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Do American Models of  
Female Career Attainment  
Apply to Japanese?

Chikako Usui

**DO AMERICAN MODELS OF FEMALE CAREER  
ATTAINMENT APPLY TO JAPANESE?**

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## ABSTRACT

Recent literature on gender stratification in the Japanese economy stresses structured discrimination in worker recruitment and training policies as leading causes of depressed career mobility among women. This paper maintains that the structural and institutional barrier perspective alone is insufficient in understanding economic roles of women in Japan. It challenges a number of key assumptions of the structural and institutional barrier perspective that places the excessive emphasis on individual independence through employment. Developed in the U.S., this perspective tends to neglect larger social and cultural features of group oriented societies. The examination of data in the postwar period in Japan indicates that working conditions as measured by working hours and vacation days have remained harsh and that the rapid economic growth has locked men in the narrow roles of worker-breadwinner. There is little sign of convergence in terms of career orientations among men and women. This paper also suggest difficulties in attributing women's lack of career orientations solely to perceived or actual employment obstacles. The discussion section of the paper considers the nature of network society as it relates to status-attainment processes. It suggests that the American emphasis on individual attributes obscures social relations and one's group affiliations as critical elements in which women's status and self-identify are embeded in Japan.

## INTRODUCTION

In a documentary called "The Japanese Version," the film-makers introduce the audience to a bar in Tokyo dedicated to American cowboy culture. Western memorabilia hangs on the walls; country and western music plays on the loudspeakers; and classic films are shown on video monitors. Regular customers in the bar dress like a character out of a Hoot Gibson movie. When asked why American Westerns are so popular in Japan, they answer that the cowboy represents traditional Japanese society. Whenever there is trouble, the cowboys all gather together into a group and take care of each other's interests, just like people in Japan.

In America, the cowboy is the quintessential individualist who solitarily roams the prairies and lives by his own rules. Like The Lone Ranger, he rides into town, confronts evil, and then rides off into the sunset.

If Japanese and Americans can see an image as clear as the American cowboy so differently, it should come as no surprise that the idea of gender equality looks very different in the two countries. It is a cliché to say that Japan is a group-oriented society and America is individualistic, but there is more than enough truth in the stereotype to not reject it because of the many exceptions that can be found. With gender equality issues, as with Westerns, what you see depends on who you are.

Compared with advanced Western nations, Japan has been cited as a society reluctant in achieving gender equality (O'Kelly and Carney, 1986). It is widely considered that the status of women is significantly lower in Japan than in any other industrial nations. Recent efforts to explain persistent gender inequality in the Japanese labor market emphasize barriers that are structured in the employment institutions and duality of the economy. The structural/institutional barrier perspective maintains that gender inequality results from discriminatory hiring, training,

and promotion systems that are tied to Japan's dual economic structure (Brinton, 1989; 1993; Kerbo, 1989; O'Kelly and Carney, 1986).

The structural/institutional barrier perspective is based on a number of American-centric premises that have dubious application to Japanese society. To provide a universalistic explanation of the causes of gender stratification in the labor market, it tends to ignore larger cultural and social institutional features of Japanese society. Japan is treated as just another place to apply American models of employment and gender relations. When outcomes deviate from the American ideal, employment structures are seen as irrational and "unfair." This is not to say that Japanese economic structures are not discriminatory. It is, however, to question the mechanical reliance on specific employment structures and institutions as the primary explanation of gender inequality in the labor market. The application of universalist patterns excessively narrows the conceptualization of female employment across cultures.

This paper argues that the structural/institutional barrier perspective alone is insufficient to offer an explanation of gender stratification in the Japanese labor market. First, the paper examines several key assumptions of structural/institutional barrier perspective as they apply to gender stratification in the Japanese economy. Second, the paper shows that Japan's economic changes during the 1970s and 1980s have tended to limit gender equality in the economy. Examination of the impact of the dual economic structures that emerged since the mid-1970s shows further strengthened gender stratification. Finally, this paper examines whether the structural/institutional barrier perspective alone can appropriately explain the observed gender stratification that emerged in the last two decades in Japan. The examination of Japanese work life and national attitudinal surveys suggests difficulties in attributing the observed

"subordination" of Japanese women to narrowly defined structural and institutional barriers. In the discussion section, this paper will consider why the individualistic career attainment model restricts our understanding of gender equality in Japan.

### **Structural and Institutional Barrier Perspective on Gender Stratification in Japan**

By any conventional quantitative measures, Japan has a very poor showing with respect to gender equality in the labor market. The overall pay differential remains 55.5 (women) to 100 (men), as compared with 68 to 100 in the U.S.; the representation of females in managerial ranks is extremely low (8.2% in 1991) compared to any other industrially advanced nation (e.g., 42% for the U.S. in 1990 and 37% for Canada in 1989) (ILO, 1991).

During the past two decades, scholars analyzing the causes of gender stratification in the U.S. developed a perspective that may be called the structural/institutional barrier perspective. Although there are a wide array of causal locations in their views, they all emphasize structured discrimination in recruitment and training policies as leading causes of depressed career mobility and lower wages among women.<sup>1</sup> The employer prejudice view developed in the 1970s, for example, suggests that employers are reluctant to hire women into full-time, employee positions because they perceive women as less committed to work careers (Bergman, 1974; Blau and Ferber, 1986; Carney and O'Kelly, 1987; Marini, 1989; Wolf and Fligstein, 1979). Also,

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<sup>1</sup> Before this perspective became popular, sociologists focused on the normative barrier perspective. It attributed the causes of gender differences in occupational positions to gender differences in socialization experiences.

corporations are reluctant to place women into high-status occupational positions that deviate from the appropriate gender relationships. As a result, women tend to be 'trapped in' assistant-level positions and have very little upper mobility and fewer wage increases. Institutionalized discrimination in the hiring and promotion system causes the concentration of women in the secondary labor market.<sup>2</sup>

A more recent structural/institutional barrier perspective (Brinton, 1989, 1993) suggests Japanese employment institutions affect men and women differently as they are placed into different job-tracks within a firm. In contrast to American hiring practices, large firms in Japan hire high school and college graduates fresh out of school only once a year. A new graduate has a once in a life-time chance of applying for a job at a large firm. When a man or woman leaves a job from a large firm, the prospect of re-employment by a large firm is almost non-existent in his or her life time. After entering a large firm, men are placed in 'career-tracks' which are the key to moving up to managerial positions and they receive extensive in-house training, seniority based wages and promotions, and permanent employment<sup>3</sup>. Women are

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<sup>2</sup> A variant of this view is known as the statistical discrimination view (Aigner and Cain, 1977; Becker, 1971; Phelps, 1972; Rosenfeld, 1983). It suggests that employers perceive women to have shorter job tenure and higher job turn-over rates than men do. Therefore, employers place women in jobs that are least affected by worker turn over or in part-time jobs. Neither type of job offers prospects for promotion.

<sup>3</sup> Occupations at large firms and government agencies are extensively ranked (Pucik, 1984). In the government sector, managerial recruits are classified into two categories: administrative track (*jimu-kei*, literally, clerical track) and technical track (*gijutsu-kei*). Promotion to managerial ranks is much higher for those on the administrative track. Since the passage of Equal Employment Law in 1986, large firms started offering women options of choosing a general clerical track, which handles assistant jobs, or an administrative career track (*sogo-shoku*). In terms of distribution of workers in Japan, about 80 percent of males and 70 percent of females are in the modern sector. The remaining population is located in the 'traditional' sector, including agricultural workers, the self-employed, and family enterprise workers. Within



typically hired as "office ladies", that is, they are placed on non-career tracks and are assigned to assistant jobs that entail little responsibility and in-firm career mobility. Because many women resign from their jobs upon marriage or child-birth, their chances of getting re-employed at large firms become severely limited. Consequently, they seek jobs in medium and small size firms in the secondary labor market<sup>4</sup>. Having shorter job tenure and fewer skills by the time they re-enter the labor market, these women receive low wages and limited opportunities for promotion. In short, these employment institutions preserve privileged positions for male workers in large firms and keep female workers in small and medium firms where jobs are unstable and wages are low. Thus, the structural/institutional barrier perspective views women as victims of structural and institutional obstacles and calls for remedies such as equal employment laws and affirmative action laws.

