ONE

Introduction

What do Americans and other Westerners think of when they hear the phrase "women in Japan"? For many people, the immediate image is that of kimono-clad, tea-serving, compliant women who do not play any role in the modern economy. This image is erroneous. Japanese women now participate in the economy at levels similar to women in Western industrial nations. Yet to conclude that there is equivalence between women's roles in the economies of Japan and the industrial West would be to replace one misleading image with another. The main goal of this book is to provide more realistic—and necessarily more complex—images of women's role in the postwar Japanese economy.

While Western impressions of Japanese women's roles may be poorly informed, Japan nevertheless represents a seeming contradiction: high rates of participation in the economy, yet sharp gender differentiation in wages, employment status, and occupational roles. The past few decades of experience in Western industrial nations, both capitalist and socialist, have suggested that a high female labor force participation rate does not necessarily mean the rapid extinction of sharply delineated sex roles in the economy or the disappearance of the male-female wage gap. But Japan demonstrates this more clearly than any other industrial society. No matter how we choose to measure gender stratification in the labor force, Japan represents the most marked deviation from other countries. This is true despite the fact that Japan has entered the ranks of advanced industrial economies. About 58 percent of Japan's people live in cities of over 100,000, compared to

76 percent of the U.S. population, and although the agricultural sector remains slightly larger than in the United States and a number of other industrial nations, the vast majority (over 90 percent) of Japanese workers are in the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy. The size of the service sector in Japan is comparable to that of West Germany and is slightly smaller than those of the United States, Great Britain, and France.[1] But the contrast between the roles of men and women in the Japanese economy is greater than in the West. Why should this be of interest to Western social scientists, policymakers, and the public at large?

Japan's phenomenal rate of economic growth in the past quarter-century and its increasing dominance in world markets have transformed it into a model of a successful postindustrial society in many people's minds. So it is critical that we ask whether Japanese sex roles represent an epiphenomenon, a legacy of Japan's relatively late entrance into the industrial world. Alternatively, do the Japanese social and economic institutions so admired by Westerners for their cohesion and efficiency actually produce and maintain strong sex roles in the economy? Have these institutions produced an even stronger case of the contradiction, already apparent in the West, between high rates of female participation in the economy on the one hand and economic inequality between men and women on the other?

I argue that this is the case. Japanese women's roles are not the epiphenomenal result of late industrial development per se. Nor are these roles simply the product of a strong sex-role ideology in Japanese culture. Rather, they are closely tied to the development of social and economic institutions in postwar Japanese society. These social and economic institutions did not "just happen." They are the result of purposive action. As Robert Cole, a long-time scholar of Japanese industrial relations, points out in reference to Japan's infamous "permanent employment system": "Although there are some aspects of an unconscious persistence of custom in the evolution of permanent employment, for the most part it represents a conscious act of institution building" (Cole 1979: 24).

[1] The proportion of the labor force employed in the service sector (industries other than agriculture, mining, forestry and fishing, manufacturing, and construction) is 59.6 percent in Japan, 71.2 percent in the United States, 72.2 percent in Great Britain, 66.2 percent in France, and 57.2 percent in West Germany (International Labor Organization 1988). Note that the statistics reported in this book are for West Germany prior to its unification with East Germany.

The Japanese educational system and labor market have developed historically in ways that disadvantage women in economic terms. This book is concerned principally with these institutions and with the family. Because my argument is about how these institutions structure the opportunities and constraints for Japanese men's and women's economic roles, the story I tell is not one based on a conspiracy of men against women or capitalists against workers. The story is about why Japanese institutions such as schools and work organizations operate in the ways they do, and how men and women respond rationally to the choices and constraints inherent in these institutions. The aggregate result is a high level of gender differentiation and stratification in the economy.

JAPAN AND WESTERN INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES COMPARED

Japanese women participate in the labor force at a similar rate to women in Western industrial nations, as the following percentages of participation (all for 1987 unless otherwise indicated) show:[2]

Sweden	81.1
Norway	63.7
Denmark (1986)	57.5
Canada	56.2
United States	54.2
Japan	*48.6*
Australia	48.3
United Kingdom (1986)	48.2
France	45.8
West Germany	42.0

With 49 percent of adult females in the labor force, Japan stands between the high rates of North America and Scandinavia and the somewhat lower rates of Western Europe. This apparent typicality masks three important phenomena that set Japan apart: (1) Japanese

[2] International Labor Organization 1988; Ministry of Labor, Japan, 1988. Countries were chosen on the basis of geographical representation and comparability of data. Figures are calculated as (total number of women in the labor force/total female population aged 15 and above) x 100, with the following exceptions: (1) for Norway, the denominator is the total female population aged 16 and above; (2) for Sweden, population and employment figures are reported for age 64 and under, which inflates the rate of participation in the labor force relative to other countries, because the 65+ age group, not included in the Swedish figure, has a very low rate of economic participation.

women, relative to men, are much more likely than their Western counterparts to be piecework laborers or workers in family-run enterprises; (2) there is a greater tendency in Japan than in other countries for white-collar jobs to be "male" and blue-collar jobs to be "female"; and (3) the male-female wage gap is greater in Japan.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employment status is an important indicator of gender stratification that has generally been ignored in research in the United States because the overwhelming majority of the U.S. labor force consists of employees.[3] In economies such as Japan's, employment status is a more salient aspect of work. Fully one-quarter (14,640,000 people) of the Japanese labor force are self-employed workers or workers in small family-run businesses. This is a greater proportion than in any other industrial country, although France and Australia also show high rates of self-employment. If men and women are distributed differently among the employee, self-employed, and family enterprise sectors, this is an important indicator of gender stratification. For example, working in a small family business involves more flexible working hours than working as an employee in a large corporation. But it also involves a dependence on the continuation of the family unit. It is typically unpaid labor, so it does not imply the economic independence that can arise from wage labor. Self-employment is also an important category to examine in and of itself. In Japan this category is comprised both of independent shopowners (the classic "petite bourgeoisie"), who tend to be men, and piece-rate workers who work out of their living rooms assembling modern or traditional consumer goods. The latter are overwhelmingly women.

