

**GENDER NEGOTIATIONS: DIALECTICS AND
DISCOURSES ON MARRIAGE IN
CONTEMPORARY JAPAN**

ジェンダーをめぐる交渉—
現代日本の結婚に関する対話と語り

ONOGWU, ELIZABETH ODACHI

Yokohama National University

2015

**GENDER NEGOTIATIONS: DIALECTICS AND DISCOURSES ON
MARRIAGE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN**

By

ONOGWU, ELIZABETH ODACHI

Supervised by

MATSUMOTO, HISASHI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy at the

Yokohama National University

2015

Abstract

Culture like most dimensions of today's global stage, is dynamic, and Japanese culture is not immune to such dynamism. Contemporary Japan has witnessed a series of unprecedented changes in almost all ramifications of its beliefs. One particular revolution, albeit slow, concerns the area of gender relations. Japanese culture is etched in patriarchy via its aboriginal "*ie seido*," or family system. A system that formed the scaffold upon which the structures of essentializing and perpetuating institutionalized sexism were erected. The family system functioned for decades to undermine women with its unusual emphasis on gender role separation. The defeat of Japan in the Second World War, however, necessitated the abolishment of this system. Though legally abolished, the consciousness of the system has remained deeply etched in both the cultural and social strata of the society. It is against this background that present day Japanese women have risen in search of alternatives to the options available to them within the polity. Expectedly, a practical search for alternatives must necessarily involve a route that threatens the traditional family system, being the prime source of their dissatisfaction. This thesis argues that by delaying marriage, cohabiting, or opting for a lifetime of singleness, contemporary Japanese women are negotiating, sometimes circumventing, and at other times crafting or plotting out an individuality that suits them within the framework of the present gender map. They are actively breaking out of the various institutionalized cultural limitations thrust upon them by virtue of their gender. It also argues that other women seek solutions outside of their culture, race, and ethnicity, by sometimes marrying down the social ladder so as to move up the career tree unimpeded by gender roles. Relying heavily on Ortner's concept of "Serious Games" and "Agency," the study concludes that women are actively negotiating and securing better spaces for themselves within the polity. It also notes the legions of challenges and hurdles ahead of them as the system fights back, thus making the process an ongoing mêlée that is far from being over.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my amazing parents, Godwin Igba and Esther Oka Onogwu, for their unalloyed support for my many ambitions. Thank you for teaching me the principles of hard work and resilience, as they are now beginning to pay off. I also dedicate this work to my siblings: Itodo, Comfort, Ene, and Idoko. I do not know what my life would have been like without each of you. Thank you for having my back at all times.

Acknowledgements

This work is a product of the goodwill and support of many individuals, many of whom space would not permit me to mention by name. I am, however, genuinely thankful to all those who in one way or the other contributed to the success of this study.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Professor Hisashi Matsumoto, who orchestrated my “defection” from literature to a more eclectic discipline of gender and cultural anthropology. Thank you for the challenge, the guidance, and all. I look forward to what the future holds in this regard.

I sincerely appreciate the entire faculty and staff of the Department of Infrastructure and Urban Society at the Yokohama National University. I am especially grateful to Professors Hiro Matsubara, Yoko Fujikake, Asato Saito, and Masayasu Komiya for their constructive criticisms, insightful comments and kind support in many ways towards the successful completion of this research.

I am grateful to the Japanese government for financing my studies and allowing me to stay in Japan through the funding of a scholarship from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Monbukagakusho).

Many thanks to Professor C.J. Korieh for his support, advice, and most importantly, listening ear. I am also indebted to Mr. Tetsuya Iwata and Professors D. I. Ker, T. Edoh and A.A Rasheed for recognizing in me a potential that would otherwise have remained latent.

Studying in Japan has brought many wonderful friends my way, friends who taught me that love transcends boundaries of race and culture. I especially appreciate Erskine and Emithal for their warmth, T. Ufomadu for being my big brother in Japan,

Kingsley and Damilola for their thoughtfulness and companionship, N. Onodera, Arai, Eiko, Simi, and Yumoto, plus all those from the UIGS study room for their kindness and support. I am also grateful to all the members of the Kanto Christian Church for being a family to me throughout my stay in Yokohama.

I am deeply appreciative of Pastor Theo and Pastor Kehinde Ugah for both their spiritual and moral support and all members of the Onogwu family, especially Uncle Jacob and my dear cousin Blessing for their prayers and backing. I thank Dr. Anjov, Solomon, Elizabeth D, Ladoosh and Inedu for being dependable friends.

Above all, I thank God for everything. The last 3.5 years were a markedly difficult period in my life. I, however, was able to persevere through many struggles only by the help of God. I am grateful to Him for granting me strength and the ability to keep my eyes on the goal.

