

**EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR JAPANESE WOMEN:  
CHANGING COMPANY PRACTICE**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

1990

## ABSTRACT

The central aim of this thesis is to examine the extent to which the growing pressures for equal opportunity between the sexes has forced Japanese companies to adapt and modify their employment and personnel management practices in recent years. It analyses the major social and economic factors prompting Japanese companies to adopt more open employment policies towards women since the mid-1970s and the change programmes introduced by management. The thesis especially looks at how companies have reacted to the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law and in the light of this considers how far the present legislation will bring about fundamental changes in the Japanese employment system towards more egalitarian treatment of women workers.

A detailed case study was conducted at Seibu Department Stores Ltd., both before and after the introduction of the EEO Law, as a critical test of the possibility of introducing equal opportunities for women in a large Japanese company. Seibu was chosen because it is a big employer of women and is a company operating in an industry which has strong economic and commercial incentives to offer women better career opportunities. All the more important, Seibu is regarded as a 'leading edge' company in personnel management reforms. The study reveals that despite many economic and social reasons that were in favour of change towards greater sexual equality in Seibu, and especially after the introduction of the EEO Law, change towards more egalitarian treatment of women has been very limited.

This study illustrates the depth of the resistance to change in the core employment practices in large Japanese companies. The present EEO Law has little potential for undermining the structural mechanisms which perpetuate sexual job segregation in the employment system. The final part of the thesis speculates on the future prospects of introducing equal opportunities for women in Japanese companies. In the light of the present socio-legal constraints, the author puts forward a number of practical policy suggestions for engendering more pervasive long-term changes towards equal employment for Japanese women.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my warmest and most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Keith Thurley, who encouraged and helped me to come to the School to pursue the doctorate degree five years ago. His continuous guidance and intellectual stimulation have been the major driving force behind the completion of this thesis. Many of the staff in the Department of Industrial Relations also offered me useful advice throughout the various stages of this research, I have learned a great deal from them.

I am also grateful to Professor Hiroshi Hazama who helped me design the initial study in 1984 while I was a Monbusho Research Scholar at Waseda University. I have also benefited a great deal from his advice on the many occasions I have visited Japan since then.

The research for this thesis would not have been possible without the generous help and cooperation of many of the staff in the Personnel Department of Seibu Department Stores Ltd. and the employees who took part in the interviews and surveys. I especially wish to thank Mr Takeshi Nishikawa, Director of Human Resource Development of the Head Office and Mr. Shoji Matsubara, former Personnel Manager of Seibu Ikebukuro Store, who gave me entry to the company and supported my initial study in 1984 and further helped me with the follow-up study in 1988. I am also grateful to Ms. Taguchi and Mr. Ishikura who helped me a great deal in administering the follow-up questionnaire survey in 1988. I owe a great debt to many Seibu women employees whom I met through the interviews and during the one month period when I worked as a shop assistant.

I should also like to thank Professor Tadashi Hanami for giving me introduction to the Women's Bureau of the Japan Ministry of Labour. I also learned much from my many stimulating conversations with him. Ms Mitsuko Horiuchi and Ms Kazuko Itosugi, senior staff in the Women's Bureau of the Japan Ministry of Labour, have spared a great deal of time on many occasions when I visited the Bureau and provided me with very useful reference materials.

This research has received financial support from the following organisations to which I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation: The Kobayashi Setsutarō Fuji Xerox Foundation provided a generous grant in 1984-5 for the initial case study and gave me further financial support for the follow-up study in 1988. I also received a grant from the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee in Britain in 1987. The Suntory Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines (STICERD) offered me a scholarship in 1986-7 while I was a full-time Ph.D student at the School.

I am particularly grateful to many of my friends in Japan who have continuously sent me the latest publications and information. Finally, I should also like to thank my husband David for putting up with me during the first six months of our newly married life. Without his

emotional support and encouragement, I could not have finished this thesis.

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and engage neither the management of Seibu nor those who have provided funding for this research.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis constitutes part of the author's long-standing interest in the adaptation of the Japanese employment and personnel management systems to environmental challenges and changing socio-economic circumstances. It is also an attempt to integrate research on 'women's issues' in contemporary Japan which, up to the present, has largely been confined to traditional subject areas such as 'the family' and 'traditional Japanese culture and values', with one of the most 'male-oriented' subject areas in modern Japanese studies, namely, the enterprises and the employment system.<sup>1</sup>

It is often argued that the viability of the Japanese employment system is sustained by a set of personnel management rules and practices which make a clear distinction between the 'core' and the 'non-core' employees. The former (predominantly male) enjoy the privileges of long-term employment, wage increases and promotion based on age and length of service (*nenko*) and internal career progression through job rotation and on- and off-the-job training; whereas the latter group is excluded (Galenson and Odaka, 1976; Ishikawa, 1980 ; Odaka, 1984). Women workers constitute a high proportion of the latter category of employees. Their relatively low wages, high turnover and flexible entry and exit from the labour market play an especially important role in maintaining the flexibility of the employment system, both in terms of the size of employment and labour cost (Shinotsuka, 1982 ; Kawashima, 1987). Up until very recently, direct exclusion and discrimination against women in all stages of employment was both legal and socially acceptable.

The picture began to shift from the mid-1970s. Social and economic changes gradually brought into question the companies' discriminatory

employment policies on women. Increased internationalisation of Japan also brought to the fore the low status of Japanese women in all aspects of the society, especially in the field of employment, compared to their counterparts in other advanced countries (The Economist, 1988). Internal socio-economic changes, coupled with pressures from the international community, eventually led to the introduction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO Law) in May 1985, albeit after seven years of controversy and debate. This law prohibits discrimination against women in vocational training, fringe benefits, retirement and dismissal. It also 'exhorts' ('morally obliges') employers to treat women equally to men with regard to recruitment, job assignment and promotion. The EEO Law marks an important turning point in the history of women's employment in Japan. For the first time in Japanese history, formal guarantees of equal treatment between women and men in all stages of employment are enshrined in a single piece of legislation. The enactment of the EEO Law has aroused much controversy and debate unprecedented in the history of labour legislation in Japan. The Japanese government described the passing of the new legislation as 'a great historical moment for all kinds of movements against discrimination in Japan' (MOL, 1986).

The central aim of this thesis is to examine the extent to which the growing pressures for equal opportunity between the sexes has forced Japanese companies to adapt and modify their employment and personnel management practices in recent years. It analyses the major social and economic factors prompting Japanese companies to adopt more open employment policies toward women since the mid-1970s and the programmes of change introduced by management. The thesis especially looks at how companies have reacted to the 1985 EEO Law and, in the light of this, considers how far the present legislation will bring about fundamental changes in the Japanese employment system towards more egalitarian treatment of women. A detailed case study was conducted at Seibu Department Stores Ltd., both before and after the introduction of the EEO Law, as a critical test of the possibility of introducing equal opportunities for women in a large Japanese company (see below).

The theoretical ground of this thesis is located in the context of a major debate central to contemporary studies on the Japanese employment system: whether the drift away from the 'traditional' Japanese model of employment and personnel management as a result of socio-economic changes and external challenges is inevitable. This question has preoccupied many Japanese and foreign scholars. In the 1950s, when the 'Japanese employment system' was first perceived as distinctively different from the systems prevailing in the western countries, it was seen as a hangover from the feudal past, destined to give way to more modern 'rational' systems (Tsuda, 1959). The continual high performance of the Japanese economy led to a subsequent re-evaluation and to the recognition that the Japanese system has many merits, compared with those of the West (Nakayama, 1975 ; OECD, 1977). This positive re-evaluation has not eliminated recurrent prophecies about the inevitable change of the Japanese system in a 'Western' direction. In the 1980s, the challenge of equal opportunities for women added extra impetus to the speculation about the eventual collapse of the Japanese employment system. How far and in what direction is the Japanese employment system changing? Is it changing in a direction which offers more egalitarian employment and career opportunities for women?

Equal employment for women is not an independent social or human rights issue on its own. Companies' employment policies for women constitute an integral part of the employment and personnel management systems. Whether Japanese companies can accommodate equal opportunity for women without introducing major changes in their present employment systems or, whether elimination of sexual inequality in employment necessitates structural change, as argued by the institutional theorists (Mayhew, 1968; McCrudden, 1982), are questions which are not only important for those who are interested in social change in modern Japan but are of great importance to a wider audience who are interested in equal opportunity policies for women.

This thesis is a study of how Japanese companies have adapted their employment policies and practices in response to the growing pressure for more egalitarian treatment of women. It is also about the

possibility of bringing about change in an employment system which has long operated on the basis of sexual discrimination. From the theoretical and policy point of view, Japan provides a unique and significant case for examining the dynamics of the change process. There are three reasons for this.

Firstly, the Japanese employment system is characterised by its duality, focussing on the differences between the large and small firms. The large firms and to some extent the medium-sized firms have developed one of the world's most closed types of internal labour markets, (Taira, 1970; Koike 1983). Historically, it has operated on the basis of discrimination against women. The rules and procedures which define the internal labour markets and govern their operation, once institutionalised, tend to be self-perpetuating and are difficult to change (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Similar to many other advanced countries, the Japanese employment system has been under pressure for change as a result of many social and economic changes in recent years. Japan, thus provides an interesting case for examining how an employment system with well-developed internal labour markets responds to the pressures for change. The emerging situation in the 1980s provides an excellent opportunity to examine the interplay between social and economic forces in Japan in shaping employer policies and practices - their strategies for change and adaptation in response to growing pressures for sexual equality. An examination of the dynamics of the changes can shed some new light on the nature of the Japanese employment system.

Secondly, there are reasons to expect the process of change to be more complex in Japan. It is a country which is uniquely situated between the advanced industrial societies of the West and the less-developed countries. Economic indices show that it is an advanced industrialised country. Socially, it shares many similar characteristics with other developing countries. The emergence of Japan as a modern state is a post-World War II phenomenon. Particularly illustrative is the position of women in the society. Further, the continued high performance of the economic system means that the desire among policy



makers to maintain the present employment system is strong. This makes demands for equal employment a much more sensitive and complex issue than elsewhere.

Thirdly, Japan also provides an excellent case to 'test' whether politics and policy intervention matter in equal employment issues. The struggle for equal employment for women in many western advanced industrial societies has its base in economic and social changes but the main force for propelling it to the level of state policies has been largely political. In the United States, the politics of civil rights and women's movement have played an important role in transforming the demands for equal opportunities into public policies (Burstein, 1985). In Japan, the economic conditions which are pushing Japanese companies to adopt more egalitarian employment policies for women are present. However, government intervention has been minimal, the EEO Law is an outgrowth of internal socio-economic changes and external pressures from the international community, not a result of an indigenous women's movement. Whether economic and commercial pressures alone can bring about changes in employment practices will reveal the degree to which equal opportunity strategies are needed.

The ultimate goals of equal opportunity policies involve normative choices which tend to vary from society to society. Moreover, the direction of change in the area of sexual equality also reflects the political strength and power balance of different social groups in a society and the demands of the economy. Despite the existence of many country-specific factors which may determine the ultimate shape of equal opportunity for women in different social systems, there are also many common fundamental issues facing all advanced industrialised countries. Japan, which is often regarded as representing an extreme case of sexual inequality and is often criticised as building its economic vitality upon the exploitation of women workers, provides a particularly interesting case for the examination of these common issues.

## II. WOMEN WORKERS IN THE JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM: SOME UNIQUE FEATURES

Rapid economic development over the last three decades has brought about dramatic changes in the role of women in the Japanese economy. One of the most significant changes has been the tremendous increase in the number of women working as paid employees (wage earners), more than threefold from 5.3 million in 1955 to 16.1 million in 1987. In 1955, women constituted 26 per cent of all paid employees; the figure rose to 36.5 per cent in 1987. The labour force participation rate of Japanese women in 1987 was 48.6 per cent, a relatively high figure compared with the Western European countries.<sup>2</sup> Although Japanese women work in all economic sectors, the rapid expansion of the tertiary sector has absorbed a large proportion of them.

Another striking feature has been the rapid growth of married women's employment. They increased their share among female employees from 32.7 per cent in 1962 to 58.7 per cent in 1987.

The rapid rise in the education level of Japanese women is also significant. In 1960, only 3.5 per cent of women newly entering employment were graduates (including 2-year junior college and 4-year university education); the figure rose to 36.6 per cent in 1987. The rise in women's educational qualifications has brought about a growing career consciousness and the intention among them to remain in employed work for longer than before. The average length of service of women employees extended from 4 years in 1960 to 7.1 years in 1987. The expansion of women's education has led to the emergence of a new type of 'career-oriented women' in Japan. According to an attitude survey carried out by Japan Recruitment Centre in 1980, women's intention to stay in employment was strongly related to their educational background. The proportion of those who replied that they intended to work continuously (without interruption) until retirement was 28.7 per cent for the 4-year university graduates, 15.9 per cent for the junior college graduates and 6 per cent for those with high school education

only. Women's labour force participation rate also increases with their level of education (Yashiro, 1983, p.46).

Women's participation in the labour force in contemporary Japan shares many characteristics with that of western industrialised countries. Both social and economic changes are moving towards an increasing role of women in employment. However, compared to the western industrialised countries, Japan has been rather slow in granting women equal treatment in the workplace. Employment practices which were overtly discriminatory against women and were explicitly prohibited by legislation in most of the advanced industrialised countries by the mid-1970s were still part of the norm of the employment system in Japan until recently. A survey of company policies on women workers carried out by the Ministry of Labour in 1981 shows that many companies discriminated against women not only in recruitment but also in wages, job assignments, training, promotion, and retirement age. For example, the survey found that only 24 per cent of the firms employing fresh graduates from 4-year university degree courses employed both sexes (71 per cent employed men only and 5 per cent women only). Education and training programmes were provided in 68 per cent of the firms surveyed, but 21 per cent of these firms provided no training for women and an additional 39 per cent provided different training to men and women. Further, 83 per cent of the firms had positions that were not open to women and 43 per cent gave women no opportunity for promotion (MOL, 1981a). Until May 1985 when the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was passed, there was virtually no legal protection against discrimination of women in employment.

Despite the rapid expansion of women's employment and the improvement in their educational qualifications, the wage gap between men and women remains wide. In 1985, adult full-time women earned on average only 56 per cent of gross monthly cash earnings of full-time adult men (see, chapter 4, Table 4.1). Recent statistics and studies in several countries show that women's earnings remain markedly lower than men. However, the wage gap in Japan is the largest and has remained so over the past two decades (see, chapter 2, Table 2.8).

Nowhere in the industrialised world do women enjoy equal status with their male counterparts in the labour market. Sexual inequality in employment appears to be a universal phenomenon but the above evidence seems to indicate that Japan represents an extreme case among the advanced industrialised countries. Nobuko Takahashi, a prominent labour administrator and supporter of the women's cause in Japan, points out that women workers in Japan not only have to cope with problems common to women workers in all industrialised countries, but they are also confronted with some 'unique problems' which stem from the three special features of the Japanese employment system, namely, lifetime employment practice, the *nenko* wage system and enterprise unionism (Takahashi, 1983, p.4). These have often been referred to as the 'three pillars' of the Japanese employment system and are often associated with employment stability and high productivity. However, one of the greatest defects of the system is that it is inherently discriminatory. From the viewpoint of the firms, employment of a permanent workforce and wage increments by age and length of service make the employment system extremely rigid, both in terms of the size of employment and labour costs. This inevitably means that the benefits of the practices can only be applied selectively: to the core workers. The majority of women workers, workers in small firms and a large number of part-time and temporary workers are excluded from these practices. The employment system is sustained by personnel management practices which make a clear distinction between the 'core' and the 'periphery' among the workforce. Women play an especially important role as 'peripheral' or 'marginal' workers in maintaining the flexibility of the system.

Until recently , it was customary for women to work only a few years between the end of schooling and marriage. They were encouraged by companies to quit before they benefited from wage increases under the *nenko* system. Before the mid-1970s, many companies actually forced women to retire under the compulsory early retirement system. As the system was ruled illegal by the courts in the late 1970s, many companies changed to an informal system of encouraging women to retire at marriage or child-birth by offering them special early retirement allowances. As

the majority of women were assigned to unskilled or assistant type of jobs, the replacement of senior women by young school leavers served the purpose of reducing labour costs. Even in the 1980s, many employers still regard the practice of encouraging the high turnover rate of women workers as an important means for reducing the rigidity of the employment system.

The employment of a large number of female temporary part-time workers is another common means for adjusting the size of the workforce to business fluctuations. The increase in the number of female part-time workers has been particularly striking in recent years. The majority of them are middle-aged housewives who tend to move in and out of the labour market, and provide a marginal workforce which can be varied with the ebb and flow of business.

The logic of the employment system is sustained by the personnel management practices which create strong institutional barriers to women's participation as full members of the work organisations. Even if employers do not have the intention to discriminate, the personnel rules and practices tend to operate to the disadvantage of the majority of women workers.

Large Japanese firms invest heavily in the training of their workers, much more so than companies in western countries (NEDO, 1984, p.48-53). There is a strong emphasis on the development of firm-specific skills which include both technical and organisational skills (Koike, 1983). Long-term on-the-job training and regular job-rotation are regarded as essential for the development of both types of skills. Training incurs heavy costs and firms will only invest if they expect that such costs can be recouped in the future. Investment in the training of women is regarded as 'risky' because of their high average turnover rate. Even for those women who work for many years, training opportunities are relatively limited as compared to their male counterparts. Economists describe this type of discrimination as 'statistical discrimination', a situation in which decisions regarding individuals are based on group-derived probabilities (Phelps, 1972;

Arrow, 1973). In western countries, women can use external vocational or professional training as credentials for career development; in Japan the emphasis on firm-specific training means that Japanese women tend to face greater institutional barriers in their career advancement and firms have a stronger discretionary power in allocating the chances for career development. The opportunities for occupational advancement depend much more on the allocative rules and procedures of the firms.

The importance of the seniority rule in the allocation of jobs, promotion and wage determination also operates to the serious disadvantage of women. Women retiring from the firm tend to lose all their accumulated seniority. When they re-enter the job market, they have to start again at the bottom of the job hierarchy. Career interruption is a disadvantage to women in any country, but it is much more of a handicap in Japan. Many firms, particularly the large ones, only recruit their regular workers from fresh school leavers. Job openings available for mid-career workers are limited; for women they are often limited to jobs in the small firms or part-time jobs.

From the mid-1960s, many firms started to stress the importance of placing more emphasis on 'merit' and 'job performance' in their wage and promotion systems; however, even up to the present day, age and length of service are still the two most important criteria in the determination of promotion and wages in Japanese firms. In many western countries, the seniority criterion for promotion is regarded as indirectly discriminatory against women because it has a disproportionate impact on women.<sup>3</sup> Equal employment legislation in the western countries usually stresses that the sole criteria for promotion should be based on merit and performance. The tendency of Japanese firms to use the seniority criterion as an objective standard for evaluation will continue to operate to the disadvantage of women.

Promotion and career development in Japanese firms also generally involves regular job-rotation which often requires geographical mobility. This is used both as a means for the development of multi-

skills and the enhancement of a worker's organisational skill; it is also used as a means of increasing organisational flexibility. Firms do not expect women employees to be as mobile as their male counterparts. The immobility of women is often used as an excuse for not promoting women and not assigning women to the mainstream career jobs.

The above are a few examples of how the customary rules and practices in the Japanese work organisations are based upon the traditional assumption that 'men's sphere is at work', therefore they are expected to be committed and loyal workers; whereas 'women's sphere is at home', therefore their role in the work organisation can only be partial or marginal. This deep rooted sex role distinction in Japanese society serves as an important ideological basis for justifying sexual inequality in the workplace. Sexual inequality in employment is very much related to sexual division of labour in the family. This is true in Japan as well as in all other countries. However, what sets Japan apart from other advanced industrialised countries is that such extreme sex role distinction has survived into a period of rapid and dramatic economic growth and has rarely been challenged until very recently.

### III. THE FORCES FOR CHANGE

If unequal treatment of women workers constitutes part of the inherent logic of the employment system, then one might expect change in women's conditions to occur as a result of economic pressures on the employment system. Women's conditions might also improve if people start to question the morality of a system which continues to treat a growing proportion of the workforce in an unequal manner. In fact, since the mid-1970s, changes have been occurring - in the economic and industrial structure, in the employment system itself and most important of all, in the legislative framework:

(1) Since the mid-1970s, there has been a rapid growth of the service economy in Japan (Mizuno, 1984). The shift of balance in the industrial structure from manufacturing to services, information and new technology has led to the rapid growth of many new types of job opportunities. Women have entered jobs in the growing service sector at a much faster rate than men. In many industries, such as retail distribution, banking and insurance, computer software and information technology, companies are finding it difficult to ignore the demands and needs of women whose performance and morale are becoming increasingly important for the competitiveness of their business.

(2) The shortage of young skilled labour is pushing many companies to employ more highly-qualified women. One important change since the mid-1970s is that more and more companies are employing female university graduates. This is an important shift in the traditional employment policy. In order to fully utilise the growing proportion of highly-qualified women, some companies are starting to introduce special career development programmes for them. This is a comparatively new phenomenon in Japan.

(3) The onset of the slower growth after the oil crisis in 1973 and the rapid ageing of the workforce are posing challenges to the logical consistency of the traditional employment system (Tsuda, 1977; Yoshikawa, 1980). For many companies a growing proportion of middle-



aged and old-aged workers means that pay increases by age are becoming too costly. The reduced possibility for expansion in many sectors also implies that the lifetime employment guarantee has to be restricted to a decreasing proportion of the workforce. Many companies are making efforts to reform the traditional practices by reducing the extent to which pay increases with age. The traditional promotion system is also proving to be too rigid and restrictive. Many companies are introducing a greater varieties of career routes in order to increase organisational flexibility and to introduce more scope for skill and career development. In the process of these changes, some companies are gradually opening up promotion chances for a few selected women (Inagami, 1988, pp.2-66).

(4) The socio-economic pressures for change culminated in the enactment of the EEO Law in May 1985. This new legislation was also partly a product of international pressures on Japan to bring her legislative framework on women into line with international standards (see, chapter 6). From the western perspective, the Japanese EEO Law may appear rather peculiar. It has granted women very few new rights and imposed only limited legal obligations on employers. The legislation makes a distinction between 'prohibition' and 'exhortation' in its provisions for ensuring equal treatment between men and women. Prohibition against discrimination applies to basic vocational training, fringe benefits, retirement and dismissal - areas in which substantial changes had already taken place before the law was introduced. With regard to the most important stages in employment including recruitment, job assignment and promotion - areas which employers resisted strongly against any formal legal intervention, the law 'exhorts' ('morally obliges') employers to treat women equally as men. The 'hortatory provisions' appear to be highly ambiguous and their enforcement is dependent upon the administrative guidance (gysoei-shido) of the Ministry of Labour. A detailed analysis of the contents of the law and the guidelines set by the Ministry of Labour suggests that the 'standard of equality' as required by the Japanese legislation falls far short of the 'western norm'. The Japanese Ministry of Labour, however, point out that the EEO Law is a developing piece of legislation and that the

requirements stipulated in the law represent no more than temporary minimum requirements aimed at raising the average norm of equal opportunities in the Japanese enterprise community by reducing the number of 'bad practice' companies. According to the Ministry of Labour, the 'spirit' of the law, goes beyond the requirements stipulated in the law. 'Good practice' employers, that is those who have already satisfied the minimum requirements are expected to fulfil their 'moral obligations' by making 'further efforts' in providing equal opportunities for women, in respect of the 'spirit' of the law. Underlying the 'hortatory provisions', there is an assumption that, in bringing about changes in the most sensitive areas of the employment system, it is best to proceed step-by-step, to push forward changes through administrative guidance, and to elicit the 'good will' cooperation of the employers. The Japanese EEO Law has two objectives. The first is to use the 'prohibitory provisions' to remove the most blatant forms of direct discrimination ; this first objective in effect aims at formally ratifying changes that have already occurred in the past and also to enforce changes in the 'worst practice' companies. Its second, more important, objective is to use the 'hortatory provisions' to exert 'moral pressures' on the 'good practice' employers, to move beyond the minimum requirements enshrined in the law, and set the new norms and standards of equality for women. The real significance of the law lies not only in the extent to which companies in general are prepared to comply with the stipulated requirements but more importantly, in the extent to which the law can act as a symbol of new moral standard to stimulate the 'good will' employers to set the pace for further change.

An important part of this thesis is to examine how Japanese companies have reacted and responded to the legislation and to see whether the model of change pursued by the companies, following the introduction of the EEO Law, is having a positive impact on the position and status of women workers.

A detailed case study was conducted at Seibu, both before and after the introduction of the EEO Law, as a critical test of how a large

Japanese company, one which already has strong economic and commercial incentives to offer women better career opportunities and is regarded as a 'leading edge' company in personnel management reforms might have taken the lead in responding positively to the the 'spirit' as well as the letter of the EEO Law. The Seibu case study is also used to test the outcomes of the equal opportunity policies on the position and status of women and to explore how far the equality debates have brought about a shift in women's work attitudes and career expectations (see chapter 8 for further details).

#### **IV. A NOTE ON THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The choice of research methods is often determined by the type of problems one intends to pursue. For the purpose of understanding a complex and evolving situation, case study method has many advantages. Information derived from representative questionnaire surveys would have been unlikely to yield the detailed and in-depth information that was obtained by establishing and maintaining a relationship with an organisation for over four years. Further, by having direct contact with the parties - both the managers and the employees - involved in the process of change, the researcher is able to gain a better and more precise understanding of the dynamics of the situations and how the actors actually perceive the process of change and the evolving new situations.

The Seibu data were obtained by using various research methods. These include in-depth interviews with personnel managers and individual women employees, a one-month-period of participant observation (during which the author worked as a temporary shop assistant on the sales floor) and questionnaire surveys of about 1,000 male and female employees. The initial questionnaire survey was conducted in the Spring of 1984, one year before the Japanese government passed the EEO Law; and the follow-up study was carried out in the summer of 1988, three years after the legislation was introduced. Details of the research methods are discussed in chapter 8.

In addition to the case study at Seibu, the author has collected information about a large number of cases over the past few years from a great variety of sources such as management journals and magazines, government publications and newspapers. These empirical cases provide invaluable information on the changes which have been going on in other Japanese companies in recent years and set Seibu in context. As the implementation of equal opportunity policies in Japanese companies is a very recent phenomenon, no previous study has been conducted in this area. It is therefore necessary to collect direct empirical evidence from as wide an angle as possible, piecing the information together in a systematic way and trying to arrive at some improved understanding of the complex and evolving situation. The methodological approach is mainly inductive.

The data and analysis introduced in this thesis represent a comprehensive and varied approach. The reader will be exposed to macro- and micro-analysis, case study method, analysis of secondary surveys and policy evaluations. Given the nature of the problems we intend to explore in this study, the adoption of a multi-method approach is crucial. It improves the validity of our interpretation and analysis. By examining the issues through a variety of data sources, one can gain a more balanced and in-depth understanding of the complex reality.

## V. OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

This thesis consists of twelve chapters. The present chapter defines the nature of the problems to be pursued, describes the approaches adopted in the research and summarises the main points of the study. Chapter two gives a brief historical overview of women's employment in Japan, focussing on the development over the last three decades.

Chapter three provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. It reviews two major schools of labour market theories, the neo-classical and the institutional, explaining the sources of sexual inequality and discrimination. The neo-classical theories provide a limited and simplistic explanation on labour market inequality and discrimination. In comparison, the institutional school provides a more useful framework for analysing the process and mechanisms of labour market discrimination. Its greatest strength, especially that of the internal labour market theory, is that it examines in much greater detail the organisational rules and practices and explains how these rules operate to exclude certain groups of workers. More importantly, the institutional school gives a powerful insight into the persistence of discrimination, which the neo-classical theories fail to explain. The chapter also discusses briefly some contemporary feminist analyses of sexual divisions in employment to overcome the limitations of economic theories in dealing with the specificity of women's labour market situation. The final part of the chapter discusses the concept of 'institutional discrimination' and looks at how the development of equal opportunity thinking has led to a shift in the legal definition of 'employment discrimination', with special reference to the experience in the United States.

Chapter four analyses the role of women workers in the Japanese employment system and examines the extent of labour market inequality. The main objective is to give a cross sectional view of the role played by women workers in the Japanese employment system and to explain how the special nature of the Japanese employment system is supported by personnel practices which discriminate against the majority of women.

The spotlight then turns on the changing situation in Japan since the mid-1970s. Chapter five focusses on the 10-year-period before the enactment of the EEO Law. The purpose is to examine why some major companies started to introduce personnel management reforms in order better to utilise the abilities of women. The chapter identifies the main source of change, before the introduction of the EEO Law, as lying in the changing labour market and business environment facing the major companies. Our analysis shows that companies have sought to use women to overcome skill shortages and organisational manpower problems without altering the fundamental organisational rules and procedures which operate to allocate men and women into separate career tracks.

In May 1985, the Japanese government passed the EEO Law which came into force in April 1986. Chapter six analyses the nature and contents of the EEO Law. It examines why the EEO Law came out the way it did and the extent to which it is meant to be 'an instrument of social change'. The remaining chapters examine whether the legislation has made any difference to companies' personnel policies on women and whether there is any evidence showing that the shift in the companies' personnel policies will bring about a fundamental change in the nature of the Japanese employment system and lead to more equal employment opportunities for women. These questions were tested by using macro-level data based on numerous surveys and reports published in Japan over the three years after the EEO Law was introduced and by a detailed case study conducted at Seibu.

Chapter seven presents an analysis and evaluation of employers' policy responses to the law by looking at three major nation-wide surveys. In terms of reducing the number of 'worst practice' companies, by removing the most obvious forms of direct discrimination against women, the legislation can be said to have some effects. However, there is little evidence that companies have taken more positive steps to initiate changes in their personnel management procedures, especially with regard to job assignment and promotion, apart from adopting a passive policy of equal treatment.

Chapters eight to ten present the detailed case study conducted at Seibu Department Stores, before and after the introduction of the legislation. Seibu is treated as a 'critical case'. This is because it is a company in which, positive changes are more likely to occur than elsewhere because of the nature of its management philosophy, the type of business, and the importance of women both as employees and customers to its successful operation. The research methods used and the quality of the data obtained are discussed in chapter eight. Chapter nine examines the changes in the company's employment policies and personnel practices on women. It looks at the situation before and after the introduction of the EEO Law. Chapter ten examines the shifts in the position and status of women by comparing their situation in 1984 to that of 1988 and evaluates whether the policy changes are leading to better career opportunities for women. It also examines whether the equality debates and the enactment of the EEO Law have raised women's career aspirations and expectations. The evidence does not indicate much improvement in terms of women gaining more senior positions or the lessening of overall discrimination against women in the promotion process. There is also little evidence that the expectations and aspirations of Seibu women have gone up over the period studied. The company's increased utilisation of women as non-regular contract employees suggests that the career outlook for the majority of women working at Seibu is not good.

Why has there been so little improvement in the provision of equal opportunities for women over the past decade, despite the social and economic changes and despite the EEO Law? Chapter 11 identifies the obstacles and constraints that limit equal opportunities for women in Japanese companies. It argues that management's continued attachment to the 'traditional' employment practices, especially the 'lifetime commitment' practice, for their core (predominantly male) employees, presents the greatest obstacle to the introduction of equal opportunities policies for women. The present EEO law has not undermined the mechanisms which perpetuate sexual job segregation in the employment system. The model of equal opportunity as enshrined in the law accepts the persistence of the structural and institutional factors which

contribute to women's unequal position in the labour market. It appears that any equality effects the recent changes in company policies might have on a small number of 'elite women' might, in the long-run, be swamped by other opposing forces which are working against equal opportunities for women. The broader context of state policies on women, both in the economic and social spheres, have not been pushing towards the direction of sexual equality. Recent developments in the government's labour and social policies have reinforced the utilisation of women as a secondary workforce.

This study shows the depth of the resistance to change in the core employment practices governing the internal labour markets in the Japanese employment system. It also cautions against too high expectation of commercially-induced, management-initiated change programmes in bringing about true equal opportunities for women. Our findings seem to indicate that if the present labour market trends continue, it is unlikely that there will be a major shift towards equal employment for Japanese women. The impetus for further change has to come from greater policy interventions from outside the enterprise. We conclude the thesis by pointing out that unless there are stronger political pressures from Japanese women themselves to campaign for more active state intervention in both the economic and social spheres, the future of equal employment for women is unlikely to progress beyond its present limit. In the final chapter, the author speculates the future prospects for further change and puts forward a number of practical policy suggestions.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Up until the present, studies of the Japanese employment and management systems have been predominantly 'male-oriented'. Women have almost absent from most of the literature in these subject areas. For students who are interested in women's employment issues in contemporary Japan, it can be an extremely frustrating experience to find that the best classic studies on the Japanese employment system dealt specifically with male workers. For example, R. Dore's British Factory-Japanese Factory (1973) dealt with male workers in two Japanese electrical factories. R Cole's Japanese Blue Collar: The Changing Tradition (1971) and his more recent publication Work, Mobility and Participation (1979) also dealt with male workers only. R Clark's The Japanese Company (1979) mentions women workers only very briefly on 15 different pages in his 282-paged book. The lack of up-to-date information on the fast changing role of women workers in the Japanese economy means that western perception and understanding of the role of Japanese women workers tends to be embedded in traditional stereotypes and antiquated images. One typical example is Brian Moeran's recent article 'Yenjoy Girls and Hobbysiness Wives: The Role of Women in the Japanese Economy' in the Anglo-Japanese Economic Journal (July-Sept 1988, Vol 2, No 2) which is based on an anthropologist's interpretation of the traditional role and images of women without taking notice of the dramatic changes in contemporary Japan. It is hoped that the author's present thesis will help fill in this knowledge gap.

2. The labour force participation rate of Japanese women was higher than that of France (44.3 per cent, 1985), West Germany (41.7 per cent, 1985), and Italy (34.4 per cent, 1986), ILO, Year Book of Labour Statistics

3. For example, in Britain, the seniority practice was identified as unlawful in the case of Steel v. Union of Post Office Workers. Further, in the Leeds Permanent Building Society formal investigation case, the Equal Opportunities Commission states that 'the Society might in the future act unlawfully if it believed that seniority was a justifiable criterion for promotion when this would have had a disproportionate impact on women...', Formal Investigation Report: Leeds Permanent Building Society, Equal Opportunities Commission, February, 1985, pp. 47.

## CHAPTER 2

### A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN JAPAN

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, Japanese women's labour force participation rate has been consistently high and so has their share in the total labour force. In 1920 when the first nation-wide population census was carried out, the women's labour force participation rate was 53.3 per cent, 5 per cent higher than the rate in 1980. The high participation rate of Japanese women before World War II was essentially due to the fact that a high proportion was engaged in agriculture, mostly in small size family farming as unpaid family workers. The sectoral distribution of the labour force in Table 2.1 shows that in 1920, 62 per cent of the female workforce was in agriculture. It was only in 1960 that the proportion of women working in the agricultural sector fell below 50 per cent. In terms of their occupational status, over 50 per cent of Japanese women workers were still engaged as unpaid family workers in the mid-1950s. It was only until after the late 1960s that more than half of the women workers were engaged as paid employees in the modern sector (see, Table 2.4).

Table 2.1

## Distribution of the Labour Force By Sector (1920-1985)

Year	Total labour force				Female labour force			
	Primary %	Secondary %	Tertiary %	Total No. (million)	Primary %	Secondary %	Tertiary %	Total No. (million)
1920	53.6%	20.8%	25.7%	27.3	62.4%	16.3%	21.3%	10.3
1950	47.0	21.3	29.8	35.6	61.2	13.2	25.6	13.9
1960	32.6	29.2	38.2	43.7	43.1	20.2	36.7	17.1
1970	19.4	34.0	46.6	52.1	26.2	26.0	47.8	20.3
1980	10.4	34.8	54.6	55.3	13.2	28.2	58.4	21.4
1985	8.8	34.3	56.5	58.0	10.6	28.3	60.8	23.0

Source: For 1920-1970, Kokusei Chosa (Population Census). For 1980 and 1985, Rodoryoku Chosa (Labour Force Survey), Somucho Tokei-gyoku (Bureau of Statistics), The Prime Minister's Office.

However, Japanese women's entry into wage employment started in the early Meiji period and they constituted a much larger share of the industrial workforce than men during the first phase of industrialisation (1894-1913). In this chapter, we shall first examine the main characteristics of women's wage employment before World War II. The main focus is on the 'dekasegi-gata' female textile worker which was the major form of female employment before World War II. The textile industry, the core industry in Japan during the first phase of industrialisation, employed a large number of women workers from the rural areas. Female textile workers represented the first widespread category of wage employment in Japan, and they remained a major group in the industrial workforce until the 1930s. During the inter-war period (1914-1937), some Japanese women began to enter clerical jobs but their number was rather small. In 1920, of the 4 million women in gainful employment, only 500,000 (12.5 per cent) were employed in offices.

Males dominated clerical jobs, females accounted for a mere 6.5 per cent in 1930. Thus one can say that the predominant form of female employment before World War II was in unskilled blue-collar jobs in the low-paying textile industry. The nature of women's wage employment before World War II is worth special note because many characteristics of female employment observed during that period have in fact persisted into contemporary Japan though in a different form, despite the dramatic changes in women's employment pattern.

The chapter then examines briefly women's work experience during World War II and the period of democratisation in the immediate postwar years. The new constitution and the enactment of new labour legislation has helped promote the social and legal status of women in postwar Japan.

The spotlight then turns on to development in contemporary Japan. The most dramatic change in the pattern of women's employment has occurred over the last three decades. Rapid economic growth since the mid-1950s has brought about a tremendous increase in the number of women employees. After the mid-1970s the industrial structure shifted from that of manufacture-based to one that is based on service, information and high technology. This has brought about a dramatic shift in the industrial and occupational distribution of women workers.

The final part of this chapter asks whether rapid economic development in Japan has improved the position and status of women workers to a level comparable to that of their counterparts in the western industrialised countries. The question is answered by looking at some recent international comparative data.

## II. WOMEN'S WAGE EMPLOYMENT BEFORE WORLD WAR II

### 1. The Origin of Wage Employment in Japan: The 'Dekasegi-Gata' Female Textile Worker

The appearance of female wage workers in modern factories dated from the beginning of the Meiji era in 1868. The Meiji government initiated the first phase of industrialisation by building several model factories, first in the textile industry, and sold them later to private capital. The first large modern silk-reeling factory was established in 1872 at Tomioka in Gunma Prefecture. As many advanced countries experienced in the early phase of industrialisation, the textile industry was the core industry until the heavy industry developed rapidly after the 1910s. In 1900, less than half a million workers were employed in factories, about 1 per cent of Japan's total population at that time, and 4,150 of the 7,171 industrial enterprises in the country were in the textile sector (Halliday, 1975, p.57). The textile industry still accounted for over half of all factory employees as late as 1929. During the initial phase of industrialisation, there were more female than male workers. In 1909, women comprised about 62 per cent of all factory workers and they comprised 86 per cent of the workforce in the textile industry (Takenaka, 1983, p.47). These figures indicate the importance of the role of women workers in the initial stage of industrialisation. The importance of women in total wage employment in manufacturing lasted until 1930, when heavy industries had hired more workers, mainly men, than the textile industry.

The majority of female workers in the textile mills were daughters of poor farm families who worked in the factories away from home for a few years before they returned to marry in their villages. Most of them were forced to work in the factories by their elders in the family in order to help the family finances. Their wages were used to supplement the family income. Okouchi(1959) described this type of workers as 'dekasegi-gata chinrodo' (household-supplementary type labour migration).

These female textile workers were usually recruited by professional recruiters hired by the factories. The contracts were essentially made with fathers or brothers of the families who received money advanced against wages to be earned by the daughters during the contracted period. It was in effect a trading of human beings. The system gradually disappeared in the early twentieth century, but for a long time when a young woman became a factory worker the decision was similar to that of selling herself into prostitution, as the social status was nearly as low (Hazama, 1976, p.30).

The working conditions of the female textile workers were extremely bad.<sup>1</sup> They worked exceedingly long hours for extremely low wages. Not only were the wages very low, but the factories had total control over when and how they were paid. As a common practice was for the families of the girls to receive one-half or one-third of the total wages for the contract period in the form of a loan when the girls signed up for employment and the remainder would be paid at the end of the contract period, the girls received nothing while they were working except for food, clothing and occasional pocket money on holidays or special occasions. The majority of the female workers were housed in dormitories and lived under the entire control of the factories. Women workers during this period had no independence. The working conditions was so poor that many girls quitted by running away. The turnover rate of these workers was extremely high. The majority of them worked no more than two years. Saxonhouse (1976, p.100-101) described the Japanese textile industry's labour force as 'the most female and the most transient' in international comparison.

Okouchi's 'dekasegi-gata chinrodo' theory is of great importance in explaining the nature of wage employment during the early phase of industrialisation in Japan and the reasons for the extremely low pay and poor working conditions. During the Industrial Revolution in Europe the labour force for the new industries was mainly supplied by surplus workers from the rural areas, who either migrated voluntarily to the cities or were forced to do so by the enclosure movement. Japan, however, embarked on industrialisation at a period when the peasant was

still closely tied to the land. The Japanese economy at the time of the Meiji Restoration was predominantly agrarian. At that time, three-quarters of the labour force was engaged in agriculture, mainly small scale family farming. The land tax reform introduced by the Meiji Government in 1873, which replaced tax-in-kind by tax-in-cash at high rates on the basis of land values, imposed severe hardship on the lives of the farmers. Some small peasants were ruined and deserted the land permanently. However, the majority stayed on as tenant farmers. In order to alleviate the economic hardships of the families, second and third sons and daughters of peasants became wage employees, while the first son inherited the farm. Some farmers became 'dekasegi' (short-term migrants who returned to their farms after years of work outside).<sup>2</sup> Thus one distinctive characteristic feature of the origin of wage workers in Japan lies in their strong ties with agriculture.

In most industrialised countries during the initial phase of industrialisation, the textile industry employed large numbers of young women at low wages. However, an international comparison indicates the exceptionally high proportion of women among factory workers in Japan during the early phase of industrialisation. This was particularly true in the case of the textile industry (see, Tables 2.2 and 2.3).

**Table 2.2**  
**Proportion of Women among Factory Workers**  
**(in percent)**

Japan		France		United States	
1909	62.0	1866	42.7	1870	24.0
1920	53.0	1881	38.3	1880	28.8
1930	52.6	1901	31.5	1900	32.6
		1921	31.6	1920	24.2
Belgium		India		Italy	
1890	24.6	1911	17.4	1901	37.4
1900	23.9	1921	17.5	1911	46.2
1920	25.0				
1930	20.9				

Source: Adapted from Saxonhouse (1976), p.99.

**Table 2.3**  
**Women as a Percentage of the Cotton Textile Labour Force**  
**(in percent)**

Japan		United States		United Kingdom	
1909	83.0	1830	66.0	1835	55.1
1914	83.3	1850	63.0	1847	58.7
1920	80.0	1890	54.5	1867	61.3
1925	80.6	1910	48.3	1878	62.7
1930	80.6	1919	42.4	1895	62.3
India		France			
1884	22.5	1886	53.0		
1894	25.9	1896	50.0		
1909	22.1	1906	45.5		
1924	21.6				
1934	18.9				

Source: Adapted from Saxonhouse (1976), p.100.



Cole and Tominaga (1976) pointed out that the leading role played by light industry, especially silk and cotton spinning, was the principal reason why the core of the early industrial labour force was female. Moreover, on the supply side, agricultural households at that time could not afford to allow their workforce, other than unmarried females, to flow out of the villages. Although many of the second and third sons who would not inherit any land did leave their native village every year, it was predominantly the females became the labour force in the early industries, because they represented those members of rural farm families not expected to serve as permanent members of the family .

One question which follows is why did not the high participation of women in industrial work in pre-World War II Japan lead to their economic independence. In both Britain and the United States, the experiences of the 'working girl' in the textile industry did eventually lead to increasing economic independence of women and their freedom as individual wage earners. The picture of the 'working girl' in the United States as described by Matthaei (1983, p.153) was quite different from the 'dekasegi-gata' female textile workers in Japan:

'While most daughters entered the labor force as dependent and selfless children serving the needs of their families, their experiences in the labor force gave them a degree of independence and freedom as yet unknown to women....As a wage laborer a girl was employed by a firm which paid her money that was her own (unless the contract had been drawn between her father and the employer). She had at least some say over how this income was spent, some latitude to use it to fill her needs. Furthermore, her employer no longer automatically provided her with lodgings; if she did not live at home, she used her wages to live on her own. Finally, working as a wage laborer provided a woman with an individual public existence, a public identity of her own. These ingredients made the working girl more than a simple continuation of the family economy experience of daughtering; they made it an experience which developed a woman's individuality during her unmarried, adolescent life.'

Similarly, in Britain, Pinchbeck (1930, p.313) pointed out that the most striking effect of the Industrial Revolution on the single working woman was her distinct gain in social and economic independence through the earning of an individual wage. In the case of Japan, women wage

workers were not able to gain economic independence before World War II despite their high participation in the industrial workforce. Their strong ties with the rural family and their subservience to the patriarchal family system<sup>3</sup> precluded the possibility for them to establish themselves as individual workers in the urban areas. Unlike the European countries where industrialisation led to the disintegration of patriarchy, the patriarchal family system in Japan, prescribed in the Meiji Civil Code(1898), persisted until the end of World War II. The patriarchal family system supported the early formation of capitalism in Japan and women workers were exploited by both systems (Kobayashi, 1976, p.74).

### **III. THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II AND THE DEMOCRATISATION POLICIES INTRODUCED AFTER THE WAR**

As elsewhere, Japanese women were mobilised to take part in a wide range of economic activities during the war period when men were recruited to the army. However, the impact of the war economy on the work experience of Japanese women was not as great as that in the European countries. This was partly because Japan did not have the history of relying on the female labour force during World War I, and partly because the government's effort in mobilising the female workforce was delayed during World War II. Despite the need to rely on the female workforce, the government's attitude towards mobilisation of women was rather ambivalent. There was strong concern that women's participation in the labour force might lead to a reduction of the population. The government issued a national mobilisation directive early in 1938, but the final decision to mobilise women did not come into effect until as late as the autumn of 1943. By that time, there was already the problem of a shortage of raw materials and the productive capacity of the economy was declining. During the brief period when women took part in the war economy, they continued to be treated as an auxiliary labour force. The policy statements issued by the government at that time specified that women were to be used only

for 'simple and easy work', for 'light handwork calling for dexterity', and 'as semi-skilled or unskilled workers' (Akamatsu, 1977, p.33-5).

The greatest impact of the war on Japanese women was not so much their direct work experience during the war but more of the postwar reforms imposed by the Allied Occupation which lasted from 1945 until 1952.

Immediately after the defeat of Japan, the Occupation, under General MacArthur as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), undertook five major reforms. The first on the list of his reforms was the granting of suffrage to women. Other major reforms included unionisation of labour, introduction of a liberal education system, abolition of inquisition and abuse by the police system, and democratisation of economic institutions.

The sweeping reforms carried out by MacArthur brought about phenomenal changes in the legal status of Japanese women. For the first time in history, women were granted equal rights with men under the new constitution of 1946. The constitution declared equality of all people before the law. Article 14 of the constitution prohibited discrimination in political, economic and social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin. Article 24 stipulated equality of the sexes in family life. Based on this principle of equality between the sexes, the Family Law of the prewar period which was based on patriarchy was abolished. The new family law put an end, at least in formal legal terms, to women's centuries-old subjugation to the male head of the family. In the field of employment, the Labour Standards Law of 1947 provided for equal pay for equal work and granted women a series of protective measures in the areas of working hours, night-work, underground work, menstruation leave, maternity leave, holidays, and restrictions on dangerous work. The labour standards provided by the new legislation could be said to be one of the most advanced in the world at that time. In some instances, it was even said that the Occupation managed to inject more progressive provisions into the new Japanese system than existed in the United States. For example, equal pay for equal work legislation did not

become law in the United States until 1963 (Robins-Mowry, 1983, p.100). Pharr (1981. p.29) describes the changes as the 'world's greatest experiment with feminism outside a revolutionary context'.

Postwar experience suggests that 'externally imposed' changes took a longer time period to take root. It was not until the late 1960s that some women workers began to challenge their employers' discriminatory employment practices through the courts by using the equal rights provided to them in the constitution and the Labour Standards Law (see, chapter 6, section I-3). This historical fact indicates that 'given rights' can only be translated into 'practical power' when the intended beneficiaries are in a position to utilise them effectively.

#### **IV. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CHANGES IN WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN**

After the Korean War (1950) which gave an impetus for the economic recovery of the country from the defeat in World War II, the Japanese economy entered an era of rapid economic growth. During the period of economic miracle which lasted from the mid-1950s to 1973, real annual economic growth rate achieved an average of 9.8 per cent. This period was characterised by heavy capital investment in the private sector and rapid automation of production system. Rapid decline of the primary industry was offset by the rise in secondary industry and later after the mid-1960s a further decline in primary industry's share of the national product was taken up by a corresponding boost in tertiary industry's share. The major industries which achieved rapid development during the period of high economic growth included iron and steel, electrical power, shipbuilding, petroleum and chemicals, electrical machinery and automobiles. In terms of value-added productivity, heavy chemical industries accounted for 63.5 per cent in the manufacturing sector and manufacturing industries accounted for 33 per cent of value-added productivity of all industries in the year 1970.

The Japanese economy continued to enjoy high growth until the recession triggered by the oil crisis in 1973. After the oil crisis, the economy entered a new phase of moderate economic growth, the annual average real growth rate in between 1974 and 1979 was 4.1 per cent. Against this background of moderate growth, the Japanese economic structure entered a new phase of transformation. The manufacturing industry which had dominated the employment scene during the period of high growth declined in importance as a major employer, and in its place the rise of the tertiary industry has been striking. Since the mid-1970s, the Japanese economy has been characterised by the rapid growth of service, information and high-technology industries.

Throughout the period of rapid economic expansion from the mid-1960s until the early 1970s, the Japanese labour market was characterised by continuous demand for additional labour supply. Women have provided an important source of additional labour supply. The problem of labour shortage was particularly severe after the mid-1960s. In response to the situation, employers changed their traditional employment policies by encouraging housewives to join the labour force. During the 1960s, automation of production systems changed most of the jobs done by skilled workers into simple repetitive tasks. A large number of women were employed as unskilled production process workers. Since the 1970s, expansion of the tertiary sector created a great number of clerical jobs which expanded the employment opportunities for women.

Changes on the demand side, along with changes on the supply side such as automation and reduction of household work, decline in the birth rate, changing attitudes towards work as a result of higher education and an increased aspiration for greater consumption in Japanese families brought about dramatic changes in women's employment pattern. The following pages examine the most significant changes over the last three decades by looking at some important statistics:

## 1. Growth in the Number of Women Employees

Over the three decades between 1955 and 1985, the number of female employees increased by three times from 5.3 million in 1955 to 15.4 million in 1985. In between the same period, male employees increased from 16.3 million to 27.6 million. The average annual rate of increase of female employees has been above that of the male employees. In 1955, women constituted 26.0 per cent of the total number of employees, the figure rose to 35.9 per cent in 1985. The greatest increase in the number of female employees was in between 1965 and 1970. During this period women contributed 30 to 40 per cent of the total increase of the employed labour force. After the oil crisis in 1973, the number of female employees was reduced by 0.2 million as a result of being laid off during the recession. However, this trend was rapidly reversed by the recovery after 1975. The female labour force continued to expand at a faster rate than for males. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of female employees increased by 3.2 million, one million more than the increase in the number of male employees.

**Table 2.4**  
**Number and Proportion of Women Workers By Work Status**  
(unit: 10,000 persons)

Year	Total	Self-employed	Unpaid family worker	Paid employees
1955	1,700 (100.0%)	267 (15.7%)	902 (53.1%)	531 (31.2%)
1960	1,807 (100.0 )	285 (15.8 )	784 (43.4 )	738 (40.8 )
1965	1,878 (100.0 )	273 (14.5 )	692 (36.8 )	913 (48.6 )
1970	2,003 (100.0 )	285 (14.2 )	619 (30.9 )	1,096 (54.7 )
1975	1,953 (100.0 )	280 (14.3 )	501 (25.7 )	1,167 (59.8 )
1980	2,142 (100.0 )	293 (13.7 )	491 (23.0 )	1,354 (63.2 )
1985	2,304 (100.0 )	288 (12.5 )	461 (20.0 )	1,548 (67.2 )

Source: The Ministry of Labour, Fujin Rodo No Jitsujo, (Report on Female Workers), 1960 and 1986.

In contrast to the upsurge in the number of women working as employees (wage earners), the number of women working as unpaid family workers almost halved from 9 million in 1955 to 4.5 million in 1985, while the number of self-employed rose only slightly. As a result, the proportion of women working as employees to the total economically active female population rose from 31.2 per cent in 1955 to 48.6 per cent in 1965 and further up to 67.2 in 1985. This shift in the work status of women from unpaid family workers in the traditional sector to wage earners in the modern sector was a result of rapid industrialisation in the postwar years, especially between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s. Kobayashi (1976, p.74) points out that such a dramatic shift in the female employment structure, and notably the rapid decline in the number of family workers, has weakened the foundation of the patriarchal value system.

## **2. Changes in Industrial and Occupational Distribution**

With the rapid decline of the primary industry since the 1950s, agricultural and forestry workers have continued their drift into secondary and tertiary industries. Since the 1960s, the great increase of female workers has been concentrated in manufacturing, wholesale, retail, finance and service sectors. In particular, the manufacturing sector absorbed a large number of women during the period of high economic growth. Within the manufacturing sector, the textile industry which was the traditional employer of a large number of women, declined rapidly after the 1950s. Instead electrical machinery and metal industries became the dominant sectors employing a large number of women as unskilled production workers. After the oil crisis in 1973, the manufacturing sector showed signs of stagnation and the number of workers in this sector has declined in relative terms. In contrast, female employment in the tertiary sector expanded rapidly after the 1970s. In particular, the large entry of women into wholesale, retail, finance and services stands out.

**Table 2.5**  
**Female Employees By Industry**

Industry	Percentage distribution			Share of women against total		
	1960	1970	1985	1960	1970	1985
Agriculture & forestry	5.0	0.9	0.6	39.4	34.5	32.1
Fisheries & aquaculture	0.4	0.2	0.2	11.5	11.1	20.0
Mining	0.5	0.2	0.1	9.5	11.1	12.5
Construction	3.9	4.1	3.6	14.7	14.8	13.8
Manufacturing	36.4	35.6	28.1	33.7	34.1	35.2
Wholesale, retail finance, insurance, & real estate	22.5	28.7	32.2	37.0	43.0	45.2
Transport, communications, electricity, gas & water supply	3.5	3.9	2.9	11.2	12.7	12.6
Services	24.7	24.2	30.0	46.9	47.5	49.4
Government	3.1	2.3	2.3	16.2	15.5	17.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>31.1%</b>	<b>33.2%</b>	<b>35.9%</b>
(Number, in 10,000)	(738)	(1,096)	(1,548)			

Source: The Ministry of Labour, Fujin Rodo No Jitsujo (Report on Female Workers), 1986.



The changes in women's employment structure can also be indicated by the shift in their occupational distribution. During the 1960s, when manufacturing industry was expanding rapidly, a high proportion of women worked as 'craft and production process' workers or labourers in the factories. In 1960, they constituted 35.9 per cent of all female employees. Clerical workers were the second largest category in the 1960s. After 1973, the increase of production process workers slowed down while clerical jobs expanded rapidly. Since then clerical jobs have been the major female occupation. In 1985, 32.8 per cent of women workers were in clerical jobs. This was followed by 'craft and production process' workers and labourers; together they constituted 27.8 per cent of female employment. The third largest category was professional and technical jobs. The increase in the number of women in professional and technical jobs has been most remarkable since the 1970s, the number doubled from 1 million in 1970 to 2.1 million in 1985. There was marked increase in the number of sales employees as the Japanese economy entered a period of high consumption and the number of department stores and retail shops increased dramatically. The rapid expansion of women in white-collar jobs reflects both the change in industrial structure as well as the rise in the educational level of women. In between 1955 and 1985, women's advancement rate to higher education (including 2-year junior college and 4-year university) increased from 5.0 per cent to 34.5 per cent; while that of men rose from 15 per cent to 40.6 per cent. The education gap between men and women has narrowed considerably over the past three decades.

**Table 2.6**  
**Females Employees By Occupation**

Occupation	Percentage distribution			Share of women against total		
	1960	1970	1985	1960	1970	1985
Professional & technical workers	9.0	9.1	13.6	33.3	40.7	46.8
Managers & officials	0.3	0.5	0.9	2.5	3.8	6.8
Clerical & related workers	25.4	30.9	32.8	35.9	46.9	53.1
Sales workers	8.7	10.2	11.8	34.7	32.6	31.5
Farmers, lumbermen & fishermen	3.6	0.9	0.6	32.9	23.8	26.3
Mining & quarrying	0.3	0.1	0.0	5.7	10.0	0.0
Transport & communication	0.7	2.0	0.7	5.3	10.1	5.2
Craftsmen & production process workers	35.9	26.6	22.7	26.9	25.9	26.7
Laborers		6.0	5.6		33.2	42.2
Service workers	16.1	13.7	11.2	54.8	56.2	50.9
Total (Number, in 10,000)	100.0% (738)	100.0% (1,096)	100.0% (1,548)	31.1%	33.2%	35.9%

Source: The Ministry of Labour, Fujin Rodo No Jitsujo (Report on Female Workers), 1986.

### 3. Increased Participation of Married Women

Another important feature in the development of women's employment pattern since the 1960s has been the increased participation of middle-aged married women.

Up to the mid-1960s, fresh school leavers and former family workers were the major source of labour supply. With the rapid advancement of women to higher education and the absolute decline in the number of family workers, the additional increase of the female workforce after the mid-1960s came from housewives. The Japanese economy faced the problem of severe shortage of labour after the mid-1960s. Economic necessity pushed the companies to depart from the traditional practice of limiting their recruitment to fresh school leavers. Since the mid-1960s more and more companies started to recruit mid-career entrants, in particular, middle-aged women were encouraged to enter the labour force as part-time workers. The part-time employment system (see, below) was introduced at that time to attract more housewives to engage in employment.

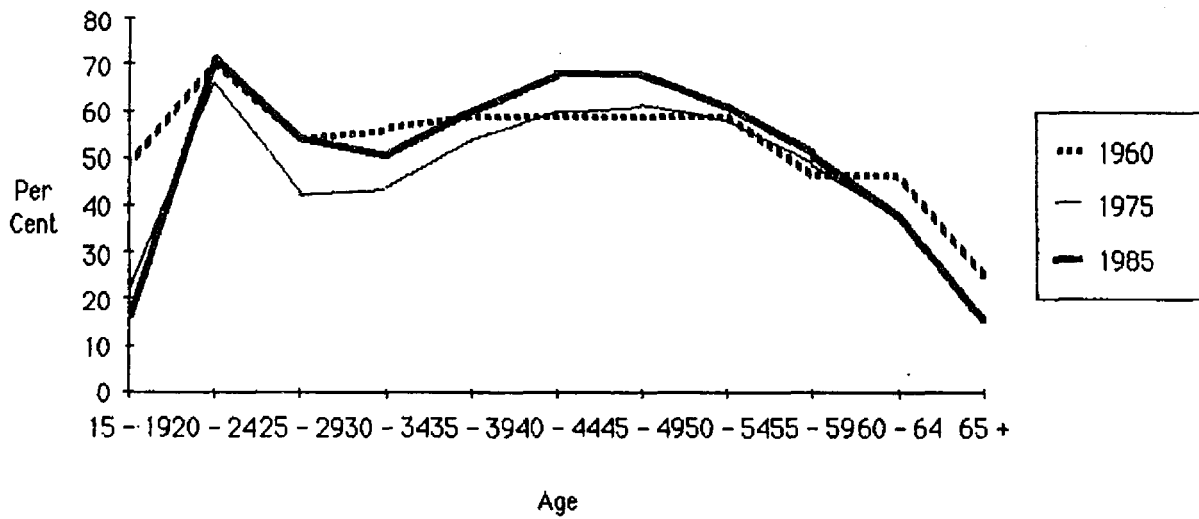
The increased entry of married women into paid employment is manifested in the compositional shift of women employees by marital status. In 1955, the proportion of those who were married was 20 per cent, it rose to 51.5 per cent in 1975 and further up to 59.2 per cent in 1985. If both the divorced and the widowed were included, the proportion reached 69 per cent in 1985, constituting about two-thirds of women employees. The average age of women employees also crept up from 26.3 years in 1960 to 35.4 years in 1985. Thus, the dominant group of women employees shifted from the young unmarried to that of the middle-aged and married.

A breakdown of women's labour force participation rate by age groups shows some important changes over time (Fig. 2.1). In 1960, women's labour force participation rate showed a mountain shape with the 15-24 age group at its summit. By 1975, it changes into a 'M-shape' (bi-modal pattern) with two peaks, in the 20-24 and 45-49 age groups, and with the

25-34 age group at the bottom, indicating women's withdrawal from the labour market at their marriage and child rearing ages. Four major changes of women's labour force participation pattern have occurred over time: (1) The participation rate of women under 20 has dropped due to their advancement to higher education. (b) The rate for the 20-24 age group increased. (c) The rate for the period of marriage and child-rearing age 25-34 declined, and (d) the rate for the middle-age group has increased and attained a peak for the age group 40-50.

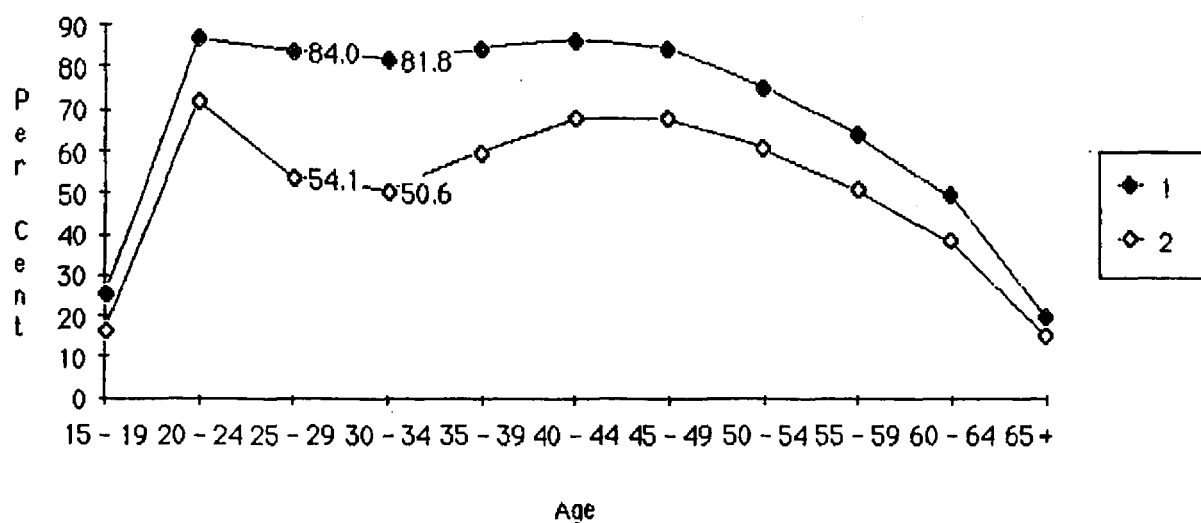
The fall in participation for the 25-34 age group is related to the decline in agriculture and family enterprises. In farming, shopkeeping or family enterprises, the workplace is not distinctively separated from the household, so women were able to continue to work after marriage or child birth, whereas wage employment tends to make it difficult for women to maintain a dual role as housewives and employees at the same time. In recent years, however, a new trend is taking place, the great fall in the rate at age 25-34 is becoming smaller. This is related to the changes in women's attitudes to work as a result of higher education and the growing economic pressure for women to engage in wage employment in order to supplement the household income. Many analysts point out the involuntary character of the reduced participation rate of women in the marriage and child-rearing age groups (Yashiro, 1983, p.27; Takeishi, 1987, p.37). Survey evidence shows that a high proportion of the non-job holders in this age group wish to work (Survey on employment structure, 1982). Fig. 2.2 shows that the 'M-shape' labour force participation pattern disappears when the proportion of those who wish to work is added to the labour force participation rate. This means that if more social services such as child-care facilities were available, more women in the 25-34 age group would go out to work.

**Figure 2.1 Women's Labour Force Participation 1960-85**



Source: Rodoryoku-chosa (Labour Force Survey),  
 Somucho Tokeigyoku (Bureau of Statistics, The Prime  
 Minister's Office)

Figure 2.2. Women's Labour Force Participation and proportion of non-job holders wishing to work, 1985



1 = Proportion of non-job holder wishing to work plus labour force participation

2 = Labour force participation 1985

Sources: Labour force participation from Rodoryoku-chosa (Labour Force Survey); proportion of non-job holders wishing to work from Shugyo Kozō Gihon Chosa (Survey on Employment Structure, 1982), Somucho Tokeigyoku (Bureau of Statistics, The Prime Minister's Office).

#### 4. Growth in 'Part-Time' Employment

Closely related to the phenomenon of the increased participation of middle-aged women since the 1960s has been the rapid growth of 'part-time' employment. The number of female part-time workers (defined as those working less than 35 hours per week in the Labour Force Survey, Prime Minister's Office) increased from 0.5 million in 1960 to 1.9 million in 1975 and further increased to 3.6 million in 1987 (Table 2.7). In 1960, part-time employment accounted for 8.9 per cent of the total number of women employed; in 1987 they constituted 23.1 per cent. The growth of part-time employment has been largely a female phenomenon. In 1960, women accounted for 43 per cent of the total number of part-time workers, the proportion rose to 72 per cent in 1987.

**Table 2.7**

**Number and Proportion of Part-time Employees\* (1960-87)**  
(In non-agricultural sector)

(No. of persons in 10,000)

Year	Total			Women		
	All employees No.	Part-time No.	Part-time As % of total employed	All employees No.	Part-time No.	Part-time As % of total employed
1960	2,106	133	6.3%	639	57	8.9%
1965	2,713	168	6.2	851	82	9.6
1970	3,222	216	6.7	1,068	130	12.2
1975	3,556	353	9.9	1,137	198	17.4
1980	3,886	390	10.0	1,323	256	19.3
1985	4,231	471	11.1	1,516	333	22.0
1986	4,296	503	11.7	1,550	352	22.7
1987	4,346	506	11.6	1,581	365	23.1

Source: Rodoryoku Chosa (Labour Force Survey), Somucho Tokei-gyoku (Bureau of Statistics, The Prime Minister's Office).

Note: \*Part-time employees defined as those working less than 35 hours per week.

Part-time jobs have accounted for a large proportion of the increase in female employment since the 1960s. Between 1965 and 1985, total number of female employees increased by 6.6 million, among which 2.5 million were part-time workers, accounting for 38 per cent of the total increase in female employment. Part-time jobs are also predominantly 'middle-aged women's jobs', women in their late 30s and 40s constituting about 60 per cent of the total number of female part-time employees in 1980s

Many factors accounted for women's increased engagement in part-time employment. On the supply side, the extra income to supplement the household expenditure has been one of the most important factors pushing more housewives into the labour market. This trend became more visible after the first oil crisis in 1973. The real increase in household income dropped from an average of 5.8 per cent in between 1965 to 1972 down to 1.3 per cent in between 1975 and 1981 (Yashiro, 1983, p.50). According to a survey by the Ministry of Labour in 1979, 57 per cent of those aged 35-54 replied that the major reason for their engagement in employment was the need for extra income to maintain or improve their standard of living (MOL, 1981, p.187). The Japanese labour market for full-time regular jobs is rather closed. For many of the middle-aged women entering or re-entering the labour market part-time employment is the only option open. Many married women also regard part-time employment as a possible compromise with their domestic responsibilities.

On the demand side, the primary motive for creating part-time jobs has shifted over time. During the period of high economic growth, it was mainly prompted by labour shortage; part-time jobs were created to encourage more housewives to enter the labour market. Since the mid-1970s, reduction of labour cost and the increasing need for a flexible workforce has been the primary reason for employing more women as part-time workers.

The term 'part-timer' has a rather special meaning in Japan. It is a rather ambiguous term. The above Labour Force Survey statistics grossly



underestimate the number of women employed as 'part-timers' as defined by their employers in reality. Many employers simply use the term 'part-timer' to distinguish a worker's employment status (as non-regular employees) from that of the permanent regular employees, whatever their working hours. According to the Survey on Employment Trends (Ministry of Labour), which defines 'part-timers' as those so called by their employers, the total number of 'part-timers' was 4.6 million in 1987, among which 4.4 million were women, constituting 95.3 per cent of total part-time employment. Takanashi (1988) estimates that about one-third of the so-called 'part-timers' actually work exactly the same hours as full-time regular workers, these are described as 'pseudo-part-time workers'. They are, like the 'proper' part-time workers, excluded from the wage structure, long-term employment security and benefits applied to the full-time regular workers.

In addition to part-time employment, there has been a rapid growth of various forms of 'arbeit' workers (temporary and casual workers) in the Japanese labour market in recent years. A high proportion of these are women and they share the common characteristics of low wages and lack of employment stability. Kawashima (1983, p.174-5) describes these women workers as 'household supplementary type labour', a concept used by Okouchi to explain the extreme low wages offered to daughters of poor agricultural households in pre-World War II Japan.

