Introduction

As a Japanese woman studying in the United States, I was often asked about the status of women in Japan: Is women's role still primarily at home? What opportunities are there for working women in Japan? How do women office workers who serve tea and do simple assignments view their work? Have things changed in the last ten years?

I was delighted to have the chance to talk about my native country, yet I wanted to give as accurate an account as possible. Initially I spoke of the intense sex discrimination in Japan. I described the severe obstacles women faced in establishing a professional career in a male-dominated society and how many women who had graduated from top universities ended up typing documents and serving tea in the office.

Most Americans I talked to in university circles had heard of the male-biased career structure in Japan, and they did not seem surprised by my story. They might, however, ask: "Is it really *still* like that?" When I replied with an emphatic yes, my American friends responded with sympathy for Japanese women and wondered how these women can stand it. One person even wondered why more Japanese women did not emigrate to the United States. Many people I talked to had a preconception of Japanese women as gentle, shy, and obedient. My account seemed to tally with this image and confirm that Japanese women, submissive and deferential, were the victims of society.

I began to feel uneasy and to state my argument less vigorously. Are Japanese women miserable? I wondered. Do they feel that they are victims of society? Are they really submissive and deferential to men? I was not sure. I was not even convinced that these women feel oppressed or

are unhappy with their lot. I realized that I had given my American friends an impression of Japanese women that I myself did not believe to be entirely true.

I changed the emphasis of my account. I mentioned that, despite being discriminated against, Japanese women have considerable say both at home and in the office. In addition to pointing out that among Japanese couples it is the wife who usually controls the family budget, I gave as an example the case of a married acquaintance of one of my Japanese friends. The husband rented a lovely condominium in a popular Hawaiian resort for his wife and eight-year-old son during their summer vacation, although he knew that he himself could not join them there. He had a promising career in one of the leading trading companies and was too busy to take time off. Summer in Tokyo happened to be especially hot and humid that year, and the husband had to sweat in the urban concrete jungle, while his wife relaxed by the sea.

Most of my American friends seemed surprised by this example. They sympathized with the man and said they were glad they were not in his position. They wondered who was really oppressed, whether Japanese men didn't suffer from the burden of earning a living in Japanese society. My friends' reaction made me uneasy. Apparently, my description had wiped out the image of Japanese women as victims of oppression. Instead, women now loomed large as tyrants enjoying the easy life while men exhausted themselves mentally and physically in the strenuous business world.

The more I tried to be accurate, the more I failed to communicate. I was frustrated: I had failed to impart the "truth" about relations between men and women in Japan. When I emphasized how much women as a group are discriminated against, I made individual women seem more vulnerable to oppression than they really are. When I described how influential individual women often are both at home and in the office, I downplayed the glaring discrimination they face. I was confused. Are Japanese women oppressed, or not? Are they powerless, or powerful? The questions guiding my research thus emerged.

In gender studies, Japan is an important case. Many observers and scholars, both Japanese and non-Japanese, agree that sex roles are strictly delineated in Japan. In terms of wages, employment status, occupational roles, and any other ways in which we choose to measure gender stratification, Japanese women are more disadvantaged than their counterparts in other industrial countries. The unequal and low

status of women in Japan has been exposed and severely criticized in the international community.

In spite of the sharply delineated sex roles, the Japanese public often claims that once you look beyond the immediately observable, you see that women have the real power over men. In popular opinion, the Japanese woman manages and controls the home as her own space, enjoys unlimited autonomy there, and frequently prevails over her husband in decision making about the home and family life in general. Derogatory terms such as *sodaigomi* (a large piece of garbage that is difficult to dispose of) and *nure-ochiba* (wet, fallen leaves that cling irritatingly to the ground even if you try to sweep them away) refer to men who have no authority in their homes and are fearful of their wives. Recently, there has been a reversal in the preferred sex of a newborn in Japan: more mothers nowadays want girls than boys. Girls, the argument goes, will provide emotional support to their parents in the future, whereas boys will only comply with their wives' wishes. Observing the strength of the mother-daughter bond, some scholars even predict that Japan will become a matrilineal society in the near future (Sakai 1995).

