Weekly News Review

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The Japanese Try Western Ways

Some, However, Want to Swing Back to Old Customs

TWO JAPANESE girls go shopping

THERE'S a "new look" in Japan. It's come about in the years since World War II, and is largely the result of western influence brought about by the presence of American occupation soldiers.

The Japanese, for the first time, are living under a democratic form of government. Along with the idea of democracy, they've also taken up many western ways of life.

Japanese women, for example, once were treated almost as servants by men in the family. The women dressed in kimonos, plain ones for everyday and beautifully embroidered ones for special occasions. They were taught how to do housework and little else.

Japanese women today are guaranteed equal rights with men under their constitution. The women may vote, as men do, and a number of them hold seats in the Diet (Japanese legislature). Both men and women debate political issues in community meetings.

More and more women are dressing in American-style clothing, although they still prefer the kimono as an evening dress. Girls now are given the same education as boys. There is a new school system with grade schools, high schools, and colleges modeled somewhat on the American pattern. Six years of

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grade school are compulsory for all.

The Japanese liked baseball and American movies long before World War II, and those two forms of amusement are now more popular than ever before. Tennis, golf, football, and skiing are among Japanese sports. And, of course, Japanese swimmers and wrestlers are famous for their endurance in championship contests.

Although many Japanese, even in rural areas, have adopted numerous western customs, much of the old way of life remains. Most of the people still sit on floor mats or cushions and eat rice with chopsticks from bowls placed on low tables.

Houses still are built of wood, bamboo, and straw. Rooms inside are separated by sliding doors which may be taken away to make one big room out of several small ones. Homes usually have electric lights, but cooking is done on tiny charcoal stoves.

Many Japanese in the cities, who've come to know Americans, have learned to like coffee in place of tea, as well as candy bars and other western tidbits. Some Japanese prepare a special dish of thin slices of meat mixed with vegetables, but meat costs too much for most of the population. Rice, vegetables, fish, and fruits still are the main foods. They are all that most Japanese workers can afford.

An office worker in Japan earns only about $28 a month, and a railroader receives only $37. The food bill usually takes more than half of the month's income.

Young people in the cities of Japan are the most enthusiastic supporters of western customs. There are many older Japanese, especially in rural areas, who want to keep their former ways of life. Some Americans think that a reaction against western manners is developing in Japan.

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