

Economic and Political Struggles of Women in Japan

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**Working paper - Série L : Lunch Seminar
WP-L-04-IFRJC-Hashimoto-09-03.pdf**

PPT presented during the Lunch Seminar on the 27th of March 2009, with Isabelle Giraudou as a discussant at 日仏会館 for our フランス国立現代日本研究センター..

Introduction: Status of women in Japan, France and other countries

Gender gap index rank of Japan has been dropping every year, while that of France has been improving. (See: Table 1: UNDP “Gender gap index 2008 of World Economic Forum as well as Gender Empowerment Measurement of UNDP Human Development Index 2008” at the end of the text) The main reason of Japan’s rank being this low is women’s inactivity in economy and politics. This paper will discuss following points: the reasons of Japanese women’s struggle with economic and political activities; and possible solutions to empower Japanese women.

Traditional Gender Relationship and Gender Equality

As for gender equality issues, there is a huge gap between people’s attitudes and its reality, especially on household issues. While the percentage has been decreasing, around 45% of people in Japan still agree fully or partly to the social norm of women should stay at home and men should work in 2007 (See: Table 2).

According to the opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet Office, while the area of education and family life is considered as the most gender-equally; social norms, customs and tradition are the least equal area, followed by the area of politics. However, even in education area, strong gender gap can be seen. First, the national average ratio of female principals at primary schools was only 17.9% in 2007, while that of female teachers was 62.5%. Also the percentage of female students majoring science or engineering at universities is the lowest among OECD member countries and falls behind most of Asia and Pacific countries. This situation ultimately links to the wage gap between men and women later in the life stage (See Attachment A).

On the family side, men and women tend to think that women have control over family matters, as wife stay at home and husbands has no time to deal with the issues. On the contrary, according to the international comparative survey indicates that women in Japan have less power at home than their counterparts in other countries. Responding to the question about the final decision maker in the family for purchasing residence or land, more than 60% answered that both husband and wife decide. Except in Japan, the decision making power tend to go to husbands than couples or wives(See Table 3).

Table 2: Public Opinion Survey On Gender-Equal Society

1) Regarding the Concept Of "Men At Work And Women At Home"

Year of survey	Agree	Partly Agree	Partly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know
1992	23.0	37.1	24.0	10.0	5.9
1997	20.6	37.2	24.0	13.8	4.4
2002	14.8	32.1	27.0	20.0	6.1
2004	12.7	32.5	27.4	21.5	5.9
2007	13.8	31.0	28.7	23.4	3.2

(The Cabinet Office”Public opinion survey on gender equality society” in 1992, 2002, 2004 and 2007)

Table 3: Q 16 Who is the final decision maker when the family purchase residence/lands

	Husband	Wife	Husband and Wife	Entire family	Others	Don't know
Japan	47.0	6.5	35.7	5.5	2.0	3.3
R Korea	20.1	16.7	60.5	1.9	0.0	0.8
Philippines	18.5	6.6	70.7	2.3	0.5	1.5
USA	16.8	6.6	71.1	3.0	0.6	1.9
Sweden	10.1	2.9	68.5	10.9	7.6	0.0
Germany	11.4	2.3	74.7	3.4	1.4	6.8
UK	10.7	4.9	78.4	1.9	0.2	3.9

(The Cabinet Office "International survey on gender equality" 2002)

Low Participation of Women in Politics

According to Inter Parliamentary Union's Survey as of Feb. 2009, Japan ranked 137th as shown table 4. Japan's rank has been receding every year, although the percentage has been slightly increased. Many countries which have advanced in the rank have taken special measures such as quota system.