How are we to interpret the seemingly contradictory depiction of women's status in Japanese society? How can the two conflicting views be reconciled? What makes it possible for women to enjoy autonomy despite their limited roles in the economy? What is the nature of their influence on men? Is it only at home that women exercise control? What about women's voice in the public sphere? These questions are central to this book.

Study of Japanese Women

The Japanese economy has attracted the attention of many Western social scientists, who have attempted to explain how and why it works. Concentrating on male employees in large corporations, their studies focus on the "lifetime" employment system and other distinctive features of Japanese companies (Abegglen 1958; Clark 1979; Cole 1971, 1979; Dore 1973; E. Vogel 1975). Only recently have women's roles in Japanese society begun to be investigated in depth.

The rapidly expanding literature on women in Japan reflects the two opposing views of women. Many studies describe how women face intense sex discrimination and, as a result, are relegated to low-paying

and dead-end jobs. Other studies, many of which examine the woman's role at home, emphasize that women have considerable leverage in society. What accounts for these opposing views? In order to answer this question, let us first examine the two perspectives.

Women's disadvantaged position in the economy is well documented, mainly by labor economists and sociologists working with statistical data. Sociologist Mary Brinton and labor economists Ōsawa Machiko and Ōsawa Mari each analyze why women's economic roles are limited in Japan.[1] Together with quantitatively sophisticated work that examines women's workforce participation (Hill 1984; Shimada and Higuchi 1985; Shinotsuka 1982; Tanaka 1987; Yashiro 1983), these writings draw an overall picture of gender stratification in Japan. However, because they deal primarily with macro-level phenomena and statistical data, these studies do not reveal how women exert influence in face-to-face interactions and negotiate power in forms other than wages, occupation, or status.

Rich ethnographic material on Japanese women's lives has been offered by anthropologists such as Takie Lebra (1984), who collected life histories from women in a small city in central Japan. Many other authors have focused on women in selected occupations.[2] There are some English-language writings on women and Japanese law (Cook and Hayashi 1980; Lam 1992; Parkinson 1989; Upham 1987), and a broader picture of women's status in Japan can be found in the works of Iwao Sumiko (1993), Mary Saso (1990), and Robert Smith (1987).

Many of these studies examining micro-level phenomena refute the stereotypical view that the Japanese woman is dependent, deferential, and powerless. Takie Lebra (1984), for example, confirms that in most Japanese homes, it is the wife who controls household finances. In addition, she finds that many husbands are totally dependent on their wives for housework, which includes not only cooking, cleaning, and ironing but also "around-the-body care" (*mi no mawari no sewa*): the wife helps the husband change his clothes, serves him at dinner, and fetches him cigarettes, an ashtray, a cup of green tea, and the like, while he relaxes before television. According to Lebra, the husband's childlike dependence gives the wife leverage to exercise power by making her services absolutely necessary. She observes: "If one looks at the wife's complete control of the domestic realm apart from its structural context, one might be led to the conclusion that women are more powerful than men in Japan, or that Japanese women enjoy more power than

American women, for whom the division of labor is not so clear-cut" (1984, 302).

A similar view of women's role specialization appears in Glenda Roberts's work (1994), which presents a speech delivered by the president of a lingerie company. According to the president, women as professional wives manage men much as a puppeteer manipulates a puppet: although men are always at center stage, it is women who make the male puppets dance.

Perhaps one of the most optimistic views is presented by Iwao Sumiko (1993), who argues that men's formal superiority is matched by women's informal dominance. It is true, Iwao argues, that women are excluded from formal arenas such as policymaking and business. But because of this, they have more freedom than their male counterparts, who must spend long hours on the job to support their families. Not only do women have the chance to engage in a broad range of culturally enriching activities, but they can also decide to work on their own terms, part-time, without the worry of making a living.[3] Iwao concludes, "Today it is, in a sense, the husbands who are being controlled and the ones to be pitied. The typical Japanese man depends heavily on his wife to look after his daily needs and nurture his psychological well-being. The Confucian ethic of the three obediences formerly binding women could be rewritten today as the three obediences for men: obedience to mothers when young, companies when adult, and wives when retired" (1993, 7). The fearful fate of retired men is also noted by Anne Allison (1994).[4]

Although most works refer to female autonomy in the household, Dorinne Kondo (1990) examines women's position in a workplace. At the factory where she conducted her research, middle-aged female part-time workers play the role of surrogate mother for younger male full-time artisans. The women invite artisans home for a hot meal, lend them money, and run bank errands for men who cannot leave work during the lunch break. According to Kondo, superordinates, such as parents or bosses, assume the position of caregiver in Japan, and subordinates seek indulgence. Therefore, by casting themselves as mothers, these women workers gain power over the younger men and claim a central space for themselves within the informal structures of the workplace. Because female part-timers are vital to the informal relations of the workplace, they can scarcely be called marginal.

