Gender Regime and Gender Orders: Women workers in the post-war model of capitalism in Japan

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Introduction
In pre-war Japan, women frequently worked in sales, domestic service, factory work and cottage industries. The employment of young women was considered essential to Japanese industrialisation: samurai and government officials patriotically sent their own daughters to work in the first state-run silk factory at Tomioka, which opened in 1892, after rumours about the nefarious practices of the French specialists working there deterred farming women from applying (Matsumoto, 1976). In 1939, women over 25 were ordered to work in coal mines (Paulson, 1976) and from the early 1940s unmarried girls were drafted to work in factories. At the end of World War Two, the proportion of working women in the total population was arguably the highest of all developed nations, because of Japan’s still heavily agricultural labour force (Iwao, 1993: 154). (In 1950 more than 60% of working women were engaged in agriculture, Japan Institute for Workers’ Evolution, 2001a: 1). However, in the years following the Second World War, Japan was unique in the developed world in seeing a decline in the number of women working outside the home. The proportion of women of working age holding a job was 57% in 1955, 51% in 1965 and 46% in 1975 (Woronoff, 1982: 138). While some of this decline could obviously be attributed to more women spending a longer time in secondary and tertiary education, men’s participation
fell by only 6% between 1955 and 1980 (Ibid.: 139). Where women did work outside the home, they had a very different position to that of men in the distinctive Japanese model of employment.

The 'classical Japanese model' of the firm as community, worker commitment and flexibility in exchange for employment security, the seniority-plus-merit (*nenko*) principle in pay and promotion and enterprise unionism (Kato and Steven, 1993) has only ever pertained to a minority of workers. Large corporations were able to afford these benefits for their workers, by externalising risk. Generally they have made use of *keiretsu*; intricate vertical relationship with small and medium sized subcontractors, which are almost entirely dependent on the larger company and provide flexible pricing and production and even absorbed surplus employees of the company in times of economic difficulty. The precarious position of smaller companies has been evident in the current recession. 47% of employees laid off for bankruptcy or restructuring in the last three years worked at companies with less than 30 staff, while workers at firms with 500 or more staff accounted for only 14% of layoffs (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 27 November, 1999). Employees of small and medium-sized enterprises also tend to receive lower wage rises in times of economic hardship than their counterparts in larger companies. In 1999 the average wage rise of workers in the former was 2.21% compared to only 1.67 % in the latter (Labour Relations Bureau, 2000). Furthermore wages and age have traditionally not been so closely related as in larger companies (Matsushima, 1966: 75).

A higher proportion of women than men were employed within these small and medium-sized companies. Women were and are also more likely to work in those other groups excluded from the Japanese employment system, such as contract workers, temporary, casual or day labourers, family workers, part-timers, agro-industrial workers, and homeworkers.

As well as being more likely to be found in peripheral sections of the labour market, women were also likely to have a peripheral position within the core. Even within large companies, supposedly permanent women workers would usually retire upon marriage or the birth of their first child. In fact without women’s short tenure and confinement to lower level positions, it would not have
been possible for men to rise upwards through the company and take on more responsibility as the *nenko* system required.

The characteristics of the distinctive Japanese postwar model have been attributed to result of the late impact of capitalist relations and persistence of Confucian ideas in Japanese society, through the influence of the *ie* as the fundamental unit of domestic and economic organisation (Clark, 1979; Stockman, Bonney, and Xuewen, 1995; Tsukaguchi-LeGrand, 1999) or of continuity from rural patterns (Abegglen, 1958; Dore 1973)

The *ie*, or household, was the fundamental unit of economic organisation of pre-industrial society. The household rather than the individual was the legal unit; everyone had to register as a member of a household; and all were subordinate to the head of that household. Merchant houses recruited extra staff through the adoption of young men, and the master of the house assumed parental responsibility towards them. Women might enter the household of another (Bacon, 1902, cited in Stockman, Bonney and Xuewen, 1995) to learn feminine skills, such as flower arranging and tea ceremony, which they could later teach, or as servants. However, whether they were servants or blood relatives of the head of household, in accordance with Confucian teachings their position was formally and actually subordinate.

