WORKING WOMEN IN JAPAN
(PRELIMINARY CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSES)

AUTHOR: Dr. Lilia DIMOVA,
Japan Foundation Fellow

CONSULTANTS:
Prof. Meiko Sugiyama,
Tokyo Women’s Christian University
Ms. Noriko Onodera
NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute

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PREFACE

Miracle, myths or just economical super power, Japan keeps world attention with its unique model of development, based on the latest world standard technologies and Japanese cultural traditions. Japan’s success is indisputable, even with no natural resources and starting from “nothing” after the World War II. So, it is and continue to be an attractive object for analyses and better understanding of our own national problems.

The Japanese working woman is even less known in the world than the Japanese woman is in general. She is somewhere between the myth and reality in the images of the most overseers. In spite of the increasing the information about Japan and the Japanese, the Japanese woman is still surrounded by riddle.

Japanese women consist 51 per cent of the total Japanese population, so the logical question is what role women in Japan play for the Japanese prosperity. Furthermore: where in the modern Japanese picture Japanese women are and what their main roles are - to be within the workforce or to maintain the workforce - as well as what the trends concerning the key women issues are and of course, what stays behind them. In few words, what means to be a working woman in Japan. That was a main goal of my research in Japan.

It has been a great chance, given to me by the Japan Foundation, to do a special research on Japanese working woman from inside Japan. As a Japan Foundation Fellow I was able to meet and to talk with many Japanese women in different age and with different education and marital status, to discuss the key female’s issues with some leading Japanese experts and specialists, also to get acquainted to the latest publications, data and achievements in the field of women’s studies, in particular of working women’s studies in Japan.
Due to my colleagues and consultants Prof. Meiko Sugiam from the Tokyo Women’s Christian University and Ms. Noriko Onodera from the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, I managed to visit many women’s organizations and to talk to variety of people at almost all level of the public and governmental hierarchy in Japan. I would like to express my great gratitude to them and to all Japanese colleagues who assisted me so much in doing the research.

I have tried to touch the current Japanese culture even for a short period of time and believe that better understanding of Japanese thinking and behavior offers much more than better introduction of Japan. A study of Japanese women, who are the most active participants in the recent development of the country, not only helps for overcoming some mistaken images about them outside Japan, but also open up a trove of reference to assist our cultures change and our own lives for the better.

All my efforts during the development of my research project in Japan were orientated to better understanding the Japanese specific culture, life philosophy, way of thinking and manner of behavior. Now I am convinced more than ever, that such approach is the most valuable and gives the best opportunity for cross-cultural studies and in-depth analyses.

I am deeply convinced that the cross-cultural studies of women’s issues are of great importance for the future national and international development in the era of globalization and that is why I have strong intention of continue my work in this direction. Japanese women, being in an intensive process of “looking for themselves”, are one of the best illustrations of women’s reaction to the challenges what face the whole world today.

Here are presented the major results and conclusions of my first stage research on working women in Japan. They could be summarize in the statement, that Japan’s woman is the main agent of social and economical change and her contribution to the improvement the national environment increases.
TWO JAPANESE WOMEN’S STORIES

AKIKO’S LIFE STEREOTYPE

Akiko is 35 years old, very elegant, prospective and rich according to the Japanese standard. It means that she is rich and successful in any standards. She has a full time job as a work orientation consultant in one of the famous women colleges in Tokyo and over 15 years work experience. She is not married and does not intend to get married. She is satisfied of her life style, of her career and of her achievements in life.

Akiko was born in a big city near Tokyo in a typical middle class family. His father is a white collar long-life worker at a big Japanese company. He is the salaryman. Her mother is a housewife (or a full-time unpaid worker) - some years ago she wanted to work out of home after the children went to school, but her mother-in-law did not allow her to do it, following the old Japanese traditions and public norms. Probably because of her not-realized desires and ambitions, now she is quite tolerant to her daughter’s way of living.

Akiko graduated 2 years women’s college and her teachers recommend her to apply for a job in the same college. So, she did not continue her education in the University and started working at the age of 20 years. She never sorry about the University and find her job interesting and useful for her and for the society.

Since the very beginning of her job career she has had a full-time contract. Her responsibilities have not changed for 15 years, but her wages increased more than twice - from 110 000 to 280 000 Japanese yen monthly in accordance with increasing her working experience and qualification. Her income now is a little bit higher than the average for the country.
She works in a small group with 4 people more, giving consultants to young women who are hunting for a job, but she does not know how much earn her colleagues. This is an widespread practice for Japanese companies and organizations - each employee is familiar only with his/her own wages.

She likes her job and hopes it to be a long-life one. Her daily schedule begins at 6 a.m. when she gets up and goes for a walk with her dog. She travels 35 minutes to and back of work (by JR and metro), what is not very long for working Japanese people. For the most of them traveling home - work place - home takes two or more hours. She is lucky because several years ago with the financial support of her parents (what is very popular for the Japanese families), she managed to buy a small flat near her workplace. Her working hours are from 8:50 a.m. to 17:50 p.m. with a lunch time from 12:30 to 13:30. After arriving home she goes for a walk with her dog and with her dog-friends for about 2 hours. Daily evenings are usually for TV and the dog.

Her social circle is limited to her colleagues, parents and dog-friends (neighbors with pets). Every weekend she visits her parents to her native city. Almost every year holiday she travels abroad. She has already been to the USA, France, Hawaii’s, Italy. With her wages it is quite possible, keeping in mind that a travel packages cost from 400 000 to 2 500 000 yen. In addition, for her like for many Japanese people it is cheaper to spend their holiday abroad than in Japan. That is one of the main reasons so many Japanese to travel whole over the world.

She likes as well sky, camps, climbing on mountains. She is convinced that her life is better than her mother’s because she is independent, responsible only for herself and has a secure job. Like many other young and educated Japanese female employees, she does not to have family and children. She feels better living alone and spearing her time according to her interests and desires. Her parents worry that she is single on 35 years age, but not very much. They worry more about her old ages (whether will she live only with the dog when she becomes 60 or 70, who will look after her, etc.)

This seems to be a Japanese phenomena since the middle of 80s - young women do not want families and children. One of the explanations, coming from the Japanese people is, that it is a form of reaction against women status before Second World War.
and especially in the previous decades. Current Japanese women generation do not want to be only housewife and full-time servant to her husband and her children. She, especially the good educated woman wants to be totally independent. It leads from one poll to the opposite one - modern Japanese women try to behave in a way typical for men and do not want to play their traditional social role as mothers and life partners.

Most probably - the extend of the recent reaction comes from the extend of dependence and unfavorable social status of Japanese women in previous years.

MIWAKO’S FEARS AND HOPES

MIWAKO is 25 years old and is a typical Japanese intelligent woman who is hunting for a job. She is a student in one of the famous Women’s Universities in Tokyo. She studies international relations and communications. Speaks English fluently: she has been in the USA for three years within the Japan-USA educational exchange. By the way, that is an excellent opportunity for Japanese student to acknowledge with the American life style and culture and to learn more about the world outside Japan. She has been as well to Africa for her own study.

Meanwhile Miwako works part-time 3 days a week at two different work places - as a weathers in a restaurant and as a research assistance at a research institute. She has got these jobs because she needs money for her education and living expenses. To be a weathers is boring and non pleasant for her, but the economical constraint is very strong. She likes very much her work at the research institute and would be happy to get it as a full time job. But she is not an optimist about the real chances, because it is quite difficult nowadays for women like her to find an appropriate job.

She was born in a family of two teachers and the intellectual capital of her both parents plays an important role in her whole life. She lives in Tokyo with her brother in a small rented flat, which rent is paid by their parents. Part of her educational costs are paid by them also, but she needs to work to support herself. She has moved to Tokyo from
another city to continue her education and because she wants to be independent. After graduating she plans to work for two years first and after getting some experience to become a post-graduate student. She is convinced that it is the right way of making career and being successful in life.

Mainly due to her good cross-cultural knowledge she has got comparatively higher criteria for a job and for her own quality of life. According to her, there is not problem for a woman in her age and with her language qualification to find a job - but ANY job. The main problem is to find an appropriate job - interesting for her, high paid and with opportunities for promotions an advances. She feels discriminated because she is a woman and in Japan has lower chance to find a good job. She would like to move to the USA, but she thinks that in the USA she will be discriminated, too - that time as a foreigner. In Japan - as an woman, in the USA - as a Japanese. She is willing to work hard, but in a field she likes and feels satisfied.

She does not think to get married, either to have children - she wants to be independent and free, to travel as much as possible and to make a successful career. She is like many other Japanese young women - as much they value independence, as less they want to create families. This is a common reaction of modern Japanese women to the old ages Japanese traditions towards women and keeping a low social status of women. Many Japanese women today need to be themselves and even selfish, but not to continue their mothers’ and grand-mothers’ status in the society.
THE HERITAGE AND THE NEW CHALLENGES

Since 1868, when the first step onto the modern state was done and Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world, Japanese society has been in the process of dynamic transformations orientated generally to internalization of the nation. One of the most fascinating dimension of the changes is the way and the direction Japanese women themselves have been changing, winning an astonishing degree of freedom, independence and equality.

Japanese social scientists and women’s issues analysts define several main periods in women status changes, which follow the global changes in the Japanese society development (Akamatsu, 1990).

THE BEGINNING OF JAPAN’S MODERNIZATION

The first period, what could be called period of ‘first internalization and modernization’, covers the years from 1868 to 1945 (i.e. from the year of Meiji Restoration to the end of the Second World War). That is characterized by the following:

- The New Meiji Government ended the policy of seclusion endeavoring to modernize the country: sent many students to Europe and America, invited advisers from these countries in order to help establish a modern legislation, promoted rapid industrialization by introducing advanced machinery and techniques;

- In 1872 the Government Ordinance released the nation from a feudal system, permitting freedom of choice of occupation and residence, but the traffic of women was still restricted;

- The Maiji Constitution was promulgated in 1889, leading to the establishment of an Imperial Diet in the following years;
In 1896 the Civil Code was enacted, followed by other laws and regulations, allowing Japan to have a judicial system by the end of the 19th Century;

The industrial revolution advanced rapidly, led by the textile industry until the end of the First World War;

The governmental recognition that the education was a very important element of a modern nation led to the ‘Education Ordinance’ promulgation in 1872: over 50,000 elementary schools were built all over the country and the elementary schools were made compulsory, at first for 4 years and later for 6 years, without any gender discrimination. That focus on education and on a modern school system, including cross-national educational exchange, has played extremely important role in the next decades for the Japanese prosperity and changing women status considerably;

However, that first period of Japanese modernization, remained indifferent to the improvement of the status of women and even in the compulsory educational field, sex discrimination was extensive. This was mainly because the government’s prime objectives centered on the economic and military development of the nation, rather than on the freedom and equality of its people (Akamatsu, 1990), and the situation did not change until the end of the Second World War in 1945.