These ethnographies reveal an aspect of women's status in Japan

that is invisible in statistical analyses provided by labor economists and macro-sociologists. However, they do not offer a convincing analysis of *how* women gain control. Why is it that women can exert influence over men despite the latter's monopoly of formal power? What is the source of women's strengths? Lebra (1984) and Kondo (1990) provide partial explanations in their perceptively written texts. However, it is still not clear why men become so totally dependent on their wives, or why they rely on their female coworkers' kindness. Are Japanese men exceptionally lazy and spoiled, or is something more structural involved? In other words, is men's dependence on women a result of their individual, voluntary action, in which case they can presumably become more independent if they choose to do so, or it is more systemically determined? These questions are left largely unanswered because the existing literature fails to integrate ethnographic observations with large-scale quantitative data.

Literature on Women's Measures of Influence

If the contradiction in Japan between women's collective economic status and individual women's day-to-day experiences is not well explained, neither is the discrepancy between collective status and individual experience in society in general. Although men as a group on many occasions exercise a disproportionate amount of power, individual men often do not *feel* powerful in their everyday relations with others (Gerson 1993). Similarly, individual women sometimes find that they can get what they want in concrete day-to-day situations despite their limited power as a group (Collier 1974; Rogers 1975; Wolf 1972). Why? In order to answer this question, we need to analyze the links between collective status and individual lives. It is necessary to understand not only how men's collective power puts them in a position of advantage, but also how it constrains individual men's choice. Likewise, we need to examine ways in which women's disadvantaged position as a group provides opportunities for individual women. Investigating these less visible power issues has important implications. For if men feel they are getting a bad deal, and if women feel their lot is better than it seems, then there may be less impetus than we would expect for change toward a statistically egalitarian arrangement.

A number of excellent studies investigate how women prevail in domestic decision making in spite of their husbands' opposition. Many

of these ethnographies come from researchers in southern European (mainly rural) societies (Dubisch 1986; Friedl 1967; Gilmore 1990; Reigelhaupt 1967; Rogers 1975; Uhl 1985), but there are also studies of women's primary roles in family life, including reproductive and distributive activities, elsewhere in the world (Boddy 1989; Chinas 1973; Collier 1974; Gullestad 1984; Swartz 1982; Weiner 1976; Wolf 1972).[5] In this literature, women's power in marital relations is typically described as being unofficial and informal but nonetheless real and is contrasted to men's official, formal, and sometimes cosmetic power. In her watershed article on a peasant village in France (1975), Susan Rogers maintains that because of social science's traditional preoccupation with authority structures, men appeared to be dominant. In reality, however, women's power in the household, although informal and covert, is more effective than the overt, formal power of men. Women grant their husbands authority, prestige, and respect in exchange for power, thus perpetuating the "myth" of male dominance.[6] A parallel argument is put forward by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) in his study of Kabyle villagers, a Berber-speaking community in Algeria. He maintains that women often wield the real power in matrimonial matters, but that they can exercise it only on condition that they leave the appearance of power to men.[7]

One of the difficulties of studying women's domestic power is that autonomy and segregation are so intertwined for a wife that it is difficult to separate their effects. Idealized observations may sometimes overestimate female control. For example, the fact that many women hold the family purse strings has frequently been considered the symbol of women's domestic autonomy. However, instead of regarding budgeting as a source of power, some women feel this responsibility is a burden (Ōsawa Machiko 1994; Ueno 1987; Zelizer 1994).

