The Movement for Abolishing Licensed Prostitution: 
The Activities of the Japan Woman's Christian Temperance Union

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This paper attempts to examine the actual conditions and significance of the movement for abolishing prostitution through the activities of the Japan Woman's Christian Temperance Union (JWCTU) from 1886 until 1935, about 50 years.

Most past research about JWCTU has analyzed it from the arguments and the activities of its leaders written in its bulletins. Little of this research has examined the relationship between the JWCTU head and its local chapters, solidarity with other associations, or public opinion and its response regarding the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution. Moreover, although it has covered various aspects, recent research on the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution has emphasized negative aspects such that the activists had a discriminatory view of prostitutes, and they also took the path of cooperating in the war.

Therefore, the author thinks that these views not only reduced the estimate of the movements' significance and roles, which appealed for abolishing the system which authorized the restriction and traffic and made efforts to solve the problem of prostitution, but these views also brought stagnation to the field of research on the movement. This paper is based on the results of these previous researches, and aims to investigate the activities of the JWCTU, its local chapters and the actual conditions of the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution, in order to confirm its significance and problems.

There are seven chapters in this paper, including the introduction and conclusion.

In Chapter 1, the author examines the establishment of the JWCTU and its subsequent activities. In December 1886, JWCTU was established by educated Christian women, which had been influenced by World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union. However, in the light of the real circumstances in Japan, the JWCTU launched not only a temperance movement, but also various reform movements. In other words, it strove to reform conventional bad habits, customs and
systems in order to improve women's status and to increase their rights. Moreover, it emphasized getting rid of prostitutes, geisha girls and mistresses who were against monogamy.

Therefore, its activities were realized as the following three pioneering movements: The JWCTU made petitions to establish monogamy, made appeals to enact a law to control Japanese prostitutes overseas, and staged a movement against licensed prostitution. It made efforts to raise public opinion against licensed prostitution by publishing bulletins and holding public lectures. After that, with the establishment of the Parliament in 1890, the JWCTU was to be a central pillar of the "National League for Abolishing Licensed Prostitution" and organized a petition against licensed prostitution.

In chapter 2, the author describes the establishment of the JWCTU as a national organization and the concrete development of the JWCT's movement against licensed brothels in the 1900s, and the role of its head and local chapters. It was formed in 1893 as a nationwide organization with chapters in various parts of Japan, and developed rapidly into a large group with considerable influence. From 1900 the Gunma, Asahikawa, Wakayama, and Osaka chapters became influential and spread movements against the moving of old, and the construction of new, licensed brothels. The people living in the areas were concerned about the licensed brothels, so many of them participated in the movements.

As the JWCTU not only, built group solidarity with local associations, but also worked on newspapers, the matter of licensed brothels could be publicized as articles and brought to the attention of people widely. Through those activities, the JWCTU became a leading women's association in the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution. Banding together with the local women's activists, it was ranked as a stronghold of the movement.

In Chapter 3, the author investigates movement for abolishing licensed prostitution during 1910s. This is the period during which the JWCTU developed the movement with the new group the Kakusei-kai (Purity Society) which was set up in 1911. From the mid 1910s, JWCTU expanded the movement against licensed brothels and founded education programs, which further strengthened the "Movement for Complete Abolition of Licensed Prostitution." Thereafter, there was a growing tendency to build national moral standards founded on the equality of chastity between men and women in this period.

Through provincial public speeches, it not only emphasized the building of new
local chapters and increasing the number of its members, but it also made sincere
efforts to build relationships with churches, mission schools, the YMCAs, and the
Shojo-kai (Maiden Association). Moreover, the JWCTU grappled with
Go-sen-bukuro-undō (Five-sen Envelope Movement), which helped to finance the fight
for the abolishing licensed prostitution and it also attempted to educate the public
about the abolishing prostitution. The collection of money by the JWCTU ensured its
financial strength and helped it to constantly expand the movement for abolishing
prostitution. This kind of effort on the part of the JWCTU influenced the movement
thereafter as well.

Besides, the JWCTU inspected Japanese prostitutes in Siberia, aimed to take the
fundamental measure to prevent them, and developed the movement for enacting the
law to protect women against forcible prostitution and traffic.

In chapter 4, the author examines the development and influence of
anti-prostitution activities after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Through the
relief activities of the earthquake, the JWCTU immediately embarked on relief efforts
for the earthquake victims by rallying women's groups, and it played an important role
in organizing the Tokyo Woman's Group Association as well. As a part of this activity,
the JWCTU launched a protest campaign against the reconstruction of licensed
brothels destroyed by the earthquake, and the research department of the Tokyo
Women's Group Union created an association for abolishing licensed prostitution. Many
activists and participants joined and the movement grew into a national pan-woman's
movement, and the public outcry against prostitution spread from Japan to Korea.
Korean newspapers and Christian magazines picked up on the movement from Japan,
and this had a strong influence on the anti-prostitution movement in Korea.

In Chapter 5, the author analyzes the uplift and diversion of the movement for
abolishing of licensed prostitution by focusing on the coalition between the JWCTU and
Kakusei-kai from the middle of the 1920s until 1935. In June 1926, the JWCTU formed
the "Federation for Abolishing Licensed Prostitution" together with the Kakusei-kai.
Then, owing to the active operation and cooperation of local chapters, churches, and
associations in each region, the groups for abolishing licensed prostitution were built in
forty-one prefectures, and proposals for abolishing licensed prostitution were passed by
dozens of prefecture councils. In this way, Saitama and Akita prefecture repealed
licensed prostitution. This uplifted the movement further and initiated its peak period.
In particular, the JWCTU's members collected almost all of the funds for the
"Federation for Abolishing Licensed Prostitution." It was clear that the JWCTU played
the most important role in raising funds for the movement.

Furthermore, riding the tide of national and international support for the abolishing licensed prostitution, the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution was diverted to purifying movements. By referring to examples of purifying movements in Britain and America, the "Federation for Abolishing Licensed Prostitution" drove for abolishing prostitution entirely. Finally, in 1935, the federation dissolved and became the "National Purity League" in order to carry out the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution and remedial measures after repealing licensed prostitution as well. Therefore, the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution was ranked as a part of the purifying movement. In other worlds, the purifying movement was comprised of the parts which the movement for abolishing licensed prostitution did not grapple with, for example: measures for help and protection of unlicensed prostitutes.

In Conclusion, the author confirms the significance and the problems of the JWCTU movement, based on the conclusions from the five chapters, and mentions subsequent research as well. Above all, the author points out four problems which were: (1) the leaders, because they were middle or high class, looked down on prostitutes and geisha girls (2) they did not consider the social mechanisms that caused licensed brothels to be built owing to the war and the army enough, (3) it should not be a neglected fact that they played a part in the national unification line, through the cooperation with the authorities and Shojyo-kai and (4) they managed the purifying movement with top-down style, and did not discuss the establishment of the "Federation for Abolishing Licensed Prostitution" with the local groups enough. Then, the movement was gradually involved in forming national policy.

Therefore, it should be accepted that there were such problems, especially when a past movement is viewed from a present standpoint. However, it is more important to evaluate the historical role the JWCTU played in that time and in those circumstances, when considered against the fact that the movement was developed in a time of trial which cannot be compared with the present. In this context, it can be said that the JWCTU was a very significant movement that deserves attention.