupations and performing underground work, while Article 61 limits the number of hours a woman could take overtime in a day, week, and year. Unsurprisingly, men do not have such prohibitions. Taking note of women's reproductive health, further special provisions in the policy allowed women to have menstrual leaves (Article 67). Women were also guaranteed leaves before and after childbirth if they wished, as per Article 65. One supposed purpose of the Standard Labor Law is to ensure equal treatment, as mentioned earlier in Article 3. However, one could easily see that the inclusion of prohibitions and special provisions is somewhat contradictory and inconsistent.

Overall available literature agrees that the Labor Standard Law is contradictory. Gail Nomura (1978: 144) argues that the Law "in many ways [is] restrictive rather than beneficial" and adds that "the provisions restricted women's working hours, types of jobs allowed to perform, and ultimately women's pay and prestige". Since the supposed protective measures put Japanese women in the same category as minor workers, this curbed women's occupational growth (Nomura 1978). Many of the Articles continued to narrow down and limit Japanese working women's occupational prospects (Nomura 1978), directly contradicting Article 3. Maho Toyoda reiterates Nomura's argument. By observing the impact of the Law on Japan's gender issue, Toyoda (2007) points out that while SCAP opposed some policies to prioritize equal treatment, specific discriminatory provisions under this policy were also pushed by SCAP. For example, during the conception of the Labor Standard Law, "SCAP approved the prohibition

---

<sup>5</sup> These are based on: the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. Government Section. *Political Reorientation of Japan*, v2. US Government Printing Office, 1949. Emphasis added by author.

of night labor (along with other restrictions on women...) as ‘essential’” (Toyoda 2007: 71). Ironically, the promotion of equal treatment was also the same argument that SCAP used to dissuade the Japanese government’s inclusion of the menstruation policy in the 1947 Constitution despite the “poor working conditions and shortage of basic supplies” in postwar Japan (Toyoda 2007: 71). This contradiction within the Labor Standard Law encapsulates the indecisiveness of SCAP, or its half-hearted effort and (un)willingness to elevate Japanese working women as workers. Parallel to this contradiction is the inclusion of traditional housewives and working wives, as well as the existence of liberation and domesticity in the portrayal of Japanese women, as a reflection of SCAP’s shifting propaganda (Rosario 2022). It is likely, therefore, that a similar form of contradiction exists in the newspaper’s portrayal of working women.

### **3. Opportunities and Position as a Japanese Woman**

In this section, the main aspects of the portrayal of working women are presented, starting with what is new in terms of occupation. It is followed by the dominant themes of the images – mainly focusing on the present gender and power dynamics and SCAP’s ideals anchored to the Standard Labor Law. Using the feminist postcolonial lens, I also pinpoint the Westerner’s privileged position, which naturally exposes the exoticization of Japanese women and the roles they portray in the images.

As mentioned earlier, Article 3 was to provide equal opportunities to Japanese women. It would mean that previously male-only occupations became open to Japanese women.

A limited number of images presents this in *Pacific Stars and Stripes*. Figure 1 shows the only picture of a Japanese policewoman in the newspaper.





Figure 1. A Japanese Policewoman with a Baby. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 9, November 14, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

Captioned as “Japanese policewomen were in daily attendance at the court, searching female Japanese spectators before entry to the courtroom – and, in some cases, caring for infant children while their mothers got a lesson in modern history...” [1], the image presents the policewoman as a caretaker. It hints that women do not yet belong in the field – which is normally considered the dangerous part of being a police officer. Instead of fighting criminals and solving crimes, policewomen are doing their duty by serving people in a way that warrants their femininity. The fact that the newspaper chose only this image to represent Japanese policewomen visualizes the tendency of SCAP to undeniably limit Japanese women’s opportunities and frame them based on their womanhood. It introduces (and reinforces) motherhood as inseparable from and a part of a Japanese woman’s core. This presentation not only diminishes the power and authority usually associated with the police(woman) but also reiterates that Japanese women are still nurturing even if they are to be part of a male-dominated profession. Thus, while the impact of the Labor Standard Law can be seen in terms of occupation, the newspaper’s portrayal continues to associate Japanese women with a motherly image.

