

**A COMPARISON OF WOMEN EXECUTIVES
IN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES**

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
ICT	Information and communication technology
MLHW	Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare
OL	“Office lady”
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

INTRODUCTION

An increase in the number and ratio of women in decision-making positions in Japan is an important goal. In this connection, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) created the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), a composite index to ascertain gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment: economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources. The GEM investigates such indicators as the ratio of women to men in executive positions and legislatures as well as the income gap.¹

To reflect women's needs economically and socially, expanding of their participation in decision-making in Japan is not only indispensable and will have great significance in expanding the layer of talented individuals who can support the nation's aging society and compensate for the loss of working-age population in the country, but also in creating more chances to demonstrate women's abilities and removing prejudice against them.

Female managers, however, are still rare in the Japanese business world, while the number of woman at the executive level is negligible. I think that an investigation of female directors' careers and research into the factors leading to their assuming such positions would be helpful to encourage women to make efforts to advance their careers in the future. In addition, such an investigation will lead to a greater understanding of the Japanese social and economic system.

In United States, the number of women managers has been increasing since the 1970's. Today, nearly half of all U.S. managers (around 46.5 percent) are women, and women are beginning to break the so-called glass ceiling to become top-level executives as well.

¹In 2005, Japan was No. 43 out of 80 countries.

In this study, I have attempted to compare women executives in Japan with their counterparts in the United States in order to learn about and understand the problems and challenges they face.

CHAPTER 1
POLICIES AND ISSUES RELATED TO WORKING WOMEN
IN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

Japanese Policies

The postwar Japanese Constitution guarantees the equality of individuals under the law. The legal status of women has been equal to that of men since the enactment of this constitution and, through it, women have obtained suffrage and the right to an education equivalent to that of men. The Labor Standard Law guarantees equal pay for equal work (with many protections for women as well). But there are still sizeable gender gaps in politics and economics. This is despite the fact that, in a gender-equal society, both men and woman are expected to participate in decision-making and to assume positions that involve responsibilities from planning and execution of various projects to the final results.

Up until the 1970's in Japan, women in decision-making positions in government organizations and private companies were extremely rare.² As a result, women's voices were not adequately reflected in policy making, and prejudice concerning their abilities and aptitudes deepened. Along with this came the problem of economic dependence on men and the low status of women in society.

In 1975, the United Nations commemorated the International Year of the Woman, and "The World Plan of Action" adopted in Mexico City noted that the stereotyped perception of gender roles would have to be changed in order to realize gender equality. In 1977, the Japanese government established a headquarters to enhance the status of women and decided on a "National Plan of Action." Since then, special activities to promote women's participation in

²In the Japanese Diet, only 2.1 percent of the members were women; the figures for executives in the central government and women in managerial positions were 0.7 percent and 6.9 percent, respectively.

decision-making in all fields, including public service, have been an important policy objective of the government. The purpose of this policy, of course, is to encourage the understanding and improvement of an expanded role for women within society at large. The concrete target for this was to achieve a participation ratio of 10 percent for women on committees and councils appointed by the various ministries by FY 1985.

The promotion of the participation of women in decision-making has been assumed to be one of the main pillars of government plans, such as the “Emphasis Target of the National Plan” (1981), the “New Action Plan for 2000” (1987), the “Plan in 2000 for a Gender-equal Society” (1996), and the “Basic Plan for a Gender-equal Society” (2000). The performance target for the ratio of women on the committees or councils was gradually increased from the above-mentioned 10 percent in FY 1985 to 30 percent at the end of FY 2005. It is now set for 40 percent at the end of FY 2015.

In 1980, the Japanese government signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and, to ratify the this convention, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was proclaimed in 1985 and revised in 1997 and 2006 to enforce the prohibition on every type of discrimination, even indirect, against women. Also, because of the declining birth rate in Japan, a child-raising law was enacted in 1992 and revised in 1995, 2000, and 2006 to cover 50 percent of a mother’s previous salary by social insurance. The length of child-raising leave has been lengthened from one year to 18 months. The “Angel Plan” 1994 and the “New Angel Plan” 1999 increased the capacities of day care centers and range of services.

Despite all this, however, women’s labor participation rates still drop in their child-bearing/raising years because of the strong belief that the mother is the best caretaker for young children. This results in a vicious circle. On the one hand, for statistical reasons, employers

are reluctant to give women positions with responsibilities or opportunities to develop their careers. On the other hand, women are discouraged from working because of their limited prospects.

Still, there are more women in professional jobs in Japan today. Women comprise 54.0 percent of professional and specialty jobs. And the ratios of lawyers (12.3 percent) and physicians (13.6 percent) are increasing rapidly. One-third of the students in medical schools and a quarter of those of who pass the bar examination are women. And they manage to design their careers once they have qualified in these professions.