## **V. JAPANESE WOMEN WORKERS IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

The Japanese economy has achieved speedy development over the last three decades. Within a relatively short time, Japan has made herself an economic superpower. The pattern of women's employment has also been transformed dramatically as the Japanese economic structure shifted and labour market demands changed. What consequences has post-World War II economic development and democratisation in the society brought about for Japanese women workers? The major trends and tendencies of Japanese women's participation in employment in contemporary Japan share many similar characteristics with that of other advanced countries. Has

their position and status in the labour market also caught up with that of other advanced countries?

There exists substantial evidence indicating that the position of women workers in contemporary Japan 'lag behind' their counterparts in other advanced countries. Recent statistics and studies in several countries show that women's earnings remain markedly lower than men. However, the wage gap in Japan is the largest and has remained so over the past two decades (Table 2.8). If we compare women's occupational distribution in Japan with that of other advanced countries, one remarkable feature is the small share of Japanese women in high status managerial and administrative jobs. Japanese women constituted only 6.8 per cent (1985) of all administrative and managerial jobs as compared with 38.5 percent (1986) in the United States, 20.1 per cent (1984) in West Germany and 21.4 per cent (1984) in Sweden (ILO, Year Book of Labour Statistics).

A ten-country survey on the attitudes of workers in the electronic and electrical industries shows that Japan has a much lower proportion of women workers believing that they can use their abilities at work (Table 2.9). The survey also shows that Japanese women workers are least satisfied with their working conditions, pay and benefits, equal opportunities and the various aspects of personnel policies such as training, job grading and promotion (Denkiroren, 1985).

**Table 2.8**  
**The Ratio of Female Earnings to Male Earnings, Selected Countries and Years**

Year	Belgium	Denmark	France	Germany	Switzerland	U.K.	U.S.A.	Japan
1965	61.2	71.3	83.1	68.1	61.9	59.5	59.6	52.2
1970	66.7	73.6	86.9	69.2	62.8	60.1	62.3	54.0
1973	68.8	78.9	85.5	70.3	66.5	62.5	62.2	56.3
1975	71.2	83.2	86.6	72.3	66.7	67.6	62.0	56.4
1977	70.0	85.1	86.2	72.7	65.6	71.9	61.9	55.5
1980	69.4	84.5	87.4	72.4	67.3	69.7	63.4	54.5
1981	72.5	84.5	87.6	72.5	68.2	69.5	64.6	54.1
1982	73.6	83.9	88.6	72.7	67.0	69.1	65.0	54.0

Notes: (1) The data refer to full time year round workers or adults working normal hours. (2) The U.S. data in 1965 is annual earnings, the data after 1970 are monthly earnings; other countries are all hourly earnings. (3) The hourly earnings in Japan is calculated by H. Shimada (1983), based on monthly earnings data from the Ministry of Labour, Monthly Labour Survey. (4) The U.S. data represent medians, while the data in other countries represent the weighted average rates (dividing the total wages paid in a given period by total man-hours in the same period).

Sources: ILO, Year Book of Labour Statistics; Handbook of Labour Statistics, U.S.A.; Monthly Labour Survey, Ministry of Labour, Japan.

Table 2.9

A ten country comparison of women workers' responses to the statement "I can use my abilities at work" (in electronic and electrical industries, 1984)

Country	Responses					NA
	Absolutely true	Fairly true	Unclear	Only slightly true	Not at all true	
W. Germany	16%	22%	19%	27%	16	0
France	21	16	8	24	12	20
Hong Kong	14	20	10	29	20	8
Hungary	35	15	25	9	4	12
Italy	30	31	8	13	9	10
Japan	3	30	39	19	8	2
Sweden	25	28	11	13	13	11
Britain	22	23	13	15	23	5
Yugoslavia	31	32	1	14	5	17
Poland	21	16	37	7	4	16

Source: Compiled from Chosa Jiho (Survey report), No.204. December 1985, Denkioren (Japan Federation of Electrical Machine Workers' Unions), Tokyo.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

A popular viewpoint adopted by many foreign scholars in interpreting the inferior position of Japanese women in contemporary Japan is the 'cultural persistence' hypothesis: that as 'late-comers' to the industrial world, Japanese women are still inhibited by many traditional values and norms and are slow in developing their occupational consciousness, when compared to their counterparts in other advanced countries. Japan is often cited as a special case among the advanced industrialised countries in the sense that rapid economic development has not eroded traditional norms and expectations regarding the sex roles.

To what extent can one interpret the relatively low status of women workers in contemporary Japan as a phenomenon of 'cultural lag', or as a 'carry-over' of the past into the present?

It is undeniable that Japanese women's employment experience during the first phase of industrialisation was rather unique. Their strong ties with the rural families and subjugation to the patriarchal family system precluded the possibility for them to develop their economic independence, despite their high participation in the country's core industry for a period of over fifty years. Employers' utilisation of the young women from the rural areas as a low-cost transient workforce in unskilled jobs meant that these women were never offered any opportunities to upgrade their skills and develop into a stable industrial workforce during the 50-year-period when they constituted the major workforce in the textile industry. Further, Japanese women's industrial work experience during World War II was not as widespread as that of their counterparts in many European countries. The impact of the war economy on Japanese women's acquisition of economic independence was not substantial.

Nevertheless, it is also true that Japan's defeat in the war led to the collapse of the feudal society. The legal and social status of Japanese women have improved tremendously in the post-war period. Also

in the economic sphere, the great majority of women workers in contemporary Japan are white-collar employees rather than factory workers. Many of them are highly qualified. The working conditions of modern Japanese office employees are, of course, of no comparison to the inhuman working conditions experienced by the 'dekasegi-gata' female textile workers in Meiji Japan. Despite these social and economic transformations, women workers remain predominantly a group of low-wage workers, their role in the labour market is regarded as 'transient' and the social expectations of them to eventually return to their 'proper' role in the family are strong, all of which are similar to the situation of women's employment in pre-World War II Japan. The post-war Japanese labour market has been characterised by widespread discrimination against women. In the pre-war years, discrimination against women was rooted in the exploitative nature of early capitalism and the position of women was aggravated by their subordinate roles in the feudalistic society. In post-war Japan, labour market discrimination against women has been systematically carried out by deliberately formulated policies which constitute an inherent feature of the peculiar Japanese employment system (see, chapter 4).

Many of the social factors leading to women's disadvantaged position in the labour market appear to have persisted in contemporary Japan. By saying this we are not treating the situation in modern Japan as a phenomenon of 'cultural lag', one in which traditional attitudes and behavioural patterns have remained unchanged in the path of modernisation. In interpreting how 'the past' has consequences on 'the present', the author is cautious in making an important distinction between 'tradition based on a carry-over of habitual attitudes and behaviour from preindustrial society' and 'tradition based on conscious manipulation of the past to devise new solutions to emergent problem' (Cole, 1979, p.24).

The unequal position of Japanese women in contemporary employing organisations is not simply a phenomenon of 'cultural lag' which will gradually 'fade away' as Japan becomes more like the 'West'. What makes change complicated is that continued unequal treatment of women has

constituted an essential element of post-war economic development and is a major factor in the development of the peculiar features of the Japanese employment system - a system so widely praised by the rest of the world as the 'secret' of the country's economic success. What deserves more attention is not so much how past feudalistic exploitation of women has 'persisted' into post-war industrial Japan, but more importantly, how past experience and value systems have been 'transformed' into a new set of socially acceptable and economically viable forms of behaviour and values in contemporary Japan and how these have been successfully integrated into the employment rules and company practices which continue to reproduce and perpetuate the unequal position of women. Labour market discrimination has been an important factor contributing to the continued inferior status of Japanese women. Discrimination against women is rooted in the very nature of the Japanese employment system.

The next chapter presents a critical review of various theories attempting to explain labour market inequality and discrimination in order to gain some theoretical insights for interpreting the Japanese situation. Chapter four examines in greater detail how the logic of the Japanese employment system is based upon company practices which systematically discriminate against women.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. The poor working conditions of wage workers in the Meiji period are well documented in the following two publications: (1) Shokko Jijo (Conditions of workers), published in 1903 by the Noshomusho (The Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce); and (2) Nihon no Kaso-Shakai (Lower Class People of Japan), written by Gennosuke Yokoyama in 1899.

2. Hazama (1976, p.29) makes a distinction between "dekasegi-type" workers and "dekasegi" (workers). Dekasegi refers to workers who engage in temporary work in addition to their regular jobs, as for example the farmer who is a construction labourer during his off season. His main occupation remains farming. In contrast, the dekasegi-type worker in the textile industry has a deep relationship with the farm family into which she was born, but her occupation is in the textile industry.

3. From the Tokugawa period until the end of World War II, the Japanese family system was governed by the concept of 'ie' (home or family), which followed the samurai ideal and was legally recognized in the Meiji Civil Code. The major function of the 'ie' was to preserve the family from generation to generation. The household head, invariably a male, was the link between the generation and it was usually the eldest son who succeeded to the headship. The family head was the ultimate authority in all family decisions. The position of women was extremely low in the traditional 'ie' system. They could neither conduct ancestral rites nor were they permitted to play a public role in society.



## CHAPTER 3

### SEXUAL INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET: A REVIEW OF THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Labour market discrimination against women exists in all societies and has a long history. It is manifested through different rates of pay and occupational/industrial segregation. The concept 'discrimination' is rather complex. There is a lack of consensus among academics and policy makers as to what exactly constitutes discrimination. The following quotation from Kenneth Boulding (1976) illustrates the difficulties involved in trying to come to grips with the concept of discrimination:

'Discrimination is a phenomenon which is so pervasive in all human societies that there is no doubt at all that it exists. It is not, however, a unitary phenomenon but a complex of a number of related forms of human behaviour, and this makes it not only hard to define but frequently difficult to comprehend fully.'

Inequality is an outcome of discriminatory behaviour and it can be used as an index by which the presence of discrimination is assessed. But is an act or procedure to be regarded as 'discriminatory' simply because women or minority group members are disproportionately affected? If labour market inequality is an outcome which appears to be caused by the fact that certain group members are in a disadvantaged position before they enter the labour market, how far can one attribute such inequality to 'discrimination' in the labour market? Further, how can one evaluate a situation whereby current 'lower productivity' is the cumulative effect of past discrimination?

There is no easy answer to these questions. The following review of various theories attempting to explain labour market inequality between

men and women will provide some insights into the nature of the problem and help to answer the above questions.

An issue central to various theories attempting to explain the existence and persistence of labour market inequality is the debate on the extent to which such inequality is a result of differences on the supply side, e.g. differences in job choices, career aspirations or productivity between men and women, and how far it is a consequence of 'discrimination' on the demand side - 'discrimination' defined in simple economic terms as 'the receipt of lower pay for given productivity' or 'any form of unequal treatment of different groups of employees which does not directly result in cost minimisation in labour utilisation or, as far as discrimination on the part of employees is concerned, which does not directly result in the maximisation of the total wage income' (Jain and Sloan, 1981, p.26).

The neo-classical school (e.g. the human capital theorists) adopts an individual level of analysis and tends to focus on supply side factors. They attribute the lower earnings of women to lower productivity. The institutional school (e.g. the segmented labour market theorists) emphasises demand side factors, in particular, it regards the structure of the labour market as a source of inequality. Besides these two main schools of thought, the radical school also contributes important insights into an understanding of labour market inequality. However, the radical literature exhibits less of a sharply delineated body of theory and more of a reaction to a set of problems experienced by the industrialised countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Amsden, 1980, p.12). The radical school will therefore be only considered briefly.

Although each school of thought holds its own assumption about the nature of the labour market, the behaviour of the individuals and the implications of inequality in the labour market, none of the approaches is entirely homogeneous. There is also much theoretical overlap, especially between the institutional school and the others.

## II. THE NEO-CLASSICAL SCHOOL

### 1. Human Capital Theory

Individuals in neoclassical theory are assumed to exercise freedom of choice and behave rationally to maximise utility. Most neoclassical theorists do not ascribe women's lower earnings to any injustice. Human capital theorists hold that the amount of investment in human capital determines labour productivity, and consequently the wage (Becker, 1964). They assume a direct relation between the amount of investment in human capital, the productivity and wage. Thus, women's lower earnings simply reflect their smaller investment in human capital and hence labour productivity. Productivity between men and women of the same age and level of education is said to differ for two reasons. First, women on average spend proportionately fewer years in the labour force than men. They interrupt their market work to bear and rear children. Second, when women are working, the jobs they choose provide them with fewer opportunities to enhance their skills. They therefore acquire less experience and on the job training than men; and their earnings reflect this (Mincer and Polachek, 1974).

However, there are several unresolved issues in the above argument. Human capital theorists cannot explain why women with the same education and productivity related characteristics as men still earn less. Many empirical studies indicate the persistence of a considerable degree of wage inequality between men and women despite controlling productivity related variables (OECD, 1979). A second loose end in the human capital argument is its inability to explain the concentration of women in a small number of female occupations within each skill category. Blau and Jusenius point out that human capital theorists have to rely on women's 'tastes' in order to explain this phenomenon. Yet, it is not clear why only women should have such tastes nor is it clear why a large proportion of women should exhibit the same set of tastes - as demonstrated by their occupational distribution (Blau and Jusenius, 1976, p. 187-8). Moreover, it is not clear in the human capital theorists' argument whether the low levels of human capital of women are

the cause or effect of observed labour instability. Low wages due to discrimination in the labour market may discourage women from investing in human capital; and low investments in human capital perpetuate women's lower earnings.

In response to the above criticism, some neoclassical theorists assume that discrimination in the labour market exists and they introduce new elements such as employers' tastes (Becker, 1957), imperfect competition due to monopsony (Madden, 1973) or the notion of imperfect information (Arrow, 1973 and Spence, 1974) to explain the phenomenon of discrimination.

## **2. Gary Becker's Theory of 'Taste for Discrimination'**

Becker's theory (1957) derives from an individualistic approach where employers or workers are treated as if they have a 'taste for discrimination', which he regarded as one major type of 'non-pecuniary motivation' in labour markets. Individuals are seen as having preferences for making transactions with certain persons instead of others, and this taste can - according to Becker - vary in strength from person to person. However, Becker took these tastes as given and did not seek to explain their origins.

According to Becker, the exercise of the tastes for discrimination involves a cost, in terms of either the profit or the wage sacrifice the individual is prepared to suffer. Thus, employers who discriminate against one group (e.g. women) act as if they had to pay a premium above the wages of the preferred group which they would not pay if they had been guided by the criterion of marginal productivity; Becker called this premium 'discrimination coefficient'. This mechanism leads to wage differences and segregation between discriminated and preferred groups, and - almost by definition - to pecuniary loss by the discriminating employer as well as imperfections in factor allocation, and as a consequence to welfare losses from a societal point of view.

Thus, one implication from the above analysis is that discrimination cannot exist in the long run because it is incompatible with profit maximisation under competitive conditions. If we assume taste differences among employers, then firms with low or no discrimination coefficients will employ the discriminated group and, due to lower labour costs, receive higher profits than firms with high coefficients. This leads to a further expansion of firms with low coefficients, and to a gradual elimination of the firms with a strong taste for discrimination. Thus, according to Becker, discrimination is very much related to market failure.

One central problem with Becker's theory of discrimination is that it cannot explain why discrimination persists in the long run. It also fails to explain the empirically more relevant cases in which employers discriminate sometimes in coalition with employees, for pecuniary motives. The question of where 'tastes for discrimination' originate from remains underdeveloped in Becker's analysis.

### **3. The Monopsony Model**

The monopsony model, first represented by Robinson (1965) and more recently developed by Madden (1973) represents an important departure from those neoclassical theories which based on the model of perfect competition. While Becker's theory implies that employers may forego income in order to satisfy their tastes for discrimination; the monopsony model explains discrimination by economic gain for employers. According to the model developed by Madden, there exists a relationship between the elasticity of labour supply and wages. Thus, a profit-maximising monopsonistic firm will offer a higher wage to men than to women because the supply of women is likely to be more inelastic for a given firm than that of males. This is caused by women's relative immobility - a lack of mobility which may be caused by the fixity of women's place of residence or by a lack of demand for women in alternative occupations. The simple model of monopsony, however, explains - if at all - only a small part of labour market discrimination.

#### 4. Information Theories

Information theories explain discrimination by employers even in cases in which the firms are profit-maximising, non-monopsonistic or non-monopolistic, and without 'tastes' for one group or another. Information theories are based either on the idea of **incomplete or incorrect information** with respect to the prospective productivity of groups, or on the idea of **uncertainty** concerning the expected productivity of each individual within one group, known as **statistical discrimination**.

Information theory based on incorrect information suffer from the same weakness as Becker's theory, i.e. it cannot explain enduring discrimination. The firms which do not discriminate make larger profits and will expand at the expense of discriminatory firms. In the long run, there should be dissemination of correct information about the actual productivity of different groups and consequently lead to the elimination of discrimination. However, this does not occur in the empirical world.

The statistical theory of discrimination seems to offer a more plausible explanation. It assumes that employers have an idea about the average productivity of different groups based on past experience, but they do not know the productivity of each individual at the time of hiring. The high cost of obtaining information about individual workers will prompt employers to use group affiliation, e.g. sex, as an inexpensive aid when making employment decisions. Such kind of discrimination is regarded as rational because it is cost minimising. However, Aigner and Cain (1977, p.182) argue that the statistical theory of discrimination can only have limited power in explaining wage differentials. If the wage differentials are great, the economic incentives will be great to develop better recruitment and selection procedures and to organise production in such a way that variation in the difference between actual and expected productivity becomes less important for the production result. If the labour market is characterised by wage competition, the explanatory power of statistical

discrimination for wage differentials will be further limited.

## 5. An Evaluation of the Neo-Classical School

In sum, one can say that the neo-classical theories have provided a limited and simplistic explanation on the sources of labour market inequality. Most of the research work by the neo-classical theorists has been concerned with why employers discriminate and the direction of its effects on wages and employment of particular groups. The problem of labour market discrimination is reduced to the pure economic question of whether and why wages are different among people with the same productivity. The existence of discrimination is deduced from labour market outcomes. Behavioural influences which are social, cultural or ideological are assumed to be stable and such extraneous influences are lumped together as 'tastes' which are outside their theoretical model. In explaining the sources of inequality experienced by women, neo-classical theorists look outside the labour market and take the sexual division of labour in the family as given. The greatest weakness of these theories is that they all fail to why discrimination persists in the long-run.

As regarding the policy question of what can be done for ending labour market discrimination, the neo-classical school provides little insight. It basically adopts a non-interventionist position. This follows from its assumption that individuals exercise freedom of choice. Such an assumption implies that women freely choose to acquire less formal education than men and to enter low paying jobs. Thus, from the internal logic of neoclassical approach, legislation aiming at changing the labour market mechanism and women's self-imposed condition is undesirable. As a strategy to solve the problem of poverty and underemployment of the disadvantaged workers, human capital theorists suggest education and training as means for improving their marginal productivity and consequently raising their wages. However, if productivity gains cannot be translated into higher paying jobs and the existence of discrimination is found to be the source of the problem, human capital theorists do not suggest how to overcome the problem.

### III. THE INSTITUTIONAL SCHOOL: SEGMENTED LABOUR MARKET THEORIES

The segmented labour market approach was offered as an alternative to neoclassical labour market theories in the 1960s to explain the problems of urban poverty and underemployment in the United States. As a challenge to the neoclassical theories, segmented labour market theories were claimed to be superior in their explanation of persistent wage differentials, job segregation, poverty, and race and sex discrimination. They provide a useful framework for the study of labour market discrimination because they focus clearly on the two forms of labour market discrimination, i.e. job discrimination (unequal access to certain classes of jobs) and pay discrimination (unequal pay in similar kinds of jobs) and seek to provide an explanation of the whole. Radical economists like Reich, Gordon and Edwards (1975) also adopted the concept of segmented labour markets as part of a more radical political economy or class analysis of the U.S. economy. In contrast to the institutional economists like Doeringer and Piore (1971) who explain the causes of segmentation in terms of technological forces, radical economists seek the roots of segmentation in historical process. They argue that political and economic forces within American capitalism have given rise to and perpetuated segmented labour market. The labour market has been segmented by employers' conscious attempts to divide and rule the labour force.

Labour market segmentation theories postulate that 'the labour market' comprises a number of more or less distinct segments (or classes of jobs) which differentially reward similarly qualified workers. Although there are wide variations in the segmentation theories with regard to the number and nature of segments and their causes, they share common points which distinguish them from the neo-classical theories: the unit of analysis is not an individual worker but a group of workers; direct relation between productivity and wage is denied; wage is not a function of worker characteristics but is determined by socio-economic and political structure of capitalism; the focus of analysis and policy issues is placed on demand side factors rather than supply side factors.



The most popularly cited models of segmented labour markets which are particularly relevant to the analysis of the questions of occupational segregation by sex and women's low pay are the internal labour market analysis developed by Doeringer and Piore (1971) and the related concept of the dual labour market (Piore, 1975; Barron and Norris, 1976).

### **1. Internal Labour Market Analysis**

Piore and Doeringer (1971) define the internal labour market (ILM) as 'an administrative unit within which the pricing and allocation of labour is governed by a set of administrative rules and procedures'. This is distinguished from the external labour market (ELM) where wages are more directly determined by market forces. The two markets are linked together at various job levels which constitute ports of entry and exit to and from the ILM.

ILMs are seen as developing from modern technologies, by which skills have become more firm-specific, so that a worker's productivity increasingly becomes a function of on-the-job training and experience, and consequently of length of service. In such circumstances, it becomes particularly important for the employer to encourage stability and reduce turnover. This is done by providing wages, benefits and prospects better than that which can be obtained in the ELM. The ILM has a limited number of entry points, mainly at lower level jobs; higher level jobs are filled from internal sources through transfer and promotion of existing employees. The wage structure tends to reward service with the firm rather than general labour market experience.

Providing more favourable terms and conditions is costly and not all jobs are of the kind where technological change makes stability and on-the-job training important. Thus the labour market can be depicted as segmented into two sectors. The part of the economy characterised by ILMs is called the 'primary' sector where workers enjoy job security and recruited internally through well-defined promotion ladders. The remaining jobs form the 'secondary' sector. The secondary sector includes many jobs requiring little job-specific skill and workers are

generally low paid with a high turn over rate and limited promotion prospects. In many firms, the two types of jobs exist side by side. Within the two categories of jobs, mobility is limited. Generally, however, mobility of individual workers is determined by entry-level jobs.

Within the primary sector, Piore (1977) introduced a further division. He suggested an upper or 'primary independent' sector, composed of professional and managerial jobs. These were distinct from the lower tier 'subordinate primary' jobs by their lower pay, higher mobility and turnover patterns which, in some ways, resembled those of the secondary sector. The majority of women are trapped in secondary sector or if they gain entry to the primary sector, are found in 'subordinate primary' jobs. This is offered, as, in large part, the explanation of women's lower pay.

In the context of the above theoretical framework, it is easy to establish the existence of job segregation and its relationship with pay differentials. Pay differentials are seen as the monetary manifestation of the differentiation in job structure. The original model of the ILM analysis does not apply so explicitly to the specific situation of women workers. It is, however, a very useful framework for analysing the structural sources of labour market inequality and how discrimination is produced and perpetuated through the operation of the rules and practices in the ILM.

The distinction between jobs in the ILM and those in the ELM inevitably gives rise to discrimination in three ways. Firstly, discrimination occurs as a result of segmentation and direct exclusion, 'the privileges conferring upon the internal labour force are not available to those in the external labour market' (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, p.133). Current employees are likely to be given preferential treatment over outside job applicants on account of factors such as possession of specific skills and knowledge of the enterprise. Workers in the ELM may not be aware of the existence of job opportunities in the ILM, even if they possess the requisite skills. Further, if they

succeed in gaining entry to the ILM, such workers may remain disadvantaged because of their lack of seniority . Thus the crucial feature of the ILM is not just that 'the 'ins' are treated under a different regime than the 'outs' but that they attain markedly better outcomes than do their excluded counterparts' (Ryan, 1981, p.16). Discrimination is therefore an inevitable outcome of segmentation of workers into the 'ins' and the 'outs'. It is, however, not clear from this 'logic of segmentation' why sex is used as a criterion. The ILM analysis explains the allocation of workers between sectors in terms of demands for different kinds of workers behaviour, in particular worker stability. Piore states that the main distinguishing feature of primary and secondary workers is 'the behavioural requirements which they impose on the workforce, particularly that of employment stability' (Piore, 1971, p.94). The majority of women are excluded from the primary jobs in the ILM because of their lack of employment stability.

Secondly, discrimination can also occur 'through the rules which define internal labour market and govern their operation' (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, p.133). The identification of this type of discrimination is often not easy. This involves two main aspects: Discrimination through entry rules and discrimination through internal allocative rules. Entry discrimination can occur as a result of hiring standards, screening criteria or recruitment procedures. Piore and Doeringer refer to the entry rules as 'the most loosely constrained instruments of manpower adjustment available to management' in ILMs and point out that these rules 'depend for the most part upon the judgement of personnel managers and foremen' (Ibid, p.138). For example, hiring standards such as educational or testing standards, can be arbitrarily imposed in order to exclude certain workers yet practised under the guise of objective procedures to ensure a competent workforce or justified by reference to the requirements of jobs at the top of promotion ladder. Discrimination or more accurately, 'statistical discrimination' may also occur as a result of using cheap screening criteria such as sex to implement hiring standards. In the high-wage primary sector, given the investment made by the firm in training and the cost of defective hiring procedures, employers will attempt to increase the rate of return on

their investment by seeking to select employees who are likely to prove stable. Since obtaining accurate information about each individual job applicant may be costly, it is common for employers to use group characteristics such as sex or education as a screening device. Following this explanation, if employers perceive women as less stable workers, then individual women may be barred from primary jobs on a probabilistic basis. Further, ILM tends to establish rather stable channels of recruitment, such as recruiting through a selected group of educational institutions and these are in part used as a kind of screening procedure. Once the channels of recruitment become well established, they tend to perpetuate and continue to reproduce the existing patterns of employment.

Discrimination within the ILMs can also occur through internal allocative rules - through the design of job mobility clusters and the criteria used for movement between or within them. In the ILMs, employers' interests are to minimise the cost of turnover and to capture natural on-the-job training sequence. Seniority combined with ability are the crucial criteria for moving along the line of progression within or between job clusters. From this perspective, women are seen by employers as less desirable employees because of their relative lack of employment stability. Exclusion of women can be effected by applying certain restrictive promotion criteria, for example, mobility requirements, or by restricting them to certain clusters of jobs which require less training. Another important point to note is that the vested interests of the employees tend to become a powerful force in deterring the adaptation of these rules to changing technological or economic circumstances. One good example is seniority rules cannot be so easily disrupted as this might create frustration and resentment among older employees if younger members move above them in the line of progression. Similarly, employers might want to promote women to 'male' jobs but male resentment can deter employers from doing so.

Thirdly, stable work groups in the ILM tend to develop certain customs based upon precedent and repeated practices, what Doeringer and Piore

call the 'natural outgrowth of the psychological behaviour of stable groups'. These customs and practices can come to acquire an ethical, or quasi-ethical, status within the work group, which can function socially and psychologically to reject groups which do not conform to the established customs. Custom also imparts a rigidity to the ILM rules and procedures and makes it difficult to change them in response to dynamic economic forces:

'Custom at the workplace is an unwritten set of rules based largely upon past practice and precedent...work rules appear to be an outgrowth of employment stability within internal labour markets. Such stability... is of value to both the employer and the workforce, and one of the factors producing internal labour market is the desire to effectuate stability' (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, p.23).

Blau and Jusenius (1976, p.194-6) point out that the ILM approach has provided certain useful insights into some of the difficulties implicit in the neoclassical approach. Firstly, the discussion of statistical discrimination in the neoclassical world focussed on its explanation of pay differentials, with job segregation by sex not being a necessary outcome. In the ILM model, job segregation is an inevitable result of certain employers perceiving a particular group as inadequate in some respect, independent of whether that group is paid lower wages in response to higher fixed labour costs of the group.

Secondly, in the neoclassical analysis, a distinction is rarely made between occupational choice and occupational assignment. Occupational choice is seen mainly a matter of individual taste. However, individual choice may be the critical variable for a relatively small set of occupations, namely those in which the individual obtains some occupation-specific training prior to employment. In most cases the employers assign workers to jobs within broad limits set by skills required and preferences expressed for the jobs. Thus, in many cases the concept of occupational assignment may be more reflective of reality than the accepted notion of occupational choice.

Lastly, the ILM analysis challenge the neoclassical assumption of the exogeneity of worker quality. The human capital theorists tend to assume that individual productivity is uniquely and exogeneously determined by the characteristics of workers. Proponents of the 'crowding' hypothesis acknowledge productivity variations between men and women due to occupation or establishment of employment, they specify the capital-labour ratio as the underlying cause of productivity differences. The ILM approach can encompass not only these and other factors, but would also emphasise the extent to which an individual worker is allowed to deploy the human capital acquired through education and work experience in the actual work situation. The type of work situation faced by the worker vary not only from primary group to secondary group within any single establishment, but also from firm to firm. An inferior work situation could have adverse effects on the productivity of a worker. Thus, denial of access to certain job categories or firms may mean not only that women receive lower wages but also that they are less productive.

#### **(b) Dual Labour Market Analysis**

The dual labour market (DLM) concept is an extreme form of labour market segmentation. It is a major application of the ILM approach to cover the analysis from the ILM (in the form of primary markets) to the ELM and attempts to deal more specifically with mobility, or the lack of it between the two. Piore's model (1971) postulates the division of the labour market into two main sectors: the primary and the secondary sector. The former offers jobs characterised by high wages, good working conditions, employment stability and job security, equity and due process in the administration of work rules, and chances for advancement. By contrast, jobs in the latter sector offer low wages, poor working conditions, considerable variability in employment, harsh and often arbitrary discipline, and little opportunity to advance. Mobility barriers prohibit the movement of workers from the secondary sector to the primary sector.

The original DLM model only refers implicitly to the problems of women workers. However, its analysis on the problem of discrimination, restricted mobility and low pay offers useful insight into the situation of women workers. Piore (1971) points out four connected factors which generate the dual markets and confine the disadvantaged workers to the secondary market. First, he suggests that 'the most important characteristic distinguishing jobs in the primary sector from those in the secondary sector appears to be the behavioural requirements which they impose upon the workforce, particularly that of employment stability'. Second, 'certain workers who possess the behavioural traits required to operate efficiently in primary jobs are trapped in the secondary market because their superficial characteristics resemble those of secondary workers.' Two kinds of discrimination seem important. There is 'pure and simple discrimination' where employers simply dislike employing workers with certain characteristics. There is also 'statistical discrimination' where employers tend not to employ members of certain groups because their superficial characteristics seem to be statistically associated with undesirable behavioural traits like unreliability. Discrimination of any kind enlarges the captive labour force in the secondary sector, and thus lowers the wages which secondary employers must pay to fill their jobs. Third, the distinction between sectors is not so much technologically as historically determined. It can also reflect employer strategy. Gordon (1972) argues that as the percentage of women in the labour force continues to increase, some employers seem more and more likely to move many jobs into the secondary market in response to the (expected) unstable work characteristics of women workers. Fourth, the behavioural traits associated with the secondary sector are reinforced by the process of working in secondary jobs. Thus, there is a strong interdependence between worker traits and the work situation.

Barron and Norris (1976) applied directly the DLM model in explaining the sexual divisions of labour in Britain. Barron and Norris suggest that in Britain women comprise the major secondary workforce. They argue that employers often use ascriptive criteria in selecting workers, that is, they select workers on the basis of characteristics like age,

sex or skin colour. The use of these broad categories as a basis of job allocation has two important consequences. When ascriptive characteristics, like sex, are used as selection criteria, it has the effects of confining the groups so delineated to the secondary sector over the whole of their working lives. The second is that the actual confinement of particular groups to the secondary sector will result in their having higher rate of labour turnover and job mobility. Thus a 'vicious circle' is created which reinforces the discriminatory power of the trait which was made the basis of selection criterion, and the labelling process becomes self-fulfilling (Barron and Norris, 1976, p.53).

### **3. An Evaluation of the Institutional School**

In comparison with the neo-classical theorists, the institutional school provides a more useful approach for analysing the process and mechanisms of discrimination. The greatest strength of the institutional school, especially that of ILM theory is that it examines in much greater detail the organisational rules and practices and explain how such rules operate to exclude certain groups of workers. More importantly, the institutional school gives powerful insights into the persistence of discrimination and why change might not occur even when the original market and technological factors which produce the rules and practices cease to exist:

'Because one effect of custom is to inhibit change, it causes the allocative structure to reflect efficiency considerations, employees interests, and the balance of power prevailing at some time in the past' (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, p.61).

The ILM theory not only recognises that labour market discrimination exists but also that it tends to perpetuate because it has positive economic value for the groups in the privileged sector. Hence, there are groups interested, not only in resisting the elimination of discrimination, but in actively seeking its perpetuation.



As the structure of the labour market and its systematic operation are regarded as the major sources of inequality, institutional theorists emphasise demand side solutions such as government employment and expenditure policy to favour those in the secondary sector of the economy. This would include equal opportunity and affirmative action programmes designed to increase the competitive position of the disadvantaged groups. The ILM analysis especially points to the crucial role of hiring practices, promotion rules and access to on-the-job training in perpetuating discriminatory behaviour. Anti-discrimination legislation designed to mandate changes in these rules is therefore regarded as one possible remedy. Doeringer and Piore (1971), nevertheless, caution that resistance to change will be strong as policy efforts to eliminate discrimination are often viewed by the employers and the employees within the ILMs as an assault upon the rules which effect labour market adjustment and preserve job security. Underlying the ILM analysis is an assumption that the process for eliminating discriminatory practices is bound to be highly complex. It requires a resolution of the conflict between various social and economic goals and an accommodation of conflict of interests among different groups in the society. The ILM analysis gives powerful insights for understanding the dynamics of the adjustment process as it takes into consideration the socio-political forces underlying labour market discrimination.

However, the institutional approach suffers from the same weakness as the neo-classical model when applied to sexual discrimination - it fails to explain the specific situation of women and has treated sexual divisions in the household and in society at large as exogenous factors. The next section provides a brief review of some of the contemporary feminist analyses which highlight the importance of power relations and gendered assumptions in affecting labour market rules and behaviour.

#### IV. SEXUAL DIVISIONS AND EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION: SOME FEMINIST ANALYSES

Many analysts have noted that the division of labour by sex cuts across all segments of the labour market; sex divides internal labour markets in the primary sector, and even in the secondary sector men and women hold different jobs. The primary-secondary distinction is too simplistic a view of sexual divisions in the labour market (Beechey, 1986; Hartman, 1978).

Jill Rubery (1980) argues that trade unions have played a crucially important role in maintaining labour market segmentation. She suggests that dual labour market theory and other radical analyses have viewed the development of the economic structure solely from one perspective - through the motivations and actions of individual capitalists - and they have paid insufficient attention to the ways in which maintaining a divided workforce may be of interests to the workers, and may be a product of struggle. This criticism, however, does not do justice to Piore's ILM analysis which does mention the role of the privileged workers in the ILM in maintaining their vested interests. Piore, nevertheless, only sees this as a by-product of the operation of the ILM rather than as an independent force in determining the structure of inequality.

Hartman (1976) introduces the concept of patriarchy in her analysis of women's subordinate position in the labour market. Like Rubery, she also emphasises the role of trade unions in maintaining job segregation and excluding women. She sees this as an expression of men's desire to control and dominate women. Hartman argues that job segregation creates a vicious circle for women from which they cannot escape:

'Job segregation... is the primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for women in the labour market. Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit, then, from both higher wages and the domestic division of labour, in turn, acts to weaken women's position in the labour

market. Thus, the hierarchical domestic division of labour is perpetuated by the labour market, and vice versa' (Hartman,1976, p.139).

Philip and Taylor (1980) point out that even the very labelling of jobs as skilled or unskilled is also an object of struggle and that social definitions and ideological constructions enter into the definitions of certain kinds of work as skilled:

'...the classification of women's jobs as unskilled and men's jobs as skilled or semi-skilled frequently bears little relation to the actual amount of training or ability required for them. Skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias. The work of women is often deemed inferior simply because it is women who do it. Women workers carry into the workplace their status as subordinate individuals and this status comes to define the value of work they do. Far from being an objective economic fact, skill is often an ideological category imposed on certain types of work by virtue of the sex and power of the workers who perform it' (Philip and Taylor, 1980, p.79).

Women's unequal position in the labour market cannot be understood solely in terms of an analysis of production and the labour market process, sexual division of labour within the family plays an important role in determining the conditions in which women enter the labour market. It affects women's labour supply pattern and the type of work they do. However, in the economic models, sexual division of labour in the family is treated as a 'given' factor. Economic theorists fail to recognise that familial ideology and state family policies, which embody the assumption that women are mothers and housewives dependent upon men, imposes a powerful constraint on women's employment behaviour and expectations and has an independent effect in shaping employers' labour force strategy.

In sum, central to feminist analyses of women's employment is the argument that 'women's unequal and inferior position within paid employment and their low pay has little to do with economic factors (for instance, that they are cheap labour), but is a consequence of gender relations and gendered assumptions which affect employers' hiring

strategies, trade union practices, which relegate women to a subordinate position.' (Beechey and Whitelegg, 1986, p.127).

The feminist perspective provides important insight into the fact that sexual discrimination in the labour market cannot be seen as merely a consequence of economic forces, but that gender divisions, power, ideology, culture and the psychology of men and women all have a role to play. This implies that strategies for dealing with inequality between men and women in the labour market needs to confront all these issues and devise ways to break the vicious circle.

## V. THE CONCEPT OF INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The above theoretical review shows that the causes leading to women's unequal position in the labour market are complex. Labour market discrimination is a multifaceted social, economic and political phenomenon. It cannot be reduced to 'the pure economic question of whether and why wages are different among people with the same productivity' (Schmid, 1984, p.265). The institutional school, especially the ILM analysis, which stresses the significance of organisation and socio-political forces in the structuring of labour markets - that labour markets are not pure markets - gives crucially important insight into **institutional discrimination** as an important factor producing and perpetuating labour market inequality.

The concept 'institutional discrimination' originated in the study of race relations in the United States in the 1960s. Until the late 1950s the study of American and British race relations was dominated by the study of prejudice. By the late 1960s, the predominant approach in the United States changed to one which emphasised institutional and structural reasons for exclusion in addition to 'prejudiced discrimination' (McCrudden, 1982). Early in 1968, Mayhew used the term 'structural discrimination' to describe the exclusion of the Negro community from employment in America. He pointed out two important aspects of discrimination: the normative patterns and the

social structures which define and perpetuate discrimination. According to Mayhew, there are important connections between the two aspects and therefore the elimination of prejudice or social stereotyping will not eliminate discrimination because social forces maintain established structures despite changes in the attitudes of individuals:

'Inequalities in some institutional spheres are reproduced in others. An unprejudiced person can apply standards in a completely universalistic and equitable manner and still exclude Negroes' (Mayhew, 1968, p.57).

Knowles and Prewitt used the term 'institutional racism' to describe a situation where:

'...behaviour has become so well institutionalised that the individual generally does not have to exercise choice to operate in a racist manner. The rules and procedures of large organisation have already prestructured the choice.. The individual only has to conform to the operating norms of the organisation and the institution will do the discriminating for the firm' (Knowles and Prewitt, 1969, p.143).

Employment discrimination clearly cannot be separated from social discrimination, this applies both to minority groups and women. 'Institutional discrimination' cannot be eradicated by simply asking employers to adopt an attitude of 'non-discrimination' or by applying equal treatment policies. What needs to be scrutinised are the mechanisms of exclusion, the organisational rules and procedures which maintain and perpetuate inequality. The logic of the above analysis suggests that to reduce inequality in employment, changing the employment rules and practices is a crucial priority. Removing employment discrimination therefore means breaking the vicious circle which perpetuates inequality.

Institutional discrimination is a universal phenomenon. Whether or not it is illegitimate depends on societal values and how the issue is brought into the political arena. The shifts in the legal definitions of discrimination and the differences in the ways it is being defined in

the anti-discrimination policies of different countries signify not only the change in societal values and perceptions of inequalities in the labour market, but also reflects the relative bargaining power of different interests groups in different societies.

In the United States, the concept of labour market discrimination has undergone three stages of development since the first days of explicit anti-discrimination policies. This change has been well summarised in an article by Jain and Ledvinka (1975) on 'Economic Inequality and the Concept of Employment Discrimination': Initially, discrimination was defined as '**prejudiced treatment**', i.e. harmful acts motivated by personal antipathy toward the group of which the target person was a member. However, since it is difficult to prove intent to harm, that first definition was ineffective as a means of solving the problems of labour market inequality.

Consequently, discrimination came to be defined in the courts as '**unequal treatment**'. Under this second definition, the law was said to mean that the same standards be applied to all employees and applicants. In other words, the employer was allowed to impose any requirements, so long as they were imposed on all groups alike. Yet many of the most common requirements such as education and testing, had unequal effects on various groups, even though they were imposed on all groups equally. This means that employers were still allowed to ignore the inequalities built into the rest of society, especially into the processes by which people acquired credentials.

In recognition of such concerns, the U.S. Supreme Court articulated the third definition of employment discrimination in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co* (Blumrosen, 1972). There the Court struck down employment tests and educational requirements that screened out a greater percentage of blacks than whites. Those practices were prohibited simply because they had the consequences of excluding blacks disproportionately, and because they bore no relationship to jobs in question. Thus, the concept of labour market discrimination shifted from a concept of intent to a concept of '**adverse impact**'; and consequently, the focus shifted from

individuals to groups. According to this approach, the problem of labour market inequality is to be solved by eliminating those employment practices that had unequal impact on the groups covered by equal employment law, independent of whether there was conscious discrimination or not. What matters are consequences and not intentions.

The development of the legal concept of labour market discrimination in the United States is also mirrored in the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) in Britain which covers both direct and indirect discrimination. As in the United States, the extension of the scope of legislation from tackling with direct discrimination to indirect discrimination, that is, from an idea of intention based discrimination to one that focusses on 'disparate impact', was the result of a recognition of the structural sources of unequal opportunity and in particular an acceptance of what has become known as 'institutional discrimination' in Britain (McCrudden, 1982). The concept of 'indirect discrimination' has also been used in European Community legislation, and now extends to look at discrimination in state and occupational social security measures. It is now widely accepted among the European democratic countries that indirect discrimination has to be covered in anti-discrimination policies if the problem of institutional discrimination is to be tackled.

The extension of the scope of legislation to cover indirect discrimination has great potential in identifying and attacking exclusionary employment practices, and in urging employers to find alternative, non-discriminatory ways of implementing employment policies. Nevertheless, the technicalities involved in proving and measuring 'disparate impact' remains highly complex and controversial (Marshall et al, 1978).

To recognise the importance of eliminating employment discrimination is not to deny the fact that many factors leading to the disadvantaged position of women are located outside the boundary (but not independent) of the labour market. Their lack of training for higher-paying jobs,

their home and family responsibilities and their tenuous commitment to full-time, continuous employment are all interrelated handicaps which make it difficult for women to perform as equals with men in the labour market.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has reviewed two major schools of labour market theories, the neo-classical and the institutional, explaining the sources of inequality and discrimination. The neo-classical theories provide a limited and simplistic explanation of labour market inequality and the issue of discrimination. Implicit in the neo-classical model is the suggestion that the elimination of discrimination will increase competition and hence national economic efficiency. This is misleading as it assumes a degree of harmony among the society's various social and economic goals. In comparison, the institutional approach provides a more useful framework for analysing the process and mechanisms which produce and perpetuate labour market inequality. Its greatest strength, especially that of the internal labour market analysis, is that it examines in great detail how the rules and practices governing the internal labour markets operate to exclude certain groups of workers and how the established rules and practices are maintained and supported by the employers and employees within the internal labour markets. These rules tend to reinforce and reproduce discrimination. By emphasising the role of socio-political forces in sustaining the established labour market rules and workplace customs, the institutional school provides powerful insights for addressing the issue of persistent discrimination which the neo-classical theories fail to account for. In contrast to the neo-classical model, the institutional school recognises the existence of conflicting social and economic goals and the conflict of interests between different social groups. Though inherently a static model, the internal labour market analysis illuminates the likely complexity of the adaptation process when the internal labour market rules and practices are challenged by external forces such as economic and technological changes or equal employment opportunity pressures. Doeringer and Piore (1971) point out that both the employers



and the employees are likely to resist rapid alteration of the internal labour market rules. This is not only because the internal labour market arrangements are seen as economically efficient by the employers and they guarantee job security and stable career progression for the incumbent employees, but also because customs and expectations tend to form around the long-standing rules which become a strong deterrent to adaptation within the internal labour markets. Despite the usefulness of the internal labour market model in highlighting the crucial role of labour market rules and company practices in sustaining and reproducing discrimination, the model is nevertheless limited when applied to the special issue of discrimination against women. The brief review of some of the contemporary feminist analyses is provided to overcome the limitations of the economic models in dealing with the specificity of women's situation. The feminist view provides important insights into the fact that gendered assumptions and sex role ideology play an important role in shaping employers' labour market policies and manpower strategies which in turn reproduces the hierarchical relationship between the sexes in society. Labour market discrimination against women cannot be interpreted simply as a by-product of employment rules and labour market behaviour. Labour market discrimination is not independent of social discrimination against women.

To summarise, the institutional labour market theories, especially that of Doeringer and Piore's theory which emphasises how the maintenance of the established rules, supported by the dominant parties, can reinforce and sustain discrimination, combined with insights from the feminist analyses, provide useful theoretical insights for interpreting the dynamic relationship between labour market structure, company rules and practices and the nature of discrimination against women. The thesis uses this framework to examine the case of Japan. The Japanese case is theoretically relevant and significant because it has developed one of the world's most closed types of internal labour markets and historically operated on the basis of discrimination against women. This thesis therefore explores a particular and extreme case of internal labour markets and how they apply to the special issue of discrimination against women.

## CHAPTER 4

### SEXUAL INEQUALITY IN THE JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM: DISCRIMINATORY COMPANY PRACTICES

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Having looked at various theories explaining the sources of sexual inequality in employment and the meaning of discrimination in the previous chapter, the focus now turns on the situation in Japan. The central aim of the present chapter is to examine how the special features of the Japanese employment system, in particular, 'lifetime employment' and the *nenko* wage and promotion systems are sustained by company practices which operate to exclude the majority of women from having equal opportunities as men. Firstly, the chapter presents some empirical evidence showing the nature and extent of sexual inequality in the Japanese labour market. Secondly, it analyses the main characteristics of the Japanese employment system and the role of women workers within the system and thirdly, it examines the personnel management practices adopted by major Japanese companies to see why they are discriminatory against women and how they operate to create strong institutional barriers to women's participation as full members of the work organisations.

The present chapter analyses the situation before the EEO Law was introduced. Statistical data will be presented up to the year 1985.

#### II. LABOUR MARKET INEQUALITY: SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

##### 1. The Wage Gap

Nothing better illustrates women's unequal status than their wages. In 1985, adult full-time women earn on average only 56 per cent of men's gross monthly cash earnings. Table 4.1 shows the changes in the male-

female earnings gap from 1960 to 1985. The rise in women's pay relative to men's between 1960 and 1975 was due to the effect of the labour shortage during the period of high economic growth in the 1960s and the rapid decline of employment in the low paying industries such as textiles and electrical machineries where many women were employed (Kawahashi, 1983, p.132-5). However, since the economic recession in the mid-1970s, women's earnings showed little sign of improvement despite the continuing expansion of their labour market activities and the improvement of their education. In fact, the wage differential has widened slightly after the mid-1970s. The rapid expansion of jobs in the female-intensive service sector which contains a large proportion of low-paying small size firms since the mid-1970s has lowered women's average wage level.

**Table 4.1**  
**Monthly Earnings of Male and Female Full-Time Regular Employees**  
(All occupations and all industries)

(Unit: 1,000 yen; %)

Year	Total cash earnings*			Regular cash earnings**		
	Female (Yen)	Male (Yen)	Differentials (Male=100)	Female (Yen)	Male (Yen)	Differentials (Male=100)
1960	9.9	22.0	45.0	-	-	-
1965	18.2	35.5	51.3	17.5	31.6	55.4
1970	35.2	68.4	51.5	33.7	60.1	56.1
1975	88.5	150.2	58.9	85.7	139.6	61.4
1976	92.7	166.3	55.7	89.1	151.5	58.8
1977	101.9	183.2	55.6	97.9	166.0	59.0
1978	108.7	195.2	55.7	104.2	176.7	59.0
1979	114.9	206.9	55.5	109.9	186.3	59.0
1980	122.5	221.7	55.3	116.9	198.6	58.9
1981	130.5	235.3	55.5	124.6	211.4	58.9
1982	136.2	246.1	55.3	130.1	222.0	58.6
1983	141.2	254.4	55.5	134.7	229.3	58.7
1984	146.6	265.1	55.3	139.2	237.5	58.6
1985	153.6	274.0	56.1	145.8	244.6	59.6

\* Total cash earnings include overtime pay

\*\* Regular cash earnings exclude overtime pay

Source: Chingin Kozo Gihon Tokei Chosa (Basic Survey of Wage Structure)  
Ministry of Labour, Japan.

Many factors contribute to the unequal earnings between men and women. Human capital theorists tend to explain women's lower earnings in terms of their lesser investment in education and training. Segmented labour market theorists argue that women earn lower wages because of their position in the labour market - women tend to be segregated in low-paying sectors and low-paying jobs. The existence of labour market barriers means that equally productive workers may not be rewarded equally. Segmented labour market theorists suggest that employment discrimination plays an important role in contributing to women's unequal earnings. Empirical studies indicate that human capital factors can only explain part of the earnings gap (Yashiro, 1980; Kawashima, 1983). Table 4.2 shows that a substantial wage gap between men and women still remains after controlling for age, education and length of service, the three most important factors in wage determination in Japanese firms. Yashiro (1980) estimates that length of service accounted for 46.8 per cent of the total wage differential between men and women; while education accounted for 7.2 per cent and firm size accounted for a mere 2.4 per cent. There still remains 43.6 per cent (34.3 per cent in the case of standard workers) of the wage differential that is not accounted for in his equation.

**Table 4.2**  
**Wage Differentials Between Male and Female Standard Employees\***  
**With Senior High School Education, By Age and Length of Service**  
 (All Occupations and All Industries)

Age	Length of service	Monthly contract earnings (1,000 yen)		Differentials (Male = 100)
		Female	Male	
18-19	0	105.6	114.1	92.6
20-24	3-4	122.5	138.0	88.8
25-29	5-9	144.9	174.2	83.2
30-34	10-14	167.2	217.3	76.9
35-39	15-19	192.8	264.5	72.9
40-44	20-24	214.8	306.4	70.1
45-49	25-29	239.5	344.2	69.6
50-54	30-	274.4	379.6	72.3

Note: \*Standard employees refer to those who work continuously for the same companies since they left school.

Source: Chingin Kozo Gihon Tokei Chosa (Basic Survey of Wage Structure), Ministry of Labour, Japan, 1983.

Neo-classical economists argue that the remaining wage gap does not solely reflect wage discrimination as one needs to look for compositional factors such as industrial and occupational distribution and other productivity-related factors such as qualitative differences in education and training that are not measured statistically. However, one should be cautious about controlling too many variables in measuring discrimination. If it were possible to control virtually all sources of variation in wages, one could pretty well eliminate labour market discrimination as a significant factor in determining wage differentials by sex. It is not our objective here to determine the extent of 'pure' wage discrimination as such. All the three factors contribute to the remaining wage gap, and the uneven distribution of women in low-paying jobs, the productivity differences between men and women may well be a consequence of labour market discrimination as well as factors contributing to wage differentials.

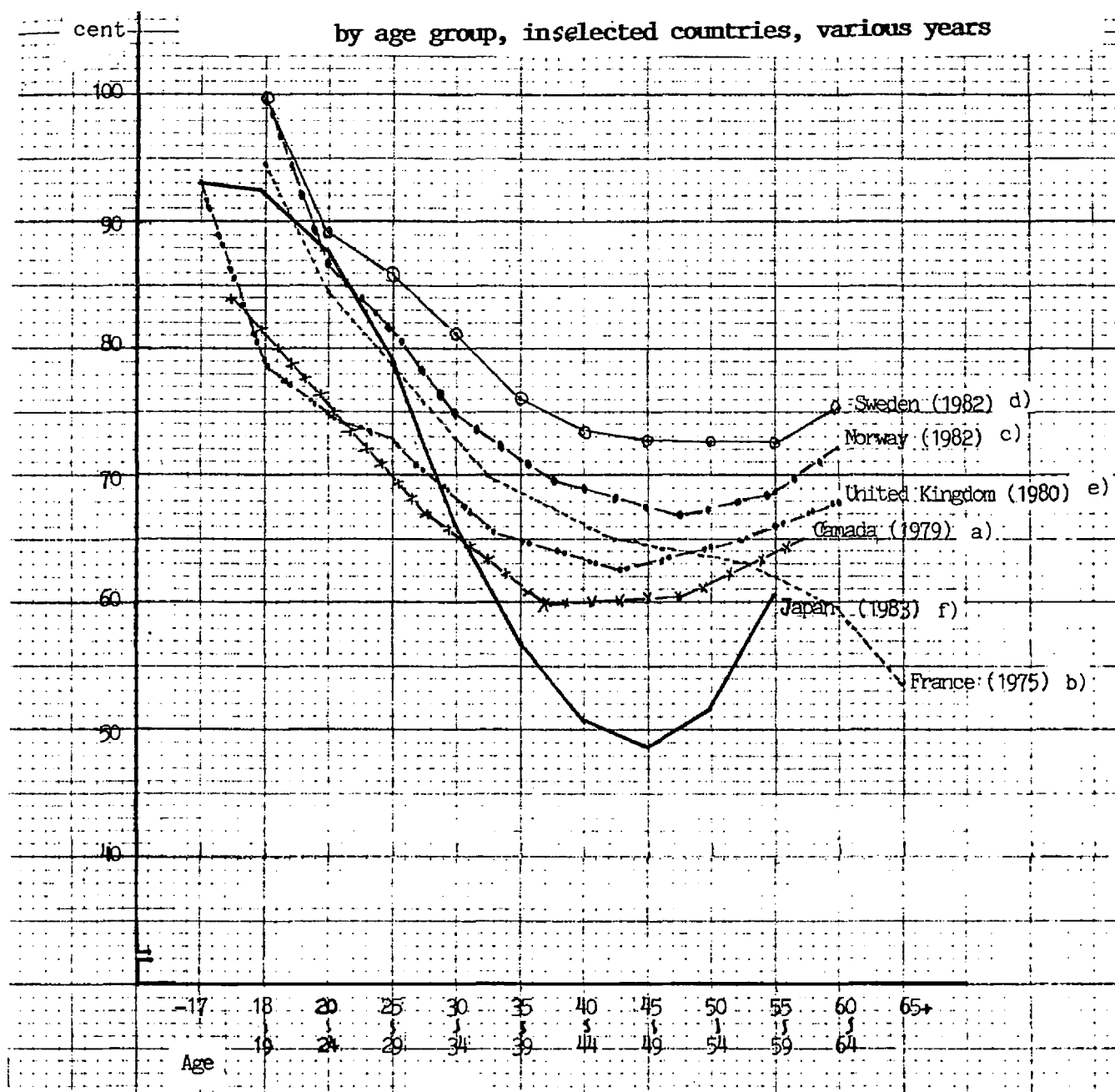
As in most industrialised countries, Japanese law (Article 4 of the Labour Standards Law, 1947) prohibits paying women unequal wages for

equal work. It is thus very rare, at least on the formal level, that women receive a different rate of pay for doing the same job within the same establishment.<sup>1</sup> A survey by the Ministry of Labour in 1981, however, indicates that 65 percent of the companies offered women lower starting wages. The major reasons given were that women were assigned to different jobs (71 %) or that they were assigned to the same type of job but with some differences in job content (33%) (MOL, 1981a, p.8-9). This indicates that an important mechanism for paying women lower wages is through job segregation. The concept of 'job' in Japanese companies is extremely vague and diffuse, this gives employers a wide margin within which to manipulate the differences in 'job contents' and justify paying different categories of employees different wages.

Another crucial phenomenon in Japan is that the wage differences between men and women are rather small when they are young, but the differences increase with age, peaking when they reach middle-age. This is a common phenomenon in most countries, but much more so in Japan (see, Fig. 4.1). The prevalence of the *nenko*-based wage practice in Japan means that workers start with very low wages when they are young, but as they get older they are promoted to higher grade jobs and receive higher wages. The principal way of skill formation, particularly in the large firms is through on-the-job training. The chances for on-the-job training and promotion for Japanese women workers are extremely limited (see, section IV). The majority of women are excluded from the *nenko* system. This is one factor responsible for the enlargement of the wage gap as they reach middle-age. Thus one can say that an important mechanism justifying women's unequal wages is through limitation of women's access to certain jobs and by restricting their promotion opportunities.

Furthermore, a high proportion of Japanese women withdraw from the labour market at the age of marriage and child-rearing (see, chapter 2, Fig. 2.1). Such an interrupted career pattern has a negative impact on women's wages and promotion in most countries, but particularly in Japan where *nenko* system prevails and continuous long-term service is an important criterion in skill formation and promotion in the large firms,

the discontinuous career pattern of women has a stronger negative impact on women's wages than elsewhere.



Sources: United Nations, *Economic Role of Women in the ECE Region*, 1985, p. 82 ;  
Basic Survey of Wage Structure, Ministry of Labour, Japan.

- Notes:
- a) Annual average earnings of full-time workers; youngest age group refers to 19 and under.
  - b) Net yearly earnings of full-time workers and employees in the private and semi-public sector. Age groups are: under 18; 18-20; 21-25; 26-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; 61-65; 65+.
  - c) Average monthly full-time earnings in establishments affiliated to the Norwegian Employers' Confederation (mostly manufacturing); the last age group refers to 60-66 years of age.
  - d) Monthly earnings of full-time employees in industry (ISIC 2+3).
  - e) Average gross weekly earnings of all adult full-time workers. First age group: under 18; second age group; 18-20.
  - f) Average monthly regular earnings (excluding overtime pay) of full-time workers in non-agricultural activities. First age group: under 17.



## 2. Job Segregation

The concept of job segregation refers to the fact that men and women are concentrated in different occupations (the 'horizontal' component of occupational segregation) and that even when women occupy the same occupation they are often employed at different levels of responsibility and allocated to different tasks than men (the 'vertical' component). It is, however, difficult to obtain statistical evidence of the latter unless one can have access to firm level data.

Table 4.3 shows the occupational distribution of male and female employees. The sexual imbalance is striking. Over half of women work as clerical or production process workers, less than one percent work as managers and administrators and less than one percent work as transport equipment operators. The concentration of women in some occupations is obvious if we look at women's share relative to that of men: Women constitute 51.4 percent of service workers, 52 percent of clerical workers, and 42.7 percent of unskilled labourers. They are severely underrepresented in administrative and managerial jobs, constituting a mere 5.7 per cent of the total. It is often pointed out that women's occupational status has improved tremendously as indicated by their large share in professional and technical jobs (48.4 per cent). A closer look reveals that the majority of professional women are concentrated in sectors such as health service and teaching. These two occupations together constituted 75 per cent of all women in the professional and technical category.

Statistical evidence from the Basic Survey of Wage Structure (1983) shows that within each of the occupation for which data are available, women still earn much less than their male counterparts.<sup>2</sup> For example, female shop assistants in department stores earn only 70.5 per cent of men's wages, and female radio and TV assembly line workers earn only 62.4 per cent of men's wages. This implies that within each occupation, women tend to be employed at lower grades and/or they are employed in smaller firms which pay lower wages.

**Table 4.3**  
**Occupational Distribution of Male and Female Employees**

(Unit: 10,000 persons; %)

Occupation	Male		Female		Women's share of total (%)
	Number	%	Number	%	
Professional & technical workers	214	7.9	201	13.5	48.4
Managers & officials	200	7.3	12	0.8	5.7
Clerical workers	448	16.5	485	32.6	52.0
Sales workers	394	14.5	178	12.0	31.1
Farmers, lumbermen & fishermen	31	1.1	10	0.7	23.8
Mining & quarrying	4	0.1	0	0.0	-
Transport & communication	208	7.6	13	0.9	5.9
Craftsmen & production process workers	949	34.9	332	22.3	25.9
Labourers	110	4.0	82	5.5	42.7
Service workers	161	5.9	171	11.5	51.4
Total	2,722	100.0	1,486	100.0	35.3

Source: Rodo Ryoku Chosa (Labour Force Survey, 1983), Statistics Bureau, the Prime Minister's Office.

The above data on occupational distribution provide only an extremely limited view of the extent of male-female labour market segregation according to job status. The Japanese labour market is not occupationally based. The labour market status and earnings of an employee are mainly determined by educational attainment, the size of the firm and the rank and position within the firm. However, in the case of women, there exists only a very 'weak link' between their educational attainment and labour market status. According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Labour in 1981, among those firms which recruited university graduates, 73 per cent did not recruit female graduates. And among those which recruited female graduates, only 19 per cent placed them in the same jobs as their male counterparts, 41 per cent of the firms replied that they placed female graduates in assistant clerical jobs, similar to that offered to junior college graduates (MOL, 1981). This 'weak link' between women's educational attainment and labour market status is confirmed by Kawashima's study which shows that women with university education are almost excluded from the large firms with well developed internal labour markets; only 18.7 per cent of them work in these firms compared to 60.5 per cent of male graduates (Kawashima, 1983).<sup>3</sup> Until very recently, the majority of large firms which had well developed internal job hierarchy, avoided hiring women with higher education for jobs connected to higher positions on the promotion ladder. They hired a small number of women with junior college education for clerical or specialised jobs with little chance for promotion.

### **3. Women's Concentration in Small Firms**

As already mentioned, in the Japanese labour market, the company one works for is more influential than the occupation in determining one's status, position and more importantly, earnings. Clark (1979, p.53) describes company membership as 'the prime attribute' defining the worker's position in the world of work .

The persistence of duality in the structure of production has been one of the conspicuous features of the postwar Japanese economic

structure and labour market. This duality is focused on differences between big firms and small firms. The large firms and, to some extent, the medium size firms have well developed internal labour markets. They hire school leavers for entry jobs, higher positions are filled through internal promotion. They pay higher wages and offer good working conditions. Nenko-based wages and lifelong commitment are common practices. Small firms, in contrast, have many entry points and a higher labour turnover rate. Labour mobility between large firms and small firms is not very common. Wages in the small firms are more exposed to the operation of the competitive labour market. Many small firms are, in fact, sub-contractors for the large firms and they are under the domination of large firms. The domination of large over small firms is also seen in other industrial countries, but it is probably more marked in Japan than elsewhere . .

There is an obvious imbalance in the distribution of the male and female workforce by firm size (Table 4.4). About 60 per cent of women work in firms which employ less than 100 persons, and less than one-fifth work in large firms with 500 or more employees. In contrast, less than half of the male workforce is found in firms with less than 100 employees and about one-quarter of them work in large firms with 500 or more employees. More striking is that a high proportion of young women work for large firms, whereas middle-aged women are highly concentrated in small firms. In 1983, 61.4 per cent of women in the group aged 35-39 were employed in firms with 99 employees or less; while only 13.9 per cent of them worked in firms with more than 500 employees. The corresponding figures for women aged 20-24 were 40.5 per cent and 32.8 per cent respectively (see, table 4.5).

**Table 4.4**

**Distribution of Male and Female Employees By Firm Size**  
(Non-agricultural sector)

(Unit: 10,000 persons;%)

Firm size	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total	2,701	100.0	1,475	100.0
1-29	847	31.4	569	38.6
30-99	404	15.0	242	16.4
100-499	394	14.6	216	14.6
500-	724	26.8	278	18.8
Public sector	327	12.1	168	11.4

Source: Rodo Ryoku Chosa (Labour Force Survey, 1983),  
Statistics Bureau, The Prime Minister's Office.

Table 4.5

Distribution of Male\* and Female Employees By Firm Size and Age Groups  
(Non-agricultural sector)

(Unit: percentages)

Age Groups	Firm Size (No. of persons)				Public Sector	Total
	1-29	30-99	100-499	500 +		
15-19	38.8 (39.3)	16.4 (14.8)	14.3 (14.8)	18.8 (23.0)	11.6 (8.2)	100.0 (100.0)
20-24	26.7 (33.9)	13.8 (15.9)	16.6 (15.9)	32.8 (23.3)	9.7 (10.6)	100.0 (100.0)
25-29	32.5 (30.3)	13.5 (14.2)	13.5 (15.3)	22.1 (26.9)	18.4 (13.1)	100.0 (100.0)
30-34	42.0 (31.2)	14.8 (13.7)	13.6 (14.8)	14.8 (27.9)	14.2 (12.4)	100.0 (100.0)
35-39	44.3 (29.8)	17.1 (14.0)	13.3 (15.2)	13.9 (30.1)	10.8 (10.8)	100.0 (100.0)
40-54	42.6 (29.9)	18.6 (14.8)	13.9 (13.8)	13.2 (27.0)	11.4 (14.2)	100.0 (100.0)
55-64	48.6 (35.9)	18.7 (18.7)	11.2 (15.6)	11.2 (16.9)	10.3 (13.1)	100.0 (100.0)
65 >	61.5 (52.6)	15.4 (19.7)	7.7 (11.8)	7.7 (7.9)	11.5 (7.9)	100.0 (100.0)

Source: Rodo Ryoku Chosa (Labour Force Survey, 1983), Statistics Bureau, The Prime Minister's Office.

\*Male figures shown in ( )

The fact that large firms only recruit school leavers for permanent jobs means that their doors are closed to many of the middle-aged women re-entering the labour market as mid-career entrants. Many of them can only find employment in small firms under poor working conditions.

Women's concentration in small firms has remained unchanged over the last two decades. The proportion of women employed in firms with 99 employees or less has in fact increased slightly from 52.7 per cent in 1965 to 55 per cent in 1985. This has been due to the increase in the number of women working in the service sector which constitutes a large number of small firms.

The above evidence indicates that a wide discrepancy exists between the relative position of men and women in the Japanese labour market. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this discrepancy can be attributed to 'discrimination' in the labour market as such. However, to attribute women's unequal position solely to 'quality differences' between male and female workers cannot explain why women as a group are systematically located in a disadvantaged position. At the same time, it is important to note that 'quality differences' between men and women can be both the result of pre-market discrimination as well as discrimination in the labour market. Kawashima's study (1983) shows that equally qualified male and female workers are not equally distributed in different sectors of the labour market. This is an important factor in producing unequal labour market outcomes between men and women. Certain institutional forces appear to be at work in the labour market which bias the distribution of the male and female workforces. It is therefore essential to know what these institutional forces are.

### III. THE NATURE OF THE JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN WORKERS

Despite repeated prophecies of the inevitable dissolution of the 'traditional' Japanese employment system, the practice of lifetime employment is still a striking feature of the employment system in Japan in the 1980s (see, chapter 11). It refers to the practice whereby an employee enters a company after school graduation, receives in-company training, and remains an employee of the same company until the retirement age of 55 or 60.<sup>4</sup> This practice is supported and reinforced by the *nenko*-based wage and promotion system, a system whereby wage increases is not so much based on job performance as on age, length of service and education. The *nenko*-based wage system reinforces high company commitment because leaving the company means giving up all the accumulated seniority and promotion chances. Up to the present, there is little evidence showing that job mobility between the large firms has increased (JPC, 1987). Mutual commitment on both the employer and employee side on a long-term basis constitutes the most important aspect of the employment system in the large firms and, to some extent, in the medium size firms in Japan.

From the viewpoint of the company, employment of a permanent workforce and linking wage increases to age makes the employment system very rigid, both in terms of the size of employment and labour costs. This inevitably means that the benefits of the practices can only be applied selectively to the core workers. Several measures are adopted by the firms to adjust the amount of employment and labour costs to business fluctuation:

(1) The employment of non-permanent workers (*Rinjiko*), including temporary and casual workers is common. These workers are hired during a business boom and may be fired when it comes to an end. Many non-permanent workers may be doing the same job as the permanent workers but are paid less and they are not entitled to various kinds of fringe benefits. They do not belong to the enterprise union. The use of non-permanent workers started at the time when the lifetime employment



practice took root after World War I (Sumiya, 1979). It functions as a safety valve for the system. According to the Labour Force Survey in 1985, 94.8 per cent of males were permanent workers against 5.2 per cent non-permanent workers; whereas only 80.6 percent of females were permanent workers against 19.4 per cent non-permanent workers. The trend since the 1960s is that female non-permanent workers have increased while male non-permanent workers have decreased slightly.

(2) Women workers play an important role in increasing the flexibility of the employment system. It has long been a customary practice that women worked only for a few years between the end of schooling and marriage. They are encouraged by the companies to quit before they benefit from wage increases under the seniority system. Before the mid-1970s, many companies actually forced women to retire under the compulsory early retirement system. As the system is now ruled illegal by the courts, many companies have changed to an informal system by encouraging women to retire at marriage or child-birth through offering them special allowances. Since the majority of women are assigned to unskilled or assistant type of jobs, the replacement of senior women by young school leavers serves the purpose of reducing labour costs. Even in the 1980s, many employers still regard it as a rational practice to encourage the high turnover rate of women workers as a means to reduce the rigidity of the employment system.

(3) The employment of a large number of female part-time workers is another important means for adjusting to business fluctuation. Part-time workers are excluded from the benefits of lifetime employment and *nenko* wages. The increase in the number of part-time workers has been particularly remarkable in recent years (see, chapter 2). The majority of them are middle-aged women who move in and out of the labour market as demand fluctuates, as a type of marginal workforce. Among the permanent regular workers, employment of women fluctuates more than men, and part-time female employment fluctuates much more than that of the permanent regular workers (Kawashima, 1983, p.153-4).