The following image, Figure 2, presents a Japanese graduate dentist assisting a Western dentist.



**AT WORK IN THE DENTAL CLINIC.** Maj. Perry W. Bascom prepares a patient's teeth for filling. He is assisted by a Japanese graduate dentist. Although dentures and bridges are made, when necessary, Major Perry explains that the treatment of aching teeth and more imperative dental work forbids extensive elective work.

Figure 2. A Japanese Graduate Dentist. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 3, May 14, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

While becoming a dentist is a new opportunity for Japanese women, Figure 2 shows the power difference (superiority of the U.S. and inferiority of Japan or principal–subordinate relationship) and gender dynamics (dominant male vs subversive female) between the Japanese female dentist and the Western male dentist. The Japanese student is presented in the caption as inferior by the word “assisted”, inferring the different positions of the two dentists, with the Western dentist depicted as the teacher or leader and the Japanese dentist

portrayed as a student or subordinate. She is pictured with unequal power – made even more evident by her unmentioned name, which contradicts Article 3 of the Labor Standard Law.

One might argue that Japanese women were empowered through labor because of the Labor Standard Law, but it also came with a price – working as an inferior and a subordinate to foreigners, which may also be seen in Figures 3, 4, and 5. Many images in the newspaper convey a similar dynamic between the characters. Elite and high-ranking officials of the Allied Powers and their families came to Japan during its rehabilitation. Because of their position and affluence, they hired Japanese maids to the point that there was a shortage of them [2]. When portrayed beside Westerners, Japanese women are often shown with unequal standing. Figure 3 presents one of the images of a maid depicted with and assisting a Western family.



Figure 3. A Japanese Maid Serves a Western Family. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, May 26, 1948. Photo taken by Air Force. Public Domain.

In Figure 4, another servant, a Japanese man, is included in the image. It should be noted that the Japanese woman is still charged with taking care of the children. Women are not depicted in any dangerous occupations.



**SAFE AND COMFORTABLE . . . The Engineers build dependent housing.  
ALERT FOR ANY EMERGENCY (below) . . . training the soldier.**

Figure 4. A Japanese Maid. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 12, April 4, 1948. Photo taken by Signal Corps and Special Forcers. Public Domain.



Welcomed by their maid, Yukiko, T/Sgt. and Mrs. Cecil Bishop and little Larry Lee move into their new home at Grant Heights. Yukiko has already put in several hours work making the place presentable.

Figure 5. A Japanese Maid Welcomes Employers. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 9, January 4, 1948. Photo taken by Signal Corps and Special Forcers. Public Domain.

This dynamic was not exclusive to how the newspaper portrayed Japanese maids. Japanese women who performed clerical jobs were also similarly represented in the images. In Figure 6, a Japanese female operator is shown with a White man as her supervisor. Again, the power difference and gender dynamics in the image are evident. The supervisor is the leader in the workplace – the one who holds authority and knows how the place operates, while the female operator is the learner or subordinate. He knows more about the job, so she should listen to him. Her smile shows that she is happy that he is helping her.



Figure 6. A Technician Instructs a Japanese Operator. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 8, January 25, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

It is the same for Figure 7, where the Japanese woman is a receptionist. Notice that in both images, the Japanese women sit while the White men stand beside them – teaching them how to perform their duties, overseeing their work, or simply towering over them. Figure 7 shows the boss assuming a classic power pose with his hands on his hips. In fact, Japanese working women in the images are more often than not overshadowed by a presence of a larger and more prominent Western figure – similarly to how SCAP positions itself beside Japan as the more knowledgeable of the two. In Figures 6 and 7, men assert their dominance and authority, effectively demonstrating and illustrating the considerable gap between Western men and Japanese women in terms of power and the positions they hold, respectively.