Gordon (1998) though has shown that in fact, during the early days of Japan’s industrial revolution systems of management most resembled those of the advanced factories of Europe or North America. Through workers’ resistance to or appropriation of management innovations, the systems diverged. The invention of the tradition of family-like business where capital-labour relations were always harmonious occurred around the time that passage of factory acts and legislation recognising trade unions (Clark, 1979). Business organisations resisted the application of aspects of the ILO convention, arguing for very weak union rights legislation “appropriate to our nation’s feelings”. However, unions were able to adopt the ideology of co-operative labour management to argue that unions and management should have a say in deciding company practice (Gordon, 1998) From the 1960s onwards, there were calls from to adopt Taylorist principles of scientific management in Japan, but these became less
attractive as the Japanese national model of capitalism began to yield more impressive results than the American one.

This paper will argue that the distinctive position of women in the Japanese model of national capitalism, far from being the continuation of consensual patterns of social organisation with deep roots in ancient Japanese culture, was in fact shaped and maintained by post war institutional arrangements and state regulation. It will concentrate on the period before the passing of the Equal Employment Opportunities Act and the pressures of globalization began to interact with changes in Japanese society to produce far reaching changes to the Japanese gender order.

**Theoretical perspective**

Connell identifies a three part structure to gender relations: labour, power and cathexis. The sexual division of labour is determined by the organisation of childcare and housework, the segregation of male and female workers, discrimination and unequal wages. Power includes such aspects as authority and control, hierarchies of states and business, sexual regulations and institutional and interpersonal violence. Cathexis refers to ‘sexual social relationships’ or men and women’s emotional relationship with each other. She differentiates between gender regimes and the gender order. A gender regime refers to the state of play of gender relations in a given institution. For example, state regulation, and workplace organisation. The gender order is the relationship between different gender regimes or “the current state of play in the macro-politics of gender” (Connell, 1987: 20).

The regime of the labour market both reflects and influences what happens in other spheres. The organisation of work and the demands made of workers will affect what happens in the family and the education system; and “in a more general way, the attitudes and principles and patterns of social relations found in the workplace are likely to have a certain congruence with those shown in other social spheres, simply because of the tendency towards consistency in individual personalities and sets of values.” (Dore 1973: 280). Furthermore, labour market operate at the intersection of the productive and reproductive
economies (Elson, 1999). The productive economy consists of paid work, and by conventional economic analysis does not include the essential contribution made to it by the reproductive economy. The reproductive economy includes all those tasks, largely performed by women, which are essential to the continuation of the labour: caring for and maintaining the labour force, bringing up and socialising the next generation of workers, improving the interpersonal skills of workers. Work in the reproductive economy is largely carried out by women.

This will be tempered by institutional arrangements, and state regulation. It is also important not to disregard the role of agency: although As Elson notes: “....labour markets are not only bearers of gender, they are also reinforcers of gender inequality, But different institutional configurations can give different results: some labour markets are more equal than others. Moreover improvements can be brought about by public action, i.e. by the combined action by the state and by groups of active citizens” (Elson 1999: 613).

The impact of firm and state policy on women’s full-time employment

Women came under pressure to leave the jobs they had occupied during the war. Most of the 7 million demobilised servicemen were unemployed (Brown, 1998: 131) and many Japanese expatriates had returned from former colonies. The government tried to secure jobs for these men. Between February 1944 and December 1945 the number of women employed (excluding those employed in agriculture) fell from 5.25 million to 2.31 million (Ibid.: 58). Widows in particular complained that they were often rejected for jobs because they had children, and were therefore in receipt of family allowances (Ogawa, 1997). More women than men were further dismissed in the recessions of 1949-50 and 1952-1953.

Enterprises branches of the Industrial Patriotic Society (Sangyou Houkoku Kai) which comprised both white-collar and blue-collar workers, had been formed to raise the spirits and provide mutual aid for the families of drafted employees. Many of its active members assumed leadership of the widespread factory control movement immediately after the war. A general strike was planned for 1 February 1947 by the six million members of the Industrial Union (Sanbetsu Kaigi) and the General Council of Trade Unions (Sohyou), although
this was called off at the urging of General MacArthur. Under significant pressure from trade unions and other worker militants, a raft of employment legislation was passed, which has the effect of securing male employment. The 1947 Employment Security Law set up a network of public employment offices and prohibited worker-dispatching activities to ensure the employment security of workers. As part of the Emergency Unemployment Counter Measures Law, national government provided funds to local government for local employment measures, the Employment Insurance Law (1975) heavily subsidises wages paid by employers who choose to adjust employed labour by means of lay offs or work suspensions combined with training and education. This was highly esteemed as thought to have saved roughly 800,000 workers from unemployment during the oil crisis. Abegglen wrote,