(4) Another mechanism for maintaining the flexibility of the employment system is the use of subcontracts. Big firms subcontract work to medium or small firms to adjust the amount of production to the fluctuation in demand and also to take advantage of a cheap labour force.

Fig 4.2 shows the composition of the workforce in a typical large firm in Japan. It is, perhaps, no exaggeration to say that employment security and favourable working conditions enjoyed by the permanent core employees are based upon an exploitative system which excludes a large number of women workers, part-time, temporary workers and workers in small firms from enjoying the benefits of the system. Unequal treatment of workers outside the framework of lifetime employment is thus an inevitable outcome of a system strategically designed to sustain employment stability of the permanent workforce. Doeringer and Piore's (1971) elucidation of how discrimination is embedded in the operation of the internal labour markets in the United States sheds light on the Japanese situation:

'Internal labour markets are designed intentionally to discriminate. They do so by selecting workers at the points of entry and by conferring privileges upon the internal labour force not available to those in the external labour market. Discrimination arises because of the job security and advancement opportunities which exist for the internal workforce and because of the economics of developing and retaining a trained workforce which the internal market provides to employees. Discrimination in this sense has a clear economic and social rationale for both employers and workers....'

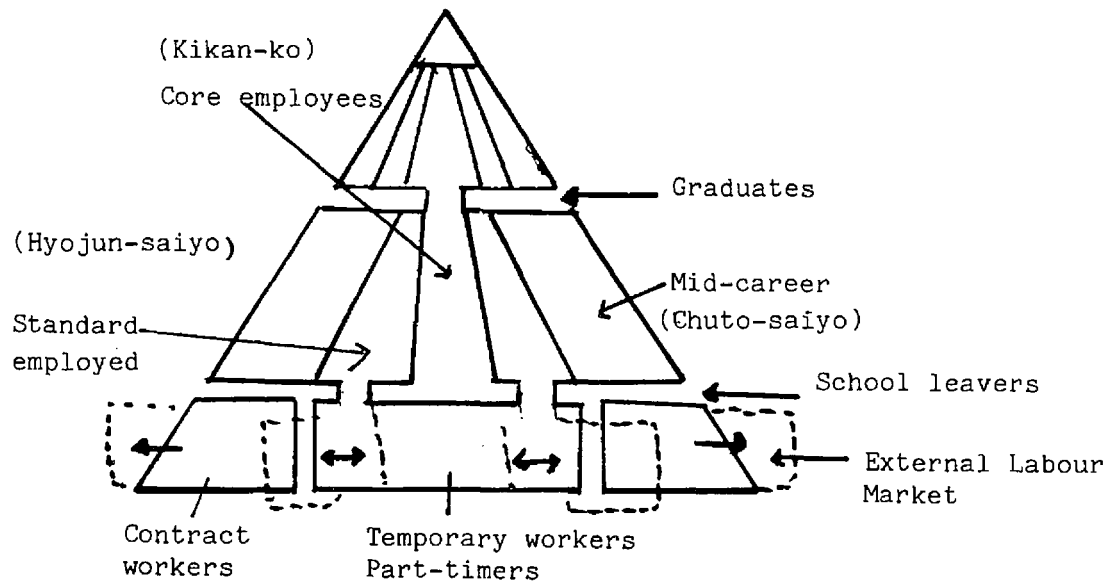
Galenson and Odaka (1976, p.626) also writes:

'The Japanese system of lifetime employment guarantee, as practised by virtually all large corporations and many medium-size ones as well, is a noteworthy aspect of the country's labour market organisation. Although limited in scope to a minority of the labour force, where it applies, it has provided firms with major benefits at relatively small cost. In our own view, its economic rationality is beyond question. Japanese customs and tradition may have contributed to its adoption and to its continuing ideological strength, but the profitability criteria alone would be sufficient to sustain its popularity in business circles whether it has served the workers equally well is a different question.'

The utilisation of women as a group of low cost peripheral workers has served the Japanese economic system well. Personnel management practices carried out by the majority of Japanese companies present strong barriers to women's participation in the work organisations on an equal basis to men. These barriers are sometimes created by direct exclusion of women in different stages of employment, i.e. direct discrimination; and/or generated by the customary rules and practices of Japanese management which operate to the disadvantage of the majority of women, i.e. indirect discrimination.

Fig. 4.2

Composition of Labour Force in a  
Typical Large Firm in Japan



#### **IV. DISCRIMINATORY COMPANY PRACTICES**

##### **1. Direct Discrimination**

A nation-wide survey carried out by the Ministry of Labour in 1981 showed that direct discrimination against women in all stages of employment was widely practised by the majority of companies (MOL, 1981)<sup>5</sup>.

##### **(a) Recruitment**

It is a common practice for large firms in Japan to recruit directly from school leavers. Each year, they decide in advance the number of new recruits they need from each education group. Many firms in western countries tend to recruit whenever new vacancies arise and individuals with suitable qualifications are sought to fit the job. Japanese firms tend to recruit the person into the organisation first before assigning specific jobs to each individual. In most cases, personal criteria and formal school education are more important than job qualifications in the firms' recruitment and hiring decisions. Sex constitutes an important personal criterion in the firms' recruitment policy. In 1981, among those firms which recruited high school leavers, 62 per cent recruited both men and women, 22 per cent recruited men only and 16 per cent recruited women only. The picture was quite different in the case of university graduates; 73 per cent of the firms limited their recruitment to male graduates, only 26 per cent recruited both male and female graduates. The reasons given by the companies for not recruiting female university graduates were that 'female high school leavers and junior college graduates were well qualified enough for the jobs' (55%), 'jobs for university graduates were limited to men only' (25%) and that 'female university graduates quit too soon' (16%). These are obvious examples of direct discrimination against women at the point of entry.

### **(b) Conditions of Hiring**

Among the firms surveyed, 25 per cent replied that they set different hiring conditions for male and female high school leavers and 38 per cent of the firms set different hiring conditions for male and female university graduates. The common differences were to require different qualifications or fields of study, to hire men as nationally mobile employees and women as local employees or to restrict the employment of women to local branch offices.

### **(c) Job Assignment**

The Survey showed that 83 percent of the firms had jobs to which they did not assign women. The reasons given for not assigning women were: 'requirement for physical strength' (51%), 'requirement for high qualification' (36%), 'frequent assignment outside the office' (27%) and 'need to make external contacts' (23%).

### **(d) Job Rotation and Promotion**

Job rotation constitutes the most important part of training and skill formation process in Japanese firms. Among those firms which carried out regular job rotation, 50 per cent did not offer women the opportunity. The reasons being that 'the assistant nature of women's job makes job rotation unnecessary' (66%), 'women do not want job rotation' (31%) and that 'women are only employed on a short term basis' (11%).

A direct result of limiting women's job assignment and training opportunities is their poor chances for promotion: 45 per cent of the firms replied that they did not offer women any chance for promotion to supervisory positions. Among those firms which offered women some promotion opportunities, 36 per cent limited promotion up to the level of first line supervisor (Kakaricho), 25 per cent limited to sub-section chief (Kacho) and only 14 per cent offered women promotion up to the level of section chief (Bucho).

### **(e) Retirement**

In those firms where there was a formal retirement system, 19 per cent set different retirement ages for men and women. In 1981, compulsory retirement at the time of marriage, pregnancy or childbirth was official policy in 2 per cent of the firms surveyed although it was believed that the practice existed more extensively in an informal manner than the official figures indicated. Discriminatory retirement rules were challenged by many court cases since the early 1970s (see, chapter 6). Many companies had eliminated their discriminatory policies, at least on the formal level, by the late 1970s. It was also an area where companies were least resistant to change as it only affected employees who were leaving the company rather than the entire personnel management system.

### **2. Indirect Discrimination**

Even if employers do not have the intention to discriminate, many of the customary rules and practices which characterise Japanese management will still operate to the disadvantage of the majority of women. As Piore and Doeringer (1971) point out, the rules and practices which define the internal labour markets and govern their practice will result in indirect discrimination and perpetuate the advantages of the core workers.

In the large firms where lifetime employment exists, personnel policies are built upon the assumption that workers will commit themselves to the firms long-term. Japanese firms tend to invest heavily in the training of their workers, much more so than companies in the western countries. There is a strong emphasis on the development of firm specific skills which include both technical and organisational skills. Long-term on-the-job-training and regular job-rotation are regarded as essential for the development of both types of skills. Training incurs heavy costs and firms will only invest if they expect that such costs can be recouped in the future. Investment in the training of women is regarded as 'risky' because of their high turnover

rate on the average. Even for those women who work for many years, firms will still hesitate to invest in their training because the expected risk for not able to recoup the cost is higher. This type of discrimination has been described as 'statistical discrimination'(see, chapter 3). However, this is appropriately defined as a form of discrimination even if employers' perceptions of the average sex differential are correct, since it is a manifestation of stereotyping, the treatment of each individual member of a group as if he/she possessed the average characteristics of the group (Blau and Jusenius, 1979, p.194). In recent years, there is evidence that some Japanese firms will start to invest in the training of their female employees and offer them job-rotation opportunities around the age of 30 when the probability of their quitting the job is reduced (Ishida, 1985). Women's chances for developing a career often start 5 or even 10 years later than their male counterparts. In western countries, women can use external occupational or professional training as credentials for career development; in Japan the emphasis on firm-specific training means that Japanese women tend to face greater institutional barriers in their career advancement because firms have a stronger discretionary power in allocating the chances for career development. The opportunities for occupational advancement depends much more on the allocative rules and procedures of the firms .

The importance of the seniority rule in the allocation of jobs, promotion and wage determination also operates to the serious disadvantage of women. Women leaving the firm lose all their accumulated seniority. When they re-enter the job market, they have to start again at the bottom of the job hierarchy. Wage data show that female mid-career entrants earn same wages as 18- or 19-year-old school leavers, disregarding their age or previous work experience (Shinotsuka, 1982, p.175). Career interruption is a disadvantage to women in any country, but it is much more of a handicap in Japan. Many firms, particularly the large ones, only recruit their regular workers from school leavers. Job openings available for mid-career workers are limited, especially for women it is often limited to jobs in the small firms or part-time jobs.



Promotion in the Japanese firms often means moving up the standard rank hierarchy according to one's age, length of service and performance. Since the mid-1960s, many firms started to stress the importance of 'merit' and 'job performance' in their promotion system, but the idea of 'job evaluation' or 'job appraisal' is not well developed in Japanese work organisations. One of the characteristics of Japanese work organisations is the lack of clear definition of jobs. On the formal level, firms do have clear-cut definition of jobs but in actual operation, the idea of individual job responsibility is usually quite blurred. There is a tendency for the actual performance of any job to be really the joint effort of a work group, thus the objective evaluation of any individual based on ability or performance becomes difficult. This is often pointed out as one advantage of Japanese work organisation because the lack of a clear definition of individual job responsibility tends to enhance flexibility and facilitates job transfer. However, when it comes to evaluation of job performance, there is always a tendency that it becomes an evaluation of the person rather than the person's job. Discrimination is more likely to occur under this situation yet more difficult to detect.

Even up to the present day, age and length of service are still the two most important criteria in the determination of promotion in Japanese firms. In many western countries, the seniority criteria for promotion is regarded as indirectly discriminatory against women because it has a disproportionate impact on women.<sup>6</sup> Equal employment legislation in the western countries stresses that the sole criteria for promotion should be based on merit and performance. The tendency of Japanese firms to use seniority criterion as an objective standard for evaluation will continue to operate to the disadvantage of women.

Promotion and career development in Japanese firms often involves regular job-rotation and job-transfer. Regular job-rotation is used both as a means for the development of multi-skill and the enhancement of a worker's organisational skill, it is also used as a means for increasing organisational flexibility. Firms do not expect women to be as mobile as their male colleagues. The immobility of women is often

used as an excuse for not promoting women and not assigning women to the main stream jobs. Women's role in the family is seen as a barrier to their mobility but the mobility requirement itself is rarely questioned or challenged.

The customary rules and practices in the Japanese work organisation are based upon the traditional assumption that 'men's sphere is at work', therefore they are expected to be committed and loyal workers; whereas 'women's sphere is at home', therefore their role in the work organisation can only be partial or marginal. This deep rooted sex role distinction in Japanese society serves as an important ideological basis for justifying sexual discrimination in the workplace.

#### **VI. WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE FAMILY: CULTURAL PERSISTENCE?**

To understand the position of women in the labour market and their role in the work organisations, one cannot ignore their position in society at large and the attitudes and perceptions of the role of women in the society. An adequate explanation of sexual inequality in the labour market needs to take into account the social constraints which place women in an inferior role in economic life. This is particularly relevant in the case of Japan, a country which has had a long history of female subjugation to the patriarchal family system until the end of World War II. The social norm of extreme sex role distinction is more marked in Japan than elsewhere. An international survey by the Japanese government in 1983 showed that 71 per cent of Japanese women agreed with the statement that 'men's sphere is at work and women's sphere is at home' as compared to 34 per cent in the United States 32 per cent in West Germany, 26 percent in the United Kingdom and 14 per cent in Sweden (PMO, 1983). The conformity of Japanese women to the traditional role in the family stands out among the advanced industrialised countries.

One question which often puzzles foreign observers and western scholars is : Why is it that more than three decades of rapid economic development have not eroded the traditional norms which make a strict

distinction between the sex roles in Japanese society? Why is it that discriminatory treatment of women in employment has rarely been seriously challenged? In others words, one is tempted to ask: What keeps Japanese women in their place?

The persistence of traditional cultural value which emphasises the importance of women's role as mother and wife in the family is often postulated as an explanation for the lack of equality consciousness among Japanese women. Lebra et al (1976, p.297) carried out a study on the lives of Japanese women in various occupations in the mid-1970s concluded that 'the fabric of feminine tradition in Japan had remained unchanged despite the growth in economic strength of individual women'. She observed that the majority of women in Japan, whether married or single, clung to the traditional definition of women's role as 'good wife and wise mother' and that there had been no fundamental questioning of the traditional role. Susan Pharr (1977, p.251) also pointed out that 'Japanese society still judges the adult women primarily on the basis of her performance in the wife-mother role. The major forces impeding the improvement of women's position in society derives from Japan's cultural tradition.'

The above observations of the attitudes of Japanese women in the 1970s still hold true in the 1980s. However, one should be cautious in interpreting the situation of women in contemporary Japan as simply a 'carry over' of habitual attitudes or behaviour from the past. It is important to note that the definition of women's roles is also a result of deliberately formulated policies both in the economic and non-economic spheres which continue to sustain the traditional familial and sex role ideology. Throughout the postwar period up until the present day, the government's family policy and education policy have consistently stressed the importance of motherhood as a sacred mission and continue to emphasise the rearing of the next generation as the sole responsibility of women (Meguro, 1980, pp.161-200). Early in the 1960s, rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and the increased participation of married women in employment led to a growing concern about the disintegration of the family system. In 1963, the government issued a

report on 'The Proper Way of Child Caring' which stressed the importance of child care within the family and the prime responsibility of the mother in the rearing of the second generation. The Report stated that 'it is to an individual adult's free choice to arrange for the appropriate way to rear their children but it is the children's right to be reared by their mothers' (Yamate, 1972, pp.79-94).

Sexual inequality in employment is very much related to inequality in other aspects of social life. This principle applies to Japan as well as other countries. What sets Japan apart from other countries is that such inequality has rarely been challenged until very recently. Sexual inequality has been justified and sustained by economic success over the last three decades.

#### Notes To Chapter 4

1. The Japanese legislation on equal pay differs greatly from that in western countries. Article 4 of the Labour Standards Law merely states that 'The employer shall not discriminate women against men concerning wages by reason of the worker being a woman'. There is no specification in the law concerning the precise meaning of 'equal work'. Unlike legislation in western countries where the meaning of 'equal work' and the criteria for comparing work are usually clearly spelled out, the term 'equal work' is not even mentioned in the Japanese legislative text.

2. Occupational wage data are severely limited in Japan. The Basic Survey of Wage Structure provides data on 99 male occupations and 40 female occupations. Comparison between male and female wages in these occupations is difficult because only 18 of the occupations covered in the survey present male and female wage data. This reflects the extent to which male and female jobs are segregated.

3. Kawashima found that the male and female workforce are not evenly distributed in different sectors of the labour market. In her study, rather than defining the dualistic character of the labour market in terms of firm size, she makes a distinction between the labour market in the concentrated sector (or the non-competitive sector) and the labour market in the competitive sector. She defines the two economic sectors on the degree of concentration of market power. The two sectors differ in terms of labour characteristics, employment patterns and wage structures. Her study found that there is a significant difference in the distribution of men and women among the sectors. Men are equally distributed between the two sectors (50.1 percent in the competitive sector and 49.9 percent in the concentrated sector), whereas a high proportion of women are found in the competitive sector (64 percent in the competitive sector and 36 percent in the concentrated sector). A more striking phenomenon found by Kawashima is that women with university education are almost excluded from the concentrated sector; only 18.7 percent of them work in the concentrated sector, in contrast to 81.3 percent in the competitive sector. Their male counterparts are distributed 60.5 percent in the competitive sector and 39.5 percent in the concentrated sector. Kawashima concludes that the concentrated sector, particularly large firms which have well developed internal job hierarchy, avoid hiring women with higher education for jobs connected to higher positions on the promotion ladder. They hire a small number of women with junior college education for clerical or specialised jobs with little chance for promotion. The competitive sector composed of smaller firms offers more job opportunities to women with higher education. Women with higher education face job discrimination against them. Higher education does not increase job opportunities for them, but on the contrary, places them in a labour surplus market even when the labour is generally in short supply. Kawashima, Yoko, Wage Differentials Between Men and Women in Japan, 1983, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Stanford University, pp. 160-1.

4. Some large firms have recently extended the retirement age up to 65. At the same time the voluntary early retirement system is being introduced in many companies in order to reduce the burden of increased labour cost in the face of the growing proportion of middle- and old-age workers.

5. The survey was carried out on enterprises with 30 or more regular employees. It was based on a random sample of 5,200 enterprises all over Japan. The response rate was 76.4 percent. The employment practices carried out by these firms, therefore, can be said to be representative of the situation in Japan. Joshi Rodosha No Koyo Kanri Ni Kansuru Chosa [Survey on Management of Women Workers], Ministry of Labour, 1981.

6. For example, in Britain, the seniority practice was identified as unlawful in the case of Steel v. Union of Post Office Workers. Further, in the Leeds Permanent Building Society formal investigation case, the Equal Opportunities Commission states that 'the Society might in the future act unlawfully if it believed that seniority was a justifiable criterion for promotion when this would have had a disproportionate impact on women...', Formal Investigation Report: Leeds Permanent Building Society, Equal Opportunities Commission, February, 1985, pp. 47.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EMERGING NEW SITUATION: CHANGING COMPANY PRACTICE IN RESPONSE TO MARKET PRESSURES

#### I. INTRODUCTION

From the mid-1970s, one could observe some changes in Japanese companies' policies towards their female employees. Some companies began to introduce new personnel practices and design special project teams or career development programmes for their women employees. Many companies started to talk about 'utilisation of women power' (josei-no-katsuyo) or 'revitalisation of the female workforce' (joshi-rodo-ryoku-no-kasseika). These were all new events in Japan as Japanese companies were traditionally rather indifferent to the 'women's issue'. Why did the 'women's issue' become a problem of concern for the Japanese companies and what prompted some major companies to introduce personnel management reforms better to utilise the abilities of their female employees after the mid-1970s?

This chapter examines the background factors leading to the shift in company policies on women. It also looks at the new personnel practices introduced and evaluates their implications for the position of women in the work organisations. We shall particularly focus on the 10-year period between 1975 and 1985. There are two reasons for this.

The first is that the oil crisis in 1973 marked an end to the period of rapid economic growth. After the mid-1970s, the Japanese economy entered a new phase of development. The economic growth rate started to slow down and the industrial structure was undergoing rapid transformation. Beginning in 1975, the proportion of the labour force working in manufacturing industries remained stagnant while those working in the tertiary industries rose rapidly (Table 5.1). One witnesses the rapid growth of the 'service economy' in Japan since the mid-1970s. It is generally believed that the growth of the service

economy tends to open up more job opportunities for women and enhances their status in the labour market. Early in 1968, Victor Fuchs, based on his observation of the changes in the American economy, pointed out that 'the advent of the service economy should make for greater equality between the sexes' (Fuchs, 1968, pp.11). Moses Abramovitz (1972) has also observed that the transformation in employment, which has characterised our time, is largely a shift from 'hard handed' to 'soft handed' work - from jobs calling for relatively low inputs of human capital which were filled largely by men, to jobs with higher demands on education and training, which can be filled by men and women. The fundamental observation is that the services are indeed, more suitable to utilising the abilities of women than were the old industrial jobs. Stanback, Jr. argued that 'women, perhaps, gradually, but nevertheless inevitably, will be substantial beneficiaries' (Stanback, Jr., 1981, pp.60).

This chapter asks whether the changes in the industrial structure and the new demands of the economy have brought about improved job opportunities for Japanese women, and looks at how Japanese companies seek to modify the traditional employment practices in order to accommodate the evolving new situation.



Table 5.1

## Distribution of the Workforce By Industrial Sector (1960-85)

Year	Total no. of workforce (10,000 persons)		Primary <sup>a</sup> industry(%)		Secondary <sup>b</sup> industry(%)		Tertiary <sup>c</sup> industry(%)	
	Male	[Female]	Male	[Female]	Male	[Female]	Male	[Female]
1960	4,372	[1,712]	32.6	[43.1]	29.2	[20.2]	38.2	[36.7]
1965	4,763	[1,861]	24.7	[32.5]	31.3	[23.1]	44.0	[44.4]
1970	5,211	[2,039]	19.4	[26.2]	34.0	[26.0]	46.6	[47.8]
1975	5,302	[1,964]	13.9	[18.4]	34.0	[25.7]	51.9	[55.7]
1980	5,536	[2,142]	10.4	[13.2]	34.8	[28.2]	54.6	[58.4]
1985	5,807	[2,304]	8.8	[10.6]	34.3	[28.3]	56.5	[60.8]

Source: Figures for 1965-1975 from Kokusei Chosa (Population Census); figures for 1980 and 85 from Rodo-Ryoku Chosa (Labour Force Survey), Statistic Bureau, Prime Minister's Office.

<sup>a</sup> Primary Industry includes agriculture, forestry and fishery

<sup>b</sup> Secondary Industry includes coal mining, construction and manufacturing

<sup>c</sup> Other industries not included in the above two categories.

The second reason for focussing on the 10-year-period between 1975 and 1985 is to see where matters stood before the EEO Law came into effect. The Japanese government passed the new legislation in May 1985 which came into effect in April 1986. Part III of the thesis will examine the nature of the legislation and how companies have responded to it. The main objective of the present chapter is to examine changes in company practices in response to market pressures, assuming that the 'legal compulsion factor' was non-existent before 1985. In practice one can never isolate the effects of the legislation from the processes leading to changes in company practices even before the legislation came into force, as some companies might have taken steps to initiate changes in anticipation of the legislation and/or the debate on the enactment of the legislation might have an educative effect on the attitudes of some

employers. It is nevertheless essential to have a picture of the situation before the law was introduced in order to understand the background context against which the law was introduced.

In the following, we shall first look at the major factors leading to shifts in company policies on women, and then examine the type of new practices introduced and finally evaluate their potential effect on women's positions in the companies.

## **II. SOURCES OF MANAGERIAL REFORM**

Changes occurring both on the demand side and the supply side have exerted pressures on Japanese companies to initiate changes in their employment policies on women. These are discussed separately in the following.

### **1. Demand Side: Changes in the Economic and Labour Market Environment**

There are three major factors relating to the changes in the economic and labour market environment which have pushed Japanese companies to pay more attention to the 'women's issue' and to initiate programmes better to utilise their abilities and to integrate them in the work organisations. Firstly, the rapid expansion of the service economy since the mid-1970s has greatly transformed the employment structure and led to increased demand for more female labour. Between 1975 and 1985, the total employed labour force increased by 18 per cent; among these male employees increased by 11.5 per cent and female employees increased by 32.6 per cent during the same period. Of the 3.8 million increase in the number of employees between 1975 and 1985, service industries contributed 40 per cent, and wholesale and retail industries contributed to 30 per cent of the increase. These are all traditionally female-intensive sectors, their rapid expansion has led to growing demand for more female labour. Although the increase in the number of female employees has been continuous since the 1950s, there are significant differences between the major factors leading to the

increase in recent years as compared with the period of rapid economic growth before 1973. The Labour White Paper of 1981 found that between 1965 and 1971, female employees increased by 2.5 million, 80 per cent of the increase was due to the growth in the aggregate demand for all types of labour; whereas between 1974 and 1979, female employees increased by 1.8 million, 63 per cent of the increase was due to the economic growth factor, 20 per cent of the increase resulted from the structural shift of the economy and a further 12 per cent resulted from the increase in the proportion of female labour in each industrial sector (MOL, 1981b). This indicates that the expansion of the female labour in recent years has resulted partly from the growth in demand for more labour in general and partly from the rapid growth in the demand for specifically female labour.

The sectoral shift of the economy has altered the occupational distribution of the labour force. In particular, there has been an expansion of white-collar jobs and knowledge-intensive occupations into which more women have entered. Table 5.2 shows the increasing tendency for women to be engaged in more knowledge-intensive occupations. The proportion of women engaged in clerical, professional and managerial occupations increased from 11 per cent in 1955 to 24.4 per cent in 1970 and further up to 34.6 per cent in 1980. This increase has been most remarkable in the tertiary sector where the proportion of women engaged in clerical, professional and managerial occupation surpassed that of their male counterparts in 1975. In 1980, 46.3 per cent of women working in the tertiary sector were engaged in clerical, professional or managerial jobs as compared to 37.3 percent of their male counterparts. The rapid growth of of the services, finance, banking and retail distribution industries has prompted companies to recruit more highly educated women and train them as specialists and experts in various fields. There has been not only a demand for more female labour but more importantly there has been a demand for better quality female labour. Many companies which had previously closed their doors to female university graduates changed their recruitment policies after the mid-1970s (see, below).

**Table 5.2**  
**Male and Female Employees in Clerical, Professional and**  
**Managerial Occupations as Percentage of All Employees in the Sector**  
(Unit: %)

Year	All industries			Manufacturing			Tertiary		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1955	15.1	17.8	11.0	15.4	17.0	14.1	33.8	36.6	29.0
1960	17.4	19.3	14.5	16.7	17.8	14.6	34.3	36.1	31.2
1965	21.5	22.2	20.3	18.4	18.7	17.7	36.3	36.7	35.6
1970	24.5	24.5	24.4	19.9	20.6	18.7	38.1	37.4	39.3
1975	28.6	26.7	31.8	21.4	21.3	21.5	40.9	38.4	44.8
1980	29.7	26.8	34.6	20.8	21.1	20.3	41.0	37.3	46.3

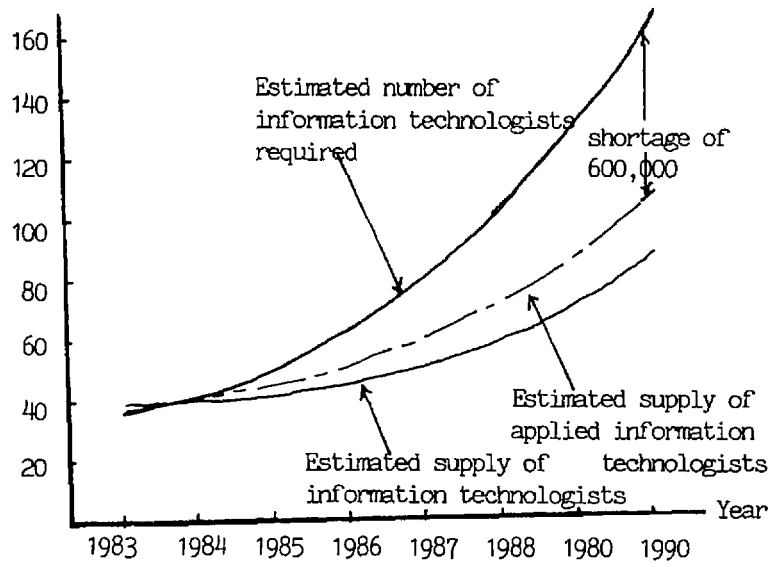
Source: Kokusei Chosa (Population Census), The Prime Minister Office, Japan, 1980.

A second factor, not unrelated to the first, has been the shortage of skilled labour, particularly in the rapidly expanding high-technology industries which has caused companies to look for ways of using more women. The shortage of skilled labour has been particularly acute in the information technology sector. Among the various types of technical specialists, those which have been in greatest demand are the software engineers. Early in the 1980s, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry warned that there would be a shortage of 600,000 software engineers if companies did not seek for an additional source of supply (see, Fig. 5.1). Major electronic firms such as Fujitsu, NEC, Toshiba and Matsushita started to recruit female university graduates and train them as software engineers in the early 1980s. For the first time in the history of the Company, Fujitsu recruited 100 female university graduates in 1980, the number more than double to 230 in 1985. NEC followed the policy in 1981. The main reason mentioned by these companies for changing their recruitment policy was shortage of skilled labour. Labour market pressures have prompted these companies to look towards women as an untapped human resource.

Fig. 5.1

Estimation of demand and supply for information technologists

(10,000 persons)



Source: Estimated by MITI based on survey on information technology industry; adapted from Ishida, 1986, pp. 49.

A third factor motivating Japanese companies better to utilise women has been the growing importance of women in the consumer market. Paradoxically, the existence of extreme sex role segregation in Japanese society, which is often pointed out as the source of sexual discrimination in the workplaces, has led to expanding job opportunities for women. Japanese women are almost in total control of the consumer market because of their control over the family budget. Increased market competition has made more and more companies realise that in order to remain competitive, they need to bring in more women and utilise their ideas in product development, marketing strategies and sales promotion. This phenomenon is not limited to the retail distribution and financial sectors, but is also present in manufacturing companies such as electrical appliance makers, automobile and office automation machinery manufacturers. These companies are setting up special women project teams to plan and develop products to suit 'women's tastes' and to market the products to women consumers. The advent of the service economy and the growing dominance of the consumer market is expanding women's job opportunities and giving them better access to the business world.

The above mentioned changes in the industrial structure and the shifting characteristics of the economy implied that a growing number of Japanese companies could no longer afford to treat all their women employees as a single group of marginal or temporary workforce. For the first time in history, Japanese companies have had to consider finding a way to integrate women in the traditionally male-dominated work organisations.

## **2. Demand Side: Internal Organisational Changes**

The onset of the slow growth since the mid-1970s has brought to the fore organisational problems created by the nenko-based promotion and reward system. In the past, when the economy was expanding rapidly, promotion and reward based on nenko did not cause many organisational problems. Up to the early 1970s, about 70 per cent of the male university graduates working in large firms could expect promotion at

least up to section chief (kacho) or department head (bucho) by the time they reached retirement age (Yoshikawa, 1980, p.45). This could be easily accomplished when the scale of the business was expanding which helped to create a large number of positions at the top of the organisation hierarchy. The system was also sustained by the continual recruitment of a large number of young school leavers every year, maintaining the pyramidal shape of the age structure in the organisation. However, the onset of the slower economic growth after the mid-1970s implies that the capacity of the company to expand and create more positions at the top has been reduced. The ageing of the population means that there is a shortage of young workers and an excess of the older ones. This imposes tremendous pressures on the companies both in terms of labour cost and organisational rigidity. Since the mid-1970s, many companies have been looking for ways to reduce labour cost on the one hand and to introduce more flexible personnel systems on the other. This has affected company's employment and utilisation policies on women. Many companies actually saw it as a 'safer' policy to recruit more women, not only as part-time or temporary employees to take up bottom-level peripheral jobs, but also to recruit more highly qualified women to take up specialist jobs, as companies assumed that the majority of women did not expect nenko promotion and a high proportion of them would retire at some stage in their careers to have families. From the company's point of view, it is beneficial to utilise more women because this not only reduces labour cost, increases organisational flexibility but also helps to maintain the pyramidal shape of the age structure which ensures the possibility of maintaining the lifetime employment and nenko system for a small minority of 'elite' (predominantly male) employees. Thus internal organisational dynamics is one major factor explaining why many companies started to adopt more open employment policies towards women and an increasing number of companies which had formerly closed their doors to female university graduates changed their policies after the mid-1970s.

### 3. Supply Side: A Highly-Educated Female Workforce

Change on the demand side offers only a partial explanation for the shift in the company's employment policies on women. The rapid rise in the education level of the female population over the past two decades has been one of the most important changes on the supply side which brings about the changes in the companies' recruitment policy after the mid-1970s. In 1965, only 6.0 per cent of women entering the job market were graduates from 2-year junior colleges or 4-year universities, the figure rose to 26.8 per cent in 1975 and further crept up to 47.8 per cent in 1985 (Table 5.3). If we look at the actual changes in the number of male and female 4-year university graduates between 1965 and 1985 (Table 5.4), the reasons for the company's move to employ and utilise more university-educated women can be easily understood. In 1965, women constituted 12.9 per cent of the total number of graduates; the proportion rose to 22.3 per cent in 1975 and further up to 23.2 per cent in 1985. In between 1975 and 1980, the total number of graduates entering the job market increased by 52,446; female graduates contributed to 36 per cent of the total increase. And between 1980 and 1985, while the number of male graduates declined by 2,118; the number of female graduates increased by 5,332. The greatest increase in the absolute number of female graduates occurred between 1970 and 1980. Given the shift in the industrial structure and the growing need for more highly qualified labour, Japanese companies could no longer afford to close their doors to female university graduates.

According to annual surveys carried out by the Monbusho (Ministry of Education), the job placement ratio of female university graduates increased by 10.6 percentage points between 1975 and 1985, it rose from 62.8 per cent in 1975 to 73.4 per cent in 1985; whereas the job placement ratio of male graduates increased only slightly from 77.5 per cent to 79.8 per cent during the same period. A survey conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Labour Office also indicates that the majority of the companies which recruited female graduates started to do so after the mid-1970s. According to the survey, among the 208 firms in the Tokyo Metropolitan Region which had been recruiting female university



graduates, 119 of them introduced the policy after the mid-1970s (TMO, 1982, p.69).

Highly-educated women not only have been entering the job market in greater number but the type of occupations they entered had also changed significantly. The most significant change over the past decade has been the increase in the number and proportion of those engaged in specialist and technical jobs other than the traditional field of teaching (see, Fig 5.2). In 1965, 76 per cent of female university graduates went into teaching - the only area which opened its doors to women with university education. At that time, job opportunities in the corporate sector were extremely limited. However, by 1984, only 27 percent of them became teachers: the majority of them went into specialist, technical and clerical jobs in the corporate sector. The expansion of specialist and technical jobs has been particularly dramatic over the past 10 years. In 1975, only 9.8 per cent went into specialist and technical jobs, this increased to 22.3 percent in 1984. An examination of detailed occupational classification reveals that the greatest increase has been in social welfare related specialist jobs - a four times increase over the past 10 years. The second largest category is that of computer programmer and systems analyst. This confirms our earlier argument that the increasing need for more specialists and technical experts has prompted companies to open their doors to female university graduates.

**Table 5.3**  
**Educational Composition of Women Entering Employment**

(unit:%)

Year	Middle school	High school	Junior college	4-year university	Total
1960	54.4	42.1	1.7	1.8	100.0
1965	43.2	50.8	3.5	2.5	100.0
1970	20.2	64.8	10.5	4.5	100.0
1975	9.2	64.0	18.3	8.5	100.0
1980	5.2	60.6	22.5	11.7	100.0
1985	5.1	57.0	25.1	12.7	100.0

Source: Gakko Gihon Chosa (Basic Survey on Education), Ministry of Education, Japan.

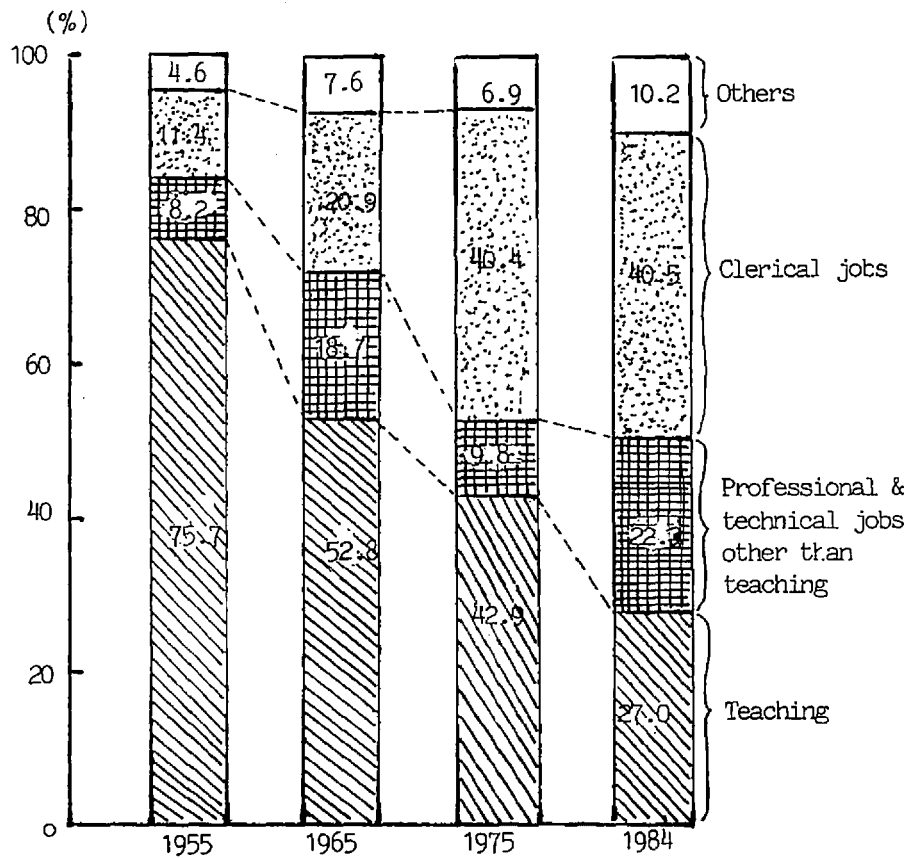
**Table 5.4**  
**No. of Male and Female University Graduates Entering Employment**

(Unit: persons; %)

Year	Male	Female	Women's share of total
1960	89,166	10,540	10.5%
1965	117,891	17,528	12.9
1970	159,037	29,190	15.5
1975	190,246	42,437	22.3
1980	223,671	61,558	21.5
1985	221,453	66,890	23.2

Source: Same as Table 5.3

Fig. 5.2 Change in the Occupational Distribution of Female University Graduates



Source: Gakko Gihon Chosa [Basic Survey on Education],  
Ministry of Education, Japan

### III. COMPANY RESPONSES TO MARKET PRESSURES: 'CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES' FOR WOMEN

The growth of the service economy and the increase in specialist and technical jobs has expanded the job opportunities for women, particularly for highly-educated women. Some companies began to introduce new policies in an attempt to open up promotion opportunities for women and to improve their morale, particularly for those who have stayed with the companies for a reasonable number of years. Statistics published by the Ministry of Labour indicate that the average length of service of women workers has extended from 4.5 years in 1970 to 6.8 years in 1985. Companies which employed a large number of women began to show concern about the problem of low morale of the female workforce. Special career development programmes were introduced to 'revitalise' the female workforce. The pages that follow examine these programmes. Whenever available, macro-level statistics will be used to illustrate the extent of coverage of the new practices but it should be noted that in some cases we are looking at pioneering examples. Such pioneering examples should not be ignored simply because they are not representative of the overall picture. As we are looking at a changing situation, pioneering examples are illustrative of an emerging new phenomenon.

#### 1. Creation of Women's Project Teams

This is the most common approach adopted by some major companies as a first step to 'revitalise' the female workforce. The original purpose had very little to do with promoting equal opportunities between men and women. Some companies started to organise women's project teams purely out of 'business needs' but in some cases it may represent a deliberate attempt to provide an opportunity for women to demonstrate their ability and to enhance their sense of participation in the work organisations through involvement in team work (Mokushi, 1980). Most companies, however, have tried to integrate the former objective with the latter (GR, 1980).

Women's special project teams have been most widely adopted by department stores and supermarkets where women are organised into small groups to improve productivity, to improve services to customers, to organise special bargain sales or to make suggestions to management regarding improvement of working environment and welfare for women etc. These women's project teams represent part of the companies' attempts to develop small group activities for promoting higher productivity and to enhance a sense of participation in management (GR, 1979; Komatsu, 1980). More recently, similar project teams have been taken up by manufacturers in the consumer electronic industries to promote product development and marketing by utilising 'women's ideas'. Some recent examples included electrical appliance manufacturers such as Sony, Matsushita Electric and Hitachi where women were specially assigned to project teams to plan and develop electrical appliances. These companies believed that products made using men's ideas were failing to penetrate the market (The Japan Times, July 25, 1985). Another example is Toshiba where a 'Women's Marketing Group' was set up in 1984 to promote the sales, development and marketing of household appliances. The company also established a 'Toshiba Lady Headquarters' in 1986 to promote the sales of word processors. The Company explained that the major reason for organising women in project teams was due to increased market competition in office automation machinery. The women's project team was part of the Company's marketing strategy in expanding the sales of word-processors (Koyo Shinko Kyokai, 1986, p.92-6; Nikkei Shimbun, March 1, 1986).

The above are typical examples of how some companies have been integrating their policies of 'revitalisation of women' with their productivity improvement activities and marketing strategies. These cases are often dramatically taken up by the mass media to portray an image of 'progressive' company policies on women. However, it should be noted that these are policies for effectively 'utilising women', not policies for promoting equal opportunities between men and women. The project teams are often established on an ad hoc and informal basis. They are not part of the formal organisation structure and there is no formal link between these project teams and formal career progression in

the company. However, 'female group leaders' do sometimes emerge through these informal work groups. In some cases these special project teams tend to lead to a second stage in women's career development programmes - training of 'female group leaders'.

## **2. The 'Female Group Leader' System**

The creation of the role of 'female group leader' is most commonly found in the female-intensive industries such as banking, insurance and retail distributions. Surveys carried out by Noriko Inagei (1983), an expert on female leadership training in Japan, found that the group leader system was quite widely practised and had been gaining popularity in recent years. Table 5.5 shows the changes in the proportion of companies which said they had introduced the female group leader system, both formally and informally, between 1968 and 1982. For all industries, the proportion of companies which had introduced the formal female group leader system increased from 42 per cent in 1968 to 57 per cent in 1982. The system was most widely adopted in the department stores and supermarkets and the financial sectors, 100 per cent and 83 per cent respectively in 1982. The increase was more extensive in the case of introducing the system on an informal basis, 84 per cent of the companies in 1982 had adopted an informal female group leader system as compared to 58 percent in 1968.

Table 5.5

Proportion of companies with female group leader system

Industries	Formal		Informal	
	1968	1982	1968	1982
Total	42.0%	56.6%	57.5%	84.2%
Textile	52.4	25.0	66.7	100.0
Pulp, leather, Iron & steel, oil	20.0	66.7	60.0	66.7
Chemical & food	52.8	53.3	41.7	86.7
Metal & electrical machinery	36.8	43.5	61.4	78.3
Insurance & finance	40.0	83.3	60.0	100.0
Department stores	75.0	100.0	75.0	100.0
Supermarkets	-	75.0	-	100.0
Trading & hotels	21.4	40.0	57.1	80.0
Communication & gas	-	50.0	25.0	66.7
(Sample no.)	(174)	(76)	(174)	(76)

Source: Adapted from Noriko Inagei, 1983, pp.15.

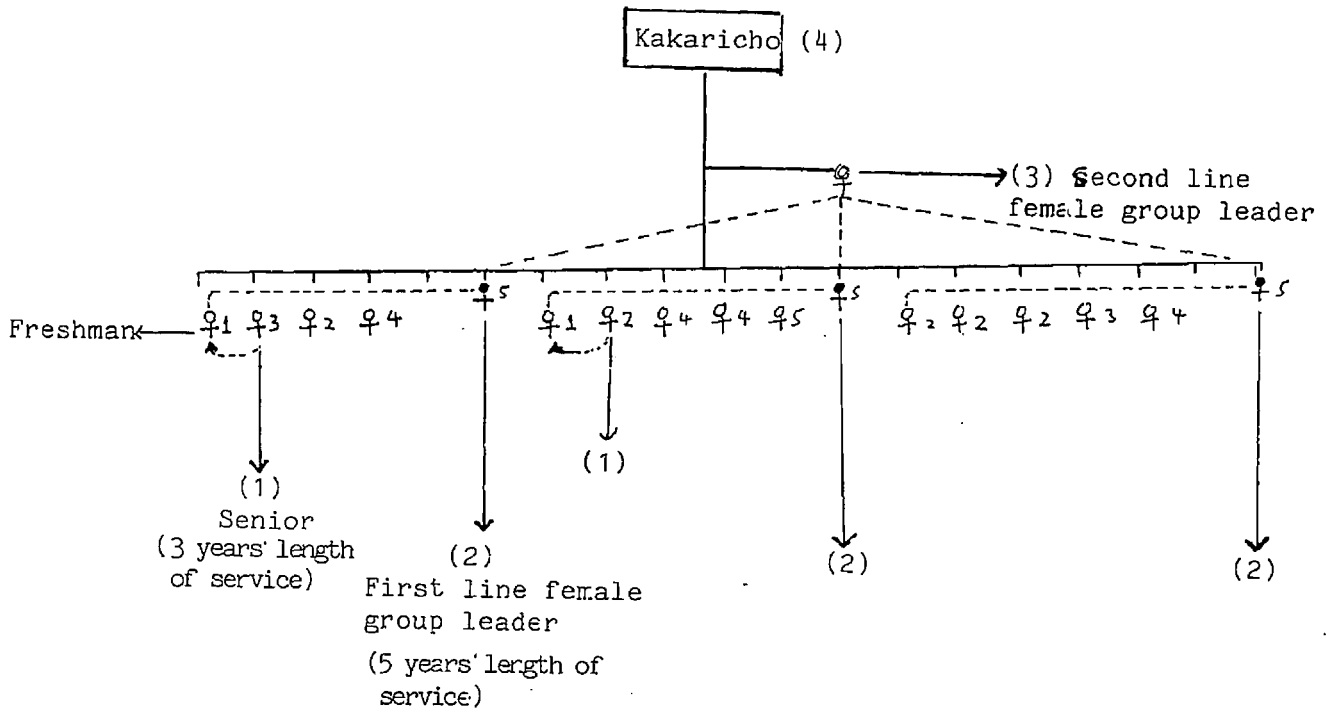
The group leader role is created in order to provide a training ground for women with supervisory potential. This is partly because some women are staying longer with the companies which start to feel that there is a need to provide a career route for them to avoid demoralisation. It also stems from the belief that women are better qualified to train women. In most cases the female group leader system is introduced in those sections or departments where there is a high concentration of women. Generally the first line supervisor (kakaricho) of the section will be a man and a female group leader is appointed to play the role of 'go-between' between the kakaricho and the female members of the work group. The 'female group leader' system is a very unique Japanese adaptation in two ways. Firstly, it manifests extreme sex role segregation in Japanese companies - the belief that women are better at training women and that a woman is needed to play the role of 'go-between' between the male supervisor and the female group members. Secondly, the 'female group leader' is a specially created work role outside the formal organisational chart. It provides an opportunity for

women to demonstrate their supervisory abilities but it does not threaten the role of the male supervisor.

Analysis of the 'female group leader' system adopted by most companies indicates that female group leaders are generally assigned to the following four types of job functions: (1) As a 'senior' (senpai) to provide individual on-the-job-training and day-to-day instruction for the new entrants ; (2) as a leader of the female work group (first line group leader); (3) as a leader of female group leaders, playing the 'Go-between' role between the supervisor and female group members (second line group leader); (4) as a supervisor of the work unit. In most cases, (1) and (2) are informal work roles, they do not appear on the formal organization chart; (3) is a formal staff function but not supervisory function (see, Fig. 5.3). There is no clear career connection between (3) and (4) although in practice women who eventually did gain promotion to first line supervisor (kakaricho) had mostly gone through the experience of being female group leaders. In this sense, the female group leader system provides a special training ground for women and it functions as a 'screening' process to select women with outstanding supervisory potential. Personnel experts in Japan point out that such a system is a necessary 'transitional stage' in Japanese work organisations for opening up supervisory opportunities for women (Inagei, 1983, pp.10). As the system involves very little training cost and tends to cause no 'disruption' to the formal organisation, companies are quite willing to 'try it out'. Further, women will have a better chance of developing their supervisory potential in single sex groups where men do not interfere. However, the female group leader system is usually not uniformly applied throughout the company but mainly introduced in those sections or departments where there is a high concentration of women or where the nature of the tasks requires a female group leader. Though in most cases established on an informal basis, the female group leader role does occasionally provide a stepping stone for some women to pursue a managerial career. Many companies, however, simply stop at the stage of training women as group leaders, no further step is taken to provide these women with formal promotion opportunities.



Fig. 5.3  
 A Model of the Female Group Leader System

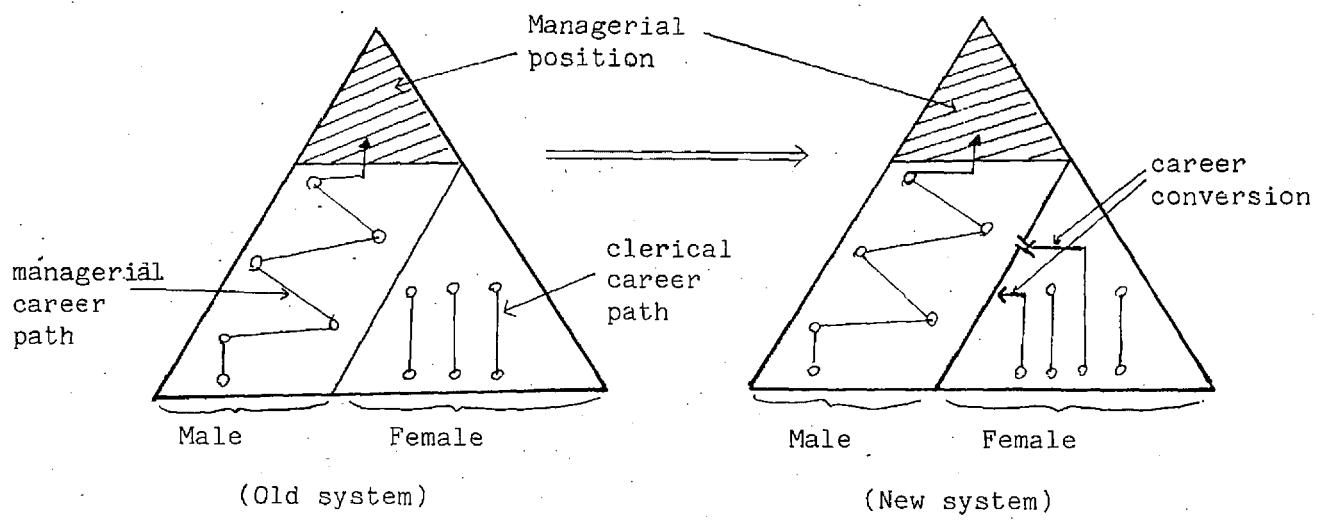


Source: Adapted from Inagei (1983)

### 3. The Career Route Conversion System

Recently, some major companies in the banking and financial sectors have taken new steps to open up formal promotion opportunities for women by introducing a 'conversion system' for their female employees. This is a system by which women in clerical positions are given an opportunity, at a certain stage in their career, to apply for conversion to the managerial career route by taking the 'conversion' exam, normally including written tests and interviews with top management. This is a new innovation adopted by some major banks, insurance and securities companies. It is a rather peculiar adaptation in these sectors: Previously women employed in the banking and securities fields were assigned to clerical positions where they remained throughout their career. Men, on the other hand, joined the companies as prospective officials (the managerial career route), gained work experience in different sections to eventually assume managerial positions (see, Fig. 5.4 ). The major criterion for making a strict distinction between the two separate career routes is the mobility requirement. Jobs in the clerical stream involve mostly routine work which does not need widespread training or job rotation. There is no requirement for job transfer which will involve geographical mobility. Promotion is only limited to a lower managerial grade. The managerial stream involves broad training in different kinds of jobs and experience. There will be frequent job rotation which may involve geographical mobility. Promotion up to top management is possible. Women who apply for conversion to the managerial career route will need to make a commitment to the mobility requirement.

Fig. 5.4  
The Career Route Conversion System



In these companies, the new system has not dramatically increased women's promotion chances. In practice very few women applied for conversion and even fewer passed the 'conversion' exam. The mobility requirement presents the greatest barrier. However, the introduction of this new system is regarded as an important breakthrough in the traditionally male-dominated fields where before women were virtually shut out from the mainstream career route. Some companies have actually extended the system to the new recruits at the point of entry by offering both men and women a choice of the two career routes - this new system is referred to as the 'two-track employment system' (see, chapter 7, section III-2). The nature of the career route conversion system is illustrated by looking at two actual examples, one adopted by a bank (Company A) and the other by a trading company (Company B):

In 1982, Company A introduced the two-course personnel system. All the jobs in the bank were divided into two streams; the clerical stream and the generalist (or managerial) stream. Each stream has its own grading and promotion system as shown in Fig. 5.5. As may be expected, all women joined the clerical stream and all the men took the generalist stream. At the time when the two-course personnel system was adopted, the Company also introduced the career route conversion system to give those women who intend to pursue the managerial career route a chance. For women who have reached clerical grade 1 and are above 30 years of age, an opportunity for converting their careers to the generalist stream would be offered. As can be seen in Fig. 5.5 the conversion will take a woman of clerical grade 1 or grade 2 or grade 3 to manager grade 2 which will normally take a male university graduate 8 years to reach that grade (about 30 years of age). That is to say, no matter how many years of work experience the woman has with the company, success in conversion implies that she has to start again at the junior supervisory level. From the company's point of view, this is a rational practice because former clerical job experience does not offer women any training in supervisory skills.

Within three years of the introduction of the conversion system, 13 women in Company A succeeded in converting from the clerical career

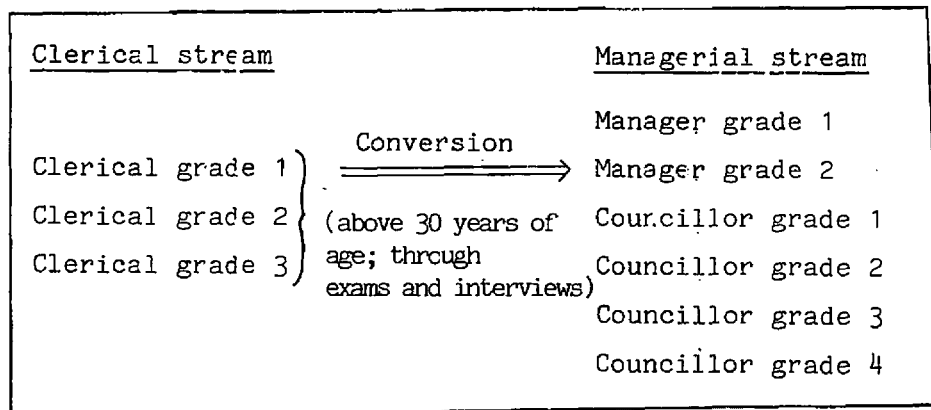
route to the generalist career route. This is a small minority taking into consideration that there are several thousand female employees in the Company.

In Company B , men and women join the company on different status and totally different career routes. Men are recruited as regular employees whereas women are recruited as 'local employees'. Regular employees are required to be nationally and internationally mobile; local employees are recruited to work at the local branch offices only. Formerly, local employees were not offered any promotion opportunity, the grading system applied only to the regular employees. Recently, the Company introduced a new grading system for the local employees, with two separate career courses: career course A will lead to promotion up to top management; career course B consists mainly of routine clerical work which will not lead to promotion to management positions (see, Fig. 5.6) This is a modified form of the career route conversion system as the female career route (as local employees) is still different from the male career route (as regular employees). Even if a woman chooses career course A, her status will still be that of a local employee, her wage rate will still be lower than a male regular employee of the same grade.

From the viewpoint of the company, the 'career route conversion system', as a way of utilising women, has a double advantage. Firstly, by providing a chance for the career-oriented women to join the mainstream career route, the system improves the morale of the female workforce and they work better during their earlier career. Second, it permits better screening by giving the company a chance to 'screen out' those women who are capable of pursuing the male career pattern and are prepared to commit to the company long-term. This explains why the companies set the minimum conversion age at around 30 - the risk of women leaving to establish a family is much reduced around that age. That means, the risk for not being able to recoup the training cost is much reduced thus companies are more willing to offer them promotion to more responsible positions.

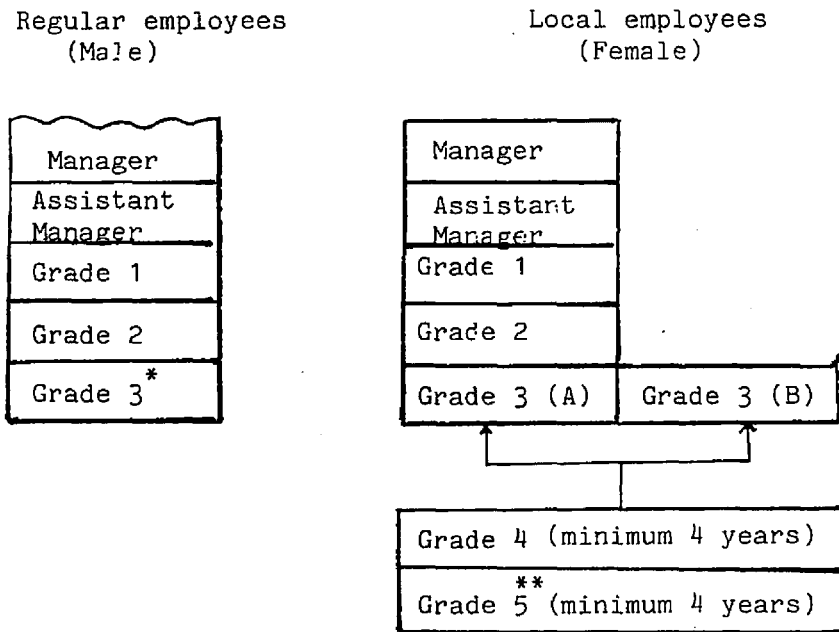
Under this system, only a selected minority of women can comply with the mobility requirements and gain entry to the managerial career route. Moreover, it is hardly a means of providing women with equal opportunity because those women who were converted to the male career route did not previously receive the same amount of training and experience as their male colleagues, and it is very unlikely that they would be able to compete with their male colleagues on an equal basis. For example, in the case of Company B, it takes a male employee a minimum of 8 years to be promoted to assistant manager, whereas in the case of a woman who has converted to the managerial career route at the age of 30, it will take her at least 18 years to be promoted to the same position. The conversion system hardly offers women equal opportunities with men. Instead, the separation of the two career routes formally legitimises total segregation of men and women. The conversion system also implies that unless a woman can satisfy all the requirements of the male career route, she is unlikely to be offered promotion to high positions. It further rationalises and justifies a system which is both directly and indirectly discriminatory against women.

**Fig. 5.5 Career Conversion in Company A**



Source: Adapted from Yashiro, 1986, pp.227.

Fig. 5.6 Grading System in Company B



\* Male university graduates start at grade 3; a minimum of 2 years before upgrade to Grade 2.

\*\* Female university graduates and junior college graduates both start at grade 5; a minimum of 4 years before upgrade to grade 4.

Source: Takio Takizawa, Personnel System in an Era of Equal Opportunity, 1985, pp.43.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have highlighted the major market and organisational forces pushing major Japanese companies to initiate changes in their traditional employment and utilisation policies on women. The positive shifts have been towards employing more highly-educated women and utilising them in specialist work roles. Many companies have taken initiatives in organising special project teams or small group activities to allow women some opportunities to utilise certain specific skills or abilities to promote productivity and enhance their sense of participation in the work organisations. In companies which employ a high proportion of women, female group leader systems were introduced to provide training opportunities for women with supervisory potential. And more recently, some companies formally opening up promotion chances for selected groups of women through career conversion.

Companies' moves to adopt more positive utilisation policies on women started before the introduction of the EEO Law. One cannot eliminate the possibility that some of the policy initiatives might have resulted from a general shift in company attitudes as a result of the equal opportunity debates before the EEO Law was enacted, or that companies might have taken steps to initiate policy changes in anticipation of the legislation. However, the nature of the change programmes introduced suggests that the primary motives behind the policy initiatives were either out of business needs or in response to labour market or organisational pressures. None of the programmes was aimed at promoting equal opportunities between men and women as such. The majority of the companies used the term 'utilisation of women' (josei-no-katsuyo) not 'equal opportunity', although positive utilisation of women might eventually lead to improvement of women's position relative to that of men.

Our analysis of the policy initiatives introduced by management, however, does not suggest much possibility of positive development towards greater equality between men and women. There are several



reasons for this. Firstly, most of the special 'career development programmes' for women were introduced on an ad hoc basis and their implementation was often restricted to certain sections or departments of the work organisations rather than on a company-wide basis. Secondly, project teams or special work roles created for women were mostly informal, lying outside the formal organisational structure and there was very little formal link between these special work roles and the formal career structure. The informality of these policy attempts meant that disruption to the formal organisation and career structure would only be minimal. Thirdly, in the case of formally opening up promotion chances for women through career conversion, a screening procedure was introduced to ensure that only those women who could comply with all the requirements imposed by the company, which virtually meant adopting the 'male career pattern', would be offered some chances. The conversion system actually justifies promotion practices which are both directly and indirectly discriminatory against women.

To summarise, companies have sought to use women to overcome skill shortages and organisational manpower problems without altering the fundamental organisational rules and procedures which operate to allocate men and women into separate career tracks.

## CHAPTER 6

### LEGISLATING FOR CHANGE? THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY LAW

In May 1985, the Japanese government passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (hereafter refer to as EEO Law) which went into effect in April 1986. This Law prohibits discrimination against women in vocational training, fringe benefits, retirement and dismissal. It also urges employers to 'endeavour' to treat women equally as men with regard to recruitment, job assignment and promotion. At the same time that the EEO Law was passed, the special protective measures for women provided in the Labour Standards Law of 1947 were amended. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical background leading to the enactment of the EEO Law, to describe and analyse its contents and to assess its potential impact on the elimination of discrimination against women.

#### I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

##### 1. International Influence

The international trend towards sex equality in recent years has exerted strong influence on the Japanese government to introduce new policy measures to promote the position of women. The increased internationalisation of Japan on the economic and political front means that neither the business community nor the government can turn a blind eye to the latest moves and actions taken by their western counterparts. One important event which triggered off the debate on the issue of sexual equality in Japan was the launching of the Women's Decade (1975-85) by the United Nations in 1975. This prompted the Japanese government to undertake concrete policy measures to promote the position of women. In 1975, the Headquarters for the Planning and Promoting of Policies Relating to Women was established in the Prime Minister's

Office. In 1980, Japan participated in the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women and agreed to ratify the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by 1985. The provisions of Article II of the Convention call for the removal of all forms of discrimination, not only wages but also the broader aspects of employment such as recruitment, training and promotion. In order to meet this requirement, the introduction of a law providing for equal employment opportunity and equal treatment between the sexes became an imperative task for the Japanese government. Under the then existing Labour Standards Law, the only requirement was for equal pay for equal work stated as a general rule. There was no stipulation against discrimination between the sexes in other aspects of employment. Thus in May 1981, the Japanese government officially reiterated that the foremost priority to be achieved in the second half of the United Nations Women's Decade was the review of existing legislation and to formulate appropriate measures including desirable legislation to ensure equality for women in employment (PMO, 1981).

The United Nations Convention was an immediate factor which had exerted pressure on the Japanese government to pass the new legislation by the end of 1985. This may lead to a belief that the enactment of the EEO Law was merely a response on the part of the government to external pressures. An examination of the internal developments in Japan with regard to women's employment since the 1960s will indicate that the new legislation is also very much a product of internal social, economic and legal developments.

## **2. Increasing Sex Discrimination Litigation Cases and the Growing Awareness of the 'Blind Spot' in the Labour Standards Law**

Rapid economic growth since the 1960s has expanded women's employment opportunities and led to some improvement in their general working conditions. However, the majority of firms still regarded women as a short-term temporary workforce, managing them in the traditional manner. Blatant discrimination against women in wages and all stages of employment was widespread. Although Article 14 of the Japanese

constitution calls for equal rights of men and women before the law, no mention was made anywhere in the labour legislation of equal opportunity in recruitment, training, job assignment or promotion. The Labour Standards Law, the most important piece of legislation for women workers, enacted under the circumstances of the immediate postwar years, was mainly aimed at protecting women from the hazards of poor working conditions. It mentions sex equality only in respect of wages. One section of the Law speaks of equality in conditions of work but limits it to creed, national origin and special status, omitting sex.

Despite the legal difficulties in bringing discrimination cases to court, by the late 1960s, an increasing number of women were suing their employers for discriminatory practices (Cook and Hayashi, 1980; Michida, 1984). Many of these cases resulted in settlements favourable to women. The majority of the cases that were brought to the courts were concerned with pay or retirement practices. Procedures for dealing with pay discrimination cases were comparatively straightforward since they were the subject of a section of the Labour Standards Law. Complainants could go to the Labour Inspectorate, which was set up to enforce the Labour Standards Law. Discrimination concerning working conditions other than pay were more complicated. Firstly, a complainant had to bring the case to the ordinary court, the procedures of which were extremely cumbersome and time consuming. Secondly, lawyers bringing such discrimination cases to court had to appeal to the extremely general terms provided for in Article 14 of the Japanese constitution which states that 'All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin'. However, there are technical difficulties in applying Article 14 of the constitution in employment discrimination cases. It is a matter of controversy among Japanese lawyers whether Article 14 can be construed to cover contracts between individuals or private organisations.<sup>1</sup> In practice, judges dealing with cases brought under Article 14 that involved women's labour contracts had, on the whole, been liberal in their judgements that the constitution was applicable only indirectly to such cases but that women were entitled to equal

treatment with men in respect of their working conditions. In several instances, lawyers had to appeal to a paragraph in the Civil Code in order to bring women's discrimination cases to the court. Article 90 of the Civil Code requires that 'good law and order are to be maintained' and judges have frequently found that working agreements condoning discriminatory conditions for women are contrary to the good intention and meaning of this article (Cook and Hayashi, 1980, p.22).

The increasing number of discrimination cases since the late 1960s has had two important results. Firstly, the large number of cases involving discrimination against women in retirement practices, in particular, the traditional practice of compelling women to retire upon marriage, had formally disappeared by the late 1970s as a result of the repeated uniform rulings of the high courts - that forcing women to retire at marriage is against 'good order' as called for in Article 90 of the Civil Code.<sup>2</sup>

A second important result has been that the growing number of discrimination cases involving working conditions other than pay has brought to the fore the limitations of the Labour Standards Law. As no mention was made anywhere in the Law regarding equal job opportunity between the sexes, cases concerning job opportunity had to be raised in constitutional or civil code terms that were extremely general. It was rather peculiar that in ruling that the compulsory retirement upon marriage practice was discriminatory and unlawful, the Tokyo District Court had to go round in circles by saying that the practice 'limits freedom of selection of a spouse' and that 'family is an important unit of society and an important part of the public order under law and should be respected as a part of the basic human rights'. In the course of the decision, the court referred to Article 13 of the constitution, which protects an individual's right to life, freedom and happiness, and to three other articles of the constitution: Article 24 guaranteeing equality and respect of the individual's home life, Article 25 protecting the individual's right to exist, and Article 27 covering the individual's right to work (Cook and Hayashi, 1980, p.49) Such a decision indicates the great technical difficulty faced by the courts

in judging the discrimination cases because of the lack of a law guaranteeing equal job opportunity between the sexes. A Japanese labour lawyer referred to the lack of provision guaranteeing equal job opportunity between men and women as a 'blind spot' of the Labour Standards Law and urged that it was important for Japan to introduce a law providing for equal employment opportunity (Michida,1984., p.129-31).

### **3. Demands from employers for repealing the protective provisions in the Labour Standards Law**

Early in the 1950s, employers started to lobby for the removal of the special protective measures for women, especially those which restricted women's working hours and night work. In 1955, Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations) formed a Research Committee on the Labour Standards Law and proposed government revisions of all aspects of the Law in order to adapt to employment conditions in the medium- and small-scale firms. Their proposals specifically required the government to relax overtime restrictions on women from 150 hours to 200 hours a year. They also demanded that the government abolish the ban on holiday working and remove the menstruation leave provision. During this period, the employers' argument was not that the Labour Standards Law had become obsolete but rather the standards set in the Law was too high and unrealistic for the medium- and small-scale firms to follow. Employers' lobbying during this period did not result in immediate government action.

The situation began to change in the mid-1960s when the Japanese economy was expanding rapidly. High economic growth, technological improvement and labour shortage led to a substantial improvement of working conditions. The argument that the standard provided in the Labour Standards Law was too high lost its validity; there was a general feeling among the employers and the government that some of the protective measures, rather than protecting women, were becoming obsolete and would restrict the supply of female labour. It was felt that a review of the legislation was necessary in order to bring it

into line with the new circumstances. In September 1969, the government set up a Labour Standards Law Study Group to engage in research and study on issues related to women workers with a view to revise the Labour Standards Law.

