

Women in the workplace: Insights from Japan

Yingying Zhang Zhang
International University of Japan

Naoko Kumagai
International University of Japan

March 2020

IUJ Research Institute
International University of Japan

These working papers are preliminary research documents published by the IUJ research institute. To facilitate prompt distribution, they have not been formally reviewed and edited. They are circulated in order to stimulate discussion and critical comment and may be revised. The views and interpretations expressed in these papers are those of the author(s). It is expected that the working papers will be published in some other form.

Women in the workplace: Insights from Japan

By: Yingying Zhang Zhang and Naoko Kumagai

1. Introduction

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe aims to create a "Japan in which women shine," with corresponding policies to encourage and empower women to participate in the workplace, balanced with family life at the same time. The catchy term "womenomics" represents the moment for Japanese females to shine, yet so far there have been impediments alongside the progress (Oda and Reynolds 2018). Indeed, the most recently published Global Gender Gap (GGG) report, in 2020, shows that Japan's position has dropped, situated now at 121st (-11) in gender parity among 153 countries. It is not so much that Japan hasn't progressed in terms of gender equality, but rather that the pace is much slower than that of many other nations.

Recent news reports also indicate that some controversies and challenges remain in the womenomics context in Japan. Rich (2019) notes that only one out of five students in Japanese top elite universities is a woman, in spite of high Japanese female educational attainment. A shocking scandal was also recently revealed: since 2010, Tokyo Medical University has systematically and fraudulently set a co-efficiency lower than 1 in order to lower female candidates' entrance exam scores and reduce the proportion of female students in the university. The justification provided for the practice is a desire to maintain the number of qualified professionals in the sector, since many women doctors leave the profession after marrying or giving birth (Okunuki 2018).

The gender issue has emerged as a relevant topic in management, especially as part of the sustainability goals of the United Nations, and converting its implementation at the corporate level. Numerous academics in the field of management have devoted studies to gender and organization. Japan is among those countries that are keeping up with this global trend to close the existing gender gap and encourage more participation by women in economic development. The well-known "womenomics" phenomenon in Japan (Lewis 2017; Reality Check Team 2018) has caught much attention, but also received much criticism. On the one hand, there are high demands on well-educated Japanese females to fill the demographic gap in the labour market (Emmott 2019). On the

other hand, despite the increase of labour market participation of Japanese women—for example, the increased number of female Japanese full-time workers from 10.43 million in 2008 to 11.87 million in 2018 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2019)—Japan has worsened its global ranking position of the gender gap, slipping from the position of 80th in the 2006 ranking, 91st out of 128 countries in the 2007 ranking, to 121st out of 153 nations in the 2010 ranking, 111th in 2016, 114th in 2017 and 110th out of 149 countries in 2018 (World Economic Forum (WEF) 2018), close to India and Tunisia.

The empirical study of Eden and Gupta (2017) indicates that being a richer country correlates with having better gender equality. This may remain very true in the majority of the cases, but the Japanese case clearly contradicts this result. As an advanced economy, Japan is top listed in the world in terms of GDP, having ranked second in the world for more than four decades until 2010, when it was overtaken by China (McCurry and Kollwe 2011)—and as a developed economy, Japan’s GDP per capita is still far ahead of China’s. According to the most recent data available from the International Monetary Fund (2019), Japan’s GDP per capita is 40,850 US dollars while China’s is 10,100 US dollars, a difference of four times. As a consequence, the low position in the ranking of gender equality of Japan is puzzling, rejecting the universality of the theoretical proposal by Eden and Gupta (2017). Nonetheless, Eden and Gupta (2017) also argue that culture and context count for an important proportion of gender equality. This provides room for further understanding and exploring the Japanese gender phenomenon, a high gender inequality in a high-income economy. We tackle Japan in a cultural context to explore the challenges of women’s participation in the labour market.

As noted, the situation of Japanese women’s labour participation is paradoxical. In spite of being the first developed economy in Asia, the overall ranking of Japan in the global gender gap index (WEF 2020) is only ahead of Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea in the region of East Asia and the Pacific. In the subindex’s ranking, we can observe that Japanese females have a relatively high position in educational attainment (91st) and health and survival (40th). Nonetheless, Japan’s women’s economic participation and opportunity is ranked 115th out of 153 countries, and the ranking of political empowerment is at 144th. Among different measures in the global gender gap, discounting measures of political participation, some of the measures for the Japanese gender index that show the most disadvantage are “Proportion of unpaid work per day” (15.14 for females and 3.13 for males), “Workers employed part-time” (36.70 for females

and 11.50 for males) and “Boards of listed companies” (5.30 for female and 94.70 for male) (WEF 2020).

