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Abstract	Japanese women's paid labor force participation has been increased tremendously backed by the economic development and expansion of tertiary industry in the recent past. The traditional M-shape pattern of Japanese women participation in the labor force is found to be changed since the participation behavior at the crucial age has undergone a change. Higher education, declining fertility rate, working hours, wage rate and household earnings are found more influential towards the participation behavior of Japanese women. But, they are, still concentrated in small and medium size of firms with low job status and low pay. Starting pay is found more consistent change of improvement but a slight change is observed in the age-earning profile which advocates the existence of nenko practice. Women's short tenure, mainly arising out of discontinuation of service during childbearing and childrearing, in the labor market is found as most important contributing factor towards sex-pay difference. In the recent years, earning power of the company is going to be vital element in the wage equation. Japanese companies policies and practices have undergone a dramatic change to utilize women's labor force particularly after the introduction of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Law. Advertisement for jobs, recruitment, job assignment have found a changing trend but there is a little evidence of change in promotion, job rotation and transfer policies of the companies. Almost, all majors companies have opened career tracking system equally for men and women so that they can take appropriate career decision at the very early stage of working life. But one frustrating point is that no appreciating change is found in Japanese women's attitude for career development even, in highly educated women in order to keep close contract with the changing development of companies working environments rather they are found in more passive mood, unconscious and ambivalence.
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Note

JAPANESE WOMEN'S PAID LABOR FORCE :  
ITS CHANGING DIMENSIONS AND PRESENT  
SITUATIONS — A Review of Literature

by

Md. Mohsin-Ul Islam

**Abstract**

Japanese women's paid labor force participation has been increased tremendously backed by the economic development and expansion of tertiary industry in the recent past. The traditional M-shape pattern of Japanese women participation in the labor force is found to be changed since the participation behavior at the crucial age has undergone a change. Higher education, declining fertility rate, working hours, wage rate and household earnings are found more influential towards the participation behavior of Japanese women. But, they are, still concentrated in small and medium size of firms with low job status and low pay. Starting pay is found more consistent change of improvement but a slight change is observed in the age-earning profile which advocates the existence of *nenko* practice. Women's short tenure, mainly arising out of discontinuation of service during childbearing and childrearing, in the labor market is found as most important contributing factor towards sex-pay difference. In the recent years, earning power of the company is going to be vital element in the wage equation.

Japanese companies policies and practices have undergone a dramatic change to utilize women's labor force particularly after the introduction of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Law. Advertisement for jobs, recruitment, job assignment have found a changing trend but there is a little evidence of change in promotion, job rotation and transfer policies of the companies. Almost, all majors companies have opened career tracking system equally for men and women so that they can take appropriate career decision

at the very early stage of working life. But one frustrating point is that no appreciating change is found in Japanese women's attitude for career development even, in highly educated women in order to keep close contract with the changing development of companies working environments rather they are found in more passive mood, unconscious and ambivalence.

### **Key Words**

Equal employment Opportunity Law, M-shape pattern, Women's employment pattern, Sex-pay difference, Changes in pay determination process, Changes in firm's policies & practices, Starting pay, Career tracking system, Career aspirations, Career expectations, Women's passive mood

## **Introduction**

It is well admitted by the scholars that Japanese Human Resource Management (HRM) is unique by its own characteristics which are practically helped Japan in emerging the highly skilled and self-reliance country in the world.

The traditional uniqueness of Japanese human resource management has gradually been undergone a change due to internal and external pressure as viewed by the different scholars. Continuous entrance of large number of female as paid labor force, increasing of aging employees, changing human resource management practices and policies to mandate the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Law, high technological development, low financial performance of companies, etc. are always tend to threat the Japanese uniqueness of lifetime commitment, *nenko* based pay and promotion system.

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This review has been done under the guidance of Professor Sano, Yoko. She pleasantly suggests & helps me in developing this essay. I am also grateful to Professor Seike, Atsushi for his kind comments and suggestions for this paper. All errors and omissions are sole liable to me. The author is an associate professor in the Department of Accounting, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; he is on study leave as a Mombusho Research Fellow at the Ph. D. Program of the Faculty of Business and Commerce, Keio University, Tokyo.

This paper addresses the following key questions :

- a. What are the trends and patterns of Japanese women in the labor force participation? Where are they employed? Do the higher education, declining fertility rate bring about any change in their labor force behavior?
- b. Is there any change in the pay determination process due to changing pattern of Japanese women labor force participation behavior and economic recession of the companies? Is there any change in the sex-pay difference and what factors still contribute towards this difference?
- c. What are the changes that have been made in human resource management policies & practices after the introduction of EEO Law? Are these changes are beneficial for the Japanese women paid employees? And how do the Japanese women response to these changes?

This paper is based on contemporary books, articles and reports relating to the Japanese women's paid labor force, wages and human resources management practices available to author until now. This review is not much comprehensive. It is beyond to say that there are abundance of rich Japanese literature but it is too hard to access fully to non-Japanese scholars.