The women’s status in that period is quite similar to a typical status of an Oriental women. Confucianism, which controlled the thought of the majority of the people, had been inherited from the feudal ages without much change and was based on the predominance of men over women. It existed in different forms in all areas of patriarchal social system.

By the way, until the beginning of the Muromachi age (1336) Japan was a matriarchal society. Most of the women (from the farming and fishing families, who made up about 80 per cent of the population throughout premodern times) enjoyed freedom, equality and power as men, mainly because they worked under much the same conditions as men did. The lives of women of the elite (primarily samurai) classes were defined throughout many centuries by the Confucian ethic. It meant that they were bound
by the ‘’three obedience’s’’: 1/ obedience to fathers when young; 2/ obedience to husbands when married; 3/ obedience to their children in old age. In the Meiji era (1868-1912) however, the samurai class culture penetrated throughout the entire society as right class distinctions were officially abolished. As a consequence, women as a whole lost their previous power and equality, and became ‘’unemployed’’ consumers.(Sumiko Iwao, 1993).

Up until 1945 there were many working women, mainly in the farming families. That women participated in labor force as an unpaid family worker, being at the same time the main responsible persons for the whole domestic duties. Till the end of the First World War female employees comprised 60 per cent of the industrial workers. After that, even though the proportion of male workers increased as heavy industry advanced, the percentage of female workers remained at 51 per cent between 1922 and 1932, and dropped to 33 per cent as industry was revived after the Second World War.

The working conditions in industry and especially in the textile-related branches at that period were extremely low. Female workers, almost all with a poor farming background, worked over 12 hours a day on a shift system also included a midnight shift. There was no legal protection for female workers (like in most of the countries in the process of the first industrialization, including Bulgaria) , until the Factory Law was enacted in 1911, but the midnight shift was abolished much later - in 1929.

The conditions where women lacked any rights continued till August 1945 - the opportunity to express their views was greatly restricted, because fields such as legislation, administration and the judiciary were closed firmly to women and the big gender disparity in educational levels was existed.

A movement for female suffrage emerged in Japan in the 1920s, influenced by the realization of universal male suffrage in Japan and female suffrage in England and in the USA, but it died uncompleted with the rise of militarism in the 1930s.

It must be pointed out, that women’s changes in Japan have been realized largely without organized women’s movement or overt feminism - neither at that
first period of Japanese modernization, nor later. Japan and Japanese women have kept their specific way of affiliation to the modern world.

THE NEW COMMENCEMENT

The second period in women status changes covers the years after the Second World War to the 1950s. It could be call ‘after war reforms period’. Its main significance was that it established the basis for the following ‘Japanese economic miracle’. Its major characteristics are as follows:

- After the Second World War ended, the country was put under the control of the American-led Allies.
- In November 1945, the occupation forces called the Japanese Prime Minister to announce five major reforms:
  1/ The introduction of female suffrage.
  2/ Realization of workers’ union.
  3/ Liberalization of education.
  4/ The abolition of absolute monarchy.
  5/ Liberalization of the national economy.

The implementation of these reforms led to the great change, what rise the contradiction question about the advantages or disadvantages, or - how could be used a unfavorable situation for the prosperity of the nation.

- As a form of implementation of the post war reforms, on April 1946 Japanese women exercised their voting rights by electing 39 women members to the House of representatives.
- On May 3rd, 1947 was enacted the New Japanese Constitution, what has since become the basis for the whole Japanese legislative system. It is based on the fundamental principles of peace and democracy, with the equality of men and women being an important feature. All laws incompatible with the concept of gender equality were modified and repealed. Husband and wife became to have equal rights and
according to the new legislation, it was the end of patriarchy, which was responsible for the low status of women before the war.

- The educational system was also the target of drastic reforms. Compulsory education was extended from 6 to 9 years. The new educational policy put a significant basis for the future Japanese economic prosperity giving the whole nation a good education.

- The Labor Union Law and the Labor Standards Law were enacted at the same time. They provided a framework for the labor movement and labor conditions and have influenced Japanese society ever since. Such conditions as 8 hour-days, 48 hour-weeks, one day-off per week, overtime pay and supplementary wages for night-shift work are applied to all workers. For female employees, long working hours and night-shift were prohibited by the labor Standards Law.

- In 1947 the Labor Ministry set up Minors’ and Women’s Bureau, what has played a large role in the administration of women-related issues at the workplaces.

Even with these law protections and better working and social conditions, Japanese women at that time were more or less in a discriminate position in reality. However, the results of progressive and democratic steps what had been done, would appear in 20 to 30 years.

The after-war reforms changed a lot the traditional socio-economic role of Japanese woman and increased in a big extend women’s contribution to global Japanese transformations.

NUMBER ONE IN THE WORLD?

The third period covers Japanese rapid growth between the 1950s and 1970s and could be call ‘Japanese miracle’.

There are a lot of books dedicated to the Japanese prosperity and economical success, but in spite of the huge world cross-cultural interest, there are still many non-answered questions. It seems, that one of the only common opinions among researchers
and experts is, that the Japanese bum has been based on the specific combination, on the unique harmony between the Japanese culture and the highest innovation achievements created in the world. It is still a discussion topic, but there is something comparatively clear and universal and it is that the Japan’s success is a result of the Japan’s successful model of development and behind it stays the Japan’s national culture. That is why, **without trying to understand the Japanese culture, thinking and behavior, and without introduction with the Japanese value structure, it is rather difficult to be explained any of Japanese achievements and periods of changes, including this - the Third one.**

Under the new legal system, enacted in the “after war reforms period”, Japanese economy achieved rapid growth. After a ten-years time of reconstruction following the war, fast economic growth continued for the next twenty years. It was a cause for many analysts to determinate Japan as a number one in the world (Vogel, 1978). From 1973, the year of the oil shock, the rate of growth started to stabilize, and Japan entered a period of prosperity overcoming difficult times caused by high appreciation of yen.

The unemployment problem had fortunately been solved by economic growth and now, almost 50 years later, Japanese unemployment rate is one of the lowest amongst industrialized countries (in 1960 - 1,7%, in 1970 - 1,1%, in 1995 - 3,2, in 1997 - 3,5%).

Japan has always lacked raw materials for industrial production and has depended on imported food. Because of these crucial reasons, there is no other way for the country to develop except to import raw materials from overseas to produce manufactured goods from which profit could be made. So, Japanese industry has made great efforts to produce high-quality products to overcome competition in foreign markets. In these circumstances the development of science and technology remains an indispensable factor.

The national standard of living, apart from housing conditions, improved gradually and Japan became one of the world affluent countries.

There are various explanations why has Japan succeeded and what is behind the economic growth. According to Akamatsu’s point of view, there could be mentioned several central reasons:
- the most important thing has been peace: the Japanese constitution is unique - it is the only one to explicitly renounce war, and Japan has become a great economic nation without military strength, contrasting the 1930s, when Japan had great military power although most of the people lived in considerable poverty;

- the second most important factor has been the establishment of democracy after Japan’s recovery from the war - this was not only the political-economic system but also encouraged the people’s recognition of the merits of the principle of equality what is impacted by the Japanese traditions and culture;

- the quality of equality in Japanese conditions is a key factor for increasing human activities and energy and the Japanese understanding of equality extremely helps Japan’s prosperity ( in will be analyzed more deeply later in the text, especially in the aspect of gender equality).

- could be mentioned as well some important features of the Japanese character, which play significant role in the successful prosperity. The tendency to work hard, being methodological, responsible, patient and keen to study are typical Japanese national characteristics. In combination with a good general education of the majority of people, it is a guarantee for success. But not only that.

Japanese salary and promotional systems are based on the implementation of the modern psychology, work organization and national culture. The Japan’s model worked perfectly in Japan for several decades, because it has been created especially for the concrete circumstances. However nowadays, when the process of internalization is advanced and there is a huge exchange of new ideas and technologies, Japan needs something new in its model of development in order to meet the new challenges.

**IN THE MIRROR OF THE MIRACLE**

Since the beginning of 1980s the Japan economy has entered in the period of comparatively stabilization. Japan develops not so fast and not so remarkable, but it
keeps the position as a world power. At the same time, Japan now is in a process of transformation and improvement of its economical model of development.

In the previous period it was generally accepted that “life-long employment” and “seniority wage system” together with a labor union system organized by each company, helped create a stable relationship between labor and management and fortified the competitiveness of Japanese companies. For several decades (it still could be seen in not a few companies), Japanese large companies employ workers right after graduation until retiring age, which is about 60 years. Employee salaries are low at first, but increase yearly. During this period companies try to improve skills and abilities of their employees through “on-the-job” training and special study courses. That encourage the loyalty of workers to the company and their attachment to the company’s life style. At the same time, companies are able to cultivate talent employees for top-level management.

Nowadays, such a system seems to work more as an inertia, then as a optimal model. Japan as a whole tends to keep its profitable traditions and customs (what have been the basis of its prosperity, success and “economic miracle”), but there are some processes what show the necessity of searching new kind of profitable principles.

Being lacked of natural resources, there are not other alternative for Japan than to find new and workable alternatives in the area of people’s motivation and management the society. Japan relays on its people and that is why it is looking for a advanced modern management scheme. The needs are even stronger nowadays, keeping in mind the new demographic situation in the country. Its main features are the following:

- In recent years the total special birthrate is declining and in 1995 it was 1.43 - the lowest ever was recorded. It have been a stable tendency for declining the birthrate in the country since 1970 (then it was 2.13, in 1980 - 1.75, in 1990 - 1.54). Such a trend is followed by many related tendencies - decreasing of the workforce and students and, of course, decreasing the number of the population as a whole.