Figure 7. A Japanese Receptionist. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 3, May 23, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

In the newspaper, Japanese working women were also portrayed as entertainers for White people in the form of exoticism. While Figures 8, 9, and 10 may not directly relate to the Labor Standard Law, they exhibit how foreigners sought after (and framed) Japanese women.

For one, the Westerners' fascination with Japanese women's appearance, the kimono, and their delight in Japanese subservience, among other things, were visibly illustrated in the newspaper. Entitled "Many Interesting Sights Await Visitors to Japan", Figure 8 was one of the many images randomly inserted by the newspaper to fill up space within its pages, but also one that had an impact because of its title and setting.



Figure 8. Many Interesting Sights Await Visitors to Japan. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, June 5, 1948. Photo taken by Signal Corps. Public Domain.

It shows a Japanese woman who serves Western military men who are likely part of SCAP. The caption implies that the image was part of the “sights” that one would likely encounter when one goes to Japan. This caption, coupled with the word “interesting” [3], gives an impression that Japanese culture is something unusual, mysterious, and something to be experienced. The newspaper uses an image of a serving Japanese woman to entice its readers to visit Japan. It seems to insinuate that one should experience being served by a Japanese woman – clearly exoticizing her. It also exhibits the power difference and gender dynamics that have persisted throughout images that portrayed Japanese women and Westerners.

The manifestation of the West’s fascination with Japanese women is also evident among Western people taking photos of Japanese women, as seen in Figures 9 and 10.





Figure 9. Westerners Flock to Take a Photo of Japanese Women. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 8, May 30, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

The images of Japanese women, most often *geisha* wearing kimonos and standing beside cherry blossoms, became a symbolic representation of Japan in the eyes of foreigners. In Figure 9, one of the photographers directs Japanese women's poses for pictures. The Westerners, male and female, excitedly flock around the Japanese women as they wait to take photos of them. It reiterates the observations of the feminist postcolonial theory wherein the Westerners seek the exotic, the unusual, the mysterious, and the Oriental (Said 1978). The image is similar to how people would excitedly take a picture with an animal at the zoo they saw for the first time – with awe, fascination, and reverence. The same could also be said in Figure 10, wherein a *geisha* mingles with and poses for Western men. The photos show that the men are amused and cannot take their eyes off the *geisha*. Figures 8, 9, and 10 also clearly exhibit the West's treatment of Japanese women as the Other – they are different and peculiar but are to be looked at, admired, and considered unique. The newspaper portrays the *geisha* as alluring and enticing creatures. Per the feminist postcolonial theory, the Westerners' privileged position (as men and the ones in power over Japan) enables them to nitpick and construct symbols or labels to associate with Japanese women.



Figure 10. A Camera Tour with a Geisha. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, *Far East Weekly Review*, Page 8, May 30, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

#### **4. Japanese Working Women in the Featured Articles of 1948 Issues of *Pacific Stars and Stripes***

Usually, the Sunday newspaper included a particular feature article that talks about Japanese people, their practices, and their daily life. It also sometimes elaborates on Japanese working women. In this section, I analyze these articles and their accompanying images in the same fashion as the previous section – by utilizing a feminist postcolonial lens and relating it to the Standard Labor Law whenever possible.



Figure 11. A Japanese School Teacher. Reprinted from Pacific Stars and Stripes, *Far East Weekly Review*, Page 6, April 25, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

According to the feature article accompanied by Figure 11, Mrs. Kuwatani has been teaching for twenty years and has refrained from following her husband's wish – for her to stop working. The newspaper also uses her case to inform readers that Japanese women chose to work even before SCAP directives (Rosario 2022). Notably, the article's author, a Western woman, may have patronized Japanese women.