#### Shortcomings of Structural/Institutional Barrier Perspective

The structural/institutional barrier perspective is insufficient in explaining gender

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the modern sector of the economy, about 11-15 percent of workers are employed by the public sector. The remaining workers are located in the private sector, with approximately 13 percent of these workers employed by large firms (Ministry of Labor, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> The term, 'secondary labor market' stems from the labor market segmentation literature (Ford, 1988: 140; Gordon, Edwards and Reich, 1983) that considers the nature and impact of economic structures on workers. Briefly speaking, this perspective suggests that the private economy is divided into two sectors: the core (or primary) and the secondary (or periphery). The core sector consists of the large firms with stable employment, opportunities for internal mobility, and high wages for workers. The secondary sector consists of small and medium size firms with marginal profits, labor intensive work, low capital input, and intense competition for survival. The jobs tend to be unstable and wages are low. Traditionally, women, minorities, and immigrants find themselves in this sector of the economy.

stratification in the Japanese labor market because of a number of American-centric premises that have limited application to Japan. First, it presumes that career mobility challenges the individual to fulfill human potential and interests, where the higher the occupational status one achieves, the more rewards accrue to the individual. This assumption, however, must be put into a proper societal context to be evaluated. Although it depicts high-status careers in large firms as glamorous and prestigious, it rarely mentions modest monetary rewards systems in Japan and high personal costs associated with high-status career attainment. Presumably glamorous, high-status, corporate executives do not earn big salaries in Japan as they do in the U.S. In 1984 the average salaries of top executives in Japan ranged from \$50,000 to \$250,000. Income gap between the top executive class and the entry-level employee class was 7:1 in Japan as compared to 37:1 in the U.S. The average male employee at his peak earnings, at around age 45-49, makes only twice as large an income as the entry-level employees do (at age 20-24) (Kerbo, 1989: 431). In addition to a modest monetary incentive system, one cannot overemphasize the harshness of working conditions in Japan. Presumably, secure career-track employment is tied to a long-term commitment to a firm where rules of seniority, rather than the rules of meritocracy, dictate promotion and salary increase. An individual must not only wait a long time for substantial salary increase, but has little flexibility and control over personal career development, working hours, and leisure time. As we shall see later in this paper, the comparison of Japanese national average labor time with that of other major countries illustrates the magnitude of Japanese deviance.

Second, the structural/institutional barrier perspective on gender stratification considers career achievements exclusively in modern paid occupations. It excludes other models of career

attainment, such as entrepreneurs who are classified as self-employed workers. The exclusion of this 'traditional' sector poses some problems for Japan, since Japan is a country of small-scale businesses and there are many owners-managers of family business enterprises.<sup>5</sup> In 1986, small businesses with less than 50 workers absorbed 64 percent of the workers in the private sector. Companies with more than 300 employees accounted for only 13 percent of workers. Thirteen (13) percent of the total labor force, or 10% of the female labor force, were business owners (Ministry of Labor, 1991). In the West, by contrast, the development of capitalism involved the rise of large-scale organizations and contraction of small-scale businesses. Only a small percentage of female workers are so called self-employed (U.S., 6%; Denmark, 3%; Sweden, 5%) (ILO, 1991). The examination of career pursuits confined to modern occupations not only narrows the conceptualization of female employment in Japan. It also underestimates actual female representation in business management and administration.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the structural/institutional approach takes the growing independence of women and their involvement in occupational careers as given and presumes men and women have similar aspirations for career pursuits. However, the increasing levels of women's work career aspirations and the corresponding convergence of men and women's life course patterns in the

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<sup>5</sup> These workers (the self-employed persons and family workers) are classified as those in the 'traditional' sector. It is almost excluded, as if this is a backward, anachronistic, and marginal category of work and workers.

<sup>6</sup> One may argue that the ownership of small business does not offer as much financial security and attractive working conditions as does large business. Nevertheless, it needs to be considered in the overall employment structures. As mentioned in the text, companies with less than 50 workers account for nearly two-thirds of the Japanese labor force in the private sector. Being a boss of one's own company offers challenges and remains an attractive career goal for workers in small and medium scale companies (Ballon, 1989: 11).

U.S. are partly a reflection of decreased stability in the work place and the family. Recent macro-level, social and economic changes (e.g., high unemployment and divorce rates, the erosion of the family wage system) have contributed to growing ambivalence with regard to the meaning of the family and decreasing functional payoffs of traditional family career pursuits for women (Buchmann, 1989; Ehrenreich, 1983). Thus, the growing independence of women and their involvement in occupational careers are also the consequence of women's greater needs to rely on their own resources as much as women's preference for career attainment based on new work and family models. These structural transformations that weakened the linkage between work and the family, however, have not occurred with the same magnitude in Japanese society. The structural and cultural basis linking the work and family life remains relatively stable, and this stability still assures the functional payoffs in the sex division of work and family careers.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the structural/institutional approach is built on the assumption that men and women have similar career orientations. In the U.S., empirical research in the 1980s lent support to this assumption. Today, there are more similarities than differences in occupational aspirations of American men and women including career pursuits in high-status occupations (Fiorentine, 1988; Jacobs, 1989; Buchmann, 1989). Thus, men and women with similar educational qualifications and career aspirations should have the same probabilities of occupational achievements. However, this chain of assumptions may not hold for Japan where men and women tend to report dissimilar career orientations and pursue different life course

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<sup>7</sup> The divorce rate in Japan is on the rise but is still the lowest among industrially advanced countries. In 1983 the divorce rate was 1.51 per 1,000 population in Japan, as compared to 5.0 per 1,000 in the U.S. (United Nations, 1983, pp. 517-519). More recent data for Japan show that the divorce rate decreased somewhat (1.26 per 1,000 in 1990) (Bando, 1992: 14).

patterns. Research indicates that most Japanese women conceive of marriage and family as the major institutional domain of their adulthood identities and pursue work careers to fit in with their family careers (Imamura, 1987; Lebra, 1984; Lebra, Paulson, and Powers, 1976; Plath, 1983). Even among the college educated, there are considerable differences in career ambitions between men and women. As we shall see later in this paper, the proportion of women who are fundamentally oriented to the pursuit of occupational success is still small and has not increased much during the past three decades.<sup>8</sup>

### **Women in the Labor Force in the U.S. and Japan, 1960-1990**

When one considers the overall labor force participation rates among women, Japan and the U.S. are quite similar. Approximately half of the female adult population is working. In 1990 the rates were 58% for the U.S. and 50% for Japan (Table 1). However, as data in Table 1 show, these two countries are characterized by diverse historical patterns in their female labor force participation. Contrary to the popular image of Japanese housewives who devote themselves to the family, Japanese women have worked in large numbers, at about 50 percent in the last three decades. Female labor participation rates in Japan have been relatively high and have shown very little change over time. In contrast, the overall trend for American women has involved a sharp increase in labor force participation rates, from 38 percent in 1960 to 58 percent in 1990. The American pattern is marked by the recency of female labor force

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<sup>8</sup> Scholars with the structural/institutional barrier perspective maintain that a lack of career aspirations among Japanese women is a result of gender-differentiated socialization or perceived or actual lack of career opportunity for women. These views are well taken. In the discussion section, I consider problems associated with these socialization perspectives.

participation, whereas the Japanese pattern reveals a relative continuity in female labor force participation in the post WW II economy. The notion that recent economic and social changes have brought about increases in female labor force participation well describes the American experience but not the Japanese.

A somewhat similar pattern of U.S.-Japan differences exists in terms of female labor force participation by marital status. As data in Table 2 show, labor force participation among single women in the U.S. rose from 59 percent in 1960 to 68 percent in 1990. A much more dramatic increase, however, took place among married women, with their labor force participation rising from 32 percent in 1960 to 58 percent in 1990. In Japan, in contrast, participation rates among married women have been relatively high, at about 50 percent in the last three decades. Thus, during the past 30 years the comparison of married women between the two countries indicates an overall higher rate of labor force participation among Japanese married women. Again, Japan shows stable, high levels of labor force participation with only a slight increase, while the U.S. experienced a sharp increase in participation during the past three decades.

#### Labor Force Participation and the Effects of Life Cycle

Although the above examination of historical trends in female labor force participation by marital status indicates a relatively stable, high level of labor force participation among Japanese married women, there are stronger effects of family of procreation (or life cycle effects) among Japanese women than among American women. As Figures 1 and 2 which describe female labor force participation by age group in the last three decades indicate, Japan

forms an upper case letter "M" or "double-humped" line due to withdrawal from the labor force in the prime childbearing period and re-entry into the labor market in middle age. In contrast, in the U.S., there has been a drastic increase in the labor force participation among married women after 1970. Among women aged 34 to 44, labor force participation rates nearly doubled, from 40 percent in 1960 to nearly 80 percent in 1989. For women aged 25 to 34, similarly, labor force participation rates increased from 37 percent to 72 percent in the same period. By 1989, there is no perceptible indication of life-cycle effects on women's labor force participation patterns among American women. By contrast, Japanese patterns have shown consistent and persistent life cycle effects on women's economic activities.