Table 4 Women in Parliament

Rank	Country	Lower or single House			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% W
2	Sweden	9 2006	349	164	47.00%
18	Germany	9 2005	612	197	32.20%
64	Philippines	5 2007	239	49	20.50%
69	UK	5 2005	646	126	19.50%
75	France	6 2007	577	105	18.20%
84	USA	11 2008	435	74	17.00%
102	Republic of Korea	4 2008	299	41	13.70%
137	Japan	9 2005	480	45	9.40%

(Excerpt from Inter Parliamentary Union Women in Parliament as of Feb. 2009)

For the issue of local politics, the situation has been slowly improving during past three decades, as the average percentage of female members of local council is 10.4 as of Dec 2008. As the percentage in 1976 was 1.6%. One of the reasons is that significant number of female local politicians, with background of civil movements, work harder than their male counterparts, and frequently inform their constituencies about their activities. NGOs such as Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association have provided trainings of women who want to be local politicians. Those activities partly contributed to increase women in local politics.

However, at same time, they often suffer from negative and stereotypical images produced by mass media. Female politicians are often asked about their family life or appearances rather than their political carriers. Also their male counterparts tend to state ultra-conservative views towards gender equality issues such as Shinichiro Ishihara, the Mayor of Tokyo stated that women without fertility as being worthless, and Mr Hakuo Yanagisawa, the former Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare implied women as child bearing devices.

Women do not have three important requirements to become politicians, i.e.(1)money, (2)supporters, (3)popularity. As those three requirements are particularly important for national level politicians, daughters of politicians have been chosen as candidates for national level elections, although the number is much less than candidates who are sons of politicians.

Reasons of Women to Stay as Fulltime Housewives

In Japan, young women tend to have a desire to be full-time housewives due to following reasons: tough working conditions; tax and pension systems; attitudes, culture and social norms against working mothers which are symbolically shown by M shape curve of labor participation rate by age groups of Japanese Women ; and negative roll of media which portray stereotyped image of women

Lack of sufficient day care system is also serious issue for women to continue their work after taking child care leave.

1) Working Condition of Women in Japan

While female percentage of the lowest level managers, assistant managers, reached to 10.5% in 2006, that of directors was still around 2% (*See: Table 5, Table 6*).

Table 5 Percentage of female managers

Level	1989	1992	1995	1998	2000	2003	2006
Assistant manager	5.0	6.4	7.3	7.8	7.7	8.2	10.5
Section chief	2.1	2.3	3.0	2.4	2.6	3.0	3.6
Director	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.8	2.0

(Surveys conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in different years)

Table 6: The reason why there is no female managers at some sections or entire organization

	Reasons									
	Lack of experience, knowledge and decision making	Lack of experience	Too long working hours	Nation-wide job relocation	Severe working hour conditions	Family responsibility overcome working responsibility	Too severe working condition	Lack of motivation	Female managers are unwanted	Other reasons
Whole	46.9	27.9	30.9	2.1	7.8	12.3	5.9	17.5	2.2	19.9
[Industries]										
Mining	43.2	29.3	36.2	-	10.3	18.9	20.5	15.5	3.4	15.6
Construction	49.2	24.1	32.2	2.7	7.2	12.3	7.5	19.7	1.6	22.6
Manufacture	50.4	27.7	30.7	1.6	7.7	17.1	6.4	20.2	1.9	17.8
Electricity, Gas, Water	53.8	42.4	31.6	-	7.8	3.5	3.9	23	2.8	10.7
ICT	51.9	47.6	32.1	0.9	5.4	2.7	1.1	10.5	0.9	13.3
Transportation	32.8	17.6	21.9	1.7	12.7	13.4	7.5	18.1	3.9	28.7
Whole sale/retails	47.1	31.8	33	4.2	6.8	10.9	6.8	17.3	1.2	16.2
Finance•Insurance	58	43.1	29.3	6.3	1.7	2.9	0.8	16.2	2.3	14.7
Real Estate	44.1	43.7	35.4	2.8	2.6	3.5	0.2	8.6	-	20.2
Restaurant, Hotels	44	22.3	45.3	0.9	11.7	9.7	4	15.2	1.2	15.5
Medical, Social welfare	37.1	25.7	18.6	0.6	3.3	3.7	0.3	9.8	0.3	33.3
Education industry	41.8	25	46.8	0.2	9.2	0.7	0.5	10.2	0.5	19.3
Other service industries	47.9	27.9	30.9	1.5	6.5	8.6	4.3	13.8	3.5	22.8
[No. of workers]										
over 5000 employees	46.2	51.8	36.9	8.7	8.7	3.1	2.1	13.8	0.5	15.4
1000-4999	48.6	51.1	42.5	12.6	5	5	2.9	17	1.3	13.6
300-999	53.7	44.8	38.6	10	5.9	7.7	3.9	19	2	14
100-299	51.7	31.4	35.7	3.9	10.1	10.5	4.7	17	1.5	15.3
30-99	44.5	24	27.9	0.2	7.3	13.8	6.6	17.5	2.4	22.4

