

MADAME BUTTERFLY IN BOBBY SOX

Japanese girls are experiencing a new freedom in living—new ways of dressing, new customs in love and marriage. They find they like it, but many Japanese men ask, "What was wrong with the old ways?"

By James A. Michener

Author of "Tales of the South Pacific," "The Bridges at Toko-Ri," "Sayonara," etc.

THE OTHER DAY a pretty Tokyo girl of 19 named Keiko-san joined with hundreds of other girls in a revolution that is sweeping Japan.

It started simply. Instead of dressing in a constricting kimono as her mother would have done at her age, she slipped quickly into exactly the kind of costume worn by girls in Paris or New York. Instead of comb-

ing a heavy head of hair so that it looked like a wig, she ran her fingers through her Audrey Hepburn bob. Then she pulled on some bobby sox, pushed her feet into saddle shoes and daubed her smiling lips with bright red lipstick.

The revolution continued in her university class, where she had the unprecedented nerve to argue with a male student. In a loud, clear voice

she said, "I'm afraid you're wrong."

One of these days Keiko-san will announce to her astonished parents that she has fallen in love with a boy of her own choice and is going to marry him.

That isn't all! When she comes of age lovely Keiko-san will vote—and possibly even run for office herself. Before the war she could have done neither of these things.

The magnitude of Keiko-san's revolution has astounded Japan, bewildered Japanese men and given the entire free world a shot in the arm. More about that later.

Let's first see what Keiko-san's life would have been before the recent changes. When word got around Japan that I was going to write about the new Japanese woman, at least a dozen men asked bitterly, "What was wrong with the old model?"

That is a fair question, for had little Keiko-san grown up in the old tradition, she would have been the world's loveliest gift to man. From infancy she would have been trained to serve. Her first cruel lesson would have been that under Japanese law she had few rights. She could not inherit property unless it was specifically willed to her. She was not permitted to vote, nor did she attend public meetings. Up to 1922 she would have been forbidden to listen to a political speech, and even as late as 1930 she was specifically forbidden to "hold even the most trivial honorary position without first obtaining her husband's written consent."

Keiko-san's family life would also have been rigorously defined. She could not divorce her husband even if he took extra "wives," but he could divorce her for inconsequential reasons, and usually he kept the children. If her husband died intestate, she could not succeed to his property. Nor was it proper for her to remarry.

But it was custom, not law, that was most binding. She would have been kept at home, would rarely have appeared with her husband in public, and would have belonged to no association of women "lest confusing ideas distract them."

On the other hand, Keiko's job would have been simple: "Keep your husband happy and raise lots of boys," whom she was obliged to spoil outrageously. Of course if she were unlucky enough to have only girls, she could depend upon her friends never to mention the fact, at least not in public.

One of Japan's finest classical plays portrays the ideal Japanese woman. Her husband has taken up with a teahouse girl, so she laments, "The fault must be mine. Either I was an unsatisfactory wife or I have unwittingly done something to displease my good husband. Otherwise he would not have disgraced himself by his present behavior. But since he has done so, the least I can do is commit suicide so that he can marry her properly." At this point men in the audience cheer.

But chic young girls like Keiko-san refuse to applaud such nonsense.



Contemptuously they call it "feudalism," the ugliest word in postwar Japan. And they are right.

For what the world reveres as the traditional Japanese woman was an accident, one of the strangest in Asiatic history. Around the year 1600, reactionary Japanese philosophers clamped down upon a hitherto free and easy Japan a rigid feudal system worse than any known in Europe. The biggest losers were women, and from then on they became "the ruled." They were slaves of their household and of their men.

What was the original Japanese woman like? In old Japan she was bold and valiant. Prior to feudalism, fiery queens often ruled the islands. Sometimes women controlled high government posts, and there are rec-

ords of women generals who led their husband's troops to battle. Those lusty women of ancient Japan would have dismissed with disgust the simpering, frightened creatures who became the style in feudal Japan and who set a pattern for female behavior which was to last for more than three centuries.

Then in 1945 Gen. Douglas MacArthur, in a series of dramatic laws, decreed the freedom of women. The results shook Japan worse than the 1923 earthquake and the islands have not yet recovered.

Women were told, "You can vote," and in 1946 they elected 39 women to the lower house of the Diet, 11 to the upper. The newly elected women announced firmly, "We are going to help rule Japan." Men gaped.

