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Contemporary Women's Employment in Japan: The Effects of State-Mandated Gender Roles, Wars, and Japan, Inc.

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN JAPAN: THE EFFECTS OF
STATE-MANDATED GENDER ROLES, WARS, AND JAPAN, INC.**

SUBMITTED TO

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Chapter One: Japan's Woman Dichotomy

I first became interested in studying Japanese women because of my two study abroad trips to Japan, during which I spent time with two separate host families, first living in Yokohama and then in Kyoto. I was able to compare my host families (and the host families of other American students studying in Japan) with my own family, and with the families of my friends in the US. I came to realize that, while not a single one of my American friends had a “stay-at-home” mother, who quit work upon the birth of her first child, all but two of my acquaintances in Japan had host mothers who did not engage in paid work outside of the home, and neither of my own host mothers had worked since having children. Both of my host mothers had met their husbands while working in the same company (it was said among fellow study abroad students that working as an office lady in Japanese companies was basically the companies' dating service for their male employees), and had left their jobs at some point after meeting their husbands, my respective host fathers.

The family situation was quite different from where I grew up, and became the subject of endless discussions between my fellow American students and myself. We spoke of our *shufu* (housewife) host mothers and often-absent host fathers, the frequency of laundry-doing (every day!) and the deliciousness of our home-cooked meals (we had french fries and gyoza last night, can you believe it?), all the while under the impression that our host families were the modern Japanese norm. At the time I did not give much thought to the fact that we were part of a special group of relatively well-to-do families, who had the resources and circumstances that allowed

them to host foreign students, which is not necessarily the norm. It is comparable to mine and my friends' family situations - comfortable, middle class, privileged.

Nonetheless, it was this perceived difference between what I at the time viewed as the “average” American family and the “average” Japanese family that ultimately caused me to pursue the topic of Japanese women. Despite savoring my delicious daily homemade meals and the comfort of having a host mom at home most of the time to socialize with, my inner feminist was wondering if this lifestyle was really what the majority of Japanese women aspired to, even in 2010, the year I first visited Japan. My image of modern young Japanese girls, who go through the same education as boys, sisters who are assumed to be raised on relatively equal footing with their brothers, did not match up with my new image of grown, married Japanese women. I began to wonder from where this disconnect arose. As I read about the many facets of the lives of Japanese women, employment jumped out at me as one of the issues that still seems in need of progress in terms of equality and discrimination, just like I have observed in my home country. Japan and the United States are supposed to be modern nations, at the forefront of progressive thinking and social equality, Japan priding itself on its broad middle class and the US on its supposed equal treatment of all citizens under the law. As it turns out, the well-known English phrase “All *men* are created equal” rings a little too true, in its disregard for women as equal citizens as they struggle for better treatment in the workplace even today.

Japanese society retains many practices designed to encourage women to become housewives, seemingly still promoting the traditional family structure with pre-designated gender roles, i.e. husband as the provider and wife as the caregiver. Japanese culture is so visible and prominent in other cultures all over the world; yet little attention appears to be paid to the

lack of prominent businesswomen in Japan. I'm not even talking about prime ministers or CEOs; I'm talking about the typical, career-track company jobs, of which a mere 6 percent were occupied by women in 2010.¹

Japan is certainly not alone in allowing continuing barriers to equality for women in the workplace. Gathering information on women's issues in Japan may also have implications for women in other cultures who are struggling with the same issues. All women, in all parts of the world, continue to experience the effects of discrimination, misogyny, and double standards; studying the societal and cultural causes of these attitudes may help to take further steps in eradicate these common offenses against women. Japan presents an interesting dichotomy: today it is one of the most advanced industrialized, educated, and safest nations in the world; how could such a place continue to deny its women equal treatment in the classroom, in the workplace, and in society at large?

Tackling all of these various aspects of women's lives would be a daunting task for an undergraduate thesis, so I am choosing to focus on employment under the assumption that full-time employment is a good measure of women's autonomy in modern society, and that the income earned gives individuals the independence to choose their lifestyles, without the financial pressure to depend on another income earner. Of course, there are many other perspectives from which to write about women's issues in Japan, but I have decided that employment is the most significant to me for the following reasons.

I look at women advancing in the work world as an indication of their fuller integration into Japanese society. Women have long been prevented from participating in this aspect of

¹ Chad Steinberg and Masato Nakane, "Can Women Save Japan?" (IMF Working Paper: Asia and Pacific Department, 2012) p. 6.

society, and the fact that they are still often prevented from pursuing careers because of their gender is backwards and archaic, in my opinion. I understand that my opinions come from an American viewpoint; Americans indeed have a long history of imposing our own beliefs on Japan and the rest of the world. However, I strongly believe that the importance of basic human rights and well-being of women far exceeds the importance of cultural differences among nations. Women are women no matter where they are, and women are treated unequally almost everywhere and even viciously in some areas. The marginalization of women in Japan is of a more hidden and less violent nature than that in many other parts of the world, but that does not make sexism and misogyny in Japan any less deserving of criticism and protest.²

My research is centered around the questions: How can such a modernized country, considered by many to be the cleanest, friendliest, most welcoming place to visit (certainly surpassing the United States on such standards), not be more welcoming of women in employment? Further, what are the main problems hindering women in employment today, and from where do these problems originate? That is, how did the present situation for women's employment in Japan come to light? I endeavor to answer these questions, beginning by uncovering the major issues in women's employment and then tracing their origins back in history to discover when and why they developed into what they are today.

² Japan is far from alone in its poor treatment of women in employment. According to the April 12th issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, women working full-time in the United States earn 79 percent of the weekly pay for full-time working men, and that doesn't even take into account differences across races. In addition, the article points out that 46 percent of women say they have experienced gender-based discrimination at work, while men are much less likely to detect instances of discrimination. (Colleen McCain Nelson, "Poll: Most Women See Bias in the Workplace," *The Wall Street Journal* 12 April 2013: A4. Print.)

Current Literature on Japanese Women in Employment

I chose employment on the grounds that young women, after graduating from college having had an equal opportunity for education with their male peers (despite many cases of unequal treatment by teachers and other students in the classroom), are then supposed to have the ability to choose their future, be that marriage, a career, or further schooling, etc. This is not often the case, unfortunately, which will be discussed later in this paper. Long term employment, as I mentioned above, provides financial independence, which is the precursor to other forms of independence for women. It is the first step toward showing society women's capability and talents, and dismantling the commonly held beliefs that women do not belong in the 'male' workplace. Recent work done in this area help to show the way women have made spaces for themselves within the employment sphere in Japan, as I will discuss below.

Literature in English on this subject has been surprisingly sporadic. Focusing largely on women in labor, women's history, and feminist studies, I found that most of the studies were to be found in online and printed journal articles, largely dealing with present-day employment; essay collections based loosely on the field of Japanese women's studies, which include one or more essays that deal with women's engagement with paid employment; and books, which cover a range of topics. Here I will discuss a few of the most relevant works that I have gathered.

First is a book written by Jean Renshaw, a management consultant and professor of management in the US, called *Kimono in the Boardroom: The Invisible Evolution of Japanese Women Managers*.³ Renshaw uses various academic disciplines to study Japanese female managers, including management theory, economics, psychology, sociology, and social and

³ Jean Renshaw, *Kimono in the Boardroom: The Invisible Evolution of Japanese Women Managers* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1999).

cultural anthropology. She interviewed several women managers, gaining an inside perspective while also keeping an outside perspective on the “invisible” achievements of these women, using cross-cultural data on labor and the economy as an objective and quantitative measure. Renshaw states that “A successful organization blends the manager, the organization, and the environments... How these elements mesh determines whether individuals and organizations succeed or fail,”⁴ going on to assert that the Japanese work environment, paired with long-held organizational structure and social conventions, are particularly restricting to women seeking traditionally “male” roles in the workplace. She says that Japanese men, especially older men, do not have a mental framework for comprehending the evolvement of women in managerial positions due to the widely held beliefs concerning gender roles and “proper” female behavior - women managers go against all of the old Japanese cultural constructs of femininity, rendering themselves literally incomprehensible to the male mind. As such, these female managers are swept under the rug, effectively denied existence in the Japanese worldview. This concept is neatly illustrated by Renshaw’s interview with a male Japanese executive, who was of the belief that female managers do not exist in Japan; yet when pressed about his wife, who was in fact president of one of the family companies and also an operating manager, he admitted, “She’s not exactly a manager. Well, I guess she’s kind of a manager. She’s my wife.”⁵

The second more extensive source is Tachibanaki Toshiaki’s *The New Paradox for Japanese Women: Greater Choice, Greater Inequality*, translated by Mary E. Foster.⁶ In the book, Tachibanaki discusses Japanese society as it pertains to women and women’s issues,

⁴ Renshaw 6.

⁵ Renshaw 8.

⁶ Toshiaki Tachibanaki, *The New Paradox for Japanese Women: Greater Choice, Greater Inequality*, translated by Mary E. Foster (International House of Japan, Inc.: Tokyo, 2010).

tackling many topics, such as income distribution, equal opportunity and the lack thereof, challenging the widely held belief that Japan is a classless society, and the lack of review on the topic of inequalities among women.⁷ Only about half of his book deals with Japanese women's employment, as there is a considerable portion of the book that describes the effect of education and class on various aspects of the lives of Japanese women, which provides insightful information despite the fact that it does not completely pertain directly to analysis on women in the workplace. In his discussion of women's employment Tachibanaki talks about the gender inequalities in Japanese companies and the influence of men over women's social status and opportunity. He brings up a long-standing debate over whether homemaking women or working women lead "better" lives, taking into consideration that many women take an in-between path by engaging in part-time work. He describes how men have an impact on almost all aspects of women's lives, including their financial status as homemakers, marital status, the gendered division of work in the household and in companies, et cetera. Childbirth also presents women with the critical decision of whether or not to continue working, and many women still choose to leave their job in favor of raising children at home, while men are never presented with such a decision.⁸ The deepest problem, according to Tachibanaki, lies in hiring and promotion practices at Japanese companies, where discrimination and sexism abounds. There have been improvements since the promulgation of various laws banning such discrimination, but stronger

⁷ Tachibanaki xv.

⁸ He goes on to say that it is the woman's choice to work, to marry and to have children, and that there are many obstacles to this scheme; such challenges will give women's lives meaning and they should not resent those whose "dreams are fulfilled," instead accepting it and moving forward on another path.

regulation and monitoring will be a necessity if it is to be fully eliminated.⁹ Otherwise there may be serious consequences for Japanese society as a result.

“Can Women Save Japan?” is an International Monetary Fund working paper published online by Chad Steinberg and Masato Nakane.¹⁰ In it, they claim that Japan’s rapidly aging population is causing the steady fall of economic growth, and examines the possibility that raising female labor participation can alter this trend.¹¹ They look at several countries and find that smaller families, higher female education, and lower marriage rates are all associated with the higher female participation rates within countries, and all of which Japan currently experiences.¹² It is each respective country’s national policies and practices concerning the promotion of gender equality that provide the variance in situations for working women across countries. Women in Japan face two major hurdles to participating in Japan’s workforce: the prevalence of gendered dual-track systems where women are often not given the long-term career-track jobs, which are normally reserved for males; and many women drop out of working up on their first childbirth.¹³ The authors propose that increasing women’s attachment to work through reducing the gender gap in career positions and providing better support for working mothers will help improve the declining workforce in Japan.¹⁴ In other words, if there are viable methods to have children taken care of during work hours, women will have more incentive to have children while also bolstering the labor force with their participation.

⁹ Tachibanaki 269.

¹⁰ Steinberg and Nakane.

¹¹ Steinberg and Nakane 1.

¹² Steinberg and Nakane 13.

¹³ Steinberg and Nakane 1.

¹⁴ Steinberg and Nakane 1.

Another relevant article is Charles Weathers' "Equal Opportunity for Japanese Women: What Progress?" published in *The Japanese Economy* journal.¹⁵ The article tackles all of the important issues plaguing women in the workforce, including the dual-track system, childcare leave, sexual harassment, long hours and other poor work conditions, and unsupportive public attitudes surrounding working women. Weathers claims that while there have been numerous improvements in the field of female employment, there are still more numerous impediments to women's success in Japanese companies that need to be addressed before there will be any significant improvement.¹⁶ The government has been making efforts toward equality, but will have to take a much stronger stance in order to get the message across to all of corporate Japan.

Yet another article that deals with women's employment is Shiho Futagami's "Non-Standard Employment in Japan: Gender Dimensions," in which she discusses changing employment patterns among women, including the rise of non-standard employment.¹⁷ She argues that Japanese culture is a major factor in the explanation for this rise, stereotyping women in terms of their role in society and giving rise to the "glass ceiling" for women in Japanese companies, excluding them from management and regular-track jobs.¹⁸ The issues of the glass ceiling and gender roles are not unique to Japan, however there are nuances to Japanese culture (and to each country's culture) which differentiate it from elsewhere, and many of the manifestations of these issues prove to be unique to Japanese society.

¹⁵ Charles Weathers, "Equal Opportunity for Japanese Women: What Progress?" *The Japanese Economy* 33.4 (2006).

¹⁶ Weathers 17.

¹⁷ Shiho Futagami, "Non-standard Employment in Japan: Gender Dimensions," *International Institute for Labour Studies Discussion Paper* (IILS Publications, Geneva, Switzerland 2010).

¹⁸ Futagami vii.

Helen Macnaughtan writes an enormously relevant essay called “From ‘Post-War’ to ‘Post Bubble’: Contemporary Issues for Japanese Working Women,” which deals with women’s participation in employment since World War II.¹⁹ She argues that in the post-war years it was important for Japan’s economic success to harness female labor, and that a special “female employment system” developed during those years that defines women’s work today in the post-bubble economy.²⁰ She argues that government legislation has been both emancipating and constraining in its efforts to ‘protect’ women due to their ‘weaker’ physiology, and that equality has been “implemented on paper”²¹ but has yet to be applied to real life.

Rising Suns, Rising Daughters is a book co-written by Joanna Liddle and Sachiko Nakajima, which does not directly deal with women’s employment but with women’s history, the changing position of women and gender relations in Japan.²² They argue that gender is central to class constructions, and that class and gender are important resources for power struggles among nations.²³ They relate the feminist movements in Japan with the emergence of middle-class women from the domestic sphere into political engagement and work, and the women’s liberation movement.²⁴ While it may not be directly applicable to women’s employment, this book deals with much of the outside factors that have great influence over women’s participation in employment, making it a significant source of information topical to this thesis.

¹⁹ Helen Macnaughtan, “From ‘Post-War’ to ‘Post-Bubble’: Contemporary Issues for Japanese Working Women” in *Perspectives on Work, Employment, and Society in Japan*, edited by Peter Matanle and William Lunsing (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, NY 2006).

²⁰ Macnaughtan 40.

²¹ Macnaughtan 32.

²² Joanna Liddle and Sachiko Nakajima, *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters: Gender, Class, and Power in Japan* (Zed Books Ltd.: New York, New York, 2000).

²³ Liddle and Nakajima 1.

²⁴ Liddle and Nakajima 1.

Kaye Broadbent's *Women's Employment in Japan: The Experience of Part-Time Workers* examines the inequalities in employment between women and men, particularly in the realm of part-time versus regular employment as it pertains to the gendered division of labor between genders.²⁵ It shows the extent of the institutionally reinforced inequalities and divisions between part-time and full-time work, and argues that the gendered division of labor in Japan is the root cause of the concentration of women in the part-time sector.²⁶

Junko Kumamoto-Healey states in her article "Women in the Japanese Labour Market, 1947-2003: A Brief Survey," in the *International Labour Review* that there have been significant improvements to the status of women, particularly in legislative changes concerning women's employment.²⁷ She argues that the Japanese state "eventually concerned itself with an improvement in the status of women as it had long been concerned with setting the framework for industrial relations in general,"²⁸ and that it may have been a combination of private interest groups and public opinion that has spurred government interest in changing the legislation.²⁹

Time for an Intervention

What struck me during my research of this topic was that there was hardly a lack of studies done on Japanese women, i.e. women's history, feminism, et cetera, but books that met

²⁵ Kaye Broadbent, *Women's Employment in Japan: The Experience of Part-Time Workers*, (RoutledgeCurzon: New York NY 2003).

