Introduction

Anne E. Imamura

In 1991, Gail Lee Bernstein's *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945* shattered a number of stereotypes about Japanese women. Among them were the beliefs that in Japan motherhood has "always" been the primary role of women; that women did not work outside the home; and that issues of combining work with family and striving for economic independence emerged only after World War II. The coverage of Bernstein's pathbreaking book ends in 1945. Since that time, the range of opportunities for Japanese women has increased while their supportive and domestic responsibilities to family and society have remained. This volume, *Re-Imaging Japanese Women*, attempts to shed light on the balance Japanese women today strike among the choices available to them.

Many factors combine to produce the range of behaviors available to members of a given society. Among these factors are traditional norms and values, the needs of society at a given historical period, and contemporary values and fashions. Behavioral expectations are frequently exemplified in heroic personalities and role models. Social institutions affect these models, and competing social institutions attempt to control or limit one another's effect. Foreign influences, popular culture, and the impact of the media compete with the goals of the polity and the economy and frequently produce alternative images of appropriate behavior.

Image differs from role in several respects. Role refers to behavioral expectations, whereas image refers to appearance. "Appearance" as I am using it here has two meanings: first, how the behavior, role, or position is seen from the outside, and second, the deliberate projection of an appearance by a person or institution. Image and role may not correspond: a couple may put forth the image of a happy marriage when in reality they live separate lives under the same roof and do not fulfill the roles of husband and wife. Image may mimic role: a young woman may portray herself as domestically inclined when she meets her prospective mother-in-law even though she may have no such interests or talents. Image can invite someone to assume a role: one may be attracted by the "glamour" of being a flight attendant and only after taking the job recognize the hard work it entails. Image may be part of a role: the nurturing daughter-in-law

is expected to conceal her frustration at the demands of a senile parent, and the mother is expected to put forth the image of enjoying long hours playing with her small children. Yet another distinction between image and role is that image can refer to the perception held of another. Thus men may have idealized images of their future spouses, foreigners may hold images of Japanese women, and older generations may have images of younger. Even if none of these images correspond to reality, they may shape the way the image holder treats or defines the object of the image and thus produce real consequences.

Throughout history, the importance of image is clear, whether in the humility of a bride-to-be or the ceremonies that surround royalty to keep them larger than life. Today, image production is a recognized industry. Politicians, entertainers, and other public figures employ specialists to develop marketable images. Professionals place importance on first impressions and strive to project appropriate images. Marketing relies on the development of a product image and creates an "ideal consumer" to appear in advertising, associating brand names with age groups and social class. Image is a recognized factor in self-esteem and education. Thus images are recognized as powerful tools by individuals seeking to create them and groups and societies seeking to control or develop them.

In this volume, we examine images of women in contemporary Japanese society. We explore how and by whom these images are put forth, the power of these images to shape Japanese women's lives, the potential for Japanese women to utilize traditional images for contemporary purposes, and the opportunities such images provide Japanese women for expanding their behavioral choices.

JAPANESE WOMEN: FROM 1945 TO THE 1990s

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the range of images of Japanese women has expanded to reflect the social change and new roles for women in Japan.[1] Immediately following the war, Japanese concentrated on rebuilding their country, and men and women worked at whatever jobs were available. In the late 1950s and early sixties, increased industrial production brought with it the "salaryman family".[2] This archetypical nuclear family, headed by a salaried male breadwinner, included two children and lived in relatively small quarters requiring little maintenance. In contrast to women who married into farm or shopkeeping families, where they helped in the family business and were under the supervision of their mothers-in-law, the wife managed her own household and was considered a full-time housewife (*sengyō shufu*). Although numerically in the minority, the salaryman family became the ideal: boys strove to become and girls to marry salarymen and attain economic security.

The route to this security was education. Thus the "education mother" was born, and the school system and the family counted on her input. The expectations of the education system shaped her role (Allison, this volume): a mother should help her children with homework, find tutors or cram schools when necessary, define which schools are best for her children, and provide moral support and physical presence during years of preparation for college entrance exams. As Brinton points out, in thus developing Japan's human capital, she became an important underpinning of Japan's economic growth.[3] The image of success became the nuclear family living in a modern dwelling with a full-time mother focused on her children's education.