In June 2003, the headquarters for a gender-equal society settled on a support plan for women's efforts at advancement; it was called "Measures to Support Women's Challenge." According to this strategy, the expected ratio of women who would serve in leading positions in all fields would be at least 30 percent by 2020. In addition, the second basic plan for a gender-equal society that had been set by a cabinet decision in December 2005 was followed. In order to attain this goal, the headquarters requested cooperation from private companies and other organizations, including local governments. As of 2005, however, women still held only 1.7 percent of executive jobs in the national government (versus 0.8 percent in 1990).

The situation is better in politics. As a result of the general election in 2005, women currently comprise 9.4 percent of the members in the House of Representatives and 12.4 percent of the House of Councillors.

In the private sector, after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was revised in 1997, discrimination against women at every stage of employment, as well as sexual harassment, was prohibited, and Article 20 calls for supporting positive action by employers..

There are a few women in managerial positions in private companies. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) "Female Employment Management Basic Survey 2005," women fill 10.4 percent of section chief/clerk jobs, 5.1 percent of managerial positions, and

account for 2.8 percent of directors. These figures show that the proportion of women in professional jobs is equivalent to industrialized countries, but that the level of women in managerial positions lags far behind.

Figure 1

International Comparison: Women's Participation in Managerial Positions		
Country	Female legislators, senior officials and managers	National Public Officers
United States	45.9 (2002)	23.1 (2001)
France	-	19.3 (2001)
Germany	34.5 (2002)	9.5 (1998)
Sweden	30.5	-
Japan	10.1 (2004)	1.5 (2004)

(Source) "Annual Report on the Employment of Minorities, Women and People with Disabilities in the Federal Government" (USA), I L O "Yearbook of Labour Statistics 2004", etc.

The ratio of the women on boards of directors in Japan is negligible as is that of women in middle managerial posts. According to a December 2004 survey conducted by Toyo Keizai Shinposha, a business/economic publisher, of 35,854 directors in all listed companies, 260 (0.73 percent) were women. And the majority of them were social directors, outside auditors, members of the founding family, or relatives of large shareholders. Only 84 of them had assumed their positions by climbing the corporate ladder.

The reasons why there are so few women executives in Japan are complex. They include the following:

1. Many women quit their jobs when they have children and, thus, lose seniority.

2. Because of the expected short period of service based on statistical data, employers will not give women the same opportunities for on/off-job training to develop their careers as they will to men.

3. Japanese firms recruit their managers from inside the firm and focus on those who have already developed their skills and knowledge. Since there are almost no opportunities for women to go back to managerial or professional jobs after an absence related to child-bearing and child-rearing (while there are plenty of low-paid, unskilled, and unsecured jobs available to them), the female talent pool within companies is small.

4. Women often lack an educational background related to business, such as economics, finance, law, or engineering even if they have a university degree in the liberal arts.

5. Because of long working hours and job rotations of men whose wives have responsibility for the family, it is difficult for women to work with the same intensity as men. Further, there is no flexibility to switch from full- to part-time work.

6. There is still some prejudice about women's abilities.

Japanese employment management based on seniority is well designed for the men who are expected to stay in one organization for the long term and develop their skills. Under this system, employers can obtain loyal, experienced workers who accept long hours and transfers; for their part, the employees have long-term job security and social benefits. But this system is based on the sacrifices of marginal workers, including women and non-regular employees, who are not in this inner labor market.

During the current prolonged recession, however, Japanese companies are changing their employment policies to streamline the ranks of regular employees and decrease the amount of training they offer. As a result, their internal human resource pools have shrunk. The companies demand experienced talented workers, however, so labor mobility has increased. In the past

several years, as business conditions have improved, the demand for talented people has increased rapidly. Thus, businesspeople have begun to understand the importance of women's potentials. Accordingly, they have begun to step up recruiting of woman university graduates for men's track jobs and are making positive plans to improve the conditions and incentives for female employee. Policies to support working mothers have also been emphasized because of severely declining birth rate. At last, the social environment has begun to change.

Practices in the United States

Over the past three decades, a significantly greater proportion of women have participated in the labor force, so that now they make up nearly half of all workers (some 46.5 percent). The M-shaped curve (peaking before marriage and pregnancy and then again after children are in school, generally full-time) of female labor participation rates has become less pronounced. Thus, women have made substantial inroads into higher-paying occupations. In 2005, 34 percent of women worked in managerial or professional specialty occupations, women made up 42.5 percent of executive, administrative, and managerial jobs, and 56.3 percent of professional specialties. There are many women physicians (32.3 percent), lawyers (30.2 percent), and scientists (42.5 percent). Some occupations like health managers (71.2 percent) and human resources managers (72.7 percent), elementary and middle school teachers (82.2 percent), and registered nurses (92.3 percent) are dominated by women.

In the United States, the law and executive orders have played important roles in promoting gender equality in the workplace. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This legislation was forged principally as a response to compelling demands for racial justice and equality; from its inception, though, it also prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion, sex, and national origin.