²⁶ Broadbent 2.

²⁷ Junko Kumamoto-Healey, "Women in the Japanese Labour Market, 1947-2003: A Brief Survey," *International Labour Review*, 144.4 (2005).

²⁸ Kumamoto-Healey 469.

²⁹ Kumamoto-Healey 469-470.

all of my research criteria (Japan, women, employment) were relatively rare, especially studies focusing on women's employment after the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s.

As has been the general trend amongst the literature on this topic, there is a focus on employment as an isolated issue, drawing mostly from present-day cultural and social pressures for explanations. This is a further manifestation of the paucity of studies on this topic, as there are not many correlations drawn between the various factors that determine women's employment in Japan, mainly historical origins of the problems women encounter in the workplace today. I would like to propose that we cannot claim to understand the situation of women in Japan until we understand the background behind it - that is, where they began the struggle, how they have fought, and how they are still fighting today. The past is inextricably connected to the present. It is the sometimes ignored, often disjointed history of Japanese women that defines their current predicament, making it one of the most important aspects of the multi-faceted subject of Japanese women's employment. This thesis will draw connections between events in Japan's modern history and the current climate of women's company employment, emphasizing that today's attitudes, beliefs, and practices are a direct result of social initiatives put in place beginning in Japan's industrialization era.

The subsequent chapters then will explain relevant historical movements and events as they pertain to current problems and issues in women's employment today. In Chapter 2, I take a look at the present day, pointing out the many important issues and blockages for women in the workforce in Japan today. In the past few years, the government has been feeling more pressure to make women more comfortable in the workplace and cracking down on discrimination and harassment, due to the necessity to harness all of Japan's potential workers at the growing

urgency of the rapid population decline that will wreak havoc on Japanese society if there continues to be minimal or no improvement.

In Chapter 3, I will begin by examining state initiatives in the Meiji Reformation in 1868 that went on to influence gender roles and behaviors through the following century, as well as influences of the West and of the first Japanese feminists on later women's employment. The Meiji Reformation (or Revolution) was a time of great upheaval and transformation in Japan and many changes were brought about in Japanese society. It is, however, this transformational era, considered to be Japan's leap into modernity, which left behind many of Japan's older traditions in favor of new ideas and practices, while keeping others, and this had an effect on women's lives in more ways than one.

Chapter 4 builds upon this narrative, covering the World War II era up to the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s. These decades appear to be considerably more fruitful for the working woman in Japan, but are certainly not without drawbacks. While women in greater and greater numbers entered into traditionally male-dominated universities and lines of work, this time period also saw the growth of gender-discriminatory practices within companies which still dominate the employment scene for Japanese women. The decades after World War II were rather detrimental for women in the workplace, perhaps veiled by the general prosperity seen in the Japanese economy at the same time. Developments within corporate practice and social attitudes after World War II result in several of the major problems that we can see in Japanese women's employment today.

Indeed, it is an interesting time for Japanese women. There are still many obstacles to overcome, but with the help of several external factors and their predecessors who have paved

the way for progress, today's Japanese young women find themselves poised to take on these obstacles despite the out-dated and sexist attitudes of many Japanese men and the older generation. In Chapter 5 I will summarize the main issues described in this thesis, and look at what kind of changes and progressions have been won. Then, I will make a projection on what I think the future holds for female employment. I will say right now that the state of women's employment in Japan will be contingent upon the government's steadfast enforcement of equal treatment laws, and social support networks for working mothers. Protection under the law for working women will help expedite the social change that is needed for an equitable work environment.

Chapter 2: The State of Women's Employment in Contemporary Japan

“I think it's a good thing. The parasites have unintentionally created an interesting movement. Politicians now have to beg women to have babies. Unless they create a society where women feel comfortable having children and working, Japan will be destroyed in a matter of fifty or a hundred years. And child subsidies aren't doing it. Only equality is.”

-Shimomura Mistuko, director of the Gender Equity Center in Fukushima Prefecture³⁰

Japan faces many economic hardships in the not-so-far future due to population decrease and a shrinking labor force. The nation is facing a record-low fertility rate of 1.25, one of the lowest in the world.³¹ If current population trends continue, 36 percent of Japan's population will be over the age of sixty-five by 2040,³² and its dependency ratio is projected to reach 87 percent by 2050.³³ That means that the number of potential workers ages fifteen to sixty-four is shrinking rapidly, to the point where it will constitute just half of the total population by 2050. This will have serious consequences for the economy and the populace. Presently, the situation of women's employment participation in Japan is spotty at best, and dismal at worst. Especially in comparison with many other industrialized nations, Japan's female workforce is conspicuously under-utilized and the numbers of working women are quite disparate from the male workforce - in 2012 female labor participation was 25 percentage points lower than male participation, besting only South Korea in this respect.³⁴ If the effects of the shrinking population are to be

³⁰ Quoted in Leonard J. Schoppa, *Race for the Exits: The Unraveling of Japan's System of Social Protection* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York 2006) p. 150.

³¹ Francis McCall Rosenbluth “The Political Economy of Low Fertility,” in *The Political Economy of Japan's Low Fertility* edited by Francis McCall Rosenbluth (Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA 2007) p. 3.

³² Steinberg and Nakane 4.

³³ Macnaughtan 49.

³⁴ Steinberg and Nakane 7.

lessened, and if the population decline itself is to be addressed, Japan is going to need to find ways to facilitate the inclusion of women in employment on equal footing with its male workers.

The main reason for Japan's low amount of female (long-term) participation in company employment is the country's basic economic model that was created in the immediate post-World War II period when corporations were emerging as the new source of power and influence over Japanese society. This model takes Japan's already gendered division of labor and capitalizes upon it, relegating women to the domestic sphere of caretaking and child-rearing, and men to the public and corporate sphere with the lack of adequate welfare, and care for children and the elderly. Housewives then became a necessity for the successful functioning of a family with children, and there was no perceived need for economic and political leaders to promulgate social support for two-income families. Decades have passed since this model became a systematically enforced barrier for women in careers who do not necessarily choose the housewife path but do not have another viable lifestyle should they decide to have children, as in the case of my first host mother. These women are forced out of their jobs because of the social pressure which says that good mothers are full-time mothers, and the pressure from corporate culture which is unwelcoming and inflexible for women in general, let alone working mothers. Many women find alternative ways to continue earning income after having children, but this is almost exclusively on a lower-level, lower-pay basis than their regular job before children and is usually on a part-time schedule.

The difficulty of maintaining both full-time careers family lives has been made nearly impossible for women in Japan because the system sustains itself through the continued cooperation of both sexes in playing into their predetermined roles in society and allows for little

deviance from the system. However, as mentioned above, this system is no longer viable in an increasingly globalized society that has brought ideas of empowerment and individuality that compete with the traditional Japanese ideas of conformity and community, as they put more value on personal development and career success than the pressure to fulfill their role as a housewife and mother. Shifting outlooks among women and the younger generation in general have resulted in Japan's birthrate hitting record lows in the last few decades, a problem that will wreak havoc on the economy if not dealt with efficiently and expediently. Correcting the birth rate will mean shifting public thought and widespread social beliefs to be more accepting and supportive of working mothers. There are several obstacles blocking progress toward this end, which will be examined below.

The Current Climate for Women's Employment

The question remains, what are the central issues and impediments women face when trying to maintain work in Japan today? What kinds of jobs do they hold? What kinds of challenges do they encounter because of their gender? How and why are these unfair challenges permitted to continue? This chapter will examine the current status of female labor market participation in Japan in the hope of addressing some of these issues. Basically speaking, much of the answer lies in women's engagement in part-time and temporary work, discriminatory hiring and promoting practices among companies along with issues of harassment and unequal treatment in the office, in the difficulties encountered by women in trying to maintain balance between work and family, and in the self-perpetuating ideologies and systems which have kept women entrenched in domestic and caretaking roles. In this chapter, I will explain the factors at

work that make the employment situation dire for women in Japan, starting with the division of labor between genders both in companies and in the home; later I will show the difficulties of holding a career as a woman, particularly company practices that are based on the assumption that women will quit working on having their first child; lastly, the effects that these factors have on the Japanese population and the economy as a result.

Types of Work

The first question to ask is in what kinds of employment do women participate, and why? As stated above, women are heavily concentrated in jobs labeled as ‘part-time,’ or ‘non-regular.’ I will be using the term ‘non-regular,’ as opposed to ‘part-time,’ for the purpose of this study because oftentimes ‘part-time’ workers in Japan are subject to working the same amount of hours as their full-time coworkers. Not only that, but, according to Charles Weathers in his article for *The Japanese Economy*, “42 per cent of workplaces covered in a survey by Japan Institute of Workers’ Evolution, ‘part-time’ or ‘clerical track’ workers perform largely the same tasks as their higher-status and higher-paid regular-track counterparts.”³⁵ ‘Non-regular’ can also include temporary or seasonal jobs; these are equally as important in the discussion of women participating in the labor force. All of these types of jobs are the counterparts to the ‘regular,’ or full-time jobs dominated by men. The ‘regular’ jobs provide legendary job security, income based on seniority, yearly bonuses, and several other fringe benefits. Such benefits are by and large denied to non-regular workers. Thus, with women being the primary source of non-regular work in Japan (although this trend is lessening, as more young men have trouble with finding

³⁵ Weathers 25.

‘regular’ work at companies due to the slow economy),³⁶ it is largely women who are denied the comforts of job security, health benefits, growing income, et cetera. Non-regular jobs can be found in any sector of employment, but the majority of them constitute clerical and office work at companies, large and small, and in the service sector.

It is no secret that women are heavily concentrated in non-regular work. A 2010 survey shows that just 6 percent of career (regular) employees are women,³⁷ and another survey in 2007 found that 62.8 percent of non-regular employees are women.³⁸ Women made up 41.4 percent of the total work force in 2007.³⁹ Why does such a discrepancy continue to exist, in such an advanced and industrial society as Japan? What causes women to be so congregated into non-regular work? Numerous reasons can be provided, but the most pervasive is the relegation of women to the domestic, as opposed to the public, working arena.

For centuries, women have been kept in the household as the manager of the household and family affairs, the responsibility for domestic upkeep, child-raising, and care for the elderly falling largely on the wife’s shoulders. Men have contributed almost nothing to helping with chores or watching the children - in fact, on average, they dedicate a meager eight minutes per day to household tasks, compared to an average of four hours of housework done by women.⁴⁰ This notion of gendered labor, based on the belief that men are the breadwinners and women are the housekeepers, has yet to leave Japanese consciousness, and in the present situation this

³⁶ Weathers 23.

³⁷ Steinberg and Nakane 6.

³⁸ Futagami 2.

³⁹ Futagami 2.

⁴⁰ Merry White, “Contemporary Japanese Women: Family, Education, and Workplace,” in *Women and Work: A Handbook*, edited by Paula J. Dubeck and Kathryn Borman (Garland Publishing: New York, NY 1996) p. 465.

causes great strain on women's ability to simultaneously maintain a balance between work and responsibilities at home. There are numerous examples of the demeaning and sexist view toward women who achieve success: former Prime Minister Hashimoto maintains that the falling birthrate is due to the higher education level of women, who are being distracted from their duties in the home. The prestigious schools who admit these women are also charged with encouraging this distraction, for women's entry into these schools will "change the very nature of the school and excellence will deteriorate."⁴¹ This attitude extends beyond the educational realm, posing a major influence on the companies especially with respect to the hiring and promoting of employees based on their gender. It has led to institutionalized, systematic discrimination in hiring practices, a topic which I will discuss more fully below.

Women in Non-Regular Work

Women are often excluded from attaining high-status jobs in companies via both social pressures and the nature of the companies. There are many barriers in Japanese companies that keep women out of higher-level positions, one of the most prominent being the dual-track hiring process. This system involves the potential hire choosing to pursue either the regular, 'career' track, or the non-regular, dead-end track, also referred to as 'part-time,' the 'general' track, 'non-standard,' or 'clerical' track.⁴² The overwhelming bias for women is that they should choose the

⁴¹ Renshaw 142.

⁴² The terminology for these different types of jobs is rather arbitrary among the literature. 'Non-regular' jobs, for the purpose of this thesis, are inclusive of contract and temporary work as well, but the term does not include entrepreneurship or the self-employed. 'Regular-track' and 'career-track' are used interchangeably to refer to full-time, long-term employment jobs.

latter track, and many in fact do take this route, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of women becoming stuck in low-level positions whether they want to or not.

Companies perceive a risk in hiring women to their regular-track jobs because of the idea that women have traditionally had a tendency to drop out of their jobs upon marriage or childbirth. This is not the only reason why companies have a preference for hiring women to general-track jobs; there another major, business-related reason also influences these hiring practices. Companies like to hire more non-regular employees because it saves money. Not only do they pay non-regular workers significantly less, they also feel no need to offer them fringe benefits, pay bonuses or severance pay. The average salary for non-regular workers is 61 percent that of regular workers, and when one factors average wage differentials between men and women, the largest wage gap occurs between male regular workers and female non-regular workers, the latter earning just 49 percent of the average wage of the former, according to the Basic Survey on Wage Structure.⁴³

These disparities pose a serious problem from many perspectives, but women receive the lowest pay both in the regular and non-regular job sectors. Companies use these normalized wage inequalities to their benefit as they increase the number of non-regular employees and decrease the number of regular employees to save on salary and benefit costs. From 1997 to 2004, the number of regular positions decreased by 4.32 million, and the number of non-regular positions increased by 3.97 million, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare.⁴⁴ By 2007 non-regular workers (male and female) constituted 37.8 percent of the total workforce,

⁴³ Quoted in Futagami 3.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Weathers 17.

according to the Survey of Diversification of Employment Status of the same year.⁴⁵

Considering that women make up almost two-thirds of non-regular employees, this adds on extra salary savings for the companies that employ them. However, even when one makes the distinction only between male and female employees, inclusive of both regulars and non-regulars, the wage gap is still a significant 28 percent.⁴⁶

On the non-financial side, non-regulars are not provided with job security and are often hired and fired at will as the company has economic growths and downturns, while the regular workers are retained. This has led to the use of non-regular workers as a sort of insurance for regular employees against economic hard times. One may laud the high participation of women in the labor force in Japan, but the reality is that the majority of working women are in the non-regular sector, and that they have not been effectively included in the same tier of employment that men have dominated for decades. If women are continually relegated to non-regular positions, they will not be given the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder, nor the potential of raising their wage; they have little to no job security, and accept poorer working conditions than their regular counterparts because they can be let go on a whim. Women non-regular workers are viewed more as a human support system for regular male employees rather than a genuine interest in integrating women into the regular workforces, as Helen Macnaughtan aptly states: “[Companies use] non-regular labour, particularly part-time female workers, as peripheral, or as a corporate cost-cutting measure rather than as a means to bring women into the core

⁴⁵ Quoted in Futagami 2.

⁴⁶ Steinberg and Nakane 19.

workforce and improve the overall labour market or use women workers in a positive or constructive manner.”⁴⁷

It is the unfortunate case that the women themselves sometimes contribute to the perpetuation of the dual-track system and the concentration of women in non-regular work. Traditional attitudes concerning the role of women are on the decrease but persist in inhibiting faster change in society’s unsupportive attitude toward working women. Jean Renshaw found that Japanese women who looked at the United States and saw negatives such as publicized violence, high divorce rates, welfare problems, and single-parent families, were more likely to attribute these problems to women “neglecting” their true roles as homemakers. She quotes the opinion of a female graduate from a top-tier university: “I saw how happy Japanese families were compared to American families, and I think it has to do with more mothers staying at home to raise the children.”⁴⁸ Another female graduate elaborates, “In America, women want it all-work and a family. Maybe in America it can work sometimes. If that’s what Japanese women want, then they should go to America. But I don’t really think it’s possible.”⁴⁹ Attitudes like these are apt to perpetuate the notion that women belong in the home and that working mothers are a deviation from this ideal. Even those who engage in part-time or non-regular work after childbirth may hold this kind of view because part-time work is seen more often than not as an “extension of their mother role,” a means of supplementing their husband’s income to help pay for their child’s tuition and other family-related expenses.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Macnaughtan 43.