### **Labor Force Participation and Its Pattern of Change**

*Summary points of this section:*

- #M-shape of women's participation tends to change but U-shape remains static.
- #Still women concentrate in small & medium scale firms with low position & pay.
- #Higher education, declined fertility rate, household income, wage rate influence women's labor market participation.

Female participation in the paid labor force in contemporary Japan shares many characteristics. Both economic and demographic developments have substantially altered the labor market environments for the female employment (Sano 1993). But compared to the western industrialized countries, Japanese companies are found indifferent in granting female equal treatment in work

place (Lam, A. 1992).

### **Women's Employment Opportunity — *facts behind***

'Rapid economic development over the last three and a half decades has brought a dramatic change in the role of female in the Japanese economy. One of the most significant has been tremendous increase in the number of female working as paid employees' (Lam 1992 p.10) and it has been stated as 'one of the most drastic changes in the female labor force participation in the recorded experience of advanced economies' (Shimada and Higuchi 1985 p.s358) and the statistical evidences supported the issue that 'the more than threefolds from 5.3 millions in 1955 to 18.3 millions in 1990 and in contrast to the upsurge in the number of women working as employees, those working as unpaid family workers reduced more than half in 1990 in compare to 1955, while the number of self employed remain more or less stable' (Lam 1992 p.10) which is very unique feature of Japan among the developed nations (Hill 1989).

The real GNP growth of the country has brought a rapid employment opportunity for women particularly during the periods of 1960s and 1970s. In Sano's studies (1987) has shown a unique correlation between the GNP growth and employment opportunities for males and females in Japanese labor market. She stated that the elasticity of employment to real GNP for men has valued between .22 to .36 in the 20 years covering the periods from 1965 to 1985 but the elasticity for women rose from .21 to .68 during the same periods under reviewed. Thus, GNP growth brought three times the previous female employment growth.

### **M-shape & U-shape pattern of participation — *tend to move***

On the basis of statistical evidences, the studies mention that 'the female labor force participation rate by the age-group is characterized by M-shape curve. This means that the female labor force participation rises after women leave school, declines during the period when they are most likely to give birth to children and to rear them and rises again after child care responsibility have been reduced. In recent years, however the bottom level of the M-shape curve has been rising and the latter peak of the M-shape curve has also been risen and women tend to increasingly participate in the labor market in the age group where household and child-rearing responsibility has been reduced and the proportion of unmarried women has increased and that

of women who continue to work even after marriage has also been increased in the recent years' (JIL 1990 p.2).

In the evaluation of women's overall labor participation in Japan from 1960 to 1990 have found a U-shape pattern falling through the mid 1970s and reaching 46 percent in 1975 before beginning to rise again. The U-shape trend of Japanese women's labor force participation is attributable partly due to the sensational nature of labor force participation behavior in response to short-run economic fluctuations like two major oil crises in 1970s. The cyclical changes in the employment of women in Japan underscore the frequently heard claim that Japanese women are marginal workers who are employed in greater numbers during the economic expansion only to be laid-off during the down-turns (Ogawa & Clark 1995 and Mizuno 1982).

#### **Women's employment pattern** — *where and what*

The employees of Japanese companies are normally divided into three stratas such as permanent full-time employment for indefinite periods, practically this group enjoys life-time employment benefits, full-time employment on year to year contract and can be terminated at end of any year and finally so called part-timers who receive low wages against hours worked, no employment benefits and can be terminated at any time without notice. Some studies (Sano 1987 and Parkinson 1989) stated that among the stratas married women have proved an ideal source of such low pay, lack of job security in exchange of abundant liberty to take off from the work at any time, can refuse overtime work, etc. to match with their domestic duties. A study (Sano 1993) also shows that the ratio of part-time workers in the women labor force has been rising and the statistics support that part-timers' share to the total female employees went from 12 percent in 1970 to 19 percent in 1980 and 27 percent in 1990.

Most of the studies stated that the employment behaviors of female, particularly for domestic responsibilities, lead to be concentrated in small and medium firms, their share in large firms is very limited. In a very recent study on the labor force rate of 68 big leading companies, which have been taken from different sectors of industries like food, textile, railway, airway, gas, electricity, finance, oil, banking, insurance, construction, etc., Professor Sano (1995) has observed that during the periods of 1968 to 1994, though a minor increase is found in very few sectors but a gradual declining trend of

female employees in almost all sectors during the periods under reviewed and this situation is unexpected particularly after the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO Law).

The labor market status and position of women are low and women are excluded from the large firms with well developed internal labor market. The extensive study of Kawashima (1983) shows that the only 18.7 percent of women work in large well developed internal labor market whereas men's share stands to 60.5 percent. Different studies show women's positions in different level of occupations. A study of Women's Bureau (1989) shows that women comprise 5 percent of supervisors (kakaricho), 2.1 percent of section head (kacho) & 1.2 percent of department head (bucho). Another survey of Foundation for Women's Work (1990) shows 99 percent of male in the managerial track (sogoshoku), .8 percent of male in clerical track (ippanshoku) and only .2 percent of male in technical track (senmonshoku) ; as against those women's shares are 3.7 percent, 96.2 percent and .1 percent respectively. Another result of survey, conducted by Women's Vocational Institute [WVI] (1990) on forty firms in finance, insurance, banking, has shown only 1.3 percent of women in managerial track, 98.9 percent in clerical track as against that men's position is reversed i. e. 99 percent and 1 percent respectively.