In the 1970s the image of a successful woman expanded to include varied opportunities along the life course: education, work, marriage, community and child-related activities, hobby and study circles, part-time work, and family leisure.

The development of supermarkets, convenience stores, and fast-food chains provided part-time or temporary employment opportunity for married women and mothers during school hours. Other opportunities arose for community service, adult education, personal improvement, and political or consumer activity.[4] Through such activities, women became involved outside their homes and neighborhoods and had opportunities to develop personal interests and networks while defining their dominant roles as wives and mothers.

The 1970s also saw the appearance of the "new family." This term referred to a young couple who married for love or companionship, not merely to build a home and family with a suitable partner. The "new family" expected to share interests, hoping that the husband would spend more leisure time with his family and thus avoid the problems the previous generation faced when father retired to a family that hardly knew him and a house that had no space for him. However, about five or six years into marriage, the new family began to look like the old family. Father worked long hours and mother was busy with the children. Yet, the new family was not entirely the same as the old: in expecting the father to spend leisure time with his family, the family became a unit of leisure, a change that suited Japan's economic development. Family-style hotels, resorts, restaurants, and amusement parks like Tokyo Disneyland became popular as the growth in disposable income encouraged the purchase of a family car, which facilitated and thus increased vacation travel.[5]

The new family's emphasis on companionship between the spouses has affected both the reason for divorce and the desire to remarry. The increase (although small) in the number of divorces among those who have been married at least twenty years is a contemporary response to the lack of companionship. When the husband retires from work, the wife declares

that she is retiring from being a homemaker. Her behavior flies in the face of expectations that she will care for her husband and his parents as long as they live. This desire for companionship in marriage is reflected in press reports: the majority of divorced persons indicate they would like to re-marry, *if* they can do so for companionship, in contrast to press reports in the 1970s that the majority of divorced women did not want to remarry.

The 1980s added further dimensions to the changing opportunities for women. In response to signing the United Nations Declaration on Women, Japan passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law to im-prove women's access to jobs (Creighton and Roberts, this volume). A labor shortage and the high cost of living combined to make work attrac-tive to women and to make women attractive to employers. Women polit-ical candidates emerged, exemplified by Doi Takako and the "Madonna" candidates (Hastings, this volume). Media images of Japanese women fluctuated wildly from the successful career woman or politician or *oyaji gyāru* who drinks and plays golf like "one of the boys" to the "new royalty" of the free spending "office ladies" who travel the world in search of ad-venture (even sex!) and ever greater bargains in designer fashions. Along with these flamboyant images was that of the successful wife and mother who spends her post-childrearing years in "female heaven" as a consum-mate consumer, traveling with friends or spouse and enjoying the rewards she has earned by caring for her family (Lock, this volume).

This picture changed slightly in the 1990s. The cost of living pushed women into the labor force, but the sluggish domestic economy cut into women's gains in the job market.[6] Women's age at first marriage rose to twenty-six, crossing the magic number of twenty-five, when women—like Christmas cakes—were supposed to become stale. Women were in no hurry to marry, and once married had fewer children. The birthrate fell to 1.53, a reflection not only of the increased costs of raising children, but also the lack of adequate housing, green space, and time working husbands had to participate in caring for their children. This low birthrate, along with the aging of the Japanese population, led the government to call for women to fulfill their nurturing roles (Long and Painter, this volume).

The multiplicity of images remained. The media offered something for every age and economic group, for those domestically oriented and those currently not. The state tried to propagate three slightly contradictory im-ages of women's roles: fulfilled mothers, caregivers for the aged, and ca-pable workers in hitherto "male" occupations who filled the labor short-age that was no longer the crisis it appeared to be in the mid-1980s.