Despite some progress in the efforts of Japanese Prime Minister Abe in promoting women’s rights in his political agenda, the success rate is not satisfactory. The participation of women in the labour market is not only a response to the UN’s call for sustainable development, but also the result of Japanese demographic needs and the economic reality. On the one hand, the shrinking population in Japan is creating an aging society, and the ongoing low birth rate is creating a demographic crisis, which causes the labour market to suffer a shortage of workforce. Japan indeed has a low unemployment rate of 3.3%, an envy of most European countries. On the other hand, due to the declining economy and increasing cost of maintaining a quality of life, Japanese families find themselves obliged to generate some extra income with females participating in the workplace. Since the 1990s, the number of double-income households has become higher than that of housewife households. For instance, in 2014 there were 10.77 million double-income households and 7.2 million households with housewives in Japan (Ministry of Welfare 2015).

The purpose of this article is to analyse in depth the causes and effects of the phenomenon of Japanese women’s labour participation and to provide insights and understanding of gender inequality in Japan’s labour participation.

2. What the data show

According to World Economic Forum (WEF) data, Japan, in comparison with the world’s first and second economy, the U.S. and China, lags behind in terms of global index, economic participation and political empowerment, but is ahead in terms of health and survival and lies in between in terms of educational attainment (Inagaki and Harding 2018). Through continuous efforts in gender policies, the participation of females in Japanese society has been active and significantly changed in different dimensions. For instance, the female athletes in Japanese Olympic Team have been proportioned to around 50% in recent years at summer games, with more female medalists than male medalists (Cabinet Office 2018).

Education

Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) show a significant improvement in women's rate of higher education from junior college to university, from under 5% in 1960 to 10% for university and 20% for junior college in 1975, to 50% for university and 10% for junior college in 2018 (Gender Equality Bureau 2019b). In spite of this advancement, subject specialization still varies according to gender. The female ratio is low in engineering and science in general, but high in pharmaceuticals and nursing science as well as humanities and education. In programs of engineering, only 15% were women in 2018, while women were over 30% of students in subjects of science, agriculture, medicine, dentistry and social science (Gender Equality Bureau 2019b).

Though the measure of Japan's female education attainment in the GGG Index is relatively high in comparison with the overall index value, the proportion of women in the workplace with higher education is not so satisfactory among OECD countries, and the attitude of Japanese parents regarding the higher education of women is still worrisome. Despite the progress of women in the workforce, only 20% of them possess a university or graduate school degree, while the figure is 40% for men (Gender Equality Bureau 2019b). Assuming that advancing to higher education provides better job and career opportunities, the Gender Equality Bureau (2019b) finds that, in the last two decades, there has been a significant drop in the number of mothers who think that "boys should be educated as boys and girls as girls." In 2014, only 40% of mothers held that view, whereas in both 1994 and 1945 over 70% did. At the same time, 60% of fathers agreed with that statement in 2014, while over 70% had in 1994 as well as in 1945.

Employment

According to the OECD data, Japan's women labour participation rate has increased in recent years. The employment rate (66.1%) was higher than that the U.S., South Korea, and the average OECD rate (59.4%) in 2016, following after the U.K. (Reality Check Team 2018). The Statistic Japan/Labour Force Survey shows a gradual but progressive increase in women's participation in the workforce since Mr. Abe came to power (Inagaki and Harding 2018). With the effort, there are 2 million more women participating in the

labour market in comparison with 2012, with a female employment rate comparable with European countries.

Most of the increase in female employment is in the part-time or contractual category; the target of 30% of management positions being held by women by 2020 has been hastily abandoned, with the current number of female directors of public companies having doubled, but only representing 3.7% of such positions (Inagaki and Harding 2018). According to WEF (2018), only 12.4% of legislators, senior officials, and managers are female, far behind the target of 30% that the Cabinet Office set in 2003 for 2020 in the 3rd Basic Plan for Gender Equality. To be more specific, only 3.7% of executives of listed Japanese companies are women, 73% of Japanese companies have no women at the management level, and 57.7% of Japanese working women are engaged in “non-regular” employment, according to data of the Japanese government and Grant Thornton International (Reality Check Team 2018). An early study of Chang and England (2011) also pinpoints that Japan, in comparison with its industrialized East Asian neighbours Taiwan and Korea, is distinctive in the high proportion of women consigned to non-regular jobs, as the principal explanatory factor to the gender gap.