In considering the magnitude of changes American women made in the pursuit of careers in the last twenty years, it is striking that in Japan the temporary withdrawal from the labor force during the prime childbearing years has remained as strong over time. Despite sweeping economic changes that Japan has undergone in the last three decades and despite much publicized increases in so-called "career minded" women who intend to pursue their careers without any interruptions, a large proportion of Japanese female workers withdraw from the labor force during the prime childbearing years and re-enter the labor market in early middle age. It is remarkable that there has been relatively little change in these M-curve patterns of female employment over time. But it is not clear what these persistent patterns mean and how they are maintained. Some argue that these M-curve patterns support the view that Japanese women still conceive of family careers as their central adulthood roles and work careers of secondary importance (U.S. Department of Education, 1987). The following section considers these questions.

### **Economic Rationalization of the 1970s and the Creation of Part-Time Jobs**

Recent studies stressing the effects of structural/institutional barriers (e.g., firm-specific employment practices) suggest that once Japanese women leave their jobs, their chances of getting re-employed in the core sector of the labor market (i.e., large firms) becomes severely limited. Once leaving the initial jobs, they are forced into the acceptance of jobs at medium and small firms in the secondary market. The examination of changes in the structure of the Japanese economy during the 1970s and 1980s does show that Japan's phenomenal economic growth has tended to limit, rather than to enhance, their full participation to the economy.

The Japanese economy was radically transformed as it was hard hit by oil shocks twice in the 1970s. Observers note that many Japanese companies coped with these adverse economic conditions by creating subcontracting relationships and a temporary, part-time work force. Ballon (1989), for example, suggests that subcontracting relationships have evolved as highly competitive technologically flexible strategies among large corporations. Also, large firms have transferred redundant workers to their subsidiaries and affiliates in order to keep the enterprise lean. Although one might expect the gradual weakening of, and even the disappearance of, small enterprises in the modern society, in Japan, small establishments have not been absorbed by large firms. They have remained strong in the overall economy. Ballon (1989: 3) estimates that small-scale manufacturing enterprises employing less than 20 workers constitute about 80 percent of all the manufacturing firms that were created since mid-1970 and remain at that level today.

Many Japanese firms also attempted to rationalize the labor force by increasingly shifting



towards part-time workers. By keeping a limited number of permanent workers to whom the company is obligated to respect life-time employment, full benefits, and competitive wages, the hiring of temporary, part-time workers gave companies more flexibility in terms of wages, hours of work, and the terms of contract<sup>9</sup>. As we see in the following section, women, especially married women, were increasingly drawn into the secondary sectors of the modern economy.

Table 3 breaks down labor force participation among Japanese women by forms of employment over time. In the post-World War II Japanese economy, a large percentage of Japanese women worked as "family enterprise workers." In 1955 half of female workers (50.6%) supplied labor as family enterprise workers. Many of these women were in agricultural industries, since the agricultural sector absorbed 43 percent of total female labor force in 1960. These female "family enterprise workers" represented the largest component of the female labor force until about 1960. By 1990, however, family enterprise workers accounted for only 17 percent of the total female labor force. The contraction of agriculture and other traditional industries paralleled the growth of modern forms of employment, as evidenced by the sharp increase of female workers in the "employee" category, from 34 percent to 72 percent between 1955-1990. Yet, further breakdown of the "employee" category in Table 3 shows that the contraction of "family enterprise workers" was accompanied by a sharp increase in female part-time workers after 1970. Part-time workers constituted only 5 percent of the total female labor force in 1970 but by 1990 it increased to almost 20 percent. By contrast, female family

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that part-time work does not necessary mean short hours of work. According to a national survey of 30,000 part-time workers conducted in 1990, on the average, married women (who made up 80 percent of all the respondents) worked 5.9 hours a day for five days with the average daily commuting time of 20 minutes (Special Committee of the Minister of Labor, 1991).

enterprise workers went down from 31 percent in 1970 to 17 percent in 1990. In the same period, the increase in full-time employment among Japanese females was modest, from 48 percent in 1970 to 53 percent in 1990.

The above findings that Japan experienced a modest growth in female full-time positions but a greater increase in part-time positions is consistent with the literature that Japan's economic success has involved the intensification of the duality in its economy in the mid-70s. By creating small firms and a temporary, part-time labor force, companies attempted to rationalize the production processes. There is clear evidence that Japan's rapid economic growth of the 1970s and 1980s has not translated to the full incorporation of female workers into the core sector of the economy where workers are assured of stable employment, better wages, and career opportunities; but has been partly achieved by dual economic structuring. Table 4 provides further evidence that women have been increasingly pulled into the secondary labor market as part-time workers. Data comparing women's employment forms by age group between 1982 and 1987 show that for all age groups considered, there has been a decline in full-time employment ("employees") but a sharp increase in the proportion of women working as part-time or temporary workers. Among women aged 35-54, part-time employment reached the highest level, accounting for 43 percent of female workers in that age group in 1987.

The above observation demonstrates that there has been a considerable degree of continuity and change in Japanese women's employment patterns. On the one hand, women have experienced stable, relatively high levels of labor force participation in the last three decades. On the other hand, women were increasingly relegated to secondary labor market jobs during the time when Japan achieved robust economic growth. It describes the unchanging

nature of gender stratification in the Japanese economy.

The observed unequal representation of men and women in the Japanese labor market, however, may or may not be the direct result of blocked opportunities or discrimination. One cannot deduce the effects of assumed causes by the observed outcome without eliminating other possible causes, such as career ambitions of the individuals. If men and women have different career choices and do not pursue similar careers, the resultant differences, as reflected in the uneven representation of men and women in certain careers, has little to do with the blocked opportunities or institutionalized discrimination in the economy.

In the U.S., there has been a growing independence of women and their involvement in occupational careers, leading to increasing convergence of men and women's life course patterns. However, one cannot mechanically apply the American model of life course patterns disregarding the linkages among cultural, social, and economic institutions. High levels of unemployment, divorce, and the erosion of the family wage system since the 1970s, in particular, have made the traditional family system obsolete. Today, American women have greater needs to rely on their own resources. In Japan, in contrast, economic prosperity of the 1960s and 1970s in Japan gave rise to the notion of 'traditional' family unit and ideology of full-time housewife (Lebra, 1986).

The following section examines a number of national attitudinal data and data on work conditions during the past two decades in Japan. It shows a considerable degree of continuity in the ways in which women conduct their life course careers. It also shows that Japan's

economic prosperity, which depended heavily on the dedicated work force and the rigid employment institutions, tended to constrain men's life course patterns to a far greater degree than it did for women.

### **Japan's Economic Growth and Harsh Labor Conditions: Men chained in the Roles of Breadwinner**

As Japan joined the ranks of economic superpowers in the 1980s, it was the Japanese management, corporate structures, and dual economic structuring that received most scholarly attention. Men were depicted as free to pursue power and venture outside the home, leaving family matters to their wives. Women were seen as chained to family roles and marginal roles in the labor market. However, issues relating to male work conditions during the past two decades have not been fully incorporated in the literature of gender stratification in Japan.

Although scholars differ in their degree of emphasis, there is agreement that the Japanese employment institutions of long-term job security and seniority were critical in achieving post-war economic prosperity.<sup>10</sup> These institutions, however, have locked Japanese men into a rigid

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<sup>10</sup> As mentioned, not all Japanese workers are provided with life-time employment. Although estimates vary, workers with life-time job security accounts for 20-25 percent of the labor force (i.e., public sector plus those working for large firms). Levin (1983), for example, suggests that workers with life-long careers accounted for about 20 percent during 1960s and 1970s. Given the heavy concentration of small and medium size firms in Japan, job mobility rates (or career change) from medium size firms to small-scale firms or to become owner-managers of small firms are higher than one might expect. According to Cole (1979) who compared labor mobility among auto workers between the U.S. and Japan in the mid-1970s, 35 percent of male workers in Japan stayed with the first employer, as compared with 13 percent of males in the U.S. Cheng (1991), based on 1,800 males workers aged 20-69 in 1975, arrives at similar figures. Cheng's study also confirms that workers in large firms and workers on managerial tracks have the lowest rates of job-leaving. Production and sales workers tend to have high rates of mobility, reflecting the existence of smaller-scale manufacturing and retail businesses in Japan. According to Levin (1983) and Cole (1979), overall job mobility rates in

system of career attainment. As mentioned earlier, the Japanese employment system demands considerable worker dedication to the company. Worker's careers are shaped and re-shaped depending on the company's goals, allowing little worker's autonomy over his career development. In addition, workers are dispatched from one geographical location to another, depending on the company's needs. These company assignments often lead to family separation, known as '*tan-shin funin*' in Japan.<sup>11</sup> Also, rules of seniority rather than worker merit dictate promotions and wage increases. This dedication to the company is also a factor in limiting men's familial role to that of bread-winner. Also, the Japanese employment system, characterized by its in-house training, fosters the acquisition of firm specific skills that are not easily transferable to other companies. Movement to another firm would mean loss of seniority and a drastic reduction in income. All these factors contribute to men's company centered life.