RANGE OF OPTIONS AND DEGREE OF CHOICE

Women's roles also changed. Sumiko Iwao tells us that over the past fif-teen years, the range of roles a "typical" thirty-five-year-old housewife

```
                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │ Graduation, │              ╭──────────────╮
                    │ Employment  │              │   Late 20s   │
                    └─────────────┘              ╰──────────────╯
                           │
     ┌─────────────┬───────┴───────┬─────────────┐
┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐
│ Marriage │ │  Study   │ │          │ │          │
│(Full-Time│ │  Abroad  │ │ Continue │ │  Change  │
│Housewife)│ │          │ │  in job  │ │   jobs   │
│          │ │Enter School│ │        │ │          │
└──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘
```
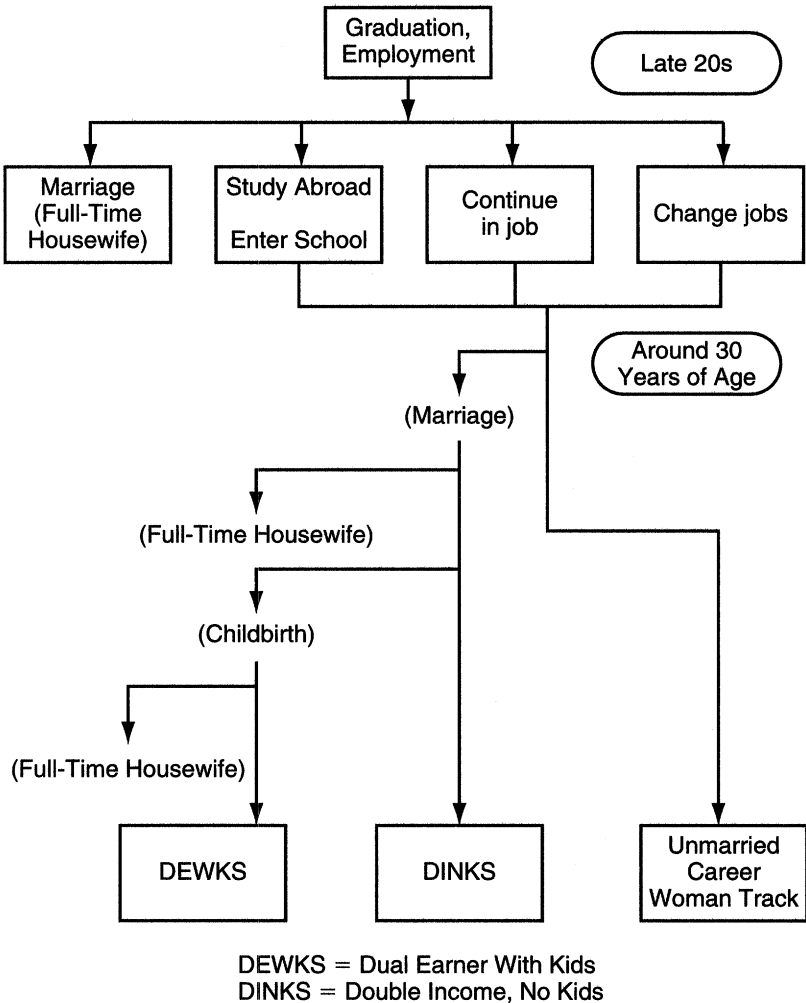
Fig. 1. New Women's Life Course. *Nihon Keizai Shinbun,* January 4, 1993. Translated by Anne Imamura.

might assume have multiplied. Her options are quite varied, whereas those of her thirty-five-year-old husband have remained the same and are quite limited.[7] The *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* illustrated this increased choice in a diagram (figure 1).

For a variety of reasons, including economic and educational circumstances, not all Japanese women can choose freely among these options. However, regardless of a given individual's situation, a multiplicity of socially acceptable images of Japanese women have accompanied her expanded roles. In most cases, new images have not replaced old, but have

Graduation, Employment

Late 20s

Marriage (Full-Time Housewife) — Study Abroad / Enter School — Continue in job — Change jobs

Around 30 Years of Age

(Marriage)

(Full-Time Housewife)

(Childbirth)

(Full-Time Housewife)

DEWKS — DINKS — Unmarried Career Woman Track

DEWKS = Dual Earner With Kids
DINKS = Double Income, No Kids

Fig. 1. New Women's Life Course. *Nihon Keizai Shinbun,* January 4, 1993. Translated by Anne Imamura.

might assume have multiplied. Her options are quite varied, whereas those of her thirty-five-year-old husband have remained the same and are quite limited.[7] The *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* illustrated this increased choice in a diagram (figure 1).