Table 1.1 shows the sexes' distribution by employment status (employee, self-employed, and family enterprise worker) in a number of industrial economies. In all countries but Japan, female workers are more likely than male workers to be paid employees. For example, in the United States, 94 percent of employed women and 90 percent of employed men are employees. Japan displays the largest gap between the proportions of men and women who work as employees, and the gap is in the *opposite* direction: men are more likely than women to

[3] Recent observers argue that more self-employment is emerging in the U.S. economy, involving 8–14 percent of the labor force (Steinmetz and Wright 1989).

TABLE 1.1

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WORKERS IN INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES

	Employee (%)	Self-employed (%)	Family enterprise worker (%)
Japan			
Women	68.6	12.1	19.3
Men	79.5	17.8	2.7
Nonagricultural population only			
Women	75.6	11.6	12.9
Men	84.7	13.5	1.7
Sweden			
Women	94.8	4.6	0.7
Men	87.2	12.5	0.2
United States			
Women	93.7	5.7	0.6
Men	89.8	10.1	0.1
United Kingdom			
Women	93.3	6.7	Not reported
Men	85.0	15.0	Not reported
Denmark (1986)			
Women	92.3	3.3	4.4
Men	86.2	13.7	0.1
Norway			
Women	92.3	4.1	3.6
Men	85.8	12.7	1.4
Canada			
Women	91.2	6.8	1.9
Men	88.7	10.9	0.4
West Germany			
Women	88.8	4.7	6.6
Men	88.1	11.2	0.6
Australia			
Women	87.0	11.7	1.2
Men	81.6	17.9	0.6
France			
Women	86.1	6.7	7.2
Men	82.0	16.9	1.1

SOURCES: International Labor Organization 1988; Ministry of Labor, Japan, 1988.
NOTE: All figures are for 1987, except where indicated. Figures represent the percentage of workers in each employment status. Workers designated in the International Labor Organization statistics as "unclassifiable by status" are not included in the table.

be employees. When industrial economies are compared, Japanese women make up the lowest proportion of employees relative to men.

The comparatively low percentage (69 percent) of Japanese women workers who are employees is complemented by the high percentage who labor as family enterprise workers in small family-run businesses or farms. Fewer than 3 percent of all Japanese male workers (and fewer than 2 percent of those not employed in agriculture) work in family-run enterprises. This proportion is slightly higher than in other industrial countries. But almost one-fifth of the Japanese female labor force work as family enterprise workers. This is about three times the rate in France and West Germany and more than twenty times the rate in countries such as the United States, Sweden, and Australia. The high rate in Japan cannot be explained solely by the presence of a larger agricultural sector. Table 1.1 demonstrates that even in the nonagricultural population, Japanese women exhibit a much higher rate of family enterprise employment than women in other countries. Japanese women also have a high rate of self-employment compared to women in most other industrial countries, and the difference between the proportions of Japanese men and women who are self-employed is not as great as in many countries. But the content of the work performed by the two sexes is radically different. Over one-third of Japanese female self-employed workers are laboring on a piece-rate basis (called "home handicraft" labor in the Japanese census). This involves tasks such as sewing or putting together electronics parts at home and delivering the work to a firm, often a subcontractor for a larger firm. This is hardly the image of an independent entrepreneur that the term "self-employment" brings to mind. In contrast to the high proportion of piece-rate work among the female self-employed in Japan, fewer than *half of one percent* of self-employed males are piece-rate workers. About one-third of male self-employed workers have employees working for them, but fewer than 15 percent of self-employed females do. Restricting the gender comparison to self-employment in the manufacturing sector presents an even sharper picture: 94 percent of self-employed women are piece-rate workers, as opposed to 3 percent of men.

OCCUPATIONS

The location of women relative to men in the occupational structure is also distinctive in Japan vis-à-vis Western industrial nations. Figure 1.1 shows the percentage female in each occupational group in six