Women were allowed to hold prefectural (state) offices, and soon they had won 985 jobs.

They were told, "You can serve on boards of education, commissions, municipal bodies." They quickly nailed down 50,000 positions.

Co-education on the college level became widespread and enrollments shot up. They were free to teach boy students in high schools and thousands began to earn a good living. Women had worked in industry before the war, but now they went to work in earnest: soon 16,400,000 shy little girls had grabbed off 41 percent of all the jobs in Japan. Next they began to own and run businesses.

Once started, the MacArthur revolution knew no bounds, and there are many wise critics, Oriental and Western alike, who believe that the only lasting reforms initiated by the Americans were land reform and this upheaval in the lives of women.

"Their freedom will prove to have been the salvation of Japan," an informed Japanese told me. "When all the other American actions have been forgotten, these determined women will hold on to their new life."

The change has touched everything. For example, at a recent tea in Princess Takamatsu's old palace, of 100 leading Japanese women only seven wore kimonos. At the spring geisha dances this year—one of the most traditional of all social events—more than 75 percent of the women in the audience wore Western clothes.

Most striking, however, has been the effect on marriage customs. A recent interview with 100 college girls showed that more than 70 expect to pick out their own husbands rather than leave the job to their parents.

Even in Kyoto, long a refuge of ancient ways, girls insist upon their right to date boys prior to marriage. Oldsters are shocked to see couples holding hands in public. Confided one dark-haired beauty, "Today we can even kiss—the way Grace Kelly does." The modern woman can sue for divorce, and of the last 621,000 divorces granted, 71 percent had been initiated by women. To the astonishment of the nation, in 75 percent of these cases wronged wives retained custody of their children. But what was more startling, some of the divorcees, including those with children, actually remarried. "Pretty soon," a determined woman prophesies, "even widows will be able to remarry."

My own introduction into the new world of the Japanese woman was startling. For several years one of my chief joys in visiting Japan has been the chance to see my young G. friend, John Chandler, and his lovely wife, Takako.

The only shadow over my visits has been John Chandler's amazing in-law trouble, for when he invites his father-in-law to dinner there is always a period of anxiety. He never knows which wife old Ito-san will bring.

John's father-in-law, who clings stubbornly to the old Japanese cus-

atoms, has two extra "wives" and for years has kept them separated and relatively happy. Once he told me, "My rice business has prospered. People expect me to take care of several women."

"I wish you'd bring your legal wife when you visit Takako," young Chandler remonstrated.

Old Ito-san patted his third wife—a pretty waitress—on the knee and explained, "She might get jealous if I always brought your proper mother-in-law."

But on my last visit to Tokyo all hell had broken loose in the Chandler household. Old man Ito was shouting, "Damn General MacArthur! He's to blame for this."

"Blame for what?" I asked.

"My wife's getting a divorce!" he bellowed.

Takako Chandler's mother, in her 60's, had sued for divorce, and it looked as if she were going to get alimony, too. Old Ito-san was profoundly shaken and when I tried to console him he shouted, "In the old days no decent woman would have done such a thing. What's happening to Japan?"

Many Japanese men feel the way Ito-san feels, and have started backfires of resistance to women's freedom. In Chiba recently the school board announced that it would henceforth hire no more women teachers, since women were clearly less capable than men, were physically handicapped, could not teach gym and demanded equal pay.

The leaders of an important union

recently announced, "We have concluded that none of us would marry a woman who spoke up in meetings. Women should remain silent as in the old days."

Political strategists have already begun maneuvers which would cut down the number of women in the Diet. Instead of electing some members of the upper house on a nationwide basis, which insures some women members, the drive is for more intimate constituencies "in which men can visit every voter and thus retain all seats." From 39 women members in the lower house in 1946, the number has dropped to eight in the present session.

Business firms are also helping to whip the new-style woman into line. Beautiful Mrs. Sumiko Tanaka, who has acted as an observer before the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women, confesses, "Firms have begun to reject women who are college graduates. So the girls have to get married—many of them in the old way. They refer to this sardonically as 'our retreat to feudalism.'"

Dr. John Ashmead, an American professor teaching at one of Japan's leading universities, reports, "It was perplexing. Sumiko-san was the finest student I have ever taught anywhere. Sometimes she seemed to know more than I did. But in seminar she would sit silent while men students made ridiculous mistakes. I finally took her aside and asked why she allowed these errors and she whispered, 'Me correct a man in

public? And maybe lose a chance of getting married?"

