

Committee IV  
Crises in Education in the 1980's:  
A Survey of Educational Values and Systems

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**JAPANESE EDUCATION AND PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE**

by

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**Discussion Paper**

on

**Katz Takeda's**

**HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKING WOMEN IN THE U.S. AND JAPAN**

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## I. Role-consciousness of the Sexes and the Structure of the Permanent Employment System

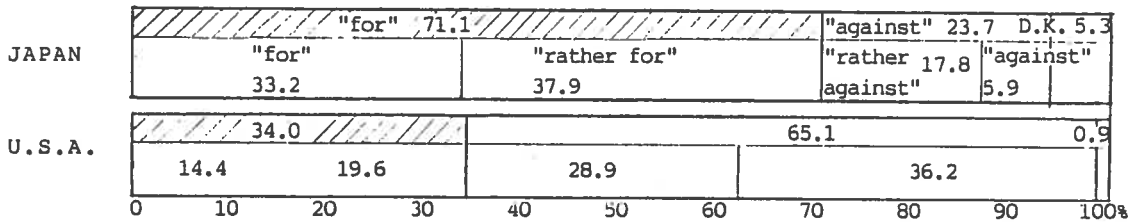
As Mr. Takeda has pointed out, higher education of women is surprisingly backward and that the status of women at places of work is low. In this discussant report (1) that the educational lag and the low status are closely related to the permanent employment structure which is characteristic of Japan and (2) that women's penetration into society has been threatening the permanent employment structure and further that women's large penetration into labor market has made the Japanese dual employment structure a subject for discussion will be pointed out.

In Japan, remarkably among advanced industrialized countries, there is very conservative traditional consciousness regarding the status of women. The typical proposition of the consciousness, which concerns the sexes' role-consciousness, says that "men should go out to work while women stay home and take care of the house." Prime Minister's Office of Japan conducted a survey in regard to this consciousness and chart one shows the result. In the survey women between 20 to 60 years old in Japan and other five countries were asked whether or not they were for the above proposition. Women who are

"for" (including "rather for") it accounted for 71% in Japan while the percentage is 31 in the United States.

Chart One

"Men should go out to work while women stay home and take care of the house."



In addition, the same question was answered by young men and women from 18 to 24 years old, the result being that 44.5% in Japan and only 18.6% in the United States were respectively for the proposition.

This traditional social consciousness regarding women is incompatible with the permanent employment system that Japanese corporate organizations adopt. It should rather be the basis of the permanent structure of household. A woman who has gotten married and has come to belong permanently to a family is supposed to take care of the household. It is theoretically impossible for this kind of woman to assimilate in organizations which take the permanent employment system. Although young women who have graduated from school find job and work in some enterprise, they consider the position to be a temporary one before marriage. For women, it is the marriage that practically have the function of permanent employment. Correspondingly employer organizations take it for granted that women's taking

a job is only temporary.

Attitudes of the organizations which take the permanent employment system in employing new staff members should here be considered. In Japan, only very few workers change employment and business enterprises distinguish this type of employment as "halfway employment" from that of new graduates, who have entered labor market for the first time. Enterprises employ the new graduates for life. The appraisal of a person in this case, then, is made according more to the long range ability than to the ability at hand. At the time of employment, therefore, new employees are all given equal amount of salary and no treatments are made according to the ability. The long range ability is decided by the rank of universities from which employees graduated, the ranking being socially accepted. In an organization, a graduate of a top-ranking university is assigned a position in which the person can receive special trainings for future key staff.

Such social consciousness and the structure of permanent employment have made a phrase "Koshikake Shushoku (chair employment)" for employment of women in Japan, which is very Japanese. The word "Koshikake (a chair)" indicates that the employment is like a chair to sit on temporarily. The two have also caused another very Japanese phrase, "Eikyu Shushoku (permanent employment)," for women to be coined. It means in Japanese that marriage is for women a kind of permanent employment. Thus marriage as well as actual employment is based on the

social custom of permanent employment. Many Japanese women seek their "permanent employment" not in business or other organizations but in a family. As will later be discussed, this kind of social structure have naturally established schools for the "permanent employment," i.e., women's schools in which home economics is primarily taught. These schools are called "school for brides." Of course there are women who continue to work regardless of marriage or childbirth. They belong, however, to the minority and their existence can be troublesome for employers. That is, as there is an assumption that women will resign when they get married or have a baby, they are treated less favorably than men. They, for example, tend to remain at low position even when it is recognized that they have superior ability to other men. In Japanese organizations job rotation is planned based on the premise that employees work for life and then promotions are made at points of the rotation. Women, who are supposed to resign halfway, will not be put on the rotation and accordingly will not be given important tasks.

In Japanese organizations, promotions and assignments of posts clearly are made for workers who will work for life in the organization and women in this sense will not be geared to the system. In organizations which have a short-term employment system, i.e., organizations which will employ, if temporarily, those who have ability suitable for the need at particular time, that an employee is thought to be going to resign

soon would not be a problem. The permanent employment structure which is characteristic of Japan is the major cause of the low status of women in Japanese organizations.

## II. Dual Employment Structure in Japan

The employment of women incompatible with long-term employment has close relation to the dual structure of employment in Japan. Japanese employment divides into employment in medium or small-sized enterprises and that in major enterprises. Minor enterprises get their jobs from major enterprises and tend to be dependent upon major enterprises, being in a very weak position. They are, therefore, the first to face hardships in case of depression and also inferior to major enterprises in salaries and other treatments.

These medium and small-sized enterprises will try to lower the cost by employing workers to whom they have only to pay small amount of salaries and as a result tend to employ women, whom major enterprises do not want to employ. The form of employment of women compatible with the short-term employment is a part-time system. This system, however, together with the Japanese dual structure of employment has caused many problems of the Labor Standards Law with regard to wages, working hours and other treatments. Improving the status of part-time women has recently become a big social issue in Japan. It can be said that the problems of the dual employment structure have been made more serious by the existence of

female part-timers.

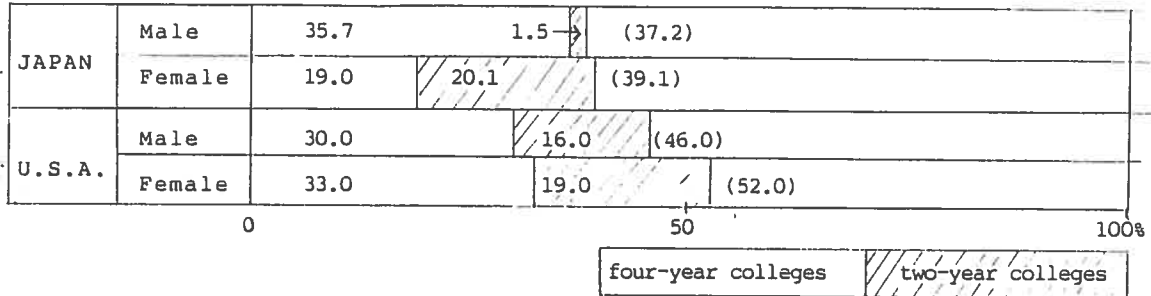
The problem of female workers has spread to top-ranking business enterprises and now the rise of position of women has been advocated more strongly than before. The rise of position of women and the Japanese employment structure, however, cannot be essentially consistent as has been discussed. Improving treatments disregarding the fact that resignation is assumed means placing a woman who is thought to resign shortly in an important position, which makes the company's rotation prepared from the time of employment meaningless. It thus denies the essential part of the long-term permanent employment structure. The conflict makes today's problem.

### III. Problem of Female Education

Female education in Japan has its marked characteristics standing in contrast to the education in the United States. In the United States there is no tendency that female students mainly go on to two-year junior colleges instead of four-year colleges. In Japan, however, it is no exaggeration to say that junior colleges are actually reserved for female students. As chart two shows, in Japan 35.7% of the male and 19.0% of the female high-school graduates go on to four-year colleges while 20.1% of the female and only 1.5% of the male students go on to two-year colleges. In the United States there is no significant difference in the pattern of the rates between four-year and two-year colleges.

Chart Two

"High School & Beyond" (colleges to go on immediately after high school)



"High School & Beyond," National Opinion Research Center, U.S.A. and Japan Youth Research Institute, Japan, 1982

Two-year colleges may be said to be colleges reserved for women, being very different from four-year colleges. With regard to future careers of students, four-year colleges aim at business and other organizations, which take the permanent employment system, while two-year colleges aim at household, which forms another kind of permanent employment structure for housewives. In Japan junior colleges are often referred to as "school for brides," which describes aptly what they really are.

The above actually may indicate that Japanese permanent employment structure has produced the two kinds of colleges. One of them educates students who will work in one organization for life and the other educates students who will take care of one household for life. As the preceding part has already set forth, the marriage actually is often referred to as "permanent employment," being considered to be the same as employment.



In junior colleges home economics is primarily taught and to acquire general culture is made the goal of the education there. Although there are some junior colleges in which specialized subjects are taught, those courses are not connected to future careers being far from practical. Graduates from junior colleges have only very weak aspirations for employment and even when they find employment, many of them go to household after marriage or childbirth.

An interesting question here may be when the orientation for junior college becomes clear in the course of education. The inquiry may also analyze on a very deep level the relationships between female students and higher education in Japan.

Although there are no exact data, it is said that until the first year of junior high school female students are generally superior in schoolwork. Then many teachers of junior high schools in Japan say that male students become even with female students at the second year of the school and male students become superior at the third year. According to the aforementioned survey of "High School and Beyond" conducted by Japan Youth Research Institute in Japan in 1982, there is a big difference in scholastic ability between male students and female students. When high schools are classified into A-C three ranks according to the percentage of students who go on to colleges (A--more than 95%, B--70 to 95%, C--less than 70%), as chart three shows the number of female students who entered A-ranking high schools was only one third of the male

students whereas 83% of the students who entered C-ranking high schools were female.

Chart Three

"High School and Beyond"

	A	B	C	Technical School
Male	75.7	41.4	16.1	59.2
Female	24.2	58.6	83.9	40.8

(%)

In the same survey students were asked whether they thought that they had the scholastic ability to go on to colleges. 17.5% of male students thought that they unquestionably have the ability and 31.2% thought that they probably have the ability while as for female students, the percentages were only 4.1% and 22.6% respectively.

These figures indicate clearly the actuality of the female education. The decision whether or not going on to a higher educational institution is made at the second or the third year of junior high school before even entering high school.

The ranking of universities extends to high schools and there is a clear ranking of high schools, classified according to the percentage of students who enter top-ranking universities. Further, to decide the high school to go on students of junior high school students are ranked through the scholastic abilities. The measure of this ranking is the deviation value in schoolwork and at the time of graduation from junior high school, female students' deviation is generally lower than

male students'.

Of course it is untrue that female students are essentially inferior in intellectual abilities. The reason why female students become inferior in two years despite the superiority at the first year of junior high school should rather be asked.

It may be attributed to the difference in perspectives upon future careers between male and female students. Many parents actually say that as women are supposed to get married and stay in family, they do not have to study so hard in junior high school. On the other hand, with regard to men it is crucial to find employment in a top-ranking major enterprise, where the employment is guaranteed for life. As has been mentioned, the Japanese permanent employment structure asks not present abilities but future long-term contribution. The measure for this selection is whether or not candidates have graduated from top-ranking universities. Since women do not have to fit into the permanent employment structure there have been little women's competition for top-ranking universities.

In Japanese sense the two types of employment, for men in business or other organizations and for women in household, are both premised on permanent bonds. Marriage, however, though it is called permanent employment, is different in its strong personal elements from business or other organizations, whose ultimate goal is production. The measure for rankink of female educational institutions, therefore, is dissimilar to that of male educational institutions, which focus merely on the

deviation value of mathematics, science and so on. For housewives an academic background, of course, is important as one of the factors but as a more important factor knowledge of home economics as well as harmoniousness, brightness and other personal aspects is required. Junior colleges function as the institution to cultivate these elements. This actuality may mean that junior colleges can be the institution which extricates education in Japan from the heavy orientation of the deviation value.

The reason why female education in Japan is inferior to that of the United States, as has been mentioned, is ascribed to the fact that marriage is considered to be one form of permanent employment. In this sense the Japanese permanent employment structure, marriage for women, has a great influence on the educational system.

Recently, however, two new phenomena have been prompting the reform of female education. One is the increase of divorce, which has been increasing rapidly, the ratio being 1.39 for a thousand population. As a result marriage may not necessarily mean permanent employment. The other is the greater participation of women in society, which requires reconsideration of the female education. Women as well as men need higher education to keep responsible in business and other organizations.

For the rise in position of women, female participation in society as fact is necessary. Considering the dual

employment structure in Japan active participation by many superior women is desired and also it is necessary to accumulate the fact that women do not resign after marriage or childbirth. Since the fact is compatible with the permanent employment structure in Japan, it may not be difficult to improve the status of women. For this purpose much may not be expected of the average women who will retire after marriage or childbirth.

Another way to raise women's status is to make being part-timers compatible with being housewives, which is the other side of the dual employment structure. The improvement of treatments of part-timers for this purpose has been a big social issue and will be gradually made.

The fundamental problem, however, is the conflict between the Japanese structure of permanent employment system and the prevailing consciousness that women should stay in family. The two will not be compatible and therefore the rise of women's status needs to take either the form of "from family to organization" or the form of the fundamental change of the permanent employment structure. Confronted by the problem of female education and employment, the Japanese permanent employment structure may be approaching a crisis at the fundamental level.