The Reality Check team at BBC (2018) attributes the drop of the WEF 2017 ranking of Japan primarily to “reversals of progress” in political empowerment. Mr. Abe’s 2014 cabinet had the highest number of female ministers in Japanese history (7 out of 18), while the 2017 cabinet showed a significantly reduced female presence (2/20). Japan’s female representation in the House of Representatives as of January 2020 is also the lowest among G7 countries (47/465). Its ranking of women in Parliament is at 135th (WEF 2020).

Desire of participating in workforce

Japan’s shrinking labour force due to a falling birthrate has sped up the process of gender equality in the workplace, or so called “Womenomics,” and brought a growing number of women to join the labour market, especially those in their 30s and 40s (Lewis 2017; Yazaki and Gatayama 2017). Japanese women’s participation in labour markets has been like an M shape, with women leaving the labour market in their 30s and 40s and then reentering it later. The M curve has been softened in recent years and become more similar to these in the U.S., U.K., and Northern European countries (Yazaki and

Gatayama 2017). According to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, women's participation at all ages increased from 10 years earlier, and the female labour force participation rate of all the female working-age population was 69.7%, with the rate for the age group between 35 and 44 at 75.3% in the July survey (Yazaki and Gatayama 2017).

This shows that the so-called M curve exists in Japan. This means that Japan's female labour force participation rate decreases for those in their 30s and 40s, implying that women with children choose not to work and later to restart working. This also implies that it is women who take care of children. Even if women reenter the labour force, most available positions are part-time with lower wages under Japan's seniority pay system. According to the Cabinet Office (2017), the average time spent by male workers on household chores and child-rearing is 1.07 hours a day in Japan while it is 3.21 in Sweden, 3 hours in Germany and 2.58 in the United States. This indicates that the heavier workload of child rearing is on Japanese women.

3. Contributing factors

On the positive side of women's increasing participation in the labour market, Yazaki and Gatayama (2017) attribute this increasing participation to: 1) expanding child care options; 2) diversifying employment patterns; 3) increasing demand for female workers due to the aging society, especially in the industries of medical care and welfare; 4) more implementation of Japanese companies' child care leave and other family benefits; and 5) the increasing number of women interested in career development. However, Japanese discrimination against women has deep roots. Japanese women spend, on average, five times as much time on unpaid activities (i.e. housework, household care, etc.) as men, while the average in the 29 countries for which data are available is only twice as much (WEF 2018).

Inagaki and Harding (2018) describe how post-World War II Japan became one of the first developed countries to outlaw gender discrimination with the new constitution that the U.S. occupiers drafted; however, a clear division of labour between the two sexes slowed the implementation of this rule in practice because it fostered economic development for men's long working hours while women stayed home to take care of

children and perform other household tasks. Despite the fact that the declining rate of birth was already evident from the 1990s, Japan seems unable to break free from the gender model which was perceived as a success in the 1970s and 1980s. This unfortunate experience in the last two decades due to the large economic stagnation has shown that the strict division of labour may need adjustment (Inagaki and Harding 2018), though there has been no apparent sign of an accelerated pace on the gender model. Yamaguchi (2019) finds evidence of female underrepresentation in both the high-status human service professions (e.g., physicians, college educators) and non-human-service professions (e.g., research, engineering).

Society and Traditions

Critics say that Mr. Abe has done little about gender inequality or Japan's entrenched culture of sexual discrimination; womenomics is rather a *tatemaie* (i.e. the face you show to the world) to boost Japan's economic growth by involving women in the labour market, and the main success has been to bring older women back to the workforce. Even the term Mr. Abe uses often is not "gender equality," but *josei katsuyaku* (women's participation or women's advancement) (Inagaki and Harding 2018).

The gender stereotype is deeply rooted in Japanese society, and often this affects the choice of career of girls over their paths of growth and development. For Gender Equality Bureau (2019b), the cause of girls' behaviour in preferring humanities subjects and avoiding science careers is the environment, not their grades. Firstly, in the family context, despite the progress, a high percentage of parents still show a strong gender differentiation in terms of their education (40% of mothers and 60% of fathers). The Gender Equality Bureau (2019b) reports the influence of family as a determinant in career choices: girls by mothers and boys by fathers. Besides the reason of the lack of personal ability for not being able to choose a satisfactory career path, women report more on the economic reasons (39.4% vs. 33.1%) and family opposition in the desired education in terms of school and subject (17.3% vs. 10%) (Soken c.f. in Gender Equality Bureau 2019b).