(the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare)

For the national government officers, the percentage of female who passed the Level 1 Recruitment Exam for National Public Officers has steadily increased each year from 15.6% (2001) to 21.1% (2006) (See: Table 7). In ten years, it is assumed that more women would be recruited to the senior level. However, the main reason of low percentage of female candidates for senior officers is that due to too long working hours, it is difficult for them to continue their work, especially after having children. In order to overcome the problem, it is essential for changing working conditions.

In fact, the ratio of female senior officers of national government in Japan had been slightly better than Republic of Korea (ROK) until early 1990's. However, after the government of ROK has introduced a series of special measures to engage more women for government officials and senior level, the ratio of ROK in 2006 increased to 5.4% which was more than twice of Japan.

The ratio of female senior officers of local governments in Japan is slightly better than that of national government, i.e.5.4% for prefectures, 8.2 for large cities, 8.9 for smaller cities, towns and

villages. At local governments, officers cannot be promoted to senior level unless they pass an examination for senior officers. Mayors and vice mayors often complain about negative female officers attitude toward the examination. They do not want to become senior officers who have to work harder and often cannot enjoy their private life. Therefore, they would like to stay at lower level to enjoy their life. Furthermore, female officers usually do not have good role models at their working place.

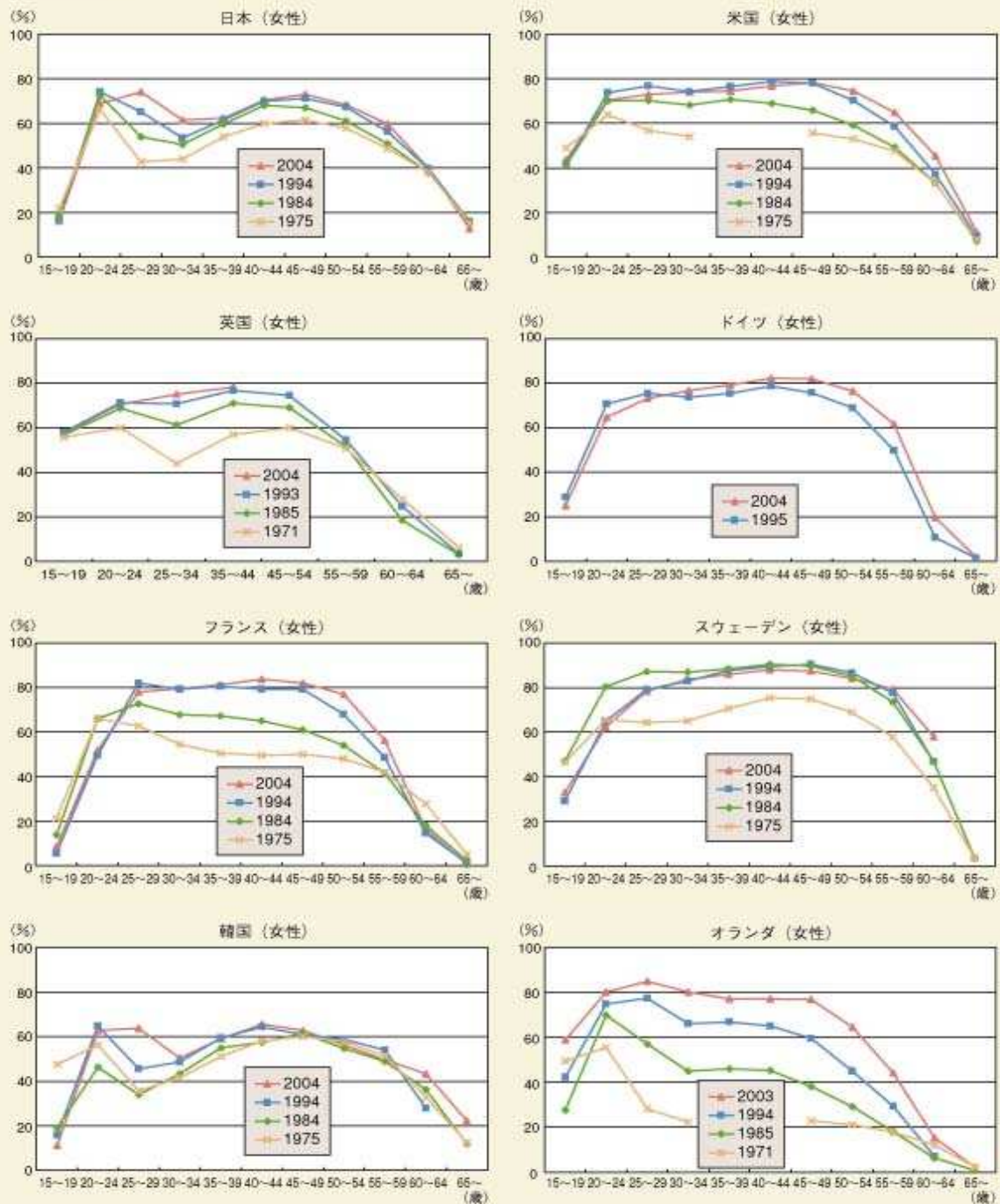
Table 7: Female senior officers at the national Government as of 2006