CONTENTS

<i>Dedication</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>vi</i>

Chapter One – Introduction

a. Background to Study	1
b. Purpose of Study	3
c. Theoretical Framework	4
d. Research Objectives	17
e. Scope of Study	18
f. Methodology	18

Chapter Two – Review of Literature

a. The Advancement of Individualism in Japan	24
b. The Economics of Marriage in Japan	26
c. Marriage in Japan	29
d. Review of Literature	35

Chapter Three – Delayed Marriage

Delayed Marriage (<i>Bankonka</i>) & the Struggles of Women in Modern Japan	47
---	----

Chapter Four- Cohabitation

Cohabitation as an Agency of Change	68
-------------------------------------	----

Chapter Five - *Ohitorisama*

<i>Ohitorisama</i> & Gender Negotiation in Japan	92
--	----

Chapter Six – International Marriage

Gender Politics: International Marriage and the Gender Game	111
---	-----

Chapter Seven - Summary and Conclusion

The Dialectics of Domination, Resistance and Negotiation	155
--	-----

Appendices	164
-------------------	-----

Figures	177
----------------	-----

Bibliography	178
---------------------	-----

Chapter One - Introduction

Re-Constructing Self: Gender, Individualism, and the New Woman

The era has ended when women will be satisfied just with being the section chief's wife [*kacho fujin*].... Today's women, filled with desires and ambition, are no longer satisfied with either of the choices 'company' or 'marriage' ”.

Fuke Shigeko

There is a growing reassessment of the meaning and role of gender and gender relations in the Japanese society. This is reflected in a widely acknowledged change of focus from the place of women in societal development to their contributions to society. This reevaluation is accompanied by the question of empowerment. It has in turn given rise to a position that necessitates the paying of higher attention to the power relations between men and women in all domains, from development projects to the workplace and home. It also recognizes that institutions often inefficiently represent women's interests, thus hampering their advancement toward gender parity.

Japanese society, however, though legendary as a conservative state, has been experiencing tremendous changes in gender relations over the years. The 1980s and 1990s saw a chain of a deep and far-reaching revolutions in this regard. This was the period that heralded the decline of the Japanese fertility rate. (Kelsky: 2008) These changes have become progressively palpable, and they bear implications on the larger society and of course on the future of the country.

Some obvious transformations in this regard include changes in the lifestyle choices available to young women and the shifting boundaries between the family and

community in present-day Japan. One major basis of this trending phenomenon is the growing individualism among contemporary women or what sociologist, Inamasu Tatsuo, has described as a deep search for a new *ikikata*, a Japanese term that roughly translates as “lifestyle” or “way of life” (Tatsuo, 1993, 7).

Contemporary Japanese women are in pursuit of a way of life that goes beyond the existing options society presents to them both at home and work, which leads to a questioning of the basics of what constitutes a good life (Kelsky 2008). This questioning and reflection has and continues to birth **alternative** ways that differ greatly from the generally accepted view of what constitutes a worthy life, the cumulative growth of which is the advent of a highly conscious and individualistic generation.

This thesis focuses on the following aspects of these alternative ways: delayed marriage (*Bankonka*), cohabitation (*Dousei*), lifetime singles (*Ohitorisama*), and international marriage (*Kokusai kekkon*). The thesis sets these alternatives against the backdrop of the social changes mentioned above to explore the life that contemporary Japanese women consider ideal. It argues that deploying either of these alternatives has become conceivably the most significant means presently at women’s disposal to repel or negotiate gendered expectations of female living options in Japan.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the present gender state and edicts in both traditional and corporate Japanese society?
- b. To what extents are the institutions of marriage and Japanese corporate culture grounds for hegemony?
- c. What are the strategies employed by modern Japanese women to challenge, negotiate, or even circumvent cultural practices that act as limitations in their quest for self-

empowerment and gender parity? How well have they fared in their quest?

d. To what extent is marriage to non-Japanese men grounds for transcending cultural margins?

The interest of this scholar in these four aspects of alternative lifestyles out of the hydra-headed new paths that serve as even out mediums for gender relations in present-day Japan, is borne out of the centrality of some of these concepts in the ongoing gender discourse. Delayed marriage, for instance, has been at the middle of most debates bordering on the changing lifestyles of women in recent times. It has also been implicated in the dipping fertility rate/population of the Japanese people.

Some scholars connect the female emancipation trend to a confluence of interconnected economic, social, and cultural changes, including notable education gains and jobs. By delaying marriage, these women can be seen as revolutionaries who are agitating against systematic sexism that acts as a barrier to their quest for self-fulfillment. (Tokuhiro 2011; Ogawa and Rutherford 1993; Rutherford, Ogawa, Matsukura 2001).

Cohabitation, on the other hand, is quite an unpopular trend in Japan, unlike its other industrialized counterparts like France and the USA. It is, however, practiced by a limited number of present day women, not as an alternative to marriage, but as a means of gaining all the privileges of a married couple while not obliged oneself to perform any wifely duties. At other times, it serves to set the tone for the nature of power sharing in some relationships that leads to marriage in the future. Consequently, it subverts some of the various systems of dispersed hegemony.

Ohitorisama is a rather nascent phenomenon in Japan. It can be described as the end stage of delayed marriage or even a cohabitation experience that does not result

in marriage. *Ohitorisama* which is increasingly becoming a popular trend in recent times is an evidence of the growing individualism and independence in all its ramifications among young Japanese women.

Taking advantage of a good education coupled with a well-paid job, some women who opt for a lifetime of singleness do not privilege marriage or family, but rather, the possibility of self-growth. They redefine their lives and career goals and dispose of every gender burdened baggage of conventional norms.