Secondly, in the school context, teachers serve as role models and significant influencers for future career decision making. On the one hand, the rate of female teachers is inversely proportional to the level of the educational institution: from over 90% in

kindergarten and nursery school, to over 60% in elementary school, over 40% in junior high school, over 30% in high school, and only 24.8% in university and graduate school. The role model factor is relevant for women's career choice and development. The Gender Equality Bureau (2019b) indicates that girls taught by female teachers in junior high school in either math or science showed a higher interest in a career in a science field than those who were taught math and science by male teachers.

Women in the Academy of International Business (WAIB 2017) also exposes that in the early days of promoting women into managerial positions, Japanese companies encountered difficulty in attracting female applicants, though women were expressing their desires to become managers. The reason was attributed to the lack of role models. As there was a strong drinking culture in after-work time in Japanese corporations, female employees were puzzled about how to behave as managers since they didn't want to spend after-work time drinking with colleagues and subordinates, but desired rather to go home to assume family and other social responsibilities. This latter implies the third context of enterprises that bias the women's choice in career and development. Inagaki and Harding (2018) suggest that Japanese companies used to be reluctant to accept female employees because they might quit after giving birth, and now the phenomenon is more due to their limitations in working hours.

Social pressure

Mr. Abe's government has focused heavily on impediments to work, like fixing the shortage of childcare and encouraging more accommodating workplaces (Inagaki and Harding 2018; Oda and Reynolds 2018). In a society that clings tightly to traditional notions of home, family and motherhood, babysitting services in Japan have emerged but are still a system relatively new to Japanese working mothers; it is considered somewhat distasteful to delegate childcare duties to strangers, which makes the service much less popular than in the western countries like the U.K. and the U.S. (Waters 2014). A middle-level female manager working in Tokyo commented in an interview that her elderly Japanese babysitter had complained that she returned home too late, which was not well perceived as her duty of a mother. Another Western female manager married to a Japanese man similarly remarked that Japanese women would not delegate the responsibility of childcare to a third party.

Therefore, it is a major challenge for professional women, as it often means a choice between taking care of the kids and continuing their career or even keeping the job, an option of “either...or...”, rather than an option of “both...and... .” However, changing the gender model requires more than building kindergartens (Inagaki and Harding 2018). What underlies the case of exam rigging at Tokyo Medical University reflects the top managerial decisions and social pressure for desiring to have more doctors who do not take maternity leave (Inagaki and Harding 2018). The traditional model embedded in the formal and informal educational system assumes the gender role of the female taking care of family and the classical role of the male as breadwinner. The Gender Equality Bureau (2019b) demonstrates that the gender equality training for the mid-level teachers at all education stages is low in comparison with newly appointed teachers. The latter is around 90%, but the former is 47.8% in elementary school, 47.8% in junior high school and 60.9% in high school. The social pressure on Japanese women is extended to such a degree that another interviewee reported that she was told to stay in the hospital overnight to take care of her son in the patients’ room when her husband intended to replace her after her several non-sleeping nights. The reason explained was that all of the other overnight family members were female, so it would be inconvenient for the hospital to have her husband to stay overnight, as they were not prepared for it.

Social pressure is not only on women professionals, but also on male workers. The rate of the use of paternal leave in Japan in 2016 was only 3.16%. Approximately 36.3% of those users took less than five days of paternal leave according to the 2018 Equal Employment Basic Survey (Ministry of Welfare 2018). The reasons for such low rate of paternal leave and short leave are the negative impact on the workplace, the lack of understanding of the boss, the difficult atmosphere and the lack of replacements and economic costs (Nakasone Yasuhiro Sekai Heiwa Kenkyujo 2018, 20). Certain data show that 11.6% of the users suffered from paternity harassment (Rengō 2014).

Legal aspects

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) was enacted in 1986. However, the impact of EEOL on the participation of women in the labour market in Japan has mixed results. Abe (2011) addresses this issue by repeating cross-sectional data of the 1987–2007 Employment Status Survey (ESS) and controlling different macroeconomic effects

and comparing the female and male statistics. The results find that the main increase in regular full-time jobs after the EEOL is for highly educated women younger than 40 years old. Nevertheless, no advances are found for women's regular employment after the EEOL, independent from their marital status and age. In addition, female university graduates' marriage rate has decreased since the rise of their regular employment participation (Abe 2011).