Because the overwhelming majority of studies have examined women's control at home in a rural community, it is interesting to see how the shift of focus from rural households to urban workplaces affects the studies' arguments. Not only do the new studies have relevance for many of us living in cities, but they also allow us to test the prevailing assumption that women are most disadvantaged in modern bureaucratic organizations.[8] Susan Rogers (1975), for example, attributes wives' power to the domestic-centeredness of the community and the importance of informal face-to-face interactions. She therefore predicts that as the locus of identity moves outside of the family and community to the workplace, women's informal power will become much less effective. Is

this prediction correct? Must women's capacity to influence necessarily be based on their homemaking skills? Is it only in the traditionally feminine sphere that women enjoy autonomy? In order to answer these questions, it is important to examine whether women can create opportunities outside the household. As Carol Mukhopadhyay writes, "Focusing on women solely as wives (especially brides) and (young) mothers overemphasizes the limitations on women's powers and sphere of action, even for the most male-dominated cultures" (1988, 465).

Compared to the accounts of women's activities in the household, discussions of women in the workplace tend to focus on their vulnerability (Kondo 1990 and Lamphere 1987 are exceptions to this). Women are depicted as victims of hierarchical work structures who must cope with limits, dilemmas, and uncertainties. In her classic study of the treatment of men and women in a large American corporation, Rosabeth Kanter (1977) describes the unequal and nonreciprocal relationship between a male boss and a female secretary. The boss evaluated the secretary, whereas she rarely evaluated him. Because the boss's opinion of his secretary determined her fate in the firm, but her opinion did not affect his fate, the secretary tried to please her boss by expressing her loyalty and devotion to him.

A remarkable piece of research on how the work environment affects human feelings has been conducted by Arlie Hochschild (1983). She, too, assumes that women's subordinate position requires them to control their own feelings more than men must. Therefore, she argues that women are expected to make themselves "nicer" than men and, for example, compliment others on their clothing. Women's niceness, according to Hochschild, is a necessary lubricant to civil exchange and keeps the social wheels turning. She writes: "High-status people tend to enjoy the privilege of having their feelings noticed and considered important. The lower one's status, the more one's feelings are not noticed or treated as inconsequential" (1983, 172).

There is a tendency to reaffirm the commonly held belief that the dominant can be assertive and the dominated must exercise discretion. Superiors, it is said, do not have to worry much about the opinion of others, especially the opinion of inferiors. Subordinates, in contrast, are supposed to be wary of what they say and do, lest they incur the displeasure of their superiors. Subordinates often attempt to appeal to the expectations of the powerful and curry favor (Scott 1985, 1990).

Contrary to such assertions, I show in this book that under certain circumstances, Japanese men in positions of authority care more about

the feelings of subordinate women than subordinate women do about the feelings of men in authority. Fear, self-control, perseverance, and indirectness characterize the emotions of men rather than women. In some cases, it is men who try to maintain harmonious relations between the two sexes by cracking jokes or talking about last night's TV programs.

In the following chapters I describe how Japanese men take pains not to offend women, how they study women's moods, and how they even curry women's favor. The extent to which these men feel constrained in their relations with women and take care not to arouse their displeasure is extraordinary. I therefore argue that macro-level power relations are not necessarily reproduced in micro-level interactions, and may even be *reversed*.

Some theorists refuse to attach much importance to power exercised unofficially. James Scott (1990), for example, argues in his finely crafted book on resistance that the fact that women must pretend to be powerless is not only a symbolic concession but a political concession, which only reaffirms men's power in the public realm. He also points out that men, as the formal title holders, may take away this "unofficial" power from women, who only exercise it on behalf of men. Such criticism, however, fails to take into account the *structural* nature of women's access to various means of control. If men's dependence on women is not the sole result of an individual, voluntary action, but one based on the institutional structures of society, men cannot deprive women of their "weapons" as easily as Scott envisions.

In fact, the assumption that formal forms of power are more effective and enduring than informal means of control may be adequate only in a certain social context. Frank Upham (1987) describes how conflict resolution in Japan is characterized by informality, where potentially general issues are particularized and universal rules are substituted for ad hoc decision making. For example, although Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) lacked specific formal powers, this fact did not stop MITI from gaining firms' compliance with its policies. By emphasizing consultation and consensus, MITI exercised strong leadership in forming and implementing many of its industrial policies (Johnson 1982; Upham 1987). Indeed, Upham contends that MITI wished to avoid legal formality so as to minimize the power of individual firms to challenge MITI in court. Informality need not mean ineffective and weak control.[9]