For a variety of reasons, including economic and educational circumstances, not all Japanese women can choose freely among these options. However, regardless of a given individual's situation, a multiplicity of socially acceptable images of Japanese women have accompanied her expanded roles. In most cases, new images have not replaced old, but have

layered on top of them, each layer having its own appeal as well as its drawbacks. Various interests within Japan can appeal to the appropriate image, and Japanese women can use these images to legitimate a range of behaviors. As women make life choices and develop new images, social institutions employ old images and create new ones to motivate women's choices. In the interaction between these two processes, we see the creative tension between the domestic ideal and the reality of nondomestic life that Bernstein described. The Japanese women whose voices are heard in this volume are nurturers, economic and political actors as well as interactants who choose and develop images to legitimate their own behavior and that of their daughters.

As we listen to the voices of a variety of Japanese women, we strive to appreciate their situations. We examine the relative power of various social institutions and the freedom of the individual to choose. In the first chapter, Nancy Rosenberger points out that, although social institutions in a postindustrial society are noncoercive, they are powerful. She observes that whereas the state is production-oriented, the media tend to be consumption-oriented. Individual women can use the often contradictory images of the media and the state to rationalize their behavior and decrease the control of the state. Thus there is a dialectic between and among competing institutions and the individual actor. This does not produce revolution, but incremental changes that Rosenberger terms "fragile resistances," which affect women's position in society.

The contradiction between the mainstream nurturer role and the image of today's woman trying to cope with new choices is apparent in the chapter by Awaya and Phillips. Awaya and Phillips examine popular literature read by Japanese working women, in which female protagonists deal with divorce, single parenthood, and careers. The problems they face reflect the challenges their readers face, and in many cases they do not have solutions but continue to cope. They may be angry and dissatisfied, confused or hopeful, but they are not submissive or primarily nurturant. They are for the most part strong, goal-oriented individuals whose lives are very different from those of the readers, but whose challenges and questions resonate with young women in Japan today.

The perspective in this literature contrasts with the belief that happiness comes from nurturing. Andrew Painter's study of a television station illustrates how this belief is reflected in the station's gender roles, its programming for the homemaker market, and the theme of a popular "home drama." The female protagonist of the drama finds fulfillment and brings happiness to her family when she ceases to resist the nurturer role and joyously takes on caring for the bedridden mother of her fiancé. This is a route to happiness that would have been recognized by any of the women in Bernstein's volume.

Margaret Lock weaves the threads of image and cultural assumption into the subject of gynecology. She points out that cultural assumptions about the nature of women and their place in society influence how the female body is seen in medical settings, where the recent "discovery" of the menopausal syndrome becomes an argument against individualism and provides "scientific" fuel for the nurturing ideology. Lock argues that Japan's view of women's medical concerns reflects the policy of keeping women healthy to fulfill their nurturing role. The women in her pages show the advantages of capitalizing on the healthy homebody image and the disadvantages of challenging it. Indeed, one way to attain individual goals that might be criticized as selfish is to cast them in the framework of nurturant behavior—legitimizing an exercise class to keep the wife healthy to care for the elderly.

One way to understand Japanese women's lives today is to examine the life of one woman and how it reflects women's choices. Robert J. Marra introduces us to Yuriko, whose great personal sacrifice rehabilitates both her natal family and that of her husband. Now the most respected woman in her village, Yuriko exemplifies the degree to which a woman can build social capital by fulfilling her nurturer role. Clearly, her years of hard work for her family have paid off in her own social status. Indeed, Yuriko is given credit for permitting her daughter-in-law to pursue a career. In caring for her grandchildren while her daughter-in-law is at work, Yuriko—rather than her daughter-in-law—receives praise from the community for her farsighted and liberal behavior.

Just as Yuriko simultaneously advanced the status of both her family and herself, the tea ceremony practitioners Barbara Mori studies find social status and personal fulfillment in the private sphere. These women are for the most part seeking to fulfill their roles in Japanese society while finding personal enjoyment and meaning within them. The tea ceremony provides a socially acceptable outlet and a milieu in which they can attain status, influence, and power. The traditional arts are compatible with the mother's job of passing on culture to her children and fit the image of a desirable, cultured wife. Thus it is difficult for her husband to object to her participation. Yet the traditional arts may provide women with opportunities to work for personal goals that might be defined as selfish in other contexts. Indeed, these traditional arts offer women the chance to attain prestige and status as well as to fulfill their leadership potential without challenging the dominance of their nurturer role.