⁴⁸ Renshaw 192.

⁴⁹ Renshaw 192.

⁵⁰ Schoppa 158.

Government policy also has a huge impact on women's choices. Current tax policy makes it advantageous for wives to keep their income under 1.03 million yen (approximately 10,500 USD) in order to be exempted from income tax. At this income level their husbands also receive what is called a 'spousal allowance,' a special deduction in taxes.⁵¹ Financial incentives like these have a strong effect on what type of work a married woman will pursue, and in the context of the aforementioned barriers to finding a welcoming, supportive full-time job, it is easy to understand how these tax incentives add the icing to the cake for reasons why many women prefer non-regular work that has fewer hours and pays low.

Aside from conservative attitudes about gender and tax incentives for low-wage-earning women, there is another operative at work in the slow-paced change toward women-friendly workplaces. Complacency is a very pervasive and significant factor preventing a unified, large-scale movement by women for gender equality in employment. Japan has a very large middle class, and many women live a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, perhaps comfortable enough that they do not feel adequate pressure to push for such a movement that would upset the harmony of society. The unforeseen benefits (possible societal change) do not outweigh the drawbacks (black-lash from bosses, husbands, parents, et cetera) for these women, who differ from "career women" who attempt to maintain careers even after childbirth. Even women who move to part-time work after childbirth do not face the same struggle and conflicting roles of full-time employee and mother that the career women must deal with on a daily basis. Leonard Stopper quotes feminist activist Ueno Chizuko, "These women make very practical and reasonable choices in the context of contemporary Japanese society... They are only doing what

⁵¹ Macnaughtan 44-45.

is reasonable given the limited options available to them. It is the fact that their lifestyle is so comfortable that makes them so unlikely to leave it or do anything that would unsettle it.”⁵²

Housewives and part-time workers lack the motivation to fight for gender equality because they are happy with their lot in life, and feminism and equal opportunity has no relevance to them.

There is overwhelming evidence for women concentrating in non-regular work in companies for the reasons discussed above. However, there are increasing numbers of women who reject the path that is generally expected of them and go into regular-track jobs. The following section takes a look at these women and the hardships of working in a traditionally male-dominated setting, particularly sexual harassment and exclusion from social gatherings.

Challenges for Women in Regular Work

There are numerous obstacles that women employees must overcome, or learn to live with and work around in the Japanese company office. Female career-track applicants know that they are expected to choose the general-track option, and know that they have a high likelihood of losing out to a more “dependable” male applicant. Women are also aware of the “‘prevailing mentality’ in the workplace that expects that [they] will resign after a short time or are less capable than men.”⁵³ Simply hiring women to regular-track jobs is a bit of a miracle in Japanese companies: according to Macnaughtan, referring to affirmative-action-like female hire goals, “At the affiliate of one global consultancy firm, the HR manager revealed that although the targets

⁵² Quoted in Schoppa 158-159.

⁵³ Macnaughtan 47.

for recruiting new graduate consultants are set at a gender equal 50-50 in Europe, the USA, and Australasia, in Japan they are set at 85-15 (male-female).”⁵⁴

Regular-track and general-track workers alike must face the challenges of surviving the Japanese office, where a woman worker is likely to be one of only a few women in the department, especially if working in the career track. At least 59.7 percent of female employees deal with the issue of sexual harassment,⁵⁵ a widespread problem that has made the work life of Japanese women uncomfortable or even unbearable, depending on the degree of the harassment, which can range from lewd jokes to rape or rape attempts. Sexual harassment, or *sekuhara*, has been a pervading part of office life for women since the inception of office culture in Japan, but only received legal acknowledgement as a legitimate issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s. 1992 marked the first legal action taken against a case of sexual harassment, when the Fukuoka District Court ruled that “*seiteki iyagarese* (sexual unpleasantness) in the workplace violated a worker’s interest in maintaining the honor of her reputation.”⁵⁶ This being the first publicized victory against sexual harassment in Japan, it received much press and several studies were conducted on the subject, and the findings revealed that sexual harassment was indeed a widespread issue in company workplaces.⁵⁷ These findings inspired inclusion of sexual harassment in the 1997 revision of the Equal Employment Opportunity Acts which, in their first version implemented in 1985, had had no mention of *sekuhara*.

⁵⁴ Macnaughtan 44.

⁵⁵ Yuki W. P. Huen “Workplace Sexual Harassment in Japan: A Review of Combating Measures Taken” *Asian Survey* 47.5 (September/October 2007), p. 814.

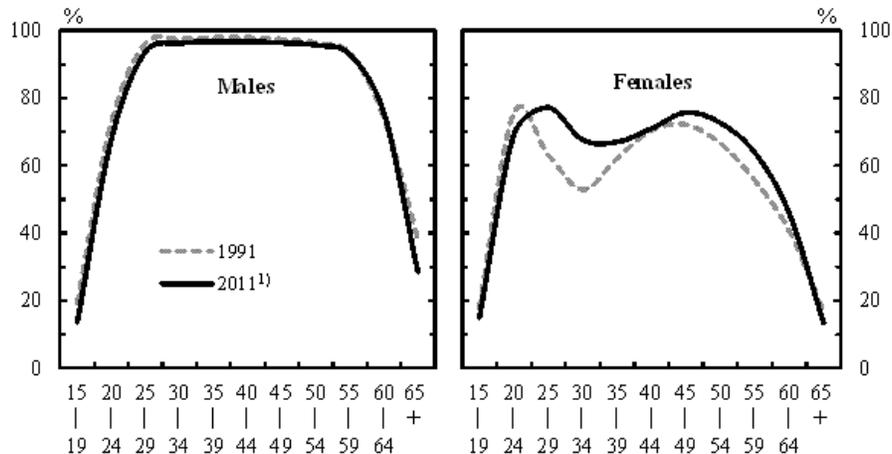
⁵⁶ Huen 812.

⁵⁷ Huen 812.

The long silent acceptance of sexual harassment can largely be explained through the context of Japanese culture, which has a deep root in Confucian thinking emphasizing group harmony at the expense of individual interests.⁵⁸ Much value is put on non-confrontational, peaceful work relationships that foster cooperative collaboration and conformation to social norms and behaviors. A common metaphor in Japan goes, “The nail the stands up gets hammered down.” It is not surprising, then, that significant numbers of sexual harassment victims hesitate to make known their experience of sexual harassment for fear of disrupting the harmony and causing the blame to fall upon themselves. Individuals would often prefer to put the interests of the group ahead of their own needs, to avoid causing a ruckus and drawing attention to themselves.

This cultural fear of being the nail that is hammered down likely does not limit itself to cases of sexual harassment, but any form of harassment or discrimination. Women are often

Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender



excluded from the infamous Japanese nighttime drinking parties which are practically requisite for advancement in the corporate ladder. These after-work drinking sessions are vital for

⁵⁸ Huen 813.

bonding between coworkers and their bosses, because during working hours, the above-mentioned cultural rules of behavior are in place and non-confrontation and conflict is key, but after-hours, after a drink or two, these rules can disappear and employees are allowed to express themselves and let be known their true feelings on this or that issue. Women, who are very often excluded from (or choose themselves not to participate for family or social reasons) these sources of stress-relief and camaraderie, find it hard to relate to their coworkers and connect with them during office hours in the daytime, and this creates a more complicated obstacle to women's advancement in the workplace.

All of the above factors that affect women in regular-track jobs work to discourage women from advancing in the company, or from aspiring higher than to work for a few years before quitting for marriage or childbirth. For those who are career-ambitious but also want to have a family, the situation is truly dire due to an almost complete lack of support for working families in Japan. In the next section I discuss Japan's low birth rate in the context of greater numbers of working women who feel constrained by the competing desires to continue their career but also wish to marry and to have children. These women often opt out of childbirth because they can find no reprieve as a woman who is expected to take over family and domestic responsibilities, from the pressure to commit most or all of their time to raising the child.

Low Support for Working Mothers Means Low Fertility Rate

The main problem behind Japan's drastically low fertility rate is likely to lie in the difficulty of working full-time while raising a child. Without older family members at home to take care of young children, there is almost no way out for women who want to keep their full-

time jobs after childbirth, as childcare service is extremely difficult to come by. Added on to the social belief that those who take child-care leave are selfish and lazy, the cards are stacked against women who may want both worlds. Entrenched cultural and social practices and beliefs continue to discourage the pursuit of both family life and working life for women, resulting in the continuance of the majority of women leaving work upon having their first child.

Much research has been done on trends in female labor participation, and in Japan we repeatedly encounter what is called the M-shaped curve, which tracks women's participation in the labor force over time. The M-shaped curve follows women from when they first begin working in their teens or early twenties, through their mid-twenties, then the late-twenties and early-thirties where the percentage of working women falls far below the younger ages. Then, around the age of thirty-five to forty-five, the line gradually moves back up as women in those age groups seek to find work again as their children have grown up. The M-shaped curve is often used as proof that women will generally not stick with their jobs for long and thus do not need to be employed on the regular track, and the salary discrepancies and lack of women in management are justified.⁵⁹ However, surveys show that of non-working (unemployed) women from the ages of twenty to twenty-five, 86.9 percent actually want to be working, and of women ages thirty to thirty-five, that number only decreases five percentage points to 81.8 percent.⁶⁰

Source: Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan.

These numbers basically eliminate the M-shaped curve, and also depict much higher numbers of women who would be working if they could than the actual number of women working at any given time.

⁵⁹ Renshaw 30.

⁶⁰ Renshaw 31.

An explanation for this is that Japan has, for a long time, espoused the traditional notions of gendered labor, determining women's purpose as playing the role of mother and housewife and men's as going out and supporting the family through work. Japanese society has yet to relinquish this belief, and although the younger generations are showing signs of moving away from this old ideology, it is still deeply rooted in public thought and private practice. As such, Japanese companies easily appropriated these implicit beliefs about the role of women, and thus "women are largely excluded from corporate management due to cultural pressures forcing them to quit work once they marry [or have children]." ⁶¹ Indeed, we must consider the prevalence of beliefs such as the '3-year old child myth' (the view that children should be brought up by their mother until they become three years old) which are 'deeply rooted' in Japanese society and which constitute 'serious barriers to women working.'⁶² In fact, it is estimated that of women with children less than three years old, 28 percent are engaged in employment of any form.⁶³ Hiring managers at companies, consciously or unconsciously, hold the expectation that female applicants will not stay with their job for longer than a few years, until they find a marriage partner and settle down to start a family.

Statistics actually support these beliefs - it is estimated that 60 percent of Japanese women leave their jobs upon the birth of their first child.⁶⁴ However, this may be more of a self-perpetuating stereotype rather than an actual preference for women to quit work when they have children - a 2003 study found that women in Japan are 22 percent more likely to return to their

⁶¹ Futagami 8.

⁶² Macnaughtan 47.

⁶³ Sawako Shirahise "Women's Economic Status and Fertility: Japan in Cross-National Perspective," in *The Political Economy of Japan's Low Fertility*, edited by Francis McCall Rosenbluth (Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA 2007) p. 39.

⁶⁴ Steinberg and Nakane 20-21.

jobs after childbirth if they work at a company that is supportive of taking childcare leave.⁶⁵ It is suggested that the propensity of women to leave work is the direct result of corporate and social practices which make it nearly impossible to successfully balance raising children and keeping a full-time job, or for families to maintain a two-income household. The result is that most women are forced to choose between their job and marriage and a family, as has been the case for decades. Until recently many have been choosing the latter, but the declining birthrate implies that in larger and larger numbers women have been moving more toward the former and opting out of child-birthing in favor of keeping their job.

We have seen the M-shaped curve above, which reveals the number of women who leave work in favor of becoming a housewife and stay-at-home mother; the other side of this, the arguably less talked about side, is the group of women who would, given the proper resources, choose both a career and a family. Childcare leave is greatly discouraged for most new parents. Promotions and pay increases are given based on an employee's personnel evaluation, and the evaluation criteria and guidelines are not generally made known to the employee, purposely left ambiguous to leave them unclear as to how they are being evaluated each period. This leads to passive-aggressive tactics in the workplace which can intimidate an employee out of taking child care leave. These tactics include implying to the employee that taking leave may or may not adversely affect their next evaluation, or mentioning the burden that would be put on the employee's coworkers should he or she take parental leave.⁶⁶ Companies in Japan are notorious for their employees working impossibly long hours and never taking vacations for the same

⁶⁵ Steinberg and Nakane 21.

⁶⁶ Weathers 30.

reason- they fear the consequences of not keeping up with the expectation that they devote their waking lives to the company without complaint.

Laws concerning the right to parental leave have been enacted in the last twenty years, but have been marginally successful in changing corporate culture and social attitudes toward parents who want to take leave, especially in smaller-sized companies.⁶⁷ In principle, parents (both mothers and fathers) have the right to one year of childcare leave with at least 30 percent of their pay. Also, as of 2005, the Law to Promote Support for Nurturing the Next Generation requires companies with 301 or more employees to create “action plans” that will include “concrete” childcare support guarantees.⁶⁸ However, such actions are not required of smaller firms, where women continue to lack the benefits required of larger companies. A 2005 survey found that such laws are not effective for small firms because they are not knowledgeable on how to create a plan, do not have appropriate staff available to do the job, and are even ignorant of the passage of the 2005 law that merely requires them to “endeavor” to enact action plans for childcare leave.⁶⁹ The fact that women who work in smaller firms are ignored by the law is a sad implication of Japan’s inability to regulate the damaging behavior of its businesses.

There are some women who have parents or parents-in-law at the ready to watch their children while they are at work, and a tiny number who have access to comprehensive daycare services, but these cases are the great minority. Such women who have these support systems are more likely to continue working because the pressure of child-rearing is lessened. The current state of child care services in Japan are rigid and unresponsive to the changing needs of working

⁶⁷ Weathers 30.

⁶⁸ Weathers 30-31.

⁶⁹ Weathers 31.

couples, as well as to the current environment where non-regular work continues to be on the rise and fewer couples have the traditional setup with the man as the regular wage-earner. Steinberg and Nakane write, “the percentage of eligible female workers taking child care leave increased from 49 percent in 1996 to 88 percent in 2011; however the impact of the policy change may have been dampened by the increase in the share of ineligible non-regular workers.”⁷⁰ In other words, more women are taking child care leave but the majority of working women are not eligible because they work non-regular jobs without childcare support.

Greater availability of daycare and childcare centers would provide significant alleviation to the problem of women’s forced choice between family and a career. One obstacle to this is the high level of government regulation of child care facilities, with strict licensing and building regulations that make it difficult to open and operate a daycare.⁷¹ Steinberg and Nakane emphasize that deregulation and the allowance of private entrants into the sector will help increase the number of daycare facilities. In the current state, daycare centers are in very high demand and their numbers are insufficient. There was a steady number of about 25,000 children each year on wait lists for daycares from 2002 to 2010, even though the capacity of daycare centers was increased by 12,000 children.⁷² This is telling evidence that although the government has made efforts to accommodate the changing dynamics of two-earner families, it has not yet been able to meet the still-growing demand for daytime childcare services. Doing so will be beneficial not only to women who would otherwise have to pick between children and

⁷⁰ Steinberg and Nakane 21.

⁷¹ Steinberg and Nakane 23.