In order to better implement the promotion of female employment, Prime Minister Abe's government enacted a law of gender equality in the workplace in 2015, calling on companies with more than 301 employees to set targets to increase the number of women in management. Another incentive to encourage women's participation in the labour market is the 2017 reform of the dependent-spouse tax deduction, which was raised from 1.03 million JPY (8,930 USD) a year to 1.5 million JPY. In an earlier condition, many women lowered their ambitions in the workplace to take lower income and part-time job positions (Lewis 2017) in order to qualify for this tax deduction.

Pay gap

As a consequence of several factors, a major form of women's participation in the labour market consists of part-time temporal contracted jobs, a factor that contributes to the pay gap between female and male. According to Yamaguchi (2019, 26), Japan's gender gap reflects the fact that "a lack of gender equality in career opportunity and long work hours perpetuates wage differences between men and women." The average wage gap in Japan is 24.50 %, higher than the average wage gap of 18% reported in other advanced countries like the U.S. and the U.K. (World Economic Forum 2020).

In spite of a tight labour market with a high ratio of jobs to applications of 1.45, Japanese companies have not managed to relax various forms of indirect discrimination that define Japan's male-dominated executive workforce (Lewis 2017). These are directly or indirectly reflected in various dimensions of corporate activities and policies, such as what occurred in the Tokyo Medical University, affecting female employees' opportunity in accessing job opportunities, career development, and promotions to managerial and top positions.

Yamaguchi (2019, 29) analysed the pay gap between women and men, and found that although one contributing factor is the types of jobs that women often take, the pay difference resulting from this factor is not large. Indeed, it is within full-time job positions

where the gender pay gap exists with more significance. Yamaguchi (2019) suggests that achieving gender equality in educational attainment will not greatly reduce the gender wage gap, with the exception of equalizing the proportion of college graduates majoring in science and engineering, which will make a difference. This assumes that job positions in science and engineering are generally more qualified and higher paid, and also indirectly suggests the relevance of career orientation to science and engineering positions among female students, as noted earlier in the education-related section.

Motivation and career

Pay as an extrinsic motivation, frequently applied in human resource management, is a means of recognition at the same time. The large gender wage gap is one of the main contributors to the high gender gap in Japan. Data from 2018 indicate Japan as the second largest in terms of gender wage gap among OECD nations. Yamaguchi (2019) finds that the major cause of this gap is the factor of non-regular employment (36% of explanation power) (Yamaguchi 2011) and gender pay difference within full-time regular employment (more than half of explanation power).

Women in Japan first lack the opportunity to go into professions other than those deemed suitable for women (Yamaguchi 2019, 27) due to the deeply rooted traditional mindset. A high rate of part-time job positions among females also implies less career development and promotion opportunity.

The dearth of female managers constitutes a major cause of gender wage disparity among regular employees. According to the 2016 Basic Survey on Equality of Employment Opportunity by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, women hold 6.4% of positions of department director or equivalent, 8.9% of section head or equivalent and 14.7% of task-unit supervisor or equivalent (Yamaguchi 2019). Some examples of management positions in Japanese enterprises can illustrate the situation: only 5.6% of Japan Tobacco's managers are women (Inagaki and Harding 2018); about 3.7% of the boards of Japanese publicly traded firms are women in 2017 (Tanaka, 2019).

The 2016 Basic Survey of Equality of Employment Opportunity also attributes two major factors to this result based on pre-specified possible reasons: 1) "At the moment, there are no women who have the necessary knowledge, experience, or judgment capability"; and 2) "women retire before attaining managerial positions due to

their short years of service.” Nevertheless, Yamaguchi (2019) disagrees with that and considers it a misguided perception. Yamaguchi’s (2016) analysis reveals that only 20% of the gender disparity among regular employees in middle management positions and above can be explained by gender differences in education and employment experience, and the rest from the gender differences in the rate of promotion to managerial positions among employees with the same levels of education and experience. Yamaguchi (2016) shows that a male has ten times more chance to become a manager, while being a college graduate only makes an individual 1.65 times more likely. For Yamaguchi (2019), contemporary Japan cannot even be considered a modern society in terms of gender issues; gender at birth, not individual achievement, determines whether one becomes a manager.