During the 1980s, problems caused by the over-commitment of male workers to their companies, as well as the costs associated with it, caught media and scholarly attention. The first sign was the rising divorce rate among the mature couples whose marriage exceeded more

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Japan are quite comparable to those found in Europe and that it is the job mobility rates in the U.S. that are higher than the international standards. Since this paper addresses male career attainment in high-status occupations, the notion of long-term employment and constraints that come with it still apply.

<sup>11</sup> *Tan-shin funin* refers to a form of job-related geographical relocation of a spouse. When assigned to a new post, a married male worker is often obliged to move to another city by himself, leaving the wife and children behind. Most of *tan-shin funin* cases occur due to children's education. In 1985 there were 200,000 married men in Japan who were classified as '*tanshin funin*.' More than half of these men were 40-49 years of age (Special Committee to the Minister of Labor, 1992). Also, the author's pilot study conducted in Japan in 1993 suggests that by age 50, Japanese male employees of large companies (with more than 1,000 workers) have typically been dispatched at least three times, requiring geographical re-location. In most cases, each assignment lasted three to five years.

than 15 to 20 years, with divorce usually initiated by the wives. The second was the difficulties men experience after they retire. Because men have lived a single minded pursuit of work careers and have neglected wives and children for so many years, by the time they retire, they have a much smaller range of hobbies and cultural/leisure interests than do women. They have very little usefulness around the house, as they are increasingly labelled as "sodai gomi" (oversized garbage) or "nure ochiba" (wet leaves). Another sign was recent news of deaths from over-work among male workers and recent incidents of worker layoffs which caused harsh media criticisms and public outcry. Hard working men, known as 'corporate warriors/fighters' during the 1970s but now known as 'company livestock' (*sha-chiku*, literally labor animals kept by companies) in the 1990s, are beginning to question the very meaning of their lives for the first time.<sup>12</sup>

Several measures of work conditions indicate the degree of harshness of the work place in Japan. The examination of labor time, shown in Table 5, indicate that in 1989 Japanese average annual working hours were 2,159 hours as compared with 1,989 for the U.K., 1,957 for the U.S., 1,646 for France, and 1,638 for Germany.<sup>13</sup> These lengthy working hours for Japanese do not include long hours of daily commute, frequent overtime work, and other job-related duties (e.g., business meetings at night, business entertainment, evening socializing with

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<sup>12</sup> Starting 1990, Japan entered a new era, known as the bubble burst following the sharp increases in asset prices in the 1980s. Economists maintain that the impact of current economic recession is qualitatively different from the previous major recessions (i.e., the recession caused by the oil shock in the 1970s and the recession caused by the rising yen in the mid 1980s). This time, white collar workers are most affected by the recession (Usui, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> The figures given in Table 5 are average labor time of all workers, including men and women. Actual working hours for men would be longer.

co-workers, and weekend golfing). Further, Japanese workers reported a total of 120 holidays in 1991 as compared with 147 days for British, 139 days for Americans, and 157 days for Germans. It also shows that Japanese took only 9 paid-vacation days in a year, while Americans took about twice that, with 19 days, and Germans and French, almost three times as many vacation days, with 29 and 26 days, respectively. Figures given in the bottom row of Table 5 indicate that Japanese and Americans missed their work only 3 and 6 days, respectively, in 1989, while Germans missed the most with 16 days, and French and British both missed 11 days. These data confirm the well-publicized notion that Japanese work long hours, many more days, and have very little time for leisure. It is not surprising to learn that most workers in Japan use their weekend just to "rest" at home rather than pursuing leisure activities.

Turning our attention from the international comparison to the examination of working conditions in Japan over time, data in Table 6 show that there has been little reduction in working hours since 1975. In 1975, the average length of working hours per worker was 175 hours, a considerable decrease from 182 hours in 1970. But it remained at that level throughout the 1980s. In the meantime, the differences between large firms (with more than 500 workers) and medium firms (with 30 to 99 workers) shrank somewhat over the years, from 7 hour in 1970 to 4 hours in 1989. Still, compared with the national average of 174 hours per worker per month, 182 hours of average labor time among medium firms is considerably long.

Although not well publicized in the U.S., the institution of two-day weekend holidays is a relatively recent phenomenon in Japan. As of 1992, only 14.5 percent of all companies in

Japan has instituted such a policy.<sup>14</sup> Another 33 percent of the enterprises surveyed had bi-weekly, two-day weekend holidays. While the introduction of two-day weekend holidays undoubtedly increased leisure time for Japanese workers, there are also indications that, to make up the lost time, companies are instituting so called "service over-time" to their employees, meaning employees put in over-time work without compensation (Usui, 1993).

A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor based on 1,573 full-time employees aged 30 to 54 illuminates the problems workers encounter at work when taking a vacation to which they are entitled.<sup>15</sup> The survey found that only 8 percent of the male employees took all the paid-vacation days in the previous year. Another 18 percent took 50-80 percent of vacation days and one-third (32%) took 20-40 percent of their paid vacation time. By far the largest category of men, 41 percent, did not take any paid-vacation time at all because "there is too much work to do" and "there is no one who could cover my position while I am gone."<sup>16</sup>

Female employees took paid-vacation time a lot more than men did. Fifteen percent (15%) of females took all the paid vacation days, and another 31 percent took 50-80 percent of the vacation time. Twenty eight percent (28%) of female employees took 20-40 percent of

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<sup>14</sup> School children still go to school six days a week, five full week days and half a day on Saturdays. In 1992 public schools instituted a two-day weekend once a month, mostly taken on the third week of the month.

<sup>15</sup> A national survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor in 1991 based on random sampling of 1,000 companies employing more than 30 workers.

<sup>16</sup> Due to rounding, figures do not add up to 100 percent. As mentioned earlier, the Japanese employment system tends to keep a limited number of full-time employees to whom companies are expected to honor long-term job security. Because the number of workers in such positions is kept small, overtime work is used very commonly during economic growth. During economic recessions, companies resort to overtime reduction first (Usui, 1993). Understaffing makes it difficult for workers to take sick leaves or vacations.



vacation, while 24 percent did not take any paid vacation at all.<sup>17</sup> By far the most common reasons for not having taken paid-vacation time involved such responses as "there is no one who could cover my position while I am gone" and "it is difficult to take paid-vacation time when your superiors don't take it." In addition, the survey reveals that those with a high education level and managerial responsibilities took paid-vacation least (Ministry of Labor, 1992).

Confirming the national pattern shown in Tables 5 and 6, the same Ministry of Labor's survey also shows that these full-time employees do overtime work regularly. It also indicates that women have over-time work much less frequently than men do. Almost half of the male employees (48%) had over-time work on a daily basis and another 32 percent of workers had over-time work every other day. Less than 20 percent of men reported having no or almost no overtime work. In contrast, a much smaller percentage of female employees, 16 percent, reported having over time work on a daily basis, and another 17 percent did over-time work every other day. Almost half of the female employees (48%) reported having no over-time work or almost no over time work.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, the assumption that high-status careers are glamorous and desirable, while low-status occupations are not, is quite misleading. Work in Japan remains much harsher than other advanced countries. Compared with male counterparts, female employees are freer from work-related constraints because of their lower status positions. Recent reports concerning a large number of women who left the managerial-track positions at large corporations indicate the harsh

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<sup>17</sup> The remaining 2 percent of female respondents did not give answers.