- Now Japan has the first place in the life expectancy in the world - the average life expectancy for female is over 82 years, for male - over 76. In combination with the declining the birthrate, the above mentioned consequences become even stronger.
It must be said, that Japanese women played a significant role in Japanese economic growth - both within the workplace and in maintaining the workforce. Moreover, Japanese women are the most sensitive part of the society towards the new challenges in the world. In addition, Japanese women’s work and family behavior changes are some kind of reaction to conservative traditions, still existing in the society.
GENDER EQUAL SOCIETY - BETWEEN LEGISLATION AND REALITY

Maybe one of the key prerequisites for the Japanese success is the people’s understanding of equality and the legislation of equality in the Japanese society. There are many views about that among the social scientists but on the whole they relate to the multi-aspects of the equality. In Japan, the public awareness of equality refers not only to human rights (what are guaranteed by the Constitution) but also to uniform life style with a minimum differences.

In contrast to the most developed countries, in Japanese society there are not great class discriminations and disparities in wealth. It is remarkable that about 90 per cent of Japanese consider themselves middle class. The majority of people in Japan lives in analogous conditions and have similar opportunities for advancement. In the case of Japan, equality stresses mostly on the equal opportunities and conditions. The inequality exists mainly as in the gender and generation aspects, but even in them the legislation of equality and inequality is quite different from the rest of the developed world. The main reason has come from the Japanese culture and traditions.

The issue of gender equality raised after the Second world war with the "Mac Arthur Constitution" - i.e. the Constitution enacted under the requirement of the American Occupation. In that document one of the crucial points was regarding to female suffrage and liberalization of education. The generation born in the postwar period has accepted the norms of gender equality as its own (not imposed by the occupations) and behaved accordingly, but the postwar legal norms were only the first step to the long road to a real gender equality in Japanese society. Even today, in public images equality between sexes are rather different that for many other nations.

A major legal landmark however was the shift from the overprotective labor standard law to the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, enacted in 1985. Nowadays the main guidelines for creating a gender equal society is the Governmental plan for
gender equal society, made in the beginning of the 1990s. In the field of employment the most important for the equality in gender is the law respecting the improvement of the welfare of women workers, including the guarantee of equal opportunity and treatment between men and women in employment (Law No 113 of July, 1972), with several additions made in 1983, 1985, 1991 and 1995.

In 1986 the Equal Employment Opportunity Law went into force, removing the overprotective clauses of earlier laws that legally prevented women from working alongside men.

It is important to point out, that the respect to the hierarchy is very strong in the Japanese culture, it is one of the core basis of Japanese thinking and behavior, and usually the changes in the legislation are initiated by the government, not by the pressure from the public. For example, rectification of laws and governmental policies to assure equal opportunities and status for women has generally been result of the government activities themselves, rather than in response to direct and even indirect pressure by women. In general, Japanese social structure and management of the society is based on the Japanese respect and awareness of subordination. Individual philosophy, acting and ever thinking and expressing own opinion are not good mannered in Japan. People are accustomed to follow the rules and to obey the above stayed often without thinking and analyzing what is behind of that. Even with respect to equality, including gender equality, the concept of seniority significantly exists.

Looking at the background, a good explanation could be given by Doi’s description of ‘amae’ (The anatomy of dependence, Takeo Doi, 1974). Many analysts believe that amae is the key concept of Japanese culture. According to others, the key concept is the feeling of harmony and the Japanese understanding of the harmony. A deeper analysis shows, however, that after all amae and Japanese feeling of harmony are very close in meaning, and the two of them are very close to the culture of dependence.

There is not English equivalent of amae, that is why it is quite difficult to be explained the right meaning of the word. In general, it means satisfaction of dependency, enjoyable passive status, and aspiration to protection, passive love, security. In some extend amae demonstrates the freedom of subordinate, out of duties in making decisions.
and keeping responsibilities. The adjective *amai*, for example, is used not only in the sense of “sweet” to the taste, but also as a description of a man’s character; thus if A said to be *amai* to B, it means that he allows B to *amaeru*, i.e. to behave self-indulgently, presuming on some special relationship that exists between the two. It is also said that a person’s view of a situation is *amai*, which means that it is excessively optimistic, without a proper grasp of the realities at stake, the cause of this misapprehension, presumably, being that the person concerned is allowing wishful thinking (a form of self-indulgence) to get the better of his judgment.

*Amae* itself is the key of Japanese culture of dependency, the Japanese philosophy of dependency. According to Doi’s view, *amae* is a key concept for the understanding not only of the psychological make up of the individual Japanese, but of the structure of Japanese society as a whole. The emphasis on vertical relationships as characteristic of the Japanese-type social structure, could also be seen as an emphasis on *amae*. It might be justified, even, in seeing the susceptibility to *amae* as the cause of this emphasis on vertical relationships.

In gender aspect, *amae* could give a key for better understanding the cross-cultural differences in images of equality between sexes. In Japan, the problem of gaining equal rights under the Constitution, has not been the issue since the postwar Japanese Constitution was enacted. It is clearly stipulated in it that “all of the people are equal under the law” and that there should not be no discrimination on the basis of sex. The crucial question is of what women want to be equal to and what their images of equality are.

The general view among Japanese women is that equality has to be considered within a broad framework that takes into account inherent sexual differences, personal preferences, and a balance of various factors (Iwao, 1993). The attention to attaining equality in Japan is being focused on the “‘humane life’”, which transcends both men and women. In many countries nowadays, including Japan, Bulgaria and the USA, gender equality is at least officially committed to the principle of equal opportunity for men and women in education, job recruitment, employment, training, promotion, and retirement benefits. Although, different paths may be taken and are taken in achieving such an
equality. It would be a great mistake to be used one and the same models and schemes in every country, without taking into consideration the national cultural phone and traditions.

In many aspects, Japanese images of equality, as well as of gender equality, keeps the traditional images of men domination, especially among the prewar generation. Even now, a few generation after the enacting of the democratic constitution, gender equality exists rather law norms, that public thinking or reality. Women are looking for equal opportunity in job hunting, for equal opportunity in advancement and promotion, but they are not willing to compete men. This involved the question of equality in a very broad context: if on an overall balance sheet the advantages enjoyed on one side and the disadvantages suffered on the other over a long period of time can be considered to mutually balance out, then they are willing to accept the relationship as workable and practical, that is, as fair and equal in the long run.

Japanese women tend to follow the practical aspects of equality in a higher extend than the principles of equality. They estimate their status and positions in society, family and at the workplace, using various criteria, including available economic resources, freedom to determine disposal of time and money, and degree of personal fulfillment. It often means that husbands and wives move in very different worlds, but the generation born before 1955 and earlier find this distance comfortable.

Japanese women also view the issue of equality in terms of the burdens and freedoms involved. In facing specific day-to-day situations, Japanese women tend to be extremely pragmatic. There are situation in which the issue of equality is important and others where it is not. This is what they consider the humane way of living - to be able to pursue their goals according to their individual preferences, not just to follow the principles of gender equality. A typical example is the current situation, when a lot of good educated women under 35 years old prefer not to get married, because the home equality concerning burdens and child care, as well as the rest domestic duties, is rather far from the ordinary Japanese thinking and behavior. They choose independent lifestyle, including financial independence. At the same time, women from the older generation, even when they have university diploma, are willing to grant a husband who
provides the economic support for the household exemption from the bulk of household responsibilities.

**The practical understanding of gender equality, makes Japanese women either to give up marriage, or to pursue the career model and goals of men today:** equality is all very well, but if it means having to work so hard that individual pleasure and private fulfillment are not permitted, they are content to do without it. This is not a model many women think worthy of emulation.

On the contrary, they think that happiness for both men and women would be better assured by a model of equality in which men were given the same freedom, rights, and options in the three main areas of life (work, family, leisure) that women could enjoy being full-time housewife and economically dependent from their husbands. Since the Japanese employment system is based on the hard work, loyalty and close attachment of the employees to their company, Japanese women are contented that if their husbands have more time for the family and personal fulfillment, it would be better for both men and women. Then women would have more time for activities out of work, while men - for more family-involved responsibilities. This balance is an approach that treats equality not only as a binding principle but a guideline and tool.

**Generally speaking, the Japanese ‘practical’ understanding of equality is related to the core issues - i.e. to the freedom of choice.** The idea and philosophy of equality after all concentrates to the opportunity for an individual free choice, where the personal preferences, needs and testes are dominated. Gender equality make sense only when makes life better for both men and women. If one of the sexes suffer because of superiority of the other, it is over to be equality at all.

In Bulgarian case for example, gender equality is protected by law in the three main areas (work, family and leisure), but the emancipation of Bulgarian women has put them into unfavorable position of new kind of inequality. Women employment has become a social norm and most women tend to have a paid job, but this is not a realization of a freedom of choice. They are more or less constraint to work because of the economic situation in the country (they have to support the family budget), or because they are educated and accustomed to be something more then housewives. At the same
time, gender inequality becomes deeper, because women practically work as hard as men
do and are the most responsible persons for domestic duties. Even in this circumstances,
more then a half of them will continue working outside home, if they are not pressed by
economic reasons. So, again raises the question about the quality of equality and the
freedom of choice as its core basis.

In Japan, the constraints are different type, but also exist. Japanese women have
a little freedom of choice and not many alternatives. It is obvious, however, that the
Japanese women and their behavior are the best indicator for the stage Japanese society is and for the necessity what has to be changed. An general analysis of the
current Japan shows, that the up going model of development (extremely successful
between 1950 and 1970) has been more or less old nowadays and there is the need of a
new actualized one, in which Japanese women would have new roles and social
positions.

It could be especially mentioned that Japanese government pays a special
attention on the equality in the country. Since 1977, when the first “National Plan of
Action” was formulated following the World Conference on the International Women’s
Year, Japan has formulated and revised its national Plan of Action a total of four times in
line with global development in women’s issues. On December 13th, 1996, the
Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality (President: Prime Minister, Vice
President: Chief Cabinet Secretary, Members: all Cabinet Ministers) formulated the
“Plan for Gender Equality 2000 - the National Plan of Action for Promotion of a Gender-
Equal Society by the Year 2000” and announced it at the Cabinet meeting held that day.
The Plan was the Japan governmental response to the decisions of the Fourth World
Conference on Women.