Corporate culture

Indeed, Yamaguchi (2019) attributes this dearth of female managers to the gender-segregated career tracks and the long work hours, which for women are incompatible with Japanese family roles after marriage with the heavy burden of childcare and household tasks. Consequently, the insistence of Japanese firms on long work hours is an inherent source of gender inequality, especially for managerial positions. Japanese industrial health specialists are concerned that long hours of working time in paid employment cause stress, low quality of life and other serious problems (Ishida 1986). Japanese married women with children largely have a problem of time squeeze or crunch as they try to cope with having both their paid jobs and their unpaid work at home, which amounts to a longer average workday than for married men (Boyle and Shibata 2009).

Male-dominated business and management culture is especially strong in traditional industries. Long working hours make it difficult for women to balance work and personal life. Unlike the clearly set and regulated work hours in many western countries, working overtime and after-work drinking hours are part of the corporate and business culture existing in Japanese society, making it difficult for women to participate in extra-workplace social activities where socialization is combined with informal networking and exchange of information.

Lewis (2017) criticizes Japan’s culture as being not yet ready to embrace the change for gender equality. Female discrimination is said to not be addressed if Japanese companies cannot provide a working environment to have promotion opportunities

without demands for unlimited work hours (Inagaki and Harding 2018). In this view, availability for long working hours should not be considered an appropriate measure for performance appraisal, which could be better reflected in their work merit, achievement and quality (Hilst 2018). That implies the need for a more objective performance appraisal in Japanese corporations' human resource management systems.

Rooted in gender stereotypes, gender segregation reflects on the hiring practices and other HR routines. The main careers open to Japanese women are related to traditional family roles like children's education and nursing, leaving few opportunities to enter into professions other than those deemed suitable for women (Yamaguchi 2019).

Women leaders and entrepreneurs

In the first year of Japanese Prime Minister Abe's efforts at gender equality, only one application arrived for the cash scheme which offered small companies incentive to promote female executives (Lewis 2017). Promoting a woman to a decision-making leadership position is not a simple, everyday task, but rather requires middle- and long-term planning and a career development pipeline. The low rate of female leaders is a social phenomenon existing in both the political arena and business environments.

Regarding the example of the Kanagawa Female Leadership advertisement, Ms. Shimada, a manager at Japan Tobacco, comments, "It is necessary to have women in decision-making processes in order to address underlying discrimination... Right now, there really is no female participation" (Inagaki and Harding 2018). Ironically, as indicated above, there have been only a few female ministers in Prime Minister Abe's successive cabinets. Similarly, in the advertising panel to promote the Kanagawa Women's Empowerment Support Group, the 11 high-profile corporate leaders featured in the panel were all male! (Lewis 2017).

The Gender Equality Bureau (2019b) reports the increasing interests of women in starting a business as being related to their experience through childbirth, childcare responsibilities, or a spouse's job transfer, in comparison with the experience of working in a company. Educational opportunity from senior entrepreneurs has been highlighted as relevant for learning and recycling knowledge. This knowledge is not only about business skills, the legislative system and procedures and financing, but also about business planning to transform the initial ideas into a concrete business reality.

As for entrepreneurship, the Gender Equality Bureau reports that the percentage of female entrepreneurs is approximately 34.2% in Japan. This is not so low in comparison with the lower rates of female executives in Japanese corporations. However, the trend of female entrepreneurs itself has not made any significant progress since the trend has remained almost the same since the late 1970s. It was 39.8% in 1979 and 42% in 1982 (Gender Equality Bureau 2019b).

The Cabinet Bureau promotes “Learning for Starting a Company,” which would provide business skills and knowledge of legislative systems and financing, which many women do not necessarily possess. This is the case because there is a growing trend of women having an interest in starting their own companies due to the difficult experiences of childbirth and childrearing while working at a company as salaried employees. Also, there is a growing recognition that preparation for starting a company is as important as supporting the starting of a company (Gender Equality Bureau 2019b).

In relation to this, the importance of environment and encouragement is also highlighted in engineering and science. The rate of Japanese women in science remained lower than that of men at universities in 2018. The Gender Equality Bureau reports that girls’ interest in natural science declines as they grow, despite the fact that elementary school girls like science more than Japanese study and points to the environment as the cause of girls’ avoidance behaviour toward science. In practice, Japanese girls’ scientific and mathematical literacy scores are better than those of both boys and girls in other countries (Gender Equality Bureau 2019b).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The Japanese government has enacted various measures to address gender issues, starting from the Gender Equality and Employment Act in 1985. Since then, reforms and measures have been concentrated to reduce the burdens of working women’s childcare, like shortening the long work hours. A one-year maternity leave system was introduced in 1992. It has been typical in Japan since 2000 to have one household with both husband and wife working. Since both parents work, raising children has become a new challenge due to the lack of childcare facilities and an appropriate work environment for mothers with young children. As a consequence, many women leave their jobs to raise their children, partly due to the traditional view on the division of labour. The Act on

Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children was passed in 2005. The Charter for Work-Life Balance was adopted in 2007.