At whatever level of organisation in the Japanese factory, the worker commits himself on entrance to the company for the remainder of his working career. The company will not discharge him even temporarily except in the most extreme circumstances. (Abegglen, 1958:11)

(Examples or rare sackings that he cited were a man who had been absent for several weeks, following a series of similarly lengthy absences, and another accused of repeated thefts.) Expenditure on welfare benefits, such grants on marriage, childbirth, illness, death, provision of company housing, and subsidised shopping facilities added to the cost of lifetime employment for companies (Matsushima, 1966).

The result of this was there was little numerical flexibility for firms and staff could only be adjusted by 'natural wastage', i.e. not replacing women who left upon marriage or childbirth. Women's short tenure was useful to firms in that it enabled them to attain. Some firms even specified retirement upon marriage in female employees job contracts (Kawashima, 1995). Rohlen (1988) shows how the number of women employed in manufacturing fell rapidly in the first two years following the 1973 oil crisis and how 'natural' wastage, as women left at time of marriage, made possible the continuation of permanent employment policies for company 'core' workers even in time of recession. Other strategies employed by
companies in the 1970s included laying off (predominantly female) part-time workers and suggesting that because of the special economic circumstances, women give up work even before they married or had children. Approximately 700,000-800,000 women left the labour force between 1974-1975 (Fox, 1999: 2).

During the 1960s development policy concentrated on heavy industries and chemical production. Between 1955 and 1970 there was no increase in social and welfare spending, therefore women's caring work in the family took the place of social welfare (Fujita, 1987). Furthermore the expansion in the welfare state which was one of the main providers of jobs for women with some education in Europe simply did not emerge in Japan. This may be one reason why women’s movement into white-collar jobs occurred somewhat later than in the West. Women still occupied one third of clerical jobs in 1960 and one-half in 1980 (Brinton, 1993: 34). For middle class women urbanisation, industrialisation and the concomitant moves towards a nuclear family meant there was less help with childcare and housekeeping from relatives. The rapid rise in men's incomes also meant that it became economically possible for a family to manage on the wages of a sole breadwinner. There is some evidence that mothers also came under social pressure to quit work, as there was a rise in articles in the popular press deploring the supposedly negative effects of working mothers on children's development. Working mothers became the focus of popular debate in the late 1950s, when the women's magazine *Fujin Koron* launched a discussion on whether women had the right to pursue a career other than that of wife and mother: the magazine’s readership generally sided with arguments for the priority of motherhood (Buckley, 1993). A 1963 White Paper on Child Welfare claimed that “a deficiency in the level of nurturing is creating a risk for the children of this generation” and linked “the decline in child welfare” and “women's increased penetration of the workforce” (Buckley, 1994: 155). Cases of death due to improper care or staff shortages in public daycare centres also made the headlines (Knipe Mouer, 1976). This moral panic succeeded in stimulating guilt in at least 2 of the women who answered questionnaires. A 60 year old's answer
to a question about whether she had faced any problems on returning to work after having children wrote:

My children became what is called ‘door key’ children (kaggiko), because there was no-one who could take care of them after school.

A 39 year old employee of a multi-national corporation responded to a questionnaire about problems experienced when returning to work after having children:

In the beginning it was only four hours a week, so there was no difficulty with the children. The only one difficulty was during the weekend, there is no…it is not certain that I will be able to get days off in the weekend, so the children are here alone and I have to work outside, and the children get a little bit embarrassed about the situation.

