



Women, the State, and National Mobilization
in Prewar Japan

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Introduction

This thesis has a two-fold purpose. Firstly, to elucidate the history of the two largest women's groups in Japan in the 1930s - Aikoku Fujinkai¹ (Patriotic Women's Association) and Kokubō Fujinkai² (National Defense Women's Association). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to illustrate the process of national mobilization and what it meant to women's organizations in Japanese society in that period. Although there were three major national women's organizations at this time, I have chosen Aikoku Fujinkai and Kokubō Fujinkai to illustrate this process because they provide an interesting contrast. The inclusion of Aikoku Fujinkai also demonstrates the historical links of the process of national mobilization with the Taishō period and the changes which this process underwent during the 1930s.

Although the main focal period of the thesis is the 1930s, the long history of Aikoku Fujinkai, which was founded in 1901, has necessitated the inclusion of an introductory chapter on the formation and history of the group until 1931. This chapter will deal with the organization's foundation, structure, and activities during periods of war and peace, and its role in stemming the spread of "dangerous" ideologies. Aikoku Fujinkai worked in close association with the state by performing social welfare duties, and by providing "proper" ideological guidance for women. Again, this chapter also highlights the historical links of women's groups and national mobilization.

The 1930s is the focal period of the thesis for a variety of reasons. Firstly, from the establishment of Kokubō Fujinkai in 1932, the decade was marked by the rapid expansion of membership of conservative women's organizations. This movement was also paralleled by increasing state control of these groups. State control of women's groups was not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a larger trend within Japanese society. This trend toward mass mobilization of people and resources for war culminated in the formation of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association³ in 1940. The IRAA absorbed the political parties and other groups, acting as an umbrella organization; inevitably, Aikoku Fujinkai and Kokubō Fujinkai cooperated with the new system and finally amalgamated in 1942 to form Dainihon Fujinkai⁴ (The Greater Japan Women's Association).

By exploring the organizational structure and expansion of Aikoku Fujinkai and Kokubō Fujinkai up until their merger, a clear picture emerges of how the mass mobilization of women was instituted through these organizations. The Japanese use an appropriate adjective for this organizational structure - mōrateki⁵ - which describes a network which is all-inclusive and exhaustive. In other words, an organizational structure which includes all women. In both the case of Aikoku Fujinkai and Kokubō Fujinkai, this organizational structure was instituted from above by men from the military and the civilian government. This of course raises questions about the degree of autonomy of these organizations, and whether there were any changes in their autonomy over time.

The identification of mass mobilization as a definitive characteristic of fascism by the Japanese historian, Furuya Tetsuo (see bibliography), provides an important analytical framework for this thesis. Within this framework, the pattern of organizational change of Aikoku Fujinkai to a structure similar to Kokubō Fujinkai is part of the process labelled "fascistization"⁶ of women's organizations by the Japanese women's historian, Chino Yōichi. The all-inclusive nature of this "fascistization" is made apparent when we bring the smaller civilian women's groups and leaders into consideration. These were similarly absorbed into the state system by the creation of umbrella organizations controlling the activities of groups, and the use of civilian women's leaders on government committees.

Before embarking on the major body of the thesis, a short explanation about my sources is in order. Because of the lack of materials available in English, much of the information contained in the thesis comes from Japanese sources. Some of these were collected while in Japan; others have come from collections held by various Australian universities. Information from those Japanese sources lacking footnotes (most notably Fujii Tadatoshi's Kokubō Fujinkai) has been cross-referenced wherever possible. Of the few English sources available, none give a complete picture of the events which shape the direction of national mobilization in relation to national women's groups. This in itself makes my attempt to clarify the relationship between the state and women by exploring and analysing the organization and function of Aikoku Fujinkai

and Kokubō Fujinkai all the more challenging.