#### **Women's paid labor force participation — influencing factors**

There are many factors that led to increase the women's participation in the labor market. The demand side analysis reveals that the demand of labor has increased in parallel to the economic growth particularly since 1975, the economy has grown mainly in the tertiary industries. In addition to the fact that the tertiary industries have accommodated a large number of women workers and its operation is suitable to part-time work (Japan Institute of Labor (JIL) 1990, Lam 1993, Sano 1993).

On the supply side, it can be explained by a change in the women's life cycle such as extension of average life span, the rise of the marriageable age reflecting a rising level of educational attainment and decrease of a birth rate (Osawa 1987, Edwards 1994). Another reason is stated as desire to enjoy higher standard of living which has become very strong among the women (JIL 1990).

However, Shimada & Higuchi (1985) provide a valid empirical document on the participation of women in the labor market by presenting time-series analysis and cross-sectional analysis. In the time series analysis, they use regression model on five independent variables such as household incomes (presumed to be negatively associated with labor market participation of women), wage rate of women's workers, working hours, demand & supply gap and overtime shifts and the equations are applied on the five groups based on the ages of female. The result of the age-group (30-54), among others, is quite satisfactory as the coefficient of the household income and wage rate have expected sign and fair degree of substantial significant and working hours turned out to be associated positively significant with the labor force participation of women.

In the cross sectional analysis of the female labor force participation in Japan which is based on the Basic Survey of Employment Structure and Basic Survey of Wage Structure as data set, logistic analysis and linear regression analysis have been used as tools on the length of hours as continuous variable and whether to participate in the labor force or not as discrete variable. The equation with continuous dependent variable yielded almost consistently such poorer results than those of with discrete variable. This fact may be interpreted to mean that the discrete choice model provides a closer approximation of the reality of labor supply decision than continuous variable model. In other words, labor supply decisions are made not in the manner of choosing optimal working hours through marginal adjustment, but rather in force of either accepting or rejecting a job offer with a fixed working hours and wage rate designed by the employers.

The number of women workers with higher education attainment has increased remarkably (Nakata, Y. & Mosk, C. 1987, Osawa 1987). 'The age group 15-19 shows a sharp decline and secular declining trend from more than 50 percent in the mid 1950s to 18 percent in 1981, the study states that this decline is mainly due to increasing school attendance of female in higher education which has been pronounced more among females than males' (Shimada & Higuchi 1985, p.358). This trend has brought a change in the educational background of workers. This type of increase in the number of workers with higher educational attainment means 'a long labor force of good quality with strong will to work' and 'higher degree of ability' (Edwards 1994, Ogawa & Clark 1995). Statistical analysis 'from 1985 to 1990 shows that



women's enrollment has increased in the college and university by whopping 33.9 percent, whereas for men was only 8.6 percent and thus, it is clear from the data that the growth in women's incentive to invest in the university education was greater which is supported by the human capital investment, in the recent five years period than in either of the previous two five year periods' (Edwards 1994 p.221).

There are both direct and indirect returns to women's education though the direct returns from the human capital investment remain elusive because of traditional practice of employment and pay determination in the Japanese labor market (Shimada & Higuchi 1985, Parkinson 1989, Lam 1992). However, Osawa (1988) shows that indirect returns which generated through the marriage market and subsequent investment in child education by educated mothers, rather than labor market but the acceleration of women's participation in the higher education as explained on the basis of statistical evidences for the period of 1985-90 and the analysis shows that 'a greater proportions of female are choosing business related majors now than in the past' and the analysis also reveals that the proportions of studying home economics and education have shown declined trend. Thus, 'the women's investment in the career related higher education increased remarkably both as compared to men in the same period implying that career ambitions and expectations among the recent cohorts have been increasing' (Edwards 1994, p.223, 224).

The acceleration of the decline in the fertility rate is difficult to determine since the fertility decision is the result of cultural and economic factors. 'Unlike the case of higher education, where it is impossible to make some adjustments for the effects of general economic conditions by comparing the enrollment behavior of women with that of men, there is no simple way to do so with fertility rate' (Edwards 1994 p.225). One can say that the observed accelerated decline in fertility is consistent with a view that women perceived an increased participation in the labor market.

The empirical evidence suggests that the fertility decision is influenced by the women's time-cost, changing life style and labor force participation pattern of women in Japanese labor market. 'In 1960s very few women stayed in the labor force after marriage or child birth. However, this pattern has been gradually changing and recently an increasing number of Japanese women began to re-enter the labor market after their child bearing responsibility.