The article gives a glimpse of Japan's salary system in early 1948. Despite the Labor Standard Law, the gender pay gap seems to persist as "Mrs. Kuwatani's salary amounts to some 3,000 yen a month... [which is] just about [stet] enough to pay for her husband's tobacco ration," while "...[The husband] makes approximately three times that amount..." [4]. The article did not state the occupation of Mr. Kuwatani, but it shows that gender equality in labor is not immediate, even with the promulgation of the 1947 Constitution and the existence of the Labor Standard Law. It also somewhat reflects the continuous presence of hierarchy and gender preference among the positions available for men and women at the time. Japanese men are often granted high salaries because they tend to occupy higher positions than women.

Another article also gives a glimpse of women's salaries at that time. It features a Japanese typist named Keiko, shown in Figure 12, who received

2,300 yen a month. The author gave no mention of men's salary in this occupation. Instead, the article aimed to compare Japanese typists to American ones. It points out that Japanese typists, or female workers in general, are more conservative compared to Americans and prefer quiet places to do their work. The featured article also recognizes that a Japanese typewriter is much harder to master as it is composed of 2,300 characters compared to an American typewriter with 26 letters. Keiko also mentions that the American typewriter is much easier to use than the Japanese typewriter she uses. While the article portrays Keiko as an independent woman – someone who earns her own keep within the bounds of the Labor Standard Law, it also states that Keiko plans only to work until a Japanese “dependable” man asks for her hand in marriage. By displaying her plans after her marriage, the newspaper reiterates Japanese women's position as part-time workers and their default role within the partnership dynamic, wherein she embodies her womanhood as a traditional housewife. Aside from the limited opportunities afforded by the Articles of the Labor Standard Law, this role ingrained in Japanese culture likely contributed to Japanese women's choice of partaking in part-time labor over full-time labor.



Figure 12. A Japanese Typist. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, page 3, February 29, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

The following images concentrate more on the power and gender dynamics between the Japanese and Americans and the fact that, despite the Labor Standard Law, women are continuously depicted within traditional women's occupations.

Figure 13 is another image with an accompanying feature article about Japanese women's salaries. It shows Mrs. Kazuko Tanabe, a famous Japanese hairdresser, with her Japanese customer. The hairdresser has been practicing for 19 years and gets a net of around 1000 yen per month. Like the article accompanied Figure 12, it aims to compare Japanese hairdressers to American ones. According to the author (Tajiri 1948), while Japanese and American hairdressers are alike, "...a noticeable difference in Kazuko's shop and its American counterpart, are the subdued voices of the women, the general air of restraint and Japanese politeness and the lack of hurry and bustle". The article also reveals that Mrs. Tanabe prefers American films over Japanese ones because "they are more mature in approach and technique" (Tajiri 1948). While it may be a small detail, it still gives an impression that the U.S. is superior, even from the Japanese perspective.



Figure 13. A Japanese Hairdresser. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, *Far East Weekly Review*, Page 3, April 18, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.



Figure 14. A Japanese Waitress Serves Orders in a Japanese Teashop. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 5, March 7, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

Figure 14 features Machiko, a waitress who gets 2500 yen per month in Chujo teashop. The article states: “[i]t will be seen that Machan [Machiko] isn’t very different from the girl who serves us morning coffee in the corner drug-store or the girl at the lunch-counter we unconsciously anticipate seeing every day” [5]. Note that the article addresses her informally as Machan. It frames Machiko as someone younger and familiar to the author. Moreover, the newspaper presents Machiko as an “ordinary” Japanese waitress that is said to be similar to American waitresses. Before the war, Japanese women often poured tea or *sake* for Japanese men. Thus, her work embodies servitude and is considered traditional in nature.