⁷² Steinberg and Nakane 22.

work, but to the Japanese economy and consequently the general population, so it is in everybody's interest to increase availability of childcare centers for working parents.

Conclusions

Today's climate for women's employment is a complicated mesh of long-entrenched social attitudes and practices; recent times have brought many changing attitudes among the younger generations whose attitudes are starting to conflict with the traditional gendered division of labor. There is a two-pronged situation consisting of the concentration of women non-regular positions and the growing number of full-time career women, with the former generally quitting work upon childbirth for lack of other options, and the latter opting out of childbirth altogether. The issue of non-regular workers is the result of gendered hiring practices, and is hampering the ability of women to reach management positions, earn higher wages, and work long-term with good job security. Companies exploit non-regular work for cheaper labor costs and as padding for regular workers who are paid more and enjoy better job security. As a result of changing attitudes toward gender roles, more women show preference for regular employment than ever, which is causing a severe decline in the birthrate and will leave Japan economically devastated if it does not first harness the under-utilized female workforce, and second, make it easier for women to balance home and work life. The way this can be done is to better enforce anti-discrimination laws in all companies, eliminate the dual-track system, enforce childcare leave laws, and provide better access to daycares for working parents. Social attitudes are slow to change, but change is already underway; it will be necessary for the government to step up to the

plate and provide the needed support and policy change to bolster women in employment and to change social attitudes towards working women.

**Chapter 3:
Meiji and Taisho-Era Origins of the Gendered Division of Labor**

Many would still consider the current working conditions of women today to require improvement, but many may not be as aware as to how far the roots of many of the labor policies and initiatives go back in time. We may even say that the current climate for women's employment in Japan is directly tied to initiatives promulgated far back in history, in the late nineteenth century, to be specific. It was this period that saw many changes - both positive and negative - that had a great effect on the role of women and women's opportunities in society. In fact, we can even say that state initiatives played a primary role in the development of modern Japanese gender roles and assumptions that plague many women of today.

Initiated by the Meiji state to mold the populace into specific gendered social roles, the slogan *ryosai kenbo*, or "good wife, wise mother" determined that a woman's destiny was to become a devoted wife and an educated mother. The ideology of *ryosai kenbo* has been pivotal for the Japanese notion of womanhood and the ideal feminine position in society. This is the primary initiative that affects today's situation for women in general, and more specifically as they seek employment, by formally creating a gendered division of labor and encoding the role of women as relegated to domesticity and homemaking. In this chapter I will deconstruct the origins of this gendered division of labor and the development of state initiatives, particularly *ryosai kenbo* and the effects of modern warfare and military expansion on women's lives. I will also look at women's education in the Meiji era as it was used as a way to mitigate pressure from the West and became one of the mainstays for modernization and social advancement espoused by the state, later becoming a major tool for the state to raise women who would willingly live the life of the good wife and wise mother for the greater good of the state. I then argue that compulsory education resulted in larger (literate) female audiences for Japanese feminist

activists, who encompassed the first wave of feminism in Japan and who advocated for women's basic rights and freedoms, which would have an impact on later social and political policies in the post-World War II era.

The Meiji Era (1868-1912)

To be fair, gendering of Japanese society was already in place in the preceding Tokugawa period, where for over two hundred years, the shogunate maintained a policy of almost total seclusion from the outside world. Society in this era was strict and allowed for little deviance from one's prescribed role in society. Women of samurai families adhered to strict Confucian rules of propriety, fidelity, and filial respect.⁷³ Those with money were educated, but samurai women did not engage in any work other than some household duties.⁷⁴ The lower classes were not nearly as strict or regulated as the samurai families, and most women of the peasant classes engaged in work related to the family business or farm.⁷⁵ Marriages were arranged by parents, and the engaged couple often had little to no choice in whom their future partner would be. Women had virtually no agency in their lives, as is typical of Confucian moral codes - in childhood they served their parents, in marriage they served their husbands, and in adulthood they served their sons,⁷⁶ allowing for almost no personal autonomy or independence.

⁷³ Martha Tocco, "Made in Japan: Meiji Women's Education," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, Ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA 2005) p. 42.

⁷⁴ Tocco 40.

⁷⁵ Joanna Liddle and Sachiko Nakajima, *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters: Gender, Class, and Power in Japan* (Zed Books Ltd.: New York, NY 2000) p. 104.

⁷⁶ Liddle and Nakajima 87.

These attitudes concerning gender relations were well embedded in Japanese society by the time of the Meiji Reformation. In 1853, Commodore Perry landed at the island of Honshu and opened Japan's doors to the outside world (e.g., the West) and brought to an end the Tokugawa regime and its policy of national seclusion. This ushered in an entirely new era which is called the Meiji era, named after the Emperor Meiji. The arrival of the West also brought many novelties in the form of technology, ideas, and political and social systems. Many changes during the Meiji and pre-World War II era served to bolster women's overall participation in society and which have had lasting effects that can be observed in contemporary Japan.

The Meiji state was concerned for Japan's political and territorial independence, and believed modernization would be essential to ensure its protection from possible overtaking by foreign powers. The Meiji powers believed that as long as their customs and practices were considered "barbaric" and inferior by the Western powers, Japan would never be able to achieve autonomy.⁷⁷ The spirit of reform applied to the overarching cultural and social attitudes of regular Japanese people. In particular, motivated by pressures to industrialize and compete with Western nations, the Japanese state made efforts to mobilize the population in ways that would best serve the nation in its endeavor to gain acknowledgment and respect in the rapidly modernizing world.

Thus, the Meiji state sought to create a social order that would organize the populace into efficient workers and modernized, patriotic citizens. Meiji initiatives to work toward greater equity crossed class lines to be sure, ending the stratified hierarchy of samurai and peasants, but failed to bring equality between gender lines. In fact, gender lines became even more starkly

⁷⁷ Liddle and Nakajima 18.

divided for the purpose of clearly defining each individual's duty in order to create efficient family structures that would allow for a more productive labor force.⁷⁸ *Ryosai kenbo*, which as mentioned above lauded the feminine role of being a good, loyal wife, and an intelligent, hard-working mother, relegated women's lives to the domestic sphere, as lifelong homemakers and caretakers, so that the men of society would be able to go out and provide outside labor without having to worry about matters of the home. The Japanese household was thus defined via gender roles, and the carrying out of such roles led to the efficient and happy functioning of a productive and harmonious society. This definition became a dominant part of Japanese gender consciousness and became so central to the perception of gender roles that it lasts into today's Japanese society where women's primary role is perceived to be in wifedom and motherhood.

Women's exclusion from educational institutions in Japan was looked down upon by the Western powers, particularly the United States, and because of the atmosphere of competition and subordination to Western powers,⁷⁹ the Japanese state was compelled to allow girls access to public elementary education for the first time in history. Women's lack of education was a point of contention for the supposedly "enlightened" European and American states, so the education of girls at the elementary level became the first step toward more equal treatment of women in Japanese society. The Fundamental Code of Education was promulgated in 1872, and required four years of compulsory elementary education for both boys and girls.⁸⁰ The Japanese government aimed to model its educational system on that of the United States, centering around the idea that the school curriculum should be the same for all children, even in cases where the

⁷⁸ Liddle and Nakajima 55.

⁷⁹ Liddle and Nakajima 32.

⁸⁰ Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Anne E. Imamura, "The Education of Women in Japan," in *Windows on Japanese Education*, edited by Edward R. Beauchamp (Greenwood Press: Westport, CT 1991) p. 230

schools were segregated by gender.⁸¹ At the time, most elementary schools were coeducational, and girls and boys learned the same content for those four years.

Debates over women's education began even before Japan's wars, but it was the influence of the wars and the state's competition with Western powers that made education an important consideration in the development of women's roles and later history. In the late nineteenth century, education became a major point of contention for the state as it entered global politics and faced competing pressures from the outside and from within. This marked the time that the Japanese state began to toy with gender constructions on the national level, and one of the most pivotal methods used by the state to control and define gender roles in Japan was through the medium of universal elementary education.⁸² By requiring compulsory elementary education, while teaching strong nationalistic and moralistic dogma to young children, the Meiji state was able to regulate ideals of femininity and masculinity to fit its newly developing military aspirations and agendas.

The Meiji state was not necessarily considering such things as women's liberation and equality when it granted young girls access to schools in the late nineteenth century. Rather, it was facing pressure from the West to reform its treatment of women, particularly the Japanese family system that confined women to the home and ignorant of the outside world.⁸³ Before the Meiji era, for the most part only the privileged samurai classes were able afford to educate their daughters. Education of sons was still the primary goal for most Japanese families, both rich and

⁸¹ Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 230.

⁸² Kimi Hara and Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow, "Educational Challenges, Past and Present," in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity are Making a Difference*, ed. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (The Feminist Press: New York, NY 2010) p. 75

⁸³ Liddle and Nakajima 45.

poor. Girls were for the most part kept in the house to help with chores and learn womanly skills before getting married, which remained the dominant attitude among Japanese families up until recently.

Education for women beyond the elementary level did not gain popular support until after Japan's first modern war,⁸⁴ the first Sino-Japanese War, a conflict that was won relatively easily by Japan's superior weapons machinery and military might. Despite only lasting for six months, the war put a strain on Japan's resources, leading to the realization that to succeed in modern warfare, the entire country's population needed to be mobilized, not only on the battlefield but on the home front as well.⁸⁵ This included women, who were then encouraged to play an active role in wartime by enforcing the ideal of "good wife, wise mother" to the fullest extent and to birth and diligently raise as many healthy children as they could for the good of the nation. With the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, public support for "good wife, wise mother" and thereby education for women, grew and the idea began to strongly permeate into national awareness and social norms. Educators and other prominent Japanese men began to liken education for women with the prosperity and power of a nation, citing domination of European and Western nations over other countries in Asia and South Asia, and the decline of Persia and Egypt, as being resultant of the exclusion of women from formal education.⁸⁶

The education advocated by reformists pushing for *ryosai kenbo*, however, was not equal education with that of boys. Rather, it was what the Ministry of Education deemed appropriate

⁸⁴ Kathleen Uno, "Womanhood, War, and Empire: Transmutations of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' before 1931," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, edited by Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2005) p. 500.

⁸⁵ Uno 500.

⁸⁶ Uno 501.

for *ryosai kenbo*, for women's "natural calling" as wise mothers who raise the future generation's citizens. While secondary schools for girls were established in every prefecture, they continued to teach girls separate material from the boys' schools - moral education and "domestic science" became the primary topics of study at the girls' schools.⁸⁷ The Meiji government indeed brought monumental changes and innovations to the economy, military and government organization; but perhaps most interestingly, it managed to bring change to Japan's social customs, including that of gender roles and relations. Soon after the Restoration of 1868, there was a large-scale reassessment of women's role in society, where motherhood as a socializer for the next generation of loyal and patriotic Japanese children became a nationalistic vision that the state sought to spread across the country.⁸⁸ As Kathleen Uno puts it, "This re-evaluation of womanhood was part of the new regime's proposals for sweeping reforms to defend the country against the threat of Western imperialism. In this way, social as well as economic and political reforms became part of the agenda to strengthen Japan in the modern age."⁸⁹ Meiji leaders, led by fear of Western imperialism and a strong nationalism which drove the country into several successive international wars, advocated what came to be called "educated motherhood," or educated women practicing their "innate" ability to instruct their children, rearing them into patriotic adults, ready and willing to defend and fight for their country.⁹⁰ The idea that educated women create stronger children, and therefore stronger families, also fits with the Confucian idea

⁸⁷ Uno 503.

⁸⁸ Hara and Fujimura-Fanselow 75.

⁸⁹ Uno 497.

⁹⁰ Uno 506.

that “the family is the root of the state,” making it even easier to accept for government officials at the time.

In the face of increasing competition with Western powers and the drive to strengthen its military, the state let down the façade of ‘better treatment of women’ and openly changed the purpose of female education from an issue of equality to one of national interest,⁹¹ lending to the lack of sincere effort to equalize the genders in the public consciousness and social sphere. By the late 1870s and early 1880s, the Ministry of Education began to turn away from this Western-influenced system and move toward a more conservative, Confucian-influenced system of ‘moral’ education. By the time the Imperial Rescript of Education of 1890 was passed, the educational system in Japan had reverted to traditional Confucian teachings altogether. It was clear what the state felt was the appropriate role for girls and women to play in society. The state took a larger role in the regulation and content of subjects taught in schools, and to each gender - boys’ education included loyalty to the emperor and military, while girls’ ‘moral’ education comprised of learning how to be a good wife and mother, and the homemaking skills needed for such tasks.⁹² The first three years of elementary school were made segregated by gender and the curriculums of the boys and the girls differed greatly in content, as described above.⁹³ The state had also closed most of the secondary schools for girls for “financial reasons,” and formally banned girls from entering any public secondary schools, many of which had previously been predominantly male but hadn’t officially excluded girls. Families were often loath to send their girls to school because of this reason as well as the burden of school fees and the loss of

⁹¹ Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 231.

⁹² Liddle and Nakajima 47.

⁹³ Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 237.

productive labor at home. It was primarily the upper-class that deigned to provide higher schooling for their daughters, not only because they had the financial means and did not need extra hand labor at home, but also because higher-class society demanded educated minds, simply as a requisite for being upper-class. In spite of the stigma that schooling caused girls to become unruly, upper-class educated families often understood the value of an education, and wished to impart knowledge on their daughters, at least enough so that they could keep up with and help their eventual husbands, who were also likely to be highly educated.

The ideology that a woman's destiny was to become a wife and mother, and that she should aspire to such work and prepare for it, left no compelling reason for there to be education for women beyond those boundaries. Secondary education had differentiated by gender from the beginning. The Fundamental Code of Education had evoked the establishment of secondary schools and universities all over the country, and while it did not formally forbid women from enrolling in these schools, the general consensus was that they were only for boys and young males. It was not until the promulgation of the Education Act in 1880, which banned coeducation beyond the elementary level that women were officially denied access to Japan's public secondary school and university systems.⁹⁴ Financial constraints were often cited as the reason for the exclusion of girls from public education institutions beyond the elementary level. Furthermore, it was a common belief that if girls became educated, they would become forward and rebellious, or unladylike, and therefore undesirable for marriage, another common belief among Japanese people that has remained mainstream until rather recently, although not into the present day.

⁹⁴ Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 231.

Due to such developments, secondary and university education for women developed primarily through private efforts in the pre-World War II period. In fact, it was Christian private schools and colleges that first provided education for girls beyond elementary school.⁹⁵ These private schools existed before the passing of the Education Act in 1880, but following that year until the government slowly began to establish girl's high schools over the following decade and a half, these were the only educational opportunities available to girls who finished elementary school. Naturally, after the government turned away from Western education, these schools began to come under attack for undermining Japanese "morals" and corrupting young women's minds with their Western teachings. Several were closed down due to these attacks and lack of attendance.

Ryosai kenbo underwent another alteration with the Russo-Japanese War, which ended in 1905. This war was another quick victory for Japan, exalted also by the fact that it was the first victory over a Western power. In this time of victory, women's role became more solidified as the idea spread that the genders were different but complimentary, with men placed as the masters of the house, who work and earn income to support the family, while women were to support the family through hard work at home and raising virtuous children. Women, while not equal to men, played an important function in society, because the entire state depended on their work as supportive wives and wise mothers. As Uno quotes female educator Shimoda Utako, "the foundations of both the state and society' were built on the family and 'managing the home and regulating the family to build the foundation of the nation and society.'"⁹⁶ The role of women's work during wartime went largely unacknowledged, and women were quickly sent

⁹⁵ Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 231.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Uno 506.

back to domestic life as they were no longer needed in the paid labor force. This pattern is one that can be observed later, from World War I as discussed below to the economic bubble burst decades later in the 1990s. This pattern has influenced today's situation for women's employment by defining it as an undesirable necessity: when they are needed, women may be called upon to fill the gap left by men either in wartime or in periods of labor shortages, but when there is no immediate need for women in the workplace they are expected to adhere to *ryosai kenbo* and remain a housewife and homemaker.