Correspondingly, the spacing and timing of births for Japanese women has been changing. Women are now marrying at a late age and having their final pregnancy at a younger age ; in the other words, the child bearing period is being compressed freezing up more time for career related activities' (Osawa 1988 p.644). However, the proportion of married women working outside the home has been increasing and significant of time cost effect has increased, accordingly leading to fertility decline as Osawa's time series analysis corroborates this hypothesis. Parallel to such increased education and declined in the fertility rate among the female women, 'the average duration of tenure on the current job has grown appreciably' (Ogawa & Clark 1995 p.297) and the Ministry of Labor reports that the mean value of tenure among the female workers was 5.6 years in 1971 but has grown to 7.3 years in 1990.

### **Japanese Women's Wages and Its Pattern of Change**

*Summary points of this section:.*

- #Starting pay tends to be equalised but age-earning relation shows a little improvement.
- #Discontinuation of women's career is the main cause of sex pay difference.
- #Pay determination process tends to undergo a change.

Equal remuneration for male and female workers for the works of equal value, without discrimination on the ground of sex, is the fundamental principle of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and was formally included in the ILO constitution in 1919 when the organization was established and has been repeatedly supported ever since.

#### **Existence of sex-pay difference — evidences**

The earnings of female in Japan is notoriously low due to disparity between male and female wage rate. The ILO reported that female in non-agricultural employment in Japan were paid 48 percent less than that of male workers and that difference was one of the largest among the developed nations. The pay difference between male and female has been found in different statistical as well as empirical studies of Japanese as well as non-Japanese scholars (Sano 1977, 1986, 1987, Tachibanaki 1975, Kawashima & Tachibanaki 1986, Yashiro 1980, Edwards 1988, Higuchi 1992, Lam 1992).

Sano (1987) has presented a research report into the work satisfaction of female doing both regular and part-time workers. Satisfaction was specially low for pay among the eight items but others were rather balanced. Tachibanki (1975) made an empirical investigation into sex, occupation, firm size, education, experience and age in explaining the pay differences in manufacturing industries. The study reveals that among the variables, sex is the biggest explanatory factor in explaining pay differentiation.

Kawashima & Tachibanaki (1986) investigated into Japanese pay differentials based on industrial division. By applying several quantitative methods, it was found that workers' characteristics such as education, length of service and age had been treated differently based on sector, sex and occupation. Pay difference by sex is mostly rooted in the differential treatment (discrimination) of worker characteristics. Their result has confirmed the prevailing discrimination in pay against female.

#### **Sex-pay differences** — *causes thereof*

An interesting phenomena in Japan is that the wage differences between male and female are small when they are young, but the differences increase with age, peak up at the middle age. Of course, it is normal phenomena in most countries but it is acute in Japan (ILO 1986). The application of *nenko* system, indicating low pay at the beginning and gradually promoted to higher pay and grade when the workers get older, in the pay determination is the unique feature in Japanese labor market. The studies (Sano 1977, 1986, Matsuura 1981, Umemura 1980, Tachibanaki 1975, 1982, Japan Institute of Labor [JIL] 1990, Lam 1992, Yashiro 1980, Higuchi 1992, Kawashima & Tachibanaki 1986) have identified life time commitment along with *nenko* practice are the responsible for the enlargement of wage gap between male and female employees in Japanese firms and the majority of female are excluded from *nenko* practice (Sano 1977, Lam 1992).

Furthermore, a high proportion of Japanese women still withdraw from labor market at the age of marriage and childrearing. Such an interrupted career pattern has negative impact on the female's wages and promotion in most countries (Mincer & Ofek 1982) 'but particularly at Japan where *nenko* system is prevailed and continuous long-term service is an important criteria in the skill formation and promotion in the large firms, the discontinued career pattern of female has stronger negative impact on female wages than

in other industrial nations' (Lam 1992 p.50).

Most of the studies agree that the shorter tenure for women in compare to men is the main cause of wage gap. Yashiro (1980) has estimated in his study that the length of service accounted for 46.8 percent, education accounted for 7.2 percent and firm size accounted for mere 2.4 percent of the total wages differential between men & women. There is still remain 43.6 percent of the wages differential that is not accounted in his equation. Higuchi (1992) found that 10.4 percent is accounted for by differences in educational investment and 27.8 percent accounted for by differences in tenure based on 1988 data.

#### **Pay determination process — *application & changing practices***

Theoretical approaches like human capital, institutional & structural, culturalist, corporatist, etc. are used in pay determination in Japan. Among the approaches, human capital and institutional & structural approaches are predominantly used in pay determination process (Amante 1989). Human capital approach is primarily used for comparative studies with United States and Western European pay level (Shimada 1974, 1981, Hashimoto 1979, Hashimoto & Raisian 1985, Ono 1987, Mincer & Higuchi 1988). Although the human capital approach became popular in 1970s eventually institutional & structural approach is dominated in the analysis of pay since the uniqueness of Japanese employment practice based on life time commitment, pay determination on *nenko* basis and supportive role of the enterprise unions motivate the scholars to analyze the wages based on dual labor market, internal labor market and labor market segmentation (Sano 1970, 1980, 1981, 1982, Ono 1987, 1989, Tachibanaki 1975, 1982, Kawashima 1983, Kawashima & Tachibanaki 1986, Higuchi 1989).