Meanwhile, other featured articles also discuss occupations unique to Japanese women. Figure 15 shows Tazue Kitaide, a finger weaver, wearing a kimono and showing her work, who was featured in an article entitled “Cinderella Story” in the 13 June 1948 issue of the newspaper. The article’s title is based on the fairytale of Cinderella. The fairytale is about a poor girl named Cinderella who was maltreated by her stepfamily and whose circumstances improved after meeting and marrying the prince. By using it in the article’s title, Everett, the author, suggests that Kitaide’s situation is similar. Instead of talking about finger weaving as a skill, it focuses on Kitaide’s position as a Japanese woman. The article shows the impact of

American culture on the innocent Kitaide, emphasizing that Kitaide had “never [been] out of her native prefecture” [6], thereby showing America’s dominance over Japan. Everett also clearly insinuates that the West could provide a more comfortable lifestyle than Japan. Kitaide was set to go to the U.S. to showcase finger weaving. Everett states, “[o]ne wonders if she [Kitaide] will return to her back-breaking job with quite the same enthusiasm after a longer taste of Western comfort and ease” [6]. This statement emphasizes that Japanese women need Western culture to improve their way of life.



Figure 15. A Japanese Fingernail Weaver Shows Her Work. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Review*, Page 7, June 13, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

Figure 16 is another image included in the article. In it, Kitaide is showing Mrs. Marlon Tilton, a Western woman, the hand spindle used in finger weaving. Keeping the power dynamics in mind, Figure 16 is one of the rarer images where a Japanese woman is portrayed as the teacher, and a Western woman is the learner. However, the information provided in the caption also shows that both women’s positions eventually reversed as Mrs. Marlon Tilton will be Kitaide’s western guide and mentor in the U.S.

**THE HAND SPINDLE USED IN FINGERNAIL WEAVING is shown to Mrs. Marlon Tilton by Miss Kitaide. Mrs. Tilton will be the Japanese girl's guide and mentor during her visit to the United States.**



Figure 16. A Japanese Weaver and Her Western Guide. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Review*, page 7, June 13, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

The “Cinderella Story” was followed by another article, entitled “Cinderella Returns” [7], by the same author on August 22, 1948. “Cinderella Returns” features the exhibition of Kitaide’s textile work held in the U.S., as shown in Figure 17, and her return to Japan. The accompanying article describes the mystification of Japanese women and Westerners continuous fascination towards them. This time, the article is written from Kitaide’s perspective. She states: “One day Mrs. Tilton and I went to a party for the press. Mrs. Tilton asked me to show the Americans how the Japanese bow in greeting. She then asked me to show them how we bow, at the same time opening a fan. Since this is a gesture used only by geisha girls in Japan, I was unable to do as Mrs. Tilton asked. She seemed quite surprised when I refused and told me later she did not know that it was a geisha custom”.





Figure 17. Textile Exhibition in New York. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 3, August 22, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

The same article describes her return from the U.S., as shown in Figure 18. It displays Kitaide's new appearance, who is now wearing Western clothing.



Figure 18. Kitaide is Back from the U.S. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Weekly Review*, Page 3, August 22, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

Like the previous article, this article does not expound on finger weaving. Instead, it focuses on Kitaide's eagerness and excitement regarding Western culture – which aspects she liked and disliked. Everett's presentation of Kitaide shows that Japanese women are unaccustomed towards American culture. It also acknowledges the existence of Western fashion in prewar Japan and how it resurfaced during its occupation under SCAP. The series of articles on Kitaide successfully frames and reiterates the U.S. as superior to Japan in many ways.

Lastly, Figure 19 shows one of the classes in a Japanese dressmaking college run by Mrs. Yoshiko Sugino, a pioneer in western-style clothes. She abandoned teaching in Japan and studied dressmaking and fashion design in New York. Her classes reconstruct kimonos and turn them into Western-styled clothes. While Mrs. Sugino ran her classes, her husband discontinued his job, became her business manager, and oversaw the overall construction process of the school building. Although both were working, their positions still indicated some traditional gender dynamics. It is also evident in the image that the students are only composed of female students – because weaving is considered a traditional skill of women.



Figure 19. A Japanese Dressmaking College. Reprinted from *Pacific Stars and Stripes, Far East Review*, page 12, March 21, 1948. Courtesy of *Stars and Stripes*, All Rights Reserved.

