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## Introduction

### **Why Is There a Persistent Gender Gap in the Labor Market?**

Since the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (Act on Securing, Etc. of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment) in 1985, a great number of policies have been implemented in Japan to support the employment of women and particularly the continued employment of women already in the labor force. This includes the enforcement (and amendment) of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act (Act on Childcare Leave, Caregiver Leave, and Other Measures for the Welfare of Workers Caring for Children or Other Family Members). However, contrary to such efforts to improve working conditions, there is not exactly a significant amount of evidence to suggest improvement in the status of women in Japan's labor market. For example, while it is certainly true that the formerly low percentage of women in employment in their thirties and forties is now rising, it has been highlighted that this is entirely due to the increase in non-regular employment and the decrease in marriage among women in said age brackets, and does not mean that women are increasingly able to continue working in regular employment following major events in life such as marriage and childbirth. Furthermore, one consequence of the lack of increase in continued employment among women is that the percentage of women in managerial positions in Japan is extremely low. According to the 2013 Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) the percentage of women in positions equivalent to section manager or higher is as low as 6.6% (in companies with 30 or more employees). Given the present conditions, the Japanese government has designated women's career advancement as one of the key areas to address in its growth strategy, and is pursuing initiatives such as efforts to ensure that 30% of managerial positions in Japan are occupied by women by 2020.

Why does the employment of women in Japan not increase? Why are female employees still being assigned roles that are focused on supporting the work of male employees? Researchers are now turning the spotlight on the rigid working practices in Japanese companies, the gender gap in motivation to learn at the stage of education before entry to the labor market, and other such factors behind the lack of increase in the employment of women. It could be said that such research adopts viewpoints on a more "micro" level, in contrast with the conventional approaches that have focused on "macro" elements such as features of the legal system and other such "prerequisites" for women's participation in the workforce. As if following the same course as these new directions in research, policies are also being oriented toward bold measures to solve problems in the ways of working in Jap-

anese companies. This special edition brings together five papers that address such issues by investigating the factors behind why the gender gap in the labor market continues to exist.

Firstly, “Determinants of the Gender Gap in the Proportion of Managers among White-Collar Regular Workers in Japan” by Kazuo Yamaguchi reveals the reasons for the low proportion of women in managerial positions in Japan through analysis of a survey conducted by the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2009. According to his findings, even if women were to have the same level of education and years in employment, this would only eliminate around 20% to 30% of the gender gap in the likelihood of promotion to managerial positions. Yamaguchi shows that it is in fact working hours that play a significant role in generating the gender gap in the likelihood of promotion to managerial positions, and that while working long hours is not really a factor in raising the likelihood of male employee’s promotions to managerial positions (because it is taken as a given that men will work long hours), it does increase women’s likelihood of promotion to managerial positions. He also demonstrates that in the case of employees whose youngest child is six years old or older, even if the age of the employees is controlled, the percentage of men in managerial positions rises, while the percentage of women in managerial positions decreases. These results suggest that companies apply employment management approaches that differ depending on the sex of employees, on the basis of the gender-based division of roles within the family. Yamaguchi emphasizes the necessity of establishing legal principles that comprehensively prohibit indirect discrimination, as have been established in other countries.

In “An Analysis of Organizational Factors That Increase Women’s Ambition for Promotion,” Emiko Takeishi investigates the reasons for the low level of ambition for promotion to managerial positions among women by looking at how it is related to the workplace environments that women find themselves in. In Japan, the percentage of women in managerial roles is remarkably low, and women have inherently lower levels of ambition for promotion than men. However, the causes for this do not necessarily rest with women. Through detailed analysis of a survey conducted by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training in 2012, Takeishi reveals that even if measures to support women’s career advancement and to support balancing work and family life are implemented at the company level, there is no increase in ambition for promotion among female employees unless they recognize such efforts. The rate of recognition of support measures implemented at the company level is not exactly high, and in order for such measures to have an impact, it is necessary for them to be implemented on the basis of thorough efforts to raise awareness among employees. Takeishi also reveals that efforts by supervisors to provide appropriate support for their subordinates’ career development play a more important role in raising

ambition for promotion than measures at the company level. As, however, supervisors' management approaches tend to differ according to the gender of their subordinates, it is suggested that it may be effective to pursue measures to encourage supervisors to support female subordinates in developing their careers.