Despite all the policies, they may not work if they are not implemented, or not implemented well. A general lack of role models of female leadership, mentorship and networking still prevails. Networking that benefits women in the workplace cannot occur among female colleagues alone, but also needs to be backed up by male business leaders.

Lewis (2017) quotes the opinion of Ms. Matsui, Goldman Sachs's chief Japan strategist: "Gender equality is very contrary to the Japanese way of doing things but the math does not add up on human capital." The shrinking labour force implies that companies will compete to attract and promote women to top positions in the near future.

Foreign multinational corporations located in Japan may provide alternative routes for Japanese local female employees to progress in managerial careers, as a foreign corporation is less restricted or constrained by local cultural tradition and institutional limitations (Bozkurt 2012). This is especially likely in these foreign companies from countries of better gender gap ranking, which have different corporate cultures and HR practices for women. Female staff may easily find role models, mentors and networking opportunities in such an environment. From an HR development perspective, women in leadership could also provide better role models for the coming generations. That implies the need first to help women start their careers and gain the training to become leaders (Cho et al. 2015).

The increasingly technology-intensive society also provides additional opportunity for women to participate in the labour market. Since one of the main challenges for women to work and progress in a professional environment is the demands of childcare and household tasks, the Internet enables many job and business opportunities from one's home site. The flexibility in terms of working hours and physical presence allows for a better work and life balance in a competitive work environment like Japan.

In order to make womenomics a reality, a changing mindset across multiple levels is needed. Mr. Abe's championing of women's advancement has been credited as a factor for the beginning of a new era in female success (Reality Check Team 2018). In Japan, following rules has been considered as one of the most relevant cultural aspects to avoid uncertainty. Ms. Kashima states that 98% of companies have complied with the law

ordering a specific women-promoting plan, although there are no penalties (Lewis 2017) if it is not executed. A more explicit and enforceable law to promote further women empowerment could speed up the pace. However, many aspects of human social behaviour cannot be simply covered by law.

Change in societal norms and corporate working culture is one of the critical aspects for providing more job, career and leadership opportunities for women. For Ms. Kashima of BNY Mellon Asset Management Japan, the macho working culture of overtime hours is under pressure for change in Japan today. It used to be “cool” to work until midnight, but is no longer considered so. If less overtime work is done, more quality job opportunities can be released to the market (Lewis 2017).

Changing the culture requires a long-term process. Still, several symptoms, ideas and policies suggest some venue for continuous and more powered progress toward gender equality and women’s empowerment for Japanese women in the workplace. The conservative social values and Japanese corporate cultures affect not only women but also men. The issue of women’s empowerment does not necessarily deepen the cleavage between men and women. Rather, it can produce more cooperative venues for men and women.

Women themselves can be initiators in changing traditional culture. They can break any gender stereotypes in occupations and find new areas of interest, particularly in the natural sciences. For that, women should be more encouraged to seek their careers in the fields they prefer.

References:

Abe, Yukiko. 2011. The equal employment opportunity law and labor force behaviour of women in Japan. *Journal of the Japanese and International Economies* 25: 39-55.

Boyles, Corinne, and Alko Shibata. 2009. “Job Satisfaction, Work Time, and Well-Being Among Married Women in Japan.” *Feminist Economics* 15, no. 1: 57–84.

Bozkurt, Ödül. 2012. “Foreign Employers as Relief Routes: Women, Multinational Corporations and Managerial Careers in Japan.” *Gender, Work and Organization* 19, no. 3: 225–53.

Cabinet Office. 2017. Gender Equality White Paper, Chapter 1, Section 4, “Attitude Survey on Child Birth and Child Rearing.”

https://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shoushika/whitepaper/measures/w-2017/29webhonpen/html/b1_s1-1-4.html.

———. 2018. “Active Role of Women in Sports and Men and Women’s Health Support,” White Paper on Gender Equality 2018 (Summary), June. Government of Japan.