However, in today's Japan, even the nurturer role contains paradoxes. As Anne Allison points out, the mother is expected to provide her children with the skills to succeed in today's production-oriented economy. A primary goal is to develop independence in one's child. This independence is not individualism, but rather the development of behavior patterns that will en-

able the child to adapt to and succeed at the tasks of school and work. Be-
cause the tasks are rigorous, the adaptation process is difficult, requiring the
active participation of the mother. Thus, the school system takes on the task
not only of educating children, but of educating mothers to participate; the
school sets rigid expectations and high standards for mother and child's
school and home behavior. In this sense, her child's school may become one
of the most powerful shapers of a woman's behavior.

Although a woman's behavior may conform to the nurturing ideal,
Susan Long warns us that we must not confuse the ideal of nurturing with
the reality of women's choices or the behavior with the desire of the indi-
vidual. To do so would mean that we miss both the "stress that accompa-
nies nurturing and the relationship between nurturing and power in
Japanese society." Long's study of care of the aged reveals the tension be-
tween the state's expectations and the desires of individual women, as well
as the impact of the media. Women may carry out their nurturing roles
because they perceive no alternative, not because they are truly fulfilled by
them. Both the media image and the state encouragement of family care
for the aged influence the expectation of husbands and the elderly and
produce stress for the wife. Her conformity to traditional expectations is
equated with domestic happiness, and nontraditional behavior on her
part is blamed for all family ills.

In the public sphere as well as the domestic, there is tension between
nurturing and individual goals. Especially since the passage of the Equal
Employment Opportunity Law, the media image of the career woman
balancing work and home has competed with that of full-time wife and
mother. We examine the perspectives of women in three different types of
employment that balance work and nurturing.

The bar hostesses John Mock describes are women with few economic
and educational resources who fled family hardships in search of indepen-
dence. They attempted to avoid lives of sacrificial nurturing, yet their only
opportunity came as bar hostesses, where they nurture clients rather than
spouse and family. This commodification of nurturing sets them apart
from the "legitimate" nurturers (wives and mothers) in their neighbor-
hoods. Although their work is, in a sense, a continuation of the nurturing
that female office workers and assistants give to male employees, the host-
esses lack respectability. Nonetheless, despite this lack and the highly com-
petitive environment in which the hostesses work, they can achieve an in-
dependence "legitimate" nurturers cannot. They exemplify yet another
way to balance nurturing and independence.

New economic opportunities for women developed in the 1980s after
the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. Yet Millie R.
Creighton argues that this law does not reflect an internal shift in Japan-
ese social values as much as a reaction to international pressures. Rather

than provide increased opportunity for the majority of women, it provides a small number of qualified women the opportunity for equal employment with men. Creighton examines the situation of department store employees and finds that department stores usually do not promote women beyond low-level managerial positions. More significant, she finds that promoting women to positions of responsibility does not necessarily make them role models for younger women. If women managers are single and childless, they are pitied by younger women, who give more prestige to homemaking than to attaining managerial status. Thus Creighton argues that legal change per se does not equal social change.

In contrast to Creighton's department store workers, Glenda Roberts's blue-collar women work hard to be promoted and value work as much as domestic roles. Although there are many similarities between these blue-collar women's attitudes toward work and those of their department store sisters, two important factors tie blue-collar women to their jobs. First, they are reluctant to give up their permanent, full-time jobs. Second, because they are blue-collar workers, not only do the families need the money, but the women's income comes close to matching their husbands' and thus cannot be considered extra in the same sense as that of the wife of a white-collar worker. As with Yuriko, their mothers-in-law may become the primary caregivers of their children and run the homes in which they live. Although their motivations are primarily economic, they feel strongly that it would be a waste for them to stay home. On the one hand, they have become part of the consumerism ideology because their wages purchase a better life for their families. On the other, they are not challenging the nurturant roles but balancing them with full-time work. The women Roberts describes are survivors. They have a strong commitment to the work ethic and high performance standards. They keep working in the face of disapproval—even of the president of their own company, who thinks women's abandonment of the household is leading Japan on the road to ruin. They work under conditions that give little quarter for pregnancy or nurturing roles. As Roberts points out, the difficulty of their lifestyle suggests that few others will choose it and that those who do choose it must depend on other women to cover their nurturing responsibilities.