At the same time, employers' moves in demanding the repeal of the protective measures grew stronger. In 1970, the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) submitted proposals to the government asking for the revision of the Labour Standards Law and branded the special protective measures for women as 'overprotection'. The TCCI's proposals triggered off debates among labour lawyers, trade unions and women's groups about the relations between the Labour Standards Law, the problems of women workers and the issues of technological development in the modern economy. At a later stage, these debates extended to the question of whether protection was an obstacle to equality.

#### **4. The Working Women's Welfare Law (1972)**

The Working Women's Welfare Law, adopted by the Diet in 1972, bears an important relationship with the present EEO Law. It manifests the government's fundamental attitude and policy on women workers which has remained unchanged until the present day.

The Welfare Law was enacted against the background of high economic growth with increased demand for additional labour supply. In November 1969, the Labour Force Research Committee of the Government's Economic Council issued a report on 'The Future Prospect and Policy on Labour Force Supply'. In the Report it was stated that an additional 8 million workers would be needed and this was to be supplemented by drawing the hitherto unutilised middle-aged women into the labour market (Keizai Shingikai, 1969). The Welfare Law was enacted with an aim 'to further the welfare and improve the status of working women by taking appropriate actions to help them reconcile their dual responsibilities of work and home or to enable them to develop and make use of their abilities' (ILO, 1972). The Law, however, was recommendatory, not mandatory, and left it to the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Labour

to persuade employers to accept its standards voluntarily. Practical measures the Law proposed to employers included provision of any necessary childcare facilities for the women they employed, including the approval of childcare leave.<sup>3</sup> The Law also foresaw improved vocational guidance and vocational training systems offered by state and local government through welfare centres for working women.

The fundamental concern of the Working Women's Welfare Law, as indicated by its title, was to improve the 'welfare' of women workers and to help them to compromise between work and family; the idea of equal treatment of men and women was not mentioned.

One practical result of the government's labour policy was the upsurge in the number of middle-aged women entering the labour market. The majority of them were employed as part-time workers. The number of part-time female workers increased dramatically, from 0.8 million in 1965 to 2.5 million in 1980 (see, chapter 2, Table 2.7). The government's policy has been criticised on the ground that it encourages more women to work part-time and attempts to preserve the traditional family system by stressing the importance of women's role as mothers and wives (Takenaka, 1983, p.255). This basic policy orientation remains unchanged in the EEO Law.

##### **5. The Proposals of the Labour Standards Law Study Group**

Formal policy debates regarding the enactment of new legislation guaranteeing equal employment opportunity began in late 1978 following the report of the Labour Standards Law Study Group.

The Study Group submitted a report to the Minister of Labour in November 1978. This Report represented the most influential statement that could be made for the re-evaluation of the existing labour legislation for women (Nakanishi, 1983). Most important of all, the Study Group proposed to the government the need for a new law prohibiting discrimination based on sex. The Report specifically proposed that such legislation should cover all aspects of employment,



from recruitment and hiring to retirement and dismissals. As regards enforcement procedures, the Report suggested adopting a flexible approach by using such procedures as administrative guidance, conciliation and recommendations and that the responsible agency should have the final authority in issuing administrative orders for the elimination of discriminatory action. At the same time, the Report also proposed that those statutory protective measures exclusively applicable to women workers should be reviewed, so as to limit them to the necessary and reasonable limit required for the protection of the maternal functions of women. This Report raised the most important issues which were to become the major subjects of debate in the later years when the government started to draft the EEO bill.

## **II. DRAFTING THE EEO BILL: PROBLEMS AND CONTROVERSY**

The idea for introducing a law providing for equal employment for women was first proposed in 1978 but the law was not passed until May 1985. The debate lasted for a period of more than seven years. The long years of debate and controversy not only indicate the great difficulties the Japanese government has encountered in drafting the bill because of the conflicting viewpoints between different interest groups, especially that of management and labour union; it also reveals the great sensitivity of the issue of sex equality in Japanese society.

Early in December 1979, the Tripartite Advisory Council (Shingikai) on Women's and Young Workers' Problems, a statutory advisory body to the Minister of Labour, appointed a Committee of Experts to study the 'substance of sexual equality in employment' and to develop standards for future legislation. The Committee was composed of 15 members, including representatives from labour and management and neutral members chosen among women's groups, university professors and lawyers. Over the seven-year-period, the Committee had attempted repeatedly to draw up concrete guidelines for the legislation but because of conflicting views among the Committee members it proved extremely difficult to reach a consensus. The main controversy centred around two areas: (1) whether the protective measures provided in the Labour Standards Law were an

obstacle to equality and (2), the scope and measures for ensuring equality in employment.

With regard to the protective measures provided in the Labour Standards Law, employers insisted that if women workers claim equality, they should renounce special protective measures in exchange; they argued that to offer women special 'privileges' other than maternity protection would be a form of discrimination against men and was inconsistent with the call for equality. Labour unions and women's groups argued that the pursuit of equality should be combined with the retention of protection. They were concerned that the removal of protection, especially that related to working hours, would lead to a serious deterioration of the general working conditions for both men and women as Japanese workers worked much longer hours than their counterparts in other advanced countries.

When it came to the concrete measures for ensuring equality, the members representing labour, management and 'public interests' (the neutral members) held completely different views. The labour side and most neutral members wanted discrimination in all stages of employment to be legally prohibited and punitive measures to be taken against violations. The labour side proposed introducing 'discrimination on grounds of sex' to Section 3 of the Labour Standards Law.

Management opposed the idea that companies should be legally bound to offer women equal treatment. They argued that while legal prohibition of discrimination with regard to age limits, retirement and dismissal would be inevitable (as these were ruled illegal by the courts in the past), other personnel procedures such as recruitment, job assignment and promotion were directly related to the companies' assessment system which should not be subjected to legal intervention. Hiroshi Kitamura, the representative from Nikkeiren (the Japan Federation of Employers' Association), made the following argument :

'The current employment systems in Japanese business have been structured on the social custom of life-long employment...the labour demand will create a grave but meaningless confusion on the current

corporate managementsystem and will eventually destroy the "vital force" of our economy' (JT, 1984).

The basis of management's argument centred on the issue of the difference in the average length of service between men and women and the 'logic' of lifetime employment practice. Representatives from small firms employed the same line of argument. Mitsugu Yamamoto, a senior official of the National Federation of Small Business Associations, made the following remark:

'..a great number of women still choose marriage rather than a career, although this is changing. Even so, it is inevitable that Japanese employers want to avoid the risks of making long-term commitments with female workers in business. We don't have an established sense of what employment equality is all about in society yet. So if these provisions become compulsory, it will only bring chaos to the business community' (JT, 1984).

The management side recommended that the proposed law should 'morally oblige' (a kind of 'doryoku-gimu') employers not to discriminate against women with regard to recruitment, job assignment, training and promotion. Labour representatives had strong misgivings about the effectiveness of 'moral obligation' and insisted on the need for more effective legal enforcement procedures. Members representing the public interests made attempts to reach a compromising solution but apparently without much success.

It was not until May 1982 that the Committee of Experts issued a report representing an effort to reach a compromise between the conflicting views on the issue of protection:

'Different statutory provisions for men and women on the ground of biological differences other than maternal function, such as physical or muscular strength, or by reason of women's heavier family responsibilities, may not be proper from the standpoint of the real meaning of equality. However, simultaneous abolition of all these protective measures for women, excepting maternity protection, is not appropriate in some cases, judging from the present circumstances in which women workers are placed...' (MOL, 1982. p.8-9).

The Report, however, avoided giving concrete guidelines with regard to the proposed legislation for guaranteeing equality. Apparently, the Committee had failed in reaching a compromise solution.

The task for achieving a consensus on the proposed legislation then fell to the standing Tripartite Advisory Council, which also consisted of labour, management and neutral representatives. In December 1983, the Ministry of Labour published a progress report of the discussions of the Council. The Report indicated all the three parties had basically reached a consensual opinion that new legislative measures were needed to ensure sex equality in employment and that the special protective measures for women, excepting maternity protection, needed to be reviewed. However, with regard to the concrete measures to be introduced in the new legislation, their opinions were split along labour-management lines. The Report merely stated the different views held by members representing labour, management and public interests.

In view of the approaching deadline for ratifying the UN Convention, the neutral members came out with a 'compromise plan' in February 1984. After a long and heated discussion, the Tripartite Advisory Council finally submitted a Recommendation to the government in March 1984. However, the opinions were still divided on the concrete measures to be taken to make employers guarantee equality for women and the extent to which the protective measures should be repealed. Some parts of the Recommendation actually referred to the different opinions of the three parties of the Council. It made no attempt to disguise the differences.

As a result, a final decision on how to reconcile the conflicting views between management and labour was left in the hands of the Ministry of Labour. At that time there were doubts among the parties concerned whether the Ministry would be able to produce a bill which would be accepted by both labour and management. It was predicted that even if such a bill was submitted, there was a strong possibility that the bill would be shelved because of strong opposition from both sides (JT, 1984a). However, in the last minute, the Ministry of Labour took strong administrative initiative, declared the Council's recommendation

as a reasonable compromise, drafted a bill based on the neutral member's position and submitted it to the Diet in May 1984. It passed the Diet a year later, in time for Japan to ratify the UN Convention that summer, marking the end of the UN Decade for Women.

The final version of the Law that emerged from the Ministry of Labour in May 1984 and eventually enacted in May 1985, nevertheless, turns out to be very much a product of compromise with management's position. The Law prohibits discrimination in basic training, fringe benefits, retirement and dismissal; but with regard to recruitment, job assignment and promotion, it urges employers to 'make efforts' to treat women equally with men. In a strict technical sense, one can say that the new legislation granted women no new rights that they had not already gained through litigation in the 1970s and early 1980s, except for prohibiting discrimination in basic training. In terms of the relaxation of statutory protections for women workers in the Labour Standards Law, it also largely reflects the interests of management: Restrictions on overtime, holiday work or late night work were abolished for women in supervisory, or managerial posts or jobs requiring expertise, specialist or technical knowledge<sup>4</sup>. The maximum number of hours of overtime for women in nonmanufacturing industries was doubled from 6 per week and 150 per year to 12 and 300 respectively. Prohibition of late night work was repealed for women working in special category of industries such as food processing and taxi driving. Other minor privileges such as guaranteed menstrual leave were repealed; in return, statutory maternity leave was lengthened from six to eight weeks. (For more details about the amendments of the Labour Standards Law, see Appendix A).

During the final Diet debate on the legislation, the Minister of Labour was challenged by a member of the opposition party whether the proposed legislation was lacking in a human rights perspective. Ryoko Akamatsu, the then Director of the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Labour made the following reply:

'In Japan, the existence of lifetime employment practice means that the length of service of employees is crucially important. Although equality means one should not use average criteria to evaluate individuals, the controversy with regard to the issue of length of service and lifetime employment could not be overcome even in the Expert Committee...' (Ouwaki, 1987, p.11).

The Minister of Labour further reinforced her point:

'It is generally agreed that the entry point to the companies is important. Until the present day lifetime employment has been a 'male-centred' system. The individual is of course important but one cannot ignore the average difference between men and women. Companies' personnel management systems have been operating on this assumption. Up to the present, women's length of service has been relatively short, one cannot say for sure that their length of service will increase. The future improvement of this will have to rely mainly on administrative guidance' (Ibid, p.12)

The above statements made by the government clearly revealed that management had won a major victory in the EEO Law controversy. The hidden message seems to be that the UN convention is too idealistic for Japan to implement as it is. The Japanese government seem to prefer a step-by-step approach, taking into account the employment practice peculiar to the country. The Tripartite Advisory Council on Women and Young Workers, in submitting the final recommendation to the government, made the following suggestion:

'... in considering the legislative framework for promoting equality between men and women, it is necessary to adopt a long-term perspective with a view of future development rather than fixing the viewpoint on the present situation. In principle, the legislation should aim at eliminating discriminatory treatment of women in all stages of employment from recruitment, hiring to retirement and dismissal. However, in formulating or amending legislation, the contents of the legislation should not be isolated from the present reality of our society' (MOL, 1986, pp.28-9).

It took the Japanese government over seven years to consider and study the issue. The process of drafting the bill was fraught with difficulties and tensions. On the surface, it appears as if the conflict of interests between management and labour both inside and

outside the committees was the fundamental obstacle; underneath this facade, the real tension was experienced by all the parties concerned, including the government, management, labour unions and the general public. The tension stems from the general anxiety that some kind of change with regard to women's position in the society was necessary, yet there was a lack of consensus as regarding how to go about the change and what needed to be done in order to bring about the change. Employers feared that equal employment for women would destroy the main pillars of the employment system and weaken the country's economic foundation. Some public commentators argued that equal opportunity for women would destroy the Japanese family and the country's cultural heritage (Hasegawa, 1984; Yayama, 1984). These commentators contended that sex role distinction was not only necessary for the economic system but also central to Japan's uniquely successful culture. Other critics attributed the government's move to enact the law to international pressure and perceived the legislation as yet another example of the imposition of foreign norms on Japan. Apparently, in the process of drafting the bill the government not only had to reconcile the conflict of interests between labour and management; but added to this, there was the problem of trying to 'bridge the gap' between the 'Japanese reality' and the 'western norm' of equality. Whatever position the government took, it was bound to be criticised.

Though the content of the law appears to be a general victory on the side of management, this need not mean the end of equality for Japanese women. The present legislation is not only highly ambiguous, it also leaves plenty of room for manoeuvre and interpretation by the government. In the following, we shall first examine the main provisions and characteristics of the Law, the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Labour and assess the future significance of the legislation.

### III. THE EEO LAW: MAIN PROVISIONS AND CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Table 6.1 summarises the outline of the EEO Law. It should be noted that the actual title of the Law is: 'Law Concerning Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment Between Men and Women in Employment and Other Welfare Measures For Women Workers'.<sup>5</sup>

An important point to note about the newly enacted EEO Law is that it is not an independent new law, but basically a revision of the Working Women's Welfare Law (1972) with a number of new measures introduced to eliminate discrimination.<sup>6</sup> In many respects, the present EEO Law is still based on the concept of the Working Women's Welfare Law (1972), the fundamental purpose of which was to improve working women's welfare and to promote measures to enable them to harmonise between work and family.

Section one of the EEO Law states that the purpose of the Law is 'to promote equal opportunity and treatment between men and women in employment in accordance with the principle contained in the constitution of Japan ensuring equality under the law; foster measures for women workers, including the development and improvement of their vocational abilities, the provision of assistance for their re-employment, and attempts to harmonise their working life with family life; and thereby to further the welfare and improve the status of women workers' (Section 1, EEO Law). According to the interpretation of the Ministry of Labour, the ultimate objective of the Law is to improve women's welfare which is the 'main pillar' for guaranteeing equal opportunity and treatment of men and women. The Ministry stated that the word 'welfare' should be interpreted in a broad sense which includes the meaning of promotion of status (MOL, 1986, pp.34-5). Equality thus is defined as 'welfare' handed down from the state to women workers, not to be interpreted as 'individual right' as such.



**Table 6.1**  
**Outline of the EEO Law**

Law concerning the Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment and other Welfare Measures for Women Worker

(1) New Measures for Securing Equal Opportunity and Treatment

Type of regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Recruitment, hiring</li> <li>◦ Job assignment, promotion</li> </ul>	Obligation to make effort (Exhortation)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Basic training</li> <li>◦ Welfare benefits</li> <li>◦ Mandatory retirement age, retirement, dismissal</li> </ul>	Prohibition without penalty
Enforcement methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Labour ministry issues guidelines for items under 'exhortation'</li> <li>◦ Voluntary settlement by grievance procedures within the enterprise</li> <li>◦ The director of prefectural Women's and Young Workers' Office is empowered to give necessary advice, guidance or recommendations</li> <li>◦ Mediation by an Equal Opportunity Mediation Commission</li> </ul>	

(2) Assistance Measures Concerning Employment of Women

Measures to facilitate Re-employment	Employers should endeavour to take special re-employment measure for their former female employees who had retired for the reason of pregnancy, child-birth or child-care
Child-Care Leave	The State should endeavour to give employers necessary advice, guidance and other forms of assistance, in order to promote the spread of child-care leave

With regard to provisions for securing equal opportunity and treatment, the present EEO Law distinguishes two different types of sanction, namely, 'prohibition' ('...employers shall not discriminate against a woman...') and 'exhortation' ('employers shall endeavour to treat women equally as men...'). The former, applied to training, fringe benefits, retirement age, resignation and dismissal, means that discriminatory behaviour is legally prohibited and if cases are brought to the courts, rulings are to be made from a legal perspective. The latter, applied to the most important stages in employment including recruitment, hiring, job assignment and promotion, is a rather peculiar 'Japanese innovation'. Basically, the 'hortatory provisions' have no legal effect. Enforcement of the 'hortatory provisions' is not within the scope of the judiciary; the major responsibility for interpretation and implementation of these provisions lies with the Ministry of Labour. Section 12 of the EEO Law empowers the Minister of Labour to issue guidelines with regard to the implementation of the 'hortatory provisions'. These will be examined more closely in section IV.

The EEO Law also establishes methods for settling disputes that arise between employers and employees. The primary emphasis is on voluntary settlement within the enterprise. If no settlement results, the director of the local Women's and Young Workers' Office (a division of the Ministry of Labour) is empowered to give the parties advice or to offer recommendations, or, at their request, to settle the grievance. In addition, each local government is to set up an Equal Opportunity Mediation Commission within the Women's and Young Workers' Office, to provide remedies and settle disputes. Each Commission will be composed of 3 commissioners appointed from among persons of learning and experience. In the case when a dispute arises and when either or both of the parties concerned apply for mediation and when the other party's consent is obtained, the Director of the Prefectural Women's and Young Workers' Office shall refer the dispute for mediation by the Equal Opportunity Mediation Commission, if the Director deems it necessary. Acceptance of the mediation plan will be voluntary.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that remedies provided by ordinary courts for employment disputes are inadequate and ineffective. There has been a tendency in many of the western countries to remove employment questions from the purview of the ordinary courts and to transfer them to specialist bodies, such as the industrial tribunals in the United Kingdom which can offer an informal, flexible, speedy and less expensive procedure for the individual complainants. This is particularly important in sex discrimination cases because there is less likelihood that the women will be able to gain union support. It is essential that the law guarantees the victim the right to obtain remedy in her own right through effective and efficient procedures. From this perspective, the EEO Law is extremely ineffective in its provision of remedies.

The EEO Law empowers the Director of the Women's and Young Workers' Office to give necessary advice, guidance or recommendations when discrimination cases arise. However, the Director has neither enforcement authority nor the right to carry out investigation although he/she has the right to refer the case to the Equal Opportunity Mediation Commission. Again, the power of the Commission is extremely limited, it cannot enforce the parties to accept the mediation plan. Moreover, neither the Women's and Young Workers' Office nor the Mediation Commission has the right to initiate mediation proceedings because the Law requires that mediation can only be carried out when either or both of the parties concerned apply for mediation and, more importantly, when the other party's consent is obtained. That is to say, when the victim applies for mediation and if the employer refuses, the mediation procedure cannot be carried out.

The Japanese EEO Law may have adopted the right approach by emphasising administrative mechanism rather than litigation procedures which tend to result in rigidity and excessive legalism, but it is important that the administrative agency should have extensive powers in investigation, to initiate proceedings in its own right and to assist and act on behalf of the complainants to bring the case to the courts

when necessary. Neither the Ministry of Labour nor the Equal Opportunity Mediation Commission has these powers. .

Nevertheless, the greatest controversy over the EEO Law is not so much about its lack of effective enforcement procedures, but more about the way the law is written with regard to the measures for the elimination of discrimination.

#### **IV. ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION: 'PROHIBITION' VS 'EXHORTATION'**

##### **1. Prohibitory Provisions (Kinshi-Kidei)**

With regard to basic training, provision of fringe benefits, retirement age and dismissal, sections 9, 10 and 11 of the Law prohibit discriminatory treatment of women: '...an employer shall not discriminate against a woman worker as compared with a man by reason of her being a woman'. There are three reasons why elimination of discrimination in these areas appears to be relatively straightforward and has caused much less controversy during the bill drafting stage. Firstly, with regard to retirement and dismissal, substantial changes had already occurred as a result of litigation in the 1970s and early 1980s. The present Law therefore merely ratifies the changes and attempts to eliminate discrimination which still remains in the 'worst practice' companies. Secondly, in the area of basic training and provision of fringe benefits, the elimination of discrimination against women will impose additional costs on the companies, but they are least likely to cause major disruption to the companies' core personnel management systems. Thirdly, in the area of training, prohibition of discriminatory treatment is limited to 'the acquisition of basic skills necessary for workers to perform their duties...' (Section 9, EEO Law). The most controversial point of this provision is the meaning of 'basic skills'. The Ministry of Labour interprets this as including basic training at the point of entry to the company, i.e. 'freshmen training' which is widely practised by Japanese companies, and basic training necessary for taking up a new job or position in the company. The main

intention of the law is to eliminate overt discrimination in basic education or training for the new recruits such as differences in the training curriculum or the duration of training. (A survey by the Ministry of Labour in 1981 showed that 78 per cent of companies provided basic entry training for both men and women; among these 53 per cent replied that the contents of training courses were different (MOL 1981a)). The likely effect of the law on training in the later stages of the employees' career, however, can only be very limited, unless women are assigned or promoted to the same jobs as men. As regards the meaning of 'training', the Ministry states that it does not include on-the-job training, because that is being carried out in day-to-day work and it is not possible for the law to intervene. As the dominant form of training in Japanese companies is on-the-job training, the elimination of this from the scope of the law means that only a small part of the training undertaken in the companies is under the jurisdiction of the law. The scope of the prohibitory provision with regard to vocational training is further limited by several 'exceptions' which include training that has to be carried out late at night or on holidays, or to be conducted in distant places to which it is difficult to commute and where company-provided accommodation facilities are for men only and employers cannot find alternative accommodation for women. Under these circumstances, according to the Ministry of Labour, different treatment of women does not constitute discrimination. It is quite common for Japanese companies to carry out training, particularly managerial training, which would require staying over-night in distant places. It is also common for company-provided accommodation to be available for men only - a traditional practice which is overtly discriminatory against women. The present law regards all these as 'reasonable' exceptions. Thus, prohibition of discrimination in training is, in effect, limited to basic training at the point of entry to the company.

## 2. Hortatory Provisions (Doryoku-Gimu)

With regard to recruitment, hiring, assignment and promotion, sections 7 and 8 of the law state that 'employers shall endeavour to give women equal opportunity with men' (tsutome-nakereba-naranai). These are the areas governing entry to the companies and job allocation within the companies over which employers resisted strongly any form of legal intervention. These provisions clearly represent an adaptation and compromise to the existing employment system. The Ministry of Labour made the following explanation:

'In the area of recruitment and hiring, the law 'exhorts' employers to treat women equally with men rather than imposes a clear-cut prohibition of discriminatory behaviour. This is based on the consideration that there is an average difference in the length of service between men and women. Companies in our country generally operate their personnel management systems on the assumption of lifetime commitment, and expectation of long-term service is important. In recruiting new employees, companies simply cannot ignore the differences in the work attitudes and the conditions of employment between men and women. To prohibit discriminatory treatment will not only cause chaos in the companies' personnel systems but also in the labour market. Therefore, at the present point, it is considered as more appropriate to adopt a step-by step approach in promoting equal treatment between men and women... Similarly, with regard to assignment and promotion, companies not only consider past and present performance but put strong emphasis on expectation of future performance. The differences in the length of service between men and women cannot be ignored. The present law therefore 'exhorts' employers to move gradually towards equal treatment.' (MOL, 1986, pp.40 and 69).

There are debates among Japanese labour lawyers whether such 'hortatory provisions' will have any effect in private law and whether it will affect the judgement of the courts. The general interpretation is that it has no legal effect and its enforcement and implementation will rely largely on the guidelines (shishin) provided by the Ministry of Labour (Hanami, 1986, p.225). Section 12 of the EEO Law empowers the Minister of Labour to provide guidelines setting forth measures that 'should be taken by employers' (kozuru yo ni tsiutomeru beki) in regard to the matters stipulated in sections 7 and 8 of the Law. The use of such guidelines to achieve a government or regulatory objective is not

unusual in Japan. Michael Young (1984) describes this type of administrative guidance (gyosei-shido) as the principal bureaucratic behaviour in Japan (see, chapter 7, section I).<sup>7</sup> During the final session of the Diet debate on the EEO Bill, Ryoko Akamatsu, the then Director of the Women's Bureau Of the Ministry of Labour, pointed out the significance of the guidelines:

'The guidelines will provide practical behavioural guidance to employers. As the guidelines spread and take root in society, such process itself represents the formation of new social order and public norms.' (Ouwaki, 1987, p.29)

In January 1986, eight months after the Law was enacted, the Ministry of Labour announced the guidelines which apparently did not arouse much controversy. According to the Ministry of Labour, the guidelines were formulated after a long process of consultation with the related committees, taking into consideration opinions put forward by the labour unions and numerous visits made by staff of the Women's Bureau to the major firms (MOL, 1986). The guidelines therefore can be seen as a product of negotiation between these parties. A close examination of the guidelines reveal that the way 'equal opportunity' is being defined appears to be rather narrow and is subject to several exceptions in favour of managerial prerogatives.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to recruitment, hiring, assignment and promotion, sections 7 and 8 of the law state that '... employers shall endeavour to give women equal opportunity with men'. According to the interpretation of the Ministry of Labour, this means 'not to exclude women and not to treat women unfavourably'. 'To exclude women' means not offering women any opportunity; 'not to exclude women' means offering women some opportunity. For instance in recruitment, employers are not allowed to advertise jobs for men only although they can specify the number of employees they intend to recruit by sex, such as '70 males required' and '30 females required'. This is not against the requirements of the guidelines because the employers do not exclude women. Similarly, with regard to assignment and promotion, employers are asked 'not to exclude women', for instance companies which do not offer women any job rotation

opportunities or promotion to managerial jobs will be required to 'make efforts' to offer women some opportunity. However, in the case where the frequency of job rotation for women is less than for men or where assignment to certain jobs is limited to women workers with certain qualifications - these do not constitute exclusion of women. The guidelines make it clear that it is acceptable for employers, like those in the banking or insurance sectors, to classify jobs into different streams such as 'managerial' and 'clerical', provided that employers do not restrict women to the clerical stream only but offer them opportunities to be assigned to managerial jobs (see, chapter 5, section III-3). Further, according to the interpretation of the Ministry of Labour, to exclude men from certain jobs or certain forms of employment does not constitute discrimination because the aim of the law is to promote equal opportunity for women and to expand their job opportunities, not the other way round. Following this interpretation, it is also acceptable to specify in job advertisements that women only are required for part-time jobs or clerical jobs. This is criticised by many Japanese labour lawyers as creating a potential loophole for employers to create more part-time or low paid clerical jobs for women. Also, if employers are to interpret the guidelines in a narrow technical sense, they can assign one or two token women to managerial jobs but keep the rest in clerical jobs; this can be said to have fulfilled the requirement that 'women are not excluded'. The Ministry of Labour pointed out that the objective of the law is to open up job opportunities to women which were formerly closed to them; not to restrict their employment options. Employers are expected to 'make efforts' in respect of the 'spirit' of the law and not to interpret the guidelines in a narrow sense.

A second meaning of 'equal opportunity' means 'not to treat women unfavourably'. According to the guidelines, to treat women unfavourably means to set different qualifications or conditions of employment for men and women. Discrimination in this sense means unequal treatment; non-discrimination means equal treatment. The guideline specifies that if as a result less women than men are able to comply with such terms and conditions, it does not constitute 'unfavourable treatment'. For



example, according to the guidelines, in the case of promotion tests, 'unfavourable treatment' means not to offer women opportunity to take the test or to impose qualification requirements on women different from that of men, such as requiring longer years of service. If the result of the tests turn out to be that less women than men are qualified for promotion, this does not constitute 'unfavourable treatment'. Clearly, the Ministry of Labour's interpretation does not embody the concept of 'indirect discrimination'.

Taking the above interpretation literally, one can say that the guidelines are aimed at no more than removing the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women. 'Equal opportunity' is interpreted as 'equal treatment of women as that of men'. On the whole, the Ministry of Labour seems to have compromised to the status quo and makes little attempt to tackle the problem of institutional discrimination.

The Ministry of Labour, however, pointed out that the 'guidelines' are no more than 'tentative measures':

'The guidelines do not represent the 'ideal norms' for achieving equal opportunities between men and women. They are no more than tentative measures, formulated on the basis of the present social and economic conditions, which employers are expected to 'make efforts' to follow at this point of time. Employers are, therefore, expected to take practical actions to follow these measures. Nevertheless, even if they implement their personnel management systems in line with the guidelines, it does not necessarily mean that they have fulfilled the 'moral obligation' enshrined in sections 7 and 8 of the EEO Law. Employers are expected to make further efforts in providing equal opportunities and equal treatment to women as that of men by taking measures which are not stipulated in the guidelines and implement their personnel systems accordingly in respect of the spirit of the EEO Law' (MOL, 1986., pp.44).

The above statement contains two important messages for interpreting the underlying assumptions of the EEO Law. Firstly, the guidelines are no more than temporary minimum requirements at the present point of time. As they are the product of consultation and negotiation, they represent a kind of average standard of behaviour which employers in

general have agreed to observe. Employers will be held responsible if they violate this minimum standard. In this sense, the nature of sanction of the guidelines is not so different from the prohibitory provisions. From the 'western norm' of equal opportunity, the standard of behaviour can be said to be very low. Nevertheless, government survey showed that blatant direct discrimination and exclusion of women were still quite common in Japan in the early 1980s (see, chapter 4, section IV). The intention of the guidelines is targeted mainly at the 'bad practice' employers, urging them to raise their standard of behaviour to the 'average norm'. However, the statement made by the Ministry of Labour indicates that the 'spirit' of the law goes beyond the requirements stipulated in the guidelines.

A more important second message is that, the 'ideal norm' of equal opportunity as enshrined in the 'spirit' of the law is of a much higher moral standard to achieve which employers are expected to 'make efforts'. This higher 'moral standard' is not a 'fixed target', but it is something above the standard set in the guidelines. As it is indeterminate and not well defined, it embodies an element of constant improvement and progress. 'Good practice' employers who have already satisfied the guidelines will still be expected to 'make further efforts' in order to fulfill their 'moral obligation'.

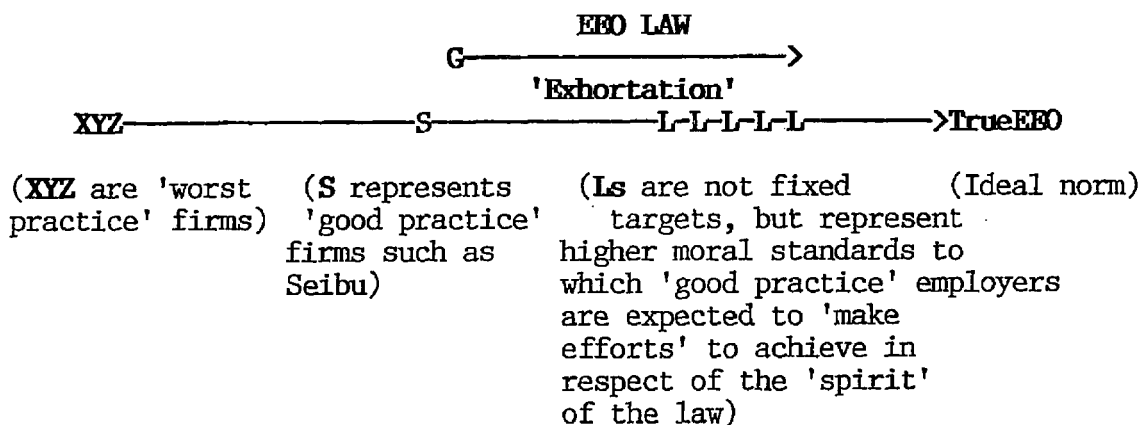
If this interpretation is correct, then the emphasis on informal sanction and the ambiguity of the 'hortatory provisions' does not mean that the law is practically irrelevant or socially insignificant. On the contrary, by manipulating the ambiguity and indeterminateness of the 'hortatory provisions', the Ministry of Labour has allowed itself plenty of scope for manoeuvring the scope of influence of the provisions. Underlying the 'hortatory provisions', there is an assumption that in attempting to introduce changes in the most sensitive areas of the employment system, the way forward is to use a step-by-step approach to push forward changes through administrative guidance.

Fig 6.1 shows the model of change underlying the Japanese EEO Law. The axis represents the spectrum of achievement of equal opportunity

standards from the 'worst practice' companies (XYZ) to the ideal of 'equal employment opportunity' (True EEO). 'S' represents the position of the current 'good practice' employers (like our case company Seibu which has taken initiatives in removing the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women and has attempted to adopt more positive utilisation policies on women before the enactment of the law), and 'G' indicates the position of the guideline. Since the 'ideal norm' of equal opportunity as enshrined in the 'spirit' of the law is a much higher moral standard beyond that required in the guideline, the intended 'spectrum of achievement' of the present EEO Law is represented by the 'Ls', a moving target which orients towards the ideal norm of 'True EEO'.

FIG. 6.1

Model of Change Underlying the Japanese EEO Law



## V. A UNIQUE JAPANESE APPROACH TO SOCIAL CHANGE?

Does the Japanese government genuinely believe that this model will work? Or, is it no more than a superficial political gesture to pay lip service to the value of equality?

To many westerners, particularly those who are trained in law, they are bound to view the Japanese EEO Law with a good deal of scepticism. Firstly, provisions like those in sections 7 and 8 are highly ambiguous. Offering women equality is interpreted as a kind of moral obligation on the side of the employers. Equality as an individual right simply does not exist in those provisions. Secondly, there is a total absence of any legally recognised sanction. Employers will not to be penalised even if they do not 'make efforts' to fulfill their moral obligations. Thirdly, litigation is discouraged and mediation is put forward as an alternative avenue for dispute resolution. One can say that the replacement of legal sanction with moral suasion suits the interests of management. The 'hortatory provisions' have removed the threat of litigation - a chief method which some determined women had used, and indeed quite successfully in many cases, in the 1970s and early 1980s in their fight against discriminatory company practices. By removing the tool of litigation, women are deprived of an important avenue for setting the pace of change. Thus the form and the content of the legislation represents no more than a political compromise to Japanese management. By appealing to the 'good will' and 'moral obligation' of the employers, the enactment of the law has done no more than reasserting management control over the agenda of change in women's equality issues. This interpretation of the EEO Law as a product of political compromise is not wrong and indeed, it is necessary to a complete understanding of the political significance of the EEO Law; but it only captures part of the meaning and the relevance of the law.

There are reasons to assume that the Japanese government is taking the EEO Law seriously and believe that it will exert pressure on employers to provide equal opportunities for women. Many observers on Japanese law argue that the emphasis on informalism and the indeterminateness of

statutes is a manifestation of Japanese attitudes to law and the preference of Japanese people for consensual methods of conflict resolution. The way the EEO Law is written, therefore, needs to be interpreted in the context of Japanese culture and legal tradition. Takeyoshi Kawashima (1967a & b), a well-known sociologist on Japanese conception of law, points out that the Japanese preference for compromise stems from the nature of Japanese social order which consists of social obligations which are indeterminate and not well defined. He argues that in such a culture, there is no place for the concept of the individual as an independent entity equal to other individuals; the indeterminateness of social obligations does not allow the existence of the concept of 'right' as the counterpart of social obligation. In a society like Japan, therefore, according to Kawashima, 'the indeterminateness of the meaning of the statutes is taken for granted, and so scope for widening and narrowing the meaning of the statutes has been almost limitless' (Kawashima, 1967b, pp.271). Many other Japanese legal scholars also emphasise that Japanese law has to be understood in the context of the law consciousness of the Japanese people (Nihonjin No Ho Ishiki) (Hideo 1976 and Noda 1976). They argue that the Japanese philosophy of law and their mental attitudes to litigation are fundamentally different from that of western countries::

'The Japanese manner of thinking clearly favours neither the formation nor the functioning of law as a conceptually arranged system of rights and duties. This does not, however, mean that there is no rule of conduct which functions for the maintenance of social order. Before the modern system of state law was established, a system of social rules of a non-legal nature directed the lives of Japanese, and that system continues to operate today, side by side with the more clearly defined system of state law. Whether this system be called "custom" or "non-law" its rules play a very important part in Japanese social life....The traditional rules that the Japanese obey are called the rules of giri. They are rules of conduct, and do not presuppose the existence of any relationship of clearly defined and quantitatively delimitable right and duties between the subjects whose conduct they regulate....Giri is a duty or the state of a person who is bound to behave in a prescribed way toward a certain other person....The person toward whom the duty is owed has no right to demand its fulfillment from the subject of duty. He must wait for the latter to fulfil it voluntarily' (Noda, 1976, p.174-5).

In the Japanese cultural context, according to this view, compromise is a kind of social virtue and litigation which demands clear-cut decisions based on universal standards are simply not preferred by the Japanese. Thus, the peculiarity of the EEO Law is a manifestation of this specific 'Japanese way' of resolving social conflict. The use of informal moral sanction for obliging employers to observe the 'spirit' of the law and the emphasis on mediation are methods frequently employed by the Japanese for reaching social consensus. In dealing with the women's equality issues, the Japanese government has appealed to this time honoured 'consensus formation model'. This type of 'cultural explanation' or even 'nihon jin ron' assumption is relevant if one is to understand why the EEO Law is written in the way it is. However, such 'cultural' interpretation should not be taken in a simplistic way as the 'natural' result of the continued strength of traditional values or culture. It is the consequence of a conscious political choice.

A crucial aspect one needs to take account of is that, the EEO Law is also a product of deliberate political decision made by the governing bureaucracy. It represents an attempt on the side of the government to step in to maintain control and steer the direction of change in an area which has important implications for the economic and social order. The fact that the Japanese government was determined to enact the law, despite strong opposition from management, was not purely out of a need to fulfil an international obligation, it was also a consequence of many internal social and economic changes which, as we have discussed, made the government realise that equal opportunity for women needed to be taken seriously and dealt with on the public policy level. The increased number of employment discrimination cases in the late 1970s was perceived as a threat to the social order; equality for women in employment would mean a substantial restructuring, not only of the employment system but the basis of Japanese society. In other words, equal employment issues were seen as becoming too important to be left to the courts or to the entire discretion of management. Frank Upham, in his recent book on Law and Social Change in Japan, illustrates that contrary to the stereotyped cultural assumption that litigation is insignificant in Japanese society, it is in fact politically highly

significant. It is a tactic used by many suppressed groups in Japanese society like the Burakumin, the anti-pollution groups and women to shock society and challenge the establishment. In all cases, the government has reacted to the challenge by asserting its primacy in the resolution of individual cases through administrative guidance and mediation and thereby maintaining control over the issue. Upham uses the term 'bureaucratic informalism' to describe the Japanese model of law which, according to him, is fundamentally different from the rule-centred or judge-centred models prevalent in the west.<sup>9</sup> In the Japanese model, the governing bureaucracy plays a central role in the formulation of new rules and social norms. Both the rule-centred and the judge-centred models according to Upham, are seen as socially and politically threatening because the litigation process is insulated from the state. The Japanese ruling bureaucracy has historically always played a prominent role in social change, thus the creation of a private domain of dispute resolution that is completely beyond its influence can be socially and politically threatening. As a consequence, the form and role of law in Japan, according to Upham, can be quite different from that of the western countries:

'Central to the Japanese model of law generally and litigation in particular is the elite's attempt to retain some measure of control over the processes of social conflict and changes. The vehicle for that control is a skilled and dedicated bureaucracy, itself one branch of Japan's tripartite elite coalition, which has a long history of active intervention in Japanese society.' (Upham, 1987, p.17)

The present EEO Law is drafted in such a way that it leaves the definition and enforcement of equality up to the Ministry of Labour. The ambiguity of the 'hortatory provisions' and the emphasis on informal methods of dispute resolution serves two important political functions. On the one hand, it is seen as less threatening by the employers. The informal methods of administrative guidance which allows for negotiation and compromise is regarded as more tolerable, and even welcomed at times. On the other hand, it has the advantage of allowing the governing bureaucracy to expand the areas into which it may intrude

because it is highly flexible and allows for possibilities for unchecked administrative action.

The realisation of the norm of sexual equality will require substantial restructuring of the Japanese enterprise organisations and many other aspects of the society. In dealing with this issue, the Japanese government is taking a cautious stance. By asserting its role as a 'consensus maker' and by emphasising the role of administrative guidance in charting the future course of change, the government is trying to maintain control of the social agenda. The objective of the EEO Law is not to prevent women's equality but to ensure that equality will occur within the framework desired by the ruling bureaucracy after informal consultation and negotiation with business and organised labour.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

If law is to be regarded as a tool to be used by women in challenging the established social order through the courts, the contents of the Japanese EEO Law is clearly a political compromise. It has granted women very few new rights and imposed limited legal obligations on employers. However, if law in Japanese society is no more than a 'denka no hoto' (a sword handed down from ancestors as a family treasure), which means that it is not for actual use, but for 'symbolic manifestation of the prestige of the family' (Kawashima 1967, pp.118), then no matter how 'conservative' the actual content of the law is, one can still expect it to exert some influence on people's attitudes and behaviour. Law is acting as a symbol of new moral standard.

If one takes the Japanese government's argument that the present EEO Law is a developing process of legislation - that the goals set in the guidelines are 'tentative measures' rather than ideal norms, then one need not be too critical of the letter of the Law. In making the statement that 'Employers are expected to make further efforts...by



taking measures which are not stipulated in the guidelines and implement their personnel management systems accordingly in respect of the spirit of the law', the Ministry of Labour is clearly taking the rhetoric of the law seriously and appears genuinely to believe that it is possible to bring about change by relying on the 'good faith' and 'voluntary cooperation' of the employers. The Ministry of Labour will urge the 'bad practice' employers to follow the guidelines with good faith, and make attempts to promote further improvement among the 'good practice' employers. Clearly, the Ministry of Labour is not simply relying on employer 'good will' as such, the potential threat of future revision of the law is real to many employers. As it is a developing piece of legislation and given the fact that its actual content is far from ideal as compared with the norm of equality in more advanced countries, pressure for more drastic revision is still present.<sup>10</sup> The fear of further legislation might add extra pressure on employers to take some action.

Further, the enactment of the EEO Law itself has created a 'new environment'. It has important political and symbolic significance in the sense that employment practices which were taken for granted and accepted as a natural result of custom before will have to be put on the policy agenda for discussion and negotiation. The application of 'moral obligation' as a kind of indirect sanction puts the employers in a defensive position. 'Bad practice' employers will be challenged according to the criteria set out in the guidelines. Non-compliance can be directly questioned and disputes will be resolved according to those criteria. But even 'good practice' employers, like our case company Seibu, can be challenged by the question 'whether enough efforts are being made' to promote equal opportunities for women.

The future outcome, however, is uncertain. The 'effectiveness' of the model of change underlying the present EEO Law will have to be evaluated not only in terms of whether and how companies have responded to the legislation but also the extent to which the policy changes will actually benefit women in terms of their job status and career opportunities. Moreover, the attitudes and responses of women to the

new situation will also be a crucial factor in determining the future outcome.

The next chapter analyses the responses and reactions of companies by looking at macro-level survey data. Part IV of the thesis looks at a detailed case study conducted at Seibu, both before and after the introduction of the EEO Law, as a critical test of how much 'further efforts' a 'good practice' company have made in response to the 'spirit' of the Law and whether the changes are having positive impact on women's position and status.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Taken literally, the article applies only to contracts between the state and individuals. Some scholars believe in the narrow interpretation of the law while the opinion of a powerful minority is that the Constitution is meant to have indirect as well as direct effect, and that the construction to be placed on Article 14 is that the Constitution regulates public policy and is therefore concerned with private contracts. Moreover, the Constitution speaks to the sanctity of contracts of all kinds and for the view that contracts must not violate public policy. Cook and Hayashi, 1980, p.21-2.

2. The first ruling of this kind appeared in December 1966. It was a case upheld by a 26-year-old female employees of Sumitomo Cement Company, against the mandatory dismissal at the time of her marriage. The Tokyo District Court judged such a practice of compelling female employees to resign on marriage unlawful on the ground that such action constitutes discrimination against women workers and is contrary to the "freedom of marriage". Since the rulings of the Sumitomo case, seven other cases in all have followed, among them Hokoku Industries, Kobe Noda School and Shigehara City. In all of them, the judges have ruled in favourable to the plaintiffs. In fact, the decisions are so clear and uniform that no new cases have been brought since 1979. Cook and Hayashi, 1982, p.50.

3. In 1975, the Childcare Leave Act was enacted as a result of persistent demand from working women. The Act enabled women teaching at national and public schools of compulsory education, nurses and dry nurses at medicare and social welfare facilities, to take one-year child care leave for taking care of their children aged under one.

4. According to the Labour Ministry Ordinance, "supervisors or managers" are defined as "the chief of a minimum unit of organisation which does work, or a person whose position is superior to the chief and who gives directions and orders on work. As with regard to the scope of professionals and specialists, the Ordinance has designated the following 14 occupations as requiring "expertise, specialised or technical knowledge": (a) certified accountants, (b) doctors, (c) dentists, (d) veterinarians, (e) lawyers, (f) first-class registered architects, (g) pharmacists, (h) real estate appraisers, (i) those engaged in research which requires sophisticated scientific knowledge at research facilities, (j) those engaged in the analysis or design of information processing systems, (k) those engaged in covering articles of editing at newspaper or publishing companies, (l) those engaged in covering and editing for the production of broadcasting programmes, (m) those engaged in designing apparel and industrial products, interior decorating and advertising, (n) those engaged in producing or directing in the production of broadcasting programmes and movies. Japan Labor Bulletin, April 1, 1986.

5. Originally the Law was entitled "Danjo Koyo Kikai Byodo Ho". The word Byodo means equality. At some stage during the debate, the word Byodo was replaced by Kindo which can be translated as "equalizing" or

"progress toward equality". Some Japanese critics suggest that the change of the title from Byodo to Kindo signifies a compromise of the government to the opponents of the legislation. The present title suggests an effort toward equalizing opportunity rather than a commitment to achieve such equality. See, Edwards, L. (1988), p.243.

6. During the drafting stage of the bill, three possible options regarding the form and position of the EEO Law in the Japanese legal system were suggested. It could be: (1) included as part of the Labour Standards Law by introducing 'discrimination on ground of sex' to section 3, as suggested by the labour side; (2) an independent new law or (3) joined to the Working Women's Welfare Law. Both the first and the second options were rejected. The EEO Law turned out to be largely a revision of the Working Women's Welfare Law, with a number of new measures introduced to eliminate discrimination.

7. Young (1984) gives an example of how local governments affect land use planning in their localities by using administrative guidance. If a developer does not comply with the planning guidelines of a municipality, the municipality may refuse to grant the developer necessary sewage permits or the waivers needed to allow the developer to bring oversized construction equipment to the construction site.

8. According to the guidelines, the following three types of jobs can be treated as exceptions to the equal opportunity requirement: (1) Where the essential nature of the job calls for a man for reasons of physiology, or where physical strength or stamina is required or other jobs which by nature of religion or customs would require a man. (2) Where the normal operation of the job would require working overtime or late at night for which it would be illegal to treat women equally as men because of the requirements of the Labour Standards Law. The Ministry of Labour's interpretation of the 'normal operation of the job' is rather broad. It includes not only the present, but also future jobs. That is, if there are expectations in the future that the job or rotation to other jobs is going to involve overtime or late-night working, employers can limit the recruitment to men only. This gives employers strong discretionary power in restricting a broad categories of jobs to men only because they can argue that these jobs are, in the future, going to involve overtime or late-night working. (3) Where the working environment or social situations such as custom and practices of a country would make it difficult for women to realise their abilities. Here, the major reference is to working in foreign countries. This exception can severely limit the recruitment of women to jobs which would require period of working overseas. Similar to category (2), it includes not only present jobs but also jobs which in the future which as a result of rotation, would require overseas assignments.

9. The rule-centred model emphasises the role of rules. It hypothesises a legal system where legal professionals use specialised techniques to find and apply unambiguous rules to clear fact situations independent of external influences. Under the rule-centred model there is a clear differentiation of law from other sources of normative learning, and law eventually supersedes all other state-sponsored forms of conflict resolution. The judge-centred model emphasises the role of judges as

political actors and litigation as the forum for broad-based social controversies. Although the assumptions of the judge-centred model lead to greater power for the process of litigation and for the judiciary as an institution, they weaken the independence and insulation enjoyed by the parties in the rule-centred model and render impossible the uniform penetration in society of formal legal norms. Despite the fundamental differences between these two heuristic models, they have one common characteristic: the limited role of the state in litigation. Under the rule-centred model, the legislature provides the legal rules but then loses all the control over the degree and speed of their penetration into social life. Under the judge-centred model, the state is an active party to the decision-making process, but is only one party. Upham (1987), pp.7-11.

10. This point was made to the author in an interview with R. Akamatsu who was Director of the Women's Bureau at the Ministry of Labour at the time of passage of the EEO Law. She pointed out that there was an implicit agreement at the time the law was enacted, that the government was to review the situation in five years' time following the implementation of the law. She also emphasised that future revision of the legislation was to be expected as the EEO Law was a 'developing' piece of legislation.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

#### I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the responses and reactions of the firms to the EEO Law and attempts to evaluate how far the legislation has exerted pressure on Japanese companies to introduce significant changes in their personnel management systems to accommodate improvements in the provision of equal opportunities for women. The chapter starts by considering the nature of 'administrative guidance' which is the chief means of enforcement of the legislation, then looks at the employers' policy responses in detail as shown by some major surveys.

In chapter 5, we examine how economic and market forces (prior to the enactment of the EEO Law) have pushed some major companies, especially those in the female-intensive sectors, to initiate changes in their personnel management practices in order to improve the morale of the female workforce and better to utilise their abilities. Most of the changes introduced, however, were ad hoc and partial and could, at best, open up limited career opportunities for a small number of women who were able to conform to the male career pattern. The policy adaptations introduced did not seek to bring about significant changes in the existing pattern of career design, the rules and practices governing job assignment, promotion and rewards, which operate to exclude the majority of women from the main stream career jobs.

If economic and market forces can only have limited effects in bringing about equal opportunities for women, will the present legislation, as an external 'legal' and 'moral' force, make any difference? This is one major question to be answered in this chapter.

In the implementation of the EEO Law, the Japanese government put heavy emphasis on 'administrative guidance' (gyosei-shido). Young

(1984) defines administrative guidance as a common Japanese regulatory technique which, although generally non-binding, seeks to make the behaviour of regulated parties conform to broad administrative goals. He points out three major characteristics of administrative guidance in Japan: (1) Modification of behaviour - Agencies adopting administrative guidance seek to encourage a regulated party to act or refrain from acting in order to advance a regulatory goal or objective. (2) Non-legal character - Administrative guidance generally is an act of 'factual' and not 'legal' character; it does not alter the legal relationships of the regulated parties. (3) 'Voluntary' Compliance - All compliance with administrative guidance is 'voluntary', in a narrow, technical sense. Compliance is voluntary insofar as an agency cannot employ the legal system or an administrative enforcement organ to compel a regulated party to obey the government's directive. In some situations, government agencies tend to use a broad array of devices to accomplish their goals such as threatening to withhold services or encourage compliance by rewarding those who do.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Ministry of Labour can create administrative or other burdens for firms that do not comply with the law, and award extra-legal benefits to firms that do comply (Edwards, 1988, p.244). Hanami points out that this type of administrative guidance can sometimes be quite effective in Japan (JERC, 1987, pp.61-2).

However, one of the most important means for assuring voluntary compliance is to encourage 'party input'- to undertake extensive consultation with regulated parties in order to build a consensus and, on occasion, to elicit the cooperation of the regulated parties. Thus, bargaining and negotiation are enshrined in the process of administrative guidance. It took the Japanese government more than seven years to draft the EEO Law; the long processes of consultation and negotiation with employers and unions through their involvement in a number of committees (shingikai) was itself an administrative guidance process. The guidelines which explain the practical requirements of the EEO Law were issued by the Ministry of Labour after a long process of consultation with the related committees and numerous private visits made by members of the Women's Bureau to the major firms.

Administrative guidance itself is a 'moral suasion' process to elicit the 'good will' of the regulated parties and assures voluntary compliance once the law is passed.

So far the EEO Law has given rise to few legal disputes. Grievances brought to the Women's and Young Workers' Offices were small in number which were accordingly resolved through the advice and guidance of the offices. Up to the present (January, 1989), no case has yet been referred to the Mediation Commission. The major role of the Ministry of Labour has been concentrated in the more general areas of 'enlightenment guidance', such as conducting seminars to explain the guidelines to job advertising firms, employment agencies within universities and schools and running public conferences, aiming at raising the equality consciousness of employers and enhancing the public's general understanding of the EEO Law.<sup>2</sup>

To sum up, the Japanese EEO Law is based on a 'persuasive' model of change; it is based on a belief that change can come about through a process of consultation and compromise with the employers. Hence the Japanese legislation 'morally obliges' employers to treat women equally in the most important stages of employment including recruitment, hiring, assignment and promotion. Unequal treatment in basic training, benefits, and retirement are, however, legally prohibited.

At the time of writing (January 1989), the legislation had been in effect for about two-and-a-half years (three-and-a-half years since its enactment in April 1985). It is possible, at this stage, to examine the extent to which companies have responded to the legislation and the type of policy changes introduced. This chapter looks at management responses to the legislation at two levels. Firstly, it examines the direct impact of the legislation on employer policies as reported in a number of major nation-wide surveys, mostly conducted during the two-year-period following the implementation of the law. It looks specifically at the extent to which companies have (or more precisely, reported that they had) introduced changes in personnel policies and practices in order to comply with the 'practical requirements' of the



law, including the prohibitory provisions in basic training, benefits and retirement and more importantly, the requirements stipulated in the guidelines with regard to the hortatory provisions in recruitment, job assignment and promotion. Secondly, the chapter looks in greater detail at the type of personnel policy changes and evaluates how far companies have moved beyond the 'letter' of the law in the promotion of equal opportunities for women. Referring to the model of change underlying the Japanese EEO Law as shown in Fig 6.1 in the previous chapter, the objectives of this chapter are twofold: (1) To examine how far the 'bad practice' companies (XYZ) have moved towards point 'G' on the spectrum of achievement of equal opportunity standards and, (2) to see whether there is evidence or indication that they are attempting to move beyond 'G'. Nevertheless, the nature of the survey data used in this chapter restricts a full test of the second objective. An in-depth case study at a 'good practice' company proves to be necessary. The present chapter provides a general background context for the detailed Seibu case study presented in Part IV.

## **II. ACTIONS AND REACTIONS OF FIRMS: THE EXTENT OF POLICY RESPONSES**

This section examines the extent of policy responses based on three major nation-wide surveys:

(1) The 'Survey on Employment and Management of Women Workers' (Joshi Rodosha no Koyo Kanri Ni Kansuru Chosa) carried out by the Ministry of Labour in February 1987 (hereafter refer to as the Rodosho Survey) (MOL, 1987b). It was based on a nation-wide questionnaire conducted on a random sample of 7,200 firms (with 30 or more employees). In the survey, firms were asked to indicate the extent to which they had introduced changes in personnel procedures and practices in response to the implementation of the EEO Law.

(2) The second major reference is the report published by the Japan Economic Research Centre in October, 1987, which is the result of a one

year monitoring of the implementation of the EEO Law by a group of academics and personnel management practitioners (hereafter refer to as the JERC Study) (JERC, 1987). The qualitative research methods used in this study, including in-depth interviews and discussions with the personnel managers of major companies, complements the more superficial questionnaire survey method of the Rodosho Survey.

(3) 'Survey on the Utilisation of Women Workers' (Kigyo Ni Okeru Joshi No Senryoka Ni Kansuru Chosa) carried out by the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Research in October 1986 (hereafter refer to as the NIVER Survey) (NIVER, 1987). In this survey, firms were asked to indicate their utilisation policies on women during the three year period before 1985 and for the three years following 1985. The survey covers 6,750 firms with 100 or more employees but only 2,018 firms responded to the survey (the response rate was 29.7 per cent).

In addition to the above three surveys, additional data and evidence were obtained from a great variety of sources including reports in newspapers and numerous surveys and studies reported in various journals over the three-year-period since the implementation of the EEO Law.

### **1. Shift in Policy Orientations on Women**

Evidence from the NIVER survey appears to indicate a general, positive, shift in management attitudes and policy orientations on women employees. As shown in Table 7.1, the proportion of companies claiming to adopt 'a positive utilisation policy based on individual ability disregard of sex' had increased from 39.6 per cent before 1985 to 54.8 per cent after 1985; at the same time those saying that their main policy orientation was 'to utilise women in assistant type of jobs' had declined from 33.9 per cent to 15.3 per cent. Nevertheless, these were policy statements made by the management of the companies, which did not necessarily mean that there had been an actual shift in the companies' policies. Further, it should be noted that part of the survey results was based on retrospective questions. The dividing line before and after the year 1985 is arbitrary rather than real. In the survey,

companies were asked to indicate their policies on women employees roughly during the three-year-period before 1985 and their policies for the three-year-period after 1985. It is not a comparison of two different survey results at two points of time. There is a possibility that management might have overstated their policy changes. However, the survey results can still be taken as an indication that the attitudes and general intended policy orientations after 1985 have shifted in a more positive direction..

Despite this, the situation as reported in the survey still awaits much improvement; 15.3 per cent of the companies still intended to continue their policy of restricting the utilisation of women to assistant type of jobs and another 15 per cent remained ambivalent with regard to their policies on women, which probably meant they had not taken any action in response to to equal treatment requirements of the law.

**Table 7.1 Policy Orientations on Women Employees**

	<u>Before 1985</u>	<u>After 1985</u>
Positive utilisation based on individual ability, disregarding sex	39.6%	54.8%
Utilisation of women mainly in specialist jobs (e.g. systems engineers,R&D jobs etc.)	13.7	14.8
Utilisation of women limited to assistant type of jobs	33.9	15.3
Utilisation policies on women under examination	5.4	11.2
Do not intend to utilise women	6.5	3.3
Others	1.0	0.6
<b>Total</b> (N= Total no of companies responded)	<b>100.0</b> (2,005)	<b>100.0</b> (2,005)

Source: NIVER (1987)

## 2. Extent of Direct Policy Response to the EEO Law

Table 7.2 shows the extent to which companies have introduced changes in their personnel management policies in direct response to the requirements of the legislation, as reported in the Rodosho survey.

**Table 7.2 Extent of Response to the EEO Law**

	Already had equal opportunity change not necessary	Change introduced	Under examination	No action yet	Unclear	Total
Recruitment	68.0%	17.0%	6.3%	5.8%	0.8%	100.0%
Conditions of employment	78.7	18.9	1.9	0.4	0.1	100.0
Job Assignment	56.1	8.8	13.6	-	21.5	100.0
Job Rotation (a) Within same establishment	74.8	8.2	8.1	8.8	0.2	100.0
(b) Rotation involves geogra- phical mobility	32.0	14.0	16.8	37.2	1.1	100.0
Promotion	53.8	4.8	11.5	29.8	0.2	100.0
Basic training (for new recruits)	55.7	5.6	No such	training = 38.7		100.0
Basic training (job-related)	42.3	4.7	No such	training = 48.0		100.0
Management training	29.7	3.0	No such	training = 60.9		100.0
Benefits (e.g.Housing Loan)	27.3	0.7	No such	benefits = 67.8		100.0
Retirement Age	82.1	15.0	-	-	2.9	100.0

Source: Compiled from Rodosho Survey (MOL,1987b).

One interesting observation is that the legislation's formal distinction between 'prohibition' against discrimination (in basic training, provision of fringe benefits and retirement and dismissal) and 'exhortation' for equal treatment (in recruitment, job assignment and promotion) became quite blurred in terms of the extent to which companies have responded. A higher proportion of firms (17 per cent) said they had introduced changes in their recruitment policies (hortatory provision) whereas only 5 per cent of the firms said they had introduced changes in basic training for new recruits (prohibitory provision). In the area of training, a high proportion of the firms replied 'no such training' which could either mean they did not conduct training in those areas, or the type of training they had was outside the scope of equal treatment requirements. This is because the present legislation only prohibits discrimination in a narrow range of training, excluding on-the-job training (see, chapter 6, section IV-1).

It appears that companies are more willing to introduce changes both at the point of entry (recruitment) and exit (retirement). These are areas which will cause least disruption to the 'core practices' of the personnel management systems and tend to affect only those employees who are either joining or leaving the company. In the areas of assignment, job rotation (especially that involves movement between establishments) and promotion, company response to the equal treatment requirements stipulated in the guidelines has been relatively limited. A high proportion of the firms had not complied with the equal treatment requirement: 35.1 per cent in assignment, 55.1 per cent in job rotation involving geographical mobility and 41.5 per cent in promotion (note: these figures are the sum total of those which replied 'under examination', 'no action yet' and 'unclear' in the survey results shown in Table 7.2). These are the areas of which changes will affect a large number of the existing employees. One would therefore expect strong resistance, both from the employers and the male employees, to rapid changes in these core areas of the personnel management systems. Changes in these areas will probably involve a long process of bargaining between the management and different categories of employees within the work organisations. Judging from the small proportion of firms which

said they had introduced changes in compliance with the equal treatment requirements, the legislation does not appear to have substantial impact in these areas.

However, one can still argue that since a relatively high proportion of the companies replied that 'change was not necessary because they already had equal opportunity for women before the legislation was enacted', this need not mean that the hortatory provisions have had no effect. It could mean that some of the firms had introduced policy changes in anticipation of the new legislation. Therefore by the time the legislation came into force, there was no need to take any further action. It could also mean that more companies are now making false claims that they have equal opportunity policies because of increasing social pressures on companies to do so. Both interpretations could be true; it would be difficult to verify the precise contribution of each factor to the replies in the Rodosho survey.

There is some evidence, however, to support the argument that many companies, especially the large firms, had taken steps to eliminate the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women before the EEO Law formally came into force. A survey by the Labour Administration Research Centre (Romu-Gyosei Kenkyu-jo) on 321 large major firms in March 1986 (two months before the EEO Law was implemented) shows that about one-third of the firms said they had completed reviewing their personnel management procedures (in the case of firms with 3,000 or more employees, the figure was as high as 75 per cent) and half of them were taking some kind of action (Rosei Jiho, 1986). In the survey, only 11.5 per cent of the firms said they had not undertaken any action.

Further, a comparison of the results of the Rodosho surveys on companies' personnel management policies on women at three different points of time, namely 1977, 1981 and 1987, shows a dramatic decline in the number of firms admitting direct discrimination against women, the decline was especially sharp between 1981 and 1987 (Table 7.3). Between 1977 and 1981, some slight improvement can be observed but the extent of change was not as drastic as that had occurred between 1981

and 1987. The change was most dramatic with regard to recruitment, conditions of employment and job assignment. The area that appeared to be most resistant to change was promotion; 41.4 per cent of the firms reported not offering women management promotion chances or imposing different terms and conditions in 1987 as compared to 45.1 per cent in 1981 and 52.3 per cent in 1977. With regard to training, directly comparable data in the 1987 survey was not available due to the different way the question was asked.

Overall, one can say that the legislation has had an impact on eliminating the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women, except for promotion. In other words, the present legislation has helped to eliminate the number of 'worst practice' companies (XYZ) (see, chapter 6, Fig. 6.1). The meagre improvement reported in the area of promotion as compared to other aspects of employment is not difficult to explain. Equal opportunity for women (defined in the guidelines as 'not to exclude women or not to treat women unfavourably') in recruitment or assignment can be fulfilled by allowing some new recruits, even if it is only a few token women, into areas which has previously excluded them. This can be achieved within a relatively short period of time. In contrast, equal treatment in promotion is much more complex. It concerns changing the policies on existing employees: even promoting a few token women to supervisory positions as evidence that the company does not 'exclude women completely' can be politically sensitive and seen as disruptive of the existing hierarchical order in the work organisation. A longer time span may be necessary before companies can formally claim they offer equal treatment to women in promotion.

**Table 7.3 Proportion of Companies Admitting Direct Discrimination Against Women**

	1977	1981	1987*
<b>Recruitment</b>			
a) Recruiting male graduates only	78.3	73.0	19.6
b) Recruiting male high school leavers only	-	24.5	14.3
c) Mid-career entry limited to males only	-	19.0	14.1
<b>Conditions of Employment</b> (Imposing different terms and conditions on men and women, e.g different age limit, exclusion of married women, etc.)			
	38.1	32.6	8.7
<b>Job Assignment</b> (Have jobs which excluded women completely)			
	91.5	83.4	35.1
<b>Job Rotation</b> (Not offering women job rotation )			
	50.8	50.4	26.3
<b>Training</b> (no training for women or contents of training programme different for men and women)			
	70.3	60.0	- **
<b>Promotion</b> (No managerial promotion opportunities or imposing different conditions)			
	52.3	45.1	41.3
<b>Retirement system</b> (Separate system for men and women)			
	22.4	19.4	2.9

Source: Compiled from Survey on Employment and Management of Women Workers (Joshi Rodosha No Koyo Kanri Ni Kansuru Chosa), Ministry of Labour, Japan, 1977, 1981 and 1987.

\* Note that questions in the 1987 survey were designed specifically to test the extent to which companies had complied with the practical requirements of the EEO Law. The way they were written differed from that of the previous two surveys. The 1987 figures were adapted by the author in such a way that they could be compared with the previous survey results.

\*\* Comparable data on training was not available in the 1987 survey.



### **III. TYPE OF POLICY CHANGES INTRODUCED**

The quick response of the companies to the practical requirements of the EEO Law raises an important question: namely, the meaning of 'equal opportunity' as defined in the guidelines, and the standards of equal opportunities required for claiming to have adopted 'an equal opportunity policy'. The present guidelines define 'equal opportunity' as 'not to exclude women or to treat women unfavourably'; as long as companies adopt an equal treatment policy, the requirements of the Law are fulfilled. An equal treatment policy merely requires companies to adopt a 'non-discriminatory' approach in applying the personnel management rules and procedures but does not require changes in these established rules and practices. It could well be that companies have accepted the equal treatment requirement with little resistance partly because they have discovered that adopting an equal treatment policy will not necessarily upset the status quo.

A more detailed examination of the type of policy changes introduced by the companies will illustrate more clearly the extent to which management have actually taken positive steps to initiate changes in their personnel management procedures and practices towards more egalitarian treatment of women, in respect of the spirit of the law.

#### **1. Recruitment and Conditions of Employment for New Entrants**

These are the areas where companies have responded most rapidly since the enactment of the EEO Law. The effects are also more readily observable as changes in recruitment and selection policies would have an immediate impact on the large number of graduates and school leavers coming onto the job market in the spring of each year.

Job advertising is the area in which most remarkable changes have taken place. Surveys carried out by the Women's Vocational Institute (Josei Shokugyo Zaidan) show a significant shift in the way companies advertised their jobs for graduates. The proportion of companies which excluded female job applicants (specified that jobs were opened to male

graduates only) declined from 23 per cent in 1986 to 3 per cent in 1987; while those which offered jobs to graduates without specifying the sex requirements rose from 32 per cent in 1986 to 72 per cent in 1987 (WVI, 1987, 1988)).

An increasing number of companies has also taken steps to remove the unfavourable terms and conditions applied specifically to the female job applicants such as requiring women to have special qualifications or skills or a restriction that women should be commuting to work from their parents' homes, etc. A more remarkable change has been the move towards equalisation of starting wages for new recruits. Section 4 of the Labour Standards Law prohibits 'unequal wages for equal work' but many companies has been able to continue offering different starting wages to men and women by restricting them to certain inferior job categories which justifies paying them lower starting wages. The EEO Law has helped to reduce unequal treatment in this area, at least on the formal policy level. More companies have moved towards equal starting wages for men and women (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4 Changes in Setting Starting Wages for New Recruits

Year	<u>High School</u>			<u>University</u>		
	Equal wages %	Differ by sex/job %	Total No. (%)	Equal wages %	Differ by sex/job %	Total No. (%)
1975	46.7	53.3	420 (100.0)	31.7	68.3	205 (100.0)
1980	59.5	40.5	388 (100.0)	35.6	64.5	183 (100.0)
1981	59.7	40.3	372 (100.0)	39.5	60.5	210 (100.0)
1982	59.9	40.1	374 (100.0)	41.5	58.5	234 (100.0)
1983	60.5	39.5	334 (100.0)	42.7	57.3	234 (100.0)
1984	63.0	37.0	327 (100.0)	43.4	56.6	258 (100.0)
1985	62.0	38.0	332 (100.0)	49.0	51.0	259 (100.0)
1986	74.6	25.4	299 (100.0)	64.7	35.3	295 (100.0)
1987	82.1	17.9	184 (100.0)	78.9	21.1	190 (100.0)

Source: Annual surveys carried out by Labour Administration Research Centre on enterprises with 500 or more employees, Rosei Jiho, No. 2834, June, 1987.

The EEO Law has made companies finding it difficult to specify the sex requirements in job advertisements or to impose obviously unequal terms and conditions on women at the point of entry. However, a more detailed examination of the harsh realities confronting the female job applicants suggests that in some case changes in the companies' recruitment policies are more in form rather than in substance. According to informal interviews conducted by the Ministry of Labour at the universities, staff at the universities' employment information office pointed out that even when they received job offers for both sexes, firms often revealed preference for men in the process of screening (JIL, 1987). There were also widespread complaints from female graduates that the changes in job advertising had only created false expectations and caused confusion in their job hunting activities as they only found out that companies had no real intention of recruiting female graduates or offering them equal career opportunities when they approached the companies (Asahi Shimbun, September 9, 1987).