Mrs. Sugino and her students aside, the author of the article criticizes Japanese women's bodies. According to the author, "Artistically inclined pupils draw the fashion posters which adorn the walls of the advanced

classrooms. These represent the human form divine in attenuated, streamlined silhouettes—a rather far cry from the Japanese figure when stripped of its slimming kimono outlines—tout nevertheless a possible goal, now that *floor-sitting* [stet] and *baby piggy-backing* are slightly on the decline”<sup>6</sup> [7].

The author states that floor-sitting and baby piggy-backing are considered part of traditional Japanese culture and that these activities resulted in Japanese women’s “undivine” figure at that time. The Western female author believes that these Japanese traditions are backward and infers that the decline of these practices benefits women’s bodies. This is another clear example of Western’s fascination toward Japanese women’s appearance. Meanwhile, Japanese women’s preference for Western-styled clothes is regarded as progressive – once again, emphasizing the power dynamics between the U.S. and Japan. The author also states: “The eagerness with which the occupation styles are being imitated, the large numbers of little dressmaking emporiums mushrooming up all over the city, and the zeal of young pupils in dressmaking schools all go to prove that the morale-building effect of new clothes plays a vital part in Japan’s reconstruction program” [7]. She thereby emphasizes the role of SCAP towards Japan’s advancement, which is naturally based on Western standards.

## **Conclusion**

Concerning the Standard Labor Law, the occupations of Japanese women described in the paper reveal that they all adhere to and work within the bounds and praxis of the Law – in a sense that Japanese women are not doing night and overtime work. The portrayal of Japanese working women parallels the contradicting Labor Standard Law. The newspaper presents Japanese women as actively involved in different occupations but with limitations. Japanese working women in the images continued to work in traditional occupations which are commonly associated with or engaged in nurturing, caring, homemaking, and service. The newspaper also depicted and described them as subservient in nature. The only predominantly male-associated occupation at that time was that of the policewoman, and even she was framed as nurturing and caring by the newspaper. Most of the presented women’s work could be performed part-time. The newspaper also showed that some Japanese women still valued marriage over career. Thus, while the newspaper indicates acknowledgement and recognition of Japanese women’s involvement and learning process in their different

---

<sup>6</sup> Emphasis added by the author of this paper.

occupations, which lets readers know that Japanese women also exist and work outside the home, the images visibly show how women were still bound to traditional roles within their occupations.

Moreover, the articles hardly portrayed women as someone with equal opportunities as stipulated in the Labor Standard Law. However, this may be simply due to insufficient material and a lack of both sexes' presence in the images.

Law aside, power and gender dynamics were also abundant in the presence of Western characters among Japanese working women. In the images and featured articles, the newspaper has repeatedly portrayed Japanese women in more supportive roles and lower-paid jobs than Western characters, who always clearly held considerably higher and more distinguished positions. For example, many images showed Japanese women as helpers and assistants in the form of maids of Western families living in Japan – a showcase of subserviency and inferiority – and as students or learners on the job – a showcase of subordinacy and inferiority. Japanese women were also a target of Western fascination, and such images bordered on exoticism, wherein the newspaper and Westerners somehow treated them as mere objects. Featured articles sometimes include information regarding the influence and preference of Western culture. The West reigns supreme and judges Japanese culture through juxtaposition with Western culture. The West serves as a benchmark. Anything Western is superior and should be emulated and coveted by Others. Japanese working women are strikingly portrayed as the secondary sex, the Other, and doubly inferior. They are treated as objects of fascination as they are either praised or criticized for their appearance. Most notably, their femininity continues to be emphasized in any position they occupy despite the existence of the Labor Standard Law. Then again, it may also be precisely due to the contradicting provisions of the Labor Standard Law.