In this book I argue that Japanese women's access to informal means

of control is not necessarily a temporary arrangement that can be easily redressed if men choose to do so. Women's empowerment may be neither coincidental nor transient. I show how, under certain circumstances, the men's power and the effectiveness of the women's resistance to it become so inseparable that one necessarily entails the other. The men described in this book cannot deprive the women of their weapons without inflicting serious damage on their own power base. The men must therefore accede to the women's use of manipulative strategies if they are to exercise their power.[10]

"Office Flowers"

Although increasing numbers of researchers are studying Japanese women, very little scholarly work has focused on female office workers.[11] Whereas their male colleagues, *sararīman* (salaried men), have attracted much attention, we know surprisingly few things about smiling receptionists and clerical assistants.[12] In a sense, the focus on male employees in large corporations is understandable: they are the beneficiaries of the unique Japanese employment system and are often regarded as the backbone of the Japanese economy. The result, however, is a biased view of Japanese labor and industrial relations. As Robert Cole argues: "Insofar as the benefits of the privileged male worker aristocrats come at the expense of female employees, temporary workers and those working in small firms, the experience of the latter is very much part of the Japanese employment system" (1979, 3).

There are two other reasons why a detailed examination of the life and work of female office workers in large firms is important. First, it has been repeatedly said that unlike men, Japanese women do not enjoy various benefits of internal labor markets available for full-time employees in large companies—benefits such as high wages, good working conditions, employment stability, and prospects for promotion. There is an imbalance in the distribution of male and female employees by firm size, with women concentrated in smaller establishments (Lam 1992). Women also account for the overwhelming majority of the increasing number of part-time employees (Ōsawa Mari 1993).

However, it is not that *more* women than men start out their employment in small firms and as part-time employees. Brinton (1993) has found that the overwhelming majority of both sexes obtain their first jobs as full-time employees, and that approximately one-third of them,

both men and women, initially work for large companies employing at least one thousand people. Although young men and women begin their work lives in similar ways, an increasing number of women move out of large firms and out of full-time employment status as they age, whereas men are less mobile.

The commonly cited explanation for women's movement is that they quit working upon marriage and, when their children are grown, they reenter the labor market in positions available to them—in small firms or as part-time workers. Such explanation, however, adds little to the data obtained from women's employment patterns. What we need to know is how young women feel, think, and behave while working in the office.[13] What factors influence their decision to leave supposedly advantageous positions in large firms as full-time employees? How do they arrive at this critical decision?

The second reason for focusing on female office workers is the need to analyze the implications of the "lifetime" employment system. Numerous scholars have documented how the Japanese management system discriminates against women (Brinton 1993; Lam 1992; Ōsawa Machiko 1993; Ōsawa Mari 1993). It is also of great interest to see how this system provides opportunities for women.

In their analyses of large Japanese firms, some researchers have noted the ironic implications of the "lifetime" employment system for female employees. Because women do not receive the benefits of the internal labor market, they feel free to criticize authority. Thomas Rohlen explains the situation: "Women have no career at stake in the organization and can always turn back to their parents. Office morale problems are quickly apparent among the women, and a great deal of effort is expended these days trying to find ways to keep the Uedagin woman happy. She has come to have a special kind of leverage because she is more willing to show her dissatisfaction and even to quit" (1974, 104). Similarly, Rodney Clark observes that women can refuse to transfer to another location, although such transfers are part of the usual career path for men: "If she had been a male graduate (and supposing that a male graduate would ever have failed to respond to such an order) her superiors would have been able to offer better chances of promotion and to threaten some kind of managerial oblivion to induce her to go. But a woman? Women were scarcely eligible for promotion in any event, and they could hardly be made to do more tedious jobs than they were doing" (1979, 217–18). Clark also mentions that women are late for work when it suits them and disappear into the office kitchen when their

sections are particularly busy. Because female workers are less wedded to the company, they regard authority lightly. They can be more independent than men (see also Iwao 1993 and Kelsky 1994).

In this study I examine what this independence buys for women. What exactly is the leverage women are said to have? How do they exercise it? Under what circumstances? What is the response of the company authority? Of their male colleagues? To what extent does it affect the way men interact with women? How are the relations between men and women in the office shaped by it? Are there any limits to women's independence? Finally, what implications does women's exercise of their leverage have on women's current and future status?