The EEO Law does not seem to have much effect on eliminating many traditional Japanese recruitment practices which, although not in direct violation of the requirements stipulated in the guidelines, have a discriminatory impact on women's job opportunities. Many companies still conduct their recruitment and screening activities for men and women separately. One common practice is to set aside different dates for accepting applications from men and women. Companies would normally finish the interviews for male job applicants first before they start interviewing female applicants. This could mean that companies only offer job opportunities to women after they have failed to recruit sufficient number of men. In the case where recruitment activities for both men and women are conducted on the same day, it is still a common practice for companies to organise separate meetings for male and female job applicants. These practices do not constitute discrimination against women, as defined by the Ministry of Labour, because companies have not 'excluded women' in the recruitment procedures.

Sex is still one of the most important criteria on which many companies base their annual recruitment plans and make their manpower decisions. A survey conducted by the Labour Administration Research Centre (Romu Gyosei Kenkyujo) in the spring of 1986 showed that three out of four companies still decided in advance the number of men and women they intended to recruit each year. Out of these more than half indicated that they did not plan to change this practice in the near future (Table 7.5). The main reason for this, as pointed out by the companies, being that 'the type of jobs' for men and women were different (Rosei Jiho, 1986).

This raises a crucial question of how far the present legislation has helped to remove the traditional practice of recruiting men for core career jobs and women for assistant type of jobs . Equal opportunities for women will not come about unless companies are prepared to eliminate the practice of making a clear distinction between 'men's jobs' and 'women's jobs'.

Changes over the last two years seem to indicate that companies are moving towards more indirect, yet institutionalised, ways of segregating the majority of women into low status jobs. The next section looks at this new form of employee selection system.

**Table 7.5 The Persistence of Sex Based Recruitment Policy**  
(1986)

	<u>No of companies (%)</u>	
Decide no. of men and women to be recruited in advance	231	(73.1)
Have changed such practice recently	43	(13.6)
Do not specify no. to be recruited by sex in advance	42	(13.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>

<u>Future Plans</u>		
No plan to change	125	(54.3)
Intend to change in the near future	91	(39.6)
Others	14	(6.1)
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>

Source: Adapted from Rosei Jiho (1986), No. 2789, June 13, p.7.

Note: The survey was conducted by the Labour Administration Research Centre in March 1986 on 321 firms with 500 or more employees. Among these 62 per cent were firms with 1,000 or more employees. This survey, therefore, can be said to be a survey mainly on large firms.

## **2. A New Selection System: The Career Track Classification System**

Since the promulgation of the EEO Law, an increasing number of major firms have introduced a new recruitment system - the 'career track classification system' (Kosu-betsu Koyo-seido)- in which new recruits are offered a choice of different career tracks at the point of entry.<sup>3</sup> Table 7.6 shows the extent to which companies have introduced this new form of selection system by firm size and industrial sector.

According to management, the system is designed to clarify each individual's 'career choice' at the early stage of their careers and to manage them accordingly. Management also point out that selection for entry to the different career tracks is solely based on 'merit' and that all career options will be opened to both sexes. As the same standards and criteria for selection will be applied equally to both sexes, the new system is therefore, according to management, intended to eliminate the past informal practice of discrimination against women at the point of entry (Kanto Management Association, 1986).

**Table 7.6 Extent of Coverage of Career Track Classification System  
(By firm size and industrial sector, 1986)**

	Have introduced %	Decided to introduce %	Being examined %	Intend to Examine %	Other %	Unclear %	Total % (No.)
Manufacturing	7.0	2.1	9.5	28.8	52.6	9.7	100.0 (2005)
Retailing & food industry	7.7	1.8	10.7	25.5	54.3	12.1	100.0 (637)
Finance & insurance	8.3	3.5	11.1	34.0	43.1	7.7	100.0 (156)
Services	7.7	1.5	6.7	19.1	64.9	14.0	100.0 (677)
Less than 300 employees	5.7	1.3	8.8	21.8	62.4	16.0	100.0 (624)
300 - 900	6.1	1.1	7.7	26.5	58.6	11.7	100.0 (897)
1,000-4,999	11.9	3.7	11.7	26.0	46.7	6.9	100.0 (405)
Above 5,000	14.5	5.3	13.2	26.3	40.8	3.8	100.0 (79)

Source: NIVER Survey (1986), adapted from Ota (1988), pp.184.



Although there are some variations in the actual implementation of the system in different companies, the most common form is to classify the regular employees into two streams, namely the managerial stream and the clerical stream. The managerial career route (usually called 'sogoshoku' or 'comprehensive career course') is usually defined with three characteristics: (a) jobs to be assigned in this track require complex judgement (such as business negotiations, personnel management, designing or developing products, planning of company policies or strategies), (b) employees in this track are subject to comprehensive job-rotation and transfers for career development and business necessities, and (c) there is no limit to promotion; employees can eventually become top-level managers or executives.

The characteristics of the clerical employee (usually called 'ippanshoku course' or 'general employee course') are in contrast with the above in the following: (a) jobs are considered less complicated and more manual; (b) job-rotation and transfers are carried out within a limited scope (especially employees are not required to move to other localities); (c) there is a formal limit to promotion (employees can attain only lower-level or local management positions). In some firms, a track for 'specialist employees' ('senmonshoku', i.e., employees who specialise in jobs requiring high-level skills or knowledge) is organised in between these two tracks.

Management claim that the new system, in which individuals are recruited for specific 'jobs' based on 'merit' and in accordance with individual 'choice', signifies a fundamental shift from the traditional sex-based personnel management system to one that is based on merit. This new form of employment system is strongly recommended by the Kanto Management Association as an appropriate way to fulfil the equal treatment requirement of the EEO Law:

'...treating women equally as men as required by the new legislation can be met if firms fully implemented the merit-based personnel management system. In such cases, the differential treatment for those in different career tracks is not based on sex but

solely based on individual merit or abilities' (Kanto Management Association, 1986, p.6)

The crucial issue here is the meaning of the concepts of 'job', 'merit' and 'choice' and the way the system is being implemented in practice.

Firstly, one needs to look at the criteria used for classifying the different job categories or career streams. How far are they job-related and how far are they behavioural requirements? In the majority of the cases, the job classification is no more than a broad distinction between the 'managerial' and the 'clerical' jobs. It is often not clear what precisely the job specifications are and what type of requirements and qualifications companies are looking for. The one common criterion used by all the firms which have introduced the new employment system is the mobility requirement accompanying jobs in the managerial career track. Some companies have made a more straightforward classification of their employees according to the commitment to the mobility requirement; in this case the two career tracks are simply called the 'Mobile career track' and the 'Non-mobile career track'.<sup>4</sup> Career progression for those in the 'non-mobile career track' is normally limited to middle management level.

Secondly, job specifications are often very broad and general. The job abilities and qualifications required for the different career streams are often no more than a set of behavioural expectations, such as commitment to be geographically mobile. According to interviews conducted by the authors of the JERC report, at the companies which have adopted the new system, there were complaints from women that they were doing the same kind of job as men but were classified into the inferior 'clerical career track' simply because they did not make a commitment to the mobility requirement (JERC, 1987, p.125-7). These are clear cases of indirect discrimination against women. As the majority of women would find it difficult to commit themselves to the mobility requirement at the beginning of their career, companies could use this new system to exclude the majority of women from the main stream career jobs.

Recruitment by individual 'merit' is in effect a disguised form of sexual discrimination.

Thirdly, the way the new system is being implemented raises serious doubts about the fairness of the selection and screening procedures. On the formal policy level, the door to the management career track is open to both men and women (in most cases restricted to graduates only), in practice men are almost automatically assigned to the management track, while women are selected for that track only exceptionally. (JERC, 1987, p.121-4). In the processes of selection and interviews with management, women were often challenged with tough questions and discouraged from pursuing the managerial career track. There were cases that men who intended to select the clerical (or non-mobile) career track were 'persuaded' by the companies to change their mind (Asahi Shimbun, September 1, 1987).

Despite the formal offer of opportunities, in reality very few women managed to pass the selection procedures to enter the management career track. Table 7.7 gives some examples of firms which have pioneered the new employment system and have recruited women for the managerial career track in the spring of 1987. The number of female graduates who managed to enter the main stream managerial career track is too small to have any significance.

**Table 7.7 Examples of companies which have recruited female graduates for managerial career track (Sogoshoku) in the Spring of 1987**

Name of Company	Total no. of male graduates recruited (All managerial career track)	Total no. of female graduates recruited*	No. of females selected for 'managerial career track'
Orientalis	56	152	2
Sumitomo Bank	420	60	20
Taisho Kaijo Kasai Insurance	120	43	3
Tokyo Gas	108	12	12
Daiwa Security	300	(Approx.)130	3
Nikko Security	396	(Approx.)160	3
Mitsubishi Bank	385	30	(Approx.)10
Mitsubishi Trading	138	125	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,017</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>61</b>

Note: These figures only included 4-year university graduates  
 \* Figures inclusive of those selected for 'managerial career track'

Source: Nikkei Shimbun (Evening), April 14, 1987.

In contrast to the managerial career track, the clerical career track remains exclusively a female domain. Under the present EEO Law, it is considered as acceptable that companies restrict certain jobs to women only (see chapter 6, section IV-2).

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the formal classification of employees into different career tracks is in effect institutionalisation of past informal practices which segregated women in the inferior dead-end jobs. The present system is more of a classification of employees by 'status' rather than by 'job'. From the viewpoint of management, the offer of a 'choice' to the individuals at the point of entry not only fulfils the equal treatment requirement of the EEO Law, but also automatically justifies the differential wage systems, training and promotion opportunities accorded for the different 'class' of employees in different career tracks. Employers thus justify paying a woman lower wages, offer her less training and little promotion opportunities by the fact that she has made a 'choice' to enter the clerical career track.

The above account does not imply that the new selection system will have no effect on improving women's career opportunities. The formal offer of equal treatment will lead to some changes, for some women will take advantage of the offer and seek to pursue the managerial career route. But the move towards equal opportunities for women would be gradual and extremely limited; only a minority of women who are capable of and willing to accept the challenge of adopting the male working pattern will be offered a chance.

### 3. Job Assignment and Promotion

These are the 'core areas' of the personnel management systems which Japanese companies resisted strongly against any kind of external legal intervention during the bill drafting stage of the EEO Law. Similar to recruitment and hiring, the present legislation urges companies to 'make efforts' to offer women equal opportunities in these areas. Policy changes in these areas have been few and extremely limited.

The Rodosho survey (MOL, 1987b) shows that only a relatively small proportion of the companies said they had introduced some kind of changes in these areas since the legislation was introduced (see, Table 7.2). Over one third of the companies surveyed either had not taken any action or were unclear about their future policies for women in job assignment and promotion. Even among those companies which said they had initiated some kind of policy changes in response to the legislation, the type of changes introduced were extremely limited and restricted to women employees who could satisfy certain terms or conditions imposed by the companies (Table 7.8).

In the area of job assignment, among those companies which reported having introduced some policy changes, 21 per cent had opened up all job categories to women; 79 per cent said they had only opened up some of the traditionally 'male jobs' to women. The Rodosho Survey does not indicate what type of jobs companies have opened up for women, but evidence from the JERC study and the NIVER survey shows that the dominant trend observed in recent years has been the expansion of more opportunities for women in areas such as sales, marketing and technical development (NIVER, 1987, p.270-1; JERC, 1986, p.84-5). Most of these are specialist jobs which require some kind of technical or specialist skills.

**Table 7.8 Type of Policy Changes in Job Assignment,  
Job Rotation and Promotion (1987)**

<u>Job Assignment</u>	Open up all jobs to women	Open up some some jobs to women	
	20.9%	79.1%	
<u>Job rotation</u> (within same establishment)	All women offered same opportunity as men	Only women satisfy certain terms and	Women who choose to do so
	27.2%	36.0%	36.8%
<u>Job rotation</u> (involves geographical mobility)	24.3%	30.8%	44.9%
	Equal opportunity for all women	Only women in certain job categories	
<u>Promotion (level)</u>	47.4%	52.6%	
<u>Promotion</u> (conditions and requirements)	56.7	43.3	

Source: Compiled from Rodosho Survey (MOL,1987b).

Note: Number of companies which said they had introduced policy changes since the EEO Law was introduced is taken as 100.0 per cent (refer to Table 7.2)

Management's attempts to open up more job opportunities for women in these growing specialist and technical areas started well before the introduction of the new legislation. The analysis in chapter 5 showed that increased market competition and skills shortages were the major factors prompting companies to expand opportunities for women in these specialist areas. The legislation has probably helped to accelerate these 'market-pushed' tendencies at a much faster pace rather than brought about any path-breaking new changes.

In the area of promotion, changes are even fewer and more limited. The fundamental policy adaptations in this area have been towards more formalised and institutionalised screening and selection procedures for women employees who aspire to pursue a long-term career. Since the promulgation of the EEO Law, an increasing number of companies have adopted the 'career route conversion system' which allows selected female employees to apply for conversion to the 'managerial career route' and then opens up promotion possibilities up to top management level. (Note: The career route conversion system constitutes an important element of the career track classification system discussed in section III, 2.)

The career route conversion system is not an entirely new policy innovation in response to the legislation. Early in the 1980s, several major banking and security companies adopted the career conversion system as a means to open up promotion opportunities for women with long years of service with the company (see, chapter 5, section III, 3). Since the promulgation of the EEO Law, this system has spread rapidly and companies have introduced more formalised and sophisticated procedures for the implementation of the system. It is more widely adopted and well-developed among the large firms in the female-intensive industries such as finance, banking and retailing.

Under this system, equal promotion opportunities would only be offered to those women who satisfy certain terms and conditions and manage to pass the screening tests and interviews for conversion to the 'managerial career track'. In some cases, the terms and conditions



would include age and length of service requirements plus performance criteria. For instance, in the case of Mitsubishi Trading Corporation, only women who are aged over 37 and with good continuous performance over the previous 3 years would be eligible to apply for conversion to the 'managerial career track' which, automatically, would also require a commitment to be geographically mobile. Many companies, however, do not specify clearly the terms and conditions required apart from the requirement to make a commitment to be geographically mobile (Rosei Jiho, No. 2887, July, 1988). Such a requirement automatically justifies the exclusion of the majority of women from promotion. The crux of the problem is that under the present conversion system, all the male employees were automatically converted to the 'managerial career route' while only a selected number of women were eligible to apply for conversion.

Furthermore, as pointed out in chapter 5 (section III-3), the career route conversion system would hardly have any real impact on promoting women's position in the work organisations unless they were given the requisite training and job experience from the early stage of their careers. So far, there is little evidence that there has been much progress with regard to equal training opportunities for women.

#### **4. Education and Training**

The effects of the present legislation in this area have been largely limited to the elimination of unequal treatment in basic induction training for the new recruits. Changes beyond the initial stage of basic training have been extremely limited (JERC, 1987, p.140). For instance, in the area of job rotation which constitutes the most crucial part of education and training in Japanese companies and is closely related to promotion, equal opportunities for women are basically limited to those who can satisfy certain terms and conditions imposed by the companies (see, Table 7.8). Job rotation which involves geographical mobility is still one of the most controversial areas which the majority of companies hesitate to initiate any fundamental policy changes.

The present legislation prohibits 'discrimination against women in provision of training for basic skills necessary for performing their jobs and duties. Prohibition of discrimination against women in management and specialist training only applies to those who have already been formally accepted for promotion to jobs which require these skills. The offer of equal treatment for women in more advanced type of training will be no more than a hollow promise unless they are offered equal job assignment and promotion opportunities.

#### **IV. POLICIES FOR 'HARMONISING WORK AND FAMILY': RE-ENTRY AND CHILDCARE LEAVE MEASURES**

In the Rodosho survey (MOL,1987b), over 50 per cent of the employers pointed out that women's 'short years of service', and another 34 per cent said that 'women's responsibilities in the family' were the greatest problems they saw in utilising women. Despite this, only 11 per cent of the employers regarded the introduction of re-entry or childcare leave systems as one of the policy priorities they intended to consider in the future.

The Japanese government emphasises that the fundamental spirit of the EEO Law is to 'promote measures to enable women to harmonise working life with family life'. The present legislation 'encourages' employers to introduce re-entry and childcare leave systems for their female employees.<sup>5</sup> So far, it appears that the legislation has had little effect on employers' policies in these aspects. Survey results show that the proportion of companies with childcare leave systems has remained unchanged between 1981 and 1985 and that those with re-entry systems for their female employees has in fact declined over that period of time (Table 7.9).

Married women constituted 67 per cent of the total number of women employed in Japan in 1987 (Labour Force Survey, 1988). About 50 per cent of young Japanese women (between the age of 19 and 25) still prefer to adopt a two-phase work profile rather than a continuous career

without interruption (Recruit Research Journal, July 1986, p.15). Despite all these, there is little evidence that companies have adopted more positive policies towards easing women's career constraints.

**Table 7.9 Proportion of companies with re-entry,  
childcare leave systems for women employees**

	1981	1985
Re-entry system	7.0%	5.6%
Childcare leave system	14.3%	14.6%

Source: Joshi Hogo No Kaikyo  
(Survey on Protective Measures for Women), Ministry of Labour,  
Japan, 1982 and 1986.

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The above is an overall review of companies' policy responses to the legislation. The major observations can be summarised as follows:

(1) In terms of reducing the number of 'worst practice' companies by removing the most obvious forms of direct discrimination against women, the present legislation can be said to have some effect. The surveys show that companies in general responded fairly rapidly (both before the implementation of the legislation or immediately afterwards) to the prohibitory provisions and the practical requirements stipulated in the guidelines with regard to the hortatory provisions. The former which in effect serves the function of formally ratifying changes which had already occurred in the past, especially in the case of retirement practices. Changes at the point of entry to the company has been most significant, especially in terms of opening up job opportunities for female graduates. Many less obvious forms of discriminatory practices in recruitment still persist. This is not because companies have not 'complied' with the requirements stipulated in the guidelines, but more because of the way 'equal opportunity' is being defined by the Ministry of Labour. Promotion appears to be an area where the majority of companies did not report to have taken action.

(2) There is little evidence that companies have taken more positive steps initiating changes in their personnel management procedures, especially with regard to job assignment and promotion, apart from adopting a passive policy of equal treatment. On the contrary, the requirement to offer women equal treatment has stimulated companies to formalise and institutionalise many of the past informal practices which operated to segregate men and women into entirely different career tracks. Companies have now introduced more formal screening and selection procedures for those women who intend to pursue the main stream career jobs. These procedures function to preserve the core personnel management system even better and ensures that equal opportunities will be only offered to a limited number of women, in the majority of cases limited to university-graduates, who can satisfy the

requirements and conditions imposed by the companies. Discrimination is indirect and being justified by the 'logic' of the personnel management system.

(3) Many of the policy changes observed were in fact a continuation and acceleration of the trends that had already been going on before the introduction of the legislation. The present legislation serves a symbolic function of formally ratifying these changes and perhaps has acted as a catalyst pushing forward these changes at a much faster pace.

(4) The present equal opportunity debate, both in the companies and at the societal level, appears to have been biased towards the 'career-oriented women' and has neglected an increasing number of Japanese women who aspire to combine employment with having a family. According to attitude surveys by the Japan Prime Minister's Office, in 1979, 39 per cent of the women said they intended to re-enter the job market after child rearing; the proportion rose to 55 per cent in 1984. The present EEO Law urges companies to introduce re-entry and childcare leave systems. There is little evidence that companies have taken steps to introduce policy measures in these areas to ease women's career constraints.

Unless companies are prepared to go beyond the 'minimum' equal opportunity standards as stipulated in the guidelines, the direct impact of the present legislation clearly can only have limited effects in removing the structural sources of unequal opportunity between the sexes. The symbolic importance of the legislation, however, does appear to have a general educative effect on the attitudes of employers. The NIVER survey shows that less employers now regard women merely as an assistant type of workforce. More employers are prepared to offer a few token women the opportunities to enter the 'male career stream', though these women should be prepared to follow the 'male working pattern'. To an increasing number of companies, equal opportunities for women might have become an important policy issue to be put on the

management agenda for discussion. However, specific policy action is slow to come and for some companies it may take many years before genuine improvement will take place.

The above observations are mainly based on secondary surveys. Although they provide a reasonably reliable data set for assessing the extent to which companies in general have taken action in response to the EEO Law, they are inadequate for the examination of more specific policy changes that might have taken place but not revealed through the broad questionnaire surveys. Especially with regard to the question of whether 'good practice' employers have taken action beyond the requirements stipulated in the guidelines, more in-depth enterprise level information is necessary. If the real significance of the EEO Law depends on the extent to which 'good will' employers are prepared to comply with its 'spirit', not just following its letter, then it is crucial to look at how a 'leading edge' company like Seibu might set the pace for further improvement.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. See, chapter 6, note 7.
2. Although the scope of the present EEO Law does not cover job advertising and employment agencies, the Ministry of Labour has carried out rather extensive administrative guidance activities directed towards these agencies in order to elicit their cooperation in the implementation of the EEO Law.
3. According to the Survey on the Employment Plans for Graduates in March 1987 carried out by the Women's Occupation Foundation (Josei Shokugyo Zaidan) (1986), 21 per cent of the firms which had no formal distinction for regular employees' career tracks adopted such a system after the EEO Law was introduced. A survey conducted by the Zenmin Rokyo (Japanese Private Sector Trade Union Council) in November 1986 also showed that 26.3 per cent of firms surveyed had already started the system just before the law was introduced, while 8.2 per cent had introduced after passage of the law and 7.3 per cent were preparing for introduction. Although there is no precise estimate on the extent to which the system is being adopted, recent survey evidence indicates that the number of companies adopting the system has been on the increase since the EEO Law was introduced.
4. Companies operating a network of branches over the country such as department stores or supermarket chains tend to use the extent of commitment to the mobility requirement as a main criterion for classifying their employees into different career tracks. For example, Ito Yokado, a major supermarket chain stores corporation, has introduced a more sophisticated system of classifying their employees into three different career tracks, namely, 'national employees' (mobile all over the country), 'area employees' (semi-mobile within a certain area or district) and 'store employees' (non-mobile). Each career track has its own grading and career structure among which only the 'national employees' are eligible for promotion to top management.
5. In April 1986, the Ministry of Labour set up a 're-entry subsidy fund' to provide financial incentives for firms to introduce the re-employment system for their female employees. Also beginning in 1988, a 'Childcare Leave Incentive Fund' was set up to encourage employers to initiate the childcare leave scheme for their female employees.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE SEIBU CASE STUDY: BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODS

#### I. INTRODUCTION

This part of the thesis presents a detailed case study conducted at Seibu Department Stores, one of the biggest department store groups in Japan. The case study was conducted both before and after the introduction of the EEO Law. The initial study was conducted in 1983-4 and the 'follow-up' study in 1987-88.

The main objectives of the study at Seibu were threefold. Firstly, to analyse in detail the major commercial and market factors prompting Seibu management to shift its employment and personnel policies on women after the mid-1970s and the type of new policies and practices introduced (before the EEO Law was enacted). Secondly, to examine how a large Japanese company, one which is deemed as 'progressive' in personnel management reforms and is regarded as a 'leading edge' company in promoting career opportunities for women, has responded and adapted its practices to comply with the 'spirit' of the EEO Law. Thirdly, to test the outcomes of the equal opportunity policies on the position and status of women and to explore how far the EEO Law and the equality debates have brought about a shift in women's work attitudes and career expectations.

This part of the thesis contains three chapters. The present chapter describes the background of the study, explains why Seibu was chosen for the study and discusses the research methods used. Chapter 9 examines the changes in company practices both before and after the introduction of the EEO law. Chapter 10 tests the 'effects' of the policy changes on the position and status of women and examines how far the equality debates and the EEO Law have had an impact on the work attitudes and career expectations of Seibu women.



## II. WHY SEIBU?

Seibu was chosen for this study because it is a major company in a sector which has been relatively active in developing new personnel policies for the effective utilisation of women. And most important of all, among the major department stores Seibu has been a 'pioneering model' in personnel management reforms.<sup>1</sup>

By the nature of the business, department stores employ a high proportion of women. The successful operation of department stores is highly dependent on women, both as employees and customers. Traditionally, the department store industry is often described as a 'women friendly' industry. Many Japanese department stores have adopted more positive employment policies towards women than companies in other sectors. Especially since the mid-1970s, the onset of slow growth and increased market competition have pushed many major department stores to look to their sales workforce, the majority are women, for ways to improve productivity. Many of the big department stores started to recruit female graduates and introduce better career opportunities in order to raise their morale and productivity (Rosei Jiho, 1978a). For business reasons, companies in the department store industry have been more sensitive to the 'women's issues' and they have been acting as 'pace setters' with regard to their personnel policies on women.

Among the major department stores, the researcher's attention was directed to Seibu because it is a very unique company - in the sense that it has pioneered many new personnel policies on women and has a high profile reputation as a 'leading edge' company in promoting career opportunities for women. This is partly due to the fact that Seibu is a relatively young company in the department store industry. In order to compete with department stores with longer history and well established tradition, Seibu management has been putting great effort into building up a new corporate image through innovations in retail concepts, management strategies and personnel policies. The innovative management policy adopted by Seibu is also partly a result of the special company culture fostered by the top management of the company - a culture which

favours ongoing change and reform in adaptation to the environment (Wada, 1981).

A series of new personnel policies introduced for the women employees since the early 1970s has won the company a 'pro-women' corporate image (NNKC, 1981; MOL, 1981c). Seibu began to recruit female graduates in 1970, much earlier than other large companies did. In 1975, the company began to introduce specialist jobs for women and a specialist career route was formally introduced in 1978 to expand promotion opportunities for all the employees. The company also introduced a re-entry scheme for the women employees in 1980. A more 'path-breaking' step was the creation of a company creche in 1982 - the first attempt of its kind in the history of Japanese companies. In these policy respects, Seibu was far ahead of many large Japanese companies in the early 1980s. A survey conducted by the Recruit Company (a Japanese company specialising in keeping track of the employment situation in the country) in 1984 found that Seibu was among the top three companies most favoured by female university graduates; the women believed they had a good chance of getting promotion at Seibu (The Japan Times, September 22, 1984). Preliminary individual interviews with 34 women employees at Seibu shows that many women graduates came to Seibu not because they were particularly interested in a career in retailing as such but because they believed that there were better career opportunities for women in the department stores industries and, most important of all, many of them mentioned the appeal of Seibu's 'good corporate image'. Many young women were attracted to Seibu because they believed that there was less discrimination against women than elsewhere. Such perception and expectation of women reflect the success of Seibu in portraying a modern 'pro-women' corporate image. Although the majority of women interviewed pointed out that the reality was far from satisfactory, they felt that Seibu top management had been putting in great effort in promoting career opportunities for women. The majority of them appeared to be rather happy that 'Seibu is better than elsewhere'.

Seibu's 'pro-women' corporate image has caused much talk both inside and outside the Company. Nevertheless, the Company's concern about the

'women's issues' stems not so much from a sense of social justice for the promotion of equality between the sexes but more from pragmatic business needs.

When the initial field work was being carried out in 1984, the author did not have in mind that the case study would turn out to be a 'critical case' for examining the effects of the EEO Law. Although the debate on the enactment of the new legislation was going on at that time, it was not clear whether the legislation would eventually pass the Japanese Diet. The major part of the field work was finished in the spring of 1984. The author left Japan in April 1985, one month before the EEO Law passed the Japanese Diet.

The Japanese government passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in May 1985. This puts the author in an advantageous position to examine the effects of the new legislation by comparing the situation at the case Company before the passing of the legislation with the situation after. This unexpected opportunity was immediately seized upon by the author. In the summer of 1988, the author returned to Seibu with the specific objective of seeing whether the EEO Law was having any impact on the Company's personnel policies towards more egalitarian treatment of women and whether there was evidence that the position of women had improved.

The fact that the research at Seibu was adapted to take advantage of the opportunity given by the new development in the research environment was not simply because the timing of the legislation had made it possible to do so, although this historical factor had provided a unique opportunity. A more important reason for carrying out a 'follow-up' study three years after the Law was introduced was because Seibu, being a 'leading edge' company in the development of equal opportunity policies for women, means that it is also a company which is most likely to comply with the 'spirit' as well as the letter of the EEO Law.

As discussed in chapter 6, the Japanese EEO Law is not only aimed at improving the equal opportunity standards of the 'worst practice'

companies by removing the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women, but it also intends to use 'moral' pressures to raise the standards of equal opportunities in Japan closer to the 'western' norm. One can say that the EEO law has two objectives. The first objective is to remove the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women through its prohibitory provisions and the practical requirements stipulated in the guidelines; this first objective is aimed at enforcing changes at the 'worst practice' companies, not a 'leading edge' company like Seibu. The second objective of the law is to use the 'hortatory' provisions to exert further 'moral pressures' on employers, those which have already moved beyond the first stage, to move closer to the 'ideal norm' of equal opportunity by giving women equality in job assignment and promotion. Seibu falls into this second category. Despite the fact that Seibu has been seen as a 'best practice' company by the Japanese standard, our initial study conducted in 1983-84 shows that Seibu nevertheless fell far short of full equal opportunities for its women employees. Market pressures had pushed the company to make minor adjustments by creating specialist work roles for a small number of women; the majority of women were still segregated in low status selling jobs at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. The mainstream career jobs in buying, product planning and managing were predominantly male preserves. Our analysis shows that the major structural and attitudinal changes which were needed to bring about egalitarian treatment of women in training, job assignment and promotion had not come about. The pre-EEO Law practices in Seibu required much improvement in order to comply with the 'spirit' of the EEO Law.

The choice of Seibu for our case study has a special significance. It is a critical case in two senses. We are examining the possibility of bringing about positive changes towards greater equality for women in a company which already has strong economic incentives to employ and utilise women. Further it is a company which has capitalised on its 'pro-women' corporate image for more than a decade. If the law is going to exert 'moral pressure' on employers to accommodate improvements in equal opportunities for women, such 'moral pressure' is most likely to be effective on a 'good will' employer like Seibu than elsewhere. If

positive changes have not occurred in a company like Seibu, one can assume that it is unlikely to have happened elsewhere.

### III. 'IMPACT STUDY': SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One question which is often raised with regard to evaluating the effects of legislation is: How do we know that the changes introduced by the company would not have come about even if the EEO Law had never been passed? Changes which do occur after a new legislation may have been due to a combination of factors. It is difficult to establish that it was the legislation which had caused or was responsible for the changes. The methodological problems encountering this kind of 'impact study' are rather complex. Aubert (1979, p.4) has argued that 'legal impact is an ambiguous term'. Firstly, law is not in isolation of social change and that changes in law is often a consequence of social change. Secondly, law can function as consolidator as well as promoter of social change. It need not always imply that social change is intended, as a law may simply seek to protecting existing social structures, or sometimes the symbolic function of law can result in unanticipated changes. Thirdly, the distinction between the 'before' and 'after' situation is not always clear as the introduction of law is usually preceded by extensive debate and consultation and therefore changes could be induced by the consciousness raising effect of the debate or intentionally introduced in anticipation of the law. Handler points out the complications in assessing the relations between law and social change:

'... the effects of changes in law on social change are especially difficult to assess. Few laws bring about total compliance. But if change is detected, what is the cause? Sometimes the law sharpens perceptions and acts as an educator or moral persuader. Other time, the law may merely ratify changes that have already occurred in society. Not infrequently, changes in the law bring about unintended changes in society. In general, it is exceedingly difficult to separate the independent effects of legal changes from effects caused by the interaction of legal changes with broader societal factors such as public opinion, the effects of timing, and social and economic conditions' (Handler, 1978, p.37).

It is both theoretically and practically difficult to disentangle the reciprocal relationship between law and social change. We therefore, do not intend to establish the causal relationship between the implementation of the EEO Law and the extent of increase in equal opportunity in a narrow technical sense. Rather, we deliberately choose to seek answers to a more specific question: Whether the legislation has made any difference to the Company's employment policies on women and if there have been some changes, we intend to see whether these changes have been a change for better or not.

The initial study conducted in 1983-84 had analysed in great detail why Seibu shifted its policy orientation on women after the mid-1970s and the type of new policies and practices introduced during the 10-year-period before the Law was introduced. Market pressures and business needs were major promoters of change during that period. This detailed background knowledge about the company strengthens the researcher's ability to interpret whether any new policy moves observed in recent years was a response to the EEO Law.

Seibu is a critical case not just in a narrow sense that it is used to test the 'effectiveness' of the law as such, rather more important, it is a critical case in a much broader sense of how a 'leading edge' company which already has strong commercial incentives to offer women better career opportunities might have taken the lead in responding positively to the 'spirit' of the Law. It is also useful to examine how Seibu has reacted as it is a model for other firms. Moreover, empirical outcomes on women are also important indicators for evaluating whether the direction of change has been positive for women.

#### IV. THE COMPANY: BACKGROUND, MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY AND CORPORATE CULTURE

The case study was conducted at Seibu Department Stores Ltd, which is the leading company of the Seibu Retail Group. The Retail Group was established in 1940, a relatively young company among the six biggest department store groups in Japan (Okada, 1982).<sup>2</sup> In 1984, the Retail Group as a whole was composed of 95 companies and 3 research institutes, with a total capital of 54.5 billion yen. The Group altogether employed 67,500 people in 1984.

Over the past three decades, the Seibu Group has adopted a policy of expansionism and diversification of business activities. Until 1983, the group was composed of four divisions: department stores, superstores, real estate/leisure and manufacturing. In between 1983 and 1984, the Group carried out a restructuring and reorganisation, expanding from four to eight divisions, aiming at further diversification in response to changing consumer demands and market environment. The eight divisions included department stores, superstores, real estate/leisure, manufacturing, credit/finance, restaurants/food services, transportation/aerosurvey and insurance.

The department stores division, led by Seibu Department Stores Ltd., includes companies importing products for the Group through connections with overseas companies, specialty stores and shopping centres. The companies in this division, centred on the Tokyo and Osaka areas and extending throughout Japan, together contribute approximately 45 percent of the total sales of the Group. In 1984, the department stores had a total capital of 3.9 billion yen. There were altogether 15 branch stores plus a number of associate stores. They employed over 12,000 people in 1984. Of these, 88 per cent were full-time regular employees of which the number of men and women were about equal. The rest of the 12 per cent were part-time employees, almost all of them were women.<sup>3</sup> Although women comprised about 60 per cent of the workforce, they were much more 'visible' than men on the sales floor. This was because the great majority of them were assigned to first line sales or customer service jobs.

Since the early 1960s, the Company had been carrying out a policy of expansionism through the opening up of new branch stores. Between 1967 and 1973, the period when Japan was experiencing rapid economic growth, the Company opened up 7 new branch stores around the Tokyo and Tokai region. Table 8.1 shows the growth of Seibu in terms of total sales. The annual rate of increase of sales started to decline in the mid-1970s, reflecting the general tendency of stagnation of the economy and the declining sales in the department store industry as a whole. However, even among the generally poor performance of the industry, Seibu was able to maintain a relatively favourable annual growth rate. In 1982, the average annual rate of increase of sales of department stores in Japan bottomed at 2.3 per cent; in contrast Seibu was able to maintain a growth rate of 7.6 per cent (Shizuka, 1983, p.56-7). Seibu's relative success in a period of economic stagnation can be attributed to its innovative retail concepts and its ambitious venturing into non-traditional retail areas, such as expansion of various types of personal services and cultural activities. In the 1980s, when most of the big department stores are turning to renovation of their existing stores rather than opening up of new stores, Seibu is planning its second stage of expansion through the opening of new 'high-tech' department stores using modern information technology.



**Table 8.1**  
**Growth in Annual Total Sales (1965-1983)**

Year	Total Sales (in billion Yen)	As Compared with Previous Year (=100)
1965	442	104%
1966	474	107%
1967	546	115% (a new store opened)
1968	766	140% (a new store opened)
1969	845	110% (a new store opened)
1970	1,100	130% (two new stores opened)
1971	1,270	115% (two new stores opened)
1972	1,550	122% (one store closed down)
1973	1,950	125%
1974	2,270	116%
1975	2,513	110% (flagship store expanded)
1976	2,760	109%
1977	2,946	106%
1978	3,068	104%
1979	3,428	112% (sports centre opened)
1980	3,763	110% (flagship store expanded)
1981	4,052	108%
1982	4,359	108% (food & interior centres opened)
1983	4,559	105%

Source: Compiled from Narushima (1978), p.169 and Seibu Nyusha-Anai (1985), p.26.

The relative success of Seibu in a period of economic stagnation can be explained partly by its relative youth as a company and partly by its innovative retail concepts and management strategy. Being a young company in the department store industry is both an advantage and a disadvantage in Japan. Japanese consumers are very conscious of good corporate image based on high quality, high social responsibility and the 'goodwill' of stores sustained over a long period of time. In this sense, Seibu was in a disadvantaged position when compared to the more prestigious stores such as Mitsukoshi which had a long tradition of over a hundred years. In order to compensate for its short history and 'lack of tradition', Seibu has been putting great effort into building up a new corporate image through innovations in retail concepts, management strategies and personnel policies. In contrast to the more prestigious traditional type of department store, Seibu presents the new image of a fast-growing young Company. It portrays a young corporate culture and its target market has been mainly oriented to the 'new thirties' - the uprising affluent younger generation (Shizuka, 1984, p.115-6). This market orientation has led to tremendous business success because the 'new thirties' belong to a generation growing up in affluent Japan with a strong mentality of consumerism. The women particularly of this generation, are either young affluent housewives or belong to an emerging new generation of career women with increasing spending power. One implication of more women entering the labour market and becoming economically independent is that they are becoming a larger and more independent market segment (Wada, 1981, p.101-2). Given that women are so vital to department store success, the changing values and orientations of women in modern Japan is certainly having an important impact on the retail strategies of department stores (Ibid, p.76-8).<sup>4</sup> Thus the corporate culture of Seibu is not only aiming at appealing to the younger generation of consumers, but more importantly to the 'new women' in Japan.

The most significant strategy adopted by Seibu during the high growth period was expansionism. However, from the mid-1970s onwards, the Company shifted to a policy of specialisation and expansion of lines of commodities and services. In both 1975 and 1980, the flagship store was

twice renovated to include new specialised areas of business such as food, sports and various cultural activities.

From the 1980s onwards, Seibu started to plan a new phase of expansion through large-scale investment in new business areas including development of information industries and the introduction of modern technology to the stores. Seibu top management believe that modern department stores are undergoing a revolutionary change from the selling of 'goods' to the selling of 'information' and 'services'. These are seen as new markets with good potential for further development. Since the mid-1970s, Seibu has put forth the concept of 'the People's Industry' (Shimin-Sangyo) as its new managerial philosophy. Department stores are no longer places where only material goods are being sold, they are rapidly transforming into an industry catering for all aspects of peoples' lives. Seibu's top management emphasise that the main task of department stores in the 1980s is the 'selling of new life styles' to customers (Seibu Nyusha-Anai, 1985, p.8) The management of Seibu also say that they believe that people who are working in the retail industry should also have broad experience in various aspects of life and have the ability and sensitivity to perceive changes in consumer needs and demands (Wada, 1981, p.217-220). Seibu management, therefore, regard the role of women as crucial to the Company's success in the new business areas because of the important role of women in the areas of 'services' in Japanese society and the fact that women almost dominate the consumer markets in Japan (Ido, 1985, p.56).

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, all these changes in the market environment and business strategies have had significant impact on the Company's employment and personnel policies on women.

## V. METHODS OF RESEARCH

Seibu is a complex organisation. To acquire information about such a huge organisation and to understand a complex, evolving situation, a mixture of methods was used throughout the various stages of the research. These include in-depth interviews with personnel management and some 30 women employees, a one-month period of participant observation during the beginning stage of the initial study in 1984 and questionnaire surveys on about 1,100 male-female regular employees in 1984 and replication of the questionnaire survey on 800 employees in 1988. It should be noted that personnel data obtained from the head office cover the whole company (all the branch stores); the interviews with the women employees and the questionnaire surveys were carried out at the flagship store in Ikebukuro and another major city-centre store in Shibuya. These two major city-centre stores were chosen mainly because they were the key stores of the company in terms of their location (both are in the Tokyo area), size, and most important of all, they are the 'strategic' centres of the company where top management put their greatest efforts in the development of new policies. They employ the largest number of people. In 1984, there were 2,479 full-time regular employees working at the Ikebukuro, and 926 at the Shibuya stores. The number of full-time regular employees at these two major stores together constituted more than one-third of the total full-time regular employees of the whole company.

Details of the field study methods and data sources are discussed in the following pages.

## 1. The Initial Study in 1983-84

### (a) The Initial Stage: Getting to Know the Organisation

The first stage of the study was to acquire information about the Company - its history, organisational structure, management philosophy and personnel system. These data were acquired through studies of company documents such as annual reports, company newsletters, personnel records and the company union newsletters. During the first three months, numerous interviews and discussions, both formal and informal, were carried out with senior staff of the personnel department, including the personnel director (Jinji Bucho) at the head office and the personnel manager (Jinji Kacho) of the flagship store who were the key contact persons for the study. Often, merely by reading company documents, it is not clear why at a particular time certain new policies were introduced. This type of information can be more effectively acquired through interviews and discussions with management.

The fact that the researcher was put into contact with the personnel director at the head office through a senior member on the board of the directors proved to be a very important asset throughout the various stages of the research. This not only enhanced the credibility of the researcher but also ensured smooth collaboration from staff at all levels. The researcher was able to obtain internal company data which would not otherwise have been available to an 'outsider'. Apart from the 'credibility factor', establishing good personal relationships with the staff is also an important factor for carrying out research in Japanese companies. Throughout the various stages of the research, the researcher has built up a good network of contacts at the company, from staff at senior management level to shop assistants. This greatly facilitated the research process but most important of all, informal discussions with these staff helped to improve the quality of the data obtained and enabled the researcher to acquire an 'insider's view' of the company's situation.

**(b) Getting to Know Women at Seibu: Individual Interviews**

During the two months between October and November 1983, in-depth individual interviews were carried out with 34 women employees at the Ikebukuro and Shibuya stores. The interviews were conducted partly as a pilot study for the questionnaire survey and as a means for acquiring in-depth qualitative information on the attitudes and working life of Seibu women. The interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire with 50 open questions. The questions touched upon almost all aspects of the women's working life including their motives for working, reasons for joining Seibu, their attitudes to career development and to the company's policies on women, their consciousness of sexual equality issues and their views about the relationship between work and family. Each interview lasted for an average of about 60 to 75 minutes.

As concerns the characteristics of the women interviewed, as they were not selected randomly from the female population of Seibu, they cannot be said to be representative of all Seibu women. Some of the women were chosen by <sup>the</sup> staff in the personnel departments of both stores, some were introduced to the author by the women already interviewed. It was not clear what criteria the personnel staff used to select those women. However, the majority of them were regarded as capable and having a promising career. The women interviewed also contained a high proportion of university graduates, partly because the Company tended to think that equal opportunity was something that had more to do with highly-educated women, and partly because it was expected that women with higher education qualifications would be more equality conscious and be prepared to discuss the issues with the researcher. In this respect, the 34 women cannot be regarded as representative of all women at Seibu. They were a specially selected group of 'elite women'. Nevertheless, the sample included an appropriate mix of women with different education qualifications and of different age groups (See Appendix B-I)

### **(c) A One-Month-Period of Participant Observation**

As a preliminary step to the questionnaire survey, a one-month period of participant observation was carried out. The author worked as a shop assistant in four different sales sections at the flagship store. The objective was to get to know about the day-to-day activities of women in a department store and to know more about the culture of the Company. The informal interviews and discussions with women on the sales floor contributed greatly to the construction of a meaningful and relevant questionnaire. Moreover, the author was able to establish a network of contacts with the women who assisted the subsequent stages of the research. The contacts proved to be of great value when the author returned to the Company in the summer of 1987 - it was through these contacts that the author was able to track down those women who were interviewed three years ago within a short period of time.

### **(d) Questionnaire Survey**

The Company's new personnel policies on women cannot be meaningfully interpreted and their implications cannot be evaluated without looking at the attitudes and the career experience of the employees, in particular the work attitudes of women and their career experience as compared to their male counterparts. A questionnaire survey on approximately 1,100 employees (400 males and 700 females) was conducted in March 1984. The proportion of male and female full-time regular employees at Seibu at that time was about equal. However, in our sample we deliberately increased the proportion of women in order to have a reasonably large sub-sample of female university graduates to allow comparison with their male counterparts (in 1984, female university graduates constituted 14.5 per cent of the total female workforce while 59.2 per cent of the male workforce were university graduates).

The questionnaire survey obtained information on the respondents' personal characteristics, their job position and status and career development experience including training and job rotation, and

information on their work attitudes, career aspirations and perception of sexual equality in the workplace.

The questionnaires were administered at the Ikebukuro flagship store and the Shibuya store. The sample was randomly selected from the male and female full-time regular employees. The questionnaires were distributed and collected through the personnel department of the stores. To ensure confidentiality, each respondent was provided with an envelope in which to seal the questionnaire when they returned it to the personnel department. A total of 1,071 questionnaires were distributed and 879 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 82 per cent (for more details about the sampling population and the samples selected, see Appendix B-II).

## **2. The 'Follow-Up' Study in 1987-88**

The 'follow-up' study was carried out with a specific objective of finding out whether the EEO Law had made any difference to the company's policies and how it had affected the position and attitudes of the women employees. In the summer of 1987, individual interviews with two-third of the women first interviewed in 1984 were carried out. Out of the 34 women first interviewed in 1984, 9 had left the company and 4 were not available for interview, resulting in a total of 21 available for the 'follow-up' interview. In addition, 4 women joined the company after the EEO Law was introduced were also interviewed. Visits were also made to the personnel department of the head office and the flagship store where numerous informal discussions were carried out with the personnel staff.

The fact that the author was able to re-establish contact with two-thirds of the women who were interviewed in the initial study proved to be of great value; it enabled the author to examine the changes in the women's careers and the shifts in their perceptions and attitudes. Most important of all, face-to-face discussion with these women



employees provided crucial information for assessing the validity of claimed policy changes made by management at the Company.

In the summer of 1988, a 'follow-up' questionnaire survey on 800 male and female regular employees was administered at the same stores where the initial survey was conducted. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, of which 685 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 85.6 per cent

The 1988 survey replicated the questionnaire used in 1984, with some minor adjustments and a number of new questions related to equal opportunity policies. It should be noted that the 1988 survey was not a 'follow-up' study of the same individuals who took part in the 1984 survey (some individuals might have taken part in both surveys but this could not be identified due to the anonymity of the respondents). Both samples were selected randomly from the regular employees of the two stores. They were thus representative samples from the same stores at two different points of time (for details of the sample selection and characteristics of the samples, see appendix B-II).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Recent literature on women workers in Japan often quoted Seibu as a 'pioneer case' in promoting equal opportunities for women in Japan. For example: "Japanese Women", The Economist, May 14, 1988, p.24 and Jon Woronoff, Japan's Wasted Workers, Lotus Press, Tokyo, 1982, p.141. A recent article appeared in the Financial Times (July 11, 1988) also described Seibu as a 'pioneer' among Japanese department stores to promote equal opportunity for women.

2. The six biggest department stores group in Japan, besides Seibu, are: Mitsukoshi, Daimaru, Takashimaya, Matsuzakaya and Isetan.

3. This figure underestimated the actual number and proportion of 'part-time' women employed because it only included those who were employed on a long-term regular basis. The large number of short-term casual part-time or temporary employees was not included. The number of those who were employed on a temporary basis varies according to the seasonal fluctuations in sales and there was no accurate record of the actual number employed.

4. This phenomenon is not unique to Japan. Recent studies in the United States also suggest that department stores should adapt their retailing strategies to the changing perceptions, values and needs of women. Hunt, Shelby D. (1981) "Feminism: Implications for Department Store Strategy and Sales Clerk Behavior", Journal of Retailing, Vol. 57, No.4 (Winter), pp.71-85; Joyce, Mary and Joseph Giltman. (1978), "The Professional Woman: A Potential Market Segment for Retailers", Journal of Retailing, Vol.54, No.2 (Summer), pp.59-70.

## CHAPTER 9

### CHANGING COMPANY PRACTICE

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that department stores employ a high proportion of women and are often regarded as a 'women friendly' industry, until recently women in Japanese department stores did not enjoy higher organisational status than their counterparts in other industries. Seibu was no exception. The majority of women were employed in low status selling jobs at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. The mainstream career jobs in buying, product planning and managing were predominantly male preserves. However, beginning in the mid-1970s, there were signs of change. A series of managerial reforms were introduced at Seibu aimed at promoting the position of women by bringing more highly qualified women into key business functions. Seibu was not the only company beginning to initiate changes in employment policies on women; similar trends and tendencies were observed throughout the whole department store industry (Rosei Jiho, 1978a). Among the major department stores, Seibu has been regarded as a pioneering model in introducing personnel policy reforms on women.

This chapter first examines the pre-EEO Law situation at Seibu, looking at why Seibu management began to shift its policy orientation on women after the mid-1970s and gives an account and evaluation of the new policies and practices introduced. The chapter then moves on to examine whether and how the EEO Law has had an impact on Seibu's policy on women. The main objective is to see how much further Seibu had progressed in promoting equal opportunities for women since the Law was introduced.

## **II. CHANGING RETAIL ENVIRONMENT AND NEW BUSINESS STRATEGY: IMPACT ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

A less-than-favourable economic climate after the mid-1970s had a depressing effect on the department store industry as a whole. Declining sales, market saturation and intense competition between different modes of retailing and within department stores themselves pushed companies to adopt business strategies rather different from those of the 1960s and 1970s. Expansion in scale of operation was no longer an option and most department stores became more 'inward looking' and turned to focus more on renovating and refreshing their existing stores, paying more attention to the quality of services, focusing more on product development strategy and market targeting. The major concern for most department stores was to devise a strategy to beat the competition of other companies in the industry - through a different merchandise mix, development of private brand products, improved quality of services and promotion of a good corporate image (Odaka, 1982).

Three major concepts can be used to describe Seibu's new business strategy in the 1980s, namely diversification, specialisation and market-orientation.

### **1. Diversification**

Diversification into new areas of business and venturing into non-traditional retail areas were the major strategies adopted by Seibu in the 1980s. The most significant changes in the consumer market were seen by top management in Seibu as: (1) Declining expenditure on material goods while expenditure on leisure, sports and various kinds of cultural activities has been increasing; (2) rising segmentation of the consumer market; unlike the period of mass consumption in the 1960s and early 1970s, consumers in the 1980s had more diverse preferences and sophisticated individual tastes. The strategy adopted by Seibu was to capture the growing new markets through the 'selling' of new life styles and the 'selling' of various kinds of services. The five major target growth markets to be captured include: (1) the market of living, such as

interior design; (2) the food market; (3) the leisure and culture market; (4) sports and health market and (5) the new fashion market (Wada, 1981, pp 105-117). Top management at Seibu regarded these growing markets as 'new lifestyle markets' and believed that all these were 'women's markets' given the fact that women in Japan are leaders in the consumer market and 'innovators' in new styles of living. Seibu management pointed out that the future success of the department store industry would depend, to a great extent, on whether companies could establish a new personnel system to utilise women as 'specialists' in these growing areas (Ibid, p.76).

## **2. Specialisation**

The 'specialty store' approach was devised as a strategy to meet the challenge of other forms of retailing such as the superstores and the specialist shops, and to cope with the changing tastes of consumers in modern Japan. This approach was based on the idea that a department store should be a big store composed of many specialty shops. Each specialty shop is targeting a certain segment of the consumer market, to provide specialised merchandise to suit that particular market segment and to provide high quality and specialised services. Seibu management believed that in order to capture 'modern' consumers who were becoming more knowledgeable, more sophisticated and who had more individualistic tastes, department stores should be able to offer a wider range of merchandise than before. However, specialisation in each range of merchandise was necessary in order to attract such sophisticated customers and, most important of all, department stores should be able to offer high quality personal services. Thus one priority condition was to have high quality sales staff with specialised product knowledge who were able to provide consulting services in the selling of commodities ; it was therefore necessary to change the 'sales clerk' to a 'professional salesperson'. This was an important factor motivating Seibu to recruit more highly educated women after the mid-1970s (see below). In order to attract more competent women into sales jobs, it is also important that these jobs are viewed as stepping stones to better career opportunities in the Company.<sup>1</sup> The specialist career route was

introduced in 1978 to provide a career route for women in first line sales jobs.

### **3. Market Orientation**

Seibu management believed that in order to maintain a favourable position in the rapidly changing retail environment it should focus on the market through bending the organisation (products, distribution and promotion) to fit the market place. This market-oriented approach required fundamental changes in the traditional organisational structure. Traditionally, the buying groups and people in a centralised management system were the major driving force of the department stores; first-line sales staff (women) played a secondary role in selling whatever was bought by the stores. However, the need for greater sensitivity to changes in consumer tastes meant that staff in day-to-day store operations, particularly the sales staff, need to play a more central role in the running of the store. Seibu management saw an increasing need to bring the customers' perspective into the central decision-making processes and to create a new structure to enable continuous sensitivity to the concerns of consumers. According to Seibu management, a more aggressive response to consumers tastes implies that department stores are no longer simply selling whatever is bought from the manufacturers or wholesalers, but are acting as purchasing agents for the customers. Seiji Tsuzumi, Chairman of Seibu, describes this as a 'reverse type' of marketing, different from the traditional approach (Seibu Nyusha-Anai, 1985, p.6)

Another important strategy adopted by most of the department stores since the mid-1970s has been the development of private-brand products. Seibu management stated that they regarded the product development function as the major driving force to revitalise the stores, to enhance sales in the market and product development should be closely linked with the promotion of its corporate image (Wada, 1981, p.129). All these factors meant that there was a growing need to bring the 'women's perspective' into central decision making and product development functions; front line sales staff who were in direct contact with

customers acquired the most essential information for predicting changes in consumer tastes and needs. Seibu was faced with a position where there was a need to bring in more qualified women and to create a new organisational structure and personnel system which gave women a more central role in the operation of the stores, in product planning and in decision-making processes. The traditional sexual division of labour 'women should sell and men manage', with men at the top and women at the bottom of the hierarchy was proving to be an obstacle to the efficient operation of the business. Early in the 1970s, complaints about the 'inefficiency' of the traditional arrangement were reported in the Company's newsletter:

'The majority of the shop-floor supervisors (kakaricho) are lacking in product knowledge. In the face of rapid opening of new stores, men with little experience were assigned to supervisory positions. In reality women with long years of experience in sales have more product knowledge and experience than the male supervisor' (Katabami, No.113, 1973).

In the light of all these changes, top management at Seibu called for a re-evaluation of the role of women in the Company. There was a growing concern that the traditional organisational and career structures had to be changed in order to give women a greater say in the planning and decision-making mechanisms of the Company.

Early in 1972, Seiji Tsuzumi, Chairman of Seibu, made a self-critical remark on the Company's lack of utilisation of women:

'We have about 170 buyers in our product planning department. According to world standards, 80 of them ought to be women. In the United States, probably about 100 of them are women and in the Soviet Union the figure may be as high as 150. In our Company, only 10 of them are women....In the coming years, the competitiveness of department stores will depend on whether companies can effectively utilise woman power' (Katabami, No. 127, 1972).

## **II. SEIBU'S NEW PERSONNEL POLICIES ON WOMEN IN RESPONSE TO CHANGING MARKET ENVIRONMENT**

The need for better quality professional sales staff and a growing awareness of the importance of bringing in the 'women's perspective' in product development and strategic business planning were the main factors prompting Seibu management to adopt more positive personnel policies on women. Beginning in the mid-1970s, new policies and practices were introduced to raise the quality of the female workforce, to improve the utilisation of able women and to provide better career opportunities for the experienced staff in first line sales jobs.

The following pages give an account of Seibu's most important new policy approach on women after the mid-1970s and examines how far this might have a positive impact on promoting equal opportunities for women.

### **1. Increased Intake of Women Graduates**

Like many other major companies, Seibu has been employing an increasing number of women graduates since the mid-1970s. This represented an important departure from past policies which restricted the recruitment of graduates to that of males.

Table 9.1 shows the number and proportional distribution of women recruited annually by educational qualifications over a period of ten years from 1976 to 1985. The number of female university graduates joining Seibu increased by more than four times between 1976 and 1985. In 1976, women university graduates constituted 4.4 per cent of the total number of women recruited; the figure rose to 22 per cent in 1985. There has also been a steady increase of junior college graduates. This, together with the university graduates, constituted 50 per cent of the total number of women recruited in 1985.



Table 9.1

**Changes in the Proportional Distribution of Women Recruited Annually; by Educational Qualifications**

	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
University	4.4	10.3	16.0	16.4	19.0	16.0	18.6	22.3	24.0	22.0
Junior College	6.9	20.9	16.4	23.4	16.0	18.0	17.2	12.3	17.0	28.0
High School	88.7	68.8	67.6	60.2	65.0	66.0	64.2	65.4	59.0	50.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(679)	(747)	(797)	(708)	(765)	(1,080)	(751)	(690)	(476)	(613)

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department Stores, Ltd.

Seibu's shift towards recruiting more highly educated women was not merely a reflection of the rise in the overall education level of the female working population but was also very much a result of Seibu management's deliberate effort to raise the quality of the core female workforce. For example, until the mid-1970s the proportion of women graduates recruited by Seibu was underrepresented (for national figures, see chapter 5, Table 5.3). However, in 1985, women university graduates constituted 12.7 per cent of the total female population entering the job market; the proportion recruited by Seibu in the same year was 22 per cent.

The long-term implication of the increased participation of highly educated women in an industry which had traditionally segregated women to low status selling jobs was proving to be significant. The majority of women graduates joining Seibu were seeking a career as specialists in sales, as buyers or as administrative staff (Table 9.2). Only a small minority would prefer to work as ordinary sales clerks on the

sales floor. Particularly worth mentioning was the high proportion of university-educated women seeking a career as a buyer - a traditionally male-dominated field in Japanese department stores. Ido, then personnel director of Seibu, pointed out that there was a need to develop new personnel policies to cope with the rising expectations and career aspirations of the increasing number of highly-educated women (Ido, 1980).

**Table 9.1**  
**Jobs Most Preferred (1984 survey)**

Type of Job*	<u>Female</u>			<u>Male</u>
	High School	Junior College	University	(All)**
Ordinary sales clerk	35.8%	18.5%	3.9%	7.4%
Sales Expert	2.8	2.0	2.9	3.7
Sales Consultant	3.1	4.0	6.9	6.8
Shopmaster	8.0	19.9	16.7	6.2
Outdoor Sales	0.0	0.0	1.0	4.0
Buyer	3.1	7.9	20.6	20.1
Staff	8.0	13.2	24.5	10.2
Technical jobs	4.9	6.0	1.0	6.8
Management	3.5	1.3	5.9	19.1
No particular preference	29.2	23.2	13.7	14.2
Others	1.7	4.0	2.9	1.5
Total (N)	100.0 (288)	100.0 (151)	100.0 (102)	100.0 (324)

( $\chi^2=116.39$ ;  $df=20$ ;  $p<0.001$ )

\*For explanations of job titles, see Fig. 9.2

\*\* Variations by educational qualifications not significant.

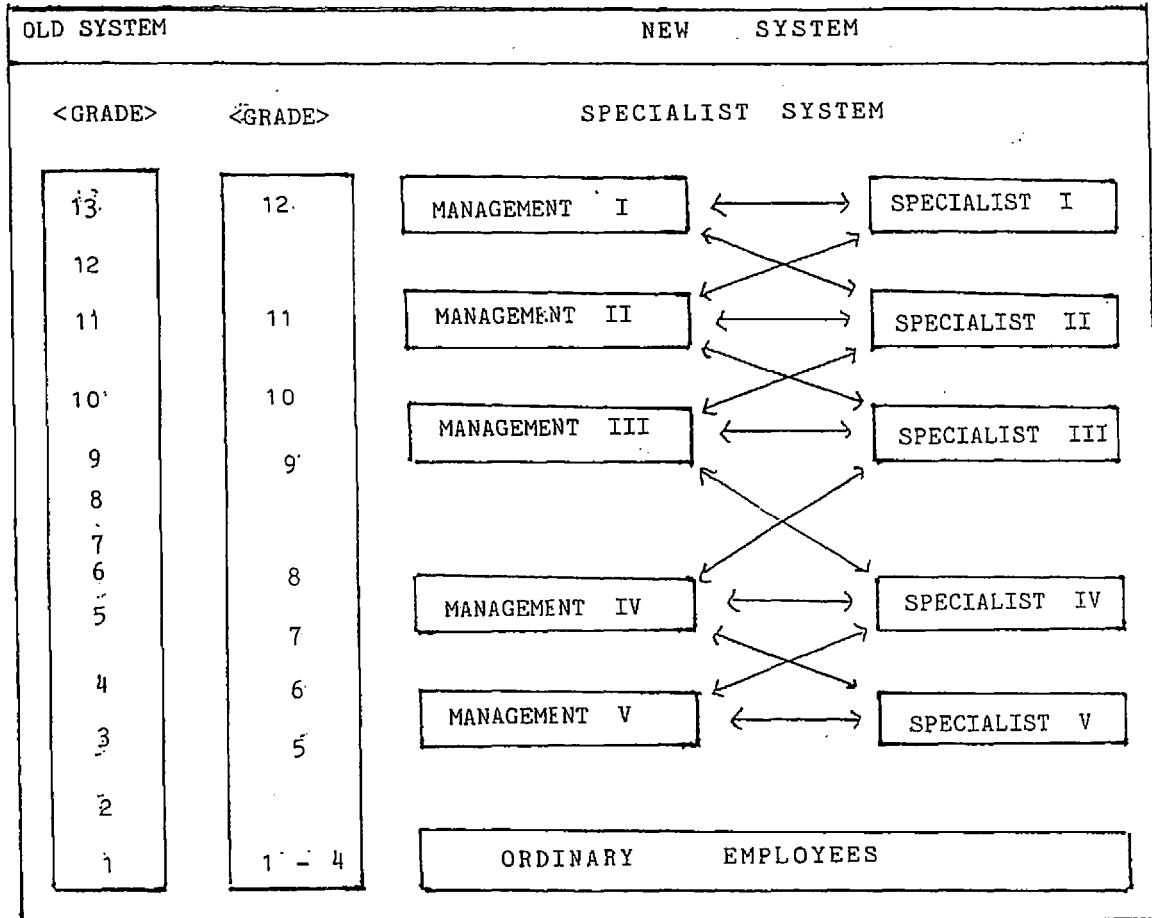
## 2. Improving the Utilisation of Women: The Specialist Career Route

Early in 1975, when Seibu began to set up specialist shops selling high quality merchandise within the stores, a new job title called 'shopmaster' was created. A 'shopmaster' is a manager of a specialist shop who supervises a small number of staff, normally no more than 10 people, and is entrusted with full autonomy in running the entire business of the shop from purchasing to selling of products. The job is defined as a 'specialist' job (senmonshoku) equivalent to the managerial role in terms of status, wages and working conditions. In contrast with managerial or staff functions, evaluation of 'shopmaster' performance is more directly affected by sales achievement.

When the 'shopmaster' role was first introduced in 1975, 21 women were appointed, constituting one-third of the total number of 'shopmasters' appointed in that year. Over the years, the number of women appointed increased faster than that of men. In 1984, out of the total number of 202, women constituted 116 of them. This specialist role had proved to be very popular among the women employees, it gave them opportunities to perform a great variety of duties in addition to selling, including supervision of a small number of staff working in the shop. Many of the specialist shops were run entirely by women staff so it was often a situation of women supervising women, which some female 'shopmasters' pointed out that it 'made life easier for them'. Job satisfaction and morale appeared to be high among women appointed to the new role.

This encouraged Seibu management to go one step further. A specialist career route was introduced in 1978 (see, Fig. 9.1). Major restructuring of the personnel system also took place.

**Fig. 9.1**  
**The Specialist Personnel System**  
**(Senmonshoku Seido)**



Source: Adapted from "Seibu's New Personnel System"  
 (Internal company document, 1983)

**Fig. 9.2**  
**Job Classifications**

JOB TITLE	JOB DESCRIPTION
SALES EXPERT セールスエキスパート職	Have distinctive ability in sales and customer development; able to maintain a large number of regular customers; responsible for selling commodities; in charge and able to achieve a high sales record.
SALES CONSULTANT マイスター職	Provide customers with consultation based on specialized knowledge/technical skill; to raise the credibility of the store and the reliability of the commodities and contribute to good sales results.
SHOEMASTER ショップマスター職	Have distinctive commodity knowledge, customer development and commodity planning ability; operation of specialty shops and provide individual service for customers; improve image of specialty shops and able to supervise and train the shopmembers.
OUTDOOR SALES アウトセールス職	Have distinctive ability in sales, customer development and planning; able to maintain a large number of regular customers; responsible for selling commodities outside the store and able to achieve a high sales record.
BUYER バイヤー職	Have distinctive ability in commodity development and promotion; the timely development and supply of commodities in accordance with the needs and demands of the market.
STAFF スタッフ職	Have distinctive specialized knowledge/skill, policy development and promotion ability; provide services to the line; suggestion and control of policy with a long term view point in order to develop organization efficiency to the fullest.
TECHNICIAN 技術職	Have distinctive specialized knowledge/skill and with official qualifications in certain technical fields; able to develop new technology and provide technical services.
MANAGEMENT マネジメント職	As a leader of the organization, able to efficiently utilize organizational resources and contribute to organization development; training of subordinates and raising their morale.

A new job classification system was introduced. It classifies all the jobs into 8 functional areas, namely, sales expert, sales consultant, shopmaster, outdoor sales, buyer, staff, technician and management (for further explanations of these job titles, see, Fig.9.2). The specialist career route refers to a career in the non-managerial job functions. In theory, Seibu emphasised that the management function was to be included as a specialist job in supervising and managing people. This represents a deliberate attempt made by the Company to remove the status distinction between management and specialists (Rosei Jiho, 1979, p.44). In the early 1960s, some Japanese companies made attempts to introduce specialist functions in their companies but most of them failed because specialists often ended up being seen as **positions** (rather than **specialist job functions**) created for people who could not make their way into managerial positions (Tsuda, 1981, pp.173-4).<sup>2</sup> Seibu was well aware of the difficulties in introducing specialist functions in an organisation which had been geared to the formation of generalists. To ensure that the specialist career route would not be seen as a second best career route inferior to that of management, Seibu made a pioneering attempt in including management into the specialist job classification system. However, in practice, the managerial career route is still seen as distinct from the specialist career route.

The specialist personnel system also brought about two important changes in the promotion system. Firstly, as a job system was introduced alongside the standard rank system, promotion had two different meanings. It could mean promotion in rank ('shokaku'), i.e. moving up the standard rank according to age and years of service; and/or it could mean promotion in position according to job performance ('shoshin'). In the past, there was no clear distinction between the two and promotion was largely determined by age and length of service. In the new system, young people with high performance can be promoted to higher level job positions without upsetting the standard rank which is still based on seniority. Secondly, in the past, promotion more or less meant becoming management which often required a breadth of experience acquired through regular job rotation. This implied that women who spent many years in sales jobs or specialised functions had little

opportunity to move up the company hierarchy as they were often regarded as 'too narrow' and not qualified for managerial positions. The new system provides an alternative specialist career route for these people. The meaning of promotion is being re-defined as involving lateral as well as vertical moves; career advancement could be viewed in terms of advances in skill rather than a change of status or span of authority.

In the new system, the standard rank (from grade one to twelve) is a common criterion which cuts across the job functions; the job system defines the individual's functional duties and evaluates their performance from a scale of lower management/specialist class five (V) to the highest class one (I). Specialists are appointed among those above grade five. In Fig.9.1, it appears as though the standard rank (grade) corresponds to specialist job performance evaluation by class; in theory they are not supposed to be related.

The need to provide a career route for women with long years of sales experience was one of the objectives for introducing the specialist system. However, the specialist personnel system was not specifically designed only to cope with the 'women's issue' as such. It stems from wider business and organisational objectives, with policies on the increased utilisation of women constituting part of the new business strategy.

Three major background factors prompted Seibu to adopt the specialist personnel system. Firstly, from the viewpoint of business objectives, there was an increasing need to train more specialists in different product areas to cope with the more sophisticated and specialised consumer markets. The specialist personnel system was introduced in line with the Company's new business strategy to capture the highly diversified and individualised consumer market through the creation of many small specialist shops within the department stores.

Secondly, the specialist system was also intended for helping to solve the twin organisational problems of career blockage and escalating

labour costs resulting from the growing proportion of middle-aged employees in the Company's workforce. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Company was expanding rapidly, a large number of university graduates (male) were recruited. Most of them had reached middle-age by the early 1980s and were expecting promotion to managerial positions. However, since the late 1970s, expansion of scale of business was becoming more and more difficult in the face of slow growth of the Japanese economy. When the Company was not expanding as rapidly as before, it implied that an increasing number of employees would be facing the problem of career blockage due to the shortage of positions. The specialist career route was introduced as an alternative career route to expand promotion opportunities for the growing number of middle-aged employees. Further, faced with an increasing number of middle-aged and older employees, Seibu was finding it more difficult to maintain the nenko-based promotion and wage system because of escalating labour costs. The specialist personnel system was also intended to bring about changes in the reward system towards greater emphasis on merit and job performance.

Thirdly, the specialist career route was also intended to provide promotion chances for some able women with many years of experience in specialist product areas. Top management at Seibu did not think that women were suitable for managerial jobs but believed that to place them in specialist jobs was a viable approach to promote their positions in the Company. The following remarks made by Kazuo Ido, the managing director of Seibu, clearly expressed the company's view on this matter:

'If we want to utilise fully women's ability, we would need to change the management-oriented personnel system to one that is more oriented to specialists. Such a change in orientation will also fulfil the new demands of our business environment... A management-oriented personnel system often operates to women's disadvantage because the majority of women do not want to become management. Thus, women's performance is often not properly evaluated. For women to become management, they often have to follow the male working standards and become like men. This means that they cannot utilise fully their **special feminine qualities**. **We do not wish our female employees to deny their roles as mothers and wives in the family by adopting the male working pattern.** Therefore, the proper approach is to develop the special qualities



of women and to utilise them as specialists' (Ido, 1980a, pp.46-7).

This represents a compromise strategy adopted by Seibu management to bring more women into responsible positions in the organisation without causing major disruption to the existing male career hierarchy. It is also a policy of utilising women based on the traditional stereotype of sex roles.

## **2. An Evaluation**

In 1984, women constituted 15.3 per cent of the specialist jobs and 6.2 per cent of the managerial positions. Although 90 per cent of the women in these positions were in the lowest class five which was equivalent to the first line supervisory level (kakaricho), the specialist career route had at least provided a chance for some women who had had many years of work experience in first line sales jobs to have promotion (shoshin) chances which otherwise would have been more difficult had there been only a single managerial career route.

Compared with the ad hoc and informal policy adopted by many other companies as described in chapter 5, Seibu had gone one step further in its policy for promoting women's careers. The specialist career route was introduced on a company-wide formal basis, it was integrated into the whole personnel system of the company. In addition, Seibu had made some efforts in upgrading the status and image of specialists by emphasising that the managerial function is also a specialist job, which is a very unique approach among the Japanese companies. How far Seibu has been successful in equalising the status of the two career routes is a separate issue.

The policy adopted by Seibu represents a rather pragmatic strategy to try to 'make way' for women in a traditionally male dominated organisation; bringing more highly qualified women into the organisation through the specialist career route rather than through the conventional managerial career path is certainly less threatening to men. This

reduces the risk of male backlash as women in specialist roles are not seen as competing directly with men for the limited number of managerial posts.

Further, the new personnel system at Seibu had full backing from the top management and the utilisation of women as specialists was seen as an integral part of the company's new business strategy rather than a 'women specific' policy as such. Theoretically, the successful operation of the specialist career system in the long run should benefit women's careers in two important ways. Firstly, it seeks to expand promotion opportunities for all the employees, not through expanding the number of vertical opportunities but the number of lateral prospects through greater emphasis on upgrading skills and competence in specialist jobs. This should give women a better chance. Secondly, evaluation of performance is based more on merit rather than *nenko*. Seibu had increased the proportion of job-related pay from 10 per cent of the basic monthly earnings to 15 per cent in 1978 when the specialist career route was first introduced and further up to 30 per cent in 1985. This means that women, with shorter years of service, should be less disadvantaged as job competence is seen as equally important as *nenko*. The increased emphasis on 'merit' should be beneficial to women in the long run.

However, the potential weaknesses of this 'women as specialists' approach are twofold. Firstly, to typecast women as specialists tends to reinforce the rather poor image of 'specialists' in Japanese companies - that the specialist career route is a secondary choice for people who cannot make their way into the mainstream managerial career route. Secondly, there is also a potential danger of perpetuating the traditional belief that 'women are different' which often serves to reinforce the existing pattern of sexual division of labour by segregating women into certain 'women's jobs'.

The argument put forward by Seibu top management that women were more suitable for specialist jobs was based on two traditional stereotypical assumptions about the role of women: (1) That women are not suitable for

managerial jobs because these are 'male domains' and (2) that women themselves do not want to become management.

This may not be because women are uninterested in managerial jobs but because they tend to perceive themselves as lacking managerial ability or because they perceive a lack of opportunity for promotion to management. The following quotations from our interviews indicate that many women felt that they had no choice because it was the Company's policy to put women in specialist roles:

"It is easier to pursue a career in the specialist role because this is the way our Company wants us to be...."

"I don't think I have a choice because the Company has decided that women are to be specialists, not management."

"It seems to me that the specialist career route has greater appeal because it is easier for women to utilise their abilities as specialists. That is why our Company introduced the specialist career route; it is much easier if I follow this route...."

"I do want to pursue a career in management but women often ended up lacking the breadth of experience for managerial positions...."

The 'women as specialist' approach can only be effective in promoting the status of women in the Company provided that the specialist career route is not seen as a low status secondary career route and that there is a balanced distribution of men and women in different specialist jobs. Data from our 1984 survey suggests that the situation was far from meeting these two criteria.

**(a) The Status of Specialist Jobs**

Despite Seibu's effort to remove the status distinction between the specialist and managerial career routes, employees still perceived the two career routes as quite different. Our questionnaire survey in 1984 showed that a higher proportion of male employees wanted to pursue a career route in management (Table 9.3). Men who were in specialist jobs appeared to be less satisfied with their positions in the company as compared with those in management; although the difference was not obvious in the case of women. (Table 9.4). A higher proportion of employees in specialist jobs, both male and female saw their abilities as not properly evaluated by the Company (Table 9.5).

If there is still a general perception that specialists are inferior in status to management, to stress that 'women are to be utilised in specialist roles' will have a doubly negative effect - specialist jobs will tend to be seen as 'women's enclaves' and this will reinforce the image that women are 'secondary workers'. This situation can only be avoided provided that men and women are evenly distributed in different kinds of specialist jobs. Evidence indicates that this was not the case.

**Table 9.3 Preferred Career Route (By Sex)**  
**"Which career route do you intend to pursue at this Company?"**  
**(1984 survey)**

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Management	33.8	5.8	16.2
Specialist	20.9	20.4	20.6
Haven't thought about it	43.1	57.6	52.2
Others	1.8	15.1	10.2
Total (N)	100.0 (325)	100.0 (550)	100.0 (875)

( $\chi^2 = 144.01$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )

**Table 9.4**  
**"How satisfied are you with your present position?"**  
 (1984 survey)

	Male		Female	
	Specialist	Management	Specialist	Management
Satisfied	57%	78%	78%	80%
Dissatisfied	43	22	22	20
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(81)	(93)	(54)	(20)

**Table 9.5**  
**"Do you think your ability is being properly evaluated?"**  
 (1984 survey)

	Male		Female	
	Specialist	Management	Specialist	Management
Yes	52%	67%	67%	71%
No	48	33	33	29
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(81)	(93)	(54)	(20)

## **(b) Segregation of Women in Sales-Related Specialist Jobs**

If we look at the distribution of male and female specialists by their job functions (Tables 9.6 and 9.7), there is a clear-cut job segregation between men and women. Women were heavily concentrated in two first line sales jobs, 'sales expert' and 'shopmaster'. Among all the female specialists, 62 per cent of them were in first line sales jobs while the equivalent figure for men was 40 per cent. Women had made very little inroad into the traditionally male-dominated jobs such as buyer, outdoor sales and management. The most important business functions at a department store - buying, product planning and managing - were still predominantly male preserves. The specialist system had not changed the traditional pattern that 'women should sell and men manage'. The new personnel system had opened up a career route for a small number of women with long years of selling experience to be promoted to a higher grade, but the existing pattern of job segregation remained undisturbed. If one of the main objectives of the new personnel system was to bring the 'women's perspective' into central buying and product planning functions, the specialist system had not made much progress in this respect. From the viewpoint of business needs, there ought to be more women in the buying function as the Company stressed the need to bring in the 'women's perspective' in product planning and development. In both the United States and Britain, women have made considerable progress in gaining managerial positions in the buying functions in department stores (Williams et al, 1983 and Gable et al, 1984).<sup>3</sup> In the case of Japan, the buying function was still very much a male preserve. This was not because Seibu women did not like the buyer's job. On the contrary, over 20 per cent of women graduates wanted to become buyers when they joined the Company (see Table 9.2). In reality, opportunities for women to become buyers were extremely scarce; in 1984, out of a total of 190 buyers, only 12 of them were women. The figure in 1972 was 10 - the situation had remained virtually the same since the chairman of the Company first made a formal policy statement in the Company's newsletter about the need to train more women as buyers.

Something was hindering women from pursuing the buyer's role. The Company's job requirements indicate that one of the prerequisites to becoming a buyer is to have managerial experience on the sales floor and to move to the local stores at some stage in the career. These requirements are clearly obstacles to women as very few of them have the opportunity to become management and a commitment to be mobile has been a requirement that many women have not felt they could satisfy.

Despite the changes in the business environment which made Seibu top management aware of the need to change its traditional policy orientations on women, by the middle of the 1980s there were still very few women in high level jobs. The small number of women appointed as specialists were concentrated in the first line sales jobs. Women virtually disappeared beyond grade 5 - the minimum grade required to become first line supervisor (kakaricho) or qualified to be appointed as specialists. The department stores were still very much operated on a two-tier structure with the majority of women in bottom level selling jobs and men in central planning, decision making and management functions. From the viewpoint of achieving Seibu's initial business objectives, the 'utilisation of women as specialists' approach has only been half successful. However, from the viewpoint of promoting equal opportunities for women, Seibu management has only touched the surface of the real issues. Seibu cannot be said to be a true equal opportunity employer unless it can satisfy two conditions. Firstly, there is a more balanced distribution of men and women in different job functions - there must be a major shift in the traditional pattern of job segregation that its 'women's job to sell and men's job to manage'. Secondly, there must be more women in central management functions otherwise women can only be seen as 'second class' members of the work organisation. To achieve these, there needs to be a more fundamental review and change in the rules and practices governing training, career planning, job rotation and promotion which perpetuate the existing structure of male dominance. Seibu has superimposed a specialist career system on top of the existing personnel system without taking positive steps in introducing more fundamental changes.

**Table 9.6**  
**Distribution of Male and Female Employees By Job Position**  
 (As of December 1983)

	Male		Female		Women's share of each category %
	No.	%	No	%	
Specialist	1,915	33.7	345	5.9	15.3
Management	1,694	29.8	113	1.9	6.2
Ordinary Employee	2,072	36.5	5,395	92.2	72.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,681</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,853</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50.7</b>

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu  
 Department Stores Ltd.



**Table 9.7**  
**Distribution of Male and Female Specialists by Job Functions**  
(As of December 1983)

Job Function	Male		Female		Women's share of each category %
	No.	%	No.	%	
Sales Expert	69	3.6	67	19.4	49.6
Outdoor Sales	479	25.0	6	1.7	1.2
Sales Consultant	128	6.7	24	6.9	15.8
Shopmaster	86	4.5	116	33.6	57.4
Buyer	190	9.9	12	3.5	5.9
Staff	787	41.1	115	33.3	12.7
Technician	176	9.2	5	1.4	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,915</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>15.3</b>

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu  
Department Stores Ltd.

#### **IV. OBSTACLES TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

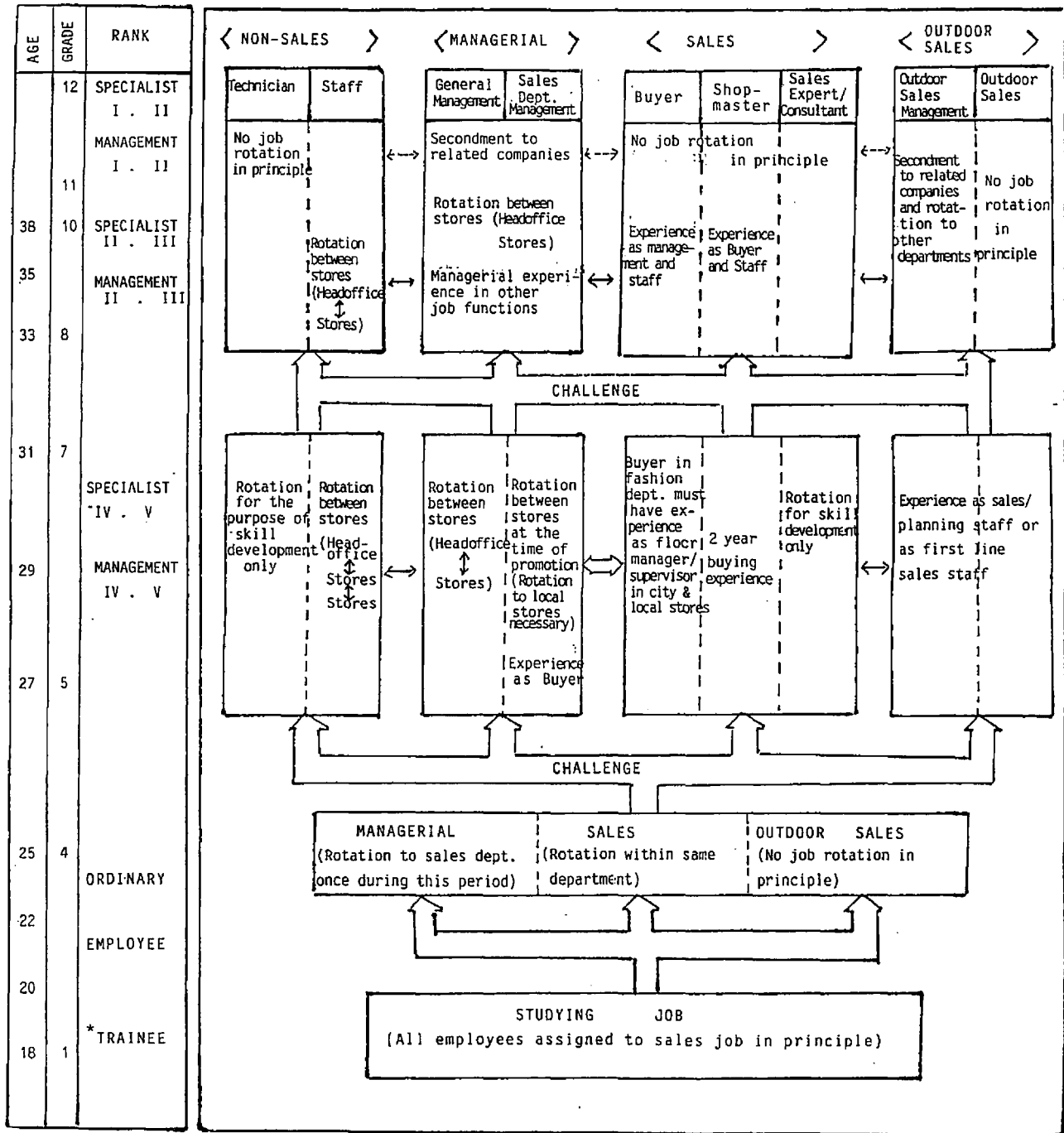
Our analysis of Seibu's personnel management system in 1984 showed that career planning and promotion were still based on the assumption of a continuous lifetime career with the Company. Training and job rotation policies were designed to be geared to the needs and expectations of such a career. In spite of the growing attention paid to a person's ability and job performance, in practice advancement in the career hierarchy was still commonly regulated by minimum age levels for each rank. The career patterns laid down by this type of planning made assumptions about the need for movement into certain types of jobs, by a certain age, and for geographical mobility. All this had negative implications for women.

##### **1. Career Planning and Promotion**

An important part of the new personnel system introduced by Seibu in the late 1970s was the establishment of a systematic job rotation policy which was built into the employees' long-term career planning in accordance with age and length of service. Fig. 9.3 shows the career path and job rotation requirements for different job categories. For a long time, Seibu has been emphasising the importance of promotion based on job performance and individual ability rather than age and length of service. The specialist system was intended to bring about a more merit-based personnel system. In spite of all these policy changes, the Company still stressed the importance of the age and length of service factor in career planning. Career development and promotion was still built upon the assumption of the necessity to move into certain jobs by a certain age. The most crucial period for career formation, as can be seen from Fig. 9.3, is around the employees' late 20s to early 30s. This is the time when an employee is required to decide which career route to pursue and the beginning of systematic training through job rotation. As the majority of women at Seibu still prefer to interrupt their career when they have a family, the rigidity of the career structure puts the majority of women in a disadvantaged position (see, chapter 10, Table 10.18).

**Fig. 9.3**  
**Job Rotation Chart**

(MODEL AGE)



Source: Adapted from "Seibu's New Personnel System", (Internal company document, 1983)

## **2. Job Rotation and Mobility Requirements**

Frequent job rotation constitutes an essential part of career development at Seibu. Except for jobs in front line sales, most of the jobs require some kind of job rotation at some stage in the career. It involves not only movement between different jobs but also moving between the head office and the branch stores and between the different branch stores. The requirement to be geographically mobile is one of the greatest barriers to women's advancement into the main stream career jobs. All the jobs in management, staff and buying functions - the areas where women are most under-represented - require some kind of mobility between different branch stores. Women as a group are often assumed to be less mobile and are often not considered for promotion to jobs which require geographical mobility.

The mobility requirements may be essential to the smooth operation of a network of stores all over the country but it is not self-evident that such requirements are always necessary and need to be rigidly applied. If women are to be given the opportunity to play the part of which they are capable, the established job rotation rules and mobility requirements would need to be challenged.

## **3. Training**

Despite the introduction of more formal training opportunities in recent years, on-the-job-training (OJT) still constitutes the most essential part of training at Seibu. The majority of the women interviewed pointed out that in terms of formal training offered by the Company, men and women were treated equally if they were assigned to the same jobs. They pointed out that the major differences were in the day-to-day on-the-job-training. Our survey in 1984 showed that over 50 per cent of the respondents did not think that men and women were receiving the same kind of OJT (Table 9.8). As regards the concrete differences, 79 per cent of the respondents, both men and women, pointed out that the 'type of tasks assigned were different'.

Table 9.8

"Do you think men and women receive the same kind of OJT in your workplace?"  
(1984 survey)

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Yes	39.3	26.7	31.4
No	51.7	56.4	54.7
Don't know	9.0	16.9	14.0
Total (N)	100.0 (323)	100.0 (544)	100.0 (867)

Most of the women interviewed were aware of the sex role distinction in their day-to-day work. When asked whether women were given same training opportunities as men, a 34-year-old woman who had been with the Company for 14 years and was a staff in the personnel department, said:

'Of course, men and women were treated differently. As men were expected to become management eventually, they were taught how to run the entire business of the shop including managing the accounts of the shop. Women were to stand in the shop and sell. Standing in the shop was our training. Even if we were interested in learning how to manage the account of the shop, we were not given any chance to learn. As a result, it becomes very difficult for us to take up managerial positions because we know so little about managing and financial matters.'

Another 24-year-old woman graduate who had been with Seibu for two years said:

'Well, we are offered the same formal opportunities by our Company. But in our day-to-day work, men and women are treated differently. Men are trained towards becoming management. Women, even the university graduates, are not given the same opportunity. When I first joined the Company, I felt that my female colleagues were more capable than men. However, after a year or so, the difference between men and women emerged. Men seem to know so much more than women. This is because men are given more training in day-to-day practice.'

Unless considerable corporate education is being undertaken to convince line managers and supervisors of the need to bring about change in their day-to-day work practices, training in Japanese companies is an area in which it is very difficult to bring about equal opportunity through change programmes on the formal policy level. Sexual division of labour can be self-perpetuating unless conscious attempts are being made to change the way men and women are being trained in their day-to-day work activities.

#### **4. Attitudes Towards Women**

Since the mid-1970s, Seibu top management has expressed, now and again, a strong intention to promote the position of women in the company, but the majority of the women interviewed pointed out that such 'apparent sympathy' from the top did not work out 'down the line'. The attitudes of individual line managers were seen by many of the women interviewed as one of the most important factors affecting their career prospects. All this indicates that if the new policy towards women is to be effective, considerable corporate education must be undertaken. It is not enough that top management of the Company is interested in promoting women; winning consent for change among middle management is especially important. Attitudes do not change easily, especially in an area involving relations between men and women which is an aspect of culture developed over centuries. In the middle of the 1980s, Seibu was still very much dominated by a 'male enterprise culture'. Some of the remarks written by the male respondents on the questionnaire (1984 survey) revealed the persistence of a deep-rooted male prejudice against the idea of promoting equal opportunity for women:

'The increasing social pressure for sexual equality may eventually bring about a society where men and women do the same kind of job, but whether this will result in genuine equality between men and women is another question. Personally, I dislike the attitude that women are to work equally as men.'

'Women are not suitable for managerial jobs because they are not broad-minded enough to make overall decision making in an organisation. I think it is wiser that women look for their careers in specialist jobs.'

'For a position above the supervisor level, I hope our Company will choose someone with good qualifications and managerial ability. Although some women can do the job properly, they tend to be too emotional and cause great troubles for the subordinates. Our Company tends to put women in management positions for the sake of publicity.'

'The increasing participation of women may change the world and even change human history. But these are not necessarily changes in a desirable direction... I resent over-evaluation of women's ability.'

## **5. Work and Family: The Unresolved Dilemma**

Women's responsibilities in the family constituted one of the greatest barriers to their advancement to senior positions. It was very rare for Seibu to promote married women to senior positions. Over 90 percent of the women in management and/or specialist jobs were single and over 30 years of age - most of them had surpassed the 'marriageable age' in Japanese society. In the mid-1980s, over 60 per cent of the female workforce in Japan were married; among the female regular workforce at Seibu, only 13 percent were married. Middle-aged women working at Seibu were largely employed on a part-time or temporary basis. Married women were seen as secondary workers.

Most of the women interviewed pointed out that working conditions at the department stores made it extremely difficult for them to combine work with family. Late-opening hours, the need to work overtime and change their work schedules during peak seasons and the fact that holidays do not necessarily fall on the weekends (Japanese department stores are opened on Sundays) cause adjustment problems for those with a family.

Seibu management was aware of the dilemma faced by its women employees. The company also realised that many women had low morale

because of a lack of long-term perspective in their relationship with the Company. In April 1980, a re-entry scheme called a 'Licence System' was introduced to enable women to return to work for the Company after a career break. In order to be qualified for applying for a re-entry licence, a woman employee has to work for a minimum of six years with the Company (or four years in the case of a university graduate) and her job performance should be 'above average' as evaluated by the personnel department. The 're-entry licence' enables the woman to return to work for the Company within 10 years of leaving and provided that she is under 40 years of age. However, it should be noted that the re-entry licence is neither a formal agreement nor a contract. It merely states that when the employee returns to work "she will be given first priority and guaranteed better conditions when compared to other ordinary job applicants". There is no guarantee of employment nor any guarantee of returning to her former position. The ultimate decision for re-employment rests on the Company and the forms of employment, that is whether she will be re-employed on a full-time or part-time basis, will be "determined by the Company taking into consideration her request" (Kurihara, 1980, p.60).

The re-entry scheme has gained the Company much publicity as a 'progressive' employer. However, the majority of the women interviewed were critical of the scheme. Most of them said they would apply for the licence if they decided to have a family as a kind of 'safety valve' for the future but they really had no intention of coming back once they decided to leave the Company. Most of the women described the scheme as 'not practical' because there was no guarantee of re-entry and no guarantee of returning to their former positions.

At the end of 1988, over a period of 8 years since the scheme was introduced, there were altogether 950 women who had received the re-entry licence and only 54 of them (5.6 per cent) had returned to work, among them 32 were re-employed as regular full-time employees and the rest as non-regular contract employees.



Given the rigidity of the career structure and the ambiguity of the scheme, it is unlikely that the re-entry scheme will help women at Seibu to resolve the dilemma of choosing either work or family. For the majority of women, interrupting their career to have a family means losing their positions in the Company. The majority of them knew that when they returned to work, the options available would be extremely limited and the chance for them to gain entry to the career jobs was very slim. The choice open to the majority of the women was either to continue their career in exactly the same way as men or to leave when they had a family.

## **6. The Limits of Managerial Reform**

Although the majority of the women interviewed tended to believe that they were 'better off' than women in other companies, very few of them were optimistic about the future prospects for women to gain higher positions in the Company.

Our analysis in 1984 indicated that the major structural and attitudinal changes which were needed to bring about more egalitarian treatment of women had not come about. This is not because Seibu is a backward organisation; Seibu is anything but backward, and it is acutely aware that women constitute a reserve of unused and undeveloped talents which, if given the opportunities to be tapped and developed, will be a powerful factor in determining the success of the industry. The problems encountered by Seibu in bringing more women into the core of the organisation illustrate some common dilemmas faced by most Japanese companies when they are confronted with the challenge to offer women equal opportunities.

The core group of employees were still governed by a set of rules and practices which stressed lifelong commitment, long-term career advancement regulated by age and length of service, a requirement for total devotion to the company by working long hours and a willingness to be geographically mobile at the request of the Company. Such a

career structure was not flexible enough to permit women to leave the Company for a number of years without losing their positions.

Seibu's ideal image of female employees, as openly stated by the personnel director, was **'those who would not deny the fact they they are women and would not refuse to carry out their roles as mother and wife in the family'** (Ido, 1980b, p.11). Sexual equality in employment will not come about unless Seibu also recognises the importance of 'man's role as father and husband in the family' and willing to make career jobs more compatible with family life.

One year after the initial case study was conducted, the Japanese government passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. The rest of this chapter examines how much further policy changes have occurred at Seibu since then.

## V. 'POST-EEO LAW' POLICIES ON WOMEN

In the three summers between 1987 and 1989, the author visited Seibu to find out whether the company had taken any new policy initiatives in promoting women's career opportunities and how much further the company went than the pre-EEO Law policies. Information and data presented in this section are mainly based on interviews and discussions with personnel staff at the flagship store and the head office, internal documents provided by the personnel department and individual interviews with 25 women employees, 21 of whom were first interviewed in 1983 (see chapter 8 for more details of the 'follow-up' study).

Broadly speaking, two types of policy responses to the EEO Law can be distinguished: (1) Direct policy responses, i.e. changes in personnel policies and practices in order to comply with the practical requirements of the law and (2) new policy initiatives undertaken by management to promote equal opportunities for women which are not directly required by the law but appear to result from a growing consciousness of Seibu management to 'move ahead' and to comply with the 'spirit' of the Law.

In terms of direct policy responses, the personnel manager at the head office pointed out that it was not necessary for the company to review or introduce any changes in their personnel policies and practices, because Seibu's policy on women had always been more 'advanced' than that required by the new legislation. The personnel departments in all the stores, however, did run special seminars to explain the major changes resulting from the legislation to those in supervisory and specialist positions. According to those women who attended the meeting, there was no explanation of the contents or implications of the EEO Law as a whole. The main focus of the meeting was on the amendments of the Labour Standards Law relating to relaxation of overtime work and holiday work restrictions. At the meeting there was no mention of those parts of the Law dealing with elimination of discrimination. The seminar was mainly intended to explain the practical details of the

changes in overtime work arrangements rather than explaining the implications of the Law on equal opportunity.

However, examination of the new developments in the company's utilisation policies on women since 1986 shows that several important changes have occurred. Firstly, in October 1986, a two-track career system was introduced which functions as a formal screening system to select some 'able' women for special training and career development. Secondly, the general policy orientation on women has shifted from the previous emphasis on utilising women as 'specialists' to an emphasis on the appointment of more women to management positions. There are indications that the company is gradually moving towards an emphasis on the importance of adopting 'positive action' for achieving 'equality in outcomes'. Finally, several new policy measures were introduced to improve the general 'support environment' to help women compromising between work and family.

#### **1. The Two-Track Career System: Selecting and Training a Core Group of 'Elite Women'**

Seibu introduced the two-track career system in October 1986. The new system classifies all employees into two types: the 'global employee' and the 'local employee'. Employees who choose the 'global career route' are required to accept the rule that they could be transferred to any office or subsidiary located in any part of the country or even foreign countries, i.e. they are required to make a commitment to be nationally mobile. For those who choose the 'local career route' transfer will be within commutable distance.

On the surface, no formal career advantages are offered to those who choose the 'global' career track apart from a small mobility allowance added to their monthly payments. Unlike many other companies which set a formal limit to the level of promotion to middle-management level to those in 'local' career tracks (see, chapter 7 section III-2), Seibu management emphasises that there is no discrimination between employees in the two career tracks with regard to the level of promotion.

However, in practice, one would expect 'global employees' to end up having a greater breadth of job experience and training opportunities which will make them more 'qualified' and eligible to be promoted to more senior key positions in the company.

The new system does not apply to all employees equally. At the time when the new system was introduced, all the female employees were asked to declare their choices of career routes. All the male employees, except those who were over 55 years old, were automatically assigned to the global career route. As a general principle, all women employees newly joining the company since the system was introduced have been asked to declare their choices when they reach the age of 27 although the company does allow the possibility for individual application for choice of career track at other stages if special circumstances arise.

Women who choose the global career route have to undergo a 2-stage screening process including paper screening and interviews with top management. At the initial stage of implementation of the new system, about 5 per cent of the female employees (276 out of a total of 5620 female employees) passed the screening. It is not at all clear what criteria the Company used to judge the 'suitability' of women to be placed in the global career route. There are no such specifications in the official document issued by the Company. Information on the personal background and characteristics of the 276 women recognised as global employees was not available at the time when the author visited the Company. However, based on our interview data, it is not too difficult to have a glimpse of the characteristics of the 'global type women'. Out of the 25 women interviewed, 6 women had chosen the global career route and 4 of them eventually passed the screening procedures. The characteristics of the 6 women are as follows:

	<u>Education</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Job</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Family</u>
A	University	34	Specialist (sales)	6	Single
B	University	34	Specialist (planning)	6	Single
C	Junior Col.	39	Specialist (sales)	7	Single
D	Junior Col.	38	Specialist (sales)	6	Single
E	University	37	Specialist (sales)	7	Single
F	University	28	Specialist (buyer)	6	Single

Cases E and F dropped out after the interviews with management. E was the only child in the family and during the interview she was asked whether it was all right for her to leave her parents behind if she was asked to transfer to a distant place. She dropped out after some consideration, feeling that the management had helped her to make a right decision. F said she changed her mind after the interview because she was thinking of getting married in the near future. The question of her likely marriage was raised during the interview and she was asked to reconsider her choice by the management.

It is not clear how many women dropped out from the 'global career route' choice after interviews with the management. The above two cases, nevertheless, do illustrate that appraisal interviews, which are very important in personnel development in Japan, could be used as informal channels to exert pressure on women to ensure their full commitment to the career requirements imposed by the management if they desire to be treated equally as men.

Although the interview sample is small, the above data indicate that those women who chose to pursue the global career route and eventually passed the screening procedures shared some common characteristics: They are highly educated, in their mid- or late-30s, single and are in specialist jobs. They are a select group of 'career-minded women' without family obligations who would be prepared to be transferred to any distant places. It is also clear that these women have all passed their marriageable age in Japan. The risk of these women leaving the Company for family reasons is thus minimised. The only young woman (case F) in our sample who applied to be placed on the global career route eventually changed her mind after being questioned about her likely marriage in the near future during the interview. The individual interviews with management appear to be an important screening procedure used by management to exert pressure on women who might not go ahead with their careers to give up.

The two-track career system is intended to function as a formal procedure to screen out and distinguish a small number of 'elite' women

who are willing and able to comply with the requirements to be 'mobile employees' and manage them accordingly. In a formal company document describing the system, the company states the following:

'In considering the fact that women are normally more closely attached to their local areas due to societal expectations, the system formally recognises the restriction of the location of their job assignment. However, the system is also intended to make a clear distinction in the management of different types of (women) employees. This enables the company to plan their job rotation and utilise them positively in line with their choices.'

Following the selection of 276 'global' women at the end of 1986, a special training programme was designed for these women. The first step to be implemented was to put these women in small groups, each under the direct supervision and instruction of top management for a period of six months.

Seibu management point out that the main reason for selecting a core group of 'elite' women stems from the commercial need to train and assign more women to key positions in the company. The career tracking system enables the company to spot the 'able' women at an early stage and facilitates training and manpower planning in the long-term. Seibu has every commercial reason to train more able women and in fact it has begun to do so after the mid-1970s, although not on a formal and systematic basis. Why did Seibu adopt the career tracking system in October 1986? The timing of the system clearly suggests that the EEO Law has added extra reason for the company to formalise the practice and perhaps to implement it more systematically and on a much wider scale in the future. Sections 7 and 8 of the EEO Law 'exhorts' employers to provide equal opportunity to women in job assignment and promotion. The rationale underlying Seibu's career tracking system is probably not so different from that of many other major companies which have introduced the system recently. The system serves the purpose of screening the 'right' kind of women to whom the company will be prepared to offer equal job assignment and promotion chances. However, in several respects, Seibu appears to have gone much further. Firstly, Seibu is not merely using the career tracking system to make a formal claim that

it has offered women equal opportunity by having a few token women selected; 5 per cent of the women employees had passed the screening at the time when the system was first introduced. Although this is a small number in relation to the total female workforce; it is not a token few. Secondly, unlike many other companies which make a clear-cut distinction in the level of promotion for the two different career tracks, the only formal distinction in the case of Seibu is the scope of job rotation. Thirdly, women who are selected into the 'global career track' are given special training. It is not so clear whether such special attention is offered to men as they are all automatically put on the 'global career track'. In this respect, Seibu's career tracking system is designed specifically to distinguish a small number of 'elite' women from the rest of the female work force rather than aimed at separating the 'male career track' from that of the female 'career track'.

Seibu is implementing the career tracking system with 'good will'; intending to select more 'bright women' to be put on the elite career course. However, like many other major companies, Seibu is only prepared to offer such special 'favour' to women provided they are prepared to make a full commitment to work like their male colleagues. The number of women who will be able to do so is bound to be small despite the 'good will' efforts on the side of the management.

## **2. A Shift in Policy Orientation: Seibu's New Career Development Programmes for Women**

In early 1987, Seibu stated its intention to design a new career development programmes to improve the utilisation of women further. In the summer of 1987, three special project teams were set up to examine specific issues related to women's career in the Company. The special project teams included a Management Development Team to design training programmes to develop women's managerial potential; a Career Development Team to examine the role of women in the Company and to design job rotation policies for women and a Women's Working Environment Team to devise new policy measures to improve the working conditions for women.



Formal policy proposals were put forward in an internal document in January 1989 which represented the most thoroughgoing new policy programmes on women documented by Seibu in recent years. In the policy document, it was pointed out that there were two approaches to the development and utilisation of women: (1) To utilise women's 'special qualities' by appointing them to specialist jobs in first line sales and services and (2), to select and utilise women in the same way as men by appointing them to managerial and staff positions in key product areas and departments. The company emphasised the importance of continuing on the first approach but at the same time pointed out that new efforts should be made to develop more women as managers. The following statement made in the new policy document indicates the shift in policy emphasis:

'The first important step in the long-term development policy for women in regular full-time jobs is to implement policies for the development of more young women as managers. At the present stage, no matter how difficult it is, the company should press forward to increase the number of women in managerial positions and help women managers to form a sense of consciousness. At the same time, it is necessary to set concrete targets and make them known to all the employees.'

In terms of concrete steps to be taken to increase the number of women managers, the project teams suggested the creation of 'women only' departments in one of the stores as a trial attempt. The rationale for this is to avoid job differentiation between men and women so as to allow women to have proper practical management training opportunities at an early stage and to ensure the absolute increase in the number of women in management positions. For the first time, Seibu has actually set concrete targets for increasing the share of women in the next ten years. The proposed target is to increase the share of women in lower management (Kakaricho) from the current 14.7 per cent to 50 per cent by the year 1998 and that of the middle management positions from 3.6 per cent to 20 per cent. This, in effect, is a kind of positive action aimed at 'equality in outcome', which to the researcher's knowledge, is the first of its kind that has been ever proposed in a Japanese company. At the time of writing, there was no information on whether Seibu had

actually gone ahead with these policy proposals. However, the EEO Law appears to have stimulated Seibu management to undertake new policy initiatives in promoting women's careers. How far these will have positive impact on women in the long-run is a separate question.

### **3. Enabling Women to Compromise Between Work and Family**

In this area, some minor policy improvements were introduced: (1) The re-entry scheme was extended to women in non-regular jobs who had worked continuously for the company for a minimum of six years; (2) staff from the personnel department together with union officials were to set up a special counselling service to provide help and advice to women employees who needed childcare facilities; (3) a modified form of re-entry system was introduced which enables women in full-time regular jobs to change their employment status to part-time during child rearing period, and re-enter the company as full-time regular employees when their children reach school age. The shift in employment status requires a termination of the previous contract and the re-negotiation of a new contract at each stage.

All these show that Seibu is a 'pro-women' employer aimed at improving the 'welfare' and working conditions for the women employees, in respect of the 'spirit' of the EEO Law, which also encourages employers to introduce measures to help women compromising between work and family. However, in terms of developing more concrete policies for enhancing women's career continuity as full-time regular employees, Seibu cannot be said to have gone very far. The re-entry scheme does not provide such a guarantee. At present (January 1990), Seibu does not have a formal childcare leave system and there was little indication (at the time when the author visited the company in the summer of 1989), that the company is intending to do so in the near future. Seibu set up a company creche providing some 30 nursery places for its over 5000 full-time regular employees in 1982, which was regarded an exceptionally 'progressive' policy. However, in its recent policy proposals on promoting equal opportunities for women, Seibu has ruled out the possibility of extending such facilities. The cost factor was pointed

out as a major impediment. Nevertheless, policies which will encourage a larger number of women to maintain their full-time career continuity do not appear to be high on the company's policy agenda for women.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that Seibu management has adopted more positive policies aimed at selecting more women to responsible jobs since the introduction of the EEO Law, although causality cannot be inferred from the timing of two events. The commercial reasons for Seibu to introduce positive utilisation policies on women remained equally strong in the late 1980s as they had been in the early 1980s. Staff in the personnel department pointed out that it was inevitable that Seibu needed to promote more able women to managerial positions and other key business functions previously dominated by men, because of the gradual decline in the proportion of full-time regular employees as a result of the increased employment of a large number of part-time and contract employees on a mass scale in recent years (see next chapter). The absolute shortage of full-time regular staff has pushed the company to utilise the abilities of both men and women to the full, in return for offering them the benefits of permanent employment.

However, the timing of the new policy measures and the major shift in the policy orientations suggest that the EEO Law has added reasons for Seibu to push forward its 'pro-women' policies at a much faster pace than they might otherwise have been. Also being a 'leader' in managerial reforms means that Seibu is very concerned about its well established corporate image as a 'pro-women' employer and this means making every effort to maintain it.

Seibu has taken some new steps in observing the 'spirit' of the EEO Law. And on the policy level, it has moved much further in promoting women's careers than many other major companies. Nevertheless, one should not be over optimistic about the overall 'equal opportunity effects' of the policies pursued by Seibu. There are several reasons

for this. Firstly, Seibu's equal opportunity policy has focussed on a small number of highly educated 'elite' women, mostly university graduates, among the regular full-time employees. Among those women interviewed in 1984, there were complaints from those with a lower education qualification that they were being left out. Such complaints came out more vividly and frequently during the interviews in 1987. Secondly, the policies are only applicable to a declining number and proportion of women in regular full-time jobs. An increasing number of women are outside the framework of Seibu's 'pro-women' policies (see, next chapter, Table 10.2). Lastly, and most importantly, equal opportunities means that women have to formally accept and commit themselves to work 'like men'. The career planning, promotion and job rotation systems which we discussed in section IV, as the major structural factors hindering the majority of women from pursuing equal opportunities in the mid-1980s remain basically the same. Seibu has done very little to review and change those rules and practices. The career tracking system serves the purpose of justifying and formalising the 'core' personnel system which operate to exclude the majority of Seibu women. Despite the 'good will' efforts made by Seibu management, the operation of the two-track career system is in effect both directly and indirectly discriminatory against women. It is directly discriminatory because it does not apply equally to both men and women, and indirectly discriminatory because it has a disproportionate impact on women - only a small minority can comply with the mobility requirements and pass the screening procedures.

Although some women have benefited from the policies adopted by Seibu, it is an extremely small number. The EEO Law has stimulated some new policy efforts at Seibu but it is unlikely that there will be pathbreaking changes in terms of the position and status of the majority of Seibu women. The next chapter looks at evidence of this argument.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. In the early 1980s, department stores in the major cities reported difficulties in recruiting 'good saleswomen' due to the growing competition from the mushrooming specialised shops and boutiques in such fashionable districts as Harajuku and Aoyama (The Japan Times, October 20, 1983). Such growing competition for good quality saleswomen was clearly one of the major factors prompting big department stores to add some attractive characteristics to the sales jobs by opening up opportunities to move into specialist roles such as fashion advisers and coordinators, etc.

2. Tsuda (1981) points out that the nature of Japanese personnel management is not conducive to the formation of 'specialist' or 'professional' in the western sense. A strong emphasis on the collective performance of the work group and task flexibility based on frequent job rotation means that individuals are not encouraged to identify with a specific task or specialist work role for a long period of time.

3. The author has carried out interviews at several retailing stores in Britain, including Marks and Spencer and W.H. Smith. In most cases, personnel managers tended to refer to the buying function as a 'female domain'. For example, at Marks and Spencer, women constituted 94 percent of the staff in the buying function.

## CHAPTER 10

### CHANGING ROLES AND ATTITUDES OF SEIBU WOMEN: TOWARDS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY?

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Having examined the policy changes introduced by Seibu management in the previous chapter, the spotlight now turns to the women employees - the intended beneficiaries of the policy changes. The objectives of this chapter are twofold: to examine firstly, changes in the employment pattern and status of women employees, and secondly, changes in their work attitudes.

The primary intention of the first part is to see how far the policies pursued by Seibu are having equal opportunity effects on women, in terms of reduction of job segregation, an increased share of women in high status jobs and improvement of career development opportunities. Whether career opportunities for Seibu women have improved or not over the most dramatic years of personnel policy changes at Seibu and in the period during which the Japanese EEO Law was introduced has wider implications beyond this one case. Seibu represents a critical test of the possibility of introducing equal opportunities for women in a large Japanese company. The company operates in an industry which has the greatest need to open up career opportunities for women. All the more important, Seibu is regarded as a 'leading edge' company in personnel management reforms by the Japanese enterprise community. As pointed out in chapter 6, one important underlying objectives of the Japanese EEO Law is to use the legislation as a 'moral force' to stimulate further policy changes in 'good practice' companies and use them as leading models to establish new equal opportunity norms and standards in the future. Since the introduction of the EEO Law, Seibu management has taken some new steps in giving women greater access to the core career jobs. It is therefore important to examine the effectiveness of the model of equal opportunities policy pursued by Seibu. If positive changes in women's position have not occurred in a 'progressive'

company like Seibu, it is unlikely that changes would have taken place elsewhere.

The second objective of this chapter is to examine how the Seibu women's work attitudes have changed as a result of the sexual equality debate in recent years, and especially after the introduction of the EEO Law. Recent research in the United States on the reactions of women to equal opportunity programmes suggests that women's work attitudes are important factors in affecting their desire for upward mobility and consequently in determining the effectiveness of equal opportunity programmes (Martin et al, 1987). The future direction of equal employment for Japanese women will depend not only on changes in employer policies and attitudes but also on how far women themselves start to perceive the possibilities of change and begin to make more demands on their employers. Further, the extent to which Japanese women's labour supply pattern might shift in the future will be an important determinant of employers' labour force strategies. How have Seibu women reacted to the 'new environment' and the possibility of better career opportunities brought about by the EEO Law? Is there evidence that the EEO Law has raised Seibu women's career expectations and made them more 'career-oriented' and less 'home-bound'? Answers to these questions will have important practical policy implications.

The questionnaire surveys conducted at Seibu in 1984 and 1988 enable a comparison of the shift in Seibu women's attitudes over time. Interpretation of the survey results is supplemented by data obtained from in-depth individual interviews with 21 women, in 1983 and 1987 (for details of research methods, see chapter 8).

## II. SHIFTS IN THE POSITION AND STATUS OF WOMEN

An examination of the shifts in the position and status of women at Seibu between 1983 and 1988 indicates two important changes. First, the absolute number and proportion of women employed on a non-regular contractual basis to take up bottom level sales or clerical jobs has expanded tremendously. Second, for those women employed on a full-time regular basis, there has been some increase in their share of specialist and managerial jobs. The general trend appears to be moving towards an increased polarisation of career opportunities for women according to their employment status.

This section first looks at the overall compositional shifts of Seibu employees by their employment status, then examines the shifts in their job status over the 5-year-period between 1983 and 1988. This will be mainly based on overall company data obtained from the personnel department; where appropriate, the observations will be supplemented by the author's survey data. In examining the shifts in women's job status, analysis of variance is used to test how far sex remains an important determinant of job status. This is a crucial test of whether Seibu has adopted a more egalitarian promotion policy over the period observed.



## 1. Changes in Employment Pattern

Table 10.1 illustrates the changes in the number and proportional distribution of male and female employees by their employment status at two points of time, 1983 and 1988. Over this period, the total number of Seibu employees increased by 48 per cent and in absolute number from 12,947 to 19,110. The increase, however, did not constitute a balanced distribution among different categories of employees. For men, the number employed on a regular full-time basis increased by 24 per cent over the period, while that of women declined by 10 per cent. The most dramatic increase was in those employed as non-regular contract employees. For women, between 1983 and 1988, the number employed on a non-regular basis had almost tripled, from 1,413 to 5,230. Although the company also started to employ a small number of men on a non-regular basis, the proportion was rather small when compared to that of women.

**Table 10.1**  
**Composition of Male and Female Employees By Employment Status**  
(Whole company)

	<u>1983</u>		<u>1988</u>		% change between 83 & 88
	No.	%	No.	%	
Male (Regular)	5,681	(43.8%)	7,055	(36.9%)	+24%
Female (Regular)	5,853	(45.2%)	5,284	(27.7%)	-10%
Male (Non-regular)	* -	-	1,473	( 7.7%)	-
Female (Non-regular)	1,413	(11.0%)	5,298	(27.7%)	+275%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,947</b>	<b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>19,110</b>	<b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>(148)</b>

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department Stores Ltd.

\*The number of male non-regular employees was almost negligible and no formal record was available.

The big growth in female numbers employed at Seibu has been accompanied by a dramatic shift in their employment status. In 1983, 81 per cent of women working at Seibu were employed on a permanent regular basis, whereas in 1988 the proportion declined to only 50 per cent (Table 10.2). In 1988, the number of women employed on a contractual non-regular basis surpassed that of the full-time regular status.

**Table 10.2**  
**Changes in the composition of female employees by employment status**  
 (Whole company)

	No.	$\frac{1983}{(\%)}$	No.	$\frac{1988}{(\%)}$
Regular	5,853	(81.0)	5,284	(50.0)
Non-regular	1,413	(29.0)	5,298	(50.0)
Total	7,266	(100.0)	10,582	(100.0)

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department Stores Ltd.

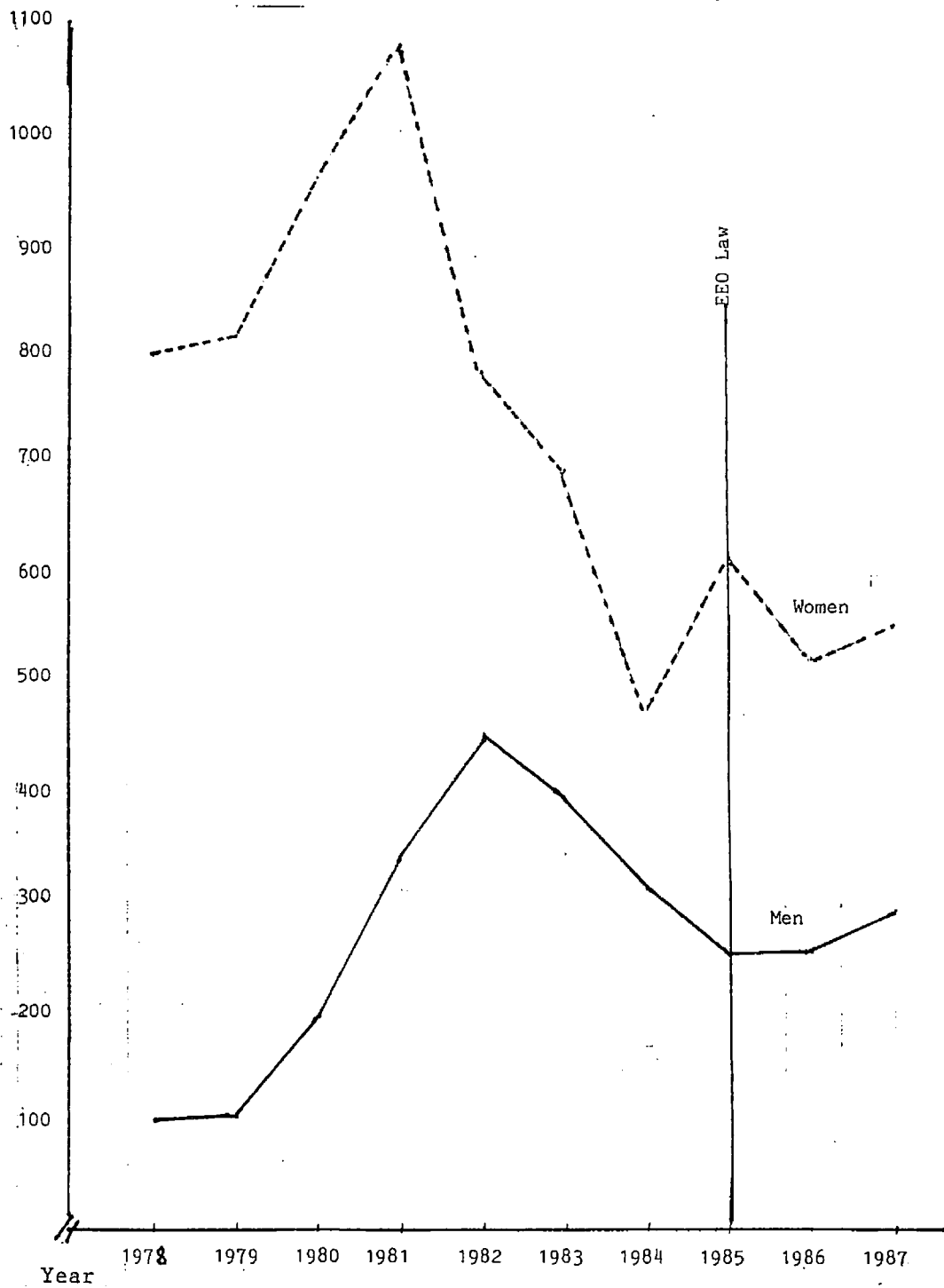
Over the last few years, Seibu reduced the recruitment of women as permanent regular employees. The increased intake of women was mainly restricted to the category of 'non-regular' contractual status (see, below). Fig. 10.1 shows the changes in the number of men and women recruited as regular employees over a period of 10 years between 1977 and 1987. The general tendency since the early 1980s has been towards reduction of employment of regular employees. The decline in the employment of women was more drastic than that of men in recent years. If we look at the number of women recruited annually by educational qualifications (Fig.10.2), it shows that the reduced recruitment of women has mainly affected the high school leavers.

The cutting down of new recruits was not due to contraction of business. Seibu embarked on a second phase of expansion since the early 1980s. The Company opened up three new branch stores between 1983 and 1987, total sales floor had expanded from 233,231 square metres to 273,399 square metres. The company had coped with the increased volume of business by recruiting a large number of non-regular contract employees. Clearly, there has been a gradual substitution of full-time regular employees by non-regular contract employees, the majority of whom were women.

Before probing into Seibu's motives for shifting its employment policy in recent years. It is worth looking in greater detail at the 'Contract Employee System' introduced in 1984.

Persons

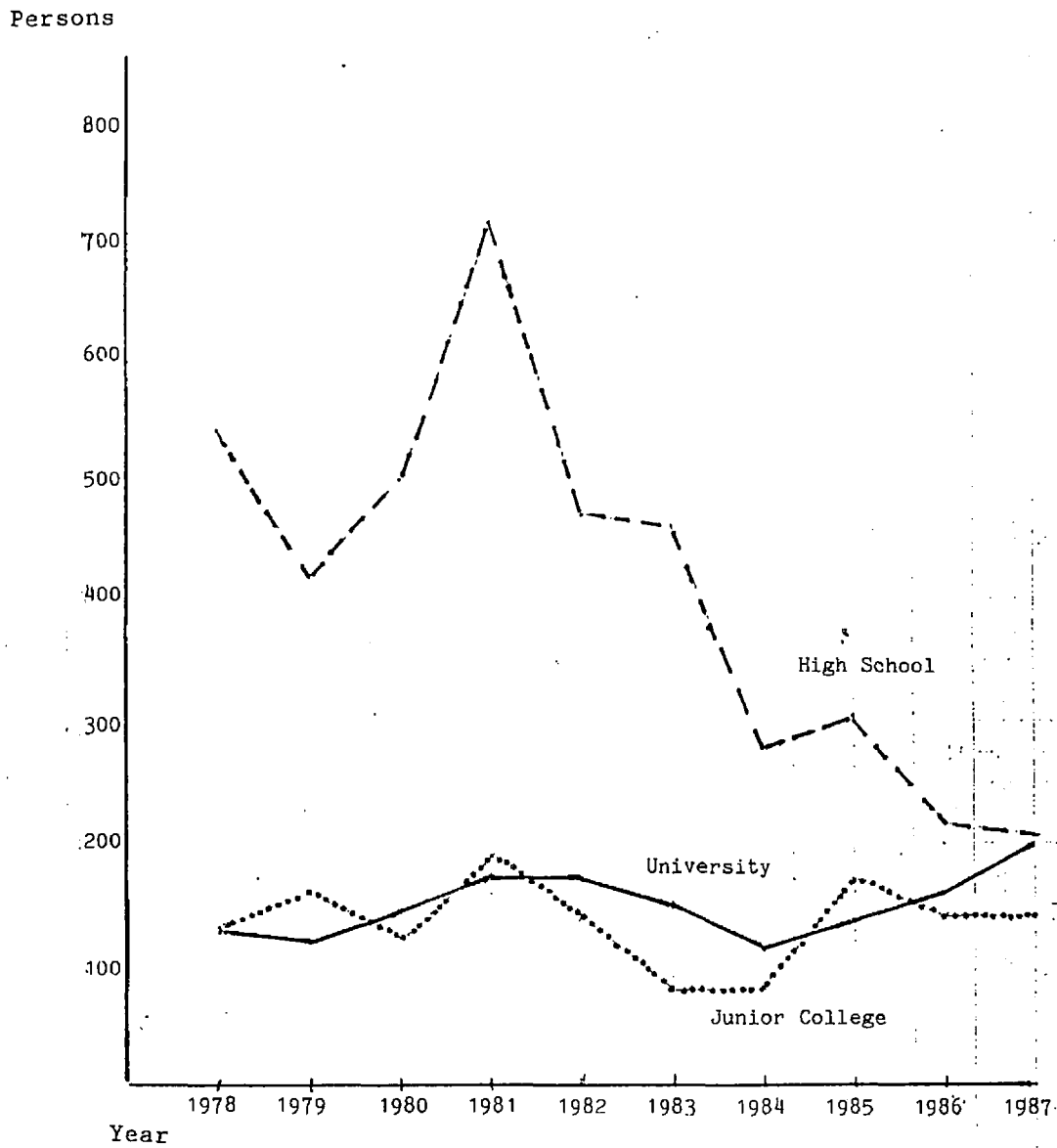
Fig. 10.1 Number of Men and Women Recruited Annually  
(As Regular Full-Time Employees), 1978-1987



Source: Data provided by Personnel  
Department, Seibu Department Stores, Ltd.

Contract Employee  
System Introduced

Fig. 10.2 Number of Women Recruited Annually  
 (As Regular Full-Time Employees),  
 By Educational Qualifications, 1978-1987



Source: Data provided by Personnel Department,  
 Seibu Department Stores, Ltd.

**(a) The 'Contract Employee System'**

Traditionally, department stores have always been one of the largest employers of part-time or temporary female workers. Seibu was no exception. What makes the recent phenomenon worthy of special attention is that Seibu introduced a new 'Contract Employee System' in 1984 which formalised and institutionalised the employment of non-regular contract employees on a long-term and large scale basis.

The new category of 'contract employee' includes the traditional type of part-time/temporary workers and a new category of contract workers whose contract of employment is for one year and subject to renewal on an annual basis. Under the 'contract employee system', the company defines three sub-categories of non-regular employees (as distinct from the permanent regular employees). These non-regular employees can work either on a full-time or part-time basis:

(1) Temporary casual workers employed for miscellaneous sales, maintenance and clerical support jobs. The term of contract is in principle up to one year but shorter period of contract is also possible. Payment is entirely on an hourly basis. The company's job advertisement states that these are jobs intended for students, housewives and the aged.

(2) Contract sales clerks employed specifically for front-line sales or customer service jobs. The term of employment is for one year which is subject to renewal on an annual basis. Payment can be by straight hourly rates or a combination of basic pay and commission. The company states in its job advertisement that these are 'women's jobs' intended to utilise the life experience of women on the sales floor. The flexibility of working hours was meant to suit the needs of women for combining work with family responsibilities.

(3) Contract specialists employed for high-level consulting, or technical jobs such as consultants in music, specialists in product development, or engineers. The system of payment and working hours are

all subject to individual negotiation on an annual basis. Each contract period lasts for one year. It is interesting to note that in the job advertisement for this category of contract specialist, the company emphasises its 'non-discriminatory' employment policy and states that 'any individual with specialist skills and abilities will be welcomed'. This category of specialist employee is clearly not intended for women only but is aiming at both sexes.

Among the above three categories of non-regular employees, the company clearly encourages women to apply for the first two categories of sales or clerical support jobs which are traditionally regarded as 'women's jobs'

Table 10.3 shows the composition of the three different categories of contract employees by sex. Categories (1) and (2) are predominantly female domains while men constitutes about two thirds of the specialist category (3). Category (2) is the largest of the three and is composed mostly of women.

**Table 10.3 Composition of Contract Employees**  
(As of October 1987)

	Male No.	Female No.	Women's share (%)
(1)Temporary/casual	261	752	74.2%
(2)Contract sales	899	4,329	82.8
(3)Contract specialists	313	217	41.2
Total	1,473	5,298	78.2

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department Stores Ltd.

The contract employees are entirely distinct from the regular permanent employees in terms of pay structure, working conditions and grading system. For instance, the grading structure for the full-time regular employees ranges from grade one to twelve; while that of the contract employees are on separate a grading system which ranges from grade one to five. In terms of pay, full-time contract employees of grade three earn 83 per cent of the annual basic income and 59 per cent of annual bonus of that of full-time regular employees of an equivalent grade. There is no formal system for the contract employees to convert their status to that of a regular permanent one. Contract employees can be doing the same kind of job in the same workplace as regular employees but are paid less and their terms and conditions of employment are less favourable.

**(b) Contract employment as a response to the EEO Law?**

What were Seibu's motives for introducing the contract employee system? Seibu management pointed out that a major motive was to reduce labour costs and to increase flexibility in future manpower planning. However, even before the introduction of the contract employee system, Seibu had been employing temporary contract employees, though not on such a large scale. The 'contract employee system' was introduced one year before the Japanese government passed the EEO Law. Under the present legislation, it is entirely acceptable for employers to specify that certain jobs are intended for 'women only'.

One cannot verify a direct casual relationship between the dramatic increase of women in non-regular contract jobs and the introduction of the EEO Law. Neither is it possible to use the timing of the new employment system as an indication that Seibu management has deliberately introduced a policy to restrict the number of women in full-time regular jobs as a strategy to 'dilute' the impact of the anticipated legislation. However, the crux of the problem is that the present EEO Law has created a loophole which allows companies to continue their policies of segregating men and women into different employment statuses.



Seibu management stated that one of the new personnel policy initiatives from the mid-1980s onwards was to differentiate the jobs of the permanent employees from that of the contract employees. The ultimate target is to 'hive off' the first-line sales jobs and the peripheral support jobs to the contract employees while the regular permanent employees are to be assigned to core supervisory and managerial jobs. Given the fact that 80 per cent of the contract sales clerks are women, the tendency is towards increased segregation of women in bottom-level sales jobs.

The increased employment of a large number of women as non-regular contract employees implies that in effect a larger proportion of women working at Seibu in 1988, as compared with that of 1984, were segregated into secondary employment status with little chance for career advancement. As a result, one can say that the overall position of Seibu women was worse off in 1988 because about half of them were virtually shut out from the core career jobs at the point of entry. This movement towards contract employment might, in the long-term, swamp any attempts made by Seibu management to promote the status of women in the company.

## 2. Shifts in Job Status of Male and Female Regular Employees

If the overall position of Seibu women as a whole was worse in 1988 because a larger proportion of them were segregated into inferior employment status, how has the position of those women in regular full-time employment status changed over time?

Up to the present, the main aim of equal opportunity policies at Seibu (and also the Japanese EEO Law) has been oriented to women employed in regular full-time jobs. From this perspective, any evaluation of the 'effectiveness' of the equal opportunity policies introduced by Seibu ought to be judged by the extent to which it has helped to promote the job status and career opportunities of its intended beneficiaries, i.e. women employed in regular full-time jobs. The analysis in this section focuses on the shifts in the job status of women in regular full-time jobs as compared to their male counterparts.

### (a) Women's share in management and specialist jobs

Table 10.4 shows the changes in the job status of male and female regular employees in the whole of Seibu (including head office and all branches) between 1983 and 1988.

Over the five-year-period observed, despite an increase of nearly 70 per cent in the number of women in managerial and specialist jobs, their share increased only slightly from 7.0 per cent to 9.0 per cent and from 15.0 per cent to 17.0 per cent respectively. This small positive change, however, did not have much effect in correcting the unbalanced distribution of men and women in specialist and management jobs. The unequal distribution of men and women in specialist and management jobs was equally striking in 1988 as it was in 1983. Management was still predominantly a male preserve in 1988. Despite the fact that Seibu management had been putting strong emphasis on utilising more women as specialists since the late 1970s, the increased share of women in specialist jobs did not prove to be particularly impressive.

**Table 10.4**  
**Job Position of Male and Female Regular Employees**  
**(Whole company; 1983 and 1988)**

1983					
	No.	Male (%)	Female No.	Female (%)	Women's share of each category %
Ordinary Employee	2,226	(39.0)	5,424	(93.0)	71.0%
Management	1,592	(28.0)	113	(2.0)	7.0
Specialist	1,863	(33.0)	316	(5.0)	15.0
Total	5,681	(100.0)	5,853	(100.0)	51.0

1988					
	No.	Male %	Female No.	Female %	Women's share of each category %
Ordinary Employee	2,164	(31.0)	4,518	(85.0)	68.0%
Management	2,210	(31.0)	204	(4.0)	9.0
Specialist	2,681	(38.0)	561	(11.0)	17.0
Total	7,055	(100.0)	5,284	(100.0)	43.0

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department Stores, Ltd.

## **(b) Distribution by job functions**

Table 10.5 shows the number of men and women in different specialist job functions and the changes in the share of women in these specialist jobs between 1983 and 1988. Although women were still highly concentrated in direct sales-related specialist jobs such as Sales Expert and Shopmaster, there had been some small but potentially important changes - an increasing number of women were entering the traditionally male-dominated jobs such as buyers and outdoor sales. Between 1983 and 1988, the rate of increase in almost all the specialist job categories (except for Sales Expert) had been faster in the case of women than men (Table 10.6). Especially in those areas where women were extremely under-represented such as outdoor sales, buyer and technical specialists, the rate of increase was relatively fast as compared to other job categories.

The gradual entry of women into the traditionally male-dominated specialist jobs might not necessarily be a result of conscious policy attempts to reduce job segregation between the sexes but could simply reflect a shortage of experienced male staff because the proportion of regular full-time employees in relation to the total number employed at Seibu had shrunk dramatically over the past five years. The dramatic expansion in the number of non-regular contract employees in bottom level sales and support jobs implies the use of existing experienced regular employees, whether male or female, in core specialist and managerial jobs.

Table 10.5

**Number and Share of Women in Specialist and  
Managerial Jobs; 1983 and 1988**

	1983			1988			(B-A)
	Male No.	Female No.	% of women (A)	Male No.	Female No.	% of women (B)	
Sales expert	57	57	50.0%	125	82	39.6%	-10.4
Outdoor sales	457	5	1.1	526	24	4.4	+3.3
Sales consultant	103	20	16.3	144	34	19.1	+2.8
Shopmaster	90	111	55.2	64	149	69.9	+14.7
Buyer	209	12	5.4	172	24	12.2	+6.8
Staff	767	106	12.1	1318	237	15.2	+3.1
Technician	180	5	2.7	191	12	5.9	+3.2
Marketing				141			
Management	1592	113	6.6	2681	204	8.5	+1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3455</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>4891</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>+2.5</b>

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department  
Stores Ltd.

Table 10.6

Rate of increase in specialist and management jobs  
between 1983 and 1988

	Male	Female
Sales expert	2.3	1.4
Outdoor sales	1.2	4.8
Sales consultant	1.4	1.7
Shopmaster	0.7	1.3
Buyer	0.8	2.0
Staff	1.7	2.2
Technician	1.4	1.8
Management	1.4	1.8
Average	1.4	1.8

Source: Data provided by Personnel Department, Seibu Department Stores Ltd.

The above evidence suggests that the job position of the regular female employees at Seibu has improved slightly over the period observed. The major shift in Seibu's employment policy towards expansion of non-regular workforce has benefitted a small number of women in regular full-time jobs. This positive change for a small group of 'elite' women employees does not necessarily mean there has been an overall reduction of discrimination against women in job assignment or promotion. There are many compositional variables such as age, length of service and education which might have caused the shift in women's job position over the period studied.

The next section examines the importance of the 'sex factor' in explaining the variations of employee status and the extent to which its relative importance has shifted between 1984 and 1988.

### III. MORE EGALITARIAN TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN PROMOTION?

In this section, the ANOVA procedure is performed to see how far sex remains a significant factor contributing to variations of employee job status and whether its relative importance has changed over time.

The 'job status' variable is measured by the employees' grade (for explanation of the grading system, see chapter 9, section II-2 ). Table 10.7 shows the changes in the distribution of male and female regular employees by grade between 1984 and 1988. (Note: The employees' grades are rank ordered into 5 grade groups). For both sexes, there had been a substantial reduction of those of grade 3 (or below ordinary employee grade). This reduction reflects the suppression of the number of new recruits, especially women, in recent years. In the case of men, the proportion of those in senior grade 8-9 (section manager level) had increased by 11.5 percentage points over the four-year period; while in the case of women, the greatest increase was in junior grade 4-5 (team leader level). The variations by grade between men and women at both points of time were statistically significant, though more so in 1984 than in 1988.

**Table 10.7**  
**Distribution of Male and Female Regular Employees by Grade**

Grade groups	1984		1988	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Below grade 3	24.3%	61.5%	7.9%	35.2%
2. Grade 4-5	28.9	29.7	30.7	48.4
3. Grade 6-7	39.1	7.8	41.4	13.9
4. Grade 8-9	7.4	0.9	19.1	2.6
5. Grade 10 or above	0.3	0.0	0.9	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
(N)	(325)	(548)	(215)	(465)
	(x <sup>2</sup> =188.85; df=4; p<0.001)		(x <sup>2</sup> =156.59; df=4; p<0.001)	

Source: Surveys conducted in 1984 and 1988.

Note: The survey did not include employees in top management positions (Bucho or above). This explains the small proportion of those in grade 10 or above. Actual company data (as of September 1988) showed that among the 7,055 male regular employees, 541 (7.7 %) of them were in grade 10 or above; whereas in the case of women, only 6 out of 5,284 (0.1%) of them were in equivalent grades.



In the ANOVA procedure, the effects of the following five factors on an employee's grade are examined:

(1) Length of Service: The actual number of working years is classified into eight categories, namely, 0-1 year; 2-3 years; 4-5 years; 6-7 years; 8-9 years; 10-15 years; 16-20 years and 21 years or above.

(2) Age: This is measured in terms of 8 categories at an interval of 5 years in each category, namely, aged 24 or under, aged 25-29; aged 30-34; aged 35-39; aged 40-44; aged 45-49; aged 50-54 and aged 55 or above.

(3) Education qualifications: The level of education is rank ordered in terms of high school, junior college and university.

(4) Sex: Male and Female

The results of the ANOVA procedure for the 1984 data and the 1988 data are presented in Tables 10.8 and 10.9.

As shown in Table 10.8, the analysis of variance shows that in both 1984 and 1988, the employees' age, length of service, education qualification and sex are significant factors explaining the variations in grade. The multiple R squared, as shown in Table 10.9, gives the variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables. In 1984, age, length of service, sex and education all together explained 81 per cent of the variations in grade; while in 1988, these variables explained 75 per cent of the variation. This implies that other factors - among which individual 'merit' could possibly be one - which are not captured in our analysis have become more important in 1988.

The relative importance of the four significant factors affecting grade (as shown by the adjusted Beta weights in Table 10.9) has remained unchanged. The most critical finding is that sex has become a more important factor explaining variations in grade in 1988. If we look at the adjusted Beta weight in Table 10.9, which indicates how much

change in the dependent variable is produced by a standardised change in one of the independent variables when the others are controlled, in 1988, the 'pure sex factor' explains 22 per cent of the variation in grade as against 18 per cent in 1984. Further, at both points of time, being male is a more positive factor in determining the average mean grade. As shown in Table 10.9, in 1984, the 'pure male effect' adds 0.21 of a grade group to the average mean grade group; and in 1988 it adds 0.29 of a grade group. However, 'being a female' has a negative effect at both points of time, -0.12 in 1984 and -0.13 in 1988. These results certainly imply that in terms of grade promotion there was no less discrimination against women in 1988 as compared to 1984. How could this be explained?

Have women been losing out in the race for promotion because competition for promotion was more intense in 1988 as the proportion of middle-aged employees, especially men, had expanded rapidly over the previous few years? As senior positions gradually became saturated, the speed of promotion slowed down and this might have hit women harder than men. Table 10.7 clearly shows that men were progressing more rapidly to senior grades over the period observed while the bulk of women were still in junior grades. Women virtually disappeared beyond grade 6-7; there was very little improvement over time.