Unions offered women little protection, since, after the deflation of the 1940s unions moved from including all non-managerial employees to a membership limited to those whose job security was assured. (The corollary of this is that as non-standard forms of employment have increased, the proportion of labour which is unionised has fallen: from around 33% in the 1960s and 1970s to 22.4% in 1998 (Rengo, 1999: 5)). In some cases, trade unions even acted against women’s employment. In 1966, Tokyu Kikan Kogyo (an engine manufacturer) changed its retirement age from 50 years for both men and women to 30 years of age for women only, a result of an agreement between management and an all-male delegation of labour representatives (Shinozawa and Hiroki). There had however been an active feminist movement in Japan before the war and just ten days after the end of the war, on 25 August 1945, the Women’s Committee on Postwar Countermeasures (Sengo taisaku fujin iinkai) was set up, to continue the struggle for female emancipation. The Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) saw raising the status of women as essential to democratisation of Japanese society and were therefore willing to deal with the feminist movement. Article 14 of the new 1947 Japanese
Constitution guaranteed women equal legal rights and freedom from discrimination in political economic or social relations. The Constitution also sought to dismantle the *ie* and to secure equal treatment between the sexes in the household. However, SCAP did little to counter the mass replacement of working women with demobilised soldiers, possibly because in the US, women were coming under the same pressure to leave their wartime occupations.

Legislation, which was ostensibly aimed at protecting women, was often either counterproductive or ineffectual. The 1948 Labour Standards Law institutionalised several provisions for the ‘protection of motherhood’, including six weeks maternity leave both before and after childbirth; the right to request leave for child care, paid menstruation leave; restrictions on overtime and a ban on night work. Carney and O’Kelly (1990) argue that this institutionalised the contingent and marginal character of women’s work, noting that thousands of women workers in railway transport and similar occupations immediately lost their jobs when Labour Standards law came into effect. The rights were in effect difficult to exercise. Courts upheld a firm’s right to refuse a bonus - which could be worth several months salary - to employees who took menstrual leave. The proportion of women taking menstrual leave fell from 26.2% in 1965 to 6% in 1998 (Kawashima, 1995: 285-286). Nonetheless, most women’s groups have continued to support this motherhood protection and have argued that overtime restrictions should be extended to men.

Article four of the Labour Standards Law specified that men and women should received equal pay for equal work. However it did not prohibit differential treatment regarding working or retirement conditions. Until 1966, the Ministry of Labour took the view that terminating a woman’s employment upon marriage did not violate the Labour Standards Law.

Although a series of court judgements from 1966 onwards formally outlawed the practice of companies requiring women to retire at marriage, informally, social expectations and the culture of the workplace continued to lead to women leaving work upon marriage or pregnancy. Women’s jobs outside the home were referred to as an *koshikake* (temporary seat), where women could observe social life (*shakai kengaku*), before retiring upon marriage (*kekkon*)
\textit{taishoku} taking up lifetime employment (\textit{eikyuu shuushoku}) in the home (Iwao, 1993; Woronoff, 1982). A trading company employee told me of the practice of one large firm that would only take on women who lived with their parents. This, she assumed, was to ensure that they were \textit{ojoosan} - respectable young ladies. Parents were expected to attend the firm’s welcome ceremony for new employees and told it was their responsibility to ensure that their daughters retired at marriage. C. Itoh and Co. Ltd., which was at the time the largest trading company in Japan, required that women who attended job interviews were accompanied by their mothers, with whom the interviewers spend more time than with the applicant (Carter and Dilatush, 1976). As the expected tenure of women workers was so short, companies often did not hire female four year university graduates, as their expected stay in the workforce would be even shorter than that of their junior college peers.

Ms. Shirafuji, whose lawsuit against her employer, Sumitomo Electric has been continuing since 1995, described how at every year end party her boss would ask the women what their plans were for the next year, implying that there was no expectation that they would stay with the firm. Another employee of the Sumitomo group claimed that on returning to work after giving birth: she was segregated from other office workers, placed at a desk by the window sitting alone behind her boss and given no work to do for 6 years. Even when there was no official policy, tacit pressure meant many older questionnaire respondents had felt under psychological pressure to leave.

[X company] had a rule for women to quit the job by 25. So I quit when I was 25, regardless of whether they were married or not. Well, you could continue to work for the company, but the working conditions and payment would not be the same level.

[Home-based kimono-wearing teacher describing her earlier career]

A 49 year old clerical worker commented:

In my case, when I was pregnant, as I did not have a job-related skill, I had no choice but to retire, because around me no women took maternity leave. But later
I often regretted that. I shouldn’t have retired from a responsible job. So if my daughter-in-law hopes to work all her life, I’ll help her.