In addition, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established in 1965 to investigate and preclude inequitable practices. The early precursors to Title VII were executive orders prohibiting discrimination by federal contractors. In the first year after the EEOC was established, a third of the charges filed with this organization alleged sex discrimination. Thus, although Title VII was born out of the racial tension of the time, the unexpected inclusion of gender in the statute quickly led women workers and the newly emerging women's movement of the late 1960's to take advantage of the opportunity to pursue equal rights.³

For affirmative action after September 1965, federal contractors had been subject to President Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246, requiring them to take "affirmative action" to make sure they were not discriminating. But what did this 1965 mandate amount to? In 1972, affirmative action became an inflammatory public issue. True enough, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had already created something called "affirmative action." An Executive Order assigned the job of specifying the rules of implementation to the Secretary of Labor. In the meantime, the federal courts were enforcing the Civil Rights Act against companies, unions, and other institutions that were guilty of discrimination.

The Department of Labor mounted an ad hoc attack on the construction industry by generally strong-arming reluctant construction firms into a series of region-wide "plans" in which they committed themselves to numerical hiring goals. Through these contractor commitments, the department could exert indirect pressure.⁴

In addition to this, there were many women who took legal action against their employers to pursue equal rights. In the 1970 *Schultz v. Wheaton Glass Co.*, a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled

³<http://www.eeoc.gov/abouteeoc/4oth/panel/>.

⁴<http://www.eeoc.gov/abouteeoc/4oth/panel/expanding.html>.

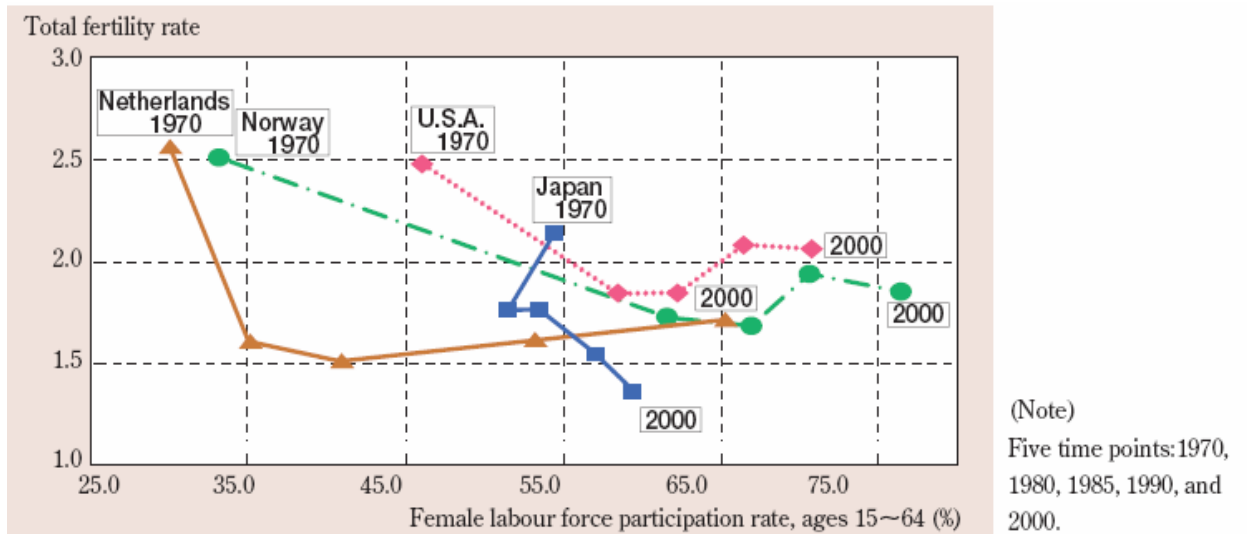
that jobs held by men and women need to be “substantially equal,” but not “identical,” to fall under the protection of the Equal Pay Act. An employer could not, for example, change the job titles of women workers in order to pay them less than men.

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that employers cannot justify paying women lower wages because that is what they traditionally received under the “going market rate.” In other words, a wage differential occurring “simply because men would not work at the low rates paid women” is unacceptable. Later, in the 1986 *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, the Supreme Court found that sexual harassment is a form of illegal job discrimination.

As for education, many young women went to law or business school to earn useful qualifications for the business world. Title IX of the Education Amendments bans sex discrimination in schools. It states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” As a result of Title IX, the enrollment of women in athletics programs and professional schools, in particular, has increased dramatically.

On the other hand, the United States did not prepare institutional supports for working women who wanted to have both a family and a career. As an exception to this general rule, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act bans employment discrimination against pregnant women. Under the act, a woman cannot be fired or denied a job or a promotion because she is or may become pregnant, nor can she be forced to take a pregnancy leave if she is willing and able to work. Nonetheless, in the United States, there is no compulsory maternity leave, no child raising leave, and no day care centers certified and subsidized by the federal government. Nordic and other industrialized nations, including Japan, on the other hand have institutional support for working mothers. But, after the rebound of the U.S. economy in the 1990’s, the birth rate began to rise.