<sup>18</sup> The remaining 12 percent of men and 18 percent of women had over-time work during certain times of the year.

working conditions and high personal costs associated with 'corporate samurai' careers as the major reason for their resignation (Shitamori, 1992). The data just examined here suggest that it is not just structured discrimination but also harsh working conditions that depress women's career attainment in Japan. Next section examines whether it is structured discrimination or these poor working conditions that discourage women and lead them to seek family careers.

### **Women's Life Course Patterns**

Recent changes in Japan have undoubtedly increased the tendency toward individualism, however, there has been a steady support in the gender division of work and family in Japan. A large proportion of Japanese, including young women, view home and family responsibilities as their primary careers and conceive of the temporary withdrawal from the labor force followed by the later re-entry into the market as the most desirable life-course patterns.

National surveys conducted by the Japanese Prime Minister's Office during the last thirty years, for example, indicate that when asked, "What is the most preferred employment patterns for women?", the percentage of respondents favoring a temporary withdrawal during the childbearing years has increased in the last thirty years. As data in Table 7 show, the percentage of women favoring such a life course pattern changed from 39.5 percent in 1972, to 55.2 percent in 1983, and 64.2 percent in 1990. This sharp increase is primarily due to the declining support for a complete withdrawal from the labor force upon marriage or first child birth. Response favoring a complete withdrawal decreased from 30.9 percent in 1972, to 19.5 percent in 1983 and 14.2 percent in 1990. Ideas for women's pursuit of work careers without any disruptions show a modest overall increase, with 11.5 percent in 1972, 16.6 percent in

1983, and 14.4 percent in 1990.

Data in the bottom half of Table 7 examine working women's attitudes towards family and work careers by different age groups based on a national sample of 3,072 working women conducted by the Japan Institute of Labor in 1992. While overall response patterns shown at the very bottom of the table fairly closely correspond to those reported by the national sample of women (working and not-working) in 1990, there are some notable differences. First, more than half of working women of all age groups support the 'temporary withdrawal followed by a re-entry' pattern. The only exception to this rule is working women aged 30-34. Among this age group of working women, the view that women should continue work careers without causing disruptions is high, with more than one in three women of this age bracket expressing such a view. The sharp increase in women's interests for the continuous pursuit of work careers, beginning with age group 25-29 and reaching the peak among women aged 30-34, may indicate the effects of "weeding out", since Figure 2 indicates that women in this age bracket (age 30-34) have the lowest rate of labor force participation among all women aged 20-55. In other words, working women aged 30-34 tend to be those more committed to their work careers. Conversely, the same result may indicate the reflective response patterns among middle aged women who found their re-entry to the labor force after taking a temporary leave was more costly than they expected. Given the bitter experience they had, they may support continuous work patterns more than temporary withdrawal followed by the later re-entry patterns.

Second, data concerning women's attitudes toward work and family careers among working women indicate that young women, age 16-19 and 20-24, show a wide distribution of preferences. This wide spread in their responses indicates the presence of diverse clusters of

career orientations among young women in Japan. While some young working women are strongly bent toward the pursuit of work careers, the large majority seek more family-oriented careers.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, the data do not support the view that young women, as compared with older women, have a more work-career centered orientation. The comparison of responses between young women (age 16-19 and 20-24) and more mature women (age 45-49 and 50-54), for example, suggests that the idea for 'complete withdrawal upon marriage or child birth' is much stronger among the younger age groups, not among the older ones. Further, mature age groups are no less supportive of women's occupational achievement than are the young age groups. The comparison of women, age 20-24 and age 50-54, for example, shows that an identical proportion of respondents in each group, 13 percent, endorses women's pursuit of work careers without any disruptions. As examined earlier, women in Japan have had a high, steady rate of labor force participation in the last forty years. Thus, there is no reason to expect today's mature working

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<sup>19</sup> Obviously, these aggregate data obscure variation in career orientations among women with different educational levels. In 1992 four-year college enrollments were 17 percent for women and 35 percent for men. Differences in career goals between college educated men and women remain still strong. According to a recent survey (Araki, 1990) of 1,019 women (aged 18-25) who were just hired by one of the large firms in Tokyo upon graduation from high school and college, 12 percent of female employees, as opposed to 54 percent of male employees, had long-term career plans at the firm. Twenty four percent (24%) of females and 34 percent of males were intent on moving elsewhere or becoming independent in the future. Thirty-six percent (36%) of females planned to quit upon marriage. No male respondents had such an answer. Twenty percent (20%) of females but only 6 percent of males did not have any future career plans. Among the four-year college graduates, the distribution for those having a long term career plan at the present firm was 13 percent for females and 34 percent for males. Thirty four percent (34%) of females and males each wanted either to move to other jobs or become independent in the future. Nineteen percent (19%) of women intended to quit working upon marriage. Twenty seven percent (27%) of females and 3 percent of males did not have any future career plans.

women to be more 'traditional' (i.e., more family centered) than today's working young. Data even support the opposite interpretation that traditional life-course patterns are more prevalent among today's young cohort than the older ones.

### Advantage of Part-time Work?

As we noted earlier, married women constitute 67 percent of total female labor force in Japan. They also account for 79 percent of part-time workers. Socio-psychological surveys taken in the last twenty years consistently show that married women who are re-entering the labor market often prefer part-time jobs to full-time jobs because they offer convenient time schedules and location. A small proportion of married women with part-time jobs opted for part-time work because of the unavailability of jobs that offered personal fulfillment or because of the unavailability of full-time, employee positions.

According to the Japanese Prime Minister's Office (1983: 125), for example, when the survey asked, "What is the most critical factor for you to consider when re-entering the job market after childbearing period?" (multiple answer question), the overwhelming majority of the respondents, 82 percent of women, replied it was most important "to be able to work without sacrificing family careers". In contrast, women with work career oriented responses, such as "to find the type of jobs one can use one's skills, ability, and creativity, was a more modest, 23 percent. Only 19 percent of women considered "good pay" as an important consideration in resuming work. Data in Table 8 summarizing the major reasons for choosing part-time work, as opposed to full-time employee positions, among various age groups of female part-time workers also yield similar results. Among all age groups, the most often mentioned response

was the 'convenient working hours' that part-time jobs offer, with more than 60 percent of women aged 20-54 citing such a reason. In general, the next most prevalent reason was also related to convenience, that is, a preference for short working hours/days. Compared to the earlier observation on lengthy working hours and little vacation time associated with the regular, full-time career pursuits, it is the flexibility and convenience that make part-time jobs attractive. Among women of child bearing age, 25-39, "having family responsibilities" was the second most important reason for choosing part-time jobs. In contrast, those who settled for part-time jobs because full-time positions were not available were quite low in general. It is the older women aged 50 and over who tended to mention such involuntary choice.

Another survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor in 1979 and 1991 (Table 9) examining attitudes among women with part-time jobs reports that the degree of dissatisfaction with part-time jobs is not high and that the large majority of women wish to continue part-time jobs. In 1979 when the question asked, "If you are given the opportunity of taking a full-time, employee position, would you like to switch to it?", 78 percent of female part-time workers declined such a hypothetical offer. The majority of these women, 64 percent, gave 'inconvenience' created by the full-time employment position as the reason for not wanting a full-time position. In 1991, when the survey asked the question, "What type of employment would you like to get in the future?", 57 percent of female part-time workers expressed no interests in changing their employment behaviors. About 14 percent of women expressed interests in moving onto more challenging work or more professional, technical, or managerial jobs. Given differences in questions asked, these results taken in 1979 and 1991 are not strictly comparable; however, the patterns of response are rather consistent. There is no indication that

female part-time workers are forced into taking "undesirable" jobs; on the contrary, the picture that emerges from these surveys is that women are making conscious decisions about their family and work careers, however undesirable their jobs may seem. Data examined here show that it is not just the perceived or actual lack of employment opportunities that drive women into the pursuit of family careers.

### DISCUSSION

It would be a gross misunderstanding to say that the structural/institutional barrier perspective does not explain the persistent gender inequality in the Japanese labor market. There is abundant evidence of sex discrimination that keeps women confined to the marginal roles in Japan's dual economy. I have challenged, however, a number of assumptions that limit our understanding of gender differences in the Japanese labor market. The uneven distribution of men and women in a given occupation does not necessarily confirm discriminatory employment practices, especially when men and women do not pursue similar occupations. The data examined in this paper show that Japanese men and women have different career orientations. Further, the examination of part-time workers, presumably the victims of discrimination under the structural/institutional barrier perspective, do not show signs of victimization.