Jobs were heavily gendered. In white collar jobs it was common practice for male employees to expect female workers to serve tea, clean the offices and even polish their shoes. These menial tasks were the target of much dislike among female employees, and serving tea in particular has been the target of industrial action. Female office workers were commonly referred to as ‘office flowers’ (shokuba no hana), with the strong implication that their presence was decorative, and short-term. This has been reflected in recruitment practice. For example, in February 1983, newspapers reported that the labour union at Kinokuniya bookstore was protesting against a memo sent to branches and sales office throughout Japan, which advised against the employment of full time women workers who were “Ugly, short, unsophisticated, or wear glasses” (Shiozawa and Hiroki, 1988: 26).

Although no questions were specifically asked about this, many survey participants mentioned among their dislikes the gendered tasks, which seem to be a integral part of the positions filled by women employees:
My position as a medical clerical worker is lower than that of a pharmacist and I have to do chore work like cleaning the office. [My duties include] Calculation, computer operation, remuneration of medical charges, work in the office (including serving tea, cleaning the office, taking care of the office plants)

[25 year old medical clerical worker]

They treat me as a girl. They think serving tea is a women's job.

[Employee of non-profit making organisation]

As they were expected to retire, female company employees did not receive the same on the job training as their male co-workers. Even now women’s training is often limited to instruction in how to properly greet customers and speak to colleagues. A 27 year old insurance clerk, when asked if there was any difference in the training she and her male co-workers received, answered:

Yes, male staff have training for two months at head office just after being taken on, but female staff have no training and are posted to general clerk [work].

Many companies do seem to have taken on board assumptions that women are essentially short-term workers, unlikely to have, or uninterested in developing skills useful to the company. It is interesting to read the recruitment literature of some of the larger Japanese corporations that stresses the opportunities for female employees to acquire what might be described as human capital for the marriage market. *Brother*, for example emphasised the opportunity to learn tea ceremony at the company dormitory and claimed that learning book-keeping at the company would be useful because it would help women learn how to do household accounts. The ideal path for a female employee was shown in cartoon form: at eighteen she enters the company; at nineteen she prepares for marriage by undergoing bridal training, taking company-provided classes in cooking, sewing, knitting and becoming *onnarrashii* (feminine or womanly); at twenty she dates, and by 21 is at the altar in a wedding dress, quitting the company and using her savings to set up home. (Lo, 1990).
Of course, doing monotonous work, with no chance of advancement hardly encouraged women to stay on at work, but if they did, the system of payment by seniority could mean that long-serving female employees were paid more than the limited jobs they were given merited. Subtle pressure can be brought to bear even on single employees who continue to work. A 27 year old employee of multi-national company, when asked whether her marital status affected the way she was viewed at work answered,

When they ask me ‘You aren't married yet. How old are you?’ It feels unpleasant.

A 32 year old receptionist said,

Very often the staff (especially men) tell me I should marry early and mention about my age. I feel it's mean to say ‘Why don't you marry for your age?’(sic).... I am tired of that.

A 27 year old clerical worker had a similar experience:

My (male) colleagues ask me why I don't get married, or if not, they think about why I'm not getting married. It doesn't force me to retire, but I think my junior colleagues feel ‘sorry’ for me about not getting married

Koike (1995) has pointed out that companies are really exercising statistical discrimination here. Statistical discrimination refers to the case where an employer looks at the behaviour of the average member of a group, and treats all members of the groups accordingly. In this case, the employers take into account that most women will leave work after a short period and are therefore treating all women as short-term employees, although some individual women will wish to work for considerably longer periods than the average. Koike (Ibid.) feels that a potential solution to this problem, which suits both the companies and more tenacious women, has been the introduction of promotion tests and tracking systems within larger companies. In the dual-tracking system most women are placed in short-term semi-skilled positions, but particularly gifted women who
express an interest and show ability can be employed on the same basis as men. However, this system too has perverse results, which will be discussed in chapter six. It also does not take into account the considerable and increasing number of women who do leave upon work at the conventional departure points of marriage or childbirth but return to working almost a full working week.