Women working in the office are called *ofisu redī* (office lady), or OL for short, in Japan. OLs are recruited immediately from universities and two-year colleges. In the past, many were also hired straight from high school, but this number has declined, especially in large corporations in urban areas, as more and more women attain higher education.

Major tasks assigned to OLs include operating copiers and facsimile machines, performing elementary accounting, and doing word processing. They are also usually responsible for such chores as serving tea to their male colleagues or company visitors, wiping the surfaces of desks with wet towels, and receiving telephone calls. Sometimes they are even asked to go out on errands, such as to buy prizes for the men's weekend golf competition. Perhaps because their work seems wholly superficial and nonproductive, some say that OLs' major contribution to the office lies in their presence. Indeed, OLs were once frequently called "office flowers," implying that they served a decorative function and thereby inspired men to work hard. Partly in response to the influence of Western feminist thinking, this expression is no longer popular. However, the role OLs play in the organization has not changed much since the days when they were called "office flowers."

My analysis concentrates on OLs working in large corporations. The discrepancy between the level of educational attainment and opportunities available for women is greatest in large firms that recruit employees, both male and female, from the nation's most prestigious universities and colleges. In addition, there are reasons to believe that OLs in large companies have more in common than those in smaller establishments. Japanese companies are infamous for their conformity. Preferring to be in step with other companies, they constantly compare their policies, including how to treat female employees, against those of similar companies. This tendency is stronger among large, established com-

panies, whose every move is watched closely by the mass media and the government. Consequently, women in large companies often face strikingly similar uncertainties and dilemmas despite differences in the specific workplace. In contrast, situations in smaller and less well-established companies are more various. Being relatively new or small, these organizations rely less on bureaucratic rules and more on personal management style. As a result, women's working conditions in these companies tend to vary, depending more on the personal opinions of an individual manager than on fixed organizational policies.

Some Thoughts on Methodology

One of the first questions I asked myself was whether my research could be carried out solely by conducting interviews, which are less time-consuming than participant observation. Many researchers emphasize that the key to a successful interview is knowing enough to ask intelligent questions without knowing too much.[14] I seemed to have the desired combination of knowing enough and yet not knowing all. I had in the past worked with OLs of several client companies when I was employed by a management consulting firm in Tokyo. I also had many friends who were or had been OLs. However, because I had never actually been an OL myself, I could inquire with genuine curiosity what it was like to be an OL.

Yet I wondered if respondents would readily answer such queries as "Why don't OLs refuse to serve tea?" and "Why are men afraid of their female colleagues?" The more I considered the prospect, the less confident I became. Offering an explanation requires simultaneous detachment and close attention; the respondent must disengage from the immediate surroundings yet observe them steadily. He or she must assume the attitude of an onlooker. The world must be objectified, which necessitates a conscious distinction between subject and object. Moreover, in order to draw a clear picture of the situation for someone who is unfamiliar with it, the respondent must deal with issues of presentation, with the distinction between representation and "reality."

Yet dividing the world into two separate realms—representations and "external reality"—is a habit of thought. According to Timothy Mitchell (1988), when Europeans, who nurtured this habit of binary vision, visited Egypt in the late nineteenth century, they found it disap-

pointing; it was *impossible* to represent. These Europeans were baffled by life in Cairo, which Egyptians "understood in terms of the *occurrence and reoccurrence of practices,* rather than in terms of an 'architecture'—material or institutional—that stands apart from life itself, containing and representing the meaning of what was done" (59, emphasis added).

OLs and *sararīman* of contemporary Japan may be more familiar with modern instruments of representation than Egyptians in the nineteenth century. However, as I see it, many still prefer to understand their lives not in abstract terms, but in concrete everyday situations. Their perceptions are not fixed but vary according to relations among the persons involved, the time, and the circumstances. They find questions such as "What do you value in life?" difficult to answer because these queries force them to extract "meaning" from an everyday situation and give it a determinate form.

This situationally negotiated understanding is evident in the Japanese use of personal pronouns, which vary according to context. The available options include but are not limited to *watakushi, watashi, washi, boku,* and *ore* for men, and *watakushi, watashi,* and *atashi* for women. The pronouns differ primarily in their degree of formality but also invoke complex resonances in terms of class, age, regionality, masculinity or femininity, sophistication, and intimacy (Hamabata 1990; Kondo 1990). A white-collar businessman who usually refers to himself as *boku* among his colleagues will raise the level of politeness and say *watashi* when speaking to his boss; he will become even more formal and use *watakushi* when addressing a large audience in a meeting. When speaking to his wife or among close friends from school, he may find the tough, macho expression of *ore* appropriate.

Furthermore, there is a plethora of expressions that can be used in place of personal pronouns, such as kin terms, occupational titles, and proper names. It is perfectly normal practice for a man to call himself *otōsan* (father) when speaking to his children. The unitary "I" presupposed in the West shifts with social positioning in Japan (Bachnik 1982; Wetzel 1994). It is made anew each time according to the particularities of a given situation. As Kondo argues, "You are not an 'I' untouched by context, rather you are defined by the context" (1990, 29).

To interview Japanese *sararīman* and OLs, I would have to formulate questions that would not look for "meaning" outside everyday occurrence. Although I had some idea of what a typical Japanese office

was like, I did not know enough to ground my questions in the concrete situations of daily worklife. Therefore, I decided to carry out the first part of my research with participant observation in a large financial institution in Tokyo, which is called Tōzai Bank in this book.[15] I worked at Tōzai Bank four days a week from ten in the morning to four in the afternoon as a temporary employee for approximately half a year between the months of October 1991 and March 1992. My job was to give miscellaneous assistance to fifty-one *sararīman* and eleven OLs belonging to three departments. I served tea, made copies, and delivered documents to nearby departments. Instead of being tied to my desk, I was able to visit different parts of the company building, meet various people, and listen to many discussions. Further details on both the bank and the workplace are provided in the first chapter.

Although my experiences at Tōzai Bank were revelatory and enriching, it was important to assess the universality of what I observed; for this purpose, interviews were indispensable. After completing the participant observation, I spoke to thirty *sararīman* and thirty OLs and ex-OLs employed in large Japanese firms. In line with the definition most commonly used in government statistics and in studies of Japanese employment (Brinton 1989; Brinton, Ngo, and Shibuya 1991; Cole 1979; Hashimoto and Raisian 1983), firms employing at least one thousand people are considered large. However, in most cases, the informants I talked to were members of superlarge companies that are famous worldwide and employ nearly ten thousand employees. In the following chapters where interviews are quoted, I refrain from mentioning each time that the speaker belongs to a large or superlarge establishment and specify only the business of the company.

I contacted the sixty men and women by asking my acquaintances for the names of associates who worked in large companies. Although such a nonrandom sample has inherent shortcomings, I compensated as much as possible by variation. I talked to informants who differed, among other things, in age, tenure, position, education, line of business, and type of industry. Above all, I made sure that no two interviewees worked for the same firm. As a result, I talked to men and women working in sixty different large-scale organizations, something that was perhaps uniquely possible in a city like Tokyo, where there is an exceptional concentration of business. Readers are advised to refer to appendix A for a full discussion of the representativeness of the interview sample, as well as other methodological issues. Profiles of sixty *sararīman* and OLs are given in appendix B.

In addition, I interviewed ten *sararīman* and ten ex-OLs of large Japanese corporations specifically about Valentine's Day gift-giving in the office, and thirty wives of *sararīman* about the White Day gifts their husbands give to OLs. Detailed profiles of these informants are provided in chapters 4 and 6 respectively. Altogether, I talked to more than one hundred men and women, whose lives were strongly connected to large Japanese companies.

At this point, a road map of the rest of the book might be helpful. I begin with a general description of women and work in Japan, placing emphasis on OLs and their daily lives in the office. In chapter 2, I examine the forces that inhibit OLs from organizing open rebellion. The next three chapters discuss forms in which OLs negotiate power: how OLs embarrass and irritate men with their critical and persistent gaze; how they publicly humiliate men through symbolic gift-giving; and how they annoy men by refusing to cooperate, sometimes gently, but other times bluntly. In all three chapters, attention is paid to the structural factors that contribute to men's vulnerability and to women's accompanying empowerment. Chapter 6 discusses men's lavish gifts to OLs as one of the most effective means of influencing women who work in the office. I conclude by noting the manner in which women's resistance is voiced through accommodation and the way it reinforces traditional gender relations.[16]