

SEVEN KINDS OF WOMEN:

DID you know that no other country can compete with China for the distinction of being the nation of hen-pecked husbands; that Norwegian women smoke a lot, wear hats with evening dress, but do not favour their national costume; that Dutch women don't leave their men alone to enjoy their after-dinner schnapps; that in some parts of Switzerland it is compulsory for girls to take a course in managing the home and caring for babies, but that Swiss women don't exercise the vote; that in Greece a woman's place is still in the home, and that the men of Greece will scorn to marry a girl who has been out to work; that Belgian women are extraordinarily courageous and thrifty; and that among Russian women, the ability to kill Fascists is not merely not incompatible with the possession of womanly qualities, but is directly attributable to them?

All this, and a good deal more, we learnt when, following up the impressions of Polish women by Countess Maria Wodzicka, which were published in a recent "Listener," we decided to ask women of seven different nationalities for some sidelights on the position of women in their home countries.

CHINESE

WE started with China. The wife of the Chinese Consul could spare us only a few minutes, so instead of an interview, she lent us a copy of a bulletin on the Status of Women in China. "In ancient China," so the bulletin said, "women enjoyed a good deal of freedom. History reveals that there were many outstanding personalities who achieved greatness and fame. Some were active in politics, others in social work, while the great majority were good mothers and housewives. Education, though a privilege of the aristocrats, was by no means monopolised by men, as women of that time had an equal chance to receive it. But during the Six Dynasties (265-588 A.D.) the Chinese came under the sway of Buddhist influences and the position of women began to sink. Instead of the enviable position they used to enjoy, women became dilettanti and wittingly or unwittingly, resigned themselves to a status of dependence. But even though this state came about, the Chinese woman has always been the despot of the family. The authority of the mother and the mother-in-law is very well known. Even the wife is always the terror of the husband; no other country in the world can compete with China for the distinction of being the nation of hen-pecked husbands.

To-day the outlook on life, and the social status of Chinese women has changed entirely. "No longer is second marriage considered immoral; no longer are women secluded; no longer are daughters forbidden to inherit properties. Instead, we see women participating in political campaigns, in social activities, in research projects, in field works, in military tasks, in factories, and in government offices. Above all, we see women moving about with a newly-awakened sense of responsibility."

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NORWEGIAN

A MUCH-TRAVELLED young Norwegian woman introduced us to Norway. Yes, she had travelled, but then all Norwegian women like to travel, she told us.

Most things in Norway are on a scientific basis, we were told. Even housewives are encouraged to be scientific by attending special schools. Girls in offices are expected to have a working knowledge of two or three languages.

"When we go out for the evening we rarely have organised games and competitions. The evening passes too quickly with discussions. Which is what we like, because there is so much we are all interested in and want to discuss."

"Have you the vote?" we asked her.

"Yes, Norwegian women vote after they have completed their 23rd year. We have complete equality with men and all careers are open to us. But married women put their homes first. They take their homes very seriously, and especially do they look upon entertaining as a very important business. But of course one of the most important things in Norway is outdoor life and sport. Children are given skis from the time they can walk. Everyone goes walking and ski-ing, and a feeling of camaraderie exists between the sexes because of the mixed sport."

Before the war Norway had an equivalent of the WAAC and WAAF organisations. It was called the "Lotte" and the members wore a military uniform. It was, of course, only part-time work. The girls took this organisation very seriously and attended regular camps for training, which included nursing, cooking, general army duties, etc.

"Norwegian women are not all tall and fair. There are all types," we were told. The city women smoke a lot, but drunkenness among women is never seen.

"One thing that is different from New Zealand is that we always wear hats with our evening dresses when we go to the theatre or to concerts. Then in the foyer we take off our hats and our coats and leave them there. And there is one thing that annoys us intensely in foreign films. Every time a picture is shown of Norway, the women are portrayed in national costumes. No women wear the national costume in Norway at all now; in fact, the Norwegian women are considered among the best-dressed modern women in Europe."



Above: A young Swiss home-maker: she is well educated but not yet emancipated politically



Right: The Netherlands Royal Family in Ottawa

Below left: Madame Chiang Kai-shek, a scholar and a stateswoman: the social standing of Chinese women has changed entirely