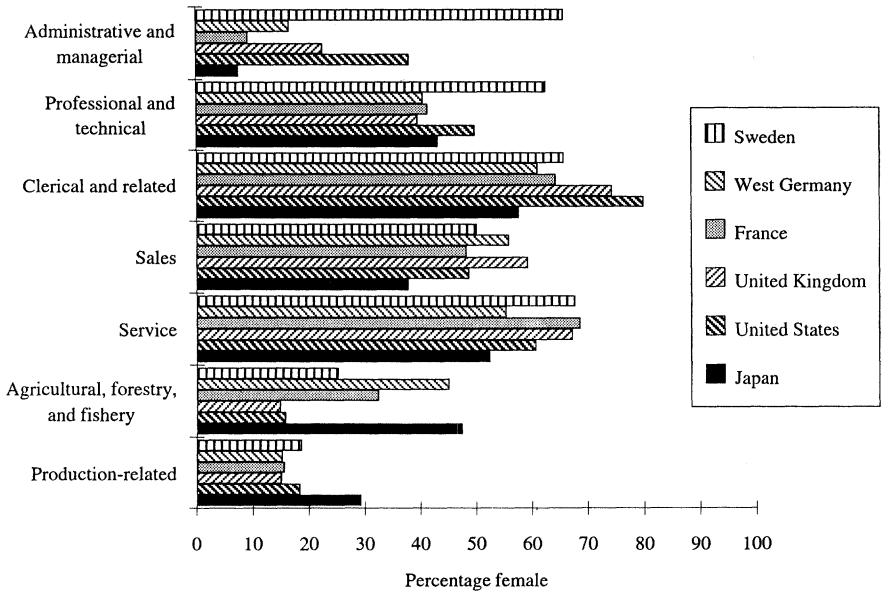

Figure 1.1. Percentage Female in Different Occupations, Japan and Selected Western Countries

SOURCE: International Labor Organization 1988.

NOTE: Administrative/managerial occupations and clerical occupations are assigned the same percentage female in Sweden, because figures for these groups of occupations are reported together in the *Yearbook of Labor Statistics* for the country.

industrial countries. The most striking characteristic of Japanese women's participation in white-collar work (administrative and managerial, professional and technical, clerical, sales, and service) is their extremely low representation in administrative/managerial positions. Only 8 percent of managers are women. France also shows a low rate of female managers (9 percent), while the rates of other countries range from 17 percent in West Germany to 66 percent in Sweden. (Since figures for administrative/managerial and clerical workers are reported together in Sweden, it is misleading to place too much emphasis on the high proportion of female managers there.) Japanese women participate in professional and technical occupations at a rate similar to that in other industrial countries. In clerical, sales, and service occupations, however, Japan shows the lowest rates of female participation compared to other industrial countries.

Figure 1.1 also shows that Japanese women are more likely than women in other countries to be heavily involved in agriculture and

manufacturing (production) relative to their male counterparts—48 percent of Japanese agricultural workers are women. This compares to much lower rates in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Sweden, and a slightly lower rate in West Germany. Japanese women are represented in production-related work (manufacturing, transportation, and other blue-collar jobs) at a rate approximately twice that of women in other countries. The unusual concentration of Japanese women in manufacturing is especially apparent when we consider part-time workers. The postwar increase in married women's participation in the labor forces of industrial countries is partially constituted by part-time work, and Japan is no exception. But it *is* exceptional in the industrial distribution of female part-time workers: nearly one-half of such workers were engaged in manufacturing jobs in 1980, compared to only 9 percent in the United States. In contrast, in the United States and other industrial countries, 50 to 60 percent of female part-time workers are employed in clerical or service occupations; in Japan, such occupations constitute only about 30 percent of the female part-time labor force. The proportion of Japanese female part-time workers in professional and technical occupations is also negligible, at 3 percent in 1980, whereas the figure for the United States is 15 percent.

WAGES

International comparisons of wage data are notoriously difficult because of comparability problems, but a few illustrative figures may be given. The overall female/male wage ratio for full-time workers in the mid 1980s ranged in Western industrial nations from a low of 68.2 (weekly rate) in the United States to highs in the 84–89 percent range (hourly) in France and northern Europe (International Labor Organization 1988). Wages in Japan are typically reported as monthly rates, and the female/male ratio in 1987 was 57.6, substantially lower than in any other industrial country (Ministry of Labor, Japan, 1988).[4] So not only are women more underrepresented as employees and as white-collar workers in Japan, but their wage levels lie farther below men's than is the case in Western capitalist economies.

[4] In East Asia, Japan and South Korea show the lowest female/male wage ratios (International Labor Organization 1987).

PROBLEMS IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROLE

These international comparisons show that in considering women's participation in industrial economies, much is obscured by focusing only on the level or amount of participation as in the figures given on p. 3 above, where Japan appears typical in the context of other nations.[5] When we examine the type of work women engage in relative to men—measured by employment status, occupation, and wage levels—the broad similarities among industrial countries become fuzzier and contrasts emerge. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the comparison between Japan and other industrial countries.

The economic and social institutions of capitalism exhibit variations across societies owing to historical and cultural disjunctures. American sociologists and economists have tended to ignore this in their studies of women's economic role. It has been easier to see and document the broad similarities in the historical trajectory of women's economic participation than to discern deeper cultural differences. This is true because of some very good methodological reasons and some rather bad theoretical reasons.

Methodologically, it is only recently that social scientists have had access to reliable time-series labor force statistics from a range of countries. So it is natural that the main focus of interest in comparing countries has been the aggregate *level* at which women participate in the economy. The issue of how to measure cross-culturally the *type* of economic participation in which women are engaged is conveniently avoided if the comparable statistical base across countries and over time is limited to labor force participation rates. But greater female labor force participation in one economy compared to another may or may not correspond to better wages or working conditions for women relative to men. Women's labor force participation may increase because wartime circumstances create a demand for their labor or because an increasing rate of divorce propels them into the work force.