First Wave of Feminism: Meiji Period

As discussed above, the state in the Meiji and Taisho eras had a large influence over gender discourses and attempted to reshape gender roles to fit specific needs of the state. Universal education had irrevocably empowering and liberating effects on many women who would previously never have been given the opportunity to learn to read and write. Much of these effects were to the behest of the state, which was promoting in full swing the idea of industrialization and 'catching up' with the West. However, this was not the only outcome of education for young women. An unexpected residual effect of this reshaping was that it also brought about new attitudes in women themselves. There were some instances of backlash against the state by women who were appalled at the way it attempted to exert total control over gender construction and how it relegated women to the bottom of society, deeming them unfit and unworthy of living as autonomous human beings and enclosing their livelihood within the household. Japanese women gained a new consciousness during the late-nineteenth century, as their issues and the "woman problem" came to public awareness. This 'awakening' of women

in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries precipitated later feminist movements that would later have a large impact on government policy and lawmaking.

Tsuda Umeko, while not widely considered to be a feminist activist, was an example of how education altered the outlook of some. She challenged the attitude that women should not receive equal opportunity for education as men. The youngest of the five girls who were sent to the United States on the trade mission, she studied at Bryn Mawr and Vassar Colleges, and returned to great discomfort to see the state of girls' schools in her home land. She founded Tsuda College, near Tokyo, with the help of Japanese and American women. She is quoted as saying: "The Japanese girls are capable, have good minds, and some of them are very talented. But as the result of the old training they lack self-confidence and initiative and, above all, strength of will..."⁹⁷ Traditional Confucian "moral" teachings, what Tsuda called the "old training," was preventing girls from reaching their potential, but with her newly founded school, she planned on providing girls with "real training," a chance to "develop a realization of the possibilities that come with freedom." Education begets freedom, in other words, and for women to achieve this was one of Tsuda's greatest dreams.

The first wave of Japanese feminism can first be observed during the Meiji era in reaction to the state construct of the family and gendered division of labor which leaves women without a place in society except as a wife and mother. While feminism of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japan did not have a major effect on state policy and gender-related initiatives, its very existence marked a transitional period in the outlook and awareness of many Japanese women. Amidst heightening political and social turmoil, Japanese women began to find their

⁹⁷ Quoted in Marjorie Bingham and Susan Hill Gross, *Women in Japan: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Glenhurst Publications: Saint Louis, MN 1987) p. 155.

voices and raise them to widespread audiences for the first time in this period. The influx of new technologies and the circulation of print media, combined with mandatory elementary education causing a high literacy rate among women, gave rise to wider access to writings and journals as well as information about social groups and gatherings, which all helped to promote the spread of feminist ideas throughout Japan. These developments precipitated the actions and political involvement of later generations of Japanese feminists who would go on to have a significant impact on women's employment, in both positive and negative ways. Without the advancements of Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa-era feminists, Japanese feminism, like in education, would not have made the progress that it did nor had the same kind of influence in society. The second major rise of feminism in Japan, or second-wave feminism in the 1950s, was much more concerned with policy making but could not have come to the fore if it had not been for the activism of the first-wave feminists.

Until post-World War II, women had virtually no rights under the law until much later, after the Second World War. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when a girl was married she moved into her husband's family's household, where she and her property was under the husband's control. This was called the *ie* system, which I will call the 'family' system; a woman's husband was the unquestioned master of the family, and his son(s) came second in authority. Women were, in effect, considered among the property of the household owned by the male authority figure.⁹⁸ Custody of all children belonged to the husband. Women could not obtain a divorce unless her husband committed adultery with another man's wife, and *that* man

⁹⁸ Laura Dales, *Feminist Movements in Contemporary Japan* (Routledge: New York, NY 2009) p. 14.

sued him, but any form of adultery constituted divorce against a woman.⁹⁹ Laws passed during the late Meiji period deemed that women were not allowed to participate in any political activities whatsoever, let alone possess the right to vote.

Arguably the first notable, openly feminist activism came around the time of Kishida Toshiko, an extremely well-learned woman who as a teenager had been posted as a tutor for the Empress. She left that post after two years feigning illness,¹⁰⁰ and went on to spend her pre-marital life speaking and writing for women's rights, producing the renowned work *Daughters Confined in Boxes*, a short story attacking the unfair and sexist *ie* system, which earned her a week in jail in 1883 when she presented it to the public. She made many other public speeches in support of issues surrounding political freedom, individual rights, and representative government.¹⁰¹ Later on she became one of the first advocates of women's rights and criticized Japan's rectification of Confucianist moralistic dogma and how it deemed women inferior to men and existed to serve men and bear children.¹⁰² She asserts, in an article entitled "I Tell You, My Fellow Sisters," that the common argument against women's rights, that 'men are strong and women are weak, therefore cannot be equal,' is nonsense because, if it refers to physical strength alone, then that shows nothing but barbarism in the sayer, but if it refers to mental strength, then the only difference is between the educated and non-educated.¹⁰³ She argued that the primary

⁹⁹ Sachiko Kaneko, "The Struggle for Legal Rights and Reforms: A Historical View," in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity are Making a Difference*, edited by Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (The Feminist Press: New York, New York, 2011) p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Mioko Fujieda, "Japan's First Wave of Feminism," in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity are Making a Difference*, edited by Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (The Feminist Press: New York, New York, 2011) p. 318.

¹⁰¹ Fujieda 318.

¹⁰² Fujieda 319.

¹⁰³ Fujieda 319.

source of happiness for human beings can only be realized through relationships formed on mutual respect and compassion,¹⁰⁴ and equality between the sexes was a necessary factor in this vision. Due to her high social class status and education level, her audience was mostly limited to those in the literate middle class.¹⁰⁵ In 1884 she married a politician and proceeded to withdraw from public speaking and from direct political involvement. She died at thirty-seven of tuberculosis, her husband having died of the same illness two years earlier.¹⁰⁶ Kishida's time was short, but nonetheless had a serious impact on several young women who would later go on to further the first wave of Japanese feminism after her.

Kageyama Hideko was one of those young women who, attending a speech of Kishida's at the age of seventeen, made it her destiny that she would follow in Kishida's footsteps and work toward women's emancipation. After a few missteps, including ten months in prison for her involvement in a planned putsch in Korea in 1885, she found her way publishing (with the help of male friends) the journal *Sekai Fujin*, or "Women of the World." The journal lasted for only two years, from 1907 to 1909, closing down due to severe censorship and repression by the government.¹⁰⁷ Despite its short publication, the journal tackled many important issues in women's rights, and calling for further action by women who were struggling within the system of female oppression. She wrote, "When we look at the conditions currently prevailing in society, we see that virtually everything is coercive and oppressive to the true nature of women.

¹⁰⁴ Fujieda 320.

¹⁰⁵ Liddle and Nakajima 13.

¹⁰⁶ Fujieda 320.

¹⁰⁷ Fujieda 322.

This necessitates that we women rise up and form a social movement of our own.”¹⁰⁸ The journal was, in her words, not meant for the “good wives and wise mothers,” nor the “successful” or the “rich”; it was meant to be read by the “losers, the weak, and the so-called hoodlums” for which the journal attempted to empower and inspire.¹⁰⁹

One famous writer who dealt with the problematic conditions of marriage for women was Shimizu Toyoko, who walked out of her own first marriage with a man who had been involved with other women. She wrote an extremely renowned short story based on her experience, called “A Broken Ring,” which Mioko Fujieda calls a “feminist declaration of independence,” in that it shows women that they have the power to get out of an unhappy or unfair marriage should they choose. Shimizu’s experience led her to become an advocate for women’s rights and went on to work as a journalist for the Journal of Women’s Education in Tokyo, where for ten years she wrote criticisms against the heavily repressive government and its “contemptuous” treatment of women, as well as a complacent society which allowed, and even supported, this treatment. Shimizu remarried with a man who later became the president of Tokyo University and who declared his love for her without care for her history (previously married women were not viewed as a desirable match in those days), writing love poems and passionate love letters to her, behavior that was extremely out of the ordinary for that time period. They seemed to approach each other with respect and acknowledgement of their feelings and mutual attraction rather than through socially conventional approaches, which was a rare thing for the rigid Meiji society.

¹⁰⁸ Until the early 20th century, women had been active participants in the People’s Rights Movement, a “popular rights” movement centered around men and led by men, to fight the class-based hierarchy which discriminated against men of lesser financial means. The movement was actually very hostile toward suggestions of truly popular rights, inclusive of women, but women nevertheless continued to use its firepower to reach larger audiences than would have been possible on their own. (Fujieda 320).

¹⁰⁹ Fujieda 321.

Unfortunately, soon after her marriage Shimizu (now Kozai) retreated into oblivion, unable to write and suffocating within the rigid rules of propriety and being a proper wife. Much later one of their sons talked about how his mother and father got along very well, but his mother was never completely happy because of what she had lost when she entered the marriage. Shimizu Toyoko, despite her marital demise, left a legacy of feminist writings that had a large effect on the first wave of feminism.

The “awakening” of women’s consciousness in the late-nineteenth century preempted later activism on the part of women toward greater social equality for women. It was the influence of these first outspoken feminists that inspired more women of later generations to continue their legacy and fight first for women’s basic human rights, and later for their right to participate more fully in society as equals with men. These pioneering women represented the first push back against the unrestricted Japanese state which enabled further advancements to be made for women’s rights as time progressed.

The Taisho Era (1912-1926)

The Meiji era was a turbulent one for women, as Japan had officially entered a period of immense change in all facets of society. Westernization brought improvements in education for women, which in turn set the stage for the first feminists in Japan. The state promoted the causes of militarization and nationalization, and succeeding wars brought economic challenges which were alleviated by the participation of women in industrial labor on the home front.

Employment for women was not a main element of the women’s movement at the time, as simply getting out of the home and participating in society was a leap beyond what women had

been permitted since before the Tokugawa period. These first steps outside the domestic sphere would bring both positive and negative effects for women's employment later on. Women's employment developed in such a way that it was not viewed as a mainstay source of labor other than when the men were literally unavailable to work, as they were overseas fighting on the warfront. We know this because as soon as the male soldiers returned home, they were quickly reinstated into the jobs women had held down during the war, while at the same time women were encouraged, and likely forced, out of their jobs and back to the domestic sphere. Japan's first modern wars, discussed above, encapsulate the emergence of this pattern, and World War I served to solidify it further.

World War I once again stimulated women's active participation in war efforts, but this time the Japanese state came to the realization that in order to maintain the nation's international power and influence, it would need to mobilize the entire civilian population in industrial manufacturing. This included women. A purely domestic role for women was no longer viable in the rapidly advancing war industry, and Japan could not maintain its military prestige without the help of women on the home front to participate in work outside of the household. Even the most conservative social commentators could not deny that there was a need for women's work for military and national progress.¹¹⁰ There was again a resultant shift of the "good wife, wise mother" ideology that made space for women's participation in labor outside of the home but still required them to manage domestic duties on top of that.

However, once the war was over, it was the expectation that they would simply return home to resume their primary job, homemaking. It was generally not an option for women to

¹¹⁰ Uno 506.

remain in their jobs to continue earning money, as they were not considered permanent laborers but rather necessary fill-ins for the male soldiers who had gone off to fight. By extension this was another fulfillment of *ryosai kenbo*, as they were working for the good of the state and the nation in its time of need. Once the need for female labor was lifted with the end of the war, women were shuffled back to the home where they would continue to fill the role of good wife and wise mother from the domestic sphere. *Ryosai kenbo* was stretched to include this shuffling back and forth between outside labor and full-time homemaking, which would set the tone for women's participation in World War II, and even later in the age of corporations. Women's labor, since the time of World War I, has not been considered a legitimate presence in the employment sphere, relegating women workers to non-regular jobs as well as the rigid division of labor, insisting on child-raising and caretaking as solely women's work.

Feminists of the Taisho era, rather than being concerned with women's employment directly,¹¹¹ openly lamented women's low position in Japanese society and yearned for a more equal society in which women were given the same basic treatment and privileges as men. The state's deliberate relegation of women to specific gendered criteria including staying within the domestic sphere and devoting their lives to supporting their husbands and children was a topic of protest, largely due to the initiated of *ryosai kenbo*, a powerful and effective state initiative promoted by the state as a means of funneling the civilian population into distinct jobs and responsibilities to streamline the creation of a strong military, as I will explain in the following section.

¹¹¹ Likely for two reasons: first, as with Meiji-era feminists, Taisho feminists were largely of middle- to upper middle-class status, and had no financial need to work themselves, and therefore were more likely to even discourage women from participating in the labor force. Second, women had yet to win the right to vote, or to divorce, or to inherit property; equality in employment would naturally come second to these more basic rights.

As the concept of gender roles and *ryosai kenbo* underwent shifts and changes caused by wars and an ever-increasing climate of internationalization in Japanese society, feminism likewise moved on political sphere, where, with greater strength of selfhood and confidence from years of mobilization for war, protested against their restricted freedom as members of Japanese society. The ideas of personal autonomy and suffrage became main issues for these women's groups, and their activism was perhaps more deviant and defiant than previous movements because of the explicit ban on women's activism from 1890. The *Seito* group, or Bluestockings, emerged in 1911 as the first and most notorious feminist group that openly questioned the *ie* family structure and women's place in society. In its five-year long journal publication of the same name, used the mediums of poetry and literature as a means for self-exploration and development,¹¹² something the state desperately attempted to avoid in order to protect the function and status of women in society. The government banned many issues of the Bluestocking journal on the grounds that it was corrupting the "values" of Japanese women, and relentlessly harassed and censored the group's members. One of its editors, Ito Noe, and her partner were arrested and murdered as enemies of the state in 1915, and in 1916 the journal stopped being published, most likely from the danger it posed to the writers and editors.¹¹³ The *Seito* journal, despite its short publication, managed to reach a wide audience of women across the country, and brought into question state oppression of women and purposeful inhibition of selfhood and personal liberation for the purpose of binding women to the family and domestic sphere.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Liddle and Nakajima 14.

¹¹³ Liddle and Nakajima 14.

¹¹⁴ Liddle and Nakajima 15.

Women's political participation had been banned since 1890, when they were formally written out of the Meiji constitution and were formally banned from attending political meetings, forming parties or gatherings, or even protesting against their own political exclusion, not to mention denying them the right to vote. Ichikawa Fusae, along with former *Seito* editor Hiratsuka Raicho, formed the New Women's Society in 1919 that campaigned for women's suffrage and political inclusion. In 1922 they won the right for women to attend political meetings, and continued the struggle for suffrage. The women's movement at this point was deeply concerned with basic human rights, such as free marriage, suffrage, inheritance rights, and so on. It was also a very middle-class movement,¹¹⁵ and was not inclusive of the working class, nor was it primarily concerned with heightening women's position in employment and industrial labor, as noted above.

In the years following World War I, the effects of rising globalization and industrialization would be seen in demographic shifts tending toward greater concentration of the population in cities, where there began to be a decline in multi-generational households, and more instances of women working for an income even while married. *Ryosai kenbo* was desperately upheld by the Japanese state, yet it became increasingly difficult to reach city dwellers who had already moved on to trends such as love marriages, fewer children, two-generation households, and the like.¹¹⁶ These kinds of developments were abhorred by state officials, who reacted by rejecting newly formulated schemes of "good wife, wise mother" that supported women's participation in outside labor, and regressing back to older versions of the adage that relegated women only to the domestic sphere, where their only purpose was support

¹¹⁵ Liddle and Nakajima 15.

