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## Introduction

### **Labor and Family Formation**

In this special feature, we focus on the dynamics of family and labor in Japan. In recent years, Japan has seen great changes to the conventional family model. In the past, the dynamics of family and labor largely followed the classic model in which a couple marries and has children, and the husband supports the family as the primary breadwinner, while the wife dedicates herself to raising the children until they are old enough for her to earn some supplementary income. Recently, however, the number of unmarried people has been rising, as has the number of married couples who remain childless. Meanwhile, it has also become increasingly commonplace for couples to conceive children first and get married afterward (“marriage preceded by pregnancy”). In terms of married couples’ work styles, as well, women have become more active participants in the workforce, and the number of married couples in which both work full-time is on the rise.

What process has this “diversification” of family-labor dynamics followed in Japan? What is the nature of the reciprocal relationship between the two, and what impact have these changes had on society? This issue brings together several articles that offer insights into these questions.

The first article examines work roles within the family. “Historical Origins of the Male Breadwinner Household Model: Britain, Sweden and Japan,” by Osamu Saito, examines the origins of the archetypal male-breadwinner household from a historical perspective. First, it considers the process through which the male breadwinner household model became predominant in Britain, Sweden, and Japan, and notes that factors specific to each country caused discrepancies in the timeline of this path to predominance. These include historical and cultural factors such as the state of the family, the functioning of social safety nets, and the stance and policies of government. In order to examine common underlying factors in these countries, the article goes on to introduce the hypothesis put forward by economic historian Jan de Vries, and conducts an analysis employing data from Japan. It concludes that for all the countries discussed, the historical period when the male breadwinner household model took root was one when it was not possible to secure high-quality resources and services from the marketplace in areas such as health and childcare, and as a result, when men’s earning potential rose sufficiently, women increasingly focused on activities within the household to improve the quality of life.

The second article focuses on family formation and discusses its relationship to the labor market. Miho Iwasawa and Kenji Kamata’s “Marriage Preceded by Pregnancy and Women’s Employment” features a rigorous analysis aimed at answering the question: “When a woman’s pregnancy precedes her marriage (i.e. a shotgun marriage), what sort of impact does it have on her future career?” In recent years, marriages preceded by pregnancy have made up an increasing percentage of all first marriages, and there are two factors that

may be contributing to this trend. The first scenario is that marriage preceded by pregnancy is in itself more likely to occur, and the second is that the number of first marriages for other reasons (i.e. not preceded by pregnancy) has simply declined. Utilizing data from the National Fertility Survey Project, the authors determined that it is the second scenario that explains the rise in marriages preceded by pregnancy as a percentage of all first marriages. The authors go on to analyze how the experience of marriage preceded by pregnancy impacts women's careers thereafter. For this analysis, a critical point is that women who have experienced marriage preceded by pregnancy differ from their counterparts (who have given birth under other circumstances) in terms of average attributes, and thus it is necessary to control for these attributes (in other words, to compare women who are as similar as possible to one another) in order to assess the impact of marriage preceded by pregnancy. The authors employed techniques such as weighting and matching with propensity scores, and came to the conclusion that even when a marriage is precipitated by pregnancy, that in itself does not appear to be a drastic negative effect on the career or income of the woman after childbirth. While the women in question do have a greater propensity than their counterparts who have not experienced marriage preceded by pregnancy to have difficulty continuing to work after childbirth, to be non-regular employees, and to have low incomes, this is not so much a cause-and-effect relationship as the result of other correlated attributes such as marriage at younger ages and shorter relationships with spouses prior to marriage.

While Iwasawa and Kamata's article analyzed the impact of family formation processes on performance in the labor market, Koyo Miyoshi's article "The Labor Market and Marriage Decisions in Japan" examines the inverse of this question, namely the impact of labor market conditions on family formation. The article begins with an extensive overview of existing studies into the relationships between marriage or childbirth and various indexes of the labor market. In overseas studies, empirical analyses concluded that increased inequality in men's wages is correlated with decreased marriage rates among women, and that high unemployment rates and insecure employment contracts are correlated with lower birth rates. In Japanese studies, as well, it has been noted that rising levels of non-regular employment among men are correlated with later marriage ages. Building on these previous studies, the author estimated women's marriage using a hazards model employing data from the Japanese Panel Survey of Consumers conducted by the Institute for Research on Household Economics. The outcome indicated that while higher estimated annual market income and household income was correlated with later marriage ages, results differ depending on the methods used to estimate unemployment rate at time of graduation.

Amid shifting family formation and labor market dynamics, what sort of stance do Japanese companies adopt toward their employees' families, and what human resource policies do they adopt? Yuko Tanaka's article "The Family in Human Resource Management" addresses these questions. In the past, under the "familistic management" approach to human resource management, compensation was paid in accordance with personal attributes, which in addition to age and length of employment included marital status and number of

dependent family members. Here, the author seeks to clarify the rationale for payment of a “family allowance” to employees, which recently has been progressively losing its basis for viability amid a rise in the relative importance of unit cost of labor. Another situation in which work-family dynamics come to the forefront is that of lone assignments (i.e. transfer of an employee away from the family). Separated from their families, assignees often experience stress and increased levels of anxiety and loneliness, but have also been observed to overcompensate for these negative effects by working with redoubled enthusiasm. Another observation is that underlying the long work hours of male regular employees is the standard premise of a male worker married to a full-time housewife, and companies’ assumption that the worker’s stress may spill over into the household but will be relieved by his wife and/or children. As these attitudes and practices generate Work-Family Conflict and lead to depression among family members and decreased levels of marital satisfaction, the article concludes that conventional labor management practices need to be reformed.

With regard to the relationship between Japan’s traditional employment system and family formation, “social law” (a collective term for labor law and social security law) plays a vital role. Eri Kasagi’s article “Family Formation and the Social Law” discusses the interaction of Japan’s social law and the family, in the context of the historical narrative of Japan’s high economic growth period after World War II. During this era of high economic growth, family formation with the premise of a single-earner household was a social norm, and legal decisions regarding employee redeployment orders were justified by the perceived necessity of a tradeoff between job security and home life. However, the gender-equality employment model emerged to replace this single-earner model, the Equal Employment Act and the Childcare Leave Act were enacted, and at this stage the social law began to recognize that work and family are two parts of one whole, and to intervene judicially with direct consideration for workers’ responsibilities toward their families. Since the mid-2000s, the concept of Work-Life Balance (WLB) has gained prevalence, and there has been increasing recognition that workers have not only family responsibilities but also the need for a private life with diverse and fulfilling activities. As WLB is a comprehensive concept applying to all workers, it is seen as playing a significant role in the realization of employment equality and measures to raise the birth rate.

We are confident that these five articles will make a significant contribution to readers’ understanding of the dynamics of labor and family formation in Japan.

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