[5] In an empirical analysis of female labor force participation in 61 countries, Moshe Semyonov found that "all characteristics that favored women's labor force participation also enhanced discrimination" (1980: 544), or the concentration of women in low-status occupations. Further, as the number of economically active females increases in a society, the odds in favor of men rather than women belonging to high-status occupations significantly increase. Thus, women's entrance into the public sphere per se is not at all coterminous with, and may even inhibit, their equal distribution with men across occupational status categories. As Semyonov points out, this finding is consistent with theories of economic discrimination that suggest declining rewards for minority group members as their supply increases.

The jobs they perform may involve poor working conditions, low economic compensation, or no economic compensation at all. An increase in women's labor force participation and a decrease in gender stratification in the labor force are not the same and should not be collapsed into one concept. An example from Japanese experience illustrates this well.

During the high-growth period of the Japanese economy that lasted from the early 1960s until the first oil shock in 1973, the demand for labor increased. In particular, as larger numbers of male junior high school graduates continued on to high school and then to university, a shortage of unskilled labor developed. This created a demand that women in their mid thirties to forties could naturally fill. Because the majority of these women had left the labor force while they were raising children, they had little work experience. Moreover, their educational level was generally below that of men. These conditions created a "fit" between the demand for cheap, unskilled labor and its supply. Large numbers of women entered the labor force as part-time workers. In 1960, 43 percent of all part-time workers were women; by 1986, this figure had shown a remarkable increase to 70 percent.[6]

The working conditions and wages of these part-time women workers are inferior to those of regular employees. A much-cited report by the International Labor Organization in 1984 found that Japan was the only industrial nation where female wages actually *fell* relative to male wages during the previous year. Subsequent reports have shown little improvement. The decrease in the hourly wage level of Japanese women relative to men is partially a result of the huge increase in the relatively unskilled female labor force.

This example shows that a comparison of the simple rate of female labor force participation in Japan and other countries masks the complexities of women's work situation. The labor force participation rate can rise as a result of women entering the labor force in subsidiary positions.

While one of the major problems in comparative studies of women's economic role has been obtaining cross-cultural data to construct good measures, this is not the only issue. A *theoretical* stumbling block has also lain in the path of people studying women's economic role in capitalist industrial societies. American social science remains guided

[6] Phrased as the percentage of all working women who are part-time workers, the figure was 9 percent in 1960 and 23 percent in 1986 (Office of the Prime Minister, Japan, *Rōdōryoku chōsa*, 1988).

by a strong underlying belief that Western Europe and the United States are cut out of similar developmental fabric, and that the more recently industrializing societies will follow suit in their educational systems, social organization of work, and family patterns. Small cultural variations may persist, of course, but the social and economic institutions and the demographic patterns arising from them are predicted to be common to the industrialization process. This viewpoint has inhibited a strong push from the side of social science theory to consider the cross-cultural variations among women's roles in different capitalist economies more carefully.

Those who argue that societies converge with industrialization would say that, as a latecomer to industrialization, Japan will gradually come to resemble all other industrial societies. However, recent studies of East Asia, particularly Japan, argue instead that societies may follow different paths to industrialization, and may therefore exhibit differences in social structure and organizational forms once they get there (see Bae and Form 1986; Hamilton and Biggart 1988; Kalleberg and Lincoln 1988; Morgan and Hirosima 1983). While a myriad of activities ranging from complex business transactions to the equally complex education of children have to be carried out in any industrial society, the organization of these activities varies across societies. Western social scientists have been slow to recognize that the organization of men's and women's roles in East Asian economies may not be on the rapid route to convergence with the West.[7] Many social scientists regard the sex-role revolution and the decline of the "breadwinner system" as concomitant phenomena of industrialization per se (Davis 1984). But Japan continues to represent a puzzle. Because it has maintained a sharply delineated sexual division of labor and is at the same time one of the leading industrial economies of the world, it is a crucial case for study.

WOMEN'S DUAL ROLE IN THE JAPANESE ECONOMY

A central argument of this book is that Japanese women have played a dual role in the postwar economic success of their country. The first

[7] There are some exceptions to this. A cogently argued recent example concludes: "The West and Japan provide quite different models of development and demographic transition. Japan illustrates that egalitarian sex roles and nuclear family structure are not necessary to achieve low fertility. Some would argue that Japan is a special case in many ways. Yet for many nations in Asia the Japanese model may be a more appealing and successful strategy of modernization, inasmuch as it retains many traditional Eastern institutions" (Morgan, Rindfuss, and Parnell 1984: 34).

role is as direct participants in the economy: they have supplied inexpensive labor to employers. The Japanese economy is segmented into a formal sector, consisting of medium-sized and large firms with paid employees, and an informal sector, made up of very small, family-run firms with some paid employees and some family members (who are typically unpaid workers). Women are likely to be full-time employees in the formal sector when they are young and part-time employees (particularly in the smaller-sized firms) or family enterprise workers when they are older. Women's direct role in the economy is therefore strongly influenced by their age. They work when young in certain sectors of the economy at the low wages of youth, and when middle-aged they work in other sectors of the economy, again generally at the low wages of youth.

Women's second role in the postwar Japanese economy has been as indirect participants: they have nurtured higher-priced male labor, the labor of their husbands and sons. To explain the nature of women's direct economic participation and the additional, more indirect economic role they play in shaping and investing in men's human capital, I argue that we need to understand the nature of the *human capital development system* in Japan—the social processes that govern the formation and use of "human capital," the skills and abilities of people. This entails a close examination of how those processes came to be embedded in the family, the educational system, and the workplaces of postwar Japan.