According to this Plan, a gender-equal society is “one in which men and women
are equal members and are quarantined the opportunity to participate in all areas of
society of their own volition. Therefore, women and men can equally enjoy the political,
economic, social and cultural benefits while bearing together the responsibilities”. In
order to bring about this type of society, the Government put together and promote
systematically comprehensive measures as necessary.
FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN TRANSITION

Only 15 years ago, a typical Japanese woman of 35 years old was most likely a professional housewife with two or more children, who devoted her life to serving the needs of husband and children. (Iwao, 1993) The ideal model of woman was (and still is for the older generation and for a big part of the men) the type ‘‘good wife - wise mother’’. On the basis of the fixed set of roles (e.g. shopkeeper’s wife, schoolteacher, mother) she assumed, each of which was clearly and narrowly defined, it was relatively easy to visualize how she lived. Today it is not so easy. Because of the great and significant changes in the Japan society, now the roles are not so strongly and constantly devoted. Japanese woman has equal opportunity rights, protected by the Constitution and national legislation, but she in many cases follow the required public norms. On one side the Japanese woman is free to choose what to be - a part of the workforce or a workforce maintenance, a career seeker or a temporarily employee, a full-time housewife or a full-time worker, a mother or a childless person. She is formally free also to choose whether to work, where and for how long. On the other side however, in spite of the legislation, Japanese woman is rather limited in her personal freedom. The limitation mainly is based on the real employment and promotion system, but also on the cultural traditions and existing public norms. This is the contradiction situation not only in Japan, but in many other countries, too.

Data from the national representative surveys, conducted within the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) in 1994 show that not only the real situation in contradiction, but the public attitudes towards women employment are also full of contradictions. The differences in public opinion could devise the societies into two big groups - ‘‘traditionalists’’ and ‘‘non-traditionalists’’. The first group cover the images,
that focus on the model ‘women’s job is to look after children and family, while the man’s job is earn money’. This group expect from a woman to be a ‘‘good wife - wise mother’’ type, and from men - to be a ‘‘breadwinner’’ and a ‘‘salary-man’’ type. The second group includes people who have more wide visions to gender roles clarification in the society. They generally think that it is a personal choice for a woman to become an employee or not.

**ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement with the statement</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Male respondents</th>
<th>Female respondents</th>
<th>Female workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband - to earn money; wife - to look after family</td>
<td>63,6</td>
<td>69,6</td>
<td>64,6</td>
<td>44,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A job is OK but what most women really want is family &amp; children</td>
<td>65,8</td>
<td>51,4</td>
<td>60,1</td>
<td>53,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job</td>
<td>57,4</td>
<td>36,6</td>
<td>54,0</td>
<td>38,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pre-school child suffers if the mother works</td>
<td>67,0</td>
<td>38,9</td>
<td>60,2</td>
<td>38,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay</td>
<td>53,9</td>
<td>69,0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>66,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparative analyses discover several important characteristics of Japanese and Bulgarian public attitudes towards women employment. It must be keep in mind, that
the basis of creating such an opinion is different. For example, for Bulgarians the women’s employment has become a life style because of the full employment policy system pursued in the country during the last several decades. People are accustomed with it, but at the same time women’s employment is an economical constraint (it is impossible for a family to meet even the existing needs only with one salary). So Bulgarian women are all in all urged to work for pay.

For Japanese people, there is not so strong financial pressure and the women employment is accepted more or less as a women’s choice themselves. In the current situation, women in Japan tend to work mostly because they need to be independent and to realize their abilities. In addition, their work orientation seems to be a specific form of rebellion against their previous status, when the Japanese society was constructed according to the scheme ‘‘man - Master, woman - servant’’. By the way, such a scheme still can be seen in old generation families and even today there are men from the same generation who think in that way. Generally speaking, the recent process of women’s changes is a process of ‘‘looking for themselves’’ and the improvements in their occupational and employment status could be defined as the core of that ‘‘looking’’.

Coming back to the data showed above it must be pointed out one more very important methodological thing, related to the data collection in Japan. Following the national culture in the way of thinking and behavior, Japanese people are not very willing to give concrete and honest answers to any questions, especially when they are not agree with something. For many Japanese it is still difficult to say ‘‘NO’’ even when they really think so. There are special surveys, contacted by Japanese sociologists, what prove that statement. When Japanese respondents are not agree with a statement, they usually prefer neutral, middle point of the ‘‘agree - disagree scale’’ (what is ‘‘neither agree, nor disagree’’) or the option ‘‘Can’t choose’’. Bulgarians on the contrast, usually choose more categorically one of the poles (positive or negative).

Keeping in mind these preliminary explanations, it could be seen from the data distribution, that many Japanese people are quite in favor of the general traditionalism - household satisfies as much as paid job. Working Japanese women are even more tend to think in this way, then the other women, even then to men. But this is only related to the
most general images of “household - job” relation and the reasons could be discovered among the images of the equal freedom of choice. Most of the Japanese working women (75 per cent) think that household and paid job bring equal satisfaction and it is a question of personal values and needs what to be chosen. Working women in Japan have personal experiences in both of the household and paid job areas and their opinions are based in a large extend on them. It is interesting that there is not big differences between men’s and women’s views related to the general satisfaction of household and paid work what lead to the conclusion, that there is a common public opinion in Japanese society at that matter. Men are a little bit more concern with the traditional principles and norms on gender role distribution then women, but with some exclusions, that is not so significant. The same could be said concerning the other aspects of women employment: **there are not serious gender differences in public attitudes towards women employment and the majority of Japanese accept women to get to the labor market.**

There are differences, however, between the common principle acceptance to women employment in the meaning of equal home-job satisfaction, and to the separate recourses and consequences of it. For example, 36 per cent of Japanese women and 45 per cent of men in Japan still have the traditional image that a husband’s job is to earn money, while a wife’s is to look after family and children. Among the working women such a views are even less - 30 per cent. The rest of the population either hesitates, or does not agree with that principle, what illustrates an active process of establishment new public attitudes towards women role.

Japanese public opinion is rather tolerant to the family and pre-school children suffering when a woman has a job. Pure traditional views has got about one third of the Japanese male and female, mostly from the older generation (50 years and over). The rest however think that women employment is not so bad for the family and children. This is mainly because Japanese men are in principle from the type “full devoted to the job”, and they most of the time are absent from home, working for their companies success. In Japan today, the traditional pattern whereby the wife alone does the household duties and the husband concentrate too much on his work is still quite widespread. In this situation married women are free to distribute their own time according to their interests and
preferences, consider the fact that they are not able to see often their husband (and to look after him). In the current Japanese family he is the “breadwinner” and is responsible for the family budget. Such a pattern has led to the model “good husbands are healthy and absent”. And if the husband is most of the time absent, there is no mother whether the wife works or not. As for the children, there are at least three options - not to have children at all (a spreading trends nowadays), to quit job for looking after them, and to go the children to a kindergarten or nursery school.

In general, only for about one third of the Japanese population could be said that is traditionalistic. The majority of Japanese now are seeking for modern, new type of thinking and behavior. The traditionalists are basically from the old generation are more men then women. On the other side of the society are the “non-traditionalists”, mostly from the first post-war generation and younger. But still Japanese public opinion is created on the basis of traditional patterns and specific cultural models.

In comparison with Bulgarians, Japanese seem to be less traditionalists then people from a country, long time ago overcome the resistance to women employment. The fact is quite strange, but there are enough empirical evidences for it. For example, the majority of Bulgarian working women (between 60 and 70 per cent) are consider with the traditional gender role distributions. They are around twice more then working women in Japan, thinking that family life and children suffer when the woman has a job. Comparing, however, the family models, as well as the child-care patterns in the two countries become obvious, that all in all the national public opinion inevitably reflects the real socio-economical picture. In Bulgaria children and family are still very valuable, and both husbands and wife have common family and leisure time. Bulgarian men, and Bulgarian women also are not devoted to their work in the Japanese way and they have opportunity to be together after work and during the weekend and holidays. They usually share not only responsibilities of children care, but as well cultural interests and have family year holidays.

Another reason for cross-national differences come from the different employment system in the two countries and from the richer experience Bulgarian working women have as full-time employees. Today, even in the crisis situation with very
high unemployment, more then two thirds of the Bulgarian women in the economical active age (what is from 16 to 55 years old according to the Bulgarian Labor Code), have jobs. Only less then 5 per cent of them are part-timers. So they have really reach and in many cases painful experience how the paid job impacts on family and children life. At the same time only a few of them have personal impression of being full-time housewives, so they look at the ‘‘household - job satisfaction’’ as at the principles and ideas, not as at something they know well. This is the one of the reasons Bulgarian working women to be 20 point less then Japanese, who accept such a double satisfaction. The second reason, far more significant is, that for the majority of Bulgarian women job is not only ‘‘source of earning money’’, but something more and important for their self-identification and self-fulfillment. Much more then to be only a housewife. For the generations born after 1930s, it is a life style for both men and women to have paid job, and they are accustomed with it. The whole child-care system in the country is adapted with women’s full-time employment. But at the same time, in spite of the good legislation and still free of charge health-care system, Bulgarian married women know quite well the difficulties of the combination full-time job - full-time on duty for domestic work. Nevertheless, about half of them strongly prefer working outside home, even when without having to work they have what they would regard as a reasonable living income.

The main conclusion is, that in Japan, how it is in Bulgaria and in many other countries, the public opinion is not an obstacle in front of the women employment. Excluding the generation over 55-60 years, the biggest proportion of the Japanese people is in favor women’s employment. It means that women’s efforts for employment equality are not only women’s. Going further, the modern Japanese society needs women’s energy and participation to the labor market. And this is not only because of the deteriorated demographic situation, but also because of the changing gender roles in the whole society and mostly because of the intensive process of significant changes among the women themselves. The current Japanese women are not ready any more to be just a beautiful appendixes to the men’s part of the society and to be the most responsible for workforce maintain. They need to be what they want and to have a large
opportunity for a free choice. What is really important, the Japanese society as a whole is on the way to accept these requirements as a life style.

ASPIRATION TO INDEPENDENCE

Why do women wish to work even when they are economically supported either by their parents or by their husbands - these are the key questions for understanding the motives what lead women’s work orientation. Meanwhile, a better knowledge about women’s work motivation gives a reliable basis for more general analyses on direction and trends of women’s changes and their participation at the labor market.

There are a lot of data available concerning those issues - obviously the topic is rather attractive for researchers and policy-makers. And it is inevitable, since the work orientation and job motivation are the core issues in many areas. Here are presented mostly data from the ISSP surveys and census statistics from Japan and Bulgaria.

Several factors create the women’s work motivation. In Japan they are related mostly with financial circumstances, with the Japanese women aspirations to independence and with the necessity to fulfill their abilities. For Bulgarian women the factors are the same, but in comparison there are some cultural and situation factors also, what strengthen the impact of the basic ones.