One more alternative route sought by some present-day Japanese women is the foreign option. This study argues that some women, in pursuit of an ascendant “social mobility” (Ortner 2006) exploit the popular myth of the foreigner’s kindness or *yasashisa* and “defect” (Kelsky 2008: 18) from what they deem to be a restrictive and clogging patriarchal system in Japan. They construct their relationships with non-Japanese men as a place of refuge in order to forge a personalized style and seek out their own individualities. It becomes crucial to scrutinize precisely how class, gender, race, and sexual positioning motivate their international liaisons vis-à-vis an oppressive nation state.

Theoretical Framework

All categories of feminism, including feminist anthropologists, view gender as a social category.¹ To them, gender is a major social organizing principle that sorts people into two separate but unequal groups.² In this thesis, gender is conceptualized as a

1 Barbara F. Reskin and Irene Padadic, *Women and Men at Work* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1994), 4. For a good introduction to feminist analyses, see Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

2 There is a problem with equating gender with inequality. How gender is implicated in socio-political and economic relations depends on what weight the society gives to gender attributes and how it is constructed in specific contexts. see Elizabeth Bright Jones, “Gender and Agricultural

socially constructed unifying belief upon which the relationships between men and women are instituted and sustained.³ In other words, gender refers to the social, cultural, and historical construction of male and female roles, which though "related to biological roles are not coterminous with them."⁴ As a socially constructed category, the differences between males and females are to be located in relational social practices and contexts, not in biological attributes (Oyeronke 2000). This notion is however, criticized for discounting historical experiences, accentuating gender dichotomies, and failing to calculate the compounding effects of sexism among other forms of diversity.⁵ Gender relations are dynamic and open to historical change because changing socio-economic, historical, and cultural factors shape gender roles.⁶ The present work shares the concerns of these scholars. In particular, the concerns of context, universal theoretical propositions, and the equation of sex with women's inequality are problematic.

Within the broad framework of gender is the advancing theory of feminist anthropology, a branch of anthropology which derived from the perceived bias found in

Change in Saxony, 1900-1930," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000).

3 See Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, "Accounting for Sexual Meanings," in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6-7.

4 Janice Monk, and Janet Momsen, "Gender and Geography in a Changing World," *Bulletin of the International Geographical Union* 44 (1994): 12-19.

5 Historically, feminism has displayed a tension over making a distinction between "sex" and "gender." see Johanna Foster, "An Invitation to Dialogue: Clarifying the Position of Feminist Gender Theory in Relation to Sexual Difference Theory," *Gender and Society* 13 no. 4 (1999): 431-456, Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (1972); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender* (1978).

6 See also Henderson, *The Gender Division of Labour*, 3.

representation and scholarship within the domain of women's anthropological studies⁷. Feminist anthropology is premised on the idea that "the study of women's roles, beliefs, and practices in society is critical to understanding both the particulars and potentials of human social life". While focusing on women and women's roles in the society, the goal of feminist anthropology is to provide an in-depth understanding of human society⁸.

In the 1970s, anthropologists Rosaldo, Lamphere, (1974) Collier, and Yanagisako (1989) all analyzed the formation of gender through hierarchical structures. Others like Rubin (1975), Morgen, (1989) and Ortner (1974) argued for the formalization of women's study within the field of anthropology. In the 1980s, feminist anthropology, swayed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other postmodern discourses, encouraged an evaluation of the politics of representation. Feminism in the 1990s focused on production and works, sexuality, gender, and the state (Lamphere 1977; Morgen 1989)⁹.

Procedurally, the unifying aspect of feminist anthropology is that it focuses on the role, standing, and influence of women within a given culture. Within this framework, individual researchers explore a wide range of interests and theoretical models to interpret data. One model is the concept of practice, a model that borrows from Marx's suggestion that all social activities come down to practice. (Bratton 1998; Dougherty 2004; Dominguez, Franks and Boschma 2009).

7 Brodtkin, Karen; Morgen, Sandra; Hutchinson, Janis (2011). "Anthropology as White Public Space". *American Anthropologist*.

8 Thomas Barfield (ed.) (2007) *The Dictionary of Anthropology*. Malden, Backwell Publishing (181)

9 Angela Bratton, (1998) "Feminist Anthropology" <http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/fem.htm>

The Practice Model: Etymology and Application

Anthropology, sociology, and most emerging multidisciplinary fields of study like gender studies and cultural studies have increasingly deployed “practices” as their fundamental body of study beginning from the end of the 20th century to present times. The range, manner, and scope engaged by various practice theorists, according to Joseph Rouse, are as wide as they are diverse. He contends:

Many practices are culturally specific, such as the Kabyle-gift-exchanges discussed by Bourdieu [1977] or the secret baptism of money by Colombian peasants described by Tausig [1980]. Yet some practice theorists also refer to activities which take various culturally specific forms, such as eating with particular utensils and preparing food accordingly [Dreyfus, 1991], while others identify long-standing institutionalized activities such as chess [Haugeland, 1998], medicine [MacIntyre], or science generally as a practice [Pickering, 1995], disciplinary cultures [Kohler, 1994]; [Schaffer, 1992]).