Figures 2. Birth Rates in Several Advanced Industrialized Countries



In addition, the gender wage gap in the United States is larger than in many countries (81 vs. 88 in France and 91 in Italy, for instance). Still there are more women in managerial positions in United States than in these countries. Despite this, even in the United States, there are serious concerns about the glass ceiling. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to undertake this research.

According to the Glass Ceiling Commission of the U.S. Department of Labor in 2002:

- Women hold 11.1 percent of board seats in the Fortune 500 companies.
- Eighty-six percent of the Fortune 500 companies (429) have one or more women directors; 14 percent (71 companies) have no women on their boards.
- One hundred eighty-eight companies in the Fortune 500 have two or more women directors; 34 have three or more.
- Of the Fortune 100 companies, 97 percent have at least one woman on their boards.

- Women represent 1.1 percent of inside directors (those drawn from top management of the company) on the boards of the Fortune 500 companies. Out of 1,173 inside directors, 13 are women.

As for women executives, the commission reports that:

- Women account for 11.2 percent of corporate officers.
- Seventy-five percent of the Fortune 500 companies (376) have at least one women officer.
- Over half (258) of the Fortune 500 companies have more than one female corporate officer.
- Six percent of corporate officers holding line jobs (as opposed to staff jobs) are women, while 94 percent are men.
- Savings institutions are the industry with the most women at the top. Other top industries include: diversified financials (30 percent), publishing/printing (26 percent), and transportation equipment (24 percent).
- Two industry groups have no women corporate officers – trucking and textiles; others with low representation include electronics and semiconductors (2 percent), and waste management (3 percent).
- Women make up 2.7 percent of the top earners (the five most highly paid officers at the Fortune 500 companies).
- In November 2002, women accounted for 15.7 percent of the corporate officers in America's 500 largest companies. These percentages are up from 12.5 percent in 2000 and 8.7 percent in 1995.⁵

⁵<http://www.breaktheglassceiling.com/statistics-women.htm>.

This advancement of American women is remarkable compared to Japanese women. But even in United States, there is still a gap between men and women, and this certainly causes some resentment. As noted above, the average salary of women is 81 percent of men (versus 67 percent in Japan). Top executives at large corporations are dominated by men. As a result of this, there are many books and magazines that discuss these and related topics. And my concern at the moment is the slight decline of the female managers and executives in recent statistics. What does this mean? A temporary drop or a very thick glass ceiling?

Why do women have such difficulties in obtaining managerial positions? Why is the glass ceiling so strong? Is it a lack of networks, role models, and mentors? Is it the burden of the second shift? Is it because mothers did not teach the rules of the game to their daughters or because women's brains are different? As a result of these and other questions, there are now many comments and discussions about the leadership style of women, which is said to be different from that of men.⁶

How about institutional supports for working mothers including longer maternity leave, child-raising leave, and community day care centers, besides support from family and private services?

The answers to these questions are different according to the country and the respective welfare regime. It can generally be said, though, that Japan and other OECD countries give greater emphasis to these institutional supports for working mothers than United States does. Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway are assisting working parents with institutional supports and generous parental insurance measures. European countries like Germany or France help mothers with liberal child allowances and encourage them to stay home or work part time. Nevertheless, there is still not enough institutional support for working parents. There is a variety

⁶S. Helgesen, *The Female Advantage: Women's Way of Leadership* (New York: Doubleday).

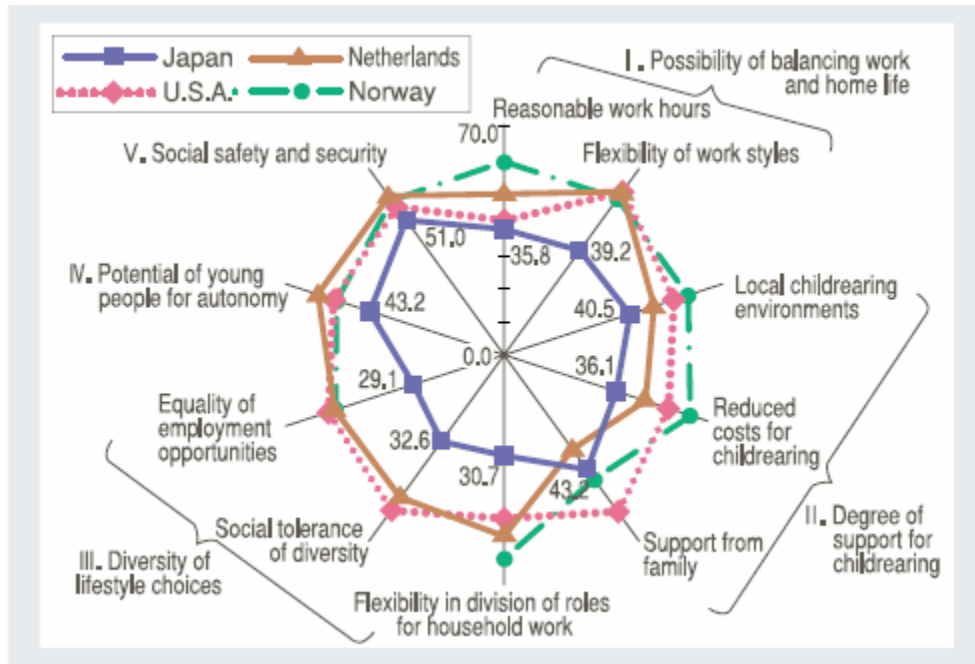
of market-based childcare services, as well as the company-subsidized on-site day care centers in the United States. But still many American husbands share the childcare and household chores with their wives.