State regulations and company practice then played a large part in persuading women to leave full-time careers upon marriage or childbirth. But so too did the expectations that women carry out all reproductive work. In the case of Japan, it seems likely that the long hours worked by Japanese company men means that they are unlikely to a share housework or service themselves regarding the cleaning of clothes and provision of meals. Women living in three generation households, at least those where parents or in-laws are able bodied, are somewhat less burdened than other married working women. 38% of Japanese working women using state childcare found that housework was a heavy or very heavy burden; a figure which dropped to only 24% of those living in three generation households and 14% where the mother-in-law had the main responsibility for cooking (Stockman et al, 1995: 114). Nakamura and Ueda (1999) found that living with one’s mother was a significantly positive (at the 5% level ) in determining the likelihood of married women continuing to work after childbirth. However, as Japan becomes increasingly urbanised and family size decreases there are fewer sons and daughters able or willing to accommodate an elderly parent (Ochiai, 1997).

There is actually rather widespread and high quality childcare provision, with subsidised pre-schools serving 40% of three year-olds and 90% of 4 and 5 year olds. Evidence suggests though that the raison d’être of these institutions is to socialise children than to relieve mothers. Nursery and primary schools place significant burdens on mothers’ time. Working or not, mothers may be expected to attend regular parent-teacher meetings, provide highly elaborate o-bento (lunchboxes) according to school recommendations and arrange for children to follow specific timetables, even during the vacations (Allinson, 1996). The result is that Japanese women in most of the post-war period have had little alternative to leaving work while their children are young, and re-entering at a lower level
when children start school. As it is very difficult to re-enter a large company after a career break (and one would in any case not be eligible for seniority pay), women are likely to enter the secondary labour market irregular work.

These changes in the gender regime of work had a reciprocal effect on the gender regime of education. From 1969 to 1989 homemaking courses in schools were compulsory for girls. (After this date, after campaigning from the Women’s Action Group and the Association for the promotion of the study of homemaking by both sexes, homemaking courses became a requirement for boys too.)

It has been noted by several commentators that Japanese parents’ educational aspirations for their sons tend to be rather higher than for their daughters. Brinton (1993) attributes this to parents choosing to invest more in sons’ education as they may expect financial help from sons in later life, and are also aware of the discrimination women face in the labour market and so consider money spent on a four year university education to be wasted only 40% of women going on to higher education enter the four year universities, graduation from which is a usual requirement for entry into career track jobs. This compares to 96% of men going on to further education. The remainder enter two-year junior colleges. (Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda, 1994: 46). Parents may of course also wish to spare their daughters the ‘examination hell’ (juken jigoku) that is a prerequisite for entry to Japan’s top universities). Women anxious to have a career might of course make a rational decision to curtail the length of time they spend in higher education. Brinton cites the comments of a mother who was keen for her daughter to go to a university:

Now my daughter is debating whether to go to junior college or university education. She says that getting a university education will be a handicap (furin) when she looks for a job; it’s true that the situation for women university graduates is very bad and close to 100% of junior college graduates can get jobs. But even so, I think she should go ahead and go to university. It’s a hard situation and it’s hard for me to give advice to my daughter. (Brinton, 1989: 552)
The exception to this model are women who became senmonsha or specialists. Dilatush (1976) noted the relatively high proportion of female professionals (compared to women in management). This would seem to go against state and company views of women as more suited to the home. However, women’s success in these areas was often attributed, in public discourse, to stereotypically female qualities. From 1884 women were allowed to become doctors through taking the national licensing exam in Medical Arts. This was seen as appropriate to women’s supposedly natural ‘nurturant’ qualities. 53% of working women who were college graduates in 1965 worked as teachers (Iwao, 1993). Knipe Mouer refers back to the debates of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, where the increasing number of female teachers was controversial, but gradually accepted as, those who favoured their employment argued, “….their gentle and patient dispositions make them perfectly suited for teaching” (Knipe-Mouer, 1976: 163).

Even in the area of dentistry, which does not have immediate nurturing associations, a case could be made that working did not challenge the gender order. A female dentist, close to retirement age told me:

If you’re a woman you can talk to children more easily. I can say, ‘There, there. It’s okay.’ I feel that the nature of women - to be gentle and caring. That sort of thing is very suitable for my job. So concerning the occupation I feel that I am happy because I am a woman and I feel happy in my job because I am a woman. In my ordinary life occasionally, well often actually, I have had the feeling that I would like to be a man, but as far as my occupation is concerned I have never had that feeling and I am happy to be a woman.