Rouse further goes on to suggest that the “extent of theoretical invocations of practices militates against any attempt to provide a comprehensive catalog of major contributors to practice theory” (Rouse 2007: 501) while Turner (1994) sees it as possessing “an odd kind of promissory utility”. All these criticism notwithstanding, practice theory has become an important theory in the study of gender, anthropology, and sociology, among other disciplines.

The basic philosophical background to practice theory provided by Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Rouse claims, is that practice “pose[s] fundamental concerns for any

conception of social life and knowledge that emphasizes rules norms, conventions, or meanings. (ibid 502)

The works of Wittgenstein and Heidegger and many other theorists (Goffman 1959; Blumer 1962; Gregor 1977) act as heralds to the theory of practice. The writings of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his *Outline of the Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice*, have come to be chiefly associated with practice theory. (Barfield 1997:376).

Practice theory can be demarcated into two distinct waves. The first generation, led by philosophers and theorists like Wittgenstein, Dreyfus, Bourdieu (1977), de Certeau, (1984) and Giddens, (1984) among others, laid the foundations of practice theory, while the second generation, comprising of anthropologist and theorists like Ortner, is currently expanding and defining its scope. (Rouse 2007)

Ortner posits that calls for a more action—based approach in anthropology became intensified, especially after the publication of Bourdieu's *Outline of a Practice Theory*. Geertz, for example, unequivocally made this call in 1980s when he asserted:

The instruments of reasoning are changing, and society is less and less represented as an elaborate machine or a quasi-organism than as a serious game, a sidewalk drama, or a behavioral text". Barnes further admonished anthropologists on the need to "watch the systems [of kinship] in action, to study tactics and strategy, not merely the rules of the game.¹⁰

10 Geertz and Barnes were both cited in *Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties*, Orner Sherry. P145

In relation to the theory of practice, Bourdieu points out:

Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with different means) the naturalization of its arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents' aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to established order. (Bourdieu 1977:164)

He believes that shared doxic dispositions create and reproduce social structures which are in turn enlivened when there is “a synthesis, momentary or extended, of the dialectic of human structure”¹¹ Bourdieu's central argument is that ethnographers tend to represent and privilege rules, models, ethics, and values over what he terms “strategies of actions,” especially in areas that draw conclusion based mostly on indigenous ideas rather than striking a balance.

Bourdieu, relying on the concepts of *doxa* and *habitus* as the basis of his fieldwork, laid the groundwork for practice theory. Bourdieu's *doxa* is based on the assumption of the existence of a playing field. This playing field exists as a “quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization”. Moreover, “the natural and social world appears as self-evident. *Doxa* is the unsaid in the field of cultural possibilities, making it seem as if there are not a multiple of, but only a

11 Dougherty Elizabeth, 2004. “Balance of practice”.p3

single possibility” (Bourdieu 1977:164). Bourdieu differentiates between *doxa* and orthodoxy, likening orthodoxy to an advanced stage of doxa. He opines:

It is only when the dominated have the material and symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them through logical structures reproducing the social structures and lift the censorships which it implies that the arbitrary principles of classification can appear as such, and it, therefore, becomes necessary to undertake the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization that marks the passage from doxa to orthodoxy (169).

Secondly, Bourdieu addressed the concept of *habitus* in his theory of practice. He asserts that habitus constitutes the normative aspect of action, which are assimilated by socializations or “dispositions”. Even though habitus is acquired through socialization, it is “produced unreflectively rather than totally unconsciously”. Throwing more light on the concept of habitus, Dougherty (2004) opines that “habitus is a condition or... a set of bodily dispositions of the individual”. These provisions she continues are not dependent solely on the individual ... but are at work within the individual”. This is because:

One person cannot contain a habitus, per se, because a habitus must be social, it must be created and recreated, produced and reproduced through interaction and ‘tradition’ or social practices of memory. Each practitioner must choose to engage or not, in habitus (5).

She concludes that “habitus is accessed not solely through words, but in mimesis, imitation, and most definitely in the day-to-day actions, the repetitious engraving of practices and dispositions into the body. It is in the agency, in an actor choosing to act,

that the balance between the interior habitus and the exterior structure is reproduced and changed” (5).

Practice is therefore based on “dispositions inherent in habitus and taking the form of strategic improvisations – goals and interests pursued as strategies – against a background of doxa that ultimately limits them. These strategies are pursued in particular ‘social fields,’ social contexts shaped by the interests of individuals and their competition” (Barfield 1997:376). A combination of habitus and doxa links ideal and practice (ibid: 376).

Even though Anthony Giddens (1979) contends that the study of practice is not a hostile substitute to the study of systems or structures, but rather a crucial counterpart to it, Miched de Certeau perceives human practices from a political perspective in the sense of a dominated group seeking to access and alter the power structure.¹²

This does not bar the question of whether or not all resistance are intentional. In de

12 Miched de Certeau contends that: As unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices something that might be considered similar to the ‘wandering lines’ drawn by the autistic children studied by F. Deligny: ‘indirect’ or ‘errant’ trajectories obeying their own logic. In the technocratically constructed, written and functionalized space in which consumers move about, their trajectories form unforeseeable sentences, partly unreadable paths across a space. Although they are composed with the vocabularies of established (those of television, newspapers, supermarkets, or museum sequences) and although they may be subordinated to the prescribed syntactical forms (temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic orders of spaces, etc.) the trajectories trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they developed (in Doherty ibid: 6).