¹¹⁶ Uno 508.

of the nation through child rearing.¹¹⁷ Japan entered the 1920s with these conflicting viewpoints, perhaps never resolving them as the decade went by and overseas campaigns intensified, eventually leading to Japan's involvement in the Second World War. The women's movement was effectively silenced in the early 1930s as militarism and Japan's involvement in overseas wars became the government's only priority, and activism of any kind was shut down almost completely. Able-bodied men were to serve in the army and women were to support the war effort by holding up the home front and working to providing supplies and support for the troops. Feminists were forced to choose between speaking out against the wars and going to prison, or cooperating with the military government for the time being and hoping that their cooperation would earn them state support of their endeavors after the war. Thus, from the late 1920s until after Japan's defeat in 1945, there is hardly any mention of Japanese feminist activity. Women were once again mobilized for total war on the home front, and this was truly Japan's largest war effort yet, as there was hardly extra time for anyone to focus on anything but the war. Women's labor was mobilized in the same way it had been in World War I, with a concentration in industrial manufacturing jobs to support war machinery and technology being used abroad. There is not much action in terms of feminism nor discourse on women's issues until Japan's defeat in the war in 1945.

Conclusions

Japanese women experienced an era of awakening in pre-World War II Japan. Education was made compulsory for all girls in the Meiji period and, despite the education received being

¹¹⁷ Uno 508-9.

gendered and used toward producing housewives, they were made literate, and that in itself is a step forward, as before this time only the high classes had ever had the money to provide their daughters with enough education to read and write. Secondly, the outspoken women who became the first wave of Japanese feminism brought the issues faced by women to the public arena, made themselves heard, circulated their ideas and refused to be ignored, and were steadfast in the face of government and social harassment. Their example was an inspiration for many women in their day, and even if they did not cause many legal changes in the Japanese government, they achieved the huge accomplishment of bringing to light the injustices and challenges particular to women in the public consciousness. Lastly, women had their first ventures into paid employment outside their homes, a new feature of industrialization in Japan. This wasn't an empowering sort of work, but it was work all the same and it took young women out of their homes and into the workforce. It gave women the sense that they had the capacity for earning wages, rather than doing work at home for no pay. This new sense of confidence helped later on, when women's work was extremely valuable to Japan's successes in World War II, and also perhaps contributed to their behavior after the loss in that war.

This was a whirlwind era for women in Japan, and set the stage for further work after Japan's fifteen-year involvement in the second World War. While there was significant change in the construction of gender and gender roles, women saw improvements in legal rights, education, work participation, and other sectors. The next chapter will take a look at the period after World War II in a different light. There was another significant alteration in Japanese society that came with defeat in the war and the ensuing American occupation and constitution, and mixed with

women's new experiences and consciousness from the periods before them, women were met with another long era of change and growth.

Chapter 4:
Manifestations of *Ryosai Kenbo* and Employment from World War II to the 1990s

The era between the Meiji Reformation and World War II marked a period of rapid change in society and in the lives of women in Japan. Compulsory education became universal, and young women gained access to higher levels of education than they could have achieved before. The state began to take an active role in social gender constructions and created specialized gender roles to meet its changing needs. Feminists made their debut in Japan in the Meiji era, bringing women's issues to public consciousness for the first time, speaking and writing to very large female audiences. All of these 'firsts' were the beginning of non-stop changes regarding women's roles in society.

This chapter will continue from where Chapter 3 left off, demonstrating that some of the origins of women's employment problems as discussed in Chapter 2, most significantly the dual-track hiring system, lie in past developments that have molded Japanese gender roles and constructions into what they are today. The decades after World War II were considerably more fruitful for the working woman in Japan, going along with the general prosperity of the Japanese economy at the time, but they were certainly not without drawbacks. Women in greater and greater numbers entered into traditionally male-dominated universities and lines of work, but this time period also saw the growth of gender-discriminatory practices. *Ryosai kenbo* went through further mutation as Japan hit a transitional stage between a war-torn nation and an economically successful corporate economy. Corporate culture, enabled by the persistent faith of Japanese people in the "good wife, wise mother" mantra, preserved the gendered division of labor by espousing the working husband/stay-at-home wife family structure, resulting in several of the major problems that we see today.

This chapter examines the impact of the loss of World War II on Japanese women and the economic miracle as it affected women in the workplace. It was the decade or two immediately following World War II that saw the development of Japan, Inc., the economic giant that lasted until the burst in 1993-4. Corporate cultures, practices, and structures were all fabricated in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and became the “norm” among companies well before today, where we see the dual-track hiring system, sexual harassment, discrimination, etc. I also argue that post-war feminism had distinct effects on female employment in Japan throughout this time period.

Male Re-Institution and the Resurgence of *Ryosai Kenbo* in the 1950s

For the duration of World War II men were almost totally absent from home, having been sent abroad to fight Japan’s many warfronts. Women were taking up work in industrial factories in droves and supporting their husband- and father-less families. The war effort - as with previous modern wars for Japan - called for action from the entire population, delegating men to the front lines and women to the domestic support of the military. Without the manual labor of women behind the scenes, Japan could not have maintained such power and military might during the war years. Likewise, childbearing was again turned into a nationalistic endeavor as women were expected to give birth to many children in an effort to strengthen military might by sheer numbers. However, once World War II came to a devastating end, the soldiers returned to a changed country and changed attitudes among women. Developments in the immediate post-war period might be said to have much to do with what we see today in women’s employment, including the dual-track hiring system and the small number of women managers.

In the immediate post-war period, there was great social and economic turmoil throughout Japan that precipitated changes to the basic fabric of the structure of authority and the family system. The loss of the war was a defacing and humiliating one for the male Japanese psyche. The absence of men through the duration of the war, compounded with economic exhaustion from fifteen years of all-out war and human casualties, brought on the profound sense of defeat throughout the nation that led to the erosion of state authority in the eyes of the populace and male authority in the eyes of women.¹¹⁸ The emperor, the symbolic patriarch of Japan, witnessed a loss of authority and the patriarchs of ordinary Japanese families experienced the same undermined power over the women. The state experienced a loss of the Japanese sense of honor along with defeat in the war, a form of betrayal that must be understood in the context of Japanese culture. The basic social contract of Japan's hierarchical society is that those in power will be accountable for the protection of those who are not in power, and the symbolic failure to keep this promise, along with the failure to atone for his failure, meant the breakdown of empirical authority and the emperor's divine right to rule.¹¹⁹ Liddle and Nakajima write, in reference to Japan's defeat in the war, "...the head of state and officers of the armed forces were shown to have produced detrimental outcomes in the form of the destruction of the material and social fabric... As a result, the emperor's right to rule, to perform the ceremonials and to intercede with the deities, [...] were forfeited for significant sections of the population."¹²⁰ There was a parallel undermining of male authority over the female as many women refused to step down and let their returning husbands and fathers resume complete control over their

¹¹⁸ Liddle and Nakajima 134.

¹¹⁹ Liddle and Nakajima 143.

¹²⁰ Liddle and Nakajima 142-3.

personal autonomy, defying social norms by continuing to work outside the home as they wanted.¹²¹ When the men returned from their posts overseas, they found themselves at a loss for place and position in their own home country. Women had taken over as the leaders of the households, and men experienced compounded loss of face by defeat in the war and by the loss of authority over women, over whom they had historically enjoyed the power to subjugate.¹²² Women, in the fifteen years of Japan's involvement in World War II, had effectively taken over the industry on the home front so that the country could use the entirety of its male population in the war effort. Just as defeat in war decreased male authority over women, it simultaneously increased the right of women to step out of the domestic sphere and into the spheres of education and employment, contributing further to the erosion of patriarchal authority systems in Japan.¹²³

The ensuing US Occupation brought dramatic changes to the lives of women, precipitating decades of social and economic developments which have had long-lasting effects on Japanese society and women's employment. Varying opinions about the justification for the American Occupation aside, there came from it a few positive implications for Japan's working women as written in the new Constitution that was promulgated in 1947. As a result of over a decade of mobilization for the war, women had a new sense of capability and confidence that had previously been amiss. Many women did not obediently relinquish their work lives for the sake of humiliated and defeated husbands who had come back expecting to return to their normal lives as before the war. As pressures mounted to return to the "good wife, wise mother" life from pre-war days, women were increasingly divided into the afore-mentioned housewife/working

¹²¹ Liddle and Nakajima 146.

¹²² Liddle and Nakajima 142.

¹²³ Liddle and Nakajima 148.

woman camps. However, that is not to say that all women who continued to work after the war were actively supporting this or that sociopolitical ideology; they simply did what they believed they needed to do and maneuvered according to necessity and practicality. That is, many women who continued working did so out of necessity because of economic hardship within the family, or, increasingly so as time went on, because of greater access to material goods and rise of consumerism in the 1960s.¹²⁴ For many middle-class families, the benefit outweighed the cost of having the wife be employed (on a part-time basis).

The US Occupation of Japan after the war proved to be more beneficial for women than not. The primary goal of the Occupation was to “emasculate” Japan’s military nationalism to ensure its total subordination to US imperialist interests.¹²⁵ This objective included keeping Japan a capitalist economy and using democratization and liberalization as the platform for its reforms of Japanese society. Women’s issues fell under such categories. As the West had condemned Japan’s perceived backward treatment of women during the Meiji era, likewise the United States opted to change the status of women in Japanese society by including guarantees of several rights and freedoms in the American-instituted Constitution of 1947. These included bans on forced arranged marriages (for men and women), the right to vote, equal divorce conditions, inheritance rights, legal guardianship of children and property, co-education from elementary school to university,¹²⁶ among others. The new provisions provided to women under the law were pivotal to helping exalt women’s issues beyond just basic rights and freedoms.

Many of the provisions included in the Constitution had been fought for by feminists for years

¹²⁴ Julia C. Bullock, *The Other Women’s Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women’s Fiction* (University of Hawai’i Press: Honolulu 2010) p.17.

¹²⁵ Liddle and Nakajima 149.

¹²⁶ Bingham and Gross 250.

before World War II, and all were won in a single sweep, propelling the situation of women forward under law. For example, feminists had long struggled for suffrage before the US occupation, but were finally rewarded with both the right to vote and the right to run for political office in the 1947 Constitution. This came along with the theoretical ‘guarantee’ of sex equality in the household and in every facet of society, although that was not so easy to quantify. Preferential treatment of men in child custody disputes was abolished, equal divorce rights ordained, and inheritance rights for women were promulgated.¹²⁷ All of these newfound freedoms and rights became vital, albeit residual, victories for women within the huge loss of Japan to American forces in World War II.

The 1947 Constitution also included what are called the Labor Protection Laws, which were later overturned in 1985. These laws provided what were seen as necessary protections for working women, but they ultimately became a set of protections for *ryosai kenbo*. They were meant to encourage women’s participation in the workforce by protecting them from overtime work, relocations, work travel, and the legal ‘guarantee’ of “equal pay for equal work,” but by denying women the ability to perform equal work to men, the protection laws actually ended up inhibiting greater gender equality in the workplace. It is a complicated decision, when one considers the context of immediate post-war Japan and the budding emergence of corporate power, between protecting women from extortion and over-work and allowing them to legally perform the same work as men, thus gaining qualification for promotion. As it was, women were stopped before they could even begin to compete with men in corporate employment, giving rise

¹²⁷ Liddle and Nakajima 152.

to the development of gendered employer practices that are still prevalent today, namely the dual-track system which also serves to prevent women from working to their full ability.

After the war, many women did in fact return to work in the reconstruction efforts as well as to join the new corporate world that was rapidly gaining momentum as the primary source of jobs in Japan. It is arguable whether the Labor Protection Laws actually aided this resurgence of women workers, as almost all women had not only participated, but were a vital factor in the industry of war before and during Japan's wars and were thus accustomed to work and earning money. Additionally, in the new Constitution the old feudal system of land ownership was reformed to the point where upper-class families were forced to sell their belongings to survive.¹²⁸ Land and wealth was redistributed so that power associated with large landowners was demolished and all families had to earn their own living, breaking down old class divisions and opening up more equal opportunity for previously rigid class groups. This had the residual effect of forcing more women into paid employment, as the basis for their previous upper-class lifestyle had been removed and their families could no longer support them financially without their earned income.¹²⁹ The high labor participation rate among women may have caused a sort of "rejection" of the stigma of women who work outside the home as the wartime necessitation of such gave most women work experience and the desire to continue to work even after the war was over. In spite of the fact that women were highly encouraged, and often forced, to leave work after World War II to make room for male returnees, the protection laws were an indication of acceptance of women in paid employment, paving the way for women to increase employment participation in the years following.

¹²⁸ Liddle and Nakajima 152.

¹²⁹ Liddle and Nakajima 152-3.

The presence of women in the workplace in the 1950s inspired opposition from social conservatives and so-called “housewife feminists” who espoused the ideal of women as housewives while men worked outside the home. This ideology was borne from the Meiji-era initiatives set forth by the state to mobilize women into the “good wife, wise mother” epithet, and continued to have a powerful influence over the beliefs of many Japanese who wanted to return to the traditional household setup from before the war. There was a split between two opposite ideologies in the 1950s, one pro-work and one pro-housewife. The housewife side promoted the importance and virtuousness of motherhood and called for women to fulfill their true calling as housewives and mothers, while the pro-work side called for more opportunity for women in employment and greater involvement in labor unions.

Men, despite the feeling of displacement and humiliation, were effectively re-instituted into the dominant role both in the home and outside. Men were given jobs that had belonged to women for several years. Likewise mirrored in the work behavior of women in the US, women in Japan were encouraged to return home after men came back from the war and wanted to take over the jobs that women had held down for several years. At the time, rather than allowing women to remain at their jobs and creating more jobs for male war returnees, women were instead sent back to the housewife role to make room for men.¹³⁰ In the words of Kaye Broadbent, “In the early postwar period women were ousted from jobs they had often been forcibly recruited into in order to create employment opportunities for the millions of demobilized soldiers.”¹³¹ Women were not considered a permanent part of the workforce, but rather an “auxiliary” source of labor that could be called on at will during low periods or labor

¹³⁰ Bingham and Gross 251.

¹³¹ Broadbent 5.

shortages. This reflects the years post-World War I when women were expected to leave work after the end of the war, despite having been a pivotal force in the victory in World War I. The state had needed women to step up to the plate once again for World War II, but again once it was over and there was no longer a vital need for them to work, it was not made an option for them to continue working - rather they were shuffled home again to show their support for the displaced male soldiers by opening up work for them. It was not conceivable that women and men could work alongside each other as equals, or that women should be incorporated into company work on the same terms as male employees, partially because Japanese men needed a purpose after the failure in World War II and partially because of the resurgence of *ryosai kenbo* all over again as the feminine ideal. It can be said that women today are simply inheriting their situation from women of this era: their situations are comparable in that when the going was tough, it was the men who were given unquestioned priority over women in the workplace, despite women having played such a pivotal role in the support of first the state's military endeavors, and then in the rise of Japan, Inc. as an international economic power.

In the past, successive wars with foreign powers as well as increasing influences of modernization and globalization had caused mutations and shifts in the meaning of *ryosai kenbo* and the picture of the “ideal” woman. Japan in the aftermath of World War II, however, saw arguably the most poignant change in the meaning of the “good wife, wise mother” construct, as it had become so entrenched in Japanese cultural practices and belief systems that it did not require state initiatives to regain momentum in social and corporate practices in the dawn of Japan, Inc. Instead, *ryosai kenbo* was promoted as the feminine ideal by local initiatives such as the “New Life” programs (enrichment programs intended to form communities among

neighborhood housewives to instill pride in their ‘profession’), which were later adopted by corporations to further encourage this behavior among women, as well as expectations of women as being destined for domestic life as a wife and mother. The “good wife, wise mother” dogma found renewed strength and appeal for Japanese society and continued to influence the structure and systemic practices of company culture that would end up excluding women from equal opportunity both in educational setting and employment settings. This section focuses on the effects of *ryosai kenbo* on women in the workplace (and not in the workplace), as it is one of the most fundamental reasons for why we are met with the dismal situation of working women in Japan today.