Independence is a very attractive value for more than a half of Japanese women. Having their own way of earning they feel themselves far more self-confidential and stable. Paid job for them is not only financial independence, but also a broader spectrum of independence - they become much more free in the way they spend their time, distribute their money, attend to cultural events or spend the leisure time. It gives them a large freedom how to live, what with and for how long. Japanese women need such freedom and independence, even when being married they are actually free to do all those things because of the absent of their husbands. But a paid job give them different kind of freedom - to be responsible for their own live. The ratio of men who thing in the same
Way is a little bit lower, but as a whole the half of Japanese public agree, that paid job increases the independence and freedom of women.

However, about one fifth of the people neither agree nor disagree with such a statement. They are in the position of observers, but are willing to change their mind. Conservative part of Japanese society covers about one forth of people, mostly from older generation. They are still convinced that a woman should not be independent and that she should follow the ‘three obeys system’. For them it is the harmony in the society and it must be kept.

**WOMEN’S WILLINGNESS TO A PAID JOB**

(\% Non-traditionalists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement with the statement</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Male respondents</th>
<th>Female respondents</th>
<th>Female workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bulg</td>
<td>Jap</td>
<td>Bulg</td>
<td>Jap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a job is the best way for woman to be an independent person</td>
<td>59,1</td>
<td>53,5</td>
<td>52,0</td>
<td>49,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most women have to work these days to support their families</td>
<td>88,6</td>
<td>67,5</td>
<td>85,4</td>
<td>68,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income</td>
<td>89,3</td>
<td>54,4</td>
<td>86,9</td>
<td>52,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Japanese working women, who see in a job the best way for independence, are the same proportion as all women. This is because first of all working women link job
with independence and they are the part of society, what appreciate quite a lot their independence.

It is important to be mentioned, that there are not serious cross-cultural differences in public attitudes towards the independence as an advantage of a paid job. But there are significant differences between working women in Japan and in Bulgaria. Bulgarian working women with non-traditionalistic views, are almost 20 points more then Japanese. The basic reason is that for Japanese women a job is still more a question of personal choice then of public norm; in Japan the traditions of women employment are in the process of establishment, while in Bulgaria they are for years a public life style. In some aspects, Bulgarian public attitudes and women’s kind of thinking could be taken in consideration as a possible model of the changes in Japanese society related the women status and social positions.

There are however huge differences in cross-cultural public opinion when financial pressure for getting job is treated. In general, a half of Japanese women (working and non-working) think that they should contribute to the household income. On one side it is a conformation of the thesis, that Japanese women are first of all practically orientated. They support not principles themselves, but the concrete things if they lead to a better life. Equality is OK, but in the case of equal contribution to the family budget devised between wife and husband, Japanese woman tend to be traditionalist and to leave her husband to be the only responsible person for the family budget. So, she does not mind to be dependent of her husband in the current “absent salaryman” behavior model, especially when the question how to use the money earned depends on her.

On the other side, Japanese women want to achieve something more, as an addition to their current satisfaction. They do not want to be pressed to work by economical reasons. If they need money, it means more money then now, but not basic money for existence. They do not mind to follow traditional cultural model, “woman at home - man outside” if they have to pay too high and inappropriate cost for their independence. This is a question of life philosophy and values - they do not want to loose their convertibility, they want to win something more then they have now. And if they
should to become “salaryman” on an equal basis with their husbands, every second Japanese woman is not agree with such a situation.

At the same time, 74 per cent of working Japanese women are convinced, that nowadays most women have to earn money in order to support their families. **To support, but not to share budget responsibilities with the husband** - this is very significant difference. Principally they do not mind to have their own budget or to **add something to the family budget - but not to be the main ‘salaryman’**. Here could be seen the impact of the current situation in Japan - stable economy, secure job and satisfied basic needs. Now Japanese are looking for possibilities to meet their new, higher needs. For example, there is something as a non announced public norm that the car should be changed every two-three years, home equipment (mostly kitchen) - also. People, in particular Japanese women, now need more then before - not only material things, and the first step they do is to hunt for a job and to tend to their independence.

The majority of Bulgarian people and especially Bulgarian women (more then 90 per cent) are deeply convinced, that they have to support their families and to contribute to the household budget. For Bulgarian society it is a public norm (shared by 95 per cent of the population), coming from the hard general situation in the country. In the crisis conditions, what are typical nowadays, women realized quite well that it is impossible for a family to live only with one salary. In addition, Bulgarian women are accustomed to be not only consumers, but also equal “earner” with their spouses.

By the way, the comparison between nations shows, that it is not typical only for a country in a crisis situation. The strongest believes in spouse equal earning responsibilities and duties have Bulgarian public, but such a views could be found in other countries, too. For example, 78 per cent of people from Germany, 85 per cent from the USA, 92 per cent from Sweden and 78 per cent from Great Britain think, that nowadays women have to work in order to support their families. In Japan they are 68 per cent - comparatively less then in the other surveyed countries, but a big proportion from the Japanese population itself. So, the conclusion is, **that women’s support to their families becomes a world norm and it shows the future alternatives in work orientation and family life direction of changes.**
Something similar could be discovered comparing the data concerning contribution to the household income, collected by the same survey (ISSP’94 module on women and changing gender roles). Japanese people, who support the idea of ‘‘equal contributions’’ are 54 per cent, while ration in the other countries is higher - in Germany - 67 per cent, in the USA - 56 per cent, in Sweden - 82 per cent, in GB - 62 per cent, in Bulgaria - again the highest ratio of 89 per cent. The different position of Japan could be explained

**********nese thinking nowadays. Moreover, they lead the motivation structure of young working women in Japan. It could be seen from the results of a survey, conducted by Recruit Research, Inc. in 1996 among 2 000 women (ages 20-39) who are presently employed. The main purpose of employment for 27 per cent of the total full-time female employees, and for 31 per cent of the female part-timers, the ‘‘living expenses’’ are.

The Japanese young woman wont to have a paid job mostly to meet her ‘‘living expenses’’, but also because she needs ‘‘to use her talents and abilities’’, ‘‘to become financially independent’’, ‘‘to finance leisure and hobbies’’, ‘‘to expand her horizons’’, or ‘‘to give a sense of order to her life’’. Many young women at that age are not married, so they work because they need to keep their independence and to arrange their life how they wish. For them, like for the most Japanese people, ‘‘their work is their life’’ and they feel satisfied from that. Their thinking is, that the job gives them freedom and self-confidence, what they really want.
JAPANESE WOMEN AT WORK

Women’s role in Japanese economic growth has two main aspects: 1/women are a part of the workforce and 2/ they maintain the workforce. The importance of the two aspects changes during the years, and nowadays the first one becomes more and more important.

Analyzing the women’s occupational status, it must be kept into consideration the basic characteristics of Japanese employment system, which is rather different from the rest of the world and what in large extend grounds the Japanese success. These features are a lot, but the most important among them are the follows:

1/ ”Life-long employment system” - in brief it means that companies hire employees for the whole their work life and take care of their skills, promotion, wages, even of their social life and leisure. This life-long contract between workers and companies means as well, that the employees have feelings of attachment and closeness to their companies as to a big family and accept the other employees as relatives. Even when they are retired, they continue working as consultants or experts without pay. The advantages of such a system are related to hard employees’ work (as for their own family), feeling of secure job and yearly promotion, high loyalty and close attachment. Workers thinking and behavior follows the model ”I am working for myself” trough
working for my company”, what according to Japanese cultural norms is an aspect of the
typical Japanese group oriented mentality.

The disadvantages of the “life-long system”, what could be seen not only from outside, are related to long hours hard work (first as a form of gratitude to the company, and after that as a common value and behavior for all employees), to creation and stabilization of a strong culture of dependence (what has very stable roots in the cultural heritage and especially in the *amae* concept of Japanese social structure), to neglecting of real family life and of fulfillment spouse’s and parents’ responsibilities. That system has even higher negative impact on women employment and it will be analyze latter in the text. The system, however, is more typical for the big companies then for the smaller, what prefer the “part-time hire system”.

2/ “On-the-job” training - it means that the companies are responsible for qualification of their employees and they organize general and special study courses according to their concrete needs of specialists. It ignores to a large extend the problem of educational profile - for Japanese employers the educational level and the type of the school or college play more significant role, then the graduated specialty. So, Japanese educational system is based on that requirement of the labor market and give to the youths basic, general knowledge, what is improved after getting to work. For the companies it is rather good, because they employ people for around 60 years, and it is a good investment for them to train their employees, For employees themselves, it is not always good, and especially for women this is the biggest obstacle for overcoming the “M-shape curve” and a big ratio of part-timers.

3/ “Seniority wage system” - it means, that salaries and wages increase yearly, depending of the work experience for the company and ages of the employees. Such a system guarantee secure promotion for all employees and respect to the hierarchy. This income model is very appropriate to Japanese way of thinking, since in general the Japanese expect the results of their efforts in long-term perspectives. For Japanese women, however, seniority wage system trough them out of the board, if they quit the job for child care leave. Going back to work after 10 years, they are not able to pass the courses what could improve their chances for a high paid occupation.
4/ ‘‘Define term contracts’’ or ‘‘part time job’’ system, which means to employ workers only for a certain period or for less then 35 hours a week. Because of its unstable job situation, ‘‘working part time’’ has low social status, but the part timers rising year on year and their number increased significantly for the last 20 years - more then twice. In 1996 part time workers amounted to 15,1 per cent of the total labor force. Out of the total number of part-time workers, 68,2 per cent were women, what defines the women’s part time work as one of the focal points of the female employment system.

There are a lot of benefits for employers, if they hire part-time workers (Chieko Kanatani, 1997):

a/ they do not have to pay much and can easily fire them, if they become unnecessary;

b/ part-time workers do not complain because they accept such treatment part of the role of part-timers;

c/ both employers and employees stick to sex role differentiation;

d/ almost all labor unions exclude and discriminate against part-time workers;

e/ government tax policies such ‘‘the wall of one (1,03) million yen per year’’, which means no taxes under that amount, represents keeping the pay for part timers low and unstable;

f/ part timers usually work harder then full timers, because they are paid for a concrete number of hours.