Of course, one may argue that the existing gender differences in career orientations is a result of perceived or actual lack of career development opportunity for Japanese women. Gender differentiated socialization and education lead men and women to acquire and to develop career patterns that are normatively gender appropriate. It contends that women generally emphasize family careers over work careers either because they anticipate social rejection or

because they come to believe that the pursuit of both family and occupational careers would not be possible.

Such socio-psychological perspectives has considerable utilities in explaining the lack of career attainment among women in Japan. However, both the socio-psychological and structural/institutional perspectives assume that occupational attainment is the only route to achieving gender equality. They conceive of gender differentiated socialization and role specialization inherently unequal. Boys and girls should be treated equally and brought up to pursue similar occupational goals. Such models of female career attainment present problems when applied to Japan.

First, gender equality often implies women's convergence to male standards. Some interpreted the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986 indicating women want to be like men and eliminated 'protections' accorded to women in the work place. It also imposed the male work standards on women. Women are now required to work just as hard and long as men do in order to be treated equally. This change was hardly an improvement for the status of women.

Second, the American model of gender equality emphasizes individual personhood, rather than gender. It equates differences with inequality. What seems like gender inequalities to Americans may not be inequality but differences to Japanese. Gender differences need not be gender inequality. American families today believe that they should bring up their children to become competent individuals regardless of sex. Japanese, however, do not. They believe that boys and girls have different characters, not necessarily unequal, that are best realized in different patterns of life. To raise children regardless of gender traits would be unthinkable and



Japanese do not endorse such views.

Third, and most important, status attainment processes are quite different in the two countries. In the U.S., status production (e.g., occupational attainment) is a must for achieving one's social status. In Japan, one is expected to fit into various statuses and fulfill duties within a particular group. To use an example of a housewife, being a housewife in the U.S. does not give a clear social status to women. Although few Americans would argue that raising children is an important occupation, it has nevertheless lost most of the status it once carried. Women who stay home are often viewed as dependent as opposed to the independent ideal. Being a housewife in Japan, however, does give her a clear social status.

American society is founded on individualism, one looking out for oneself. "Every man for himself." "It's a dog eat dog world." In such a society, the construction of individual self is directly linked with individual status production. The assurance of individual rights and opportunities become the rules of playing the fair game of status attainment for all.

In contrast, Japanese society is a society of interlocking relationships, often called a network society. In such a society, it is not individual needs that take precedent but mutual consideration of others' needs. "I take care of your needs; you take care of mine." One's identity is embedded in social interactions which are hierarchically ordered. The construction of oneself is achieved by taking and fulfilling statuses, roles, and responsibilities one occupies in a given social network. The little guy should respect the big guy, but the big guy should take care of the little guy. Individual social responsibilities are valued as highly as, or more than, the individual rights. An individual's social self is achieved by taking roles in relation to one's groups (the family, company, community).

Linguists and anthropologists offer critical differences that exist between a status-achieving society (e.g., U.S.) and a role society (e.g., Japan). Japanese who come into contact with other Japanese cannot interact, even sit down at a table, unless their status is clearly defined in the context of social relationships. When identifying oneself, Japanese will say, "ABC kaisha no Nakao desu." An American will say, "This is Jim Metzger from ABC company." In addition, Americans provide their given name first, but for Japanese, family name comes first. Once the status-relevant characteristics, such as age, sex, education, company, and occupational title have been identified and relative ranking known to one another, then talking can proceed with an appropriate usage of language (i.e., amount of deference, respect, informality/formality). Conversation must be tailored to the nature of social relationships.

There are few languages that are as extensive as Japanese in delineating status distinction and confirming role responsibilities (Kerbo, 1991; Suzuki, 1986). Individual's roles and statuses are relatively fixed and social interactions bring about role confirmations. One's 'sensei' (teacher) from elementary school days remains 'sensei' no matter what status the pupil may achieve thirty years later. When the pupil's mother sees her son's teacher on the street, she will still call him 'sensei.' The teacher is not her teacher, but her son's teacher, and the usage of 'sensei' indicates that her status is defined through her relation to her child. She does not exist as a person *per se*, but is given a status defined by a web of social relations. Similarly, family members call each other by status-relevant terms, such as 'oneesan' (elder sister), 'oniisan' (elder brother), 'okasan' (mother), indicating one's own relationship to the addressee. An older sister may call her younger brother by his first name, but the reverse is not proper; a mother can call her son by his first name, but the son cannot address his mother by her first name.

These distinctions mark status boundaries between superiors and inferiors.

In the Japanese language, one's self is embedded in social groups and constructed through social interactions. Even though a newly married couple call each other 'anata' (you), 'omae' (you), or by their first names, with the arrival of a child, they start calling each other 'otosan' (father) and 'okasan' (mother). The wife is not his 'okasan' but she is 'okasan' from the point of the child. When the wife talks to her child, she will call herself 'okasan', identifying herself from the child's point of view. Suzuki (1986) notes that within the family, this relational terminology tends to harmonize with the position of the youngest child, signifying the child-centered, rather than couple-centered, family relations in Japan. In the Japanese family system, the relationship between parent and child takes a higher order than that between husband and wife. This partly explains why parenthood (especially, motherhood) carries considerable weight in adult status attainment. Achieving parenthood is significant not just in terms of psychological gratification but more in terms of achieving own self in society. In the U.S., there is no equivalent linguistic role confirmation, and 'Tom' and 'Jane' remain two individuals. Marriage is a personal contract between two separate individuals, and this individualistic and personal nature is reflected in the ceremonial exchanges of birthday gifts and the demonstrative usage of terms like 'honey' and 'darling' to confirm their bonding (Suzuki, 1986: 154).

Outside the home, a Japanese person is linked to his/her neighborhood, school, community, and company in a similar manner (e.g., 'sen-pai', 'ko-hai' at school and work). Further, through social interaction, Japanese are socialized to be considerate of the needs of others and expect reciprocity. Doi (1986) claims that Japanese are raised from birth to rely on others rather than operate independently. It is not simply dependence but rather

interdependence, an elaborate interlocking system in which one looks to others to fulfill his/her needs while they, in turn, look to him/her. The Japanese ritual of gift-giving signifies this principle of social reciprocity. One gives a gift to perform the duties associated with his/her status in one's group. *Giri*, the moral imperative to perform one's duties toward other members of a group, evokes the obligation to reciprocate (Befu, 1986). It is in these reciprocal social relationships that one's social characters are defined (i.e., the degree to which one meets obligation defines one's character). When a person's self-identity and statuses do not depend on the immediate groups, then, *giri*-based gift giving loses its meaning. Befu (1986) suggests that with the more individualized life style, educated people in urban areas find *giri*-based gift-giving very constraining, nuisance, 'feudalistic', and an unpleasant obligation. They shift to more personalized gift-giving based on the already established relationship. In such gift-giving, the principle of reciprocity does not exist. The act of gift-giving itself is the acknowledgement of giver's social character.

In the U.S. the housewife/homemaker role and the status of motherhood have increasingly been stigmatized and become ambiguous. These changes force a woman to attain status through her own work career. In contrast, the status of a Japanese mother is acknowledged through her social interactions outside of the familial contexts. She does not need to demonstrate who she is to others in order to be recognized. She is called 'okaasan' from her child's teacher, 'okusan' (housewife) from shopkeepers in her neighborhood and from colleagues who works with her husband. As in the case of gift-giving, failure to fulfill one's roles appropriately diminishes her social character and leads to a loss of the face for the whole family.

In summary, in the U.S., men and women must compete for their status production.

One's social status is assumed to be achieved, with rewards given to career based high-status attainment. In Japan, men and women need not seek a similar status, but they need to fit into a network society. Men and women fulfill different roles in these social networks. Rewards of high-status attainment do not directly go to an individual, but are shared by the members of the group involved. The wife of a teacher is treated with respect from her husband's pupils and the pupil's parents. The community receives her as the wife of a teacher and expects her to fulfill roles that are quite different from other wives. She may work full-time or part-time, and her work orientation derives from her family needs rather than purely from her own needs. When a middle-aged part-time worker says that she needs convenient work hours, it is the most rational approach to fulfill her family duties as a mother and as a wage earner. The lack of women's career orientation in Japan is not just caused by the perceived or actual obstacles in education and employment, or by her false consciousness, but it is an outcome of defining her economic roles in the familial context.