In the United States, discrimination against women is strictly prohibited by the law, and free competition is encouraged. In contrast, there is a great deal of direct and indirect discrimination against working women in the Japanese corporate world, and this causes them to lose the motivation to maintain their careers.

Scandinavian countries have succeeded in supporting working parents and equality for women, but they share the heavy burden of tax and social security costs. European countries suffer high unemployment to protect regular union workers (women also have difficulties in getting jobs as regular workers). The United States is suffering a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Japan and Germany, both of which emphasize respect for motherhood and the family, are seeing serious declines in birth rates. Thus, there is no social system that does not entail any cost or sacrifice.

My concern is to create better systems for men and women in order to sustain society. But this will involve a mixture of many social and economic factors.

Figure 3. Social Environments in Japan, the United States, Norway, and the Netherlands



Source: Bureau for Gender Equality, Cabinet Office, 2005

Figure 3 shows the many factors that contribute to the social environment for women. Not only the equality of employment opportunities or support for childrearing, but also the possibility of balancing work and home life, diversity of lifestyle choices, and social safety and security influence women’s roles in the society and economy.

CHAPTER 2

JAPANESE SURVEY

Survey Design

The survey was conducted with the Works Institute (Recruit Company), *Toraba-yu* Magazine (a bi-weekly publication for women who are looking for better job opportunities), and Showa University Women's Culture Research Institute. The subjects were the members of the board or/and corporate officers of listed companies offering stock on public exchanges (JASDAQ, the Tokyo Stock Exchange, Mothers, and Heracles). We get the subjects' names from Kaisha Shikiho (Toyo Keizai Shinposha). They were women who were promoted from within their organizations or recruited as regular employees. We excluded social directors as well as women who were related to family founders or stockholders.

Because of time and financial constraints, we choose 86 women who live in Tokyo and/or the nearby suburbs and asked to interview them. As incentives, we told them that they would be introduced in *Toraba-yu* in an article named "Onna no Shussedo [Successful Career Paths of Women]" with their photos. As a result, 53 agreed to talk with us, and we analyzed the 27 who had time to give us a long interview. This survey was done between July and December 2005.

Background Data of the Interviewees

The age distribution was as follows: two were in their 30's, seven in their 40's, 14 in their 50's, and four in their 60's (as of the end of September 2004). Thus, two-thirds of them were 50 or older.

Their industries were: service (6); distribution (5); computer software (3); information and communications technology (ICT) service, high-tech manufacturing, chemicals, entertainment, and distribution of medicine (2 each); apparel and two other types of manufacturing (1 each).

The industries were diversified and included not only sectors in which relatively more women are working such as distribution or services. It is significant that their companies did not belong to the so-called basic industries of Japan (steel, automobiles, banking, and insurance). Most of their companies were young and growing, and they did not have very many employees who were well qualified or experienced. The companies belonged mainly to so-called emerging industries like ICT or software or had developed novel business models like used book stores, new kinds of pharmacy chains, or innovative customized financial services. Many of the women were recruited or asked to join these companies in their early stages by the founder and were promoted along with the growth of the firm.

Only two of the women were the founders themselves, and five were working in foreign companies. Two each were CEO's, senior vice presidents, or managing directors. Eight were managing directors, six were directors, five were executive officers, and two were corporate officers.

Their marital status was as follows: never married (6); married once (15); divorced and remarried, divorced, and widowed (two each). There were more single or divorced and widowed women than the average of their generation, and 12 of them had no children. Most of those who did have a child or children got support from their own mother (one from her mother-in-law) to raise the children (not all women commented about childcare).

Their education level was higher than average; nevertheless, there were six with only a high school education or who had failed the university entrance examination and two who had

gone on to vocational school. The breakdown is as follows: graduate school (2); undergraduate (with bachelor's degree) (16); junior college (1); vocational school (2); high school only (6).

Their majors in university were generally liberal arts (such as English literature or education). Only some of the younger women had majored in economics or business. This is also common for men who evolve in different fields after they join companies. But it is still a disadvantage for women not to major in business because firms tend not to invest training for them.

Three of the women majored in pharmacy or biochemistry, one in physics. The women who chose science (a non-traditional field) were more motivated to pursue careers. They or their parents were not trapped in feminine career stereotypes.