Overall, this complex depiction of Japanese working women parallels and reiterates the following established contradictions: the depiction of Japanese housewives as “liberated” but passive working wives (Rosario 2022), the inconsistent contents of the Standard Labor Law, and the SCAP's conflicting and shifting propagandas (from emancipation to domesticity) towards its approach to Japanese women and Japan as a whole.

## References

Burney, Shehla 2012. “Edward Said and postcolonial theory: Disjunctured identities and the subaltern voice”. *Counterpoints* 417: 41–60.

Geddes, Margaret 1977. "The status of women in post-war Japan: A critical examination of the contribution of the occupation authorities towards raising the status of women in Japan". *Australian Outlook: The Australian Journal of International Affairs* 31(3): 439–452.

Koikari, Mire 2002. "Exporting democracy? American women, 'feminist reforms', and politics of imperialism in the U.S. occupation of Japan". *Frontiers – A Journal of Women's Studies* 23, no. 1: 23–45.

Macnaughtan, Helen 2005. *Women, work and the Japanese economic miracle: The case of the cotton textile industry, 1945–1975*. London: Routledge.

Marfording, Annette 1996. "Gender equality under the Japanese constitution". *Verfassung Und Recht in Übersee / Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 29(3): 324–46.

Matsuda, Hiroko 2012. "America, modernity, and democratization of everyday life: Japanese women's magazines during the occupation period". *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13(4): 518–531.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade 2003. "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses". In: Reina Lewis, Sara Mills (eds.). *Feminist postcolonial theory: a reader*. London: Routledge. 49–74.

Nomura, Gail M. 1978. *The Allied occupation of Japan: Reform of Japanese government labor policy on women*. Ph.D. dissertation. Manoa: University of Hawai'i.

Ochiai, Emiko 1997. "Decent housewives and sensual white women – representations of women in postwar Japanese magazines". *Japan Review* 9: 151–169.

Rosenberger, Nancy 1996. "Fragile resistance, signs of status: Women between state and media in Japan". In: Anne Imamura (ed.). *Re-imagining Japanese women, 1600–1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2–45.

Rosario, Angela Louise C. 2022. "Liberty and domesticity: The portrayal of Japanese housewives in the 1948 issues of *Pacific Stars and Stripes* during

The Representation of Japanese Working... SILVA IAPONICARUM LXVIII  
the Allied occupation”. *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* 58(1): 69-98.

Said, Edward W. 1987. *Orientalism*. New York: Visage Books.

Scott, Joan Wallach 1986. “Gender: a useful category of historical analysis”. *The American Historical Review* 91(5): 1053–1075.

Shibusawa, Naoko 2006. *America’s geisha ally: reimagining the Japanese enemy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Toyoda, Maho 2007. “Protective labor legislation and gender equality: The impact of the occupation on Japanese working women in the mass media”. In: Mark E. Caprio, Yoneyuki Sugita (eds.). *Democracy in occupied Japan: the U.S. occupation and Japanese politics and society*. London: Routledge. 67–88.

Ueno, Chizuko 1997. “In the feminine guise: a trap of reverse orientalism”. *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal. English Supplement* 13: 3–25.

Yoneyama, Lisa 2005. “Liberation under siege: U.S. military occupation and Japanese women’s enfranchisement”. *American Quarterly* 57 (3): 885–910.

### ***Pacific Stars and Stripes* articles referenced in the paper**

1. “Two-Year Trial”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Nov. 14, 1948: 9.
2. Yo Tajiri, “Milady’s Hairdresser”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Apr. 18, 1948: 3.
3. “Many Interesting Sights Await Visitors to Japan”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Jun. 5, 1948.
4. “Japanese School Teacher”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Apr. 25, 1948: 6.
5. “They Also Serve Who Only Stand And Wait”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Mar. 7, 1948: 5.
6. Beth Everett, “Cinderella Story”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Jun. 13, 1948: 7.
7. Beth Everett, “Cinderella Returns”, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo), Aug. 22, 1948: 3.