

Political women in Japan: A case study of the seikatsusha network movement

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Abstrak

This article describes and analyzes the activities and impact of the Seikatsu Club movement in Japan, a social and political movement of Japanese women. Based on our analysis, we attempt to demonstrate the following conclusions: 1. The Seikatsu movement has been remarkable as a vehicle for recruiting and mobilizing women locally both in community activities and electoral politics. 2. For many women, participating in the public, political sphere is transformational and for a smaller minority, values and goals have been redefined and they have gained a new sense of empowerment. For the latter group of 'New Women', greater gender consciousness appears to be developing. 3. While the movement's goals and those of many individuals within it are challenging to prevailing Japanese politics and economics, there are contradictions. Organizationally, hierarchy and paternalistic male leadership have been dominant, despite the formally democratic structure. And aspects of the movement's ideology (e.g. linkage to domestic producers, non-professional housewives seeking electoral office) are profoundly conservative. 4. The movement has demonstrated considerable success at the ballot box in local areas in recent years, although its geographic scope and numerical depth remains limited. Still, it is among the few non-party groups of independents to attain increased representation at the local level. However, commitment to electoral rotation and income sharing may limit the growth of female professional politicians arising from the Seikatsu movement. 5. Seikatsu-elected proxies have achieved incremental policy impact on a number of issues at the local level and movement groups have become active as service providers and policy implementers as well through new administrative partnerships with sympathetic mayors and bureaucrats.