Six of them studied in the United States; one got a Ph.D. in physics; and one earned a master's degree in accounting. They were all motivated and, in addition, their English skills gave them opportunities. Three of them had lived in the United States or France for a while.

Career Paths of the Interviewees

We categorized the interviewees into three groups: ambitious (hoping to be executives, 4) middle (expecting to continue to work, 11); and not particularly motivated (wanting to be good homemakers after support-level jobs, 12). The ambitious group were all younger than 50, and they hoped to become entrepreneurs or to climb the promotion ladder to get an executive position. The middle group said such things as: "my mother advised me to have some qualifications (*te-ni-shoku*) to hedge my life risks" (pharmacy major) and "as my mother was widowed, I thought women should work the same way as men" (in the distribution industry). The not-particularly-motivated group made comments like: "I did not want a man's track job (*sogoshoku*) with heavy responsibilities. I preferred to enjoy my life as an 'office lady' (OL)" and

“I had no idea about a future career. I thought I might be a good bride and homemaker.” “My parents expected me to be happy homemaker and sent me to a women’s college.”

The older group of women grew up when gender roles were ingrained in the people and society. They did not have a clear image of a future career. Companies were not accustomed to accepting women as future executive candidates. They started their careers as OL’s, assistant clerks, or secretaries. No one accused employers of discrimination against women. They might have thought of the situation as quite appropriate or just ordinary (*atarimae*). Actually seven out of the 12 in the not-particularly-motivated group quit their jobs after they married. Three of the 11 in the middle group also quit because of difficulties in balancing work and their outside life or because of family issues.

On the other hand, some in the middle or not-particularly-motivated groups found joy in their jobs after they started working. This was because they enjoyed being thought of as an independent person, inspired by a nice and respectable boss who was dedicated to the work, liked the experience of connecting with the real world, and so on. “I learned a lot from everyday work; it was exciting to find out about new things,” one said. “The more senior workers (*senpai*) gave me strict training as a bank teller, so I got some sense of numbers,” according to another. And, said a third: “As I was in general affairs, I had to do everything like arrange the lunch meetings of the board or other small things like that. That was good training.”

Their experience tells us that, even if women are not well motivated at the beginning of their career, they will change their attitude after they start working. The factors that had an impact on them varied, from working with a respectable boss or being trained and mentored by strict *senpai*, to good evaluations, and so on. We can imagine, though, that there were many women who had no chance to work with a good boss or *senpai* and who may have quit their jobs without discovering their aptitudes or potential.

It is critically important for companies first to encourage young women at the beginning of their careers to attempt many tasks to develop their aptitude, second to give them opportunities to recognize the joys of work, and third to have appropriate role models or mentors who will inspire young women to have a long career perspective.

The Influence of Family Issues

Some women quit their jobs when they got married. Others pursued their careers and received good support or new perspectives from their husbands. For example, the American husband of one of the executives not only encouraged his wife to go after a career and advised her; he also changed his job and followed his wife between Japan and the United States when she was transferred and/or promoted.

Some typical comments from such women were:

1983 “My husband pushed me to try for a new challenging position.”

1984 “My second husband is a good friend, and we discuss many things related to business.”

1985 “My husband asked me to have a baby and promised to care for the baby himself.”

One executive quit her previous job, followed her husband when he went to graduate school in the United States, and got a PhD herself. Some executives comment that their husbands share in the household chores. This is very rare in Japan, as is having a husband who supports his wife in a career. I would say that almost all the women executives have supportive husbands; if they do not, they either do not become executives or they get a divorce.

Becoming divorced or widowed tends to be a springboard for their careers. “My husband passed away when our baby was just 15 months old. I transformed myself from just an assistant to a serious worker.” “After 10 years as a housewife, I must work to support my family in spite of having no skills or qualifications. I had no other choice but to raise my daughter by myself.” “I

determined three things when I divorced: I will not think of children as an excuse; I will work for 10 years as a mother; and I will work the next 10 years as a father.”

Their determination (*kakugo*) is completely different from ordinary young women who are looking for their identities without having any motivation for a career or many women who have no confidence in their abilities.

In our study group, there were not many cases of women who started their careers after middle age. One exception was a woman who began a second career as a part-time worker in a new second-hand bookstore chain after 17 years as a homemaker.

The Springboard

Many executives had special experiences that gave them confidence and new perspectives in their careers. Some of comments about such experiences were as follows:

“After the company went bankrupt, I had to manage even minor matters and supported the employees in finding new jobs. That was a hard experience, but I had a sense of responsibility.”

“When my company was merged with a large firm, I decided to back up the people from the previous company in my job in the personnel section.”

“It was a special experience. The new project was huge and expensive, but I was the only one who had the knowledge of accounting and software-programming. I was appointed and got the job done.”

“I did not think I was capable, but my experiences and skills as a hospital pharmacist were very much appreciated in the new pharmacy-chain company.”

Compared to Americans, many Japanese people, especially women, lack faith in their own abilities. Women in Japan are taught to be modest, supportive, dependent, and never aggressive.