Practically, wage determination & wage variation analysis in Japanese labor market have been done predominantly on the male data (Shimada 1974, Hashimoto & Raisian 1985,) very few analysis is available in explaining the conditions and trends of female wages in the Japanese labor market (Ogawa & Clark 1995).

Different theorists have explained gender pay difference from their own angles. Human capital theorists (Becker 1964, Mincer, J. 1974) explain female low wages in terms of their lesser investment in education and training

arising out of their weaker labor force attachment. Institutional & structural theorists (Doeringer & Piore 1971) argue that female wages are low because of their inferior position in the labor market and female tend to be segmented in the low paying jobs. The Japanese labor market is not occupationally based. Labor market status and earnings of employees are mainly determined by educational attainment, size of firm and rank & position within firm. The studies (Ministry of Labor [MOL] 1981, Kawashima 1983, Shimada & Higuchi 1985) show that there is very weak link between women's educational attainment, labor market status and wages. Evidences also support that relative to American women, Japanese women have higher propensity to drop out of the labor force during their childbearing and childrearing periods (JIL 1990, Japan Labor Bulletin [JLB] 1991). Osawa's study (1993) shows that among women who quit their jobs due to their marriage and childrearing, the average period of interruption of career for college educational women was 10.5 years which is viewed as the larger than those of other developed nations.

Recent low performance of the firms and awareness among the employees have threatened the application of *nenko* system as dominating factor in pay determination which now become the serious question among the scholars (Sano 1977, 1980, 1986, Taira 1970, Magota 1979, Tachibanaki 1982, Arai 1988, Kim 1992). Their studies have already signal out that the traditional *nenko* based pay determination is in the state of disappearing in medium and small firms and little bit application is available in large firms (Sano 1986, Hitachi Research 1987, Tachibanaki 1982, Ministry of Labor 1993, Amante 1992) and company's profitability has been getting importance in the wage equation in the recent time (Sano 1993).

The White Paper Report on Labor (Ministry of Labor 1993) states that the trend of lifetime employment and seniority based pay scale have examined in context of workers' awareness, the realities of how workers react to the system and co-operate response. The majority of workers opt for lifetime employment but a significant number of workers are against seniority based pay system. Thus, a switch to merit based pay system is receiving a wider support.

#### **Sex-pay gap — *its changing situations***

Statistical analysis from 1960 to 1989 shows a rising trend of female wages in relation to male due to shortage of labor during the period of rapid economic

growth in 1960s and declining trend of wages mainly due to employment in low paying jobs in tertiary industries (Lam 1992, Kawahashi 1983, Sano 1993). Another analysis shows 'monthly contract earnings for the newly hired male and female university graduates for the selected years from 1975 through 1991. The ratio of female's to male's starting salaries exhibited a clear upward trend over the entire period from .91 in 1975 to .96 in 1991' (Edwards 1994 p.226).

However, since the economic recession in mid 1970s, female wages have shown little sign of improvement despite the continued expansion of their labor market participation and improvement of education as shown in prewar situation. In fact, the wages differentials have widened slightly after the mid of 1970s. The rapid expansion of job in female intensive service sector which can absorb a large proportion of low paying small firms where women are employed (Lam 1992, Sano 1993).

The Japanese labor market is characterized by dual structure and the female are excluded from the primary sector due to firm's employment practice. Thus, female tends to be concentrated in the smaller firms where wages are substantially low. Kawashima & Tachibanaki (1986) classified the labor market in their studies into primary and secondary on the basis of capital concentration ratio. They found that in the primary sector wages differential between male and female is only 26 percent of the wage gap by the human capital accumulation whereas in the secondary market, differential human capital accumulation explains 75 percent of the wage gap.

'Age-earnings profile of university educated female's to men's don't appear to have changed noticeably between 1980 and 1990. The wages examined in terms of average monthly scheduled cash wages of the four year college or university educated regular employees and excludes bonus and overtime payments and the analysis stated that if bonus were included, the sex comparison would be even less favorable to female. When one compares the ratio of female's to male's scheduled wages for 1980, 1985 & 1990 there are some slight differences between three years under review but there is no evidence pattern of change' (Edwards 1994 p.226-227).

Ogawa and Clark (1995) made an extensive empirical evidences on the wages pattern of Japanese female from 1976 to 1986 using two sets of data-Basic Survey on Wages Structure (BSWS) and National Survey on the

Family. They follow the human capital model used by Hashimoto & Raisian (1985) and Clark & Ogawa (1992) for male employees. They consider the human capital variables like experience & its squared term, tenure & its squared term, education and interaction effect of experience & tenure and additional variable such as child used in analyzing the data on family survey.

Their regression model shows that the effect of the labor market experience and job tenure on earnings growth of Japanese female change considerably over the periods of 1976—1986, thus pointing to the pronounced change in the wage system in Japanese labor market. The earnings profile of female workers become slightly flatter over the periods under review. The result from the BSWS for 1976—86 indicates that the effects of tenure, education and firm size variables on female's full time earnings growth are substantially longer than those found by Clark & Ogawa (1992) for men during the similar periods. Their analysis implies that judging from the recent upward trends with respect to women's tenure & education and the women's full time wages in Japan are likely to continue rising.