So far I have been careful to refer to "Japanese women's roles in the economy" rather than to "Japanese women's social status" or "the status of women in Japanese society." This is intentional. This book is about women's roles in the economy and does not deal with other dimensions of women's status, such as access to political power or to cultural symbols and resources. Yet in defining not only a direct economic role for women but a second, indirect role as "investors" in the human capital of men, the family explicitly enters into the discussion. This is because of its ubiquitousness: marriage and childbearing are nearly universal among Japanese women. Men's and women's valuation of the roles of wife and mother is high, and women are the principal caretakers of all household responsibilities save the primary breadwinner role. Particularly important is their investment in the "quality" of children, especially sons. A full examination of women's participation in the Japanese economy therefore needs to include women's role in the development of male human capital. While most of the

empirical materials of the book deal with the nature of women's direct participation in the economy, women's indirect economic role is important in the guiding theoretical framework: women play an important part in Japan's human capital development system by investing heavily in the human capital of the males to whom they are attached. This is anathema to most Western women, especially Western feminists. What does it mean for Japanese women's own view of themselves? What implications do Japanese women's dual economic roles have for their status in society? I shall return to these questions in my conclusion.

WESTERN STUDY OF THE JAPANESE "ECONOMIC MIRACLE"

If the variations in women's economic role in industrial societies have not been well mapped by social science researchers, neither has Japanese women's role in the modern economy been well mapped in the rapidly expanding body of writings on Japan. In the past decade, the eyes of the world—especially the industrialized Western nations and the rapidly industrializing nations of East Asia—have turned to Japan as a successful model of industrialization, economic growth, and stability, both in politics and in labor relations. James Abegglen's classic *The Japanese Factory* appeared in 1958. After a ten-year hiatus, during which Japan exhibited unprecedented economic growth, Western social scientists began to produce studies of Japanese industrial relations at a rapid pace.[8] These studies contributed a great deal to our understanding of the origins and functioning of the Japanese permanent employment system, whereby workers are hired into firms directly out of school and remain with the same firms for the duration of their working lives. Japanese management practices were brought to the attention of a broad Western audience both inside and outside academia. Japan's high economic growth rate and increasing share in foreign trade also prompted the publication of dozens of popular books aimed at a broad audience. At first, these were almost uniformly in praise of the Japanese management system (e.g., Ouchi 1981; Vogel 1979). A

[8] Representative examples include Abegglen and Stalk 1985; Caves and Uekusa 1976; Clark 1979; Cole 1971a, 1971b, 1973, 1979; Crawcour 1978; Dore 1973; Kalleberg and Lincoln 1988; Levine and Kawada 1980; Kalleberg and Lincoln 1985; Lincoln, Hanada, and McBride 1986; Lincoln and McBride 1987; Marsh and Mannari 1976; Rohlen 1974; Takezawa and Whitehill 1981; Vogel 1975.

few years later, a rash of highly critical "Japan-bashing" books (e.g., Kamata 1983; Van Wolferen 1988; Woronoff 1980, 1983) decried various aspects of the same system.

A striking feature of both the scholarly and popular treatments of Japanese industrial relations is their overwhelming focus on the small proportion of the labor force that is covered by permanent employment policies. (Such a policy is constituted by the tacit assurance by the employer, in the absence of a formal contract, that the employee will have guaranteed employment through retirement). This emphasis on permanent employment excludes at least 70 percent of the male labor force from discussion, and omits closer to 85 or 90 percent of the female labor force.[9] The result is a very biased view of Japanese labor and industrial relations. Nearly all of the workers cushioned from the ripples of change in the economy are male, and they are employed in the government sector or in the large, stereotypical firms—the Mitsubishis, Sonys, and Toyotas—with which Americans are now so familiar.

Recent critical Western writings on the Japanese management system emphasize the inequalities in the system. But these writings have been journalistically rather than analytically oriented, and they have rarely focused on the position of women. There is a need now to analyze the "underside" of the permanent employment system closely. Leading scholars in the field of Japanese studies have pointed to the need for more research focusing on female workers, temporary employees, and workers employed in small firms (Cole 1979). But American social scientists with Japanese expertise have almost universally chosen other issues to study.[10] By and large, the perception of Japanese and Western observers that Japanese gender roles are clear-cut, and that considerable sex discrimination exists in Japanese labor markets,

[9] Because permanent employment is not based on a legal contractual arrangement, we must rely on estimates to give a sense of the numbers of people involved. My estimates are based on the proportions of men and women who work as "regular employees," rather than temporary employees or day laborers, in large firms (of 1,000 or more employees) or the government sector. If anything, these estimates will overstate the extent of permanent employment because not all workers classified as full-time are necessarily immune to the danger of being laid off by the employer.

[10] This may be partially a by-product of the gender composition of the small group of Americans who are Japan specialists. It is important to keep in mind that the field of Japanese studies developed largely in response to World War II, and many of the senior scholars in the field are men who received language and area-studies training via the military. The entrance of more women into the field is a relatively recent phenomenon. It thus is not surprising that most work on women in Japanese society has been produced in the last ten years or so.

seems to have exerted a dampening rather than an energizing effect on research. Embedded in the pages of one of the best studies of Japanese work organizations is the simple statement, "Japanese companies do not promote women" (Clark 1979). On a more cynical note, a well-known American scholar of the Japanese economy produced no rebuttals (although he had perhaps hoped for some) at an international conference in 1984 with his comment that "the function of Japanese women is to work at low wages, produce 1.9 children, and work at low wages again." It is hard to imagine a more succinct summary of women's dual role in the economy.

A number of anthropologists, as well as several interdisciplinary groups of scholars, have produced vignettes of Japanese women's lives. We have a few writings in English on the legal aspects of Japanese women's employment. Research on women in selected occupations—including geisha, government bureaucrats, and office workers—has appeared in the past few years.[11] And some popular accounts of women's roles have been produced by Western journalists stationed in Japan. Taken as a group, these writings provide much in the way of valuable detailed descriptions of women workers, but little in the way of analysis of why women play the economic roles they do.

Japanese scholars' own investigations of women's economic participation represent a different genre of research: quantitatively sophisticated studies, mainly of the level of female labor force participation itself. This research is represented in English by a few sociologists and by several neoclassically oriented labor economists (see Kawashima 1983; Osawa 1984, 1988a, 1988b; Shimada and Higuchi 1985; Shinotsuka 1982; Yashiro 1981). Tanaka Kazuko (1987), a sociologist, has utilized a life-cycle approach to labor force participation similar to that of labor economists. She examined the labor force participation

[11] Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1984) offers rich ethnographic material on women's lives, and Robert Smith (1987) provides an overview of the status of women in Japanese society. Alice Cook and Hiroko Hayashi (1980) focus on how Japanese law deals with women's employment. Frank Upham (1987) includes a chapter on the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law and litigation in sex discrimination cases. For work on women in different occupations, see Dalby 1983; Lebra 1981; Osako 1978; Lebra, Paulson, and Powers 1976. Glenda Roberts's dissertation (1986) is a wonderful ethnography of women workers in a lingerie factory. A journalist's exploration of women's roles is offered in Condon 1985. Susan Pharr's account provides the best picture of women in politics (1981). Research on rural women includes Bernstein 1983 and Smith and Wiswell 1982. Dorinne Kondo (1990) focuses on the construction of the self in small Japanese family businesses. The most comprehensive account of women in the labor force is Saso 1990, which compares women's roles in the contemporary Japanese economy to the roles of women in the economies of Britain and Ireland.

decisions of several cohorts of Tokyo women at different points in their lives, as they balanced family and work responsibilities. Also on the sociological side, work in the status-attainment tradition has been carried out by Tominaga Ken'ichi, Naoi Atsushi, and several other scholars.[12] In labor economics, a number of Japanese scholars have studied women's labor force participation, usually with aggregate-level government data.[13]

In summary, most of the English-language literature on gender stratification in Japan falls into two categories: descriptive, qualitatively rich vignettes of individual Japanese women, and quantitatively sophisticated work either by labor economists working in a human capital tradition or by sociologists working in a status-attainment tradition. Upon initiating the current study, this distribution of research perspectives left me feeling unsatisfied, for both theoretical and methodological reasons.

On the one hand, the micro-level, descriptive literature is useful in being able to tap into how individual Japanese women think, feel, and behave. But this literature offers no sustained analysis of *why* patterns of gender stratification are systematically reproduced in Japanese society. On the other hand, the labor economics and status-attainment literatures give the outlines of labor force participation patterns and relate them to standard demographic characteristics of individuals (such as age, education, marital status) and households (employment status and income of household head, number of children, etc.). This produces an aggregate picture in which individual motivations and behaviors are blurred. Blurred, too, are the characteristics of Japan's particular social-institutional context. It is certainly of great interest to see how women's level of participation in the economy has changed over time. But looking at the *quantity* of participation obscures the *type* of participation and inhibits careful analysis of the position of women in the stratification system.

The bifurcation of the literature on Japanese women's work patterns into rich descriptive accounts and aggregate labor force descriptions

[12] This work has been published mainly in a series of reports in Japanese based on the Social Stratification and Mobility (SSM) surveys carried out by Tominaga's group.

[13] See Higuchi 1982, 1983; Higuchi and Hayami 1984; Sano 1972; Yashiro 1983. The work of Anne Hill (1983, 1984) has both built upon and stimulated Japanese economists' efforts to understand the nature of female labor force participation in Japan. Hill was the first American scholar to analyze Japanese female economic participation in the paid and unpaid sectors of the economy.

has another unfortunate result. Existing research fails to consider individual men and women in the social context of Japanese society and in the accompanying opportunity structures and constraints implied by Japanese social institutions. (Lebra 1984, a beautifully written text on contemporary Japanese women, is one exception to this.) Stated bluntly, the cultural myopia of some of the principal traditions of American sociology and economics seems to be repeated in the English-language literature on Japanese women's work patterns. Let us consider this cultural myopia for a moment.

A number of bodies of literature in sociology and economics have dealt both theoretically and empirically with the male/female wage gap and other male/female employment differences in the United States. In sociology, these include the status-attainment tradition and various approaches emphasizing the structure of labor markets. In economics, the human capital tradition dominates, and is supplemented by labor market approaches. A number of other literatures in the two fields deal with male/female employment: the sex-role socialization literature, literature on screening and statistical discrimination in employment, and Marxist-feminist literature on capitalism and patriarchy.