Certeau's opinion, they are not. Doherty, echoing de Certeau, asserts that such tactics are "often in the simple acts of survival that individuals and groups resist, without intention or organization. Moreover, consequently, over time and across space, there is sometimes a shift in the structure as the internalized habitus begins to shift along with practicing consciousness" (ibid 6). The following analysis shall explore Sherry Ortner's newer updates on the theory of practice, particularly the centrality of the concept of agency.

Updating Practice Theory: Sherry Ortner and the New Representation of Practices

Sherry Ortner points to the growing popularity of analysis focused on a "bundle of interrelated terms: practice, praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance". She argues that a second and carefully related package of words "focuses on the doer of all that doing: agent, actor, person, self, individual, subject". (Ortner 1984:144)

The newer practice theorists Ortner reference share the vision that "the system" does not possess the powerful "determining" influence upon human action and the shape of events. (ibid 146) Another significant aspect of the newer practice orientation that differentiates it from the earlier approach is its profound Marxist influence from the 1970s.

More generally, she argues, "the Marxist influence is to be seen in the assumption that the most important forms of action or interaction for analytical purposes are those which take place in asymmetrical or dominated relations, that is these forms of action or interaction that best explain the shape of any given system at any given time" (ibid 147).

Adding that whatever form the interaction or struggle assumes, whether between asymmetrical actors or between participating actors, the approach tends to highlight social asymmetry as the most important dimension of both action and structure. (Ortner, 2006)

The new practice approach can be summarily seen as an approach that answers questions concerning “the impact of the system on practice and the impact of practice on the system”. At the core of the system are unambiguous actualities of asymmetry, discrimination, and control in a given society.

In other words, what practice theory seeks to explain is the “genesis, reproduction, and change of form and meaning of a given social/cultural whole, defined in – more or less -- this sense” (ibid 149). It is a study of all forms of human action from a political view. A study of the “functioning aspects of a cultural system through which actors manipulate, interpret, legitimize and reproduce the patterns of cooperation and conflict that order their social world” (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:311), a sort of “dialectic of control” (Ortner 1975:145).

The Place of Agency in the “game” of Practice

Agency as a concept is being widely deployed in the study of culture, gender, anthropology, and other social sciences (Giddens 1984; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Ahearn 2001; Ortner 2006; Dales 2005, 2009). It has been used in studies of “power relations” to “deconstruct the production and reproduction of such relations” (Dales 2009:3). It is that which constitutes the “acting units” of practices. Ortner (2006) asserts that “most practice anthropology to date takes these units to be individual actors, whether actual historical individuals, or social types (women, commoners, workers, junior siblings, etc). The analyst takes these “people and their doings as the reference point for understanding a particular unfolding of events and/or for understanding the processes involved in the reproduction or change of some set of structural features ”(ibid 149).

Fundamentally, agency is the “socially determined capability to act and make a

difference,” (Barker, 2012:496) or the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112). Ortner sees agency, in a nutshell, as a part of what she termed “serious games”. The idea of serious games is to build upon the core insights of “practice theory,” but also to go beyond it by moving questions of practice in “several new directions,” especially the more complex questions of power relations and various dimensions of the subjectivity of social actors. (Ortner 2006:129). Agency forms part of the process of what Giddens terms “structuration,” namely “the making and remaking of a larger social and cultural formations” (Ortner 2006:134).

Agency embodies power, or at least closely relates to ideas of power in domination and resistance, as seen in people’s ability to act on the behalf of others, influence others, and maintain control over their own lives. (Ortner 2006). It does not refer to:

“heroic actors or unique individuals, nor is it about bourgeois strategizing, nor on the other hand is it entirely about routine everyday practices that proceed with little reflection. Rather it is about (relatively ordinary) life socially organized in terms of culturally constituted projects that infuse life with meaning and purpose. People seek to accomplish valued things within a framework of their own terms, their own categories of value. (ibid:145)

The game of power itself is complex, and power relations are characterized by instability. It sometimes produces “structures of rules and assumptions, and the private subjectivity/consciousness/habitus of the players and...thus always results in social reproduction. Yet ultimately games do change, sometimes because of the entry of some externality that can't be digested, but sometimes too because they empower some of the

normally subordinated subjects, and open up the possibility of rebellions, great and small” (Ortner 2006:149).

Ortner identifies “intentionality,” the “cultural construction of agency,” and the “relationship between agency and power” as the key principles that operate within and motivate agency (ibid135).

The dominant theory of motivation in practice anthropology is based on interest theory. A highly individualistic, pragmatic, rational, and self-serving orientation is based on the assumption that actors “rationally go after what they want, and what they want is materially and politically useful for them within the context of their cultural and historical situations”. Interest theory, therefore is not considered the most suitable as it appears too narrow a concept.¹³

In this sense, a less emotional and less aggressive/overly political theory becomes necessary. Expounding on Geertz’s (1973) idea of the divide between interest and strain theory, Ortner proposed strain theory as a more appropriate perspective to understand the motivations behind practice theory.