Ministries	no. of female senior officers	%
M of Health & Social Welfare	46	5.3%
M Foreign Affairs	30	4.1%
M Ed. Sci. Tech	13	3.6%
M Justice	11	2.7%
M Environments	3	2.3%
M Economy & Industries	10	1.6%
M Finance	1	0.8%
M of Traffic & Construction	13	0.6%
Average		2.0%

As a result of above-mentioned reasons, an unique M shape curve labor force participation rate by age groups has been formed only in Japan and ROK(Figures 8 this would be edited to show only Japan, ROK and France with English title). This curve demonstrates the idea that mothers should take care of their children.

(Figures
8)

第1-特-1図 各国年齢階級別女性労働力率



(備考) 1. 日本は総務省「労働力調査」、その他の国はILO「LABORSTA」より作成。
 2. 1975年の米国の30～34歳は30～44歳。
 3. 2004年の英国の35～44歳は35～49歳。
 4. 1971年のオランダの30～34歳は30～44歳。

2) Tax and pension systems

The unique tax system and pension systems formed decades ago encourage married women stay at home or work at part time basis.

As for tax systems, spouses whose annual income is less than 1.03 million yen are entitled to have several privileges: they are freed from paying tax; they get spouse allowances from their

husbands or wives' employers; and their working husbands or wives can get tax exemption for their spouses from their income.

Under the pension system, unemployed or with income of less than 1.3 million yen, spouses of full time workers who are under the welfare pension program and mutual aid pension program are not required to pay (annuity cost) for their pension. But they can receive public-pension when they become 65 year old. It is estimated that the total number of those people is around 12 million. As a result, there are strong complains about the pension system particularly among bachelors and dual income couples who have no dependent spouses. The financial crises in the Japan's public pension system could be improved if those dependent spouses pay the annuity. Even though, trade unions tend not to agree to change this system.

The above two factors have prevented economically dependent women from working as full time workers who are required to work for long hours. Even though they are highly educated, they work part time and make their efforts to keep their annual income less than 1.03 million yen. Hence, the average income of Japanese women has been kept lower than that of other countries, resulting ranking of Japan lower in Gender gap index and other international index on gender equality.