**Table 10.8 Analysis of Variance**

Dependent Variable: Job Status (Grade Group) (1984 data)

Source of Variation	Sum of square	DF	Mean square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	529.84	17	31.17	213.75	p < 0.001
Age	57.03	7	8.15	55.87	p < 0.001
Length of service	36.21	7	5.17	35.48	p < 0.001
Education	2.46	2	1.23	8.45	p < 0.001
Sex	14.27	1	14.27	97.89	p < 0.001
Explained	529.84	17	31.17	213.75	p < 0.001
Residual	122.19	838	0.15		
Total	652.03	855	0.76		

Dependent Variable: Job Status (Grade Group) (1988 data)

Source of Variation	Sum of square	DF	Mean square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	410.58	17	24.15	117.22	p < 0.001
Age	48.06	7	6.87	33.32	p < 0.001
Length of service	12.57	7	1.79	8.71	p < 0.001
Education	2.48	2	1.24	6.02	p < 0.005
Sex	18.06	1	18.06	87.65	p < 0.001
Explained	410.58	17	24.15	117.22	p < 0.001
Residual	134.87	655	0.21		
Total	545.44	672	0.81		

**Table 10.9**  
**The 'Pure Sex Effect' on Job Status (Grade Group\*)**

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>
Beta for age variable	0.47	0.54
Beta for length of service variable	0.43	0.29
Beta for education variable	0.08	0.08
Beta for sex variable	0.18	0.22
Multiple R Squared of all independent variables	0.81	0.75
Grand Mean of dependent variable (grade group)	1.77	2.11
'Male effect' on grade group	+0.21	+0.29
'Female effect' on grade group	-0.12	-0.13

Source: This table is derived from the multiple classification analysis in the anova procedure. For the original multiple classification analysis tables, see Appendix C.

\* See Table 10.7.

#### IV. CHANGES IN WOMEN'S WORK ATTITUDES: GROWING CAREER CONSCIOUSNESS?

Despite the fact that only a very small number of women have gained entry into senior jobs and there is little evidence indicating less overall discrimination against women in promotion, our survey results show that more women in 1988 believed that men and women were treated equally in their workplace than they did in 1984. In 1984, 24.6 per cent of the women said they felt men and women were treated equally; the figure rose to 36.9 per cent in 1988. Chi square tests show that the shift over time is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=19.42$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). This change in perception is especially prominent among younger women, those aged under 24 and aged 25-29, as shown in Table 10.10.

There are two possible explanations for this positive shift in the perception of Seibu women. Firstly, it may reflect actual improvement in the general working environment at Seibu towards greater equality, such as more egalitarian task assignment for younger women and more equal treatment of men and women in day-to-day on-the-job training. There is some evidence suggesting that such general improvement might have occurred. In 1984, 26.7 per cent of the women in the survey said they received the same kind of on-the-job training as their male counterparts, the figure increased to 32.2 per cent in 1988. A second possible explanation is that the company's formal selection of a small number of 'elite women' through career tracking and the special attention these women are getting has given women an impression that career chances are opening up. This might have made them feel that men and women are treated more equally than before. The author's interviews with 21 women in the summer of 1987 provides some relevant information for supporting this second explanation. The majority of the women interviewed, although appearing somewhat hesitant to give a straightforward reply when asked if they thought women's promotion chances had improved over the previous three years, did indicate that they believed there were some positive changes. Most of them referred to some concrete examples of women moving into lower or middle level management positions:

'There are now more young women becoming shopmasters...and there is also one female senior manager (bucho)...I think the company is making some efforts...'

'Promotion for woman is still very slow. But I think there is now relatively more chances for women to move into first level supervisory positions. There has been an increase in the number of women becoming assistant managers.'

'I don't think there has been much change. There are not so many women in management positions ... but I think there will be some improvement from now on...'

The Seibu women's perception of improvement in equal opportunities, whether or not it reflects the actual reality, might have important implications in the long-run. The 'hope hypothesis', an important component of relative deprivation theory, posits that when economic conditions improve, the disadvantaged should have higher aspirations for upward mobility (Crosby, 1976 and 1982). If Seibu women believe that the company is moving towards more egalitarian treatment of women, will this lead to an increase in their aspirations and expectations for upward mobility? Further, has the introduction of the EEO Law itself, as an additional 'external factor', raised Seibu women's career consciousness? Answers to these questions are crucially important. The reactions of women to equal opportunity policies and the shifts in their attitudes and expectations are important factors in determining the effectiveness of equal opportunity programmes and can create its own dynamics for further change.

**Table 10.10 Women's Perception of Equality: 1984 and 1988 compared**  
 ('Do you think men and women are treated equally in your workplace?')

(By Age Cohorts)

	<u>Aged under 24</u>		<u>Aged 25-29</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988
Yes	28.2%	44.9%	21.2%	36.8%
No	36.6	26.4	63.6	40.2
Don't know	35.3	28.7	15.2	23.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
(N)	(238)	(149)	(151)	(143)

( $\chi^2=11.48$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.005$ ) ( $\chi^2=16.21$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.001$ )

Table 10.10 (Con't)

	<u>Aged 30-39</u>		<u>Aged above 40</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988
Yes	20.2%	26.6%	28.9%	34.1%
No	70.6	57.2	60.0	53.3
Don't know	9.2	16.2	11.1	12.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
(N)	(109)	(100)	(45)	(75)

( $\chi^2=4.42$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.20$ ) ( $\chi^2=0.50$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.80$ )

Three major aspects of Seibu women's attitudes will be examined. Firstly, their job preferences; secondly their aspirations and expectations for upward mobility and thirdly their intention to pursue a continuous career. The analysis will especially focus on the shifts in the attitudes among the younger age cohorts and the graduates. If the recent equal opportunity debates are having a positive impact on women's work attitudes and career aspirations, one would expect such impact to be more prominent among the younger generation, especially those who joined the company in recent years. Further, as already discussed in the previous chapter, women graduates have been the major focus of Seibu's equal opportunity policies. And in the Japanese labour market as a whole, they have been the main beneficiaries of recent changes in companies' recruitment policies, following the introduction of the EEO Law. If equal opportunity policies are having an impact on raising the aspirations and expectations of the potential beneficiaries, one would expect such effect to be the greatest on the graduates.

The following analysis will be based on the results of the questionnaire surveys conducted in 1984 and 1988. Only the attitudes of women in regular full-time jobs will be examined as they are the intended beneficiaries of the EEO Law and Seibu's equal opportunity policies.



## 1. Job Preferences: Do Seibu Women Desire Entry into 'Male Jobs'?

One prerequisite for equal opportunity is to eliminate the traditionally clear patterns of job segregation by sex. This is a formidable task, especially in department stores where the traditional pattern of sexual division of labour - 'women should sell and men manage'- is so deeply rooted in the psychology of men and women and the 'culture' of the organisation. Breaking down the sexual barrier between jobs involves not only positive action on the side of the company but also changing the sex-typed conception of the jobs.

Although over the past 4 years, there had been some slight improvement of women's share in specialist and management jobs; women were still under-represented in the major specialist and management jobs. In particular, the two most high status core work roles, buyer and management, are fundamentally male-dominated areas (see, Table 10.5). The company has appointed more women as buyers (women's share has increased by 7 percentage points between 1983 and 1988) in recent years but the increased share of women in managerial jobs was almost negligible (a mere 2 percentage points increase over the 5 year period observed).

Table 10.11 shows that the job preferences of men and women reflect the existing patterns of sexual division of labour. Buyer and management are the jobs most preferred by men, this has remained the same at the two points of time. The majority of women either 'had no particular preference' or intended to work as ordinary sales clerks or as specialists in direct sales. Management was at the bottom of women's job preference, both in 1984 and 1988. The differences in job preference by sex were statistically significant at both points of time, though less prominent in 1988.

It is worth special note that there had been some shifts of women's job preferences over time. Fewer women said they intended to be ordinary sales clerks and more women indicated they wanted to become buyers. The shift over time is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=18.39$ ;

df=10; p<0.05). There is no statistically significant variation between groups with different educational qualifications. A breakdown of job preferences by age groups indicates that the shift is only significant among women who are under 24 years of age ( $\chi^2=21.29$ ; df=10; p<0.025). Less of them would want to remain as ordinary sales clerks; more indicated they wanted to become staff or buyers. Despite these signs of positive change, management remained an area in which young women did not appear to show much interest in either 1984 or 1988.

**Table 10.11 Job Preference**

('Which job did you wish to pursue when you joined the company?')

Type of Job	1984		1988	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ordinary sales clerk	7.4%	25.3%	6.5%	19.4%
Sales expert	3.7	2.6	4.7	4.2
Sales consultant	6.8	4.0	4.2	3.8
Shopmaster	6.2	12.8	3.3	10.0
Outdoor sales	4.0	0.2	1.4	1.2
Buyer	20.1	7.7	21.4	11.4
Staff	10.2	12.7	12.1	12.2
Technician	6.8	4.4	7.0	4.0
Management	19.1	3.3	21.9	3.6
No preference	14.2	24.4	14.4	25.4
Others	1.5	2.6	3.3	4.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(324)	(545)	(215)	(461)

( $\chi^2=161.14$ ; df=10; p<0.001) ( $\chi^2=97.86$ ; df=10; p<0.001)

Women's job preferences appear to be partly influenced by the existing sex ratios of the job. The increased entry of women into the buyer's role in recent years has provided role models to follow and has stimulated younger women's career interests in this traditionally male-dominated job. The unattractiveness of managerial jobs to women appears to be a self-reinforcing cycle in which the lack of representation of women in turn attracts very few women.

This would seem to be the result partly of the nature and customary demands of the managerial work role. Male resistance to women's entry into managerial work roles is much stronger as it means disruption of the traditional hierarchical relationships between the sexes (see, chapter 9 section IV-4). The demand for those in supervisory positions to work long overtime hours presents another major obstacle to women. Several female supervisors indicated to the author in the interviews that they would prefer switching to specialist work roles once they had a family as the pressure for overtime work is less. Unless more deliberate efforts are made to change the 'male work practices' and positive action taken to change the sex-type conception of management job itself, it seems that even when given the opportunity women would still 'voluntarily' refuse the chances offered and 'self-select' themselves into the traditionally 'female jobs'.

## 2. Aspirations and Expectations for Promotion

In the questionnaire survey , the respondents were asked two questions related to their aspirations and expectations for promotion: (1) 'Do you desire promotion to a higher position?' (2) 'If you continue to work in this company, up to which level do you think you would be promoted?' The first question aims at probing a general response indicating aspirations, that is, whether women want promotion, and the second question asked the respondents to predict the specific level which they think they can achieve . The same questions were asked in the 1984 and the 1988 survey.

If the EEO Law and Seibu's new personnel policies are having a positive effect on women's career attitudes, one can hypothesise the following: (1) That women's aspirations and expectations for promotion should have increased over time; (2) that such a shift in attitude should be more prominent among younger women as they are most likely to be affected by the EEO Law and benefit from the policy changes; and (3) that the aspirations and expectations of women graduates should have gone up more than other groups of women as this group of women have been the major beneficiaries of the EEO Law.

**(a) Aspirations for promotion: Do women want promotion to higher positions?**

Table 10.12 shows the responses of women to the question related to their aspirations for promotion, in 1984 and 1988. Contrary to our expectation, there is no evidence that women's aspirations have gone up. The proportion of women said they 'desire promotion to a higher position' increased by a mere 1 percentage point from 36.7 per cent to 37.7 per cent, and the proportion of those those who said 'they prefer to remain in the same position' remains unchanged. The proportion of women who appeared to be uncertain about promotion ('Don't know') constituted a majority at both points of time. The pattern of responses to the question basically remained the same.

**Table 10.12 Women's Promotion Aspirations: 1984 and 1988 compared**  
( 'Do you desire promotion to higher position?')

	1984	1988
Higher position	36.8%	37.7%
Same position	19.7	19.7
Don't know	41.9	40.6
Others	1.7	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(544)	(463)

( $\chi^2=0.36$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<0.95$ )

As both the age structure and the educational level of the female sample have shifted over time, this could have disguised the shifts in responses among women of different age cohorts and of different educational qualifications. Table 10.13 shows a breakdown of the responses by 4 age cohorts and table 10.14 shows the responses of women by their educational qualifications.

The results in Table 10.13 test the hypothesis that the aspirations of the younger age cohorts should have gone up more than the older age cohorts. The results neither confirm nor reject the hypothesis completely. The proportion of younger women who said they 'wish promotion to a higher position' has increased very slightly (2 percentage point for those under 24 and 3 percentage point for those age 25-29); the variations are, however, too small to be statistically significant.

**Table 10.13 Women's Promotion Aspirations: 1984 and 1988 compared**  
(By Age Cohorts)

	<u>Aged under 24</u>		<u>Aged 25-29</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988
Higher position	30.0%	32.0%	43.0%	46.0%
Same position	15.0	16.0	22.0	16.0
Don't know	54.0	50.0	33.0	37.0
Others	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(239)	(148)	(153)	(143)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =0.50;df=3;p<0.99)		(X <sup>2</sup> =2.14;df=3;p<0.70)	

Table 10.13 (Con't)

	<u>Aged 30-39</u>		<u>Aged above 40</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988
Higher position	43.0%	40.0%	36.0%	30.0%
Same position	25.0	19.0	27.0	36.0
Don't know	31.0	38.0	38.0	32.0
Others	2.0	3.0	0.0	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(110)	(98)	(45)	(74)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =1.80;df=3;p<0.75)		(X <sup>2</sup> =2.63;df=3;p<0.50)	

Our prediction that the aspirations of women with higher education should have gone up more than those of lower education (hypothesis 3) is refuted by the results shown in Table 10.14. At both points of time, women with a higher education tended to have a stronger aspiration for promotion but there is no indication that their aspiration had increased more over time than those with a lower education. Contrary to our prediction, a higher proportion of women graduates said they 'would prefer to remain in the same position' (increased by 6 percentage points) and those who desire 'promotion to a higher position' has declined by a 2 percentage point.

To summarise, there is no evidence indicating that Seibu women's aspirations for promotion have risen over time.

**Table 10.14 Women's Promotion Aspirations: 1984 and 1988 compared**  
(By Level of Education)

	<u>High School</u>		<u>Junior College</u>		<u>University</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988	1984	1988
Higher position	26.3%	27.3%	43.4%	42.4%	56.3%	53.5%
Same position	26.3	27.9	16.4	12.1	5.8	13.4
Don't know	46.4	41.9	38.2	44.8	35.0	30.7
Others	1.0	2.9	2.0	0.6	2.9	2.4
<hr/>						
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(289)	(215)	(152)	(153)	(103)	(95)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =2.8;df=3;p<0.5)		(X <sup>2</sup> =3.08;df=3;p<0.5)		(X <sup>2</sup> =3.71;df=3;p<0.3)	



**(b) Level of promotion expected**

Table 10.15 shows the responses of male and female employees to the question "If you continue to work in this company, up to which level do you expect to be promoted?". For analytical purposes, the responses were classified into 4 categories:

- (i) Low expectation group: Those who replied that they expect to remain as ordinary employees or up to team leader level (Kakaricho level).
- (ii) Medium expectation group: Those who expect promotion up to middle management level (Kacho level).
- (iii) High expectation group: Those who expect promotion up to top management or senior executive level (Bucho level or above).
- (iv) 'Don't know' group : Those who replied that they had not thought about the issue. This could either indicate a lack of interest in promotion or uncertainty about career future.

**Table 10.15 Promotion Expectations: 1984 and 1988 compared**

('If you continue to work in this company, up to which level do you expect to be promoted?')

	Male		Female	
	1984	1988	1984	1988
Low expectation	9.5%	7.9%	48.7%	40.1%
Moderate expectation	23.6	21.8	7.8	8.5
High expectation	38.3	44.4	2.9	5.1
Don't know	28.5	26.0	40.6	46.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
(N)	(326)	(216)	(549)	(461)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =2.09;df=3;p<0.7)		(X <sup>2</sup> =9.8;df=3;p<0.05)	

As shown in Table 10.15, the majority of men exhibit a high expectation in both 1984 and 1988, while the majority of women either have a low expectation or they gave a 'don't know' response. In the case of women, those with a low expectation has decreased by 8.6 percentage points and yet there was only an increase of 2 percentage points of those with a high expectation. More women in 1988 replied 'don't know'; an increase of 6 percentage points.

A breakdown of the responses by age cohorts (Table 10.16) shows that the shift in attitude over time is statistically significant at 0.5 per cent level among women aged under 24. The proportion of this group of young women with a low promotion expectation has dropped rather sharply from 50.8 per cent in 1984 down to 32 per cent in 1988. Those with a moderate or high expectation remained a small minority at both points of time. The most striking feature, as shown in the table, is the increase in the proportion of those with an 'uncertain' attitude, the figure rose from 42.9 per cent in 1984 to 61.6 per cent in 1988.

Table 10.17 shows the breakdown of women's responses by education groups. Chi square tests show that the shift in attitude over time in each group is not statistically significant. This is probably due to the fact that age is a more important factor than educational level. It should also be noted that female university graduates have been the main beneficiaries of Seibu's 'pro-women' policies since the mid-1970s and they already exhibit higher career aspirations and expectations than other groups of women in 1984. Therefore, one might not see an obvious shift in their attitudes over the period observed. However, the most crucial observation in Table 10.16 is that, contrary to our expectation, the proportion of female graduates with a high expectation has declined slightly over time, from 11.7 per cent in 1984 to 9.5 per cent in 1988, and those with 'uncertain' attitudes have increased by 10 percentage points. In comparison, male graduates with a high expectation has increased rather significantly over the same period observed, from 50 per cent in 1984 to 56.6 per cent in 1988 (note: male figures not shown in table).

**Table 10.16 Women's Promotion Expectations: 1984 and 1988 compared**  
(By Age Cohorts)

	<u>Aged under 24</u>		<u>Aged 25-29</u>	
	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>
Low expectation	50.8%	32.0%	52.3%	46.5%
Moderate expectation	4.2	3.9	5.2	6.4
High expectation	2.1	2.6	5.2	6.4
Don't know	42.9	61.6	39.9	41.2
<hr/> Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(240)	(149)	(153)	(143)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =14.04;df=3;p<0.005)		(X <sup>2</sup> =2.71;df=3;p<0.50)	

	<u>Aged 30-39</u>		<u>Aged 40 or above</u>	
	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>
Low expectation	48.6%	49.5%	22.7%	30.2%
Moderate expectation	12.6	12.4	25.0	17.4
High expectation	3.6	4.3	6.8	9.9
Don't know	35.1	33.7	45.4	42.5
<hr/> Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(111)	(99)	(44)	(69)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =0.11;df=3;p<0.995)		(X <sup>2</sup> =1.73;df=3;p<0.70)	

**Table 10.17 Women's Promotion Expectations: 1984 and 1988 compared**  
(By Level of Education)

	<u>High School</u>		<u>Junior College</u>		<u>University</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988	1984	1988
Low expectation	51.2%	42.4%	47.7%	38.7%	44.7%	36.2%
Moderate expectation	5.9	5.2	6.5	8.6	15.5	15.7
High expectation	0.7	2.4	0.7	5.5	11.7	9.5
Don't know	42.2	49.4	45.1	46.6	28.2	38.5
<hr/>						
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(289)	(215)	(153)	(153)	(103)	(95)
	(X <sup>2</sup> =7.19;df=3;p<0.1)		(X <sup>2</sup> =7.59;df=3;p<0.1)		(X <sup>2</sup> =2.71;df=3;p<0.50)	

On the whole, the findings support our prediction that equal opportunity policies should have a greater impact on the career expectations of younger women. However, this observation needs some qualification: What could be said is that young women, especially those aged under 24, appeared to be less pessimistic about their chances for promotion in 1988. Less of them expected to remain in a low position, yet there is no clear-cut evidence that their expectations for promotion to higher positions have increased over time. Instead, a great majority of them expressed an 'uncertain attitude'. The 'uncertain group' increased from 42.9 per cent in 1984 to 61.6 in 1988. The proportion of the 'uncertain group' among the graduates has also increased by 10

percentage points, from 28.2 per cent in 1984 to 38.5 per cent in 1988. The significant observation is that women who are most likely to 'benefit' from the company's equal opportunity policies appear to display a greater degree of 'uncertainty' about their career future than before. How do we explain this?

There are two possible explanations: the first relates to women's practical reaction to the 'new situation' and the second concerns the conflicts in values experienced by the Seibu women.

Firstly, women's increased ambivalence about their career future could be a reaction to the fact that core career jobs have become much more demanding, especially in terms of working hours. Our survey results show that both men and women worked much more overtime hours than they did in 1984. The increase was particularly remarkable among women graduates; in 1984 only 2 per cent said they worked more than 20 hours overtime per month, the proportion increased to 22 per cent in 1988. This was also confirmed by the author's interviews with a group of 'elite women' in 1987. Among the 21 women interviewed (they were initially interviewed in 1983), two-thirds of them worked more overtime hours than they did in 1983. Some younger women, especially those regarded by the company as 'high flyers', worked up to an average of 50 hours overtime per month. The majority of the women interviewed had more doubts about the possibility of combining work with having a family. In addition to the actual increased in career demands, the company's new policies of career tracking and adoption of more formal selection procedures also appear to have made women, especially the 'potential beneficiaries' of the new policies, more aware of the 'negative aspects' of upward mobility such as long working hours, showing 'loyalty' to the company and a commitment to the mobility requirement. Seibu introduced the career tracking system in 1986. Younger women who joined the company after 1986 were likely to be informed of the demands which company would make on them if they intended to select the 'mobile career track' (see chapter 9, section V-1). The selection and screening processes themselves might have had an impact on women's attitudes. Both our survey results and interviews

show that in comparison with the pre-EEO Law situation, women in 1988 perceived greater 'availability' of equal opportunities. At the same time, women are also more clearly informed of the terms and conditions required for equality. The increased degree of uncertainty among the young women and the graduates could reflect their reaction to the new situation. It is as if these women were saying 'Now that I can have it, I am not so sure I want it.' Could this reaction also explain why the career aspirations of the graduates - the 'target population' of Seibu's equal opportunity policies - have declined over time? Fewer graduate women said they wanted promotion to a higher position and more of them wanted to remain in the same position in 1988 (Table 10.14). The possibility of giving women access to better career opportunities also means that women are asked to make more clear-cut choices at the early stages of their careers in order to facilitate the company's training and manpower planning policies. The 'pressure of equality' is becoming more obvious to women in 1988 than in 1984.

There is another reason why women would appear to have become more ambivalent about their career future. This could be a manifestation of a greater degree of value conflict experienced by the Seibu women in the post-EEO Law era. And such conflict is likely to be greater among women who are more career conscious. The EEO Law is a symbolic representation of the value of sexual equality and the importance of women's role in employment. The introduction of the law might have in fact raised the career consciousness of women. The fact that the attitudes of the young women - the post-EEO Law generation (those aged under 24) - have shifted most significantly is a suggestive piece of evidence. However, the 'law effect' has not manifested clearly in a positive manner in terms of raising women's aspirations for promotion because it could have been mediated by the 'Seibu effect', that is, women's reaction to the 'real situation' at Seibu. The 'law effect' and the 'Seibu effect' might have generated inconsistent effects on women's attitudes and this can help to explain why the group of women who are most likely to be affected by both factors exhibit a high degree of 'uncertainty' about their career future. Another important point worthy of note: both the EEO Law and Seibu's policies have stressed giving women access to equal

opportunities without introducing positive measures to ease women's career constraints. Seibu women might have felt easier to leave employment before when they were confronted with the conflicting demands. However, the value of 'equality' as a desirable goal has put more Seibu women in the dilemma of choosing between 'either work or family'. Hence, more of them displayed a greater degree of 'uncertainty' in 1988.

### 3. Attitudes to Career Continuity

The author's re-interview of the 21 'elite women' in 1987 showed that more than half of them, appeared to have changed their minds about their intention to combine work with family and had become rather 'pessimistic' about the possibility of pursuing a continuous career:

'It would be very difficult to continue working here if I get married. Working hours are too long and it is just physically not possible to combine both.' (43-year-old, senior manager (bucho), single)

'It is becoming very difficult.... I wish I had more time with my family . The amount of work is too much. I simply do not have time for myself....' (33-year-old, in staff function, who was married and had one child)

'I have no confidence in combining both work and family. If I consider getting married one day, it will be very difficult for me to decide what to do.' (33-year-old, in first-line supervisory position, single)

A comparison of the results of the survey in 1988 with that of 1984 shows that the proportion of women who desired to pursue a continuous career had declined over time, from 16 per cent in 1984 to 12 per cent in 1988 (Table 10.18). An increasing number of women would prefer to seek a compromise by adopting a two-phase work profile, that is, retire from their job to raise children and re-enter the job market at a later stage in their life.

The decline in the proportion of those who desire to pursue a continuous career was most significant among women in their 30s, a drop from 26.6 per cent in 1984 to 13.6 per cent in 1988. This was correlated with the fact that many of the women in their 30s were already married and were probably more aware of the practical difficulties of combining employment with family responsibilities. Table 10.19 shows the change in attitudes of single and married women at two points of time. For single women, there is no evidence that more of them would want to pursue a continuous career, the majority of them either intend to adopt a two-phase work profile or were 'uncertain'. The attitudes of married women (only those without children were asked to respond to the question), however, showed a dramatic shift over time. In 1984, 38.2 per cent of them said they intended to pursue a continuous career, this figure dropped by half to 19.1 per cent in 1988.

Seibu management might have allowed more women to compete with their male colleagues on an equal basis, but the intensive demand of the core career jobs, the practice of long working hours as a sign of commitment and the lack of policy measures to ease women's career constraints mean that such opportunities are seen as irrelevant by the majority of the women. There is some evidence suggesting that women are actually refusing the offer of senior jobs. It was mentioned to the author by a senior personnel manager at the head office that the company had made several attempts to assign women to senior positions in the personnel department but they encountered great difficulties in persuading women to take up the posts offered. This issue was also discussed during the author's interviews with the women employees. One woman confirmed that she was offered the post of personnel manager (jinji-kacho) but eventually decided to turn it down because 'it was not the kind of job she had wanted'. Another woman pointed out that the company appeared to be more willing to appoint women to senior management positions than it was three or four years ago but such efforts often turned out to be futile because women appointed to management positions tended to resign afterwards. There is a lack of company-wide data to verify the extent of this phenomenon. If the incidents mentioned were representative, then it further confirmed our argument that the 'equal opportunity



efforts' made by Seibu management might not have much effects on women's position.

**Table 10.18 Women's Attitudes to Career Continuity: 1984 and 1988 compared**

('Do you intend to continue working after child-birth?')

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>
Continue working	15.7%	12.3%
Quit and re-enter	27.1	35.1
Retire permanently	24.6	17.5
Haven't considered	25.9	28.5
Others		6.7 6.7
<hr/> Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(536)	(393)

( $\chi^2=12.49$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p<0.05$ )

**Table 10.19 Women's Attitude to Career Continuity: 1984 and 1988 compared**

(By Marital Status)

	<u>Single</u>		<u>Married</u>	
	1984	1988	1984	1988
Continue working	11.9%	11.3%	38.2%	19.1%
Quit and re-enter	27.2	35.2	30.9	39.4
Retire permanently	27.8	19.7	7.4	7.2
Havent considered	27.4	29.3	16.2	21.5
Others	5.7	4.5	7.4	12.8
<hr/> Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(453)	(329)	(68)	(52)

( $\chi^2=9.71$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p<0.05$ )

( $\chi^2=6.16$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p<0.20$ )

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has presented a case study of organisational change in a situation where one could have expected the greatest changes towards greater sexual equality; for many social and economic reasons and especially after the introduction of the EEO Law. Nevertheless, the study shows that change towards equal opportunities for women has been very limited.

Over the period observed, there has been a small increase in the number of women appointed to specialist or managerial jobs, but numerically much more important has been the increase in the number of women in contract employment, being segregated into inferior employment status and treated as a distinct sub-group of 'second class' employees with virtually no prospect for career advancement. It can be argued that the overall position of women was worse in 1988 as compared to that of 1984. Seibu's increased utilisation of women as non-regular contract employees in bottom-level sales and clerical support jobs appears to have swamped the company's previous policy attempts to promote the status of women in the company.

There is little evidence that overall discrimination against women in grade promotion has been reduced. Despite a small increase in the numbers of women in senior grades, their relative share was as negligible in 1988 as it was in 1984. Management positions remained predominantly a male bastion.

The study also examined whether the equality debates and the EEO Law have raised Seibu women's career consciousness, especially among the younger women and the graduates, who are most likely to be affected by the law and benefit from the company's policy changes. The results indicate a rather complex situation. The overall results show little evidence of positive change in terms of more women wanting promotion to senior positions. Contrary to our expectation, the aspirations of the graduates have declined over time. In terms of women's expectations for promotion, there have been some significant shifts, especially among

the younger women. This suggests that the law might have had an impact on their expectations. There was a significant decline in the proportion of women aged under 24 who expected to remain in a low position. Above all, the most striking finding is that a much greater proportion of the young women and the graduates displayed an 'uncertain' attitude regarding their career future. The tendency towards greater 'uncertainty' can be observed across the whole female sample, but most striking among the groups of women who are most likely to have been affected by the law and Seibu's new policies. The results show that it is necessary to distinguish the general 'consciousness raising effect' of the law from the specific 'Seibu policy effect' on the attitudes of women. It appears that any positive consciousness raising effect that the law might have had on women was being mediated by their actual experience at Seibu. The equal opportunity policies adopted by Seibu, although appearing to offer women greater access to core career jobs, have made women more aware of the 'price of equality' and put them under greater pressure to make their career choices through formal screening at the early stages of their careers. The 'new situation' has put those women who might have wanted equal opportunities in a greater dilemma than before. The conflict between the new value of equal opportunity as symbolised by the EEO Law and the traditional familial ideology has become more apparent. This explains why women who are most likely to have been affected by the law and benefit from Seibu's policies have become more ambivalent and uncertain about their career future.

In the long-run, it is more likely that Seibu women are going to make a pragmatic choice. Fewer women in 1988 intended to pursue a continuous career without interruption and more of them, especially the married women, would prefer to retire from work when they have children. The intensive demands on employees in career jobs to work extra long hours - much more so than in 1984 - and the requirement to make a commitment to relocation for those who intend to pursue the main stream career route has driven a growing number of Seibu women to become more 'home-oriented' in 1988. The majority of the women interviewed by the author in the summer of 1987 pointed out that if equal opportunity

meant that they had to forego having a family and work like their male colleagues, they would rather seek a compromise by adopting a 'two-phase work profile'. For the majority of Seibu women, this is probably a pragmatic choice in a system which does not allow career jobs to be compatible with family life and in a society which expects women to take up sole responsibilities for raising children.

Any attempt to improve the position of women in an organisation raises a wide variety of issues many of which extend far beyond the organisation. Equal opportunities for women necessitate structural and attitudinal changes at the organisational and societal level which may take many decades to achieve. This case study, however, seems to indicate that if the present trends continue, it is unlikely that there will be a major shift towards a brighter prospect of equal opportunities for Seibu women, and indeed, for women employed elsewhere.

One final question one might raise : why Seibu management, which has for a long time stressed the crucial role of women for the successful operation of the business and has capitalised on the company's 'pro-women' corporate image, has failed to make more use of the talents of their female workforce? Equal opportunities for women are not marginal issues at the company. Seibu management has made 'further efforts' since the introduction of the EEO Law in an attempt to select and promote more able women to senior positions. Seibu management was well aware of the difficulties the company might encounter in retaining some of their talented women in the long-run. When the author visited the company in the summer of 1989, a senior personnel manager at the head office pointed out that the company had reached a 'deadlock' in their equal opportunities policies. He made the remark that the present career system was fundamentally 'male-oriented' and that the current situation presented a great dilemma for the company's personnel management policies.

The nature of the dilemma is that in order to attract and retain more able women in responsible jobs, the company would need to change the promotion rules and the work practices governing the core career jobs,

for example, allowing for greater flexibility in career planning, enabling women to retain their seniority after a period of career break, reducing the intensity of work and allowing for the mobility rules to be applied in more flexible ways. However, altering these rules too radically would have two 'undesirable' organisational consequences for management. Firstly, offering women true equal opportunities would imply redistribution of the promotion chances between men and women. This would disrupt the job security and *nenko* promotion expectations of the male employees which are part of the long-standing implicit understanding between Seibu management and the male employees. This long-standing customary expectation has been the major force generating high commitment, high output effort and willingness to cooperate in furthering the aims of the company. The benefits the company derives from these long-standing practices are considerable and it is not at all clear that Seibu management is willing to give them up. As long as 'good employers' in the Japanese enterprise community are still expected to be able to offer long-term job security and stable career progression for their (male) regular employees, giving up the benefits of the traditional system too rapidly might jeopardise the status of Seibu in the enterprise community and their ability to attract good quality male graduates. Moreover, as pointed out by Doeringer and Piore (1971, p.161), seniority and promotion arrangements are customary in nature, their complete elimination may require changes in custom itself. Seibu management's desire to protect the stability of the core career jobs imposes a severe constraint on the company's willingness to alter the promotion rules and work practices too drastically.

Secondly, introducing fundamental changes in the career rules to allow more women to retain their seniority and career continuity would not only imply an absolute increase in labour costs but would also lead to an expansion of the number of employees under the guarantee of lifetime employment with its associated career expectations. The guarantee of lifetime employment under the *nenko*-based career progression system is extremely costly and rigid. The 'core' system can only be maintained if there is a large number of low cost 'peripheral' workers to provide the necessary flexibility. Seibu is faced with a fundamental dilemma of

how to get some 'good' women ('noryoku to iyoku aru josei', meaning women with the 'right ability and motivation') into top jobs without raising the career expectations of all women, and more importantly, how to make the dualistic character of the employment structure continue to be acceptable to the majority of women, amid the growing pressures for equal opportunities. Seibu management has adopted two strategies to cope with the dilemma. The first strategy is through career tracking, using the mobility requirement as a main criterion. The differential treatment accorded to the selected 'elite women' is therefore justified by the fact that they can conform to the 'male career rules'. A second long-term strategy adopted by Seibu is through segmentation by employment status. The contract employee system serves the objectives of cost reduction, enhancing manpower flexibility and at the same time helping to 'dilute' the potential destabilising effects of equal opportunity pressures. In the 1980s, the increased pressures for greater equality for women has pushed Seibu to adopt more cautious policies in maintaining a delicate balance between the need to give some selected women equal opportunities and at the same time ensuring that the long-standing employment practices governing the internal career jobs will not be disrupted.

The present manpower strategies might not help Seibu management to resolve their dilemma in the long-run. The fact that some women are turning down promotion and that more of them appear to have become more 'home-oriented' is an indication that Seibu might be failing to attract and retain enough 'good' women. The new strategy of segregating a large number of women into 'dead end' contract sales jobs is potentially unstable. Seibu management has begun to show concern about the low morale of the contract sales workforce and the decline in the quality of service - an important factor in maintaining the competitiveness of the department stores. A potentially more explosive element is that the contract sales employees are mixed together with the regular full-time workforce. The differences in their treatment are immediately obvious. Several women supervisors interviewed by the author pointed out the increasing difficulties in managing the 'emotional conflicts' between the regular and the contract female employees. In the long-run, Seibu

management might find it difficult to justify to the majority of women why some women are treated better than other women. In the past, segmentation of the workforce at Seibu was justified by the sex role distinction that 'men should manage and women should sell'. Such clear-cut sexual division of labour has become blurred in recent years. The new policy at Seibu is that 'men and some talented women should manage and the majority of women should sell'. This new segmentation strategy is potentially unstable. The disruption in the clear-cut sexual divisions of labour might begin to generate its own dynamics of instability.

Whether Seibu management will be pushed to institute more fundamental changes in the sexually discriminatory employment practices in order to attract and retain more 'good' women and to avoid the demoralisation of the female sales workforce is a question which cannot be predicted purely from the viewpoint of 'efficiency needs'. One crucial insight to be gained from Doeringer and Piore's internal labour market analysis is the observation that internal labour market rules and customs tend to persevere in the face of contrary economic pressure: that institutional survival is not dependent upon the logic of economic efficiency alone and that custom has influence upon management decisions as well as being a constraint (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, pp.24).

The Seibu case nevertheless illustrates that the continued stability and persistence of the internal labour market rules in their present forms cannot be taken for granted. The nature and dynamism of internal labour market rules need to be interpreted in the wider context of social and power relationships between the 'privileged' and the 'exploited'. The special type of internal labour markets in Japan have traditionally operated on the basis of hierarchical sexual divisions and cultural repression of women. The social conditions of women have provided 'resources' for Japanese management in their development of labour market segmentation strategies. If these social conditions shift, management might be forced to adopt a different strategy of workforce segmentation. The continued persistence of the special type of internal labour markets in Japan is therefore partly dependent upon

the social condition that the majority of the Japanese women will continue to accept a 'male dominated' system.

Very little has been said in this case study about the role of the labour union. This omission is justified by the fact that the Seibu enterprise-based union simply defends and expresses the interests of the core workforce. Despite the fact that department stores are 'women's industry', less than one in ten union officials are women and all branch leaders are men. The union leadership is as male-dominated as the top management team.



## CHAPTER 11

### EQUAL EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN IN THE JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM: LIMITATIONS AND OBSTACLES

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The empirical evidence presented and discussed in the previous chapters indicates that neither market pressures nor the EEO Law have caused Japanese companies to introduce fundamental reforms in their employment and personnel management systems. Nevertheless, there have been changes in company policies on women. Our analysis shows that major companies, especially those which traditionally employ a high proportion of women, have taken steps to modify their recruitment and promotion policies by opening up the main stream career jobs to a select few of highly qualified women since the late 1970s. By the mid-1980s, especially after the introduction of the EEO law in 1985, the majority of companies had removed the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women.

The crucial question asked in this thesis is how far these policy changes have removed the structural sources of inequality between the sexes and the extent to which these policy adaptations have resulted in a fundamental shift in the nature of the Japanese employment system.

Both the macro-level analysis of company responses to the EEO Law and our detailed case study at Seibu show that none of the policy adaptations have sought, in any way, to change the nature of the rules governing job assignment, promotion and the career structure in the core employment systems. The model of change adopted by the companies is based on the premise that only those women with the 'right ability and motivation' (noryoku to iyoku aru josei) - meaning those who can conform to the existing organisational rules and practices like their male counterparts - will be granted equal opportunities. The 'two-track employment system', beginning to be widely adopted by an

increasing number of companies in recent years, typifies the superficiality of the companies' responses to the demands for equal opportunities.

Parallel with the above trend is the increased pursuit of labour flexibility and the systematic utilisation of women as part-time and contract workers on a mass scale. This diminishes the career chances for an increasing number of women faster than the present EEO law could ever help to improve them.

Why has there been so little improvement in the provisions of equal opportunities for women? This chapter examines the conservative forces within the employment system and the broader state policy context which constitutes a powerful mechanism to maintain the status quo.

## **II. MANAGEMENT'S CONTINUED ATTACHMENT TO THE JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM**

### **1. Preserving 'Lifetime' Employment**

The extent to which major firms are willing to open up core career jobs to women and offer them equal promotion chances depends greatly on the extent to which central importance is given to the traditional practices of lifetime commitment and seniority-based wage and promotion system (nenko system). These two distinctive employment features, which constitute the cornerstone of Japanese personnel management, not only create tremendous practical barriers to women's entry into the core career jobs but are often used by management as rationales to justify companies' unequal treatment of women from the viewpoint of economic efficiency. How far and how fast are these traditional practices losing their central importance in the employment system?

Despite much speculation about the inevitable dissolution of these long-standing practices, recent statistical evidence shows the opposite (MOL, 1987a). A recent report published by the OECD suggests that, far from disappearing, the lifetime commitment practice retains its

centrality and that there are signs that it is diffusing down the firm size hierarchy (Dore, Bounine-Cabale and Tapiola, 1989). Some of the crucial evidence cited in the MOL survey and the OECD Report are:

- The strengthening of the lifetime employment practice is indicated by the fact that there has been an increase in the proportion of 'standard' workers over time (referring to those who were hired immediately after graduating and have worked continuously for the same enterprise). The proportion of standard male workers in the age group 30-34 has increased from 73.6 per cent in 1970 to 75.7 per cent in 1975 and to 77.9 per cent in 1984; for female workers in the same age group; the corresponding figures are : 44.7 per cent, 51.2 per cent and 58.5 per cent (MOL, 1987, p.16).

- The above observation is supported by concomitant figures showing a clear decline in the proportion of 'non-standard' mid-career recruits. Workers between the age of 30-34 who have less than 5 years of service may be deemed as 'deviants' from the standard lifetime recruitment from school or university - likewise for 35-39 year olds with less than 10 years of service and so on. For example, the proportion of 'non-standard' mid-career recruits in the age group 30-34 in firms with 1000 plus employees has declined from 14 per cent in 1961 to 11 per cent in 1975 and further down to 8 per cent in 1984. Likewise, those in firms with 10-99 employees have also declined from 52 per cent to 41 per cent and further down to 38 per cent in the respective years. Similar trends can be observed for other age groups (Dore et al, 1989, p.57).

There is less clear-cut evidence, however, as to how far the nenko system is crumbling under the labour cost pressure exerted by demographic changes. The general indication is that it is being modified, i.e. the relative importance of nenko as a criterion for determining wage increase and promotion has declined, especially for white-collar workers but it still retains considerable influence (Hazama, 1989, p.206-8).

In the area of promotion, management have stressed the need to move towards a system which is based on individual merit and competition. There is, however, little evidence showing that this is happening in practice. More emphasis on competition and merit appointments should lead to a gradually increased dispersion in the ages of those occupying managerial ranks/posts. The trend is quite in the opposite direction. In 1976, 32 per cent of Sub-Section Chiefs (Kakaricho) were in the modal age group 35-39, and 32 per cent were younger. In 1984 approximately the same 33 per cent were in the same modal age group, but only 20 per cent were younger. At the top end, the 1976 figures for Department Chiefs (Bucho) were 34 per cent aged 45-49 and 25 per cent younger; eight years later, 37 per cent were in the former age group and only 15 per cent were younger (Dore, et al, 1989, p.64).

Some subtle changes in personnel practices may not be easily captured by statistical indicators. If there have been moves to de-emphasise the importance of lifetime commitment among the core employees, these are only going at a very slow pace. The dominant opinion among the enterprise community is that companies should make their best efforts to create sources of flexibility out of the seemingly rigid lifetime employment, such as expanding the sphere of employee loyalty and identity to the whole enterprise group so that excess manpower in one enterprise can be transferred or dispatched to another when necessary, buying in more specialist services in areas where technology is changing fast and increasing the utilisation of contract and part-time workers to extend the margin of greater employment flexibility. The fundamental orientation is that long term employment should be maintained for the core employees because this is believed to be the source of viability of the Japanese economy. Recent surveys on companies' personnel policies show that the desire and incentive to maintain their core employees' lifetime commitment is still strong. Over 80 per cent of the firms indicated an intention to maintain a guarantee of lifetime employment for their regular employees in the future. Although the framework of lifetime employment guarantee is to be modified, it might not necessarily mean lifetime employment within the same enterprise: over 90 per cent of the firms would want to guarantee lifetime employment at

least within the same enterprise group (Hazama, 1989, p.205). As regards main preoccupations of personnel policies, 87 per cent of the firms replied that the main emphasis would be on training and manpower development (Inagami,1989, p.8). This increasing emphasis on training investment by the companies will serve to increase their incentive to maintain the long-term commitment of their employees.

In a period of rapid economic and social change, Japanese employers are careful not to cause too great disruption to the traditional personnel practices which are seen as the source of high commitment and high productivity. A recent report published by the Japan Productivity Centre stresses the importance of re-vitalising the lifetime employment practice:

'There are widespread opinions that the practice of lifetime employment needs to be modified in response to structural changes in the economy. Measures such as increasing mid-career recruitment, transferring or dispatching excess manpower are carried out in certain sectors of the economy or some departments of companies. These employment adjustment measures are necessary in order to maintain managerial efficiency. However, it is extremely important that the fundamental nature of lifetime employment is to be maintained. Career formation through long-term training and development under the guarantee of lifetime employment is a system which has many merits for the society, the economy, industrial relations and the management system. The merits of this system will continue to outweigh by far the de-merits in the future. The framework and the form of lifetime employment may need to be modified but it is desirable that the nature of lifetime employment relationship should be preserved' (JPC, 1987, p.9).

Strategies adopted by major companies to preserve the benefits of lifetime employment for their core employees include restricting the number of those who are under such guarantee, increasing the utilisation of temporary, part-time, and contract workers and ensuring that the top elite posts are reserved for those who are seen as 'committed' workers (presumably mainly men) through various forms of career tracking at an early stage. Unless women are prepared to commit themselves to work continuously without interruption, their chances of gaining core career jobs are going to be extremely limited. To force women to work like men

under the lifetime employment system, according to a JPC report, will only cause many social dysfunctions:

'The practice of lifetime employment was originally formed in the large enterprises applying to the core male employees. It will create serious trouble if the practice is applied to women. In general, women are not geared to the practice of lifetime employment. To force women to comply to the requirements of long-term continuous employment and frequent mobility involving geographical movement will cause many practical difficulties for women and is socially dysfunctional' (JPC, 1985, p.77).

The fear that equal employment for women will upset the flexibility of the employment system and cause disruption to the social infrastructure which supports the system is deeply entrenched in Japanese management thinking.

## **2. The Increased Utilisation of Women as Non-Regular Workers**

While the majority of women continue to be excluded from the framework of 'lifetime' employment, their role as non-regular workers, including those employed as part-time, arbeit and contract workers, is becoming increasingly important in the 1980s. The proportion of women employees classified as non-regular workers increased from 26 per cent in 1980 to 32 per cent in 1985. Over that period, the total number of women employed in the non-agricultural sector increased by 1.1 million, non-regular employees contributing 99 per cent of the increase. The proportion of male non-regular workers showed only a slight increase from 6 per cent to 7 per cent during the same period (Somucho, 1981 and 1985).

The system of restricting core career jobs largely to men and utilising the majority of women as a flexible non-regular workforce has served the Japanese economy well. Management will continue to restrict the employment of the majority of women as non-regular workers and are not prepared to adopt active policies which will enhance women's career continuity. Even a 'leading edge' company like Seibu does not have a

childcare leave system at present (1990). The so-called re-entry scheme which was introduced in 1978 did not commit the company to re-employ the returnees in full-time regular jobs. Many companies use the re-employment scheme as a measure to maintain a large number of women, who retire from work for family reasons, as a pool of potential returnees and re-employ them as non-regular workers when the need arises. Re-employment scheme which guarantees an offer of re-employment at the same grade or employment status is almost non-existent in Japan.

Another reason why companies are not prepared to employ too many women as regular employees is the fear that it might intensify competition for the increasingly scarce managerial or specialist positions in the internal career hierarchy in the face of an ageing workforce. A report submitted to the Ministry of Labour by the Committee looking at personnel management policies in the ageing society made the following remark:

'The introduction of the EEO Law might have raised the career aspirations of women, but under the present nenko-based personnel system, increasing the number of posts for women means cutting the posts for men. The majority of the companies have very little intention in improving their treatment of women workers' (MOL, 1988, p.9).

### **3. Utilisation and Cooptation of 'Elite Women'**

To say that Japanese companies have not adopted active policies to ease women's career constraints, is not to say that there are no economic benefits to be gained by offering some women better job opportunities. A company like Seibu genuinely needs to have more women in 'top jobs' because of the nature of its business. Given the impending problem of skills shortages, Japanese companies cannot afford to waste the talents and potential of a growing number of highly educated women. The growing purchasing power of Japanese women and their dominance in the consumer market is another reason why companies cannot completely ignore the interests and demands of women both as

employees and as customers. Many companies in the service sector such as retailing, banking and insurance and even manufacturers of consumer electronics recognise that 'the customer matters' and are aware of the need to use more women staff who could create the understanding and the link with their customers. Moreover, in an age of intense market competition, even using the theme of 'equal opportunity' as a public relations exercise might prove to be beneficial in promoting corporate image. Labour market changes and commercial needs have exerted powerful pressures on Japanese companies to provide better job prospects and employment conditions for some women. The EEO Law has added extra impetus for change.

Nevertheless, it cannot be taken for granted that the way companies choose to respond to these pressures will be good for the promotion of true equal opportunities for women in the long run. Our analysis of the responses of the major companies to these pressure cautions against too high expectations.

Companies which are concerned about the 'women's issue' either due to the nature of their business or out of concern for portraying a 'progressive' corporate image prefer to talk about policies for better 'utilisation' of women rather than using the term 'equal opportunity'. The former has a much broader and more flexible policy connotation but does not necessarily involve comparing women with men. Popular 'women utilisation programmes' adopted by major firms include creation of women only project teams in areas of consumer product design or marketing; and creation of specialist work roles for women in areas which are deemed as best for utilising their feminine qualities such as sales and customer services (see, chapter 5). Moreover, most of these 'women utilisation programmes' are restricted to graduates rather than applying as general policies for all the female employees. This type of policy clearly has several advantages from the viewpoint of management interests. It enables the company to utilise the best female talents to enhance product or market competitiveness in areas where female consumers dominate. By restricting the utilisation of women to 'women-specific' areas as defined in the traditional way, it ensures that the



basic pattern of sexual division of labour is undisturbed, and by creating specialist work roles for women it makes ways for some aggressive women to take up more responsible jobs yet minimises the challenge to the established male career hierarchy. Also by targeting their new policies on the graduates, it helps to absorb the pressures for equal opportunity which is most likely to come from this group of women.

In sum, one can say that market pressures and commercial considerations are triggering many changes in Japanese companies' utilisation policies on women, but these have not affected directly the nature of employment relationships, nor have they challenged the pattern of job segregation which underlies women's disadvantaged position in the labour market. A small number of 'elite' women might have benefited from the changes, but on the whole the great expansion of women's employment has been in low paid non-regular jobs. Our case study at Seibu clearly indicates the limits of management-initiated change programmes, and the persisting tensions between the need for flexible labour in order to maintain the viability of the core employment system and the full utilisation of women's labour potential on an egalitarian basis. The growing pursuit of greater flexibility in manpower planning and reduction of labour costs at Seibu since the mid-1980s led to a systematic policy of utilisation of women as a form of cheap contract first-line sales on a mass scale. In 1988, over half of women working at Seibu were non-regular contract workers with no prospect for career advancement. This has in effect almost completely reversed the company's previous attempt to improve the status of women in sales jobs. Japanese management's continued attachment to the 'traditional' employment practices and the increased pursuit of manpower flexibility cautions too high expectation of management-initiated change programmes in bringing about equal employment for women.

Has the EEO Law made any difference to the above situation? The present legislation can be said to be quite 'effective' with regard to achieving its objectives. It has made 'bad practice' companies reduce

the most blatant forms of direct discrimination against women and has induced 'good practice' employers like Seibu to take more positive steps in giving women formal choice and possibility of access to enter core career jobs. However, the effects of these policies on women's position and status appear to be minimal. The model of equal opportunity as enshrined in the law accepts the persistence of the structural and institutional factors which contribute to women's unequal position. The review of the overall responses of companies and the Seibu case study reveals the inadequacies of the 'equal treatment approach' and the major loopholes in the legislation. The way 'equal opportunity' is being defined has permitted companies to create more part-time and contract jobs for women and segregate them into inferior employment status which automatically justifies unequal treatment. The present legislation has not undermined the mechanisms which perpetuate sexual job segregation in the employment system. On the contrary, it has helped to preserve the core employment system even better and ensures that core career jobs will only be offered to those who can satisfy the requirements imposed by the companies.

### **III. THE STATE POLICY CONTEXT**

It appears that any beneficial effects the present legislation might have on a small minority of 'elite women' will in the long-run be swamped by other opposing forces which are working against equal opportunities for women. The broader context of state policies on women workers has not been pushing towards the direction of sexual equality.

The continuing marginalised position of the majority of women workers in the Japanese labour market is more than just the natural outcome of market forces. The overall political-economic perspectives underlying the form of policy adopted by the Japanese government towards women workers have helped to reinforce their marginal role in employment. The main orientation of government policies on women workers since the mid-1960s has been the emphasis on the importance of their role as part-time or temporary workers. This policy has been consistently developed

and evolved in line with the needs of the economy since the mid-1960s up until the present day.

It was during the labour shortage beginning in the mid-1960s that women, along with the aged, were mentioned as a secondary labour force available to fill any shortages (EPA, 1971). Part-time employment for women was encouraged and recognised by the government as a form of employment which suits the specificity of women's conditions (MOL, 1964). The Working Women's Welfare Law was enacted in 1972 as part of the government's attempts to encourage more married women to enter the labour market as additional labour to cope with severe labour shortages (see, chapter 6 section I-4).

In the 1980s, the government re-activated and re-asserted its policy of reinforcing and consolidating the role of part-time and temporary workers in the Japanese economy. This time, it was a response not so much to labour shortage, but more to the need to enhance the flexibility of the labour market because of the need for rapid adjustment to structural shifts in the economy and technological changes.

The Employee Dispatching Business Law, which recognises the legitimacy of temporary workers dispatching agencies previously prohibited under the provisions of the Employment Security Law, was introduced in June 1985.<sup>1</sup> This together with the recent policy proposals on part-time workers attempting to consolidate the formation of what the employers' called an 'intermediate labour market, represent the latest policy measures introduced by the government to provide a legal and administrative infrastructure to support the employers' increased pursuit of manpower flexibility (MOL, 1987c)<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the continuing deterioration of the working conditions of the part-time and temporary workers in recent years, neither the Employee Dispatching Business Law nor the new policy proposals on part-time workers include active measures for the protection of their working conditions. The issue of 'harmonisation' of the working conditions

between the regular and the non-regular employees is not on the government's policy agenda (Ouwaki, 1989; Nakajima, 1989).

The Employee Dispatching Business Law and the proposed policies on part-time workers complement the EEO Law. The EEO Law does not so obviously apply to non-regular workers. It has allowed a loophole for employers to earmark jobs for women only. The present new policies in consolidating the position of part-time and temporary workers will serve to reinforce employers segregation and segmentation policy. The proportion of women workers who are outside the scope of the EEO Law has expanded rapidly in recent years and will continue to expand.

The underlying ideology of government policies on women workers has always emphasised 'harmonisation of work and family' rather than questioning the prevailing assumption that a woman's primary role is that of housewife and mother. Under the government's recent 'administrative reform', child care budget was severely cut (JFWA, 1981, pp.161-4; Hiroki, 1988).<sup>3</sup> The number of public child care facilities has declined since the mid-1980s. In the face of an impending ageing society, the government has put forward a 'Japanese-style welfare policy' which encourages 'self help' and emphasises the importance of the traditional family foundation in supporting the aged (Takenaka, 1983, pp.240-2; Hayashi, 1986, pp.22-3). The traditional family ideology and the importance of the role of women as housewife and carer was recently re-asserted in a government document entitled 'Perfecting the Foundation of the Family'. It put forward a priority policy to establish a new national holiday called 'Family Day' to acknowledge the housework and child care performed by housewives. Further, recent reforms in taxation policy introduce extra tax benefits for women who are full-time housewives and those working part-time.<sup>4</sup> All these policies serve to endorse the traditional family ideology and constitute one of the greatest constraints inhibiting women's full integration in the labour market.

Sexual division of labour in the domestic sphere has a profound impact on women's work attitudes and their labour supply pattern. This would

seem in part to explain why the EEO Law does not appear to have raised women's 'career consciousness'. In 1979, 20 per cent of Japanese women desired to pursue a continuous career even after marriage or childbirth. The figure dropped to 16 per cent in 1987 (PMO, 1979 & 1987). The author's interviews and survey results at Seibu also reflect this trend (see chapter 10, Table 10.18). This is not so much that Japanese women have become more 'conservative', as often pointed out by the Japanese mass media lately, but more because the equality debate and the EEO Law has made women more aware of the practical constraints they are likely to encounter if they want to pursue a continuous career pattern similar to men. More women have chosen to adopt a pragmatic strategy, making a compromise between family and work. The proportion of women who prefer to adopt a two-phase work profile, retire from work when they have families and re-enter the labour market when their children have grown up, has increased from 39 per cent in 1979 to 52 per cent in 1987 (Ibid). This implies that the 'M-shaped curve' of women's labour force participation pattern will not change.

Employers will continue to design their labour force strategy by taking into account women's labour supply pattern, utilising them as a cheap workforce when they are young and employing them as part-time or temporary workers when they are middle-aged.

Social conservatism and 'market rationality' are the dominant forces shaping government policies on women. The national aggressive pursuit of economic growth since the mid-1950s, and the supposed virtues of the traditional familial ideology which defines the primary role of women as housewives and mothers in the family have shaped the form and direction of state policies on women workers. The government, by adopting a labour policy which helps to consolidate the formation of a secondary labour market on the one hand, and by re-asserting the familial ideology which defines a woman's primary role as housewife, mother and carer for the aged in its recent family and welfare policies, on the other, is significantly responsible for the meagre improvement of the situation of women workers.

#### IV. WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS: AN OBSTACLE TO CHANGE?

Our study at Seibu shows little evidence that women have become more career conscious and were prepared to demand better career opportunities. Does this indicate that equal opportunities are not desired by the majority of Japanese women? Or is it because there is a lack of awareness of the need for change?

Opponents of equal opportunities for women in Japan often used the following observations to argue against the introduction of more drastic policy changes: (1) That improved career opportunities do not always seem attractive to women and (2) that Japanese women themselves endorse the sex role ideology and that their psychological identity with the traditional feminine role renders external action ineffective. These observations are not entirely inaccurate but they cannot necessarily be used as a guide for policy.

What deserves more consideration is why the majority of Japanese women are not prepared to accept the type of 'equal opportunities' offered by their employers. Under the present employment system, women who desire equal opportunities are asked to accept and conform to the male 'working norm' which requires them to accept the mobility requirements in a very rigid way, to work excessive over-time as a sign of commitment to the company and to ensure that the occupational sphere remains aloof from the domestic sphere. All these practical constraints have made any expectation for career advancement unrealistic for the majority of women. Government surveys on Japanese women's attitudes often confirm the view that women themselves appear to continue to endorse their familial roles.<sup>5</sup> However, many women may conform to the traditional role expectations not because they believe this to be right but rather because there seems no worthwhile alternative.

Nevertheless, it is true that compared to their counterparts in western countries, Japanese women have been slow in developing their equality consciousness for their equal rights. Experience in the United States and the United Kingdom suggests that government active

intervention in the provision of equal opportunities policies for women was largely a result of political campaign and lobbying by women's pressure groups (Meehan, 1985). In Japan, women's pressure groups have not consolidated as a major social force to exert pressures on the government to intervene more actively in equal opportunity issues. The women's voice was almost unheard in the process of drafting the EEO Law. Two factors might have contributed to this. Firstly, from the historical point of view, Japanese women's liberation from the bondage of the feudal society came after World War II, a result of democratisation policies introduced by a foreign power (see, chapter 2). One can therefore say that the original impetus for change did not come from grass-roots social forces inside Japan. Second, the extreme degree of 'sex role specialisation' in Japanese society and the structural embeddedness of sex roles means that Japanese women are more rigidly bound by the social norms and structures than their counterparts in the more individualistic western societies (Lebra 1984, p.301).

Until very recently, Japanese women have rarely expressed their discontent in the form of public protest. This apparent 'lack of demand' for change should not be taken as an indication that Japanese women are 'contented' with their lot and that changes are not desired by them. Our study at Seibu shows that the recent equality debates and the EEO Law have had an impact on the attitudes of the younger generation. The growing uncertainty and the greater ambivalence of the younger women towards their career future is a sign of change. The perceived tension between the value of sexual equality, as symbolised by the EEO Law, and the familial ideology which continues to demand women to conform to the traditional housewife role may in the long-run generate greater discontent among the younger generation which believes that the new legislation is gradually opening up more career opportunities for them. In the past, women who were discontented with their treatment in the occupational sphere tended to 'retreat' into the family where the 'housewife role' could guarantee some compensatory fulfilment. However, the social picture has been changing fast and there are signs that even the 'housewife role fulfilment' for Japanese women is crumbling rapidly as a result of externalisation of many traditional family functions

(Meguro, 1980; Lebra, 1984). More Japanese women are seeking fulfilment outside the domestic sphere and the continual exclusion of them from the occupational sphere may lead to growing discontent, especially among the highly-educated women and the younger generation.

Recent developments in the Japanese political scene certainly indicate that Japanese women are becoming more politically conscious and they have in fact used the electoral weapon to show the extent of their discontent with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (see, next chapter). There are signs that the discontent of Japanese women will become more manifest in the years to come.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

This thesis has presented a detailed study of how major Japanese companies have adapted their employment policies and practices in response to the growing pressures for more egalitarian treatment of women. It evaluates the effects of the policy changes on the position of women in the companies. The analysis indicates that the policy changes have had very limited positive effects on women's job positions. Although the EEO Law has helped to eliminate many of the formal written rules which discriminate against women directly, many substitute rules are written with sexual differentiation in mind and continue to discriminate indirectly against women. The study shows that unequal treatment of women, once built into the structural differences in the workplace, tends to perpetuate and reproduce itself through the operation of the seemingly 'sex blind' labour market rules and company practices. Institutional discrimination has maintained and perpetuated the structure of sexual inequality in the Japanese employment system. Major Japanese companies have been able to preserve and maintain the stability of the core employment practices governing the 'male-dominated' internal labour markets in the face of growing pressures for change. A number of strategies have been adopted to 'absorb' and 'dilute' the 'destabilising' effects of equal opportunities. The



'career tracking' systems have been designed to co-opt a small number of highly educated women with strong career aspirations and, at the same time, to prevent the EEO Law from inflating the expectations of all women. Another important strategy has been the introduction of more clear-cut formal segregation at the point of entry. Many jobs which were previously carried out by women in the lower-tier of the internal labour markets have been 'externalised' and become contract or temporary jobs. The 'contract employee system' adopted by Seibu is a good example of this new strategy of segmentation.

We have argued in this chapter that Japanese management's continued attachment to the 'traditional' employment practices, especially the pattern of 'lifetime commitment', imposes a powerful constraint on their willingness to introduce more liberal equal opportunities policies for women. Even a 'leading edge' company like Seibu, which has a reputation for its innovative equal opportunities policies, has failed to introduce more path-breaking policy changes. The nature of the constraint is not only that women do not seem to possess the requisite 'behavioural traits' such as employment stability or a strong commitment to intense work, but more importantly, the smooth operation of the system requires a large number of women to be available as low cost peripheral workers. Full equal employment opportunities for women will not only destabilise the male career hierarchy and the established work practices but will also upset the flexibility of the employment system.

One question remains unresolved: Why is it that Japanese management can continue to preserve the 'male-dominated' employment system despite the economic and legal pressures for change? In other words, why has the special form of internal labour markets continued to survive in the way it has in Japan? This question is closely related to the recurrent debate about the origin and the nature of the 'Japanese employment system' - a question which has preoccupied many Japanese and foreign scholars since Abegglen's pioneer study in 1958 first perceived the 'Japanese employment system', characterised by the peculiar features of 'lifetime commitment' and *nenko*-based wage and promotion, as distinctively different from the systems prevailing in western

countries. Since then, a remarkable number of books and articles have been published on the subject. Broadly speaking, the various interpretations can be classified into two different approaches, namely the culturalist and the economic functionalist. Those who adopted the culturalist approach (Abegglen, 1958; Okouchi, 1958) argue that the distinctive features of the Japanese employment system are a consistent and logical outgrowth of Japan's pre-industrial social organisations. Okouchi emphasised the transplant of rural social relations into modern factories. Abegglen argued that 'the hard core of Japan's system of social relationships remained intact' in the face of rapid industrialisation. In other words, these authors emphasise the role of social continuity carried over from Japan's pre-industrial past into contemporary industrial organisations. Economic functionalists have offered a different interpretation. Taira (1970) argues that Japanese labour market institutions and practices are basically the consequence of optimal economic choices of employers and workers given the labour market conditions prevailing during industrialisation. He presented historical evidence that the practices of lifetime commitment and *nenko* wage system emerged as late as World War I as a reaction of employers in major firms in their attempt to cope with chronic shortage of skilled workers and their high labour turnover rates. Using neo-classical economic analysis, Taira demonstrated that the peculiar character of the Japanese employment system is less a carry-over from the feudal society than the result of a rational economic choice by employers.

How would the two different perspectives explain the origin and the perpetuation of labour market discrimination against women? Culturalists will argue that it is a persistence of social discrimination against women. As the Japanese employment practices were modelled on the basis of the principles that regulated family life (the '*ie*' system) in feudal Japan, it was accepted as normal that only the male members were rewarded with permanent tenure and the benefits of the system. The exclusion of women reflected the inferior social conditions of women in feudal Japan and this has persisted into contemporary Japan. Economic functionalists will argue that sociological forces such as 'culture' or 'tradition' have little role to play in a competitive

market economy. Discrimination against women is no more than a by-product of the labour market rules and employment practices which represent the optimal economic choices made by employers. Discrimination has persisted because it is economically functional.

Our analysis of the dynamics of change in the 1980s illustrates that both of these general interpretations are too simplistic. The survival of the special type of internal labour markets in Japan and the persistence of discrimination against women cannot be fully understood from the viewpoint of efficiency-based economic theories. Nor is it adequate to interpret the contemporary situation as 'cultural continuity' in Abegglen's sense which sees 'culture' as a static historical phenomenon. One needs to develop a better understanding of how new employment practices and labour market rules become institutionalised and how 'culture' or 'tradition' are utilised as 'resources' and at times perceived as 'constraints' by the 'dominant parties' - in the case of Japan, management - in the process of responding to the emerging economic and labour utilisation problems. Cole (1979, p.22-3) has argued that 'no matter how innovative new institutions may appear, they do not develop in a cultural and structural vacuum...It is the availability of these resources and the possible combinations among them which determines the mix in the emerging process of institutionalisation'.

Economic and sociological forces are not independent of each other. An important insight to be gained from the internal labour market concept developed by Doeringer and Piore (1971) is that sociological forces can influence labour market institutions and behaviour. Doeringer and Piore emphasise the important role of workplace 'customs' in sustaining internal labour market rules and perpetuating discriminatory practices. Doeringer and Piore define 'customs' as the outgrowth of employment stability in the internal labour markets. Implicit in their model is the assumption that discrimination is an incidental consequence of internal labour market rules designed for efficiency purposes. The Japanese experience suggests that it is necessary to develop this line of argument further in order fully to

explain the survival of the Japanese type of internal labour markets and the nature of continued discrimination against women. Three major points are worthy of special note.

Firstly, discrimination against women cannot be interpreted merely as an incidental by-product of 'neutral' internal labour market rules designed for efficiency purposes. Our analysis of Japanese management's adaptive strategies in the 1980s illustrates that gendered assumptions have been important factors in shaping and determining many of the employment practices introduced by management. Many of the company practices are designed with the 'traditional' sex role model in mind. Japanese companies can continue to operate many of the discriminatory practices because (they assume that) the majority of women will continue to accept their conditions. Moreover, the dominant role of management in Japanese society implies that they have a 'free hand' in shaping the new labour market rules and practices. The cultural repression of women continued to be utilised by management as a 'resource' in the process of institutionalisation of new employment practices in the 1980s. The persistence of discrimination against women needs to be interpreted in the socio-political context that Japanese management has a dominant political role in the society and that Japan is still fundamentally a male-dominated society. Power and status issues are relevant in understanding the formation of many of the company practices which operate on the basis of discrimination against women. The mass scale utilisation of the rural-based unmarried daughters as transient low cost labour in the textile industry before World War I is an example of employers' strategic policies in exploiting the most subordinated members of the society. At that time women constituted the majority of the industrial workforce partly because industrial jobs had the lowest status in the society. In developing and consolidating the internal labour markets in the core sector of the Japanese economy after World War II, employers have consciously transformed sexual differentiation into structural differences in the workplace. Once such sex-based stratification is institutionalised in the employment practices, the perpetuation of discrimination against women becomes reinforced by the nature of the workplace relationship. In the 1980s, one can observe the

institutionalisation of many new employment practices which continue to discriminate against the majority of women. If we regard employment policies and practices as a consequence of employers' conscious strategies to satisfy market requirements and labour utilisation problems at different historical stages of development, one can say that Japanese employers, in designing their strategies to cope with the emerging economic and technological demands, have consciously exploited women's social conditions and utilised them as a source of cheap labour. Discrimination cannot be interpreted as an incidental by-product of 'sex blind' labour market rules.

Secondly, Doeringer and Piore explain the survival and stability of the internal labour markets and the issue of discrimination entirely in terms of the internal logic of the core workforce. The Japanese case has demonstrated that one cannot explain the dynamism of internal labour markets and discrimination entirely in terms of factors internal to the core workforce. The relationship between the 'core' and the 'periphery' is crucial. Changes affecting the peripheral groups can be critical to the survival of the internal labour markets for the core groups. The Seibu case illustrates that the continued stability of the rules governing the internal core workforce is dependent on the fact that the 'periphery' will continue to accept their conditions. This explains why Seibu management has been anxious not to disturb the delicate balance of the relationship between the 'core' and the 'periphery'. This has imposed a severe constraint on Seibu's equal opportunities policies for women.