The statistical evaluation has been made on gender wage differences by age, enterprise and industry. Wage differences among the age group of 20, 30 and 40 medium and small group of enterprises and transport, telecommunication, service, electricity, gas, water, steel industry and wholesale have declined whereas the data also reveal a big gender pay difference in the age group of 50, big enterprise and manufacturing industry. Empirical studies based on another set of statistics have shown gender pay differences using the educational level and continuity of service as weighted factor for the analysis. The study reveals that wage differences in the age groups of 20, 30 and 40 have moved to decline mainly because of female's labor force participation with the higher education (Satoshi Hisano 1995).

### **Firms' Changing Policies and Practices—Women's Situations**

*Summary points of this section:*

#HRM policies & practices have undergone a dramatic change, particularly after EEO Law, which seem to be favourable for women though contrast views still prevail.

#Career tracking system is viewed to be most conducive to career planning for the women.

Traditionally, Japanese companies were rather indifferent to women's career development issues because of family relation and frequent dropout tendency of women from labor market. The well known life-time employment, internal company training and *nenko* based pay & promotion systems are applied exclusively to men (Sano 1977, JIL 1990, Lam 1992). Women are treated as single group of short-term temporary work force which help management to make employment adjustment during the ups and downs of the companies.

**Female labor force** — *initial steps for their utilization*

However, several changes like the expansion of service economy, rapid expansion of high-technological industries, companies financial burden for aging employees due to *nenko* practice, growing importance of women in the consumer market, women's higher education, women's increasing participation in the workplace, etc. in the economy and labor market (Sano 1993, Lam 1992, Edwards 1994) have motivated the firms to utilize female labor force. From the mid 1970s, many companies started to talk about the revitalization of female labor force by forming women's project teams and most of the departmental stores and supermarkets where women were organized to improve customer services and subsequently similar project teams had been taken up by famous companies like Sony, Mitsubishi, Hitachi, etc. to promote product development and marketing by utilizing women's ideas (Lam 1993).

Female group leader has been introduced in the female-intensive sectors like banking, insurance, supermarket, department stores, etc. with object to provide training by qualified women to those women who want to stay in the company. Inagei (1983) found in a study that female group leader scheme was in exist in 1968 and in 1982 in formal and informal ways the system on formal basis has increased from 42 percent in 1968 to 57 percent in 1982.

'In the early 1980s, some major companies in banking and financial sectors adopted new step to open up formal promotion chances for women by introducing a career conversion system (*shokumu tenkan seido*)' (Lam 1992 p.81) with an object to improve the morale of women. The conversion system allows women to apply for conversion to managerial career from clerical positions if certain conditions are satisfied. Opponent of the career conversion system argues that very few women can comply with the company's requirements, moreover, that men and women still start their careers on an entirely unequal basis. So, Yashiro (1986) argues that this type of post-entry



correction of discrimination hardly offers women true equal opportunities. The majority of women are still trapped in secondary jobs (Lam 1992, Edwards 1994).

### **Women's employment expansion — effects of EEO Law**

A new chapter of talking on women's equality with men was introduced with the implementation of Equal Employment Opportunity Law in April 1986. It is well expected that the EEO Law expected to channelise the equality irrespective of sex in the fields of recruitment, hiring, job assignment and promotion. Different studies put forward the evidences on the effects of EEO Law and on the gradual changing policy formulation of companies to highlight the women's career development.

Cannings and Lazonick (1994) empirically examines the employment rate of newly graduated female employees. They hold constant the effects of changing demand and supply conditions for female graduates in order to better isolate the possible effect of the EEO Law. They use simple regression model covering the time series data from 1953 to 1990 and taking the annual change in the number of female university graduates entering employment as dependent variable and the explanatory variables are the annual increase in the number of new female four years college graduates, an index of demand for the university educated women, a five year moving average of the annual percentage increase in the number of marriage per 1000 population, and the dummy variable equal to 1 for the year 1985, the year the EEO Law was passed, through 1990. Their study shows that statistically significant effect and concludes that the existence of EEO Law has encouraged the employers to increase the proportion of the university educated women among the newly employed.

Edwards (1994) explains the effects of EEO Law with statistical evidences that, though sometimes she states it as a casual link, young women are in the state of preparation for pursuing career jobs by attending in four year college and university, taking majors relating to a business career, reducing fertility rate. The study also stated that in contrast to women's response, firms' responses to EEO Law are found positive but the trend of the development is slow and females are tended to be concentrated in a second class managerial track.