Saso (1990) also notes that some women have been successful in rising in the professions or the civil service. However, she convincingly attributes this to the relative gender-blindness of these areas of employment, which rely upon competitive examination for entry.

**The rise in part-time work**
In 1963 Economic Council of the Prime Minister’s Office proposed “extensive use of young, unmarried female workers in simple jobs”, “only a small number of educated women in supervisory positions”, women returning to their families at “a suitable age for marriage” and rehiring “persons of middle age” (Lebra, 1976b: 110). However, in 1972, the Economic Deliberation Council argued that women’s abilities had been insufficiently developed and recommended that women’s labour be more effectively utilised by making part-time workers a permanent feature of the workforce, rather than regarding them as temporary workers (Shiozawa and Hiroki, 1988).

It is important to explain that regular and irregular work are not necessarily distinguished by a difference in job content or hours worked, but rather in the rewards that accrue to the workers. (In fact, the Ministry of Labour’s 1990 Comprehensive Survey of the Condition of Part Time Workers actually defined the main criterion for inclusion in the survey as being “treated as so-called part-timers” rather than as a regular employee, and went on to classify “part-timers” who worked full time hours as “Part Timer B”).

The term “paato taimu” seems in practice to means merely that such employees do not receive the same fringe benefits as regular employees. Many part-timers work long hours: in 1993 there were 5.65 million workers who were defined by their workplaces as paato, but who worked more than 35 hours per week (Wakisaka, 1997: 144). The category of part-timer is however convenient for employers as part-timers receive few seniority raises and are unlikely to receive bonuses. As the bonuses of full-time employees are usually equivalent to several months' salary, this is a very significant difference.

Changes in Japan’s social structure and government development policy produced the conditions, which encouraged the growth in the female part-time labour force. The number of female part-timers increased by more than 4 times between 1970 and 1984 (Hunter, 1995: 479). By 1965, nearly 70% of women who completed junior high went on to senior high school. This meant that there were far fewer young women available to carry out factory work, and firms being forced to turn to older married part-timers. By 1970, 51% of married women were working (Iwao, 1993).
Under the Japanese Archipelago Reformation Plan (1970), companies were given incentives to locate factories in rural areas. Most factories at the time were clustered around urban areas and the resulting pollution was a matter of public concern (McCormack, 1996). Around the same time, under the Rice Acreage Reduction Policy, rice production was being cut back, which meant that many farming women were looking for work to supplement the family income. The increasing mechanisation of agriculture also freed rural women for part-time work (Shiozawa and Hiroki, 1988). Women often worked to raise money for the increasingly essential cram school fees for their children, and smaller families and childrearing no longer plays such an important role in the lives of women as in the past. As birth rates have fallen, women spend only a few years less than men in the workplace.

Imada (1997) suggests that the increase in part-time work may have retarded change and to have institutionalised women's 'dual burden' of productive and reproductive work. If it is customary for wives to work part-time, this means there is less incentive for men to take equal responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and housework. A married part-time worker with adult children told me:

When I returned to work I didn't like to see my husband's frowning face, but he has changed now. He is okay now, if I don't do too much - if I'm not excessive ....[W]hen I'm very busy and I don't cook good food for him, he weeps. He acts. Usually he doesn't speak a lot. He is a quiet, very kind person, but one day, he made me a whiskey. He offered me a whiskey. He said, ‘Why don't you drink a glass of whiskey?’ I thought something had happened, something serious had happened. And he said, ‘Do you have any complaints?’ I said, ‘No’ and I asked why, and he said, ‘You have been ignoring the housework recently.’ So he thought I had some complaint about him, or home. But it wasn't true: I didn't have any complaints.

The tax and benefits system also was designed in such a way as to offer married women few incentives to work full-time. In 1949 Sharp report recommended that a new tax system should be devised centred on the individual rather than the  ie.
A new tax system based on this came into effect the following year. Tax was based upon the individual but deductions were permitted for dependants, with deductions of equal value for both spouses and dependants. In 1961, an effort was made to recognise the contribution to women’s work within the home (*naiyo no ko*) and to distinguish spouses from children by the introduction of the Deduction for Spouses. (State payments to mothers had in fact been a major demand of almost all leading feminists in the Taisho period, Molony, 1999) However, once a wife’s income exceeded a certain amount this deduction was lost. (This was changed to the benefit being phased out gradually as income rose, following complaints from companies that their workforce were trying to cut back their hours, just at the busiest time of year (Higuchi, 1997).