5/ ‘‘Two courses promoting system’’ - it means that promoting scheme is based not on individual achievements and personal abilities, but on the course passing. In Japan there are two major type courses - ‘‘a general course’’, what allow employees to work in planning and essential business, and ‘‘an ordinary course’’ which gives the opportunity only for supplementary work. In spite of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, many Japanese companies have adopted the system of two courses in their interests. It is a common practice, when they under one or another excuse organize general courses only for their male employees, while the female are able to join only the ordinary one. After all, it gives the employers official grounds not to promote female workers or to keep for them supplementary occupations. That kind of ‘‘hide discrimination’’ is widespread in
Japan and it is also a focal point in the current activities for ‘‘gender equal society’’ changing.

6/ ‘‘Real life is working life’’ model - what is the core Japanese attitudes towards work and determinate the direction of thinking and behavior of the whole society. Full time workers usually devote all their time and energy to their job and they almost do not have any time for family life and cultural and leisure activities. That is why, Japanese families in fact consist exclusively women’s contribution. Men spend their time (working and a large number of non-working hours) at companies and practically do not have physical possibilities to share family responsibilities like domestic work or child care.

It is said, that Japan is a country with the longest working hours in the world. Governmental statistics for 1995 show that the total working hours of Japanese are less then 2 000 (1 772 normal working hours and 137 overtime hours) per year. But actually the number of working hours account for 2 500 to 3 000 hours if they include the unpaid overwork called ‘‘service overwork’’, or ‘‘furoshiki overwork’’ (bringing work at home). The workaholic like this affect the lives of families and children and, of course, full timers cannot have enough time for themselves. Further, sudden death from myocardial infarction caused by overwork has been increasing in number since 1980’s and now it often happens in engineers, businessmen, and even public servants in their 30’s and 40’s. Doctors and lowers try to give advance through Karoshi hot lines, though it is hard to mend the habit of overworking. (Kanatani, 1997).

7/ Nearly 90 per cent of Japanese companies are either small, or medium - sized enterprises with less then 300 workers. They employ over 80 per cent of working women and 70 per cent of men. In addition, there is not mobility in the Japanese job market, especially in the case of the larger corporations.

All above mentioned characteristics in the Japanese employment system work in combination with each others. The previous years convincing proved, that such a combination is the best for Japan and only on its basis Japan can reach a big economic success, Now, however, there are a lot of new evidences, that these principles must be changed. Today, when the Japanese labor market needs women participation, the male
dominated pattern of employment with its long working hours that is behind the powerful Japanese economy (and the global economy in which it plays a major role), as well the seniority promotion and accompanying pay, will have to change. (Iwao, 1993). It seems clear that women will become a driving force of change in the Japanese economy and whole society.

One of the needs for changing is related to the Japanese women position at work place and it is the main reason for the new legislation and for the Governmental plan for equal society.

Before the Second World War, the female labor force participation rate was very high, but the areas where they were employed were very limited - mostly in agriculture and in textile industry. In the postwar period, and until 1965, the proportion of working women in the total women population was one of the highest among developed countries throughout the world owing to the large farming population. But during the process of industrialization and urbanization, Japanese men become salaried workers, while many women become full-time housewives and the main consumers, and play a key role in Japanese economic growth mainly as “maintaining the workforce”.

The first transformation in the female workforce was in the period 1960s to 1970s. In 1960 the largest percentage (43 per cent) of working women were employed in the primary sector, mainly agriculture; 20 per cent - in the secondary sector (manufacturing) and 37 per cent - in the tertiary sector (schools and offices). Those employed in the secondary sector were mostly young junior high school graduates (having completed compulsory education), who worked in the small or large factories.

Women, worked in the tertiary industry, were mostly teachers (53 per cent) or in clerical positions (21 per cent), all of them with college education. Full-time employed women with high school or college diplomas were called ‘‘sarari garu’’ (salary girls) or “BGs” (business girls). Almost all of these women were single and young, and they uniformly quit their jobs upon marriage. Some companies routinely set up the retirement age for women separate from that for men, sometimes as early as age 35. It was not surprising that women were known as the “flowers of the office” (shokuba no hana) - pretty to look at and decorative, but insubstantial and transient.
In the early 1960s the Japanese economy began to shift toward the service sector - finance, information, commerce. It gave a new territory for women to join the workforce and now they cover two thirds of the tertiary industry. At that period however, because the employment rate of wives of salaried workers in cities was lower, the labor participation rate of women gradually declined due to urbanization. That process lasted till 1975 when it turned upwards again.

It became common for the housewives of salaried-men in cities to take jobs and the number of female workers has increasing in spite of changing times of prosperity and depression. The changes were both in the qualitative and the quantitative aspects:

- the average age of women workers has been getting up and now more then 60 per cent of working Japanese women are over 35 years old;
- the percentage of married working women has increased accounting for 70 per cent in 1989, but after declined again. In 1996 it was 51 per cent;
- educational level of working women has improved and in 1989, 28 per cent of the newly graduated female employees are in college diplomas ( from 10,5 in 1970), and 14 per cent - with university ( from 4,5 in 1970).

Although the number of working women increased and they began to participate in ever greater numbers in a range of economic and social activities, their lives remained hemmed in by many discriminatory practices and customs. In spite of the Equal Opportunity law or of the Governmental Plan for Equal Society, working women are in the worse occupational positions then working men.

In 1996, how the Prime Minister’s Office reports, the female labor force continue to expand, reaching 40,5 per cent of the total labor force. The female labor force participation rate is 50 percent of the population 15 years of age and over. The participation rate for married women is 51 per cent.

For the period of 20 years (from 1975 to 1996), female workers employed in the primary industry declined from 17 to 6 percent, in secondary - from 27 to 24 percent, while in tertiary industry increased from 56 to 69 percent. Tertiary area of economy is the main work territory for Japanese women nowadays and there are indicators that the process will continue in the same direction.
By age group, the female labor force participation rate is the highest in the 20-24 age group (73.8 percent), gradually declining for women over 25 and bottoming out of the 30-34 age group (54.8 percent), before rising again to reach a second peak of 71.6 percent in the age of 45-49 age group. The result is that the M-shaped curve continue its existing. It could be seen on the graphic.

Behind that M-figure of female employment age distribution stays the current model of life cycle of Japanese women what could be seen also at the graphic.

The majority of Japanese women join the labor market at the age 20-24 years old. They usually work for several years and almost 20 percent of them quit the job after marriage and child born. After the youngest child goes to school many of them wont to return to work again, but Japanese system for hiring and promotion gives them a limited opportunity to find appropriate jobs. The most widespread solution is the part-time job, so most of them go back to work, but mainly as part timers. Since the 1980’s, many enterprises count on the part time women workers as essential, as they know it is profitable to employ those who work very hard and well but with low wages. In that case, women are quite suitable and at the same time they play a significant role in the development of the national economy.

M-shape curve itself and women domination among part timers in Japan are extremely hot topic for politicians, trade unions, women organizations and, of course, for experts of women’s issues. There are at least two different point of views.

The first statement is, that M-shape curve could be overcome and women have to have the opportunity to grow up their children without quitting their job, or to quit it but for a short time. In addition, this concept argue that women must have enough chances to find full-time jobs and to make their career on an equal basis then men.

Such a situation exists in many countries (including Bulgaria), but it needs a developed infrastructure, social policy and public support. It means, that there should be enough facilities for child care (kindergartens and nursery schools). It means as well. that domestic duties and child care responsibilities should be equally or almost equally distributed between spouses. In Japanese case it is related to reorganization of work time (not so long working hours for both men and women) and to creation a wider framework
of child care facilities. The existing forms (public, private and co-operative kindergartens) obviously are not enough.

In Japanese case there is one more important thing - "unpaid nursery care for the elderly or sick family members". According to the Japanese traditions, children are the most responsible to look after their parent when they become older and weak to do this for themselves. So, nowadays many women quit their jobs for that reason. Such a non-paid nursery work, doing principally by women, is some kind of public norm and follow the Japanese cultural customs and traditions. If women want not to quit their job for elderly care reasons, there should be enough public facilities for that.

Women themselves do not have a common opinion about their work cycle. According to data from Public Opinion Survey on Joint Participation of Men and Women (1995) announced by The Prime Minister’s Office, the biggest part of the respondents (40 percent) supports the position "Better to have an occupation, then to leave temporarily for marriage or pregnancy, and return to occupation again after completing childcare". Mostly young women (20-29 years old) thing in that way mainly because they are in front of such a "leave". It is important, that every fifth of this age group has the intention to become a housewife, but the far majority - 72 percent wants to continue working. So called "career-seekers" are even more among the next age group (30-39 years old) - 82 percent.

The other statement related to the women’s roles balance, opposite to the first one is, that women should first of all be mothers and wives. It is supported mostly by the older generation. Their main arguments are, that children suffer when their mother is not all the time with them and there are serious danger for their education and socialization. This is the traditional view on women’s role and is has strong support mainly by people (both men and women) born before the World War II. For example, according to the Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equality (1995), conducted by the Prime Minister’s Office, 35 percent of women and 44 percent of men over 60 years old believe in the volatility of the model ‘‘Man is to work and women is to stay at home’’. The supporters to this model from the younger generations are far less - respectively 13 percent and 26 percent for female and male among 20-29 years group. In toyal, 22,3 percent pf all
women and 32.9 percent of all men support the notion “men should work, while women stay home”. In spite of decreasing that support during the years, Japanese consciousness of division of labor by gender is still higher than countries such as Sweden and the USA.

**Probably the best solution for compromising the two statements is related to the opportunity, given to women for a free choice.** Both statements are based on serious arguments and both are reasonable. At the same time, both of them finally depend on the individual culture and value scheme. Since the basic principal of democracy is freedom of choice, obviously women have to have such a freedom.

But there are some objective circumstances, what must be keep in mind and what can not be ignored, and what make the solution not so easy. The current situation in Japan and its forthcoming development more or less needs women’s participation in the labor market. This is because of the constantly declining birthrate, as well as the prolonging life expectancy and the rapid increase of elderly proportion of Japanese population, what itself is a reflection of rising living standards and advances in medicine, but a more basic cause is the declining birthrate (Yashiro Naohiro, 1996). However, as an aged society comes closer to reality and the long-term balance between labor supply and demand shifts to favor women, a reevaluation of the cost and benefits of regulation and guidelines will become urgent. The main areas of public policy (labor regulation, welfare services, taxes and pensions, etc.) and their implications for job opportunities for women and family arrangements, should be adopted to the new labor market challenges and women’s requirements.

According to the public opinion, some of the principles of the Japan’s existing socioeconomic framework need changes. For example, asked about wage systems, 71 percent of new employees said they prefer the ability-based system, far outnumbering 28 percent, who hoped for the seniority-based wage system (Survey, conducted by the Tokyo Chamber of commerce and Industry in 1996, polling 1 046 new employees at 318 small-and-medium-size enterprises). Asked how long they hope to work with their companies, 18 percent of female new employees said “until get marry” and 12 percent - “until give birth”, which indicates, that the share of those who consider marriage and child-birth as turning-points in their company life fell below the 30 percent line (7 percent
less than the previous survey). It would seem that women, especially young Japanese women becoming career-oriented. Young Japanese men on their side, becoming mobility-oriented, since 32 percent of them ‘would like to change the job if occasion arises’ and 24 percent ‘do hope to do business on their own’. Comparatively not big proportion of the new male employees (36 percent) intend to work for one of the same company ‘until the retirement age’. So, both male and female young workers prefer more flexible work regulations, like ability-based wage system and opportunity for labor mobility during their work life.

According to the information coming from the Prime Minister’s Office, 79 percent of female workers were company employees in 1996. By industry, 61.6 of all female company employees were working in services, wholesale and retail trade, and the restaurant industry. By occupation, clerical and office work accounted for the highest proportion of female employees, followed by craft, construction and manufacturing workers, professional and technical workers. Job areas which have seen the largest growth since 1975 by number are clerical and related work, followed by professional and technical occupations, sales workers, and protective service and service workers. The average age of female employees is steadily increasing (36.5 in 1995).

Latest social surveys show that not a few Japanese working women are at a disadvantage at the work place because of some disparity between men and women. According to the survey on Working Woman, conducted in 1996 by Recruit Research, Inc., 43 percent of surveyed 1243 full-time employees feel some indicators for gender inequality at their present work place. The data discover that the biggest number of women at a disadvantage could be found in large companies (56 percent), and by the tie of work - in the financial and real estate industries (58 percent), and in the manufacturing industries (55 percent).

Usually the form of female disadvantages are related to the amount of payment, and to the access to high business positions (in particular women’s participation in planning and decision-making processes). In 1995, for example, only 6.3 percent of the members of the national parliament were women. In the local government sector and in companies, it could be find more women promoted, but in general, Japan ranks twenty-
seventh in the world on Gender Empowerment Measure (measuring the number of women in the parliament, management, professional, and technical occupations). This is according to the Human Development Report, published by the 1995 United Nations Development Plan.

The Fundamental Investigation Report for Women Employees in 1996 says that 59 percent of all enterprises which employ more than thirty people have women in subsection chief and higher positions, but the real ratio of women supervisors is 1.5 percent at the head of departments, 2 percent as section chiefs, and 7 percent as subsection chiefs. It can be seen in the attached graphic.

Only 19 percent of working women say that they are treated equally with men at their workplaces (according to the Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equality, carried out in 1995 by the Prime Minister’s Office). The majority feel discriminated - “if anything, men receive better treatment than women” (43 percent), or “men receive much better treatment than women” (19 percent). One third of men, however, think that there is gender equality in their workplace and they are treated equally.

Looking at the Ministry of Labor information, Japanese female employees have small changes in their wages during their working life. In addition, they received lower salaries than male employees. In the beginning of their career, young workers are employed with low wages, but even then there are gender differences - in the age group 20 - 24 years old men earn average 200,000 yen per month, while women - 178,000. After that during the working life, the gender differences increase year by year. For male employees average wages reach the top of 421,000 yen when they are 50-54 years old. Female employees at that age earn twice less - 217,000; their maximum is 220,000 yen and they get to when are 45-49 years old. The main reason for such a discrimination against women is the seniority promotion system and the available job opportunities, especially when they reenter the work force after child-care leaving. Most of all they are able to find part-time jobs that are less paid. That is why the line of female employees' wages is almost without changes, while the male's one shows more than three times increasing in the middle of their work career.
At the more general level, gender inequality in wages and in managerial status shows once again, that the legislation itself is not enough for creating gender equal society. People thinking and employers attitudes towards female employees need to be changed, too. The same could be said about family arrangements.

Social survey data show, that not only the actual labor market is in a process of changes, but public attitudes and opinions, too. According to the data from Survey on Women Worker’s Employment Management, conducted in 1995 by the Ministry of Labour, 45 percent of basic views follow the model “Place women in work where they can make effective use of their special qualities and sense”. Only 3 years before in 1995, such views covered 38 percent what demonstrate liberal changes in public opinion. But still the model “Place women in all kinds of work according to their capabilities and suitability” dominates - 55 percent in 1992 and 47 percent in 1995.

The general conclusion is, that in Japanese public opinion have been set in serious changes. It is quite significant, that women’s and men’s views concerning female employment and work place status in Japan coincide and about 90 percent from the total number of surveyed men and women support the scheme “Women should have a job”. Only 4,1 percent female and 4,6 percent male think that “Women should not have a job”. If both labor market and women themselves wish to work fruitfully and with short quit jobs for child birth of baby care, some things in the Japanese social framework should be change according to the new socioeconomic situation.

And one more significant change in the Japanese public opinion. The differences between men’s and women’s attitudes and opinions are comparatively small within the generation over 50 years old, but they are quite remarkable among the younger generations. For example, men-traditionalists are twice more than women-traditionalist in the age group 20-29 years, and almost three times more in the age group 30-39 years. It seem to indicate that women’s changes in Japan go faster than men’s and women could drive the liberal changes in the whole society in the future. They are now more liberal orientated and care more perspective values then men, what turn the attention to the necessity of really equal education for men and women in Japanese society, not only concerning the basic knowledge, but also the social values of a gender equality.
FAMILY LIFE-STYLE CHANGES

There are at least two main trends in family arrangement in the modern Japanese society related to the female employment - increasing the number of young women who do not want to get married, and increasing the number of married working women. Both tendencies are based on the changes in socioeconomic framework in Japan, as well as on the development of new kind of thinking and behavior of Japanese people.

Nowadays, the majority of working women in Japan are married. In 1996, 57 percent of female employees are married, and 33 percent - unmarried. Thirty years ago (in 1962), the picture was opposed - 33 married against 55 unmarried. The process of joining married women to the labor force was very intensive in the 1970s, but now it is comparatively constant. It raises some important questions concerning the balance between job and house work, as well as the model of the contemporary model of Japanese family.
At the end of 1970s, there are four types of family ideals. (Meiko Sugiyama, 1978). According to the housewives’ concept, opinions on the ‘‘ideal family’’ could be devised into the four types:

a/ ‘‘male supremacist type’’ - where the man is a master of the household and there is strong gender role distribution: women are totally devoted to the home, family and children, whole men are concentrated on their job outside home and they do not do any house work and child care;

b/ ‘‘male priority type’’ - man dominates as a head of the family, but he puts his energy mainly into work, while woman is the most responsible person for protecting family life;

c/ ‘‘sexual equality type’’ - a wife concentrates on creating a warm family, a husband is a ‘‘salary man’’, but it is natural for him to help in kitchen work or mind the children;

d/ ‘‘independent woman type’’ - both family partners have their own work and interests and each of them is enthusiastically involved in them.

Then and even now, the first two types are supported mainly by people from the older generation, while the second two types have more supporters among the young generation. Recently, however, the public attitudes towards family institution and children mark some new characteristics. They could be seen in the national representative data, collected by the NHK Cultural Research Institute in 1995, within the International Social Survey Program. In the table below could be find as well the main similarities and differences between Japanese and Bulgarian public attitudes.

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN**

(Percentage of agreement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement with the statement</th>
<th>All respond</th>
<th>Female respond</th>
<th>Female Empl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BULG JAPAN</td>
<td>BULG JAPA</td>
<td>BULG JAPA</td>
<td>BULG JAPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Married are happier than unmarried 67,3 40,3 72,2 35,8 - 30,9
The main advantage of marriage is the financial security 50,0 42,4 57,0 43,9 - 39,4
The main purpose of marriage is to have children 71,7 18,9 73,8 16,7 - 13,7
Watching children grow up is the life’s greatest joy 89,9 86,7 94,5 88,4 - 85,9
Children interfere too much the freedom of parents 50,7 43,8 52,5 42,9 - 41,1
One parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together 32,9 59,4 36,6 59,5 - 59,0

Looking at the data several things keep the attention. The most impressive among them is, that the majority of Japanese people are not convinced in the marriage advantages. For the biggest part of them the main purpose of the marriage is financial security, but not children. It is really surprising keeping in mind that over 85 percent of them feel children’s growth up as the greatest life’s joy. They however, do not see the necessity link between marriage and growing children. For more than a half of them a single parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together.

Japanese reserved attitudes to marriage are reflection of the traditional family model, what can be seen even today. Especially young educated women do not want to be dependent from their husbands in the same way like their mothers and grandmothers. They do not wish to play a ‘’supplementary roles’’ such to maintain their spouses and to spend the whole their life as a housewives.

At the same time, Japanese women like children and a big part of them do not mind to grow up some. According to the same survey, for the biggest part of Japanese men and women (over 55 percent), the ideal number of children in a family is three, and for 34 percent of the total surveyed female and 41 percent male - two. Only 0,7 percent women and men think, that the ideal number is one child. At the same time, the total
fertility rate in Japan is only 1.43. Obviously, the reasons are more than one and are related not only to personal values.

Financial independence is important, but not so important purpose of marriage, compare to Bulgarian public opinion. While in Bulgarian case it means double income what is much better than one, in Japanese it is related to financial independence mainly for women. For example, in Japan almost all workers receive dependent and housing allowances with their pay. These allowances are ordinarily paid to heads of households, being men in most cases. Such living expense allowances are equivalent to up 5 percent of salaries. However, this gives rise to pay differentials between men and women.

Further, as one’s company rank and position rises, promotion to a managerial position means the receipt of further special stipends, but these are given less frequently to women workers due to the fact that they have not been with the company as long and have had fewer opportunities to be nominated to managerial positions. The total number of women who have reached this level in the company hierarchy is therefore below that of men. This is the main reason for young educated women not to wish to get married but to become ‘‘career seekers’’.

There is another tendency in the modern Japan, related to the marriage age. The average age at first marriage for women is 26,2 as of 1994 and has continued to rise. Age at first marriage for men is 28,5, and it has not changed since 1990’s. Women’s views of marriage have changed much, and more and more women agree that if they can be independent economically, they do not want to marry, or they do not think that the real happiness of women lies in marriage.

Women’s lives change a lot with marriage. At first, almost all newly married women change their maiden names to their husbands’. And many quit their jobs to stay at home to do house chores and to raise their children. This is the beginning of the M-shaped curve.

