While **women in Japan** were recognized as having equal legal rights to men after [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), economic conditions for women remain unbalanced.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Japan#cite_note-nytimes-soble-4) Modern policy initiatives to encourage motherhood and workplace participation have had mixed results.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Japan#cite_note-Borovoy-5)

Women in Japan obtained the [right to vote](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage) in 1945.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Japan#cite_note-womens-vote-japan-6) While Japanese women's status has improved in the last decades, traditional expectations for married women and mothers are cited as a barrier to full economic equality.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Japan#cite_note-Nohara-7) The [monarchy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_monarchy) is strictly males-only and a princess has to give up her royal status when she marries a commoner.

There are a number of prominent female figures who have [made a name for themselves](https://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/articles/women-in-japanese-history-who-led-the-way-for-the-rest-of-us/) in Japan’s long history, but not to be overlooked are the Japanese women who have become an inspiration in modern times. Read on for 12 women from [Japan](https://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/) who brought down barriers and became “the first” in their respective fields.

1. Toshiko Kishida (1863-1901)

One of the first Japanese feminists, Kishida was a public speaker who traveled the country during the Meiji period, speaking out on behalf of women’s rights (and who was arrested several times for it). One her most-quoted lines was, “If it is true that men are better than women because they are stronger, why aren’t our sumo wrestlers in the government?”

2. Ichiyo Higuchi (1872-1896)

The face of the 5,000 yen bill, Natsuko Higuchi (pen name: Ichiyo Higuchi) was a prominent writer during the Meiji period. Although she died at the young age of 24, Higuchi’s works brought her recognition as the first woman writer of the modern era. Her stories focused on the plights of women and the poor, told in a style influenced both by classical poetry and the rapidly modernizing society in which she lived.

Also As a part of the reform of the Central Government implemented in January 2001, the Council for Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Bureau were established, whereby the national machinery for the promotion of gender equality in Japan has been significantly strengthened.

A "gender-equal society" is a "society in which both men and women, as equal members, have the opportunity to participate in all kinds of social activities at will, equally enjoy political, economical and cultural benefits, and share responsibilities." In such a society, the human rights of men and women are equally respected. Women who desire an active role in society may participate in activities of their own choosing, while men could enjoy a fulfilling home and community life. A gender-equal society is a society built by men and women as equal partners.

The realization of a truly affluent society is dependent on the establishment of a social framework that allows individuals to choose various lifestyles regardless of their gender, and without being bound by such rigid, stereotyped gender roles that assume that child rearing and nursing are exclusively women's duties, while men are the workers, tax-payers and pension renderers who support the nation. In reality, however, although gender equality has more or less been achieved in Japan as far as laws and legislations are concerned, women's participation in the policy- and decision-making processes remains insufficient, and women still have few opportunities to realize their full potential. The traditional tendency to view men's participation in housework and child-rearing as unmanly and the heavy burden of housework, child care and nursing that is still placed on women testify to the fact that Japan is lagging behind other countries in terms of gender equality.

We, each and every one of us, need to rethink our prejudiced notions of gender-based roles, so that we may realize a society where men and women can participate together in politics, at the workplace and at home, and lead exciting and fulfilling lives.

## Strengthening the national machinery for the advancement of women

In 1994, the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality (President: Prime Minister, Members: all Cabinet Ministers) was set up within the Cabinet. In addition, the Office for Gender Equality and the Council for Gender Equality were established by Cabinet Orders in the Prime Minister's Office. In the reform of the Central Government implemented on January 6, 2001, the Central Government was restructured from its former one Office and twenty-two Ministries to one Cabinet Office and twelve Ministries, to be able to deal effectively with complex policy issues in the 21st Century. As part of this reorganization, a Cabinet Office headed by the Prime Minister was established in the Cabinet, and a Council for Gender Equality and a Gender Equality Bureau were established within this Cabinet Office. The Gender Equality Bureau is mandated with the formulation and overall coordination of plans for matters related to promoting the formation of a gender-equal society, as well as promoting the Basic Plan for Gender Equality and formulating and implementing plans for matters not falling under the jurisdiction of any particular ministry.

Which role does gender play, if we want to understand the reality in the Japanese school

system? In terms of participation in the school system, the relation between boys and girls

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Already in the mid-eighties the quota of girls had exceeded the one of boys. Comparatively

more boys than girls started working at this early stage, but generally it can be stated that

high school education had become necessary in order to earn a certain social status and

income. About 73 percent of girls and boys attend schools with a general curriculum

(futsŪka). Within the professional track we can distinguish gender specific choices: Girls

are more likely to specialise in a commercial course, in home economics, nursing and wel-

fare studies, while boys more often select technical high schools with courses for industry,

agriculture and fishery (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology

2005: 54–55).

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