The system was changed again in 1987. Since 1975 the difference between the allowance for spouses and the allowance for child dependants had been eliminated. In the wake of a backlash to a recently introduced and very unpopular consumption tax. From 1987, if a woman earned less than 700,000 yen, then her husband not only received the 350,000 yen Deduction for Spouses, but a further 350,000 yen to in recognition of the woman’s *naiyo no ko*: in effect, wages for household, but paid to the husband. This is a strong disincentive to women seeking to further their careers: there is in fact a negative correlation among recipients of benefit between the wages of husband and wife.

If a second earner in a couple earns more than 1.3 million yen annually then, valuable tax breaks are lost, and the primary earner may also lose their entitlement to company family allowances (Osawa and Houseman, 1998). According to the Japan Institute for Workers’ Evolution (2001: 2) “More than 30% of part-time housewife workers adjust their income to match what is allowable by Japanese law and not to exceed their husbands’ monthly spouse allowance.”

This was reflected in responses from focus group and survey participants. One respondent made it clear that this had affected her work choices:

There is a tax regulation. If I earn up top one million yen, my husband can get tax relief for his wife and children. If my income exceeds one million yen, the tax relief….he can’t get tax relief, so I have to work less than 120 hours a month.
Sometimes this encouragement can be even more overt. According to one focus group participant:

I am working as a part-timer. I pay tax, but, the.. I mean the clerk at the tax office said a few years ago, you should ...you work too hard...too much. If you work this much, you have.. you don’t have to pay this tax, something like that. If I cared about such a small thing, quite small, I can’t work, so I don’t care ...that kind of thing. But I pay. I mean the pension, I pay the health insurance by myself, so the city tax.....so I know how much, how can I say, disadvantage I have. And I don’t.... so much, I mean I have no bonus.

In 1986 the Pension Fund Law was revised. Changes made it possible for non-working women to claim retirement benefits, although they had not paid towards a state retirement plan, even if their husbands had not paid a supplementary premium. Widows were also entitled to 75% of their husbands’ pension. A working woman who paid social security benefits, on the other hand, would receive retirement benefits in her own right, but after husband’s death, she would have to choose between this benefit and her husband’s. She would therefore either forsake Bereaved Family Benefit or the benefits for which she has made contributions.

Other benefits also strengthened preferential treatment for married couples where the woman did not work full-time (Higuchi, 1997). If a person works less the 75% of a normal working week or earns less than 1.3 million yen per annum, she does not have to pay health insurance or social security payments, and is treated as a dependent of her husband (or father).

This system is particularly likely to deter educated women from continuing full-time participation in the labour force. Disparity in educational attainment between a couple is rare in Japan, so a highly educated high-earning husband, is likely to have a better paid job which would enable his also highly educated wife to stay home or work part-time. There is in fact, among couples claiming
spousal deductions, a negative correlation between the earnings of husbands and wives (Higuchi, 1997: 114).

The system also disproportionately subsidises higher income couples, as women in blue collar occupations are relatively keen to continue to work full-time after marriage or childbirth (Roberts, 1994).

Conclusion
Labour markets are 'bearers of gender' and so the positions women hold within them will both be restricted by expectations of women's role in the reproductive economy, and will be shaped to some extent by the way men and women generally relate to each other in society at large. State regulation and company practice in Japan have interacted with general expectations of the role of women in Japan, and have played a large part in constructing a gender order in which men and women's experience of employment is very different. When young, Japanese women have usually been confined to routine jobs with little or no training and expected to leave upon marriage or childbirth. Societal and demographic change, educational advance and the increased acceptance of the ideology of equal labour rights have meant that Japanese women's determination to continue to work has gradually increased. A minority of determined women have succeeded in establishing themselves as professionals and other women have re-entered the workforce as irregular employees. Both as short term regular employees and as irregular workers, Japanese women have enabled Japanese companies to maintain secure and well-rewarded employment for most male company employees. The Japanese national model of capitalism though emerged in the very specific conditions of the immediate post war period. As Japan becomes ever more integrated into a very different international economy, this model is undergoing changes, which will both impact upon and be affected by the actions and choices of men and women within it.

Bibliography


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