This is because the strain perspective places more emphasis on analysis of the system itself as a way of understanding where actors are coming from. Specifically a system is “analyzed with the aim of revealing the sorts of binds it creates for actors, the sorts of burdens it places upon them...this analysis, in turn, provides much of the context for understanding actors’ motives, and the kinds of projects they construct for dealing

¹³ Ortner thinks that “Although pragmatic rationality is certainly one aspect of motivation, it is never the only one, and not always even the dominant one. To accord the status of exclusive motivating force is to exclude from the analytic discourse a whole range of emotional terms- need, fear, suffering, desire, and others that must surely be part of motivation”. (1984: 151)

with their situations” (Ortner 1984:157).

The strain perspective avails the practice anthropologist a sense of reason, and accomplishment as wrought not only by problems being solved and gains being sought but also by “images and ideas of what constitutes goodness in people, in relationships, and in conditions of life”. (152)

Regarding how practice theory shapes, reproduces, and changes the system, Ortner claims that the agent places greater emphasis on ordinary living. More focus is placed on the little practices that people sanction over and over in their everyday lives, all of which are grounded in philosophies of a social arrangement that inspires and organizes the system as a whole. Thus, in “enacting these routines, actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organizational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those Principles in the world of public observation and discourse”. (ibid 154)

The central concern of contemporary practice theory, however, is domination: an investigation into the asymmetrical social relations and heart of what is going in a given society and how the fundamental assumption of practice theory in that culture (in the broadest sense of the word) “constructs people as particular kinds of social actors. But, social actors through their living, on-the-ground, variable practices, reproduce or transform - and usually some of each of - the culture that made them”(Ortner 2006: 129).

This brings to the fore the significance of actors who effectually engage all the “on-the –ground” variable practices, “serious games” (Ortner 1996, 1999) that can shape the system¹⁴.

14 Expounding on what she terms serious games, Ortner asserts: “One of the central games of most cultures is the gender game, or more specifically the multiplicity of gender games available

The serious game perspective goes beyond the simplistic assumption that practice theory is only actively played out, resulting in oriented goals and projects that involve both routine practices and intentionalized action. It also focuses on relations of power, subjectivity and social actors, especially those involving “intentionality” and “agency” (Ortner 2006:129).

In conclusion, Ortner notes the ironic twist in practice anthropology that may not be so obvious when she observed that “although actors’ intentions are accorded central place in the model, major social change do not for the most part come as an intended consequence of action. (Ortner 1996:157)

Recent scholars of practice theory have criticized the neglect of the individual. Some argue that there is a precise place for the individual as a distinct from agent who carries a multitude of other social practices (Reckwitz 2002) while others like Warde (2005) question dispersed practices as opposed to ‘integrative practices’ with a far more concrete empirical aim. Most recent scholars of practices, however, agree with the fundamentals of the concept of practice within an asymmetrical culture.

in that time and place. The effort to understand the making and unmaking of gender, as well as what gender makes, involves understanding the workings of these games as games, with their inclusions and exclusions, multiple positions, complex rules, forms of bodily activity, structures of feelings and desire, and stakes of winning, losing, or simply playing. It involves as well, the question of how gender games themselves collide with, encompass, or are bent to the service of, other games, for gender is never, as they say, the only game in town. (Ortner 1996:19)

Research Objectives

1. The primary purpose of this research is to study contemporary Japanese women and identify the various points of departure from the norm with regard to gender and culture.
2. To investigate the practical and political statements made by their lifestyle choices that constitute these departures from the norm.
3. To evaluate the implications of these choices for the entire Japanese society.
4. To investigate the reactions from both the traditional and corporate Japanese world.
5. To scrutinize select cases to demonstrate the relevance of their themes to the discourse on gender and male hegemony.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is discussed from two dimensions: a) a time frame that records major events in the lives of Japanese women; b) from the angle of geographical location.

Even though there are recalcitrant remnants of the Japanese family system in various facets of Japanese society, the family system is an ancient aspect of the Japanese culture that was legally abolished in 1947. This study focuses on the post– Second World War era and the various categories of Japanese women that were born after the war.

It is worth noting that this research mainly examines the experiences of women between the ages of 20-50. However, for the sake of painting a clearer picture of the Japanese situation, examples are from the lives of women born earlier as well.

Geographically speaking, I interviewed women who are living in Yokohama (and a couple from Tokyo) for this research. Within the Yokohama area, I focused on (but

not limited to) women from the Tsurumi Ward. These women were graciously introduced by a volunteer teacher and another interviewee from the Minami Ward (Gumyoji) area (see a map of Yokohama, Appendix).

It is crucial to note that these areas and interviewees constitute only a tiny fraction of the Japanese population. Consequently, these are only representative cases of a trend that can no longer be ignored.

Methodology and Data Collection

In addition to a wide review of books, (mostly in English and a few in Japanese), journal articles, and newspaper clippings on related topics, I carried out extensive field work within the Yokohama area for about 15 months (from November 2013 to March 2015). Most of the interviews were conducted in Japanese, thus making the process of transliteration quite laborious.