Current theories, especially human capital theory in economics, lift the individual-level processes producing large-scale stratification patterns outside of social-institutional constraints and the structure of human relationships. In other words, these theories tend to abstract the individual from the surrounding social context. They are therefore culturally quite narrow. The social-institutional context and the normative patterns of human relations vary among industrial societies. These variations need to be—and can be—theoretically formulated. This is important if we are to understand women's current roles in different industrial economies and how those roles will change in the future.

Gender stratification is systemic. It is the result of a sequence of choices made across the life cycle of an individual, choices that are structured by the institutions and the people with whom one has contact. It is critical to develop a theory of gender stratification that combines principles of voluntaristic social action (how individuals make choices) and a structuralist perspective (how those choices are constrained by the environment). Adjudicating a balance between an explanation of gender stratification based on individual, voluntaristic action and one based on the institutional structures of society is a

central purpose of this book. The tension and complementarity between these two types of explanation will surface many times in the succeeding discussions.

JAPANESE "UNIQUENESS"

In Japan, the first non-Western nation to industrialize successfully, Westerners see a unique, exotic culture. Given this, it is easy to analyze social phenomena in terms of the country's exceptionalism. Readers committed to this view may regard my analysis of gender in the Japanese economy as having too much of the sociologist in it and not enough of the anthropologist. That is, they may feel that I do not place enough emphasis on the uniqueness of sex roles and sex-role ideologies in Japan vis-à-vis the West. My analytical approach stems from the belief that while exegesis of cultural uniqueness makes for fascinating reading, it ultimately does not advance theoretical understanding. American sociology has become so turned in on itself that the important role of comparative work in testing and modifying theory is obscured. Sociological and economic work on gender stratification, where the emphasis on highly quantitative studies of the U.S. population embodies strong, often unstated, assumptions about the social-institutional and normative environment, represents a particularly strong case in point. Stepping outside American society to view how the same basic social institutions operate in a different industrial society (Japan) is necessary for the development of a general theory of gender stratification in industrial societies. To the extent that Japan is "unique," its uniqueness lies in the way in which the institutions of capitalist industrial society operate in that cultural context. The same is true of the United States and other countries.

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The opposing tendencies to see Japan either as a follower of Western societies or as completely "special" and "unique" are simplistic views. The only route to a more balanced and deeper view is to compare Japan closely with another culture or cultures. Chapters 2 and 3 examine Japan and the United States. Chapter 2 shows that women have always played somewhat different roles in the two economies. Japanese women's more disadvantaged role is closely linked to employment practices that place heavier emphasis on seniority and work experience

than American employment practices. Chapter 3 extends the analysis of the employment system to a theory of human capital development systems. These systems vary across industrial societies and have a strong influence on the extent and perpetuation of gender stratification. The family, the educational system, and the work organization in Japan together constitute a particular type of human capital development system that contrasts with that of the United States. Coupled with Japanese norms governing marriage timing and interpersonal relationships, this system produces strong barriers to women's advancement as direct participants in the economy and provides support for their indirect participation as nurturers of husbands and sons.

The two-country comparison of chapters 2 and 3 focuses on the historical incorporation of women into the economy, the dominant employment practices, and the structure of the human capital development system in each country. While it would be instructive to include more countries, this would make the comparisons unwieldy. The United States is a good companion case to Japan. It has neither a radically high nor a radically low female labor force participation rate, and in this respect it is representative of other industrial countries. Employment practices and the other institutions—education and the family—that constitute its human capital development system are arguably less representative of the full range of industrial economies than a Western European case might be. But because the distinctiveness of American institutions highlights the distinctiveness of Japanese institutions, our understanding of how both societies operate can be deepened by the comparison. Admittedly there is a personal stake at work as well: as an American, my research on Japan is inevitably shaped by implicit comparisons with the United States. An intuitive base of knowledge about one's own culture forms part of the conceptual guide for any researcher's investigation.

Chapters 4–7 focus exclusively on Japan. Chapter 4 examines changes in work organization in twentieth-century Japan, with particular emphasis on the postwar period. I argue that the employment system in large firms was structured by conscious policy decisions in the sphere of private enterprise and in government. These decisions have had the consequence of constructing and perpetuating a subsidiary economic role for women. In chapter 5, I introduce my own study of 1,200 men and women in three Japanese cities in the mid 1980s. This study facilitates detailed examination of how and why the two sexes fare differently in the labor market. The data also permit a com-

parison of the experiences of a younger and an older group of people, in order to see how much gender stratification patterns have or have not changed in recent years. In chapter 6, I turn to education, arguing that Japan's educational system and the way it is articulated with the labor market are also the outcomes of policy decisions, decisions that have had very different effects for men and women.

The exclusively Japan-focused chapters describe the recent historical trajectory of educational institutions and the labor market, and examine how men's and women's lives are played out in these institutions. The intersection between the household and the economy is also a central emphasis, in terms of the separateness of men's and women's roles and the centrality of Japanese women's roles as household financial managers, nurturers, and educators. In chapter 7 I examine the implications of rapid social change in Japan for women's economic roles during the final decade of the twentieth century, and evaluate whether Japan, if not a "follower" of Western gender stratification patterns, is a "leader" of other East Asian countries.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Issues of methodology constitute some of the most significant barriers to an understanding of Japan, to communication about Japanese society among social scientists, and to communication between the social scientist and the lay person. These barriers are unfortunate and bear some comment here.