The construct of womanhood from decades earlier in the nineteenth century gained refreshed relevance in Japanese society in the wake of World War II. As in previous times of war and exaggerated nationalism, women were burdened with the responsibility of giving birth to many children and raising them to be strong, patriotic, self-sacrificing soldiers. Instead of military, however, the new soldier was a corporate ‘warrior,’ who possessed all the same qualities as military soldiers except that instead of giving their lives to the nation, they give it to the company. Women’s roles returned to acting as a support system for both their husbands, so that he would be able to spend his energy on his work, and for the next generation of salarymen, so that they would become loyal and dedicated workers.

These roles returned to the forefront as the ideal of social gender roles despite the growing number of working women in Japan’s post-war years. Pre-World War II Japan had been socially and economically stratified, the wealth very unevenly distributed among the rich and poor. Wealthier women had the ability to run the household through maids and servants, while

poor women were given the double burden of running the household and working to make ends meet. Homemaking became somewhat of a dream life for working women who were under the constant pressure of “good wife, wise mother” and were perhaps exhausted from their multiple roles as wife, mother, and laborer.¹³² The housewife was considered the natural, feminine opposite to the corporate warrior, or salaryman, and was promoted as the modern ideal feminine model.¹³³ This model was yet another mutation of *ryosai kenbo*, except instead of being necessitated from war mobilization efforts, it came from corporate necessity for strong and capable (male) corporate workers and mobilization of women as the domestic support system, the same role they had played in Japan’s wars. *Ryosai kenbo* as an ideology may have fallen to obscurity in Japan today, but the impression it left has left a lasting impact on society. Women repeated the same pattern as they had in Meiji and Taisho-era wars after World War II, having been displaced from the employment sphere as the men returned to their home country. Women would later end up repeating the same pattern in the aftermath of the economic bubble burst, having been set up as a source of disposable labor in their part-time and non-regular employment in the developmental stages of Japan, Inc.

Women and the Economic Miracle

After the political and economic turmoil that ensued after the defeat in World War II and the American Occupation, Japan began to feel a sense of stability and peace that it had not experienced in years. As early as 1962, the Japanese economy had hit its famous decades-long

¹³² Tachibanaki 173.

¹³³ Dales 17.

period of growth known as the “economic miracle,”¹³⁴ and the general populace began to see financial prosperity and wealth greater than anything they had had before. In 1960, over 70 percent of the population considered themselves middle class, and that number jumped to 90 percent by 1970.¹³⁵ Material goods such as washing machines, cars, houses, and televisions were now accessible; but perhaps more significantly, education was more financially attainable as well. With the growing salary levels of company workers and the resulting rise of middle class families, more women became capable of leaving work in favor of raising children and household duties, with the family relying solely on the husband’s income. The companies were largely concentrated in urban areas of the country, causing a substantial movement of much of the population from rural areas to the cities, where there was the promise of higher wages and better living standards.¹³⁶ This resulted in a diminishing of farming and other small family businesses, along with an inflation of tertiary, larger company employment-type jobs, leading to a phase of urbanization that altered the fabric of the traditional family structure and living situation. Nuclear families became the norm; in the absence of extended family to help take care of the children and other household chores, the women of the family became the sole source of this unpaid domestic labor in the new urban homes, while the husband spent more time at the company and utilized the home primarily for eating and sleeping.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Bullock 16.

¹³⁵ Bullock 16.

¹³⁶ Tachibanaki 174.

¹³⁷ Dales 17.

The 1950s housewife debate continued into the 1960s and developed in that time from a “housewife debate” to a “domestic work debate.”¹³⁸ The pro-motherhood camp needed to adjust to the continuing trend of women participating in employment despite the pressures to marry and stay at home. The situation also became more complicated as increasing numbers of women chose to work until marriage or childbirth, quit to raise the children, and then return to work once the children were grown. Another important factor was the demographic trend toward greater concentration in urban areas, where rather than the traditional three-generation households, there were mainly nuclear family households consisting of only the parents and children. This was due to the high cost of living in such areas and the limited availability of living space.¹³⁹ Being a homemaker became a sign of some considerable wealth, as living on only the husband’s wage became increasingly difficult with the rising cost of living, pressures of consumerism, sending children (including daughters) to school and on to post-secondary school, et cetera.

Education in the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century

College education after World War II was a direct reflection of lingering gender roles as determined by *ryosai kenbo*. Higher education increasingly became a prerequisite for career employment in companies, and is an important factor in the progression of women’s employment in the twentieth century. Although education is more or less equalized today, the slow manner in which it became equally divided between men and women points to gendered ideologies concerning the attainment of higher education, the purpose of an education, and the life

¹³⁸ Sandra Buckley, “A Short History of the Feminist Movement in Japan,” in *Women of Japan and Korea*, edited by Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA 1994) p. 153.

¹³⁹ Buckley 154.

trajectories of men and women in the decades after World War II. In the time immediately after the war, the belief in the purpose of education for girls as preparation for a domestic role as a housewife and mother was very much the dominant ideology concerning education for women. It was widely believed that a virtuous woman's expected life trajectory would ultimately lead her into the domestic sphere, thus despite more equalized legislation for the compulsory years of elementary and middle school education, it was still easily accepted that education for women served the purpose of preparing them for housewifery and child care. This was reflected more in post-secondary schools, where parents and family had the prerogative of whether or not to allow their daughters to attend school beyond what was necessary. Nevertheless, attendance in high schools (which were and continue to be non-compulsory by Japanese law) soared and there was soon great overcrowding of the relatively small number of schools in existence at the time. Classes of sixty to seventy students were not rare before many more institutions were built to accommodate the increased demand for secondary education.¹⁴⁰ The surge in attendance at school also played a part in the economic miracle as the overall level of education increased.

Although popular opinion concerning education for women remained in agreement with the *ryosai kenbo* ideology, under the 1947 Constitution public education had been secularized and nationalist ethics and moral teachings had been banned from public school curricula.¹⁴¹ This represented a move toward equalized educational practices which gave girls the same learning as boys, allowing them a much higher chance of advancing on to higher levels of education. Previously, beyond the basic reading comprehension and writing, girl's elementary education had consisted primarily of homemaking classes. Now they were taught the same material as boys in

¹⁴⁰ Bullock 17.

¹⁴¹ Liddle and Nakajima 150.

coeducational schools, exposing them to new material that would possibly inspire them to careers that they would not have otherwise known of. The change in educational settings and curriculums for girls no doubt had an impact on the amount of young women who went on the study in universities and work full-time for a career. In fact, it may be said that the legacy of the US Occupation for women's education was that women were given the tools necessary to compete with men in traditionally male-dominated educational subjects, such as engineering or the sciences. Women are far from being equally represented in such subjects still today, but there has been much progress in this area since the years after World War II.

College and university education enrollment also increased during the period of economic growth, although not as rapidly as high school enrollment. Only 13.7 of male and 2.5 percent of female students went on to four-year universities in 1960, as well as 3 percent of female students who attended junior college.¹⁴² These numbers increased to 27.3 percent, 6.5 percent, and 11.2 percent, respectively, by 1970,¹⁴³ showing a significant but not overwhelming increase in attendance at higher-level educational institutions. This may largely be attributed to the high level of competition to get into these colleges and universities, and the high cost of tuition. Competition was fierce because of the steadily growing number of applicants, and in order to gain acceptance it became increasingly necessary to engage in after-school academic training for exams. Families spent larger amounts of money on these extra classes and training so that their son would have higher chance at getting into university, which put more pressure on mothers to engage in some kind of work to supplement the household income. Therefore, it was still the primary goal to send sons to university rather than daughters, as not all families had the

¹⁴² Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 237.

¹⁴³ Fujimura-Fanselow and Imamura 237.

capability to do so yet, and working mothers could only supplement the father's income for so much. This pressure lessened as salaries continued to rise for salaried men with the growing success of the economy, and it became the norm to send daughters to post-secondary school.

For several decades this often meant sending girls to two-year junior colleges, where there was no actual job preparation except for homemaking, as the curriculum usually consisted of various home economics training courses, as well as some humanities courses which were considered "feminine" academia. Graduates from these junior colleges were not going to college as a means to further their education in preparation for a career, but as further preparation for becoming a wife and mother, under the tenet of "good wife, wise mother" that had remained the ideal female aspiration through the years after World War II. The popularity of these junior colleges actually played a hindering role to women's employment, as graduates from these schools were most often the ones who entered the general-track jobs and who quit soon after finding a husband, and although university graduates fell under this pattern as well, junior colleges were practically designed to become training grounds for housewifery under the guise of "higher education," so as to make women feel assured in that they were gaining access to a great privilege. In fact junior colleges at the time were an insidious extension of *ryosai kenbo* that only contributed to the impediment of women's participation in employment by teaching them the skills to play into the system of "good wife, wise mother," and not to become confident and enlightened individuals with career aspirations and goals. Another way to frame junior college education in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s was as a type of training program for entering the dual-track system as a non-regular employee, who would work until marriage or childbirth, and

then quit to undertake the job of homemaking and child-rearing for which they were prepared at the junior college.

University enrollment for women remained low for many years after World War II, and has increased at a steady and incremental pace up to the present. As discussed above, education for women was still viewed as a preparation for marriage and married life, not a tool for future employment or career training, as seen with the growth of junior colleges. In fact, too much education was seen as a hinderance to a woman's attractiveness in a marriage proposal, for an overly-educated woman would pose an intellectual threat to her husband if she were to be smarter than he. The gendered division of labor very much extended to the world of education and academia; by and large, women were not (and still are not) welcomed into the academic world as fully capable and intelligent human beings. Their place was still very much believed to be in the home, taking care of her husband and raising good, fit children to create the best future for the country. This belief extended to all facets of Japanese society, from education to employment. As women were delving into the new territory of higher education, they were also entering company employment in the dawn of Japan's economic miracle.

Women's Employment in Japan, Inc.

About a decade after the end of World War II, companies began to sprout in swaths, and needed employees to join their workforce. Women were included in greater numbers as time progressed, but not in the most ideal employment situation. The late 1950s may be thought of as the birth of Japan, Inc., in which Japanese companies began to thrive and the economy hit its growth period which lasted well into the 1970s. At this stage, companies developed what would

become normal practice for hiring, promoting, and firing employees. It is in these decades that the “dual-track” hiring system was born, and it hasn't changed very much since then. Laura Dales describes the effect of the developing corporate system on women’s employment: “... It was the popularization of the housewife model that enabled women to participate in the workforce, albeit on the limited terms devised by the capitalist market. In order to fuel its rapid growth, the post-war economy demanded a large and flexible pool of manual workers, and women proved ideal.”¹⁴⁴ Women were also a cheaper source of flexible labor than male laborers, adding to their desirability as low-level and clerical employees. Even tax and pension policies were designed to support the salaryman-housewife family structure, capping a “dependent” wife’s maximum income so that the husband could still claim tax breaks for dependents.

The general track, as described in Chapter 2, was created specifically for women, as there was a ‘common sense’ assumption in Japanese society of women’s ‘natural’ role as caregivers and complementary opposites to salarymen. General track jobs encompassed all secretarial and service positions in a company, reflective of women’s service role in society. General track job requirements include such things as pouring tea for regular employees, customer service, photocopying, and other menial tasks. General track jobs are not meant to be long-term, as it is the expectation that these workers will leave after just a few years. Until the practice was outlawed in 1966, it was common for women to be forced to retire from work upon marriage.¹⁴⁵ Women were simply expected to take these types of non-regular jobs in lieu of even attempting to apply for a regular job, which were reserved for men. Promotion up the corporate ladder was available only to employees who had many years of uninterrupted work at the company, thus

¹⁴⁴ Dales 17.

¹⁴⁵ Bullock 27.

rendering most women ineligible, as it was the overwhelming majority of women who had to take time off of work to raise children. This is still the case today, as there are still no options for women to continue working with small children.

If one looks at just the sheer numbers of women who have joined the workforce since the 1950s, one will see very promising numbers, as women made up 45.7 percent of the total workforce by 1970 and that increased to 50.3 percent by 1995.¹⁴⁶ However, once one incorporates the type of employment women are engaged in, the picture becomes less optimistic. In 1960, under 10 percent of female workers were classified as non-regular employees. That number increased to almost 20 percent in 1980, and to over 45 percent in 2001.¹⁴⁷

The dual-track system can be reduced to women once again being relegated to a position of subordination, not on equal ground with male workers despite their earned history of strength and dependability in Japan's times of need. The "good wife, wise mother" attitude that was constructed in the Meiji era became inescapable even as women advanced into the workplace; just as they were expected to act as a supportive role to their working husbands at home, they were likewise expected to be this support system to the male regular workers in companies. The common sensical assumption by companies, the government, and society that women leave work after marriage or childbirth left them with little choice but to play the role expected of them. Rather than face chauvinistic and offensive discrimination, most women opted into the system "willingly"; that is, under the severe pressures put upon them and the complete lack of encouragement or support for women who aspired to be anything more than a homemaker.

¹⁴⁶ Renshaw 22.

¹⁴⁷ Macnaughtan 39.

Another reason that women may have supposedly “willingly” gave in to the prescribed role that was created for them was the issue of reproductive rights and birth control. The birth control pill was (and still is) not allowed in Japan, making condoms, pulling out, and abortion the most common methods of birth control available to Japanese women. Add to that the linguistic taboo against using words to describe female bodily functions in the Japanese language,¹⁴⁸ causing great adversity to talking about such things as sex and pregnancy, and difficulty in getting women to talk to doctors about possible birth control options. Such negative connotations to even *talking* about sex and women’s bodies compounded with the many difficulties with maintaining financial and social independence and sexual autonomy no doubt intimidated many women into “willingly” playing into the “good wife, wise mother” lifestyle prescribed to them.

The women’s liberation movement of the 1970s in Japan addressed this issue of sexual repression and attempted physical re-appropriation of women’s bodies to eliminate the state’s “private hegemony” over female sexuality.¹⁴⁹ Women were expected to stay demure and submissive, free of their own sexual desire and silent about their own bodily functions. There is a serious imbalance of power in sexual relations between men and women, with most birth control options requiring the cooperation of the male, which can often be difficult to obtain. Women are taught not to be too demanding, especially when they are economically dependent on the salary-earning husband, so they are not likely to resist sexual advancements or insist on making their husband wearing a condom or pulling out when he does not want to. A 1983 survey of married women found that 39.4 percent of twenty and thirty year-olds and 69 percent of those

¹⁴⁸ Dales 19.

¹⁴⁹ Dales 19.

forty and above always acquiesced to their husband's sexual advancements regardless of their own feelings, citing some of the following reasons: "My husband always carries it through anyhow once he decides to do it, so it's useless to protest," "I obey against my will because he gets very nasty if I reject him," "I was beaten two or three times in the past when I rejected him. It's easier and faster if I accept him."¹⁵⁰ The women's liberation movement attempted to make it easier for women to approach these issues through women's spaces and support systems as well as establishing new language for describing sexual details to make it easier to obtain reliable birth control. These contributions to the women's movement of the post-war era helped many women gain sexual autonomy and independence by allowing them to overcome fears of being open about sexual relations and liberating them somewhat from the metaphorical shackles imposed on them by the state and corporate family system which had previously denied them. They may also have opened the doors to some women who otherwise would have felt pressured to marry and have children at a young age, most likely limiting their chances at developing a lifelong career. Birth control has allowed women greater freedom in life choices concerning who to date and marry, and the ability to do so while continuing to work.

Issues of the women's liberation movement brought to the forefront issues of sexual harassment and sexual discrimination in companies as well. Women had been dealing with these issues in silence for the most part because of their fragile hold on their jobs, but in the 1970s and 80s, there was a rise in lawsuit cases of harassment and open discrimination. These lawsuits may not have brought on instant law reform and enforcement at the time, but they served to bring attention and raise awareness to the existence of the crimes occurring within companies. Equal

¹⁵⁰ Miho Ogino, "Abortion and Reproductive Rights: The State of Japanese Women, 1945-1991," in *Women of Japan and Korea: Continuity and Change*, edited by Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA 1994) p. 79-80.

employment legislation movements began to appear in the late 1980s through the present, becoming more potent and effective with each new revision, thanks to the many women of a couple decades earlier who brought media attention to their predicaments. Sexual harassment and discrimination have not been fully eradicated from companies in Japan, as we still see a very paltry amount of women in management positions, but the work of women in the 70s and 80s to get the ball rolling on preventing these issues remains significant to the situation of women's employment today.