**HRM policies & practices** — *already changed & moving to change*

The equalization of starting salary for new entrance is a remarkable change. The result of Rōshi Jiho (1987) reveals that most of the companies have moved towards equal starting wages for male & female. The survey results show that the percentage of companies equalizing the starting wages have been increasing e. g. from 46.7 percent in 1975 to 82.1 percent in 1987 for high school graduates and from 31.7 percent in 1975 to 78.9 percent in 1987 for university graduates. Another analysis reveals that 'the ratio of women's to men's starting wages shows a clear upward trend over the entire period covered from .91 in 1975 to .96 in 1991 for the newly hired male and female university graduates' (Edwards 1994 p.226) But age-earnings profiles between university educated women and men don't appear to have changed noticeably between 1980 & 1990 which indicate that *nenko's* effect is still strong particularly in large companies (Tachibanaki 1982).

The proportion of newly university graduated women who have found employment, has grown faster than male graduates. A study of Japan Institute of Women's Employment (1990) shows that women with university degree represented 13.7 percent of all newly graduated female employees in 1989 compared to 4.5 percent in 1970 and 11.7 percent in 1980. Another analysis of Edwards (1994) shows a changing pattern of graduated male and female who find employment in three different periods from 1975 – 1980, 1980 – 85 & 1985 – 90. Among the three periods, 'the percentage point increase of the third period is greater than in the first two periods' (Edwards 1994 p.227).

An increasing number of major firms introduce career tracking system (*Kosubetsu Koyo Seido*) in a positive response towards EEO Law (Women Vocational Institute WVI 1986, Foundation for Women's Work 1989, Women's Bureau, MOL 1990, Lam 1992). The most common form of career tracking is to classify the regular employees into two streams —managerial track (*Sogo-shoku*) which has unlimited promotion opportunity backed by intellectual work assignment, extensive training, job rotation and transfer, —clerical track (*Ippanshoku*) which has limited promotion & low pay followed by limited job rotation, transfer in local areas, in some firms, there is additional track called specialized track (*Senmonshoku*).

Edwards (1994 p.231) states that 'there are some signs that firms are

moving to improve opportunity for women and the fact that the most evident change is the well spread use of the two or multi-track system suggests that upto now, this commitment has been at best half-hearted'. Kanto Management Association (1986) strongly recommended the two or multi-track career system because the system helps to design individual's career choice at the very early stage of his / her career. Under the system, the selection for entry to different career tracks is solely based on merit and all career tracks are opened to both sexes and thus, Association states that new system tends to eliminate past informal practice of discrimination against women at the point of entry.

Different studies (NIVER 1987, MOL 1977, 1981, 1987, 1990, Women's Bureau 1989, Sugeno 1987, Lam 1992) show the management attitude and policy orientation on women's employment particularly before and after EEO Law. The results of these studies suggest that many companies have already adopted policies or in the process of formulating the policy and programs to utilize female labor force, major change in the recruitment of 4-year college graduates, the utilization of women limited to assistant types of jobs have declined, their boundary of works assignment has expanded, recruitment & conditions of employment have improved, mode of advertisement has changed & opened to both sexes, improve the eligibility for companies facilities like housing loan for women, sex-difference mandatory retirement has abolished in some companies, etc. Therefore, the results as a whole, indicate that the attitude and general intended policy orientation particularly, after the implementation of EEO Law have shifted in a more positive direction.

#### **HRM policies & practices changes — *contrasting evidences***

But still there are many studies (Sugeno 1987, Carney & O'Kelly 1987, Women's Bureau 1989, MOL 1990, Lam 1992, Edwards 1994) that show evidences on the management negative attitude on several aspects. Sugeno and Carney & O'Kelly state that under the conventional personnel management practices, firms adopted a policy to hire women exclusively or overwhelmingly from high school or 2-year college and assign them mostly to clerical or operative jobs and often fear to recruit 4-year university graduates if they unrealistically demanded high work assignment and higher pay. Lam (1992 p.127) has opined that 'many companies still conduct their recruitment and screening activities for men and women separately', accept applications for male and female in different dates and finish interviews for male applicants before female applicants, she claims, it could mean that companies recruit

female only when they fail to recruit male. Women's Bureau, MOL and Edwards state that there is no change in the job rotation, transfer policies of firms which are very 'onerous' particularly for married women, the most resistant to change promotion policies of the firms since more formalized and institutionalized screening and selection procedure are adopted for promotion of women who aspire to pursue a long-term career. The study also shows that '50 percent of firms still restricted recruitment for technical related jobs to men & over a quarter of the companies did not seek to recruit female graduates for administrative jobs' (Lam 1992, p.127).

### **Women's Career Aspirations and Expectations**

*Summary points of this section:*

#Women's attitude towards the career attachment & development has found no sign of improvement concurrently with the changing policies & practices of HRM.

#Women are found unconscious & ambivalent and supportive views are found for discontinuation of career and taking two or three phases working life.

Traditionally, women's works are controlled by family as well as social system. They have to spend a portion of life time for childbearing & childrearing. Japanese women are not exception to this universe. Moreover, they have to do household works since there is no clear cut demarcation on the division of household works among the members. Parkinson (1989) illustrates another insoluble problem for female is taking care of aged member of family which is absolutely assigned to women.