3) Fathers inability to take child care leaves, despite of their wish

The percentage of male workers who took child care leave in 2006 was increased to 1.6% of the male workers who are eligible to take child care leave. It was three times increase from 2004 as the ratio in the year was only 0.5%.

According to a survey conducted by Benesse in Nov. 2006, 34.6% of fathers whose wives were pregnant wanted to take child care leaves, but actually only 1% of them were able to take child care leave. The main reasons why they were not able to take the leave were ① their work were too busy to take the leave, ② income decrease and followed by ③ Working place environment which stop men to take the leave

4) Negative role of Japanese media

Japanese media mostly portray traditional gender roles. Even Yomiuri Newspaper which has the largest no. of circulation has posted editorials which criticizes gender equality. The main reason of this situation, besides social norms, is very low female ratio among decision makers, producers and reporters of Japanese media. Female ratio in media in 2006: newspaper reporters 12.5%, managers (NHK 2.8%, private TV 10.5%)

Turning Point: Extremely Aged Society and Economic Recession

Extremely aged Japanese society needs women power to promote economic activities. Furthermore due to the economic recession, many companies have started to reduce employee's overtime work and introduce work sharing. As the results, male workers can't get enough salary to support their family by their own income. They have to ask their wives to work to get additional income for their family. This is a good turning point for Japanese women to start their new carrier.

The Government has promoted Work and Life Balance policy in collaboration with business community and trade unions in order to tackle the issue of labor shortage caused by low fertility rates.

A law to promote nurturing the next generation was enacted in 2005. The law stipulates the company with more than 300 employees should formulate plan of actions to ensure their employees can raise their off springs and implement the plan.

Local governments also formulate plan of actions and implement the plan. Those plan include increase of day care centers and other facilities for working mothers and fathers.

Solutions to Enable Women's Full-Swing Challenges against Obstacles

The following four issues could be the solutions to enable Japanese women's full-swing challenges against obstacles

① Elimination/ improvement of social prejudice, stereotyped social norms, customs and tradition

According to the results of opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet office in 2007, to the question on how gender equality can be achieved, 'the respondents mentioned Elimination/ improvement of social prejudice, stereotyped social norms, customs and tradition' is the most important, followed by 'Women's empowerment by obtaining more economic power, knowledge and skills' and 'Providing better public service which promote women's employment and social activities

The percentage of respondents who supported Taking the positive action for increasing female managers and decision makers has been decreased from 12.7% in 1992 to 11.5% in 2004 and even to 10.7% in 2007.

In order to change social norms, Japanese media should be changed. First step to change Japanese media is to increase female decision makers, producers and reporters.

② Improve social system to ensure couples can handle both work and family

Potential labor force participation rate in their late 30's and early 40's of Japanese women is around 75%. This indicates that if those women could find jobs which meet with their conditions and day care centers for their children, they can work, while rearing their children.

③ Empower women

Although the ratio of Japanese women who advanced to higher education was 40.6% for four year college and 11.9% for junior college respectively in 2007, the ratio of women who entered graduate school was dropped to 7.0% in the same year. More women should go to graduate school to empower themselves. Parents also should change their expectation of their children which is different depending on children's sex. The sixty five% of fathers want to send their son to universities, while only 41% of fathers want to do so for their daughter. Changing social norms is also important factors to empowerment of Japanese women.

④ Start to increase women in local politics

The recent study results issued by IDRC(International Development Research Center in Canada)revealed that as local women gained voice, local governments have been changed to more accessible, accountable, and responsive. This situation is also applicable to Japan. We, Japanese women in collaboration with understanding men, can change Japan from grass roots levels.