I first started with Japanese students from a small English school around Yokohama station, where I sometimes teach English. The students were highly cooperative and spoke quite deeply about their lives. I then interviewed the Japanese women in my religious circle who were willing to talk with me. I focused on the women around Tsurumi Ward (where I lived for two years) and relied heavily on the help of my volunteer Japanese teacher. After interviewing her, she brought four women from her neighborhood to me, and I interviewed them each at separate times.

This snowballed into a chain of a long list of interviewees. My teacher's neighbors introduced other friends and neighbors to me until I had to tell them I had enough interviews. I also relied on my African contacts (primarily immigrant men) who

introduced me to their Japanese spouses, and these spouses introduced me to more friends.

We held interviews sometimes at their homes, coffee shops, restaurants, community (*Kemin*) halls, gardens, parks, and various locations around Tsurumi. I had follow-up interviews with some of my interviewees to seek further information, as well as updates both physically and by phone.

As earlier stated, I focused on a particular age group to bestow meaning to the emphasis on contemporaneity while not shutting out older narratives. I also interviewed roughly 15 Japanese men to avoid an unbalanced, lopsided narration and bring a different angle to the study.

I employed a semi-structured style to carry out the interviews. Beginning with question guides (refer to Appendix 1 for details), more questions were born out of their responses. In this way, I could explore the uniqueness of their individual life stories, which resulted in my being able to obtain some highly informative responses.

The questions were designed to investigate the contemporary opinion of Japanese youth toward marriage, alternatives to marriage, and expectations in marriage. The questions were slightly altered for men, married women, and women married to non-Japanese men.

I have paid careful attention to preserving the anonymity of my informants by changing their names and disguising their workplaces and other pieces of information that might give away their identities.

Definition of Terms

Certain terms have been used consistently in this thesis. Whereas terms like “hegemony” and “patriarchy” have straightforward connotations, it is imperative to

define two terms used in this dissertation – agency and structure.

Agency is that which answers questions on the dialectics between the field of possibility and the actions of individual actors. It deals with how representations changed and how individuals go beyond their present condition. The term is used to “mark the idea of a form of subjectivity where by virtue of contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility ... of resistance must be produced in ideological context.¹⁵ Agency involves intentions, cultural constructiveness, and its relation to power. Agency is mostly part of a process, creating remodels of larger social and cultural formations (Ortner, 2006:134).

Structure, on the other hand, has its roots in the work of linguist, Levi de Saussure. It was de Saussure's works on kinship that imparted an anthropological angle to the concept. In a nutshell, structure is “a setting: an imagined context, a playing field of social possibilities on which certain activities are more likely to happen than others. It operates both on an individual in order to exist but also outside an individual as a set of pressures and expectations made evident in the social setting established...by humans” (Dougherty 2004:1).

Outline of the Thesis

This research consists of seven chapters.

Chapter One - Introduction

This chapter introduces readers to the thesis of this research. Here I present the purpose and objectives of the study by drawing attention to the recent changes regarding gender norms and expectations within Japanese society.

¹⁵ See Wimal Dissanayake's introduction to *Narratives of Agency: Self-Making in China, India, and Japan*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1996, page ix

I also elaborate in detail on the theoretical framework deemed suitable for this research. As the theoretical framework is the scaffold upon which the entire research is built, I provide a step by step justification by situating the whole work within the subset of gender studies known as feminist anthropology and employing a nascent model for the efficient application of feminist anthropology - the practice model. As practice is likely to appear throughout this thesis, I elaborated mainly on the new practice theory that I will deploy subsequently. The scope of research, methodology, and term definitions also form part of this chapter.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

This chapter discusses the economics of marriage in modern Japan by using Gary Becker's model on marriage economics. The historical background to the discourse of gender in Japan, the place of women in Japanese civilization, various evolutions over time, and other details that will contextually support the establishment of the research findings is elaborated upon here. This chapter will also focus on reviewing existing related literature.

Chapter Three - Delayed Marriage

This chapter seeks to explore the link between a nascent notion employed by contemporary Japanese women and the concept of practice viz: delayed marriage. Delayed marriage, has been substantially written on by other scholars of gender in Japan. I have however, argued the practicality of this lifestyle as a way of forcing society to recognize the gender imbalance inherent within its polity.

Chapter Four – Cohabitation

Cohabitation, is not very common in Japan. It also carries the risk of unwanted pregnancy and singleparenthood which untill now, is highly negatively stigmatized. However, I contend that cohabitation provides all the privileges that are normally available to marriage couples without the baggage of gender obligations and expectations.

Chapter Five - *Ohitorisama* (Lifetime Singles)

Within this chapter, I explore the growing popularity of lifetime singleness, or *Ohitorisama*, in light of the current study. Using the life stories of women who have given up on marriage, I relay their intents and motivations, as well as the political implications of their decisions. I also point out the relationship between delayed marriage, cohabitation, and *Ohitorisama* claiming that *Ohitorisama* can arguably be said to be the end product of the duo.

Chapter Six - International Marriage

This chapter examines relevant ethnographic data from the field to demonstrate the relationship between international marriage and the practice of patriarchal circumvention. Here I contend that some women are exploiting their positions on the margins of the corporate world to escape male hegemony in all its ramifications by entirely shunning marriage to Japanese men.

