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January 22, 2017

Women In Japan

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### Final Report – Governor Yuriko Koike

As a woman from the USA it is easy to forget that the political timeline of my rights as an individual and citizen are different than that of other countries. In school we learn about women who fought for equal treatment and full recognition in the eyes of the law/government and society. The 2016 presidential elections were an incredible eye opener to many young women's minds, mine included. Last year I also watched the Olympics in Rio, which served as an opportunity for me to be introduced to the governor of Tokyo, Yuriko Koike. After some research online and at my university's digital library I discovered that she is an impressive individual outside of her political career, boasting an international education and tri-lingual capabilities. Her career in politics is also inspiring as she is neither a man nor the beneficiary of a legacy in politics. Yuriko Koike is a strong willed woman who has made her own way through Japanese politics.

Yuriko Koike was born in Kobe, Japan in July of 1952. Her mother a traditional house wife and her father an oil executive. Koike is has shared her parent's desires for her growing up as "My parents told me to do what I wanted to do, saying I should not copy someone else's example," (Asahi Shimbun). She would go on to enroll in Egypt at Cairo University, her major Sociology. Through her time in Egypt she was able to learn to Arabic which upon her return to Japan, allowed her to work as an interpreter. Through her prowess as an interpreter Koike was able to assume a job as a TV assistant at Nippon TV and later this helped to secure positions as an interviewer of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and also Yasser Arafat. This exposure caught the attention of many and soon Koike had an opportunity to enter politics through the help of a Kumamoto governor and soon Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa. He wanted to start a political party and was interested in having Koike run for a seat in the house of councilors under its name, Japan New Party. However after this party dissolved, Yuriko Koike moved from one party to another before finally joining the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 2002.

An interesting aspect of Yuriko's Koike's budding political career is that she did not begin as a career politician. Politics like many other job arenas in Japan are not particularly easy or welcoming to women. Koike's transition into politics is notable because she successfully transitioned from her TV career

directly and permanently into the Political career track. She has mentioned that she feels this is a type of destiny as the third generation of women since the women's right to vote was passed in 1945. A second generation of women made a push in 1989 running for government positions and winning, this further encouraged women to become more involved with politics. Koike states in her article for Harvard International Review "When I ran for House of Councilors...I did so despite my lack of political connections... I am completely independent. I aspired to enter the political fray because of my ideas and principles...I consider my role in politics to be completing the mission of the first generation of women, who fought before the war for suffrage and a place for women in decided the nation's fate. The second generations... established the idea that women had a role in politics...the people now consider women like me to be part of the third generation, whose members campaign on their own ability and do not see limitations to their pursuits."(Koike). After joining the LDP, Koike among many other positions she would come to hold she was appointed Minister of the Environment and would hold that position from 2003 to 2005. In 2005 Koike would introduce an initiative to reduce the use of electricity in the summer called "Cool Biz". This idea took hold and by the end of summer 2005, the ministry estimates that it saved co2 emissions equivalent to 1 month of 1 million households worth of co2 usage. Yuriko Koike suggest that it would have been impossible for a

man in her position to suggest a campaign such as “cool biz” because men are too concerned with adhering to traditions. Later in 2007 Koike is the first female defense minister after she is appointed due to the former minister resigning. She would end up resigning herself after 54 days due to a scandal involving Japanese Naval men leaking classified and confidential information.

In 2008 Yuriko Koike made headlines when she began her campaign to become the president of LDP. This is another first for Japan. Unfortunately she would lose, coming in third place. It's not until 2016 she announces her intent to run for governor of Tokyo, under the LDP. The party ultimately backed Hiroya Masuda in the race and Yuriko Koike decided continue her bid to become governor. Upon winning the bid, she promised to alleviate the shortage of day care centers in the Tokyo area, referencing the long waitlists. She also mentioned she would dedicate herself to fixing Tokyo's financial woes. Yuriko Koike went on to win the election, pulling ahead by 1 million votes over her nearest opponent, thus becoming the first woman governor of Tokyo. Unfortunately, even Yuriko Koike is not immune to sexist insults and remarks. During her campaign she has been called many names, some referring to her various turns in different political parties, “Madame conveyor belt sushi”. Others making light of her age by doubting her abilities to be an effective leader because she is “a woman past her prime in thick makeup”. Koike frequently talks about how being a woman is an advantage in politics as

far as Japan is concerned. It helps her to bring a fresh perspective and less hesitation when it comes to making big decisions. In light of this mudslinging and doubts of her abilities she makes a poignant observation regarding not being a part of the “old boys network”, “A male politician can make a mistake and no one brings gender into the matter. But if a female politician makes mistakes, people immediately blame it on her being a woman. None of the millions of mistakes made by male politicians over the centuries has ever been attributed to their gender. Yet somehow, a woman politician’s errors are always gender-based.” (Koike) Despite this road blocks, she still believes that as women gain a stronger foothold in politics, there is hope for more movement forward for the equal treatment of women.

When studying Japanese history, you can see a steady decline in the role of women in society. Towards the end of the Heian period, Confucianism was beginning to take a deep hold. This style of thought was largely based on the idea of patriarchal dominion and strict gender roles. This helped to refine the military leaders and ruling class of the 12<sup>th</sup> century but women would come to suffer. The idea that should be able to freely choose what they would like to do day to day without the judgement of society weighing down on them seem like an easy thing to fix. But even in modern Japan we see various types of this unfair treatment rearing its head. The concept that a woman’s main and only job is to take care of the home and the children is just as strong

as ever. Women account for half of the population however they struggle to land salary jobs, if they choose to get married or become pregnant the pressure to walk away from their career is immense. Those that endure through this pressure can fall victim to various types of harassment on top of having to struggle to find someone to take care of their child during the day due to shortages of day cares in many cities. Just because a politician is a woman doesn't mean that she is the perfect crusader for women's rights and equal treatment however simply being able to elect a woman is overcoming a huge hurdle in the fight to move forward. I wanted to know more about Yuriko Koike and her political career because I know that women come under more scrutiny than their male counterparts. Koike in a Telegraph article states "One of the things that I hated the most when I was a minister is that when a male minister makes a mistake, he is not strongly criticized for what has gone wrong. "But if a woman minister makes a mistake, even her colleagues would accuse her, simply because she is a woman. Or if she happens to do a good job, then it is often said that she only managed to achieve it because she had assistance from someone else."(Telegraph). Koike states that in the future she could put together her own party in no time, I feel that Yuriko Koike is only the beginning of what will come next for Japanese women.

### Works Cited/Bibliography

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“Yuriko Koike Seeks To Become Japan's First Female Prime Minister”. Telegraph. Julian Ryall. 08 Sept 2008

#### Timeline

- 1976 BA in Sociology, Cairo University, Egypt.
  - 1972 Arabic Intensive Course, Oriental Studies, American University of Cairo, Egypt.
- 1977 – Interpreter and Translator of Arabic, Secretary General of the Japan-Arab Association.
- 1978 – Interviewer and Coordinator for the Nippon TV Special “Colonel Qaddafi and Yasser Arafat”
- 1979 – News presenter for Nippon TV’s Daily Program “Current Issues”
- 1988–1989 – News presenter for TV Tokyo’s Financial and Business Programs “World Business Satellite” and “Top Business Executives” – Madonna boom
- 1990 – Secretary General of the Japan-Arab Association.
- 1992 – Elected to the House of Councillors from the Japan New Party.
- 1993 – Elected to the House of Representatives from Hyōgo Prefecture’s Second District, Vice-Minister of the Management and Coordination Agency.
- 1994 – Vice-President of the Japan New Party, founding member of the New Frontier Party.
- 1995 – Assistant to the Secretary General of the New Frontier Party.
- 1996 – Director of the Public Relations Bureau of the New Frontier Party, re-elected to the House of Representatives from Hyōgo Prefecture’s Sixth District.
- 1997 – Chair of the Standing Committee on Science and Technology of the House of Representatives



1998 – Founding Member of the Liberal Party, member of the Standing Committee on Trade and Industry of the House of Representatives, Director of the Standing Committee on Finance of the House of Representatives.

1999 – Member of the Committee on Public Relations of the Liberal Party, State Secretary for the Economic Planning Chair of the Liberal Party.

2000 – Member of the Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare of the House of Representatives, Vice-Chair of the New Conservative Party Policy Planning Committee, and re-elected to the House of Representatives from Hyōgo Prefecture's Sixth District.

2003 – Minister of the Environment, Minister in Charge of Global Environmental Problems (Second Koizumi Cabinet), re-elected to the House of Representatives, Minister of the Environment and Minister in Charge of Global Environmental Problems (Second Reshuffled First Koizumi Cabinet), and member of the Committee on Economy, Trade and Industry and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives.

2004 – Minister of the Environment, Minister in Charge of Global Environmental Problems, and Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs (Reshuffled Second Koizumi Cabinet).

2005 – Minister of the Environment, Minister in Charge of Global Environmental Problems, and Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs (Third Koizumi Cabinet and reshuffled Third Koizumi Cabinet). Re-elected to the House of Representatives.

2006 – Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for National Security Affairs (First Abe Cabinet).

2007 – Minister of Defense (First Abe Cabinet). Left office after only 54 days in office.

Preceding he fumio Kyūma resigned as Defense Minister on 3 July 2007 for remarks made at [Reitaku University](#) in [Kashiwa, Chiba Prefecture](#) on 30 June. In this speech, he stated "I now have come to accept in my mind that in order to end the war, it could not be helped that an atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and that countless numbers of people suffered great tragedy." He appeared on a [Fuji TV](#) morning news show on 1 July, saying he did not think an apology would be necessary, but he apologized later the same day.

2016 The governor of Tokyo, Yoichi Masuzoe, has resigned following revelations about his profligate spending habits in a scandal that risked damaging the political fortunes of the country's prime minister, Shinzo Abe.