Their self-esteem is not very high. Thus, these kinds of successful experiences, which give them confidence, are critically important for the future of their careers.

Mentors and Role Models

Mentors play a very important role for women executives. Eight of the 27 in our research group obtained their positions through the support of or an offer by the founder or top CEO. Who, exactly, were these mentors? Five of them were former bosses. Several years after starting a new business, they offered a position to their old subordinate for whom they had high regard.

Not many Japanese men tend to take the risk involved in joining a new business. As a result, many entrepreneurs have difficulty in finding capable, diligent, and reliable male employees. There may not be serious competition inside new growing companies as compared to older, traditional large firms with an abundance of qualified male colleagues. Thus, women have more opportunities in new companies. At the same time, many entrepreneurs – who have the courage and determination to start a new business – may be free from old stereotypes and prejudices against women.

But only few of these women had mentors, i.e., an established person who looks after younger individuals and gives them advice or introduces them to his/her network. They also had no role models because they themselves are the first generation of women in the Japanese business world.

Findings

1. Most of the women executives obtained their positions at new, non-traditional, growing companies. (Traditional Japanese *kaisha* with life-long employment and the seniority system are not good places for women to find good career opportunities.)

2. Their careers were different from typical Japanese employees who rise through the corporate ranks. Many changed jobs; some quit to become wives, mothers, and homemakers; others studied abroad and gained new opportunities.

3. They had fruitful encounters with good leaders.

4. They had supportive husbands or they were divorced/widowed.

5. Most of them gained their skills, knowledge, and attitudes after they began working.

6. The experience of success gave them the self-confidence to pursue their careers.

7. Most of those who had a child/children were assisted by their mothers.

CHAPTER 3

U.S. SURVEY AND COMPARISON WITH JAPANESE WOMEN EXECUTIVES

Survey Design

In order to make a comparison between Japan and the United States, I interviewed American women executives, but I did not have a formal network or the institutional support I had had in Japan. My interviewees consisted of three groups.

1. Five women who participated the international planning meeting for the Global Summit of Women held in New York in February 2005.

2 Six women who participated in the “women’s leadership board” of the Women and Public Policy Program at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, in May 2005.

3. Six women leaders in Boston and four in New York who were among my personal friends.

I conducted and recorded the interviews myself and then transcribed them.

My personal friends shared more than 60 minutes with me and give me their resumés, but the other women spent less than 30 minutes each with me. The survey was not designed for statistical analysis, but it gave me great ideas and insights about the leadership of women in the United States.

Background Data of the Interviewees

Five of the women are entrepreneurs, four are independent consultants, two are lawyers, and 10 are executives in large organizations. Their industries included investment consulting, service, banking, insurance, advertising, manufacturing, and non-profit organizations.

Their ages were between their 40's and their 70's. Two were more than 70, five were in their 60's, 11 in their 50's, and three in their 40's.

Ten of the women had graduate degrees; the other 11 had undergraduate degrees. The younger generation had more graduate degrees, including MBA's and law degrees. (One African-American woman spent five years to graduate from college in a work-study program.)

Nearly all of them thought that a career was a matter of course and they have worked almost their lives. This was also true for the older generation (one was involved in volunteer activities when she was living outside of the United States). Three of them went to graduate school in their mid-career period.

Family Background

Fourteen of the women are married, five are divorced, and two have never married. The married women are enjoying a happy married life. All of them appreciate the support of their husbands in their careers. One husband is a full-time homemaker taking care of three children. Many of the husbands, despite having their own professional careers, are also sharing the housekeeping and childcare chores.

Only one complained about the second shift, and this was a divorced single mother who had to take care of her two young children on her own.

Almost all of them outsource their housework. One entrepreneur said: "A housekeeper is a necessity for working women. You can do everything just like men if you have a housekeeper." (This is an Indian-American woman who runs a jewelry business and has a live-in housekeeper.) Many of the others have part-time helpers to clean their houses as well as nannies, baby sitters, and nurses to assist in raising their children.

There was not enough time to talk about their parents, but some had grown up in divorced families, and many said their fathers encouraged them in their careers. No one said that they had help from their mothers in raising their children, which is very different from the situation in Japan.

Work Style

It is not unusual for Americans to change jobs, and 16 of the interviewees had done so more than twice. As an exception, one had stayed in the same company for more than 30 years. Many of them had also changed their place of work, for example, from the West to the East coast or from Boston to New York, and so on. One consultant had worked in Africa, one executive in South America, and one consultant in Japan. Many of them made occasional domestic and overseas business trips.

They work hard and put in long hours – the same or more than their Japanese counterparts (one of the consultants gets up 5 in the morning and works until 8 in the evening). But they also enjoy more vacations than Japanese executives. And they participated in social networking groups and volunteer activities more than their Japanese counterparts. They enjoy their lives energetically and are tough physically and mentally.