Japanese psychologists have begun to warn the new women publicly: "You are fooling yourselves. You want freedom and modern kitchens like in America. But what do the women of America want? Having had freedom they now find that what they really need is the security of a home and a family." Studies are being made showing that marriages arranged by parents usually work out better than those contracted new-style, and amateur philosophers everywhere are trying to convince Japan that "the old-style Japanese wife was the luckiest woman in the world—and didn't know it."

This year I witnessed an amusing incident in the men's counter-revolution. An enlightened factory owner hired ten large buses to take his workers on the annual cherry-viewing picnic, where traditionally the men of Japan whoop it up.

"Why ten buses?" a committee inquired suspiciously. "Five have always been enough before."

"This year you can bring your wives, modern style."

"We'd rather work," the men growled—and canceled the picnic.

Sometimes even women support a return to the older ways. A young Japanese wife, after a visit to American-style homes, concluded that the Western bed was better than sleeping on the floor Japan-style. Her husband teased her about going modern and said he'd stay on the floor. The arrangement was satisfactory until

the girl's mother-in-law happened to visit her son.

"What's this?" she stormed.

"A bed," the young wife explained.

"Whose bed?"

"Mine," the girl confessed.

"Take it out!" the older woman commanded. "No girl is going to sleep higher than my son."

On two points the traditionalists are correct. "The new-style woman you hear so much about" one of them told me, "lives only in the big cities. In rural Japan things are going along just about as they always did. There a man is still boss."

The other point is that the new woman has emerged under the protection of the American occupation. Even women realize that if hard times and unemployment come, they will be forced back into the old patterns.

But although the pressures against freedom are strong, the forces supporting women grow each day more powerful. Champion of women's legal rights is a courageous warrior, Miss Fusae Ichikawa, a member of Japan's upper house. Councilor Ichikawa is a bouncy, gray-haired, tweedy woman of 63 who acts and talks like an embattled American suffragette of the early 1900's. One of the most pleasant experiences in Japan is meeting this vital woman. She bubbles over with joy when discussing what the women of her country have accomplished. "Don't tell me General MacArthur gave us our freedom," she snorts. "We won

it." Then she bangs the table, "And we're going to *keep* it."

She is supported in her determination by unexpected forces. Recently the powerful *Mainichi* newspaper thundered: "Japanese diplomats must make a practice of taking their wives overseas with them. Modern life demands it. And when we entertain foreigners here in Japan, we must invite our wives, too."

This change is becoming evident. During my first seven trips to Japan I met only one Japanese wife socially. It used to be possible for a foreigner to live in the country for years without ever meeting a wife at dinner, or in a restaurant or at the theater. But today one is beginning to meet wives, some of whom speak excellent English. "No matter how dull the conversation gets," one wife told me, "I still find it thrilling. You see, up until recently my husband dined only with geishas."

Even in the hitherto sacred field of boys' education new voices are being heard. Says one educator, "A great misfortune in Japanese home life today is the failure on the part of parents to rear their male offspring according to new principles

in keeping with the progress made in the feminine world."

Today boys reared in the old patterns often run into trouble. Girls are beginning to ask, when they meet a boy who wants a date, "Are you a new-style man or a feudalist?" If he replies the latter, no date.

In the argument that storms across Japan the most important aspect is rarely mentioned: the freedom which women have won will probably save Japan from Communism.

Throughout Asia many countries have either fallen to Communism or seem about to do so partly because the women of those countries could see in old patterns absolutely no hope for a decent life. Communists could thus count upon 50 percent of the population—the women, that is—to support any kind of revolution which might improve their lot. Across Asia, Communists are whispering, "When we take over your country, things will be better."

But in Japan this whispering campaign has no appeal. Fighting Miss Ichikawa can reply, "We have won our freedom. Now our only job is to protect it." Communists can offer such women nothing.



Bedtime Story

DURING "Sharing Period" at school, Johnny was telling about refurnishing their house. "We've been having arguments—most every day—about our new furniture, but I guess it's all settled now," he said. "Mommy got her way about the living room, but Daddy won on the bedroom deal."

"Yes?" said the teacher, encouragingly.

"Yes," replied Johnny. "Mommy wanted twin beds, but Daddy said that he commuted every day and he'd be darned if he was going to commute at night."