Finally, we examine the political arena. During the period Bernstein covered, Japanese women did not have the right to vote. Now there are women at almost all levels of Japanese politics and of all political persuasions. Those familiar with women's entry into politics in the United States will not be surprised that most of the Dietwomen studied by Hastings either worked their way up in "feminine" professions or were related to male politicians whose seats they inherited. In recent years, however, real changes have been made. Younger women do not remember when women could not vote, and women have become important constituents

for candidates. Political women have established themselves in the opposition even though, as Hastings argues, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party trivialized women by choosing candidates for their charm or media talent rather than political ability. Women have been elected in large numbers as "clean" candidates after political scandals have toppled male incumbents, but it remains to be seen how women will fare as candidates after the electoral reforms of 1995.

The final chapter by Patricia G. Steinhoff brings us full circle to the competing pulls of nurturance and individualism and to individual versus image. The three radical women she depicts resemble the wives who help run small family businesses in Japan. All are recognized for their ability, but gain formal authority only when their husbands die. None of these women was forced to make a sharp choice between marriage and career; indeed, their public image depends more on their feminine behavior than on their political activity. As Steinhoff illustrates, Shiomi earns great respect for being an exemplary mother and wife, caring for her aged father, and waiting for her husband to be released from prison. Even the police see her as an ideal woman. In contrast, Nagata—who is depicted by the press and the legal system as aggressive and unfeminine—is seen unsympathetically as evil, whereas the beautiful, elusive Shigenobu has become a romantic figure. Thus male media images shape the way these radical women are viewed. In the unlikely sphere of political radicalism, nurturing behavior carries political capital, at least in the view of mainstream society. Yet as Steinhoff takes pains to point out, none of these women is reduced to her media image. Each has a real life whose choices and circumstances reflect the influences at work in the lives of other contemporary Japanese women.

No single book can encompass the full range of Japanese women's lives. This book focuses primarily on urban women who balance domestic and nondomestic responsibilities and opportunities. It attempts to shed light on the forces that influence Japanese women's choices at the end of the twentieth century. The tensions between the society and the individual, between production and consumption, between image and reality are not unique to Japan. How these tensions are resolved, images manipulated, and traditional values incorporated, modified, or discarded is relevant, however, both to our understanding of Japan and to our understanding of gender issues in general. As the women in these pages built on the foundations laid during the time Bernstein studied, so will young women today and tomorrow build on the foundations laid by these women.

NOTES

1. In an extensive review of the American literature on Japanese women over the past 130 years, Yoshi Kuzume finds an interesting dialectic. She argues that

American images reflect more the changing values of American society than changes in Japanese women's roles. At the same time, the American scholarship influenced the image Japanese society had of itself. Hence, the images took on a reality of their own and were developed as one side responded to the images brought forth by the other. See Yoshi Kuzume, "Images of Japanese Women in U.S. Writings and Scholarly Works, 1860–1990," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 1 (1991): 6–50.

2. For a discussion of the salaryman, see Ezra F. Vogel's classic study *Japan's New Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

3. Mary C. Brinton, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

4. For a fuller discussion of these developments, see Anne E. Imamura, *Urban Japanese Housewives: At Home and in the Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

5. David W. Plath discusses the impact of the automobile on Japan in "My-Car-isma: Motorizing the Showa Self," *Daedalus*, Special issue, *Showa: The Japan of Hirohito* (Summer 1990): 229–244.

6. In the spring of 1993, employers cut back on recruitment of all new graduates; however, they cut back more on female recruitment. Nobuko Matsubara, the Director General of the Women's Bureau in the Ministry of Labor, sent a letter of appeal to major economic organizations urging them to comply with the laws guaranteeing equal employment rights for men and women.

7. Sumiko Iwao, *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 6.