In the 1960s and 1970s when American professional baseball players joined teams in Japan, they went to Japan with the belief that what matters most is individual performance. Americans are accustomed to doing their best, and by so doing, to help the team. However, they soon discovered that 'playing a game' in Japan meant quite different things, things that seemed totally unrelated to baseball performance: being on time to the minute; going to numerous meetings and practices; doing what others do; being status-conscious; and being regimented, etc. Japanese players are trained to work toward the progress of the team. Each person sacrificing his personal goals to the team objectives (e.g., instead of hitting a home run, bunt). American players complained that these Japanese rules and practices were too

constraining, irrational, bizarre, and unfair. Japanese resented American players for not caring to respect Japanese customs and concepts of order, established procedure, and "face" in playing baseball (Whitig, 1977). The bitter exchange of remarks revealed that a seemingly clear-cut activity, playing baseball, is not so simple, given differences in the institutional contexts of the activity. The baseball story parallels difficulties of understanding gender equality in the two countries.

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TABLE 1  
 PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE  
 United States and Japan, 1960-1990

Year	U.S.		Japan	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1960	84	38	85	55
1970	81	43	82	50
1980	75	52	80	48
1990	74	58	77	50

Source: Japanese Ministry of Labor (Rodo-sho) (1991). Fujin Rodo no Jitsujō (Conditions of Female Labor). Appendix 1, p.5, Appendix 96, pp. 90-91. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Statistical Abstract of the United States 1991. No. 641, p. 390.

TABLE 2  
WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE BY MARITAL STATUS

Year	U.S. Single	Japan Married	Single	Married
	(100 %)	(100 %)	(100%)	(100%)
1960	58.6	31.9	63.6	51.1
1970	56.8	40.5	59.3	48.3
1980	64.4	49.8	52.6	49.2
1990	68.0	57.8	55.2	52.7

Source: Japanese Ministry of Labor (Rodo-sho) (1991), Appendix 3, p.8; U.S. Bureau of the Census. Statistical Abstract of the United States 1991. No. 642, p. 390.

FIGURE 1  
FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE,  
UNITED STATES, 1960-1989