Japan's population, following a short baby-boom right after the war, began to decline during this period as well, and has not stopped since. Much of the blame has been laid on working women who were more interested in selfishly making money than family values and their "duty" as the child-bearers, despite the above demonstrable evidence of demographic and economic changes that made it more difficult to raise children than it had been in the past. In reality, women have continued for the most part to fulfill this role as dutiful wife and mother, quitting work upon childbirth and spending several years devoting themselves to this job. It is not women's lack of "responsibility" that is suppressing the birth rate, but rather the overall difficulty and expense of raising children on couples living in urban areas. It creates a catch-22 that jobs are overwhelmingly located in cities, where the cost of living is the highest and where it is the most difficult to raise children. The problems of the cost of raising children, both in monetary terms and in opportunity costs, need to be addressed as the main issue preventing the constant decrease in the birth rate.

1980s Legislation and the Economic Bubble Burst

Through the 1970s and 80s the number of women employees had been rising steadily, though still largely in the non-regular sector. In 1986 Japan witnessed the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOC) which was a package of laws concerning women's treatment in company employment settings. It was intended to promote equal treatment of men and women employees, and to help women gain entry into higher positions of work in companies. It repealed the Labor Protection Laws which had become barriers to women's advancement in the workplace because of the bans on overtime, work travel, etc. The EEOC was met with much criticism from both conservative parties and the left, as it was a breakthrough set of laws toward better treatment of working women, however it included no repercussions for employers who did not adhere to the new rules, only "encouraging" equal treatment in recruitment, hiring, job assignment and promotion.¹⁵¹ As such, it was rather ineffective at actually improving the employment situation for women employees, and many say that it was enacted largely to "placate international opinion" and to curb the growing number of discrimination lawsuits throughout Japan.¹⁵² There have since been multiple revisions of the EEOC as well as new laws attempting to remedy the poor employment situation for women and working families, and the effectiveness of these laws is continually debated.

The economic bubble burst in the early 1990s had the largest effect on working women, who were viewed as a disposable source of employment and were hired and fired as needed in order to protect the continuous employment of male regular employees. The number of regular positions decreased by 4.32 million in 1997 while the number of non-regular positions grew by

¹⁵¹ Kumamoto-Healey 463.

¹⁵² Weathers 18.

3.97 million in 2004,¹⁵³ illustrating companies' increasing reliance on non-regular workers as disposable sources of labor in an unstable post-bubble economy. In this way, in Japan's time of economic hardship, women's role as supporter and subordinate was only emphasized and reinforced by corporate practices, reflective of social beliefs and assumptions.

Conclusions

Developments in Japan's post-World War II era have had lasting effects that continue into today's employment situation for women. From the resurgence of *ryosai kenbo* to the dual-track system practices in companies, women have been constantly told that their true place is in the home, raising children and taking care of their husbands. Mutations of *ryosai kenbo* allowed for mothers and married women to work part-time or non-regular jobs to supplement the family income, but not for financial independence. Only the determined, career-type women who withstood discrimination and sexist practices in the companies became the exception, those women who became the 6 percent of women managers of today's Japanese companies. Several factors contributed to women's incentive to quit work after marriage or childbirth and mostly aspire to a life of homemaking and possibly working on the side, for the good of the family rather than for themselves. By numbers, more women than ever were participating in paid employment, signaling vast improvement over previous times when it was considered abhorrent for women to work outside the home. However, this improvement proved to be more hollow than it appeared, as proved by the economic bubble burst in the 1990s that highlighted many of the flaws and bandages used to hide the poor situation for female employment on the inside of

¹⁵³ Weathers 17.

corporations' gendered practices. Women have always been relegated to a supportive role in society, and this has only been emphasized by their position in company employment in Japan.

Chapter 5: Final Thoughts and Implications for the Future

“Make sure your accomplishments are public. Don’t let your male peers take credit for your accomplishments. Tell people what you are doing...Volunteer for every assignment that has the possibility of making you visible. Be a vacuum for information. Visit the secretaries and office ladies, so that you learn what’s going on. If you feel you have to serve tea, listen to the conversations when you serve. Never reveal your tactics.”

-Guerilla warfare tactics of a female manager¹⁵⁴

“There are no women managers—just office flowers.”

-Senior male executive¹⁵⁵

The above quotes, one by a woman and one by a man, both in management positions, exemplify the existence of a stagnant attitude among men and within corporate culture that women are not suited for and incapable of occupying positions of leadership. The female manager quoted above feels as though women must employ guerilla tactics in order to be noticed in the Japanese workplace in the hopes of getting promoted, while the male executive seems confident in his belief that there are no women who actually contribute to the advancement of companies. He, for all intents and purposes, represents the exact reason why the female manager feels the need to use special tactics to succeed as a woman employee. This type of hopeless chauvinism is rather common in the upper ranks of Japanese companies, resulting in the preservation of the status quo and excuse-making for why there are virtually no women in higher positions: common reasons cited include “They don’t stay,” “they’re not committed to the job,” or “they don’t want the responsibility.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Renshaw 127.

¹⁵⁵ Renshaw 94.

¹⁵⁶ Renshaw 183.

Women in Japan have seen much change over the course of the last century. Today's climate for women's employment remains a challenge for women who aspire to more than raising children and possibly working on the side: most face the inevitable choice between a good family life, or making a lifelong career for themselves. Women seem to be split into two groups: of those who choose to have children, most quit work upon childbirth but possibly take up part-time jobs as the children grow older; and those who forego children and continue working.

That being said, the issues that women face in employment, must be looked at it in the context of Japan's history in relation to women's work, for we cannot expect to see the entire picture in a temporally suspended view of Japan, but must search for the origins of the main problems impeding women's employment today in historically based social and cultural conventions. These lie far almost a century ago when Japan emerged from a self-imposed isolation and first entered a period of rapid modernization after the Meiji Reformation of 1868. Gendered social roles which relegate women to the home and the men to the public space, inherited from centuries of Confucian-based thought, were codified in the late nineteenth century into a matter of national interest the state endeavored to maximize productivity among its citizenry for the purpose of competing with the West. *Ryosai kenbo*, the persistent ideology that a women's place is within the domestic sphere, was borne in this era and would continue to haunt women throughout the following century and beyond. Wars, education, and the work of the first Japanese feminists all played significant roles in the formation of women's collective consciousness in the Meiji and the following Taisho and Showa eras by shaping the way the state, society, and women themselves viewed women's function in society. The US Occupation

following World War II, despite not being motivated by the purest of intentions, was rather advantageous for women in Japan. Under the 1947 Constitution, for which the US is mostly responsible, women were granted several rights and freedoms and in the following years would in greater and greater numbers enter the workforce as Japan's economic miracle hit full force in the 1960s and 70s. However, underneath the apparent blossoming of women's employment, as measured by the sheer number of women participating in paid employment, lay harmful trends that would go on to define how women participate in the workforce today, the most prominent of these being the dual-track hiring system employed by many Japanese companies.

Women's employment has come a long way since a century ago, but there is still much more headway that must be made before we will see true gender equality in the workplace. Japan is not unique in its subordination of working women. Many industrialized nations, such as the United States, still grapple with the pervading issues of sexual harassment and the "glass ceiling," which keeps women at low levels of authority and preserves the wage gap between men and women. However, these issues seem to become magnified once one takes a look at Japan, where the employment situation for women, as measured by rates of long-term participation, the number of female managers, and wages, surpasses that of South Korea alone.

Interviews with Japanese women themselves bring us much insight when analyzing and deconstructing the problems in place that hinder them from reaching their goals and aspirations. Management professor Jean Renshaw, whom I quote many times throughout this chapter, as well as journalist Veronica Chambers, have conducted many interviews with various women executives, who share their thoughts on the situation of women in corporate Japan, and their points of view provide great insight into the reality of what working women deal with and what

they believe is the situation of women in employment today. One female manager said: “Women in Japan tend to see management work as a risk to their personal lives and are dogged by the old-fashioned notion that aggressive behavior is unattractive. Doing support-type work is somehow psychologically easier.”¹⁵⁷ Another is quoted as saying, “Society is getting better and better for women. I’m quite comfortable with my work, but there are still some issues. Some jobs are expected to be done by women, like serving tea when guests come. Even if you have a career, if you’re a woman, you’re expected to serve tea.”¹⁵⁸ One male producer, director, and writer says of women workers in Japan, “our generation has more freedom in doing anything, but also I think that even though we have more freedom, if women want to survive in a career they have to work hard—probably twice as hard as the men. Only the strongest can survive in this society.”¹⁵⁹

We must also keep in mind that many of these interviewees are at the top of the top, some of the highest-positioned women executives and scholars who no doubt are not representative of the Japanese female population as a whole. However, the mere fact that these high-achieving women exist means that they are paving the way for more women to enter into previously exclusive realms after them, and are exposing to male-dominated sectors female faces, equally qualified and capable as their male counterparts.

Toshiaki Tachibanaki, in his final statements about inequality among women, says “Each person is free to determine how he or she wants to live...It is true, though, that most women want to have a romantic relationship and get married, to have children, and, if possible, to work

¹⁵⁷ Veronica Chambers, *Kickboxing Geishas: How Modern Japanese Women are Changing Their Nation* (Free Press: New York, NY 2007) p. 81.

¹⁵⁸ Chambers 59.

¹⁵⁹ Chambers 66.

too. They will face various obstacles, but tackling those challenges will give their lives meaning. People may fail sometimes, but another path forward opens quickly if they accept it when things do not work out; they should not resent others whose dreams are fulfilled.”¹⁶⁰ I must disagree with such an assertion, because while it is true that not everyone can get what they want in life, it is unfair to say that women should always have to choose and simply “accept” when they cannot achieve a work and family balance, when it is not of their own incompetency but the incompetency of Japanese society that is preventing them from living a fulfilling life that they are free to define. It is not tackling challenges they face in the workplace, e.g. discrimination and sexism from their superiors and coworkers, which gives women’s lives meaning. To turn to the academic world which is similarly situated to corporate life, my thesis advisor, Professor Lynne Miyake, has spoken to me of her female colleagues in Japan. She has observed some sad and disturbing effects of the stigma against hard-working women on many of them, who face chronic depression, anxiety, and dissonance between their academic and work lives and their personal lives due to the stigma against strong, achieving women in Japan. The effects of the status quo on their passion for their work, their confidence and self-esteem, their personal lives and lives as a whole. They are literally viewed as unattractive and unloveable simply for doing what they love and for what they have great talent.¹⁶¹ What, I ask, is “fulfilling” about that? There is nothing “meaningful” in this, in the sense that Tachibanaki means, nothing other than proof of the pervasive and powerful effects of sexism in Japanese male-dominated society. Renshaw quotes a female university professor: “It’s better to be invisible than to be pushed

¹⁶⁰ Tachibanaki 268.

¹⁶¹ Lynne Miyake, Personal Communication, 15 April 2013.

down. You learn to disregard your feelings to survive. Korean women are more overtly assertive and are pushed down harder.”¹⁶²

Further, if one door is shut on a female worker, who is to say that “another path forward opens quickly” for her? There are already so few career employment opportunities available for women. The answer certainly is not Tachibanaki, a male himself, who has never had to deal with the problems with which my professor’s female colleagues and many ambitious Japanese women have had to deal. The problem with men trying to define women’s issues and women’s role in society is that they do not have the experience of being a woman, and can only see things from a male perspective. Japan’s power structures have been traditionally dominated by men, so it is in a way understandable that society has been slow to achieve more equality in the workplace. Now, however, is the time when Japan will need to seriously reconsider its position on the treatment of women in employment, or else there will be grave repercussions for the birth rate and consequently the nation’s economy.

But just as many Japanese men would rather see the current system remain in place, and there are also many Japanese women who are content with the status quo and do not sense a need for great social change in terms of traditional gender roles. Perceived cultural differences play a large role in this attitude in many cases. Two female university graduates suggested this point of view, one saying “In America, women want it all - work and a family. Maybe in America it can work sometimes. If that’s what Japanese women want, then they should go to America. But I don’t really think it’s possible.” The other said “I saw how happy Japanese families were compared to American families, and I think it has to do with more mothers staying at home to

¹⁶² Renshaw 140.

raise the children.”¹⁶³ These statements make comparisons between the United States and Japan, which may influence the attitude of the two speakers, but I think that their beliefs summarize the perseverance of the division of labor and its deep establishment in society.

In order to eradicate the problems in women’s employment, Japan will need to change social attitudes toward gender roles and the division of labor. Currently the traditional system demands that mothers are the ones who must devote their time to child-raising, rather than sharing the burden between mother and father. Such attitudes appear to be disintegrating among the younger generations, as I observed among the female Japanese students who I met while studying abroad. As the female executive quoted above said, hopefully companies will willingly choose to evolve their stratagem from basing their structure on the acceptance of old and tired gender roles to gender-equal and more flexible approach to hiring and promotions.

My personal experiences in Japan lead me to believe that women have begun to and will continue to forge paths for themselves in the realm of full-time employment. There may have been a slight bias because of the outgoing personality types of Japanese university students who were willing to hang out with American study abroad students; nevertheless, I witnessed in the young women I met ambition, motivation, dedication, and gutsiness on par with any number of my American peers. An acquaintance of mine, as a result of her *shushoku katsudou* (“job-hunting lifestyle,” which most college students go through as they approach university graduation), received an offer for regular, full-time employment at 三菱電機, known in English as Mitsubishi Electric, the widely-known automobile and electronics company. Mitsubishi is in fact known in Japan as a very traditional, male-dominated company, having been an established

¹⁶³ Renshaw 192.

power for hundreds of years,¹⁶⁴ exemplifying her accomplishment in attaining career employment in that company.

I must acknowledge that my viewpoints are naturally of a very Western perspective, due to my middle-class American upbringing. I advocate employment as a source of independence and personal achievement, an assertion to which many others may not adhere. It is important to exercise some cultural sensitivity as foreigners approaching this subject. A life of full-time work may not be desirable for everyone, especially in a country not of Western thinking and whose social and family values may differ significantly from ours.

Personal opinions aside, overriding evidence suggests that if the situation for working women does not improve, Japan will face enormous economic strain and upheaval from the rapidly shrinking population.¹⁶⁵ The country needs to rethink its traditional beliefs concerning the gendered division of labor as it relates to and determines people's roles in society. This may come about through force, as the economy stutters even further due to labor shortages, or it may come through waves of progressive and effective policy making which will ease the dissonance between work and family.

The stubborn population decline has begun to force the Japanese government to reconsider public policy concerning women in the workforce, as there is a growing need for both a) women to participate in outside employment, due to the shrinking number of young and able Japanese workers, and b) for women to find a healthy balance between raising children and maintaining a long-term career. As it is, full-time working women are forced to choose between work and family, and the low fertility rate suggests that many are choosing work over bearing

¹⁶⁴ Renshaw 181.

¹⁶⁵ Macnaughtan 49.

children. More government support for working mothers as well as encouragement from the systems of power, i.e. corporate and social systems, for women to participate in regular employment is needed not only to bolster the economy and raise the birthrate, but to take a step toward the betterment of women in society in general. Equal treatment and opportunity in employment for women are valid measures of women's position in society, and that financial and economic independence can provide many benefits for women in modern times. Jean Renshaw quotes a Japanese female executive: "I certainly hope management - or at least most of them - will choose evolution rather than retreat. If, for some reason, it chooses retreat, I think there will be a revolution. But then again, that might be fun too."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Renshaw 249.

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