

Mind-set of Young Working Women

By Ato Ekusa

Japanese women are supposed to be graceful, like Princess Akishino, or Kiko-san as she is popularly known. It is said that many foreigners tie the knot with Japanese women for this very reason. European and American men often say that true bliss would be to live in an American house, eat Chinese food, and have a Japanese woman as your wife.

In fact, Japanese women are very tough indeed. It is the woman who has the real power in the Japanese family, so much so that sometimes men call their wives *yama-no-kami* (god of the mountain) with a nuance of bantering. When a Japanese man receives his salary, he hands it all to his wife, who manages the household budget and dishes out pocket money to her husband each month. In the West, despite the ladies-first custom, it usually is the man who holds on to the purse strings, giving his wife enough money every month to cover the living expenses.

Recently young women in Japan have begun to take jobs and therefore have become quite affluent. In the industrial society of the past, which centered on the manufacturing industries, most jobs required physical strength, so companies did not evaluate women on a par with men as workers. However, in today's post-industrial society, in which many companies sell information and other services rather than manufactured goods, it is brain power rather than physical strength that counts. And in terms of brain power, women are born equal with men. These days the number of job opportunities for women is increasing tremendously.

One of the most conspicuous social trends in Japan recently has been the emergence of a generation of young women who, far from being graceful, are strong-minded, well-off, and full of pep. Reflecting this trend toward women's stronger position in society, young women have coined several new expressions for describing their men friends. For ex-

ample, there is *asshy-kun* (Mr. Feet). When a group of young women have a night on the town and then miss the last train and cannot find a taxi, they call one of their men friends, who goes to pick them up by car and drives them home. Thank you, Mr. Feet.

Then there is *mitsugu-kun* (Mr. Present), who has no special relationship with the woman but always sends her expensive presents at Christmas and on her birthday. Both *asshy-kun* and *mitsugu-kun* are typical of today's young men who are eager to please their newly independent women friends.

A man with whom a woman has a slightly deeper relationship is called *keep-kun* (Mr. Fallback), and the man who she expects to marry in the future is called *honmei-kun* (Mr. Ring). The woman has real affection for the latter, but sometimes she wants to enjoy a gorgeous date with someone who will spend a lot of money on her—Mr. Fallback.

A recent issue of a young women's magazine described Mr. Ring as someone who the woman loves unconditionally and can associate with without worrying about loss or gain; the kind person in whose presence she can relax; a man who she can trust and who will look after her forever; a person who is genuinely kind and not looking for any gain; and a man who is good-looking enough for her to be able to introduce him to her friends.

In contrast, Mr. Fallback must be strikingly handsome, so that when they are walking together, other women will turn and look; he must be well-off (women rank their Mr. Fallback according to how much money he spends on a date); he must have a plush car for use on dates; he must be someone with whom she can associate easily and speak her mind openly, whether he likes it or not; and he must buy her presents and treat her to expensive dinners, otherwise there is no use in going out with him.

These young women who categorize



Young Japanese women are noted for being strong-minded, affluent and full of pep.

their men friends according to purpose are called *takabi* (highfalutin women). Mainly born in Tokyo, they have graduated from high schools affiliated with public and private universities. They had their first experiences with men in their high-school days, and they get the utmost pleasure out of scorning others. They are said to be the biggest enemy of young women who have come up from the provinces to work in Tokyo.

Young women from the provinces who overcome the bullying and make their way in Tokyo are called *jiage-gyaru*, a pun on the term *jiageya*, which refers to "land sharks" who acquire strategic plots of land by fair means or foul. There are three types of *jiage-gyaru*: those who have an ambition in life, such as to become a teacher or a critic, and do their utmost to fulfill it; those who try and entice men with their long hair, miniskirts and famous brand-name clothes and accessories and who use selfishness as their main weapon; and those who cultivate the Kiko-san image of being well-educated, wholesome and refined, with the smile thrown in so that people around them cannot help but offer their services.

In the 1950s it was often said that two things had gained strength in Japan following the war: women and stockings. These days it seems that women are becoming stronger still.

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