Early in the process of researching this book, it became clear that primary data collection would be necessary in order to have a good set of observations on the contours of individual Japanese men's and women's lives—their family backgrounds, educational and work histories, attitudes and expectations about their children, and so forth. First of all, these data would provide valuable descriptive information. Second, they would provide the grist with which to carry out quantitative analyses and test hypotheses about how Japanese social institutions structure the roles of men and women in the economy. This latter purpose was eminently more pressing. Because there are no public data consortia in Japan, the social scientist faces an odd situation: Japan is arguably a data-rich research environment and a data-poor environment at the same time. One can obtain published statistics on virtually anything—private research firms and the government collect and publish a great deal of information and conduct many surveys of social

attitudes and behaviors. There is thus a relative abundance of *descriptive* material. But it is nearly impossible to obtain the individual-level data (what social scientists call "raw" data) necessary for the labors of causal, statistical analysis.[14]

The consequent need to collect primary data produces advantages and disadvantages for one's research agenda. The design and execution of my project to collect data from 1,200 people in three cities were predictably time-consuming and frustrating, but this was compensated for by the joy of being able to ask exactly the questions I wanted. (I also included in my survey enough descriptive questions to compare my sample of 1,200 individuals with published statistics on the national and urban populations of Japan.) My quantitative data set thus has the typical dual characteristics of containing a wealth of original questions designed for testing hypotheses, while at the same time representing the limitations of a small-scale survey research effort. Appendix A describes the survey and sampling design and discusses the representativeness of the sample.

This book reflects a commitment to methodological eclecticism, a commitment that developed not in the classroom (in either my role as student or teacher) but in the field. Although I ostensibly went to Japan to collect survey data, I also collected a great deal of other material in the course of living there for a year and a half. As a sociologist, I wanted to immerse myself in Japanese life as much as possible and develop acquaintances and friendships. I also came to regard—probably as a matter of survival—even the briefest of encounters, be it with a taxi driver or a bank teller, as an opportunity to learn more about the society. For the first time it became apparent to me what it means to live as a sociologist. I found that if one is able to keep one's sociological glasses in place, any event, any social or business encounter, becomes data or food for generating hypotheses or confirming hunches and moving on to the next sociological puzzle. Induction and deduction took turns in shaping this study.

Although I originally intended to do a small number of interviews of my survey respondents, midway through my stay in Japan I reconsidered this plan. I came to feel that the comments made to me under natural circumstances, while not necessarily statistically representative of the attitudes, or *ishiki*, held throughout Japanese society, neverthe-

[14] No matter how their collection is funded, data are essentially treated as the property of individuals in Japan. And most of the data collected by the government to produce reports are destroyed a few years after the publication of results.

less had high reliability. As a young, highly educated, single woman living alone in a foreign country, I represented something of a curiosity to people. My Japanese is close to fluent, but (fortunately or unfortunately) not so perfect as to elicit the concern or suspicion reportedly inspired by some Westerners raised in Japan. I was comfortably *outside* the social system but was able to communicate with people *inside* it, in their own language. I posed no threat. In a sense, this was the ideal sociological situation. Young men talked to me about the conflict between their own aspirations and those their parents had for them. Young women facing the pressures of society and their parents talked to me about whether they could possibly hope to get a good job, and, if they did, whether they would be able to find someone willing to marry them. Middle-aged parents and employers talked to me about their expectations of the younger generation. And married men and women talked to me always about their expectations of the opposite sex, over endless cups of tea or *sake*, as the case may be. The natural give and take of relationships and the importance of *continuing, enduring* relationships over time in Japanese society made the exchange of ideas, as well as of worries and joys, more frank and honest than would be true had I selected a group of strangers from among my survey respondents and interviewed them.[15]

One of the reasons for using ethnographic or fieldwork techniques in studying Japanese society lies in the fact that there is tremendous consensus about a range of social and demographic behaviors in the society. I was frequently struck by the fact that I heard such similar comments and opinions from a variety of people—from sushi makers, small business owners, and taxi drivers to government bureaucrats and middle-level managers in major Japanese corporations and banks. The degree of social consensus in Japanese society can of course be overemphasized. But it nevertheless is a social fact in itself. I have tried wherever possible to test this impression of consensus regarding certain attitudes and behaviors critical to women's labor market position against a quantitative manifestation of consensus in attitudes and behaviors. (For instance, is the statistical variation in women's age at marriage as low as one would expect, based on people's common perceptions? Yes!) Here again, the process of induction from people's

[15] In all cases, I have made a special effort not to provide any information that would lead to a person's identification, and all my friends and acquaintances knew that there was some chance that their comments might occasionally serve as background material for the "real" analysis of quantitative data.

comments has led me to some investigations into quantitative data that deductive theory would most likely not have yielded.

In sum, I constructed a division of labor among methodologies. The three-city survey provides rich data on life histories and, secondarily, on attitudes. Interactions with people in my daily life, as well as monitoring of newspapers, television, and other mass media, helped me tap into attitudes in a way that would probably not have been possible in interviews or surveys conducted with a random sample of strangers. And government statistics and newspaper reports on attitudes and behavior regarding women's labor force participation, sex roles, family life, education, corporate life, and so on, provide the broad context for this book and the hypotheses I test. I have tried as much as possible to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative techniques, motivated by the belief that good social science comes not just in the form of constructing regression equations but also in listening to what people have to say about their own lives.