Mentors and Role Models

Many of them talked about mentors. But their definitions are very different from one other. One of them said: “Yes, I have had many, many mentors, and I learned a lot from each of them.” According to another: “I have had a nice person as a mentor for long time. He always looked after me, gave me good advice, and offered opportunities. I did my best to support him too. It is a kind of harmonious marriage in the workplace.” Two of them said their mentors were women. “She is

excellent. She cleared the way for me and has been very supportive.” “She is my role model and strategic friend. She is not a formal mentor. But when I was struggling professionally, she talked me through the challenges I faced.”

Some of them talked about role models. “Yes I had a role model, when I was young girl. A friend of my mother’s was a lawyer. She was brilliant. That may be one of the reasons I chose law in university.” “I worked for some women managers in my first job, so I always saw that it was possible for women to succeed.” “My mother was a nurse. She worked when I was young, so she is my role model.”

But also some of them said they had no exact role models, they were different from other women, and so on. I assume that, in United States, it is already the norm for women to have a career, and they do not necessarily need to look for role models. There are numerous role models everywhere around them.

Career Development

The American executives preferred to develop their careers using their own initiative. Some went back to school to earn advanced degrees; one changed her job to get international work experience; and one transferred to the legal section to enrich her background. On the other hand, most of the Japanese executives were not strategic about developing their careers. They did their best in their given positions, but did not have a long perspective or strategy. (Of course, there were some exceptions, and I was impressed by the fact that the women in the strategic group had spent some years in the United States). Many of the U.S. executives appreciated their companies’ support of their career development and diversity or mentoring programs to support their advancement. “I am lucky to be at the right place, at the right time,” one of them said.

Findings

1. Forty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, it is more common for women to have both a career and a family in the United States than in Japan. Not only women, but men as well think that this is natural, and sharing childcare and household chores is relatively common. Of course, the load is not perfectly distributed, and arrangements differ with each couple.

2. American women are encouraged to be more independent and prepare for their future careers by earning law, MBA or other degrees, and they choose their jobs and companies carefully from a long-term perspective.

3. There is no visible discrimination in education and workplaces to discourage young American women, and they can believe in equal opportunities and treatment in the future.

4. Because there are many women in management, there is no lack of models and even woman mentors in the United States. This is one of the reasons that the young women can have long-term career perspectives.

5. For affluent executives, there is the choice of outsourcing housekeeping, a market service that is not developed in Japan. (It is not possible for middle-class women who have average incomes.)

6. American women managers and executives are energetic, not only enjoying hard work, but also their volunteer activities, networking, and vacation time.

7. American women managers and executives have more autonomy and flexibility of working style than in Japan.

8. The Americans are concerned about and ready to help other women to develop networks.

CONCLUSION

It has now been more than 21 years since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in Japan, and 43 years since the Civil Rights Act was signed in the United States.

The Japanese government has made efforts to support working mothers by enacting legislation to assist them in raising their families and by certifying day care centers for 2 million children. Still, many women quit their jobs to stay at home to be good mothers/wives, while their husbands/men work long hours as breadwinners. The gender roles that have been ingrained and standardized have been among the major obstacles for women in pursuing careers. As a result, neither the government nor the women themselves worked seriously to create gender equality in the workplace and to eliminate the discrimination against women.

The Japanese women executives I interviewed are good examples of women who found breakthroughs to participate in risky new growing businesses with the dedication, skills, and experiences they gained after they started working.

We can learn some lessons from U.S. experiences in our efforts to increase the number and ratio of women executives in Japan. We need:

1. The strong will of the government to eliminate discrimination through laws and affirmative action and support of these policies by women who want equality at work.
2. Equal wage and job opportunities, which are more serious needs for divorced or single women who are close to the poverty line.
3. Preparations and development of vocational capacity to do the job and a willingness to pay for this by oneself under a long-term career perspective.
4. Development of childcare and housekeeping services.
5. Change of attitudes of men/husbands about sharing the housework and childrearing chores.

6. Mobility of labor and the flexibility of work styles

7. Emotional support and encouragement from companies, mentors, and friends.

At the same time, Japan can also make suggestions to United States. I believe that 12 weeks of maternity leave is not long enough for working mothers. That is the amount of time that was given in Japan 30 years ago.

The United States should be more serious about legislating maternity and childrearing leave and extend more support for childcare to balance work and family life.

In addition, the government should be more committed to provide better-quality childcare, not only for poor mothers, but for middle class parents as well. This could involve tax breaks for companies that provide on-site childcare facilities.

Japan has also set a good example in terms of investment in human resources by companies with long-term views. Likewise, American companies should invest more in education and training for their employees.

The next theme will be to examine what value the women executives bring to the corporate world and society, not with regard to using the women's talents effectively, but also in inspiring work ethics. This should begin by discussing the leadership styles of women, which are said to be different from those of men.

I hope that, in the future, women can have equal opportunities to develop and use their abilities and thereby contribute to society. I hope that this will bring another value to our society to develop a more peaceful and sustainable world, which will be more diversified and fruitful with different styles of societies, leadership, and contributions.