Thirdly, Doeringer and Piore's model is inherently a static model which does not provide a satisfactory explanation of how internal labour market rules might change over time. At the heart of Doeringer and Piore's argument is the observation that internal labour market rules persist because they are economically functional. Although their model emphasises the important role of workplace customs in sustaining inefficient rules and practices, they argue that the ultimate sanction against custom is economic failure. Thus they assume, as a matter of faith, that internal labour markets survive because they are

economically functional. Their model implicitly assumes that 'mature' internal labour markets tend to persist and so does the structure of discrimination. However, the Japanese experience suggests that internal labour market rules do change and that their persistence in certain specific forms cannot be taken for granted. The Japanese type of internal labour markets has persisted because management has actively sought to protect their stability and because those who are excluded from the privileged jobs appear to continue to accept their exclusion. Nevertheless, in the face of economic changes and the growing pressures for equal opportunities, Japanese companies have had to introduce some changes in some of their rules and practices in order to protect the stability of the internal labour markets. For example, by allowing a small minority of women to enter the core career jobs and by re-defining the boundary of the core system through changes to the entry rules. As already pointed out in the conclusions of the previous chapter, the new practices introduced by Seibu have generated some elements of potential instability in the company's personnel system. How far the present system at Seibu will continue will depend not only on the intensity of market competition, but also whether Japanese women will continue to accept the 'male-dominated system' and how far the legal environment will continue to allow management a 'free hand' in structuring their workforce on the basis of gender differentiation. The present EEO Law has introduced some elements of potential instability in the employment system but it does not have enough power to obstruct Japanese employers sex-based workforce segmentation strategy.

In sum, the Japanese case has illustrated how gendered assumptions and gender relations can influence and shape employers' labour force utilisation strategies and determine labour market structures. Our study has also highlighted the importance of the relationship between the core and the periphery work groups in understanding the nature of internal labour markets and the issue of discrimination. The Japanese experience also demonstrates that existing labour market theories which have been developed primarily in the U.S. context have limitations when applied to a different social context. The Japanese employment system has recurrently been labelled as 'unique' by many Western scholars.

This is not because Japanese society is so fundamentally 'different' from Western societies but more due to the fact that many Western concepts and theories which claimed to be universal are no more than theoretical constructs 'local' to their own societies. Western understanding of the Japanese employment system has not progressed very far since Abegglen's first detailed study of the Japanese factory organisation was published in 1958. This is partly because too many researches and studies carried out by Western scholars are restrained by their a priori theoretical assumptions and the associated methodological constraints. More empirical research which explores and analyses reality as faithfully as possible should be encouraged. This thesis is the first attempt to research on equal opportunities issues in Japanese companies. Our detailed in-depth analysis of the emerging situation in the 1980s has raised some crucial theoretical issues which will need to be developed further in future research.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

1. In October 1984, Keizai Doyukai (Japan Council of Economic Organisations) published an article calling for the formation of an 'intermediate labour market', pointing out that 'a new adjustment mechanism is urgently needed to cope with the growing influence on employment brought about by technological progress in office computerisation'. The Council proposed to the government for the formulation of policy measures to assist the rapid formation of an 'intermediate labour market'. Eight months after the appearance of this article, the Employee Dispatching Business Law was enacted (for details of the Law, see Japan Labour Bulletin, Vol.25, No.7, July 1, 1986) The law recognises the legitimacy of temporary workers dispatching agencies which were previously prohibited under the provisions of the Employment Security Law. One result of this law has been the mushrooming of new employment agencies which dispatch workers to companies as 'temporaries'. According to the Ministry of Labour, companies authorised by the government as 'temporary' employment agencies and those whose application for accreditation was received by June 1, 1987, totalled 7,286. There were only 2,518 agencies at the time when the law went into effect. The law has resulted in an almost three-fold increase in the number of temporary employment agencies in one year.

According to the Ministry of Labour, the objective for formally recognising these agencies which have been burgeoning in recent years is to impose strict requirements upon their operation and to stipulate detailed control provisions for effectively conducting administrative supervision. In practice, the law merely specifies the scope of operations of these temporary agencies in a very loose manner. It initially recognised 12 types of occupations as legitimate for operation, in accordance with general legal standards prescribed by the law, occupations that (a) require professional knowledge, skills and experience and (b) by special nature require a special kind of personnel management. Many agencies and companies were able to exploit the loose meaning of these prescriptions to expand the types of jobs to be operated by 'temporary' workers. Three years after the enactment of the law, the type of occupations recognised as legitimate for operation under manpower dispatching agencies increased from 12 to 16. The greatest increase in the number of temporary workers has been in the category of 'clerical and general administrative workers', over 90 per cent of whom are women. Recently, many large firms in the banking and financial sectors started to set up their own 'temporary workers agencies' within the enterprise group which re-employed their own retired aged workers and women employees (Gendai Free Worker Kenkyukai, 1986, p.24). In practice, the law has little effect in protecting the working conditions of these workers. Evidence shows that working conditions of these workers have deteriorated. A recent survey shows that the average hourly wage has declined by 13 percentage points between 1986 and 1989 (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, July 24, 1989). This is partly because the scope of occupations carried out by the dispatched temporary workers have expanded to increase many low pay clerical jobs. Many companies have been externalising jobs which were previously



conducted by full-time regular employees to external dispatching agencies or agencies within their own enterprise group.

2. In October 1987, the Ministry of Labour issued a report outlining an expert study group's policy proposals for part-time workers. This report represented the most detailed and influential report on government policies on part-time workers since the first report on utilisation of women as part-time workers was published in 1964. The report specifically proposes the introduction of comprehensive and systematic measures for recognising part-time labour as an employment form vital to the Japanese economy. Policy revisions in six areas were proposed: (1) Assurance of minimum working conditions through administrative guidance; (2) provision of welfare measures, including re-examining the employment insurance system which has mainly been designed for full-time regular workers and the introduction of a special mutual aid system corresponding to the retirement allowance system; (3) Measures for ability development and employment assurance; (4) consolidation of the labour market and provision of labour information; (5) promotion of mutual transition from part-time to full-time work and (6) revision of the taxation system.

This report represents an official document calling for the more effective utilisation of part-time workers through consolidating their position in the labour market. The purpose is to confer better 'welfare' to the part-time workers. There is, however, mention of the harmonisation of the working conditions between part-time and full-time workers. The report also proposed the introduction of a part-time worker welfare law.

One of the most controversial points raised by the report is the definition of part-time workers. It excludes the 'pseudo-part-time workers'. At present at least over one-third of the so-called part-time workers are in fact 'pseudo-part-time workers'. They actually work full-time like the regular employees but are classified as part-time in terms of status. The word 'part-time' in Japan is less a description of working hours but more a 'label' for employment status and a terminology for labelling many low status job traditionally performed by women. The report proposed to exclude these 'pseudo-part-time workers' outside the scope of the proposed government policies.

3. In 1985, the government reduced the national treasury's contribution to the child care unit cost from 80 per cent to 70 per cent. It was further lowered it to 50 per cent in 1986.

4. Under the government's tax reform in 1987, a married man with a non-working full-time housewife or with a wife who works part-time with an annual income of less than 57 thousand yen is entitled to a special married man's allowance (thirty-five thousand yen), on top of the existing married men's allowance (thirty-five thousand yen). If the wife's annual income is beyond the threshold of 57 thousand yen, the special allowance is reduced in proportion eventually down to zero when the wife's annual income reaches 92 thousand yen. This new tax policy is widely criticised as discouraging women from working full-time by offering extra-privileges to full-time housewives and those who work

part-time (Ishihashi, 1989, pp.55; Nikkei Shimbun, Evening, February 6, 1989)

5. In the 1984 survey, 36 per cent of Japanese women agreed with the statement 'men should work and women should stay at home', 41 per cent disagreed and another 23 per cent replied 'don't know'. In the 1987 survey, 37 per cent agreed with the statement, 32 per cent disagreed and the proportion of those who replied 'don't know' has increased by 8 percentage points up to 31 per cent. These results were often dramatically taken up by the mass media as evidence that Japanese women have become 'more conservative' in recent years. An article in the Independent (March 12, 1988) described the result as showing that 'Japanese women go for hearth and home'. The Japanese government predicted that, unlike in some other industrialised countries, in Japan women would continue to put marriage and children ahead of their careers, even beyond the year 2,000 (PMO, 1987). However, what deserves greater attention from the survey results, similar to our finding at Seibu, is that more Japanese women exhibit an ambivalent attitude to the traditional sex role distinction, rather than becoming more 'conservative' as such.

## CHAPTER 12

### POLICIES AND PROSPECTS

#### I. SETTING THE POLICY GOALS: WHAT DO EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY POLICIES MEAN TO ACHIEVE?

Following our conclusions in the previous chapter, one remaining question deserves consideration in this thesis. What type of policy will be necessary if equal employment opportunities for Japanese women are to be achieved? This inevitably raises a highly controversial question: What does equal opportunity policy mean? Policy priorities and objectives cannot be established unless there is a clear vision of the goals to be attained. The precise nature of policy goal is still an ongoing debate in many western advanced countries although there is a tendency towards increasing similarity in policy aims and approaches (OECD, 1979).

In Japan, the development of EEO policy is still at a beginning stage. Recent debates on women's employment issues have largely focussed on the question of ~~whether~~ Japan should introduce EEO policy for women rather than on the question of ~~what~~ equal opportunities were meant to achieve. This lack of clear policy vision has prevented the debates from moving beyond the very narrow boundary prescribed by the policy makers.

Arguments and debates on equal opportunity policies are often confused by the lack of clarity as to what exactly equal opportunities are meant to achieve. The recent work by Jewson and Mason (1986) represents an attempt to define equal opportunities by identifying a liberal/radical dichotomy approaches to policy making. According to these authors, 'the liberal conception argues that equality of opportunity exists when all individuals are enabled freely and equally to compete for social rewards...the aim of liberal equal opportunities policies is the removal of unfair distortions to the operation of the labour market by means of

institutionalising **fair procedures** in every aspect of work and employment.' They argued that 'the radical approach is very different. It seeks to intervene directly in workplace practices in order to achieve a **fair distribution of rewards** among employees...Thus the radical view is concerned primarily with the outcome of the contest rather than with the rules of the game, with the fairness of the distribution of rewards rather than the fairness of procedures.' The authors pointed out that the two approaches were fundamentally in conflict, though various parties had interests in manipulating meanings to obscure this fact.

The Jewson and Mason dichotomy is a useful starting point in conceptualising the two distinctively different views on the ultimate goals of equal opportunities. However, such a dichotomous schema is too much of an 'ideal type' straight-jacket. Moreover, the liberal and radical approaches are not necessarily in contradiction with each other but could be seen as two extreme approaches on the continuum of equal opportunity policies practised by different countries at different stages of policy development. The author has developed the Jewson and Mason dichotomy further by distinguishing four different approaches to equal opportunity policy, namely, the conservative, liberal, progressive and radical approaches.

The conservative approach sees equal opportunities as existing when all rules and procedures are equally applied to both men and women. The objective is to eliminate 'direct discrimination' by applying the principle of 'equal treatment'. Although the same standards are to be applied, the employers are allowed to impose any requirements, so long as they are imposed on all groups alike. The conservative approach does not seek to tackle the problem of 'indirect discrimination', and so is insufficient. The approach adopted in the Japanese EEO Law falls into this category.

Almost all anti-discrimination legislation in western countries has adopted the liberal approach as a minimum prerequisite to the pursuit of equal opportunities. The aim is to eradicate both direct and indirect

discrimination by ensuring that all rules and procedures are not discriminatory and that they are fairly enforced. This approach involves identifying and replacing discriminatory practices, especially those which have the effect of disadvantaging one group more than another and are not 'justifiable'.<sup>1</sup> A positive attempt to take action in this direction moves the liberal approach close to that of a progressive one.

The progressive approach seeks not only to eradicate direct and indirect discrimination through the principle of fair procedures but also carries a vision of achieving fair distribution of outcome. The concept of 'equality targeting' and 'positive action' (not positive or reverse discrimination) are invoked to attain certain policy goals. Policy goals, for example, numerical results, are used as a benchmark of success, but not as ends in themselves. In recent years, many countries have started to incorporate, to a greater or lesser degree, elements of the progressive approach by encouraging employers to undertake some form of positive action. For example, in the British and Canadian equal opportunity legislation, there is some provision for positive action in training with the intent of increasing the supply of qualified women workers to compete effectively with men.

Aggressive pursuit of positive action programmes with numerical outcomes as ends tends to move the progressive approach close to that of the radical one which sees equal opportunities as existing when equality in outcome is achieved. This approach seeks equal distribution of rewards as ends in themselves. Policies such as preferential treatment (reverse discrimination) and redefinition of 'merit' are used to achieve certain numerical policy goals.<sup>2</sup> The quota system adopted in the United States is an extreme example of positive action programmes. The achievement of numerical goals which involves reverse discrimination has aroused much controversy and debate in the United States. One of the greatest controversies has been over the moral issue of violation of the principle of achievement through 'merit' (Glazer, 1975; Block and Walker, 1982). The pragmatic difficulties in measuring 'disparate

impact' and 'statistical parity' have also been the subject of debate in recent years (Smith, Jr, 1980).

An analysis of the development of equal opportunity policies in many of the advanced democratic countries shows that there has been a general shift of policy approaches from the liberal to the progressive or even radical approaches, with the initial emphasis on achieving equality in procedures moving gradually to that of attaining a more fundamental level of equality in outcomes or rewards. This shift in policy objectives in many countries partly reflects an improvement in the understanding of the nature of discrimination, but also partly shows a growth in the strength of the political will in achieving the ideal of equality with substantive outcomes.

Among the four approaches depicted in our continuum, the radical approach is the most controversial one. At present, only the United States has implemented this approach on a wide scale. Both on theoretical and practical grounds, the author cannot find much support for the radical approach. From the theoretical point of view, practices like reverse discrimination or preferential treatment sit uneasily with the principles of equality underlying the philosophy of equal opportunities. Practices like the quota system raises the most acute concern because the burden of adjustment falls on the individuals, who may themselves never have been guilty of discriminatory behaviour. Further, from the practical viewpoint, it is important to note that inequality in labour market outcome has its sources both inside and outside employing organisations. To achieve equal opportunities with substantive outcomes, policy action both inside and outside employing organisations are necessary. To make employing organisations bear the sole costs of correcting all forms of discrimination is not justifiable and will only lead to strong resistance and creates new problems of discrimination.

To summarise our argument, to achieve equal opportunities in employment with substantive labour market outcome, policy actions both inside employing organisations and in the society at large are

necessary. There is, however, a minimum level of action that employing organisations need to take: adopting a liberal approach aimed at eradicating both direct and indirect discrimination is a necessary first step but not adequate. The current development in most of the western advanced countries is to move towards the progressive approach by taking positive action to eradicate systemic discrimination and to accelerate the process of change.

From the above perspective, the current policy approach adopted in the Japanese EEO Law clearly falls short of the norms and standards generally accepted among the advanced democratic countries in the western world.

## **II. ACHIEVING EQUAL EMPLOYMENT FOR JAPANESE WOMEN: SOME POLICY PRIORITIES**

If the goal of achieving equal opportunities for women in Japanese companies is to be made possible and if the norms and standards of equal opportunities in Japan are to be raised up to the commonly accepted 'western' standard, major legal reforms and new policy actions are necessary. Firstly, elimination of both direct and **indirect discriminatory** company practices is a prerequisite. Secondly, the problem of women's increased segregation in 'part-time' and contract jobs must be tackled if women's overall job status is to be improved. This problem cannot be resolved merely by removing discriminatory employment practices, coherent policies must be developed to ease women's career constraints, especially that related to family responsibilities and childcare. Last, but not least, a long-term strategy for change will, of course, require the development of comprehensive policy measures in a wide variety of arenas, both inside and outside the sphere of employment, to bring about a major shift in social attitudes and a re-definition of sex roles in Japanese society. However, these broader social policy issues are outside the main theme of this thesis and will only be mentioned very briefly. The following

discussion focusses primarily on policies aimed directly at changing employment practices.

## **1. Elimination of Direct and Indirect Discrimination**

### **(a) Reforming the EEO Law**

The present EEO Law is rather inadequate and in many ways defective. The review of the overall responses of companies to the legislation and the Seibu case study reveals the inadequacies of the 'equal treatment approach'. The present legislation accepts the persistence of the structural and institutional factors which perpetuate women's unequal position. If the present EEO Law is to be turned into an effective tool for eliminating structural sources of inequality, both substantive and procedural reforms are necessary.

Firstly, the meaning of 'discrimination' has to be re-defined to incorporate the concept of 'indirect discrimination'. At present, the Ministry of Labour interprets discrimination as 'unequal treatment'; therefore to offer 'equal opportunities' to women means 'not to exclude women and not to treat women unfavourably'. This interpretation does not embody the concept of 'indirect discrimination'. Companies are allowed to impose any rules or requirements as long as they apply to both men and women. Career tracking rules and promotion screening procedures which obviously result in the exclusion of women are not seen as discriminatory under the present legislation. The narrow interpretation of the meaning of 'equal opportunity' also gives rise to another major loophole - that the Law is only applicable to women and that the intention of the Law is to raise the standards of women's employment equal to that of men, not the other way round. This not only means that the 'male work norms' are to be preserved but has also enabled employers to continue their policy of job segregation by restricting low status and low pay jobs to women only, because 'to exclude men' does not constitute discrimination. Unless this loophole of the Law is closed, the problem of job segregation will deteriorate.



Secondly, the scope of the present Law is too narrow. It covers only employing organisations without recognising that discrimination in employment is also practised by many other employment-related bodies such as job advertising agencies, professional bodies and labour unions. These organisations either practise discrimination themselves or they constitute a support system which reinforces the persistence of discriminatory company practices. In Japan, the role of the enterprise-based labour unions in reinforcing the discriminatory company practices cannot be overlooked. Japanese labour unions, like the companies, are equally male dominated. Many union leaders basically share the employers' view on women's employment issues. Japanese women are almost invisible in union leadership. This is one important factor explaining why the union movement in Japan has made little effort in pushing for reforms which serve the specific interests of their women members. Recent study in Britain shows that female union officials attach 'a high priority to organising women workers, encouraging women members to become active in union affairs and promoting women's interests, such as child care, maternity leave, equal pay and the conditions of part-time workers, in collective bargaining' (Heery and Kelly, 1989, p.201). The promotion of equal opportunities in union organisations is especially crucial in Japan as the enterprise-based unions constitute an important part of the employment system. The scope of the Law needs to be broadened to cover a wider spectrum of employment related bodies and labour unions. In practice, it is quite possible for the Ministry of Labour to use its discretionary power in extending the influence of the Law to a wider scope, albeit only in an informal and limited way. For example, following the implementation of the Law in 1986, the Ministry of Labour has carried out various 'enlightenment activities' such as seminars aimed at the job advertising agencies which are, strictly speaking, outside the scope of the Law. There is no reason why the Ministry of Labour cannot extend its administrative guidance activities to the labour unions or other professional bodies.

Thirdly, the enforcement procedures of the Law must be reformed if compliance is to be secured. The present EEO Law has little power of sanction against non-compliance. The 'hortatory provisions' which

'morally oblige' employers to provide equal treatment to women in recruitment, job assignment and promotion have no legal binding effect. This means that individuals are denied of the right of access to remedies from the courts. Compliance is entirely dependent on the 'good will' of the employers and the extent to which officials of the Ministry of Labour are prepared to exert 'moral pressures' on the companies through administrative guidance. Our analysis has shown that equal opportunities will not come about simply by changing the 'morals' or 'attitudes' of the employers. Up to the present, many employers appeared to have complied with the requirements of the Law following its implementation, but this was mainly because the standards of behaviour required by the Law were so low that most employers need not have taken much effort in order to claim that they have complied with the letters of the Law.

If the Law is to be amended to prohibit indirect discrimination in all stages of employment, strong resistance from the employers is bound to arise and many of them might find new means to evade the Law. This is because the eradication of indirect discrimination will require employers to review and change many of their existing personnel practices which are seen as the 'core practices' constituting the 'foundation' of the Japanese employment system. For example, practices like the mobility requirements, job transfer and promotion policies and the career tracking systems will all be questioned and challenged. Unless more effective implementation and enforcement procedures are introduced, it is unlikely that the law can have much effects on company policies.

Both adjudication and administrative means of enforcement are equally crucial. Although individual litigation remains a highly restrictive and inefficient means by which to institute large scale changes in employment practices, individual access to legal remedies from the courts is an important right of which must not be denied. Especially in Japan where the women's movement is not strong and the degree of union support for women's cause remains limited, court cases can be an important means for mobilising the support of the public and in

stimulating political action at the early stages of policy development. The discrimination cases brought to the courts in the late 1960s and the 1970s by some determined Japanese women showed that individual litigation can be a powerful means for challenging discriminatory company practices and the rulings of the courts can have considerable symbolic and practical significance. Legal victories in individual cases can have significant cumulative effects and can sometimes be turned into a political advantage for exerting pressure on the government to take stronger administrative initiatives in pushing forward changes on a wider scale. This method has worked in the past. A concrete example is the way in which the Ministry of Labour used administrative guidance to eliminate discriminatory retirement practices in the early 1980s after individual women had won a succession of court cases which judged separate retirement systems for men and women unlawful in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

The effective implementation of the law requires continuous monitoring and policing. At present, there is virtually no independent expert body in enforcing or policing the Law. The functions of the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Labour have been practically limited to that of promotional or 'enlightenment' activities, a diluted form of administrative guidance. The Equal Opportunity Mediation Committee (EOMC) set up under the EEO Law has limited conciliatory power. Experience in the United States and Britain shows that an independent equal opportunities commission with legal and enforcement powers is necessary for policing the Law and acting as a catalyst for change. The enforcement procedures can be made more effective if the Japanese EOMC can be turned into a more powerful body for policing and monitoring the Law with more extensive enforcement and legal powers.

**(b) Developing Voluntary 'Positive Action' Through Administrative Guidance**

Voluntary positive action which involves encouraging employers to take initiative in reviewing, identifying and replacing employment practices which are directly and indirectly discriminatory against women should be

strongly encouraged through concrete guidelines. Employers can also be encouraged to use 'target setting' in achieving specific equal opportunities goals and be permitted to practise positive action in areas such as training for women in order to increase the number of women qualified for jobs in which they are underrepresented. Such positive action can be encouraged and promoted through 'administrative guidance', first targeting at 'good will' employers like Seibu, using them as 'model employers' to stimulate action on a wider scale in the enterprise community.

It should be pointed out that in the case of Japan better and more effective use of 'administrative guidance' might prove to be a realistic approach in bringing about changes in company practices on a wider scale in the the long-run. What is needed is a stronger political will on the government's part to take action. There are two reasons why the Japanese government should and could make more effective use of administrative guidance. Firstly, the preference for 'legal informalism' in Japanese society has meant that non-legal and non-confrontational methods of bringing about changes in socially and economically sensitive areas are perceived to be more acceptable to those who believe that their interests are being challenged. Secondly, in the past, the Japanese government has demonstrated the effective use of administrative guidance in bringing about significant changes in many aspects of social and economic lives in Japan (Young, 1984). There is no reason why such method cannot be used more effectively in equal opportunities issues.

The enactment of the EEO Law in Japan represents the beginning of a willingness on the part of the governing bureaucracy to step in and steer the course of change in women's employment issues. However, in all societies alike, law will only be relevant if its 'spirit' is effectively implemented through compulsion and voluntary action in parallel. In Japan, the existence of a skilled and dedicated government bureaucracy which has a long history of active intervention in Japanese society can both be a strength and a weakness, depending on how far the governing bureaucracy is prepared to steer changes in the direction

which favour the interests of the majority of women.

## **2. Enhancing Women's Career Continuity and Reducing Segregation in Part-Time and Contract Employment**

Even with the most ambitious agenda for reforming the EEO Law, there are severe limitations in what it can do to improve women's employment position unless parallel policies are introduced to tackle the problem of women's concentration in low paid and low status part-time or contract jobs.

In Japan, as elsewhere, many women choose part-time employment because of the constraints in combining paid employment with family responsibilities. However, many Japanese women enter part-time employment because of lack of alternatives. This is especially true in the case of middle-aged women newly entering or re-entering the job market. Many jobs labelled as 'part-time' are in fact full-time in terms of working hours but with 'part-time' pay and working conditions. Over 90 per cent of the contract employees at Seibu work full-time hours. A recent survey by Nihon Fujin Kai on 2,500 'part-time' women workers shows that 33.8 per cent of them actually worked the same number of hours as full-time employees and that another 33.3 per cent said that they actually worked over-time (Asahi Shimbun, January 1, 1990). Thus the problem with part-time employment in Japan is not merely a problem of workers who choose to work shorter hours because of family commitment, but it is an integral part of the employment system which discriminates against a large number of women by depriving them of the opportunities to have full-time regular employee status and by forcing them to take up employment with inferior status and working conditions. It is a complex situation which requires policy intervention both on the supply and the demand side of the labour market.

### **(a) Childcare Policies**

On the supply side, policies to improve women's career continuity can help to increase the number of women who will be able to maintain their full-time career jobs. At present, many women are forced to quit their jobs when they have children because of the lack of childcare facilities or provisions for childcare leave. When they re-enter the job market, the chance for them to get a full-time career job is very slim, many of them can only find 'part-time' or 'contract' jobs. A survey on women's work attitudes carried out by the Prime Minister's Office in 1986 shows that 60 per cent of the women surveyed pointed out that the greatest problem with continuing their career is the lack of childcare facilities. Women's career continuity could be improved if there are better childcare provisions. At present child care leave as a statutory right is only granted to women teaching in public schools of compulsory education and nurses. The number of companies in the private sector providing childcare leave systems is very small. The latest survey in 1985 shows that less than 15 per cent of the establishments in the public and private sectors provide such a system for their employees (see, chapter 7, Table 7.9). At the moment, the prospect of the government to pass a bill guaranteeing childcare leave for working parents is not great despite rising pressures from the opposition parties and the labour unions to introduce childcare leave as a statutory right for working parents. In August 1987, the opposition parties submitted a childcare leave bill to the Diet. It was rejected by the Ministry of Labour on the ground that 'it was still too soon' for Japan to introduce such a bill. The strong opposition from Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers Association) appeared to be a major obstacle (JFWA, 1988, p. 68). The recommendatory policy adopted by the Ministry of Labour does not appear to have much effect so far. An alternative strategy in the immediate future is to push for such provisions through collective agreements at individual enterprise level. Unless more employers are willing to grant such leave for their employees, the majority of women will not be able to resolve the dilemma of choosing between work or children.

The duration of women interrupting their employment can also be shortened if more childcare facilities are provided. In Britain, the demographic pressure has forced many employers to take initiatives in setting up workplace creches as a means to attract and retain more working mothers. In Japan, workplace creche is an issue which has rarely been discussed. Seibu set up a creche in 1982 providing some 30 nursery places for some 5,000 full-time female regular employees which was already an exceptional case. The Seibu attempt, however, was more for promotional purposes rather than representing a genuine attempt to help women. Not only was the number of creche places too small in proportion to the number of women working full-time at Seibu, but the creche was only set up near the flagship store in Tokyo despite the fact that Seibu operates a large number of branches all over the country. In its recent policy proposals on promoting equal opportunities for women, Seibu has ruled out the possibility of extending the facilities. The cost factor is obviously an impediment. However, another barrier in persuading Japanese employers to set up creches is the deeply rooted thinking in Japanese society that work and family should be kept as entirely separate domains. It will require a more revolutionary change in the Japanese 'work ethic' before work and family are seen as equally important domains for both men and women.

A possible compromise strategy would be for the government to sponsor more community-based nurseries with coordination and support from employers. Such scheme is more realistic and might prove to be attractive to employers like Seibu which operate a large number of branches over the country. Unless the state is prepared to bear some of the costs and play a more active role, it is unlikely that employers will be prepared to take much initiative in this area. Another scheme that is likely to benefit women who want to work full-time is to offer working parents tax deductions for childcare expenses incurred. This would enable women to choose more freely whether they want to work full-time and pay for child care or work part-time and rely on other alternatives for child care such as relying on relatives. This scheme was introduced in the United States for working parents since 1954 and

has enabled more women to continue full-time employment (Dex and Shaw, 1986, pp.8-11).

**(b) Improving the Job Prospects for the Mid-Career Re-Entrants**

Enabling more women to continue their full-time employment through better provisions of childcare facilities and tax concessions can only help to solve part of the problem by reducing the number of women facing the risk of losing their full-time career jobs because of childcare constraints. The social pressure on women to quit their full-time jobs when they have families is still tremendous. Many of them, however, are prepared to return to work when their children reach school age. The job market for full-time career jobs is almost completely closed to these middle-aged women. The majority of them are forced to take up low status part-time or contract jobs. Unless the job prospects for the re-entrants can be improved, the majority of Japanese women will continue to be treated as 'second-' or even 'third-class' employees. Employers could be encouraged to provide better re-entry schemes with a guarantee for the woman to return to full-time regular employment status with some kind of financial incentives provided by the government such as bearing part of the re-training costs. The present re-entry schemes offered by the companies are not taken seriously by the women employees as there is no guarantee that they can return to their former jobs nor is there any formal provision for skill updating or re-training. More state-sponsored re-training schemes could be provided directly by the government for women returning to the job market to help improving their job qualifications and hence their job prospects.

**3. Harmonisation of Working Conditions for Part-time and Contract Workers**

Above all, a more direct policy for improving the job status of many more women is to improve the status and working conditions of the 'part-time' or contract workers. First and foremost, discrimination against the 'pseudo part-timers' must be eliminated. At present, about one-third of the so-called 'part-time' workers actually work full-time like



the regular employees but are paid 'part-time' wage rates and not entitled to many of the benefits enjoyed by the full-time regular employees. The 'contract employee system' introduced in Seibu is a clear example of segregation and discrimination by employment status. Such unequal treatment in wages and working conditions according to 'employment status' should be eradicated. Second, the working conditions of many 'genuine part-timers' and contract workers could be improved if benefits such as employment insurance and retirement allowances are extended to them.

Improving the status and working conditions of 'part-timers' in this way would seem to imply additional costs for employers. The argument against this is that the incentives for employers to provide 'part-time' jobs will diminish which will result in the loss of job opportunities for many women. Such argument is only partially true. At present, there are strong incentives for employers to substitute many full-time jobs with 'part-time' or contract jobs because it reduces labour costs and increases manpower flexibility. Many employers are able to adopt this manpower strategy because of the permissive legal framework and because there has been a good potential supply of labour, predominantly female, for these jobs. If 'part-time' jobs are made more costly, the incentives to substitute full-time jobs with 'part-time' jobs is less but this will not necessarily mean a net loss of job opportunities for women. Given the continued expansion of the Japanese economy, the growing skills shortages and the challenge of the demographic changes, the argument that by making 'part-time' jobs more costly will price these jobs out of the labour market does not appear to have much ground.

In the above, we have discussed policy measures to deal directly with the elimination of discrimination and policies for enhancing women's career continuity and job prospects. It is, however, important to note that the struggle to correct inequality in the labour market must not be abstracted from women's family relations and responsibilities and sex role stereotyping in society at large, which reinforce and perpetuate sexual inequality in the workplace. Policy actions to improve women's career opportunities in the work organisations can only have a limited

success as long as women continue to undertake most of the work in the household and are expected to be carer for the young, the old and the sick. Sexual division of labour will continue if other aspects of social policies continue to reproduce sexual divisions and perpetuate women's economic dependence. Equal opportunity and positive action programmes must be combined with a wide range of measures which operate on all aspects of women's life experience. Fundamental reforms in school curriculum and the education system are crucial. Social security and income taxation structures which continue to assume a secondary role for married women and encourage married women to refrain from employment must be changed. Major changes in these policy areas are now being introduced in many of the European countries as part and parcel of the equal opportunity programmes for women. The debate in Japan is only beginning. Detailed discussion of policies in these areas will take us far from the main theme of this thesis. It is, however, important to stress that the pursuit of sexual equality must not be too narrowly defined and confined to the area of paid employment although this is an area where fundamental restructuring towards greater equality will have major positive consequences on many other aspects of Japanese women's life experience.

### III. FUTURE PROSPECTS

How far the present government will shift its policy orientation on women and the extent to which it will take further administrative initiative in adopting policies which favour equal opportunities for women will be influenced by many social, economic and political factors.

Recent developments in the Japanese political scene indicate that there is some scope for optimism. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had monopolised power since the end of World War II, suffered a major political set back in 1989. Public support for the ruling party has plummeted to historical low point due to an extraordinary coincidence of scandals and unpopular policies. What has been particularly significant is that women voters have led the way in deserting the ruling party. The imposition of the consumption tax has politicised women and they begin to wonder whether the party governing in the name of big business interests can really accommodate the demands of women and consumers. In the election for the House of Councillors (upper house of the Diet) in July 1989, the LDP suffered a crushing defeat, losing its majority for the first time since the party was founded in 1955. The voters, especially women had protested against the LDP by defecting in large numbers to support the Socialist Party which, for the first time in Japanese history, is governed by a woman leader. In an attempt to regain political ground, the ruling LDP has recently appointed two women to top cabinet posts, hoping that such 'pro-women' political gesture will help to win back credibility among women voters. The political set back of the ruling party might be a temporary phenomenon, but recent events underline two significant changes which might have more long-term impact on government policies on women. Firstly, the political turmoil has taught the ruling party an important lesson, that women voters have learned to use the electoral weapon and that this can be a powerful tool in shaking the foundation of the governing power. Secondly, it also shows that Japanese women are much less inclined to accept silently the exploitation they have traditionally encountered. The ruling party might be pushed to

introduce more 'pro-women' policies in the near future in order to regain its popular support among the women voters.

The recent development within the labour movement also points towards a more positive direction for women workers. The union movement's growing concern about declining union membership has prompted the newly formed umbrella organisation, Rengo (Japanese Private Sector Trade Union Confederation) to set off a series of new policy initiatives in attracting more women members. The organisation of part-time workers has become a major policy priority for Rengo. In an interim report spelling out the policies of the new federation, expansion of membership through actively organising part-time workers is on the top of the policy agenda (JIL, 1989). Rengo is also aware of the limitations of traditional enterprise-based unions which virtually exclude all non-regular workers. A new strategy proposed by Rengo is to organise the part-time workers on a community basis. At present, only about 6 per cent of the part-time workers are unionised. Rengo sees the growing number of part-time workers as a potential source for enlarging its membership base. Until very recently, Japanese labour unions have primarily represented the interests of the full-time regular employees; the latest move of Rengo in organising the part-time workers and bargain on behalf of their interests will certainly provide an important basis of collective support for the most exploited groups of women workers. How far the union movement will be committed to support the women's cause will depend on whether more women are in a position to become full-time union officials to make their voices heard and take part in the decision-making and bargaining process.

Finally, the future direction of government policies on women workers will also be influenced by the prospect of continuing economic growth and the demands of the labour market. At present, the economic climate is certainly favourable to women's job prospects. Furthermore, companies are beginning to feel the impending pressure of the demographic changes. Skill shortages have become more acute than ever. Equal opportunities goals for women are certainly easier to pursue in times of high demand.

This study, however, cautions against too high expectation on the potential of market pressures and management-led policies to bring about fundamental changes in company practices. Japanese management have adapted well to the pressures for change over the past decade and they may continue to perform well in the coming years. The impetus for further change has to come from forces outside the companies.

One major lesson that Japanese women can learn from their counterparts in the 'West' is that grass-roots lobbying and political campaigns from women themselves is an important element for propelling equal opportunities issues to the top of political agenda (Meehan, 1985). Unless Japanese women are prepared to grasp the opportunities generated by the recent political events, seek more influence in the government decision making mechanisms and acquire more allies in the re-united labour front, the pace of change can only be very slow and may not necessarily be in the direction welcomed by the majority of Japanese women. If Japanese women are to achieve full and real equality, it cannot be on men's terms. The male 'work ethic' has to be changed and the Japanese management system needs to be challenged.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 12

1. 'Justifiability' is an important legal concept in American and British anti-discrimination legislation for the interpretation of whether certain employment practices are indirectly discriminatory. In the famous Griggs v. Duke Power Co. case, the U.S. Supreme Court for the first time in history struck down employment tests and education requirements that screened out a greater percentage of blacks than whites. These practices were judged indirectly discriminatory because they had the consequence of excluding blacks disproportionately, and because they bore no relationship to the jobs in question. According to the U.S. courts, the only defensible practices having unequal impact are those necessary to the safe and efficient operation of enterprise. Employers must demonstrate their relationship to the job in question and meet the test of business necessity. The U.S. courts required an employer to satisfy the court on two separate questions if he raised the business necessity defence: firstly, that the exclusionary condition or practice had been 'validated', and secondly that there was no acceptable alternative which would have a less exclusionary effect.

In Britain, indirect discrimination is legally defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, section 1 (1)(b). A person indirectly discriminates against a woman if he applies to her a requirement or condition which he applies or would apply to a man but (i) which is such that the proportion of women who can comply with it is considerably smaller than the proportion of men who can comply with it, and (ii) which he cannot show to be justifiable irrespective of the sex of the person to whom it is applied, and (iii) which is to her detriment because she cannot comply with it. The most important judicial analysis of the meaning of justifiability in Britain is that of Phillips J in Steel v. Post Office case. Phillips J made an important point that "a practice which would otherwise be discriminatory...is not to be licensed unless it can be shown to be justifiable, and it cannot be justifiable unless its discriminatory effects is justified by the need - not the convenience - of the business enterprise" (1978 ICR 187-8).

For more detailed discussion of the concepts of 'indirect discrimination' and 'justifiability', see, Jain and Ledvinka (1975), McCrudden (1982) and O'Donovan and Szyszczak (1988), chapter 4.

2. Redefinition of merit is a type of positive action differs from preferential treatment in that it alters substantially the qualifications which are necessary to do the job by including race or gender as a relevant "qualification" in order to be able to do the job properly. Group membership is a job-related qualification, rather than an exception to it (McCrudden, 1986, p.225).

3. Although individual women had won a succession of court cases which judged separate retirement systems for men and women unlawful in the 1970s, a survey in the late 1970s disclosed that the great majority of Japanese companies had clearly illegal retirement policies. It was at that point that the Ministry of Labour made the elimination of separate retirement systems a major priority and that it issued administrative

guidance in 1980 urging companies to eliminate the discriminatory practices. The continued activity by the government has had substantial effects. By 1983, 90 per cent of Japanese companies previously maintaining them had discontinued mandatory retirement systems upon marriage or pregnancy, and 70 per cent had eliminated all forms of separate retirement systems (Upham, 1987, pp.147).

	Original	Amendment		
Overtime Work & Work on Holiday	Two hours per day, six hours per week or 150 hours per year  Work on holiday is prohibited	Women in managerial or specialist jobs	Restrictions repealed	
		Others	Industrial sector	Overtime work restriction to 2 hours per day abolished
			Non-industrial sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>° The ceilings for hours of overtime work shall be decided by a Labour Ministry Ordinance within the framework of 6 to 12 hrs multiplied by the number of weeks within 4 weeks, and 150 to 300 hrs per year</li> <li>° Frequency of work on holidays per 4 weeks shall be decided by a Labour Ministry Ordinance</li> </ul>
Night Work	Prohibited (Exemptions: °Medicine & health °Entertainment °Telephone operators °Stewardess °Radio & television announcers & producers °Others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>°Female workers in managerial or specialist jobs</li> <li>°Female workers whose working hours are short or other work which, in view of its nature, requires late night work</li> <li>°Female workers who have made applications to the employer and for whom the employer has got approval from the government agency</li> </ul>	Restrictions repealed	
		Others	Restrictions retained	
Underground Work	Prohibited	Those who have to work underground for a temporary necessity (excluding women in pregnancy or after confinement)	Restrictions repealed	
		Others	Restrictions retained	
Hazardous Jobs	Employment in certain hazardous and dangerous jobs prohibited	Female workers in pregnancy or after confinement	Engagement in works detrimental to pregnancy, child-birth, feeding, etc. shall be prohibited	
		Female workers other than those mentioned above	Present restrictions abolished, however engagement in certain works that are harmful to the function of pregnancy or child-birth prohibited	
Maternity Leave	Six weeks each before and after confinement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>° Pre-natal leave in case of multiple-pregnancy extended to 10 weeks</li> <li>° Post-natal leave extended in all cases to 8 weeks</li> </ul>		
		When female workers in pregnancy or after confinement so request employers shall not engage them in overtime work, holiday work or late night work		
Menstruation Leave	Employer must give menstruation leave upon request to female workers who suffer severe problems or those employed in works injurious to menstruation	Employer must give menstruation leave upon request to those female workers who suffer from severe menstruation problems		
Fare for returning home	Employer must pay the fare for returning home to dismissed female workers who wish to do so within 14 days after dismissal	Repealed		



APPENDIX B

SAMPLE SELECTION METHODS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLES

I. The Interview Sample

Table B.1 Characteristics of Women Interviewed

<u>Characteristics</u>		<u>Nos. Interviewed</u>	
		<u>1983</u>	<u>1987</u>
(1) Age	Under 29.....	14	4
	30 - 39.....	16	11
	40+ .....	4	6
	(Average age)	(31.5)	(35.2)
(2) Education	University.....	17	9
	Junior college.....	8	7
	High school.....	9	5
(3) Position in company	Ordinary employee...	19	3
	Specialist.....	11	16
	Management.....	4	2
(4) Marriage	Single.....	28	16
	Married .....	5	4
	Separated.....	1	1
<hr/>			
Total nos. interviewed		34	21

## II. The Survey Samples

### 1. Sample Selection and Sample Size

In both the 1984 and 1988 surveys, the male and female samples were drawn from the full-time regular employees (excluding those in top management positions) at the Ikebukuro and Shibuya stores. The employees at the two stores were treated as one single sampling population. The sampling population was divided into the male and female sampling frames and the samples were drawn randomly from the employee code numbers provided by the personnel department.

In the 1984 survey, the male sample size was 25 per cent of the male population and that of the female was 35 per cent. In the 1988 survey, the male sample size constituted 20 per cent of the male population. In the case of women, a disproportionate stratified random sampling method was used. The female population was stratified into three groups according to their educational levels, namely, university graduates, junior college graduates and high school leavers, the sample fractions for the three groups of women were 50 per cent, 40 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. The reason for varying the sample fractions in reverse proportion to the actual distribution of the female employees by educational levels was to ensure that the survey sample would provide a sufficient number of female university graduate sub-sample for statistical analysis. In 1988, female graduates constituted about 20 per cent of the female regular employees at Seibu as compared with 63 per cent in the case of men. All the statistical analysis of the female responses as an overall sample was weighted by the sample fraction.

Table B.2 shows the size of the sample population, the samples selected and the number of responses for the 1984 and 1988 surveys. The sample population figures for 1984 as shown in the table differ slightly from the actual numbers of the sampling frames as the figures shown in the table were obtained from the company's personnel records at the end of 1983 and the samples were drawn in March 1984.

**Table B.2**  
**Sample Population, Sample Size and Response Rates**

**1984**

	Sample population (persons)	Sample fraction (%)	Sample size (persons)	No. of responses (persons)	Response rate (%)
Male	1,526	25%	386	327	84.7%
Female	1,879	35%	688	552	80.2%
Total	3,405		1,074	879	81.8%

**1988**

	Sample population (persons)	Sample fraction (%)	Sample size (persons)	No. of responses (persons)	Response rate (%)
Male	1,323	20%	265	218	82.3%
Female					
University	280	50%	140	127	90.7%
Junior Col.	497	40%	199	165	82.9%
High Sch.	654	30%	196	175	89.3%
Others	-	-	-	3	
Sub-total	1,431		535	470	87.8%
Total	2,754		800	688	86.0%

## 2. Representatives of the Samples

As a test of the representativeness of the survey samples, Table B.3 compares the distribution of the 1984 male and female samples by educational levels with that of the sample population and Table B.4 compares the age distribution of the 1988 sample with that of the sample population. The comparisons show the degree of the representativeness of the samples is high.

**Table B.3 Comparing the distribution of the 1984 sample by educational levels with the sample population (total regular employees at Ikebukuro and Shibuya stores)**

	Male		Female	
	Population* (%)	Sample (%)	Population* (%)	Sample (%)
High School	37.0	37.3	61.4	52.7
Junior College	2.6	4.3	21.1	27.2
University	57.7	56.3	16.5	18.8
Others	2.6	2.1	0.9	0.7
Total (N)	100.0 (1,526)	100.0 (327)	100.0 (1879)	100.0 (552)

\*Note: These figures were obtained from the personnel records as of November 1983 while the survey samples were drawn in March 1984

**Table B.4 Comparing the distribution of the 1988 sample by age groups with the sample population (total regular employees at Ikebukuro and Shibuya stores)**

Age groups	Male		Female	
	Population* (%)	Sample (%)	Population* (%)	Sample (%)
Under 29	33.4	30.3	64.2	62.7
30 - 39	36.1	42.2	19.9	21.3
40 - 49	21.5	18.4	9.4	10.0
50+	9.0	9.2	6.5	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
(N)	(1397)	(218)	(1474)	(470)

\*Note: The figures were obtained from the company's personnel records as of September 1988. The total numbers of the sample population shown here differ slightly from that of the sample population shown in Table B.2 as the sampling frames were drawn on a different date.

### 3. Composition of the Samples: 1984 and 1988 Comparison

Table B.5 shows the composition of the 1984 and 1988 samples by age, length of service, education and marital status. The characteristics of the samples did not change greatly between 1984 and 1988. Nevertheless, the 1988 sample was slightly older, had been longer with Seibu and was more educated:

(a) Age structure: The share of those in aged under 24 has declined. This is especially in the case of the female sample which reflects the reduction of employment of new recruits as full-time regular employees since the early 1980s. The relative share of men aged 35-39 and above has shown a remarkable increase. In the case of women, there is no increase in the share of those aged 30-34 and only a mere 1 percentage point increase of those aged 35-39. This implies that there has been little change in retention rate of women in their child-rearing age. The relative share of women aged 40 and above, similar to that of men, has almost doubled between 1984 and 1988.

(b) Length of service: The average length of service of both the male and female samples has gone up. The average length of service of the male sample was 9.0 years in 1984 and 10.7 years in 1988; and that of the female sample had extended from 5.9 years to 7.8 years.

(c) Education: The overall education level of the sample in 1988 was higher than that of 1984; the proportion of high school leavers had declined while that of university graduates has crept up.

(d) Marital status: In both the 1984 and 1988 samples, the majority of women were single while about two-thirds of men were married. But the proportion of single women has declined over time and those who were married or separated has increased.

(e) Entry to the company: The majority of the male and female employees joined the company directly after their school or university education. At both points of time, the share of male mid-career entrants was higher than that of women. However, the relative share of male mid-career entrants has declined over time while that of women has remained more or less unchanged.

**Table B.5 Characteristics of the Samples**  
(Regular full-time employees)

	1984		1988	
	Male No.	Female %	Male No.	Female %
<u>Age</u>				
Under 24	35	(10.7)	240	(43.6)
25 - 29	104	(31.9)	154	(27.9)
30 - 34	83	(25.5)	69	(12.5)
35 - 39	53	(16.3)	43	(7.8)
40 - 44	24	(7.4)	16	(2.9)
45 - 49	17	(5.2)	18	(3.3)
50 & above	10	(3.1)	11	(2.0)
<u>Length of Service</u>				
0 - 4 yrs	109	(34.1)	308	(56.0)
5 - 9	63	(19.7)	145	(26.4)
10-14	81	(25.3)	48	(8.7)
15-19	45	(14.0)	27	(4.9)
20 >	22	(6.9)	22	(4.0)
<u>Education</u>				
High School	122	(37.3)	291	(52.7)
Junior College	14	(4.3)	153	(27.2)
University	184	(56.3)	104	(18.8)
Others	7	(2.1)	4	(0.7)
<u>Marital status</u>				
Single	130	(39.9)	465	(84.2)
Married	195	(59.8)	73	(13.2)
Separated	1	(0.3)	14	(2.5)
<u>Entry</u>				
Fresh grad.	202	(61.8)	402	(73.0)
Mid-career	125	(38.2)	149	(27.0)
Total (N)	327	(100.0)	552	(100.0)
(Population)	(1,526)		(1,879)	
			(1323)	(1431)

Note: As missing observations (no responses) are excluded from the computation, the total number of male and female sample in each category may not be precisely the same as the total sample (N) indicated at the bottom of the table.

## APPENDIX C

### ANOVA AND MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS

Multiple classification analysis(MCA) results can be requested from the ANOVA procedure in the SPSS<sup>X</sup> processes. The MCA output consists of the grand mean of the dependent variable and a table of category means for each factor expressed as deviations from the grand mean. The category means expressed as deviation convey the magnitude of the effect of each category (e.g age groups) within a factor (e.g. age).

In an MCA table, deviation values are presented in three forms: unadjusted; adjusted for main effects of other factors; and adjusted for main effects of other factors and covariates, if applicable. The adjusted values show the effect of a certain category within a given factor after variation due to other factors, and sometimes other covariates, has been taken into account.

The MCA table contains several measures of association. First, a correlation ratio, the eta statistic, is associated with the set of unadjusted category effects for each factor in the MCA table; the square of eta indicates the proportion of variance explained by a given factor (all categories considered). Beta is a statistic associated with the adjusted category effects for each factor. More specifically, Beta is a standardised regression coefficient in the sense used in multiple regression. Finally, multiple R appears at the bottom of the MCA table. Just as in multiple regression, the multiple R squared appears at the bottom of the MCA table indicates the variance in the dependent variable "accounted for" by all factors, covariates, and factor-by-factor interaction terms. (For more detailed explanation of the ANOVA procedure and multiple classification analysis, see SPSS<sup>X</sup> User's Guide, chapter 26, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983).

The MCA results from the analysis of variance on the employee's job status in chapter 10, are presented in Tables C.1 and C.2.



**Table C.1 Multiple Classification Analysis**

(1984 Data)

Dependent Variable: Job Status (Grade Group)

Grande Mean = 1.77

Variable + Category	N	Unadjusted Dev'n	Eta	Adjusted for Independents Dev'n	Beta
<b>Age</b>					
1 Under 24	273	-0.77		-0.35	
2 25 - 29	256	-0.29		-0.26	
3 30 - 34	151	0.56		0.33	
4 35 - 39	92	1.01		0.60	
5 40 - 44	35	1.20		0.63	
6 45 - 49	32	1.29		0.68	
7 50 - 54	14	1.51		0.92	
8 Above 55	3	0.89		0.43	
			0.84		0.47
<b>Length of Service</b>					
1 0 - 1 year	108	-0.74		-0.43	
2 2 - 3	215	-0.67		-0.37	
3 4 - 5	168	-0.17		-0.05	
4 6 - 7	72	-0.07		0.01	
5 8 - 9	59	0.29		0.25	
6 10 - 15	142	0.83		0.39	
7 16 - 20	58	1.21		0.60	
8 Above 21	34	1.52		0.85	
			0.81		0.43
<b>Education</b>					
1 High School	406	0.10		-0.05	
2 Junior College	166	-0.24		-0.03	
3 University	284	-0.00		0.10	
			0.14		0.08
<b>Sex</b>					
1 Male	314	0.52		0.21	
2 Female	542	-0.03		-0.12	
			0.45		0.18
<b>Multiple R Squared</b>					0.81
<b>Multiple R</b>					0.91

**Table C.2 Multiple Classification Analysis**

(1988 Data)

Dependent Variable: Job Status (Grade Group)

Grande Mean = 2.11

Variable + Category	N	Unadjusted Dev'n	Eta	Adjusted for Independents Dev'n	Beta
<b>Age</b>					
1 Under 24	162	-1.06		-0.68	
2 25 - 29	194	-0.24		-0.16	
3 30 - 34	102	0.28		0.15	
4 35 - 39	88	0.76		0.50	
5 40 - 44	52	1.01		0.66	
6 45 - 49	29	1.16		0.86	
7 50 - 54	33	0.88		0.55	
8 Above 55	12	0.59		0.26	
			0.83		0.54
<b>Length of Service</b>					
1 0 - 1 year	92	-0.93		-0.39	
2 2 - 3	92	-0.63		-0.20	
3 4 - 5	95	-0.44		-0.15	
4 6 - 7	90	-0.03		-0.01	
5 8 - 9	84	0.16		0.06	
6 10 - 15	99	0.51		0.18	
7 16 - 20	68	1.88		0.27	
8 Above 21	53	1.17		0.56	
			0.73		0.29
<b>Education</b>					
1 High School	285	0.09		-0.07	
2 Junior College	166	-0.31		-0.01	
3 University	221	0.11		0.10	
			0.20		0.08
<b>Sex</b>					
1 Male	209	0.62		0.29	
2 Female	464	-0.28		-0.13	
			0.46		0.22
<b>Multiple R Squared</b>					0.75
<b>Multiple R</b>					0.87

The London School of Economics and Political Science  
( University of London )



集計用コード  (1~4)

〈仕事意識と能力開発についてのアンケート〉

調査ご協力をお願い

四年前（1984年）、私は日本の企業における女性の能力開発について、西武百貨店の社員の皆様にアンケート調査を実施させていただきました。四年たった今日、皆様の仕事意識及び能力開発に関して、どのような変化があったか、また、『男女雇用機会均等法』が実施されて以来、貴社の中でどのような変化が生じたか、これらの問題点を検証するために、この追跡調査を実施させていただくことになりました。

ところで女性の職場への進出、職場における男女平等の問題は、単に女性ばかりでなく、男性にとっても仕事上重要な問題であると考えられます。そこで、このアンケート調査は男性と女性の社員両方に実施することにしました。皆様にはご多忙中のところ誠に恐縮ですが、何卒ご協力下さるようお願い申し上げます。

なお、今回お答えいただきます方々は、統計学的な無作為抽出法により、社員番号をもとに選ばせていただきました。皆様のご回答をいただいた調査票は、添付しました封筒に密封した上で、各店別責任者にお渡してください。人事部を経由して私どもの研究室にいただくことになっております。調査票の開封、結果の分析などはすべて私どもの研究室で電算機によって処理することになっており、調査結果は学術的研究目的以外には一切使用することはありませんので、皆様に個人的にご迷惑をおかけするようなどは絶対にありません。調査の趣旨をお汲みとり下さり、何卒ご回答下さいますように、お願い申し上げます。

昭和63年 9 月

ロンドン大学

研究員 アリス・ラム（監 章玲）

記入上の注意

1. 回答は、すべて右側の  の中に番号で記入して下さい。ワクのわきについている番号は、集計上のものです。気にしないで下さい。
2. とくにことわりのない場合は、1つだけ選んで下さい。

〈質問項目〉

I あなたの入社についておたずねします。

Q 1 あなたが西武百貨店に入社された主な理由は何ですか。

(主な理由を3つまで順位をつけて選んで下さい。)

01. 企業の成長性・安定性が良いから
02. 企業の知名度が高く、社会的なイメージが良いから
03. 企業が文化産業に対する取り組み方が良いから
04. 賃金・労働時間など待遇が良いから
05. 福利厚生が充実しているから
06. 自分の資格・技能を活かせるから
07. 通勤に便利だから
08. 性別による差別がなく、女性を積極的に活用するから
09. 女性の再雇用制度(ライセンス制度)があるから
10. 知人の紹介
11. 特に理由はない
12. その他(具体的に)

( )

	Q 1	
第1位		(5~6)
第2位		(7~8)
第3位		(9~10)

Q 2 あなたは入社当時、是非やってみたいと思う仕事がありましたか。

(以下の現在の職種に近いもの1つだけ選んで下さい)

01. 一般販売職
02. セールスエキスパート職
03. マイスター職
04. ショップマスター職
05. アウトセールス職
06. バイヤー職
07. スタッフ職
08. 技術職
09. マネジメント職(管理職)
10. 特になかった
11. その他(具体的に)

( )

	Q 2	
		(11~12)

II あなたは現在の仕事や就業条件などについて、しいていえば、どのように思っていますか。

Q 3 仕事の内容は

1. 満足
2. まあ満足
3. やや不満
4. 不満

	Q 3	
		(13)

Q 4 仕事の将来性は

1. ある
2. どちらかといえばある
3. どちらかといえはない
4. ない

	Q 4	
		(14)

Q 5 社内での自分の地位は

1. 満足
2. まあ満足
3. やや不満
4. 不満

	Q 5	
		(15)

Q 6 収入は

1. 満足
2. まあ満足
3. やや不満
4. 不満

	Q 6	
		(16)

Q 7 実労働時間は

1. 長すぎる
2. どちらかといえば長い
3. ちょうどよい
4. どちらかといえば短い
5. 短い

	Q 7	
		(17)

Q 8 自分の能力・実績は正當に評価されていますか。

1. されている
2. どちらかといえばされている
3. どちらかといえはされていない
4. されていない

	Q 8	
		(18)

Q 9 現在より責任が重い仕事を担当してみたいと思いますか。

1. 担当してみたい
2. 自信がないので担当したくない
3. 現在の仕事はすでに責任が重いので、いまのまままでよい
4. 責任が重い仕事は担当したくない
5. その他(具体的に)

( )

	Q 9	
		(19)

Q10 いままで、あなたはこの会社をやめたいと思ったことがありますか。

1. そんな気持ちになっことは1度もない
2. 多少そんな気持ちになったことがある
3. 真剣にそう思ったことがある
4. 現在でもそのことで悩んだり迷ったりしている

Q10  (20)

→SQ その理由は (具体的に)

( )

Ⅲ 教育訓練についておたずねします。

Q11 あなたは、入社以来教育訓練 (研修コース) を受たことがありますか。

1. ある
2. ない

Q11  (21)

Q12 (前問で「ある」と答えた方に) どのような研修を受けましたか (あるいは受けていますか)。a～gのそれぞれについて回答して下さい。

	1 受 け た	2 受 け て な い	
a 一般社員研修	1	2	a <input type="checkbox"/> (22)
b マネージメントコース	1	2	b <input type="checkbox"/> (23)
c 職能専門コース	1	2	c <input type="checkbox"/> (24)
d 実務訓練コース	1	2	d <input type="checkbox"/> (25)
e 通信研修	1	2	e <input type="checkbox"/> (26)
f 国内外留学	1	2	f <input type="checkbox"/> (27)
g その他 (具体的に) ( )	1	2	g <input type="checkbox"/> (28)

Q13 日常業務の上でOJT (現場での教育訓練) は能力開発のために非常に重要だと思われませんが、あなたの職場では男性と女性は同じようなOJTを受けていると思いますか。

1. 思う
2. 思わない
3. わからない

Q13  (29)

→SQ どのような点が違うと思いますか。a～dのそれぞれについて回答して下さい。

	1 ハ イ	2 イ エ	
a 上司の男女に対する教育指導のし方が違う	1	2	a <input type="checkbox"/> (30)
b 与えられる仕事の種類が違う (例えば、男子は商品管理、企画、数値等、女性は販売、レジ等)	1	2	b <input type="checkbox"/> (31)
c 与えられる情報量が違う	1	2	c <input type="checkbox"/> (32)
d その他 (具体的に) ( )	1	2	d <input type="checkbox"/> (33)

Ⅳ 次に配置転換・昇進などについておたずねします。

Q14 あなたの現在のポストへの配属理由は、次のどれだと思いますか。(1つだけ)

1. 自分のキャリア (経験・知識) からみて、適任と思われたから
2. 自分の性格や人柄からみて適任と思われたから
3. 学校で学んだことを活かせると思われたから
4. 自分が希望したから
5. 育成のためのローテーションの一環として
6. 特に理由はない
7. わからない
8. その他 (具体的に)  
( )

Q14  (34)

Q15 あなたは西武百貨店に勤めてから配置転換を何回経験しましたか。

- 1. なし → Q16へ進んで下さい
- 2. 1回
- 3. 2回
- 4. 3回
- 5. 4回以上

Q15  
 (35)

→SQ1 最近の配置転換はどのようなものでしたか。

- 1. 職場内での配置転換 (同じ部門での配置転換)
- 2. 職場間での配置転換 (他部門への配置転換)
- 3. 事業所間での配置転換
- 4. その他 (具体的に)

SQ1  
 (36)

→SQ2 その配置転換によって、仕事の内容が変わりましたか。

- 1. はい
- 2. いいえ
- 3. その他 (具体的に)

SQ2  
 (37)

→SQ3 仕事についての責任は

- 1. 重くなった
- 2. かわらない
- 3. 軽くなった

SQ3  
 (38)

→SQ4 自分の能力を示す機会は

- 1. 増えた
- 2. かわらない
- 3. 減った

SQ4  
 (39)

→SQ5 その配置転換は昇進を伴いましたか。

- 1. はい
- 2. いいえ

SQ5  
 (40)

→SQ6 その配置転換はあなたから見て、あなた自身の能力の形成にどのように役立ったとお考えですか。  
(もっともあてはまるものを1つだけ選んで下さい。)

- 1. 特定の専門的な知識や技術・技能が身についた
- 2. 幅広い知識や技術・技能が身についた
- 3. 管理的な能力が身についた
- 4. 知識や技術・技能の習得にはあまり役に立っていない
- 5. 知識や技術・技能の習得には全く役に立っていない
- 6. わからない
- 7. その他 (具体的に)

SQ6  
 (41)

Q16 あなたは一般的に言って能力開発のためには定期的な配置転換が必要だと思いますか。

- 1. 是非必要
- 2. ある程度は必要
- 3. あまり必要ない
- 4. わからない

Q16  
 (42)

Q17 この次の配置転換の機会の際に、あなたは能力開発のために職務を変更 (仕事の変更) したいと思いますか。

- 1. 思う
- 2. 思わない
- 3. 特に考えていない
- 4. その他 (具体的に)

Q17  
 (43)

Q18 では能力開発のために職場を変更 (就業場所の変更) したいと思いますか。

- 1. 思う
- 2. 思わない
- 3. 特に考えていない
- 4. その他 (具体的に)

Q18  
 (44)

→SQ7 どのようなものを希望しますか。

- 1. 同じ部内の他の職場へ
- 2. 他の部門へ
- 3. 他の事業所へ
- 4. 特に希望はない
- 5. その他 (具体的に)

SQ7  
 (45)

Q19 あなたが西武百貨店の中での今後の希望進路は。

- 1. マネジメント職 (管理職)
- 2. 専門職 (マネジメント職を除く狭義の専門職)
- 3. 職種にこだわらず、自分に合ったことなら何でもやってみたい
- 4. 特に希望はない
- 5. その他 (具体的に)

Q19  
 (46)

Q20 あなたは現在よりも高い地位に昇進したいと思いますか。

- 1. 現在より高い地位に昇進したい
- 2. 現在と同程度の地位でよい
- 3. 昇進について特に考えていない
- 4. その他 (具体的に)

Q20  
 (47)

Q21 あなたはこの会社ですっと働きつづける場合に、将来はどこまで昇進できると思いますか。

1. 一般職
2. 係長または相当職
3. 課長または相当職
4. 部長または相当職
5. 部長以上または相当職以上
6. 特に考えていない
7. その他（具体的に）

Q21

( ) (48)

V 貴社の新しい人事・雇用制度及び社内における女性の地位についておたずねします。

Q22 貴社では、最近『勤務地申告制度』が導入されましたが、あなたは、次のどれを選びましたか。

1. グローバル型
2. 勤務地限定型
3. あてはまらない

Q22

( ) (49)

→SQ (1と答えた方に)

グローバル型を選択した理由は（具体的にお書き下さい）。

( )

Q23 あなたはフレックスタイム制度についてどう考えますか。

1. 積極的に導入すべきである
2. 部門特性をみて導入すべきである
3. 導入は慎重にすべきである
4. 導入には反対である
5. わからない

Q23

( ) (50)

Q24 西武百貨店の新しい人事制度において、年功より個人の能力や業績を大きく重視することになると、今後女性が登用される機会が増えると思いますか。

1. 大いに増える
2. 多少増える
3. あまり増えない
4. ほとんど増えない
5. わからない

Q24

( ) (51)

Q25 貴社の女性活用は、他社にくらべて進んでいると思いますか。

1. 思う
2. 思わない
3. わからない

Q25

( ) (52)

Q26 『均等法』は貴社の女性のキャリアにとって、役に立っていると思いますか。

1. はい
2. いいえ
3. わからない

Q26

( ) (53)

Q27 あなたにとって仕事をする上で、男性の上司と女性の上司はどちらが望ましいと思いますか。

1. 男性の上司
2. 女性の上司
3. 能力さえあれば、性別は関係ない

Q27

( ) (54)

Q28 あなたの職場は男女平等だと思いますか。

1. はい
2. いいえ
3. わからない

Q28

( ) (55)

→SQ どの点が不平等だと思いますか。a～fのそれぞれについて回答して下さい。

	1 ハ イ	2 イ エ		SQ
a 能力・業績の評価	1	2	a	(56)
b 昇進・昇格	1	2	b	(57)
c 教育訓練の機会	1	2	c	(58)
d 配置転換	1	2	d	(59)
e 職種の配属	1	2	e	(60)
f その他（具体的に） ( )	1	2	f	(61)

Q29 あなたは西武百貨店でいつまで勤めようと考えていますか。

1. 定年まで勤めたい
2. 定年までは考えていないが、ある時期までは勤めたい
3. ほかのいい仕事につくまで勤めたい
4. 特に考えていない
5. その他（具体的に）

Q29

( ) (62)

(女性の力は基本調査項目へ進んで下さい。)

VI Q30～Q33までは女性の方のみにおたずね  
します。

Q30 (独身の方に) あなたは結婚されても仕事を続け  
ますか。

- 1. はい
- 2. いいえ
- 3. 特に考えていない
- 4. その他(具体的に)

Q30  
( )  (63)

Q31 (独身の方や子供がいない方に) 出産されても仕  
事を続けますか。

- 1. 子供が生まれても継続して勤める
- 2. 子供が生まれたら退職し、子供に手がかからな  
くなったら再就職する
- 3. 子供が生まれたら退職し、再就職はしない
- 4. 特に考えていない
- 5. その他(具体的に)

Q31  
( )  (64)

Q32 (子供がいる方に) あなたは小学校入学前のお子  
さんがいますか。

- 1. いる
- 2. いない

Q32  
 (65)

Q33 (女性の全員に) あなたは現在の仕事をつつけて  
いく上で、何か悩んでいることや不満に思っている  
ことがありますか。(3つまで選んで下さい)

- 01. 自分の時間がない
- 02. 家事をする時間がない
- 03. 育児や子供を教育する時間がない
- 04. 仕事が単調でおもしろくない
- 05. 長時間労働の割には収入が少ない
- 06. 残業が多い(勤務時間が長すぎる)
- 07. 疲れる
- 08. 人間関係がうまくいかない
- 09. 職場での男女差別
- 10. 能力が活かせていない
- 11. 業績が認められていない
- 12. 仕事の将来性がない
- 13. 特に悩んでいることはない
- 14. その他(具体的に)

Q33

	(66~67)
	(68~69)
	(70~71)

(基本調査項目へ進んで下さい。)

基本調査項目

F1 所属する事業所

- 1. 本部(商品事業部を含む)
- 2. 池袋店
- 3. 渋谷店
- 4. 新規事業部および  
その他事業部( )

F1  
 (72)

F2 年 齢

- 1. 24歳以下
- 2. 25~29歳
- 3. 30~34歳
- 4. 35~39歳
- 5. 40~44歳
- 6. 45~49歳
- 7. 50~54歳
- 8. 55歳以上

F2  
 (73)

F3 勤続年数(1年未満の場合は0と記入して下さい)

F3  
満  年 (74~75)



F 4 性別

1. 男 2. 女

F 4

(76)

F 5 結婚

1. 未婚 2. 既婚 3. 死・離別

F 5

(77)

F 6 最終学歴

1. 中卒 (旧小卒・旧高小卒) 4. 短大卒  
2. 高卒 (旧高女卒・旧中卒) 5. 大学卒・大学院卒 (旧高専卒)  
3. 専門 (専修) 学校卒 6. その他

F 6

(78)

F 7 入社

1. 新卒入社 2. 中途入社

F 7

(79)

F 8 雇用 (契約) 形態

1. キャリア・キャスト 3. ソウシャル・キャスト  
2. アクティブ・キャスト 4. クリエイティブ・キャスト

F 8

(80)

F 9 就業形態 (雇用契約上の週平均勤務時間)

1. フルタイム (週37時間30分以上) 3. パートタイム (週28時間未満)  
2. パートタイム (週約29~37時間29分)

F 9

(81)

F 10 職位

1. 一般職 2. マネジメント職 (管理職) 3. 専門職

F 10

(82)

F 11 職掌

01. 一般販売職 06. セールスエキスパート職 11. バイヤー職  
02. 一般事務職 07. アウトセールス職 12. 技術職  
03. 係長 08. マイスター職 13. 専任職  
04. 課長 (担当) 09. ショップマスター職 14. その他 ( )  
05. 部長 10. スタッフ職

F 11

(83~84)

F 12 あなたの級

1. 3級以下 4. 8~9級  
2. 4~5級 5. 10級以上  
3. 6~7級 6. あてはまらない

F 12

(85)

F 13 所属部門

1. 販売部門 5. 人事・総務部門  
2. 営業・外販部門 6. 親規事業部門  
3. 営業企画・販売企画部門 7. その他部門 ( )  
4. 商品企画・管理部門

F 13

(86)

F14 あなたの直接の上司

01. 男性      02. 女性

F14

(90)

F15 (部下がいる方に) あなたの直接指揮下の部下の人数

F15

人 (91~93)

F16 月平均の残業時間(繁忙期を除く)

01. ほとんどない    02. 5時間以下    03. 6時間~10時間    04. 11時間~15時間  
05. 16時間~20時間    06. 21時間~25時間    07. 26~30時間    08. 30時間以上

F16

(94)

F17 休日出勤

01. ほとんどない    02. 3ヶ月に1回    03. 2ヶ月に1回    04. 月に1回  
05. 月に2回    06. 月に3回以上    07. その他(具体的に:    )

F17

(95)

■最後に女性が働くことについて、何かご意見やご要望がございましたら、どんなことでも結構ですから、下記へご記入下さい。

ご協力有難うございました。念のため記入もれがないかどうか  
ご確認のうえお出し下さいますようお願いいたします。

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