#### **HRM practices in Japanese companies — *women's traditional role***

Japanese labor market has three institutional features such as lifetime commitment, *nenko* based pay and promotion and enterprise union. Under the lifetime commitment, the workers stay with the company until the mandatory retirement age and receive systematic job training & experience on various kinds of through rotation and transfer for several years. *Nenko* based promotion and pay system reinforces high commitment because leaving the company means giving up all the accumulated seniority and promotion chances. It is normal practice that union membership restricted to the regular employers.

The practices of traditional norms were originally carried out in large companies and applicable to male workers. It creates serious trouble if practices are applied to women (Sano 1977, Japan Productivity Center 1985). By the very nature of women participation in the domestic works as well as childbearing & childrearing, it is very difficult to comply with the requirements of long term continuous employment and frequent mobility involving geographical relocation will cause many practical difficulties for women. Thus, the Confucian tradition and companies practices influence in forming three phases working profiles —entering full-time position immediately after graduation from school —quitting their jobs to get married and finally re-entering the labor force in part-time or arubaito jobs after a long period of interruption in employment. Thus the main problem is encountered by quitting jobs at earlier life stage.

The dual roles of women in home and at workplace influence the womens labor force participation behavior. Thus, Edwards (1988) argues that the characteristics of Japanese employment practices and family relations would make it difficult for Japanese women to take up the same employment opportunities as men. The majority of the women can not enter into the framework of the traditional norms, thus, they have to shelter in the non-regular pattern of jobs like part-time, arubaito and contract works. Women employment as part-time, arubaito and contract workers increased from 26 percent in 1981 to 36 percent in 1990 whereas men's share was 6 percent to 8 percent increased over the same period (Somucho 1981 & 1990). Moreover, women particularly, married with child try to avoid the jobs that have extensive job training, geographical relocations, job rotation, probably for compensation of low pay & low status jobs to make compatible with their family life. This type of avoidance is the greatest constraint for upward mobility of women (Cannings & Lazonick 1994).

#### **HRM changed policies & practices** — *women's passive mood*

With the introduction of EEO Law in 1986, major changes in Japanese management have started as already explained in previous section (Firms' changing policies & practices —women's situations). Companies have adopted different types of career tracks so that that women can build up their careers at the very initial stage of working life. Practically, 'the future of equal opportunity for women depends not only on the company's response towards expansions of programs for the female but also on how the women themselves

start to perceive the possibilities of improvement' (Lam 1993 p.216).

The studies of Prime Ministry's Office before and after the implementation of the EEO Law in 1979, 1983 & 1989 show a declining trend of women's intention to continue career. The studies also reveal that the preference of adopting two phases of work profile i. e. retiring from the work when they have families and re-entering the labor market when their children have grown up, rose from 39 percent in 1979 to 55 percent in 1983 and further upto 64 percent in 1989.

Most interesting observations of Seibu's experience has been found by Professor Lam (1992) on women's attitude relating to career development. She conducted surveys in Seibu Department Store in 1984 and 1988 to investigate the women's positions before and after the implementation of EEO Law covering three major areas such as job preferences, their aspirations and expectations for upward mobility and finally their intention to pursue a continuous career.

The study reveals that majority of the women have shown no particular job preference and the management type of jobs was at the bottom of women's preferences, there was no evidence that women's aspirations for promotion have increased though it was hypothesized that the aspirations and expectations of women with higher education would be increased than less educated cohort but the result was rather disappointing as they prefer to stay with the same position and their desired promotion to higher position was declined to two percentage points whereas the majority of men exhibited a higher expectation both in 1984 and 1988. As regard to continuity of career, a comparative of the survey results in 1988 with that of 1984 shows that the proportion of women wishing to pursue a continuous career has declined over time and increasing number of women would prefer to adopt a compromised two phases work profile i. e. retire from the job for domestic purpose and re-enter at later stage of working life.

It is internationally recognized that Japanese women's wages are lower than other advanced nations. Several studies (Sano 1987, Kawashima & Tachibanaki 1982, Edwards 1988, Ogawa & Clark 1995) mention that pay disparity with men, limited promotion and very few work related facilities demoralize and dissatisfy women's willingness to continue the career. But right now

women's career continuity is the vital issue in the economic reality of companies (Parkinson 1989) to get equal benefits in the workplace in the changing environment of Japanese human resource management.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study has documented that Japanese women's participation has increased in the paid labor market along with their educational improvement and decline their fertility rate, but they are employed at a high proportion in the small and medium sizes of enterprises with low grade of jobs and low pay. Moreover, the EEO Law has brought about a dramatic change in the work place by creating career track jobs which can be chosen by all irrespective of sex at the very initial stage of working life. This study has also revealed that Japanese women still don't start to perceive the changing phenomena which are crucial for the equal share in the work place. Why they are still in the low paying jobs? Do they accept low paying jobs to make compatible to their family responsibility or / and to avoid the hard rules of transfer, job rotation, etc.? Why they are not responsive to the changing practices, available upto now, of the companies? Will the Japanese women be equally responsive to changing situations like their male colleagues if same kinds of companies facilities and family support are available? Or will they play their home-oriented traditional role and enjoy 'a golden age of freedom'??

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