———. 2019. List of Ministers. Accessed on January 31, 2020. https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/meibo/index.html.

Eden, Lorraine, and Susan Gupta. 2017. “Culture and Context Matter: Gender in International Business and Management.” *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management* 24, no. 2: 194–210.

Emmott, Bill. 2019. “Japan’s female future.” *Strategy + Business*, March 12, 2019. <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/Japans-female-future?gko=8933e>

Gender Equality Bureau. 2019. White Paper on Gender Equality 2019 (Summary), June. Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/whitepaper/pdf/ewp2019.pdf.

Hilst, Yvonne M. 2018. “Equality in the Workplace Means Exactly That.” *Financial Times*, September 3, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/89405c7a-ad09-11e8-94bd-cba20d67390c>.

Inagaki, Kana, and Robin Harding. 2018. “Japan’s Culture of Discrimination Saps ‘Womenomics.’” *Financial Times*, August 29, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/2d05e910-a45e-11e8-8ecf-a7ae1beff35b>.

Ishida, Kazuhiro. 1986. “Gendai no rodo to sutoresu–1” [Contemporary work and stress: 1]. *Chingin to shakai hoshō* 929 (January): 61–66.

McCurry, Justin, and Julia Kollewe. 2011. “China Overtakes Japan as World’s Second-Largest Economy.” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/feb/14/china-second-largest-economy>.

Nakasone Yasuhiro Sekai Heiwa Kenkyujo [Nakasone Peace Institute]. 2018. “2025 Nen Mondai Kenkyukai Hokokusho.” IIPS Policy Paper, May.

Lewis, Leo. 2017. “Japan’s Womenomics Resists the Sceptics.” *Financial Times*, March 7, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/2fd5378a-e7c8-11e6-967b-c88452263daf>.

Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. 2019. *Rodoryoku Chosa 2018*. <https://www.stat.go.jp/data/roudou/sokuhou/nen/dt/pdf/index1.pdf>

Ministry of Welfare. 2017. *Koyo Kinto Kihon Chosa* [Equal Employment Basic Survey FY 2016]. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/71-28r.html>.

Ministry of Welfare. 2019. *Koyo Kinto Kihon Chosa* [Equal Employment Basic Survey FY 2018]. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/71-30r.html>

Oda, Shoka, and Isabel Reynolds. 2018. “What Is Womenomics, and Is It Working for Japan?” *Bloomberg*, September 20, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-19/what-is-womenomics-and-is-it-working-for-japan-quicktake>.

Okunuki, Hifumi. 2018. “Tokyo Medical University Scandal is a throwback to when discrimination against women was the norm.” *The Japan Times*. August 26 2018.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2018/08/26/issues/tokyo-medical-university-scandal-throwback-discrimination-women-norm/#.XkJAQTEzZPY>

Reality Check Team. 2018. “Reality Check: Has Shino Abe’s ‘Womonomics’ Worked in Japan?” *BBC News*, February 17, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42993519>

Rich, Motoko. 2019. “At Japan’s Most Elite University, Just 1 in 5 Students Is a Woman.” *New York Times*, December 8, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/world/asia/tokyo-university-women-japan.html>

Rengō. 2014. *Survey on Paternity Harassment* (in Japanese). Accessed on January 31, 2020. <https://www.jtuc-rengo.or.jp/info/chousa/data/20140123.pdf>.

Tanaka, Takanori. 2019. Gender diversity on Japanese corporate boards. *Journal of The Japanese and International Economies* 51: 19-31.

Waters, Megan. 2014. “Babysitting Services in Japan: Finding the Right Partner to Care for Your Child.” *Savvytokyo.com*, August 14, 2014. <https://savvytokyo.com/babysitting-services-in-japan/>

WEF (World Economic Forum). 2018. *Insight Report: Global Gender Gap Report 2018*. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

———. 2020. *Insight Report: Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Accessed on January 31, 2020. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.

Yamaguchi, Kazuo. 2011. “Decomposition of Inequality among Groups through Counterfactual Modeling: An Analysis of the Gender Wage Gap in Japan.” *Sociological Methodology* 41, no. 1: 223–55.

———. 2019. “Japan’s Gender Gap.” *Finance & Development*, March 2019, 26–29.

Yazaki, Hilariko, and Miho Gatayama. 2017. “Japan’s Female Labor Force Set to Toss Out M-curve.” *Nikkei Asian Review*, September 17, 2017. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-s-female-labor-force-set-to-toss-out-M-curve>.