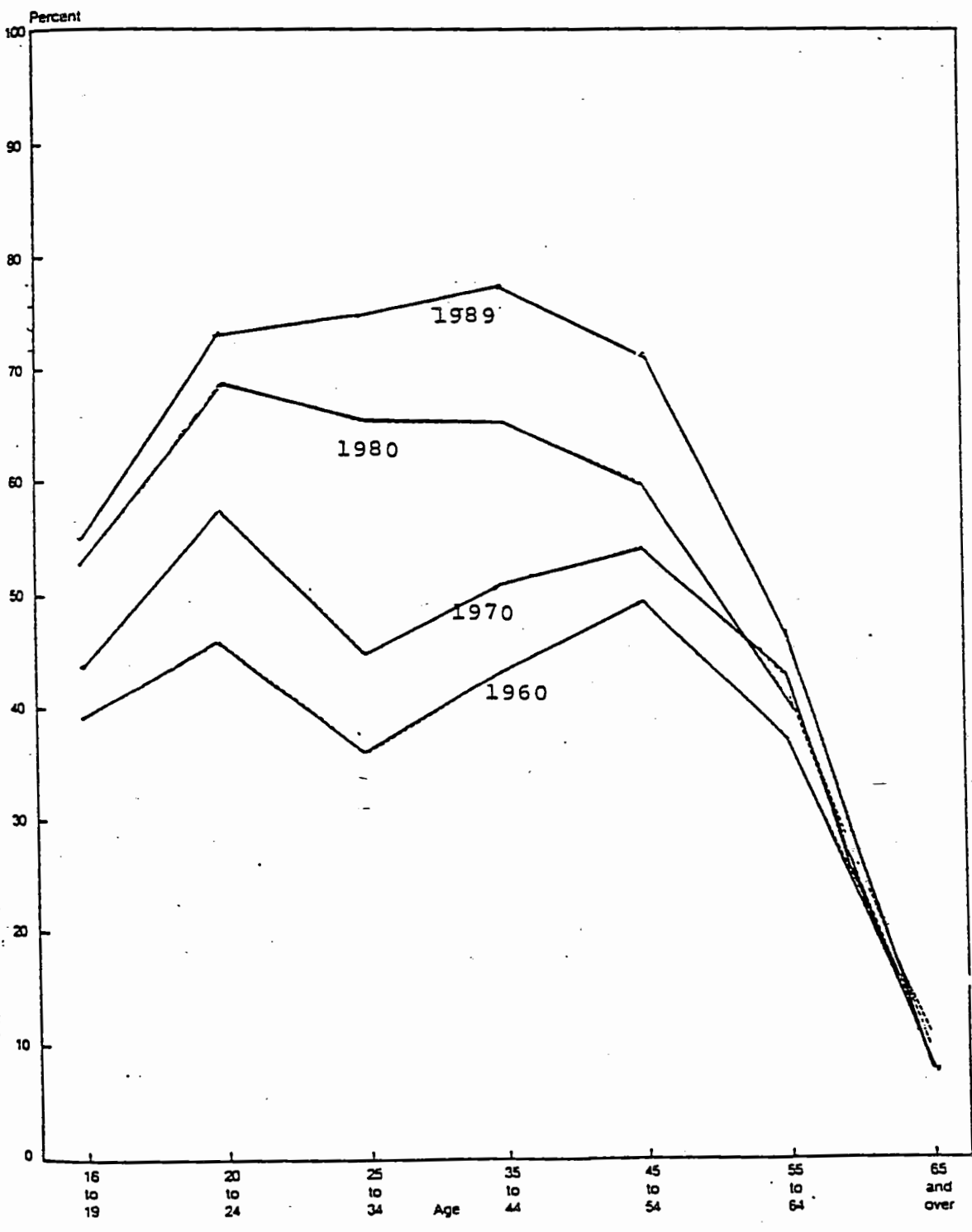


FIGURE 2

FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE,  
JAPAN, 1960-1990

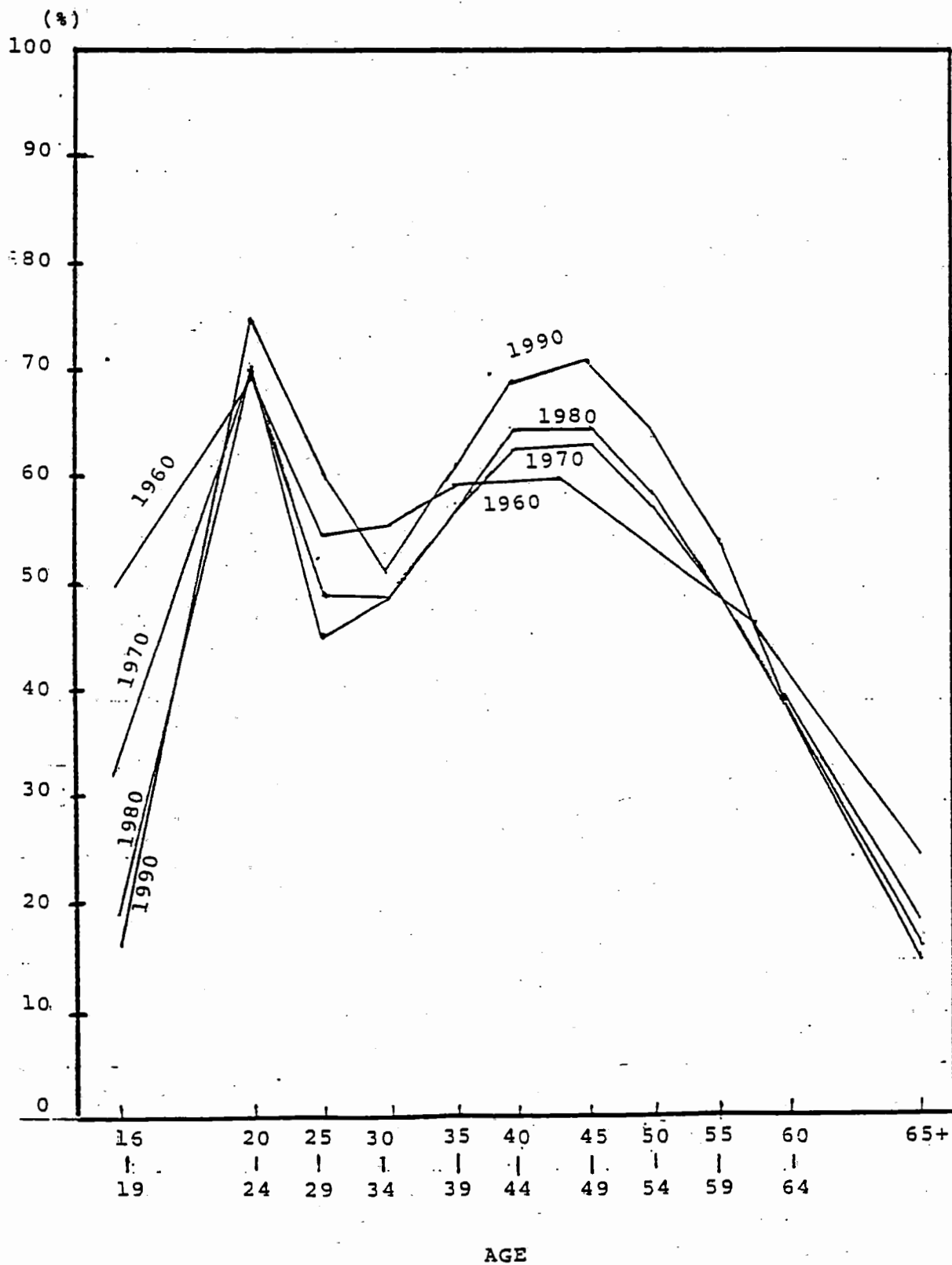


TABLE 3  
JAPANESE FEMALE WORKERS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Year	Employee		Worker* Employed	Family Employed	Self (%)	Total
	Full-time	Part-time				
1955	----- 33.6			50.6	15.8	100
1960	----- 40.8			43.4	15.8	100
1970	48.3		5.0	30.9	14.2	100
			----- 35.9			
1980	51.3		12.0	23.0	13.7	100
			----- 35.0			
1990	52.6		19.7	16.7	10.7	100
			----- 36.4			

Source: Japanese Ministry of Labor (Rodo-sho) (1991). Fujin Rodo no Jitsujō (Condition of Female Labor). Appendix 6, p. 10, and Appendix 97, p. 92.

\* Includes family enterprise workers and workers who perform work at home (e.g., piece rate work).

TABLE 4  
 EMPLOYMENT TYPE BY AGE AMONG WOMEN,  
 1982 AND 1987, JAPAN

Age	Employee	Part time/ Temporary <sup>a</sup>	Other <sup>b</sup>	Total
<u>1982</u>				(%)
15-24	86.8	10.7	2.5	100
25-34	70.7	24.7	4.6	100
35-54	56.5	34.5	9.0	100
55 -	53.2	24.5	22.4	100
<u>1987</u>				(%)
15-24	81.6	22.1	1.6	100
25-34	70.4	26.3	3.2	100
35-54	50.5	43.3	6.1	100
55 -	47.5	35.2	17.2	100

Source: Rodo-sho (1990). Rodo Hakusho. Appendix 7, p. 351.

a: Includes regular part-time workers and temporary wage earners.

b: Includes all other forms of non-regular jobs, including self-employment and family business partnership.

Table 5

Conditions of Work as measured by the Average Hours Worked per worker per year, Average Number of Holidays per year, Average Number of Paid-vacation per year, and Missed Work Days per worker per year: Cross-National Comparisons, 1989 and 1991

Work Conditions measured by:	Japan	U.K.	U.S.	France	Germany
<b>Hours worked per worker per year</b>					
1989	2,159	1,989	1,957	1,646	1,638
1991	2,080	1,902	1,943	1,662	1,582
<b>Holidays per year</b>					
1989	117	147	138	154	155
1991	120	147	139	154	157
<b>Paid-vacation days taken per worker per year</b>					
1989-1991	9	24	19	26	29
<b>Missed work days per worker per year</b>					
1989	3	11	6	11	16

Source: Ministry of Labor (1991: 63) and (1993: 68).



Table 6

Conditions of Work as measured by the Average Hours Worked per worker per month and availability of Two-day Weekend Holidays in Japan, 1970-1989

Firm size	1970	1975	1980	1985	1989
<b>Hours worked per worker per month</b>					
All firms	182 (hrs)	175	175	175	174
500+	185	163	176	177	178
30-99	192	175	183	184	182
<b>Institution of two-day weekend holidays</b>					
All firms	n.a.	4.6(%)	5.4	6.4	14.5
1,000+	n.a.	28.5	30.6	35.5	63.0
30-99	n.a.	2.8	2.5	3.0	8.9

Source: Ministry of Labor (1992: 286-87) and (1993: 382). Based on the report by companies employing 30 or more persons.

Table 7  
 Women and the Preferred Life Course Patterns  
 by Age Group, 1972-1990, Japan

Survey Year N.A.	Don't work	Work until marriage or birth of a first child	Resume work after children are grown up	Continue working while raising child	
<b>Overall Trend (1972-1990)<sup>a</sup></b>					
1972 (%)	7.8 (%)	30.9 (%)	39.5 (%)	11.5 (%)	103
1983	2.2	19.5	55.2	16.6	66
1990	1.9	14.2	64.2	14.4	53
<b>By Age Group (Working Women only) (1991)<sup>b</sup></b>					
16-19 (%)	0.0 (%)	28.2 (%)	50.4 (%)	9.9 (%)	115
20-24	0.1	26.9	52.3	13.5	71
25-29	0.0	17.6	53.2	22.2	70
30-34	0.6	7.5	48.0	36.4	75
35-39	0.0	7.2	53.6	31.2	80
40-44	0.0	7.2	68.3	19.0	56
45-49	0.0	7.0	75.0	13.0	50
50-54	3.7	7.4	68.5	13.0	74
Total (%)	0.2 (%)	19.6 (%)	54.9 (%)	18.0 (%)	74

Source: a--Prime Minister's Office (1990) A Survey of Women's Attitudes toward Work. b--The Japan Institute of Labor (1992). A Survey of Employment Conditions and Career Attitudes among Female Workers. Report No. 21., p. 55. N=3,072.

Table 8  
Major Reasons for Choosing Part-time, as opposed to Full-time, Work  
among Women, Japan 1991 (Multiple Answers)

Major Reasons for choosing part-time work	Age groups (%)										Total Average
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Convenient working hours	59.7(%)	66.0	67.1	66.5	67.1	63.5	61.9	57.2	59.7	60.2	64.2
Short working hours/days	25.1	33.9	31.6	33.5	39.2	36.6	35.8	33.5	37.7	27.0	35.0
Have family responsibilities	9.0	33.2	46.9	43.0	28.7	17.9	14.8	7.0	5.5	2.3	25.2
Interesting job	23.3	18.1	16.4	12.6	16.2	15.7	16.7	13.3	21.6	14.5	16.1
Couldn't find a full-time job	10.3	8.9	9.1	10.6	11.7	17.0	22.2	23.0	16.1	17.3	14.4
Other major reasons	23.9	13.3	14.5	12.6	12.9	13.3	12.0	16.7	12.1	20.8	13.9
Easy to quit	18.8	15.2	11.8	15.0	11.9	13.2	12.2	12.6	14.7	16.0	13.4
Have friends who work part-time rather than full-time	7.0	3.6	6.3	10.2	10.2	13.0	13.8	14.1	14.6	13.2	10.8
Lacking physical stamina to work as a full-time worker	5.2	5.3	4.1	5.2	9.2	11.7	15.0	15.5	16.9	25.2	9.9
Good pay and benefits	9.8	8.3	9.5	8.8	9.3	9.3	10.3	9.4	13.5	5.4	9.4
Have elderly relatives to care for	0.9	0.6	0.8	1.5	2.7	3.5	3.2	3.2	4.5	2.8	2.4

Source: A Committee to the Labor Minister on Employment Policies,  
(1992) Conditions of Part-time Workers. pp. 122-123. N=30,000.

Table 9  
Work Career Orientation among Female Part-time Workers  
Japan 1979 and 1991

Year	Question and Response	
		(%)
1979	"If you were given an opportunity to become a full-time employee, would you like to switch to a full-time position?"	
	Wish to switch to a full-time employee position	17.4(%)
	Do not wish to switch to a full-time employee position	78.1(%)
	Other/n.a.	4.5(%)
1991	"What type of employment would you like to get in the future?"	
	Would like to stay as a part-time worker	57.2(%)
	Don't know	29.7(%)
	Would like to do more challenging work rather than assisting someone	6.6(%)
	Would like to receive educational or on the job training so as to move onto a professional or highly technical job	5.9(%)
	Would like to move to a managerial job	0.6(%)

Source: Ministry of Labor (1984). Conditions of Female Labor. p. 60. Ministry of Labor (1992) Conditions of Part-time Labor Force. p. 23.