In Japanese families the income is managed mostly by the wife. According to the ISSP survey data, 60 percent of Japanese women manage all the money received by one of the two of spouses, and 20 percent pool the money together. In Bulgarian case, the
family budget is organized in different way - because usually both partners work, they pool the money together and use the amount they need.

There are however quite similarities between Bulgaria and Japan in housework distribution between spouses. The old traditional views, that women should be the most responsible for the domestic duties, are shared by the majority of people in Japan and in Bulgaria. It can be seen in the following table.

### DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEWORK BETWEEN THE SPOUSES

( In percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types domestic works</th>
<th>Always woman Bulg</th>
<th>Usually woman Bulg</th>
<th>Equally or both Bulg</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Equally or both Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cares for sick family member</td>
<td>16,6</td>
<td>56,6</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>20,8</td>
<td>34,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops for groceries</td>
<td>17,6</td>
<td>56,3</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>21,4</td>
<td>30,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>57,7</td>
<td>79,8</td>
<td>10,1</td>
<td>13,2</td>
<td>2,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of Japanese women do the whole domestic work. This is due to many factors - cultural heritage, traditionalism in public views, customs mostly among men. But probably the most Japanese reason is long hours work, what practically do not allow man to share domestic responsibilities. From the other side, however, it is the reason more young men to want marry then women.

Modern young Japanese women want to have not only ‘’sponsor’’, but a real husband who to share with them the whole family life. In Japan, even in children care the most responsible are mothers. Japanese fathers do not have enough time for their own children. According to the International Comparative Research on Home Education, conducted by the Japan Association for Women’s Education in 1995, Japanese fathers spent the shortest time with their children (3,3 hours per day), compare to all surveyed countries: Japan, Republic of Korea, Thailand, USA, UK, Sweden.

There is another trend concerning the modern Japanese family and family life: extended families have broken down and the ‘’nuclear’’ and ‘’DINKS’’ (double-income, no-kids) family models has become more and more typical for the contemporary
lifestyle. In addition, the number of divorces and single people increase year by year, home violence - too. The prerequisites could be found in the changed family patterns and in the contradiction within the relationships children-parents and husband-wife. Traditional values regarding social harmony also exacerbated the situation and some experts go to the conclusion: “It is about time that we faced the truth: Japan’s family illusion has been shattered”. (Tomoko Shibuya, The Japan Times of Jan.3th,1998).

In general, **Japanese women, including working women, are not the most responsible, but almost always the only responsible for the whole domestic work and for the child care.** In addition, according to women’s views in Japan there are not enough child care facilities and not a few working mothers are pressed to quit their jobs if they decide to have children. So, the future of female participation in the labor force will depend on a complex factors - work place and home habits changes. And again - the legislation itself, even the best one is not a panacea.

### CONCLUSIVE NOTES

The modern Japanese society nowadays is in an active process of internalization and globalization like most of the countries in the world. One of the most important direction of the changes is orientated to the improvement women’s social status and women’s role in the new socio-economical environment. The governmental “Plan for Gender Equality 2000” has put the basic philosophy of creating a gender-equal society giving the general framework of measures and activities.

In Japan’s so-called “miracle economic growth” and the more resent period of slower but stable growth what has turned Japan into world super-power, an increasing number of women have began to assess the pluses and minuses of their situation and more toward solving their own problems. Japan today faces many domestic and
international problems, but now Japanese women could play more and more significant role in turning the nation away from policies which sacrifice the individuals for economic gain.

In front of the 21st Century Japanese women are in the process of “looking for themselves” in cross-cultural perspectives, and in particular the young generation has already overcome many of the old traditionalistic thinking and behavior. On the basis of their higher education and self-confidence the majority of them demonstrated aspiration to more freedom of choice, to independence and to realization of their abilities and interests.

Working women in Japan are protected by several laws, especially by the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, the Labor Standards law, the Child Care or Family Care Leave Law, the Part-time Work Law, the Industrial Health and Safety Law. In spite of the democratic legislation however, they are still in an unequal position at the work place and in family life. Their status is a reflection of the whole Japanese socio-economic framework and cultural heritage, as well as of the their specific working and leaving environment.

In the current Japanese society three types of working women could be found, classified according to their age and number of years in employment.(Hirota Hisako, 1987). They are as follows:

‘‘Young Workers’’: In the middle of 1980’s they include around a third of working women under thirty years old in Japan. They are generally well educated, mainly full-timers with better working conditions than those of the ‘‘middle-aged recruits’’. Many of them wish to become ‘‘career - keepers’’ instead of ‘‘full-time housewives’’, or not to marry at all. For them independence is a very attractive value and they are one of the most active supporters to the culture of equality. The majority of female young workers prefer the ‘‘ability-based system’’ against the ‘‘seniority-based system’’ for promotion and work advancements. As a whole, they are strong career-oriented and very active agent of social change.

‘‘Career Women’’: They are over 30 years old with more than ten years in continuous employment, and cover over one-quarter of the total female labor force. In
general they have broken more or less the traditional Japanese view ‘‘women’s job is to stay at home and to look after family and children’’. They themselves could be subdivided into three groups:

‘‘Group A’’ - it is made up of professional women, including teachers (as the majority), doctors and nurses, journalists, researchers, lawyers, librarians, designers, etc. These women are in jobs requiring expertise and special qualifications. They usually have better salaries, their jobs are more interesting and they have higher positions than the rest of working women. However, this group with its good working conditions represents only a fraction of the total workforce.

These of them, who are not only very high educated but also extremely bright and full with ambition, established a special sub-sub-group of ‘‘The Superwoman Elite’’. (Iwao, 1996). They work long hours, achieve impressive results, and win coveted posts. They are a very small minority, but are starting to climb an uncharted mountain, and nobody yet knows how their ascent will change them and others, what effect their success will have on their marital and social friendships. In five or ten years, however, as their number grow, they will likely become a force that cannot be ignored, and the battle of the sexes for promotions and appointments may begin in earnest.

‘‘Group B’’ : it includes women in government and big business. They are mainly full-timers, and many of them work as clerical workers. Their work conditions are comparatively good, but because of the ‘‘seniority wages system’’ their salaries do not increase a lot even after twenty years experience.

‘‘Group C’’ : it covers women working in small companies. Despite having worked over twenty years, their annual incomes generally do not even reach the average starting salaries for new female high school graduates. Many of them are part-timers and their working conditions are worse then in Groups A and B.

‘‘Middle-Aged Recruits’’ : They are over thirty years old but with less then ten years continuous employment. At the middle of 1980’s they were over 40 percent of working women. Almost half of them are part-timers, even though some of them work very hard and long hours. Their salaries tend to be extremely low. In large companies female employees from this group often have better wages and working conditions then...
full-time employees in small companies. However, in principal part-timers are in a weak positions, because they have no guaranteed contracts and limited alternative opportunities for work. Small companies remain the prime users of part-time workers, although the greatest increase in part-timers recently has been at the large supermarkets and restaurant industry.

If we use different indicators, working women in Japan could be classified in many other groups. For example, one of the most popular division is according to the type of the labor contract. On that basis female employees could be “full-timers” or “part-timers”. Married women usually are from the second category and it is a big challenge nowadays because of its impact on the women’s opportunities for self-realization, and on family and birth planing.

Out of the total number of part-time workers, 68,2 percent were women in 1996. But the term ‘part-timer’ does not, as the words suggest, refer to the length of time worked. Such women are generally perceived as a source of cheap labor. The problem is that part-timers become more and more attractive for employers and women reenter the labor market after child care leave mostly as a part time workers. And this is not because they wish to work part time, but because they are under the existing conditions. The government is now seeking to standardize working conditions and stabilize wages to tackle this problem, but in many cases women are still treated as contemporary and supplementary work force.

There are several serious factor who prevent Japanese women from keeping on working, and therefore - from nomination and promotion according to the ‘seniority-based’ system. In 1996 according to 76 percent of working women (The Prime Minister’s Office’s information) the most important and widespread among the preventing factors is ‘child care’, followed by ‘care for the elderly or sick family members’ and ‘housekeeping’. It indicates, that there could be more than now child care and elderly care facilities for those women, who do not want to quit their jobs for family reasons.

In spite of the gender equality orientated legislation in the modern Japan, there are differences in treatment of men and women both at the work place and in the families.
According to the Working Women’s Network Report’1997, the main causes of the wage differences are the follows:

a/ The seniority wage system, which is applied only to male employees;

b/ The family wage system (with family allowance) centering on the head of household;

c/ The administration of personnel through the track system, adopted after the enactment of the equal opportunity law, causes a concentration of women in lower paid jobs.

Employment equality and Gender Equal Society are ambition tasks in front of the Japan’s ongoing development, but there are some obstacles to their realization. According to the NGO’s evaluation of the effectiveness of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in Japan, made by The Society for the Study of Working Women (November, 1992), more than a half of Japanese see as an important obstacles “low opinion that men and management have of women”, “lack of social service welfare for children and the elderly”, and also “women’s double burden of housework and childcare”. Many Japanese (46 percent) believe, that “long working hours for men” are important reason for continuing employment inequality in the workplaces.

The majority of Japanese public opinion (over 40 percent according to the same survey) see the necessary measures to improve equality of employment in “shorten working hours for men and women”, “eradication of men’s sexist mentality”, “give women more training opportunities”, “increase the number of women managers” and in “change companies attitudes”. They are related both with keeping the law norms and changing traditional thinking and behavior.

Japan’s labor market nowadays (and tomorrow even more) needs women participation, mostly because of the declining fertility rate and the rapid increase of the elderly proportion of the population. Many Japanese women are also career-oriented and have enough energy, education and ambitions to find a good job and to be good workers. At the same time, there are some barriers in front of the more effective employment equality and in front of the general orientation to establishment a gender equal society.
Now in Japan there are contradiction public opinion attitudes and positions concerning the solution and they are based on reasonable arguments. They vary between strong keeping the Japanese traditional culture and socio-economical roles distribution among men and women (‘women should look after family - men should earn money’), and strong seeking for independence even on the cost of single childless life.

Obviously, there is not an easy receipt or estimation, but living in a democracy Japanese women expect more alternatives and space for a free choice. Now they are changed a lot and the life philosophy of many of them, especially of the young generation is rather progressive and liberal than men’s. It is a serious indicator, that they could play a new significant role in Japanese further development.

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