Tomoko Komagawa's "Gender-Based Job Segregation and the Gender Gap in Career Formation: Focusing on Bank Clerical Staff since the Postwar Years" provides a detailed explanation of how gender-based job segregation has established itself in Japanese companies over the years, using the example of the Japanese banking industry. The Japanese banking industry, which was formerly one of the most notably regulated industries, is also known as an industry in which there is a significant gender gap in careers. From around the late 1950s it became the convention in major banks for male employees to be predominantly assigned tasks such as loan screening and client relations, while women were predominantly assigned to deposit operations and the internal clerical work for each section. Banks started to employ large numbers of female high school graduates and assign them as tellers at deposit counters, in order to create a friendly and approachable image that would allow them to acquire deposits from individual clients. This served to develop a workplace culture in which "men work outside (for the sections involved in loans and corporate and individual client relations), while women protect the inside (the internal clerical work)." Up until the early 1990s, women's careers were limited to "women's jobs" with limited opportunities to develop their skills through internal transfers, and only rare opportunities for promotion to managerial positions. In the late 1990s, major financial deregulation led to an increase in the importance of providing services to individuals (retail banking). Banks subsequently began to also invest in the education and training of female employees, and to expand measures to support balancing work and family life with the aim of ensuring that female employees stay in their jobs. As a result, the percentage of women in managerial positions began to rise. Nevertheless, the branches with female branch managers are mainly engaged in providing services to individual customers, and still many of the branches that largely provide services to corporate clients have male branch managers. As this trend shows, while the "ceiling" or barriers blocking women's career progression are gradually being lifted as a result of banks having pursued efforts to "utilize" female employees, these efforts have also in effect led to ongoing gender-based job segregation. Looking at these examples of women's career advancement in the banking industry, it seems that similar cases may also be observed in other industries in Japan (albeit with differences in scale).

As suggested by Yamaguchi and Komagawa, Japanese companies pursue employment management approaches that are in some elements based on the assumption that women (wives) bear the responsibility for the family. In "Female Labor Participation and

the Sexual Division of Labor: A Consideration on the Persistent Male-Breadwinner Model,” Junya Tsutsui investigates this more directly by looking at whether reductions in the frequency of housework done by wives are substituted by increases in the housework frequency of their spouses. His analysis reveals that although wives decrease the frequency at which they engage in housework as their working hours grow longer, the frequency at which males engage in housework does not increase to the extent that it compensates for that decrease. As a result, wives find that the level of domestic welfare decreases if they increase their working hours, and therefore face a tradeoff between housework and work that prompts them to avoid taking jobs that involve working long hours. Tsutsui surmises that attitudes and shared norms play a significant role in this inequality in the division of housework in Japan, as it cannot be explained by differences between the working hours or income of the respective partners. Under such conditions, if childcare leave and other such measures to support balancing work with family life are only expanded for women, it is possible that this will further solidify the sexual division of labor in married couples.

In “Gender Disparities in Academic Performance and Motivation in STEM Subjects in Japan,” Natsumi Isa and Ayumu Chinen analyze the reasons for the low percentage of female students in Japan who elect to major in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) subjects when entering higher education, by looking at motivation toward studying mathematics and Japanese. While at the elementary school stage female students are level with male students in mathematics in terms of their objectively observable performance and motivation to learn, many female students have a strong dislike for mathematics. In the third year of junior high school, a positive effect on motivation to learn mathematics is seen particularly among students who have achievement-oriented values, and this effect is stronger among female students than male students. The choices made in the third year of junior high school form a significant turning point in a student’s academic career path leading up to higher education. The fact that adaptability to an achievement-oriented value system determines motivation to study STEM subjects in the third year of junior high school, and that the impact of such adaptability is significant among female students, suggests that in order to encourage female students to elect to study STEM subjects, it is necessary to pursue initiatives that take a different approach to those that set out to improve female students’ performance in and motivation to study such subjects.

These studies bring to light a vicious cycle in which the roles that companies expect of women limit the work that women engage in, in turn leading to a decrease in companies’ expectations of women. This vicious cycle has surely determined the current status of women in Japanese companies and Japanese society as a whole, and future policies therefore need to be focused on breaking it. While it is highly conceivable that such a task may

pose great challenges, the papers in this special edition offer the first steps toward the solutions.

Tadashi Sakai  
Hosei University