Table 1 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index 2008 and UNDP Human Development Index(HDI) & Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)for selected countries

Country	2006 rank (among 130 countries)	2008 score	2007 rank (among 128 countries)	2006 rank (among 115 countries)	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Score	Educational Attainment	Score	Health and Survival	Score	Political Empowerment	Score	UNDP HDI rank	UNDP GEM rank
Norway	1	0,8239	2	2	6	0,7838	1	1,0000	53	0,9787	2	0,5330	2	2
Finland	2	0,8195	3	3	19	0,7408	1	1,0000	1	0,9796	1	0,5577	12	3
Sweden	3	0,8139	1	1	5	0,7842	33	0,9987	75	0,9735	4	0,4994	7	1
Iceland	4	0,7999	4	4	20	0,7323	61	0,9934	96	0,9697	3	0,5044	1	5
New Zealand	5	0,7859	5	7	7	0,7792	1	1,0000	69	0,9745	6	0,3899	20	13
Philippines	6	0,7568	6	6	8	0,7734	1	1,0000	1	0,9796	22	0,2741	102	62
Denmark	7	0,7538	8	8	28	0,7116	1	1,0000	97	0,9696	10	0,3340	13	6
Ireland	8	0,7518	9	10	48	0,6811	1	1,0000	81	0,9727	8	0,3535	5	23
Netherlands	9	0,7399	12	12	51	0,6674	59	0,9937	72	0,9743	12	0,3241	6	6
Germany	11	0,7394	7	5	45	0,6877	49	0,9954	57	0,9783	16	0,2962	23	8
Sri Lanka	12	0,7371	15	13	99	0,5598	65	0,9925	1	0,9796	5	0,4164	104	100
United Kingdom	13	0,7366	11	9	42	0,6918	1	1,0000	69	0,9745	21	0,2801	21	14
France	15	0,7341	51	70	53	0,6631	1	1,0000	1	0,9796	18	0,2939	11	17
Australia	21	0,7241	17	15	22	0,7307	1	1,0000	73	0,9741	37	0,1915	4	7
United States	27	0,7179	31	23	12	0,7524	1	1,0000	37	0,9795	56	0,1398	15	18
Mongolia	40	0,7049	62	42	10	0,7563	1	1,0000	1	0,9796	95	0,0839	112	94
Thailand	52	0,6917	52	40	25	0,7283	69	0,9906	1	0,9796	104	0,0685	81	78
China	57	0,6878	73	63	43	0,6915	87	0,9778	126	0,9410	54	0,1408	94	72
Vietnam	68	0,6778	42	n/a	24	0,7287	106	0,8943	92	0,9700	67	0,1184	114	62
Singapore	84	0,6625	77	65	58	0,6544	98	0,9376	117	0,9575	81	0,1005	28	15
Bangladesh	90	0,6531	100	91	119	0,4436	104	0,9093	124	0,9496	13	0,3098	147	-
Maldives	91	0,6501	99	n/a	95	0,5661	1	1,0000	122	0,9508	96	0,0834	99	90
Indonesia	93	0,6473	81	68	90	0,5714	97	0,9445	82	0,9719	80	0,1014	109	87

Cambodia	94	0,6469	98	89	56	0,6588	114	0,8559	1	0,9796	87	0,0933	136	93
Malaysia	96	0,6442	92	72	100	0,5548	75	0,9895	98	0,9695	109	0,0631	63	69
Japan	98	0,6434	91	80	102	0,5440	82	0,9854	38	0,9791	107	0,0651	8	58
Brueni Darussalem	99	0,6392	n/a	n/a	91	0,5700	62	0,9934	109	0,9659	122	0,0275	27	-
Korea, Rep.	108	0,6154	97	92	110	0,4867	99	0,9366	107	0,9670	102	0,0714	25	68
India	113	0,6060	114	98	125	0,3990	116	0,8452	128	0,9315	25	0,2484	132	-
Nepal	120	0,5942	125	111	116	0,4618	124	0,7454	119	0,9553	34	0,2144	145	83
Pakistan	127	0,5549	126	112	128	0,3724	123	0,7509	123	0,9498	50	0,1465	139	98

1) **Economic participation and opportunity** – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment

2) **Educational attainment** – outcomes on access to basic and higher-level education

3) **Political empowerment** – outcomes on representation in decision-making structures

4) **Health and survival** – outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio