Principal Earner and Accommodator in Household

—An illustration of gender stratification process in contemporary Japan—

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Abstract

This paper has two objectives: (1) formalization of some aspects of the gender stratification process in contemporary societies, and (2) a critical examination of the current Japanese gender-equal policy using the formal model of stratification.

I start with the illustration of household supply of labor by Obi (1969). Obi points out that households always have two types of workers. One is "the principal earner" (PE), who takes the charge of earning income, with no responsibility for housework. The other is "the accommodator" (AC), who takes double roles of earner and housekeeper, according to the family needs.

Then I focus on the gender stratification process with differentiation between PE and AC through three steps as follows. The first step is the sex-typed determination of the worker type: most men become PE, while most women become AC. The second step is the working style differentiation between the two types of workers: AC often must give up full participation in paid work since they should arrange the hours between paid and unpaid work, while PE can fully participate in paid work continuously. The third step is the determination of earnings: suppose the wage rate to be the same, PE earns more than AC in proportion to the ratio between their working hours. These processes constitute the gender stratification, in which men hold the advantage over women in earning power.

The second half of this paper contains critical examination of the Japanese gender policies with the latest findings. The Japanese Government has taken two kinds of measures against the gender stratification: (1) support to workers with household responsibilities for full participation in paid work, such as day-care centers and shorter working hours, and (2) institution of established partial participation in the work system, such as parental leave. These measures can be regarded as the measures against the second and the third step, respectively, of the above-mentioned gender stratification process.

Recent quantitative studies have revealed these measures to be insufficient to offset AC's disadvantage in the labor market. (1') It is estimated that AC can hardly make full participation in paid work, even if the conflict between work and family matters is successfully eased with the shorter working hours and the growing capacity of day-care centers, as scheduled in the current policy. (2') Parental leave entails enormous opportunity cost for leave-takers, due not only to the lower payment during the leave, but also to the loss in the human capital that will damage their career in the long run. In short, the current policies cannot realize any gender-equal society.

The last possible measure is against the first step of the gender stratification process: the sex-typed PE/AC choice. This paper will conclude that in the future gender-equal society, if any, men and women will become AC with the equal probability. Men's partial employment due to household responsibility is therefore the key to gender equality, and is of an urgent importance as research question for the stratification study.

1. Introduction

As well as other industrialized societies, Japan has the gender stratification system that has its root in the sexual division of labor within the household. Under this system, men have an advantage in the labor market because they flee from family responsibilities. As a result, there is a great difference in lifetime income of men and women.

In the late 1990s, the Government of Japan established a gender-equal policy. In a report submitted in 1996, it is first declared that men and women should enjoy economic earnings equally (Council for Gender

Equality 1996). Following the line of the report, the 1999 Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society requires the Government to develop a gender-equal policy against gender biased institutions and practices.

How are such gender inequalities caused? How does the current gender-equal policy try to remove them? This paper tackles these issues using the fundamental concepts of the stratification study.

2. Formalization of the Stratification Theory

2.1. Basic concepts of stratification theory

Stratification studies aim at the understandings of "the complex of social institutions that generate inequalities" (Grusky 1994: 3). It offers useful tools to analyze inequalities in various forms. We start with formalizing of the basic concepts of the stratification theory.

Status

Status is the central concept in the stratification theory. It refers to a social position with assigned distinctive role, which is a set of right and responsibilities. Differences in the status emerge because of the division of labor that insures the satisfactory completion of the basic tasks in the society (Tumin 1967: 19).

Rewards

Reward refers to desirable and scarce goods distributed to those who occupy a status. Generally a status has its value socially defined and is matched to "reward packages". Members of society allocated to a status are rewarded as their status is defined (Grusky 1994: 3).

Ascription

Ascription refers to a person's properties given by nature. Stratification theory gives an importance to ascriptive process in attaining status. It is usually distinguished from status attainment by achievements (Tumin 1967: 47).

2.2. Stratification process

The three basic concepts highlight the pathway through which an individual attains a status and receives rewards, as illustrated in Figure 1. Stratification proceeds through steps from ascription to status, from status to status, and from status to rewards. First the given ascription effects what status she/he attains. The number of the status is not limited because our social system is so complex that the status attainment in one dimension is dependent on that in another dimension. The model should accordingly be formalized as having chain processes among multiple status that are mutually associated. Status finally determines how much reward he/she receives.

Note that Figure 1 is written only with abstract concepts. Each of them can be substituted by any substantial ascription, status, or reward. It illustrates a general form of stratification, which is applicable in any kind of inequality.

This model gives distinct articulation in the complex process. For applied social scientific studies, it has an essential virtue of helping to codify various political measures.

Figure 1 also suggests the plurality of equal societies. The stratification process always contains two or more steps. When you aim at the equality for certain ascription, you can accomplish your aim with only stopping one of the steps; inequality will disappear either if status attainment becomes independent of ascription, or if rewards become independent of status. Therefore the equal policies can take various measures, and the image of the equal society can be different, according to the condition the society faces.

[Ascription] → [Status] → ········ → [Status] → [Rewards]

Figure 1. The general model of stratification

3. A Process of Gender Stratification

We focus on a particular process of stratification—stratification between men and women due to the sexual division of labor and resulting in the gap in earnings. Throughout this paper we refer this kind of stratification as simply "gender stratification".

We focus on the difference in earnings between men and women. In contemporary Japan we can observe a great gap in the earnings that men and women earn throughout their life as an individual. The process creating this gap can be conceptualized as a variant of stratification process we formalized in the last chapter: it begins with sex—one of the ascriptions attributed by nature—, effects the process of her/his status attainment, and results in the distribution of earnings, which is one of the rewards of the greatest importance for people in modern societies. We postulate men and women are differentiated through the two steps of status attainment process: (1) sex-typed determination of the worker type and (2) differentiation in the working style between the worker types. Then the earnings gap eventually emerges between men and women.

3.1. Economic models of the labor supply from households

Economists have long argued that women and men exhibit different elasticity in their labor supply: Labor supply by women dynamically changes according to the economic condition, whereas that by men is almost constant. The sex difference in labor supply was found in US for the first time (Douglas 1957). Subsequently, a series of following studies among various countries confirmed the sex difference in labor supply to be common to industrialized societies (Mincer 1985).

The difference in the elasticity of labor supply demonstrates that men and women follow different decision-making processes. Obi (1969) formalized this difference considering (1) the institutionally assigned normal working hours and (2) the two roles that workers must fulfill in a household. First, in the contemporary societies, since the normal working hours are institutionally assigned, workers are not allowed the arbitrary determination of their working time. Instead they can only choose whether they accept an employment opportunity offered by an employer, which is a set of the wage rate and the working hours. Second, households always have two types of workers. They take different roles in the household and consequently follow the different regulations on the decision whether they accept the working conditions offered by an employer. The working style is accordingly different between the two types of workers. Obi estimated the labor supply from households, postulating that (1) the normal working hours are 8 hours per day, and (2) the worker type is fully determined by the sex.

Obi's simple model was developed by Higuchi (1991) to distinguish two levels of the working hours assigned by an employer: full-time and part-time working hours. People now face to a threefold decision: to work full-time, to work part-time, or not to work. Apart from this development, Higuchi's model followed the line of Obi (1969) to estimate labor supply from household with the a priori postulation that the worker types are fully determined by the worker's sex.

3.2. Sex-typed determination of the worker type

Obi (1969) and Higuchi (1991) aimed at estimating the trend of labor supply, not at explaining gender stratification. Their model, however, brings out a cardinal point to facilitate our understanding of the gender stratification process; it describes the first step of the process.

We call the two types of workers in Obi and Higuchi's model as "principal earner" and "accommodator"[1].

1. The principal earners take the charge of earning income to support the household, with no responsibility for housework. They accordingly have no choice left but to be full-time workers. They are not responsible in housework, although they can participate in housework for their remaining time after the working hours.

2. The accommodators take double roles of earner and housekeeper. They decide whether to work or not; and how long the working time should be, if they work. The decision depends on the condition including the family needs, the wage rate and working hours offered by their prospective employer, and the income that the principal earner of the household earns.

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[1] Obi (1969) originally called these types of workers as "核" (gainfully employed principal earner) and "非核" (potential earner).

The notions of principal earner and accommodator are sex-neutral in their definitions. In reality, however, the distribution of these worker-types is extremely sex-typed. Table 1 shows changes in time-use by women and men among their life stages. As shown in the table, women with children adjust the allocation of their time according to their children's age. As their children grow up to reduce the needs for childcare, they spend shorter time on childcare and longer time for paid work. In contrast, men's time spent on paid work is constant at 8 or 9 hours per day, regardless of their children's age. The figures reveal that most men are the principal earner in their household, while most women are the accommodator. This sex-typed determination of the worker type within household constitutes the first step of the gender stratification process.

Table 1. Time use of wives and husbands with their children (hours per day; weekly average)

Household type / Age of the youngest child	House-work*	Child-care	Work**	Tertiary † activities	Primary ‡ activities	Total
Wife						
0 year old	4.65	4.62	0.62	4.13	9.98	24.00
1–2	4.77	2.93	1.12	4.75	10.42	24.00
3–5	5.27	1.33	1.85	5.27	10.28	24.00
6–9	5.45	0.38	2.47	5.70	9.98	24.00
10–14	5.32	0.08	3.40	5.43	9.78	24.00
15 and over	4.90	0.03	3.33	5.57	10.17	24.00
Husband						
0 year old	0.38	0.52	8.33	4.75	10.03	24.00
1–2	0.35	0.28	8.50	4.85	10.02	24.00
3–5	0.30	0.17	8.62	4.90	10.02	24.00
6–9	0.30	0.05	8.43	5.22	10.00	24.00
10–14	0.27	0.02	8.43	5.27	10.00	24.00
15 and over	0.35	0.00	6.98	6.18	10.46	24.00

Hours spent by the wife/husband of households containing a couple and unmarried children.
Data: 1996 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities (Statistics Bureau 1998).
* Housework excluding childcare, including nursing.
** Including commuting and schoolwork.
† Leisure, sports, social activities, medical examination, rest, watching TV, and so on.
‡ Sleep, meals, and personal care.

3.3. Differentiation in workforce participation

Since principal earner and accommodator behave following different rules, their working styles are also different.

By definition, principal earners meet the normal full-time working hours requested by a prospective employer. They consequently make continuous participation in workforce as full-time workers. In contrast, accommodators' workforce participation is dependent on their family needs and economic conditions. While some of them continuously participate in workforce as full-time workers, others withdraw from workforce. Most of them experience career interruption during the period with the great family needs to be part-time workers or full-time housekeepers.

Table 2. Continuity rate of full-time employment (CRFE) by birth cohort

Birth	Women		Men	
	%	(*N*)	%	(*N*)
1925–1935	21.6	(88)	97.6	(124)
1935–1945	23.0	(126)	100.0	(132)
1945–1955	21.4	(224)	100.0	(175)
1955–1975	22.4	(214)	99.1	(117)
Total	22.1	(652)	99.3	(548)

Data: 1995 Social Stratification and Social Mobility (SSM) Survey.
See Tanaka (1999: 26–27).

We saw in Table 1 that women's working time is dependent on life stages. The life-stage dependency also appears in women's occupational career. Table 2 shows the continuity rate of full-time employment (CRFE), which is defined as the proportion of people continuing regular full-time employment, until their childrearing stage, among those who were regular full-time employees before marriage[2] (Tanaka 1999). As summarized in Table 2, women's CRFE has been steady at about 20%. Among women who were regular full-time employees before marriage, about 80% have discontinued their career. This career interruption is reflected in the labor statistics as the M-shaped curve of Japanese women's economic activity rate.

In contrast, men do not follow such a life-stage dependent course as women do. Men from their late 20s through 50s show workforce participation at constantly high level. The results from the Labour Force Survey (Statistics Bureau 2002) show more than 80% of them work as full-time workers. Career interruption due to marriage or childbirth is scarcely experienced by men (Table 2).

3.4. Differentiation in earnings

Difference in workforce participation brings in difference in earnings. We put the earnings of a person as

$$\text{Earnings} = Q \times W + A, \tag{1}$$

where Q denotes the quantity of labor the person supplies, W denotes the wage rate, and A denotes allowance.

The level of participation in workforce directly determines the quantity of labor supply Q. Since a full-time worker works for longer time than a part-time worker, Q is greater for full-time worker than for part-time worker. If a worker takes leave or quits the job, Q becomes zero. Such difference in Q results the difference in earnings, if the other variables, W and A, are both constant.

Furthermore, the wage rate W is dependent on Q, in reality. Full-time workers are always offered a higher wage rate than part-time workers. Nakata (2002a: 27; 2002b: 81) estimated the average hourly wage for part-time workers is about 60–70% of that for full-time workers in Japan. This kind of wage differentials makes part-time workers more disadvantageous against full-time workers.

Discontinuous career, which means a temporary fall in Q, can also entail a disadvantage in the long run (Maruyama 2001: 13). If the work performance depends on the human capital accumulated through job experiences, workers quitting job to be absent from job experiences will be inevitably disadvantageous in the contest against the competitors who have a continuous career and have fully developed their work performance. In addition, if the wage system places an importance on seniority, an interrupted career itself lowers the wage rate, even after the worker comes back working. Economic Planning Office (1997) estimates that the average earnings of workers with interrupted career are lower than those of workers with continuous career, and that the former can never catch up with the latter. It also estimates the earning loss from career interruption is 16–27% of the expected earnings for a continuous career.

The last factor determining earnings is allowance A, which is paid for the support for one's livelihood, regardless of her/his service to production. Some kinds of allowance, for example, sick leave allowance or parental leave allowance, are designed to compensate workers for the earnings lost because of the decline in labor supply Q due to a certain reason. Suppose such kinds of allowance fully compensate the lost earnings, workers will be able to opt out of work without potential loss of income when they themselves consider it necessary——that is, "de-commodifying" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 23) in the work-system will be completely achieved. However, any society is far from the complete de-commodification for present (Esping-Andersen 1990: 50). People in any society must prepare for some loss of earnings if they withdraw from full participation in workforce, although the extent of loss varies with societies (Iguchi and Nishimura 2002).

3.5. A summary of the gender stratification process

Figure 2 summarizes the gender stratification process described above. The stratification process starts with sex, which corresponds to ascription in the general form of stratification process (figure 1). Then the process goes on over the three steps that are marked as X, Y, and Z in Figure 2.

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[2] I used data from the SSM Survey, conducted by a temporary organization of volunteer sociologists. The permission of the 1995 SSM Kenkyuukai (1995 SSM 研究会) to use data and publish the results is gratefully acknowledged.

[Ascription] Sex		[Status 1] Worker type		[Status 2] Workforce participation		[Rewards] Earnings
Men	→	**Principal earner**	→	**Full**	→	**High**
Women	→	**Accommo dator**	→	**Partial / None**	→	**Low**
Step	X		Y		Z	
	↑		↑		↑	
Policy sub-goal	?		Moderate work/family balance		Family-friendly work system	

Figure 2. The three steps of gender stratification process due to the sexual division of labor

Step X: Sex determines the worker type. Men become principal earners while women become accommodator. This is a reflection of the sex-typed differentiation in role and status within the household.

Step Y: These two types of workers are different in the level of workforce participation. Principal earners can make a full participation while accommodators can make only partial or no participation. This means the differentiation in status in the labor market.

Step Z: Finally this differentiation in the status in the labor market results in differentiation in earnings. The more inactive the participation in workforce, the lower the earnings.

4. Gender-Equal Policy against Each Step of Stratification

The current Japanese policy holds two types of concrete sub-goals toward a gender-equal society. To achieve these sub-goals, the Government has taken some political measures against the steps Y and Z in figure 2.

We call the first sub-goal, focused on the step Y, as "the moderate work/family balance". To achieve this sub-goal, the Government should force any individual to strike a moderate balance between paid work and unpaid housework. But for any regulation or support for work and housework, principal earners would work for indefinitely long hours, while accommodators would shoulder the enormous burden of housework. To prevent such imbalance between work and housework, the current policy takes two measures: one aims to limit principal earners' work, while the other aims to relieve accommodators' housework. If these measures work successfully, principal earners and accommodators will eventually be equal in their workforce participation, to be equivalent in the labor market.

We call the second sub-goal, focused on the step Z, as "family-friendly work-system". To achieve this sub-goal, the work-system should minimize the disadvantage suffered by part-time workers and workers with a discontinuous career and should establish the system of compensation for the lost earnings because of partial participation in workforce. Among a variety of concrete measures, the most importance is given to the measures aiming at development of systems for the established partial participation (i.e., parental and family care leave), along with the secondary measures aiming at pay equity between full-time and part-time jobs, or at making the wage system insensitive with seniority. If these measures work successfully, workers partially participating in workforce can earn as much as those fully participating; although their work-styles are different, their earnings are equal.

In the next chapters, we will examine the measures taken by the current Japanese gender-equal policy.

5. The Moderate Work/Family Balance

5.1. Work/family balance policy

The sharp contrast in work styles between principal earner and accommodator is rooted in the difference in responsibilities they hold. Since principal earners hold no family responsibilities, there may be no problem if

they continuously commit themselves to full-time paid work. In contrast, since accommodators hold family responsibilities, it is always difficult for them to make continuous commitment to full-time work; they should accommodate their working time to the family needs. As a natural consequence, accommodators' work/family balance is inclined to the family side, relative to principal earners'.

Council for Gender Equality (1996) declared that men and women should share equal work and family responsibility. The moderate balance thus became a sub-goal of the gender-equal policy. If principal earners and accommodators both strike a moderate balance between work and family, the difference in workforce participation between them will disappear. Aiming at this sub-goal, Japanese current policy takes two measures: (1) to reduce principal earners' working time; (2) to reduce accommodators' care work, including childcare and nursery care.

The measures to reduce principal earners' working time are described in the first report by Council for Gender Equality (1996). The practical measures documented in this report are "promoting a five-day work system, the taking of annual leave, and curtailment of overtime". The goal of these practical measures is set as 1,800 hours of annual labor. This goal had established in the Socio-Economic Plan for Structural Reforms (Economic Deliberative Council 1987) in 1980s Japan, which can be converted as about eight hours per working day (Economic Planning Agency 1989).

Council for Gender Equality (1996) also documented the measures for reducing housework. On the ground that the upbringing children and family care should be borne by society as a whole, the report declared that the various care systems for children and elderly should be offered. The report mentioned to concrete plans for this purpose including daycare institutions for young babies, longer hour or emergency childcare, services for the in-home welfare measures for the elderly, and the training of more personnel for family care.

5.2. Criticisms against the effectiveness of the moderate balance policy

When the Government of Japan established the policy towards the moderate work/family balance, there was no evidence that the policy will successfully realize the moderate work/family balance for all people. There have been quantitative studies on that issue conducted since the policy was declared, which have presented negative evidences about the effect of the policy.

Cabinet Office (2002) reported the small effect of the men's working hours and the capacity of daycare centers on full-time employment of women with infants. This report provides results from a numerical simulation with a multivariate nested logit model. The sample was designed to be a national representative sample of married women with children aged 3–6 in Japan, and the dependent variable was whether they are employed full-time or not. Among numerous independent variables, this report focuses on the effect of their husband's working hours and the capacity of childcare centers within the municipal they lived. The result of simulation (Cabinet Office 2002: 74) show that when we assume the husband's working time to be 8 hours per day and the childcare center to be capable of a half of the number of children, full-time workers would constitute only 26.2% of the sample. That is, even if the political measures mentioned above worked as scheduled in the current policy, accommodators can hardly make full participation in paid work.

Why is the effect of these measures so small? The answer may lie in the system of exchange of member's time within the household.

Figure 3 illustrates the expected exchange system in the household to redistribute time among the members. As described here, the reduction of normal working hours will reduce the working time by the principal earner, then increase housework time by him/her, then reduce the accommodator's housework, finally increase the working time by the accommodator. It is also expected that childcare support should reduce housework by the accommodator, resulting in an increase of her/his working time.

Unfortunately, this exchange system does not effectively work in Japanese households. Matsuda and Suzuki (2002: 78) and Tsuya and Bumpass (1998: 91, 100) report results from quantitative analyses on couples' time allocation that the length of husbands' working hours has little effect on the housework sharing between the husband and wife. These results imply the effect of the reduction of working time for the principal earner on his housework is small. Although there has been no report about what become of couples' time allocation when housework time is reduced, we can naturally expect that less than 100% of the reduced time will shift to the accommodator's working time. In other words, the effect of the reduction in work or housework will be dispersed through increasing leisure time. Such dispersal effect within the time-exchange system may give the explanation why the reduction in work and housework is not effective.
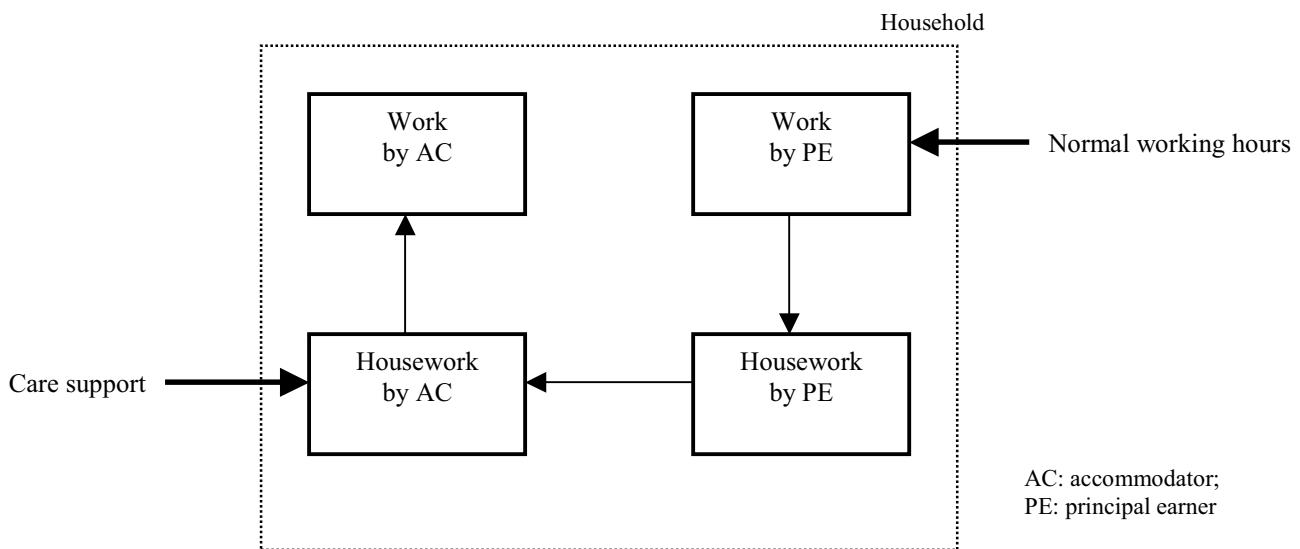
Household

Figure 3. Exchange system of members' time in the household expected in the policy

Accordingly, the gender-equal policy must introduce a new sub-goal: the smooth working of the time-exchange system in households. If work time and housework time are exchanged more smoothly within the household, the measures toward the moderate work/family balance should work more effectively.

Suppose the smooth working of the time-exchange system is completely achieved, the moderate work/family balance will realize under the current policy? Unfortunately, the answer will be "no". Tanaka (2000) reported the result from a simple simulation of time-use of men and women aged 30–39. For the simulation, Tanaka assumed that any change in work (or housework) time is completely substituted with the change in housework (or work), with no change in leisure time. The expected time-use of men and women is simulated under the condition that working hours are reduced until 1,800 hours per year and childcare time is reduced until zero. The result shows even under the completely smooth working of the time-exchange system, the measures of the current policy cannot realize the moderate work/family balance.

6. Family-Friendly Work System

6.1. Family-friendly policy

As we saw in Equation (1), a difference in workforce participation causes a difference in earnings with three factors. (a) Workers are usually paid according to how long they work: at a constant wage rate, the shorter the working time, the lower the earnings. (b) The wage rate is not constant in reality: part-time workers are always offered a lower wage rate than full-time workers. (c) Even though the fall in working time is temporary, it entails a loss in earnings to the worker in the long run, because of the disadvantage in seniority and in accumulating human capital. These factors have a great effect under Japanese work system, which grants a great favor of workers with a continuous full participation in workforce. A partial participation or no participation in workforce, either temporary or permanent, has a disadvantage under this system.

If it is inevitable that accommodators are disadvantageous to principal earners in workforce participation, as we saw in the last chapter, the work system should develop to overcome the effects of such factors, from the viewpoint of gender equality. Such a system is called as the "family-friendly" work system (Ministry of Labour 1999: 7), under which a partial participation in workforce owing to family responsibilities is no disadvantage in the career and in the earnings. To institute the family-friendly work system, the current policy mainly aims to establish parental leave and family care leave.

6.2. Established partial participation and compensation

The parental and family care leave system has an effect to outweigh the disadvantage of discontinuous career. Under the system, leave-takers are guaranteed to return to the same workplace at which they worked before the

leave. This permits them to reconcile a continuous career with a temporary no-participation in workforce. In Japan, Child Care and Family Care Leave Law since 1992 has guaranteed the right to take parental leave and family care leave to all workers. During the leave, the leave-takers can receive from the employment insurance 40% of the cash earnings they received just before taking leaves.

However, the parental or family care leave does not completely outweigh the disadvantage of those who takes the leave. While the 40% of their earnings is guaranteed during the leave, the 60% will be lost.

Moreover, it has been reported that parental leave entails a disadvantage to the leave-taker in the long run. Senda and Higuchi (2000: 30–32) estimated the earning loss owing to taking parental leave using data from a national representative survey of married women. Senda and Higuchi reports that except for professionals and managers, parental leave entails 30% or more loss of earnings to leave-takers after they come back to their jobs.

It is debatable what causes such enormous loss in their earnings. The cause may be the disadvantage in the turn-taking for promotion: during the leave they may have lost their place in the queue for promotion, and they may consequently go back of the queue. However, the cause may be the decline in work performance because of obsolescence or depletion of their skill during the leave (Senda and Higuchi 2000: 34–35). These problems will be serious in the jobs with bitter competition or with frequent innovations.

6.3. Remaining issues

The current Child Care and Family Care Leave Law does not guarantee the sufficient duration of leave for all persons taking care. It guarantees only one year of parental leave per child and only three month of family care leave per care-receiver. Furthermore, parental and family care does not cover the entire housework. Consequently numerous workers must adjust their working style to fulfill their family responsibilities not supported with the leave system. They become par-time workers, or quit their job to become full-time housekeepers.

Thus parental and family care leave does not give a perfect solution to the problem. Along with the leave system, reformation of the wage system should be made to eliminate the disadvantage of discontinuous careers and of part-time working.

The Japanese wage system places a great importance on seniority, which is often called the *nenkou* (年功) system. Under such a system, a discontinuous career entails an enormous loss in earnings in the long run, even if the worker comes back to workforce.

Suppose the wage system is restructured into a seniority-insensitive one. A discontinuous career will be no disadvantage for itself. The gap between continuous full participators and discontinuous ones will consequently be small. However, even under the seniority-insensitive system, some disadvantage will be remained for a discontinuous career. If the work performance depends on the human capital accumulated through job experiences, workers quitting job to be absent from job experiences will be inevitably disadvantageous. Under the seniority-insensitive wage system, the work performance itself, not the seniority, become a key issue of equality between discontinuous and continuous careers.

Another problem lies in wage differentials between full-time and part-time workers. Such differentials are large in Japan. Nakata (2002a: 27; 2002b: 81) estimated the average hourly wage for part-time workers is less than 70% of that for full-time workers. Suppose a part-time worker works for a half of full-time workers' working hours, his/her earnings should be 35% (=70×0.5) of full-time workers, at most.

It is clear that a radical measure is needed to eliminate the gap in the wage rate between full-time and part-time workers. If the gap disappears, there will be remained the difference in earnings in proportion to the working hours.

7. Practicable Gender-Equal Society

7.1. Limited effects of the current policy

We examined the effect of the current gender-equal policy on the gender stratification due to the sexual division of labor. As we saw, the policy is insufficient to offset women's disadvantage in the labor market. It cannot realize either the moderate work/family balance for principal earners and accommodators in households, or equal payments between full participators and partial participators in the labor market.

This insufficiency may be attributable it has not been long since the institution of the gender-equal policy in the late 1990s. If so, it may be just a matter of time that the national gender-equal machinery becomes powerful enough to carry out tougher policies.

However, it is also possible that the sub-goals of the policy themselves will face essential difficulties.

1. As we saw in Section 5, when the working hours are reduced, the reduced hours will be mainly spent on leisure, not on housework. This situation is unfavorable for gender-equality, but is favorable from another viewpoint, since the claim for reduction of working hours has been made on the ground that people are overworking and need more leisure time (Ministry of Labour 1989). As far as the Government accepts such a claim, no measures can be taken against increasing leisure time.

2. Although there has been family-friendly work systems instituted, under which partial workforce participation owing to family responsibilities is supported in terms of earnings and of a career. However, these systems do not overcome the disadvantages in earnings and in a career, as we saw in Section 6. To eliminate the gap between full participators and partial participators in workforce, we must institute a full compensation for any loss due to partial participation. Such compensation must cover possible opportunity costs that may appear in future. It may be too costly and infeasible.

7.2. Another possibility

It is unpredictable whether the current policy can solve the difficulties to realize a gender-equality. Anyway, in decades to come we will witness the result of the social experiment on the effect of the work/family balance policy and family-friendly policy.

In case the result confirms the ineffectiveness of the current policy, what measure will remain? We will conclude this paper by introducing the last measure, which has been not considered in the gender-equal policy.

We saw in Figure 2 the gender stratification process goes through three steps X, Y, and Z. Among these three steps, the current policy has focused on the last two steps Y and Z. Since our examination disclosed that it is difficult to stop the differentiation process working through these two steps, the focus should shift to the first step X.

The first step of gender stratification is the sex-typed determination of the worker types, where men are to be the principal earner while women are to be the accommodator. Once men and women are assigned to the different worker types, it is difficult to close the gap between them afterwards. Equalization on the first step is therefore of a great importance.

If the equalization in the first step is achieved, men and women will become principal earners or accommodators with the same probability. Table 3 describes an equalized society, where p denotes the probability of a person becoming a principal earner, while 1-p denotes the probability of becoming an accommodator.

Table 3. Equal probability in the choice of the worker-types

Sex	Principal earner	Accommodator
Men	p	$1 - p$
Women	p	$1 - p$

Since p denotes probability, it varies from 0 to 1 theoretically. But in reality p must be small, because an accommodator is necessary for any household to achieve an efficient allocation of the human resources within the household. Suppose all people marry and form a nuclear family household, where two adult workers are available. Since each household needs at least one accommodator, the probability p must be smaller than 0.5.

In a gender-equal society, if any, a half or more of men will become an accommodator. They must decide their work style according to the family needs. Some of them may become part-time worker, become full-time housekeeper, or return after a temporary break from work. Anyway, a considerable number of men cannot continue full-time participation in workforce.

In the statistical term, whether gender equality can come into reality depends on whether men's continuity rate of full-time employment (CRFE) can be reduced. We saw in Table 2 men's CRFE has been almost 100%. How to reduce this high rate will be the key to gender equality.

Unfortunately, we know little about what determines men's CRFE. Empirical research on men's workforce participation has a difficulty that the variation is little and a larger sample is needed. Accordingly more research resources should have been spent on this issue. In fact, however, workforce participation of men has been rarely argued, whereas that of women has been long argued in stratification studies. There is no research about how the number of male housekeepers has been changed, what social groups they belong to, how they are stigmatized, and how gender-free curriculums in education effect.

In the near future, the gender-equal policy may aim at encouraging men's partial participation in workforce. We should prepare the theoretical and empirical research on men's workforce participation, which should be an important research question for the stratification study as a study of inequality.

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