Many women, convinced by their “imagination” of the *yasashisa* of all non-Japanese men, embark on such cross-cultural movements. I also argue that their desire for social mobility causes them to sometimes sacrifice social ability at the risk of altering their carefully mapped out pursuit of personal advancement by marrying down the social

ladder. I also argue that sometimes the differences in culture that constitute the primary merit of this practical move also turn out to be its undoing.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

Each chapter will have a conclusion of its own as each section discusses an aspect of societal happenings that is slightly different. Chapter Seven will serve as a link connecting the dots between the various aspects of gender reevaluations. This chapter will highlight government policies and the place of contemporary Japanese men in the entire gender discourse. It will also, by way of conclusion, reiterate the focus of the investigation and the findings of the study.

Chapter Two - Review of Literature

The Advancement of Individualism in Japan

Individualism is a phenomenon that has characterized most of the western world for a considerable period. It is this tendency that impelled Burgess and Locke (1945:527) to arrive at the conclusion that:

The concept of familism previously defined as an ideal type signifies that the interest of the family as a group is paramount to the interests of individual members. The concept of individualism by contrast means that the continuity and welfare of the family is no longer the chief social aim but rather the personality development of its members. The trend is away from regarding the family as an end in its members. Individualism may even go to the logical extreme of a person deciding not to marry in order to be free from responsibilities of family life and to retain a maximum of personal freedom.

Burgess and Locke aver that a distinct feature of individualism is the fact that personality development takes precedence over the continuity and welfare of the family. They suggest that the decision to give up marriage altogether is an extreme case of individualism. On the contrary, forgoing marriage for personal reasons is becoming an all too familiar occurrence in contemporary Japan.

Japanese society however, has never been one to sanction free will and individualistic ways of living. In fact, it has been often described as possessing a

collectivist, rather than individualistic, culture (Sugimoto 2003; Iwao 1995; Takano and Sogon 2008; Takano and Osaka 1999). Belonging to a fundamentally group oriented society, the Japanese people mostly think of their actions in terms of their implications on the larger group. Thus, the society largely embodies a group consciousness mentality.

The Japanese abhorrence for individualism can be traced to feudal Japan. Individual conduct, according to Fukutake, (1989) was “for the most part... guided and regulated not by internalized conscience or rational judgement, but by custom and authority....the individual, living for harmony and status, lacked autonomy the capacity for independent action” (43). John Clammer claims that (1997) this ethic came to define and affect the way Japan is often perceived and interpreted. He argues that “the difficulty of resistance in Japanese society lies primarily in the tendency of oppositional forces (whether political or cultural) to be co-opted, not least by the media” (19). Maruyama, (1967) conversely, claims that in feudal Japan, “the ruling class was inclined to see, in any sign of individuation, a symptom of political and social disintegration.” It was in this social context that the expression “individualism,” as “a greenhouse for all radical ideas,” (527) came to be accepted.

He further adds, “The other figure, which recurs in our score of modern Japan’s historical development, is the over-sensitive response, on the part of the government, to every show of marked individuation, and the premature enforcement of preventive measures against “subversive tendencies” (527). That is to say, the response was not so much in reaction to actual disturbances as to their supposed or feared consequences in the future. This aversion is captured in one of its popularly known and well-used proverbs: 出る杭は打たれる (Deru kui wa utareru), or “The stake that sticks up gets hammered down.”

In recent times, however, social individualization has been central to Japanese

social debates, reflecting an evolving break between older generations and a new group of more self-oriented younger generations (Ronald & Hirayama 2009). These younger generations of “individualized individuals... [are] centrifugal and associative. [They are] self-made and independent minded (Maruyama ibid: 527).

One justification for the growing advance of individualism in contemporary Japan is the waning economics of the institution of marriage. Gary Becker (1981) postulates that people often enter marriage for economic reasons. He argues that the gain from marriage has to be balanced against various expenditures involved in the process to determine the worthiness of the institution. Gary considers the gains from marriage complementary. He sees the input of spouses as market goods that relate positively to the importance of children in a marriage.

Further, Gary argues that this gain from marriage depends on market opportunities. The effect of a change in opportunity can be analyzed best by equating the maximum output of any household to its full income deflated by the average cost of producing a unit of output. Contemporary Japanese women are now increasingly viewing marriage “even with a secure partner, as an unattractive prospect.” This is, in part, “attributable to the gender division of labor so prominent in post-war Japan” (Rebick and Takenaka 2006:8).

The Economics of Marriage in Japan

Japanese society is a highly structured society where a clear-cut gender-based division of labor has been part of its rubric for centuries. With little conflict of gender roles, the ideal, middle-class man (most Japanese fall into the middle-class citation) is a hard working salaryman (*sarariman*) who works from dusk to dawn, mostly in a company,

sacrificing comfort, leisure, and all to earn a living to support his family (Fukutake 1989; Condon 1985).

The average Japanese woman, on the other hand, is a stay-at-home wife and mother. She runs the day-to-day activities of the household, pay the bills, sees to the welfare and education of children, and even looks after the aged parents of her husband sometimes in addition to her own. She sacrifices anything that goes by the name of ambition or career and makes herself constantly available to keep the house warm.

The Japanese case is unique in that the labor of both man and wife is ideologically indispensable. Both of them are seen as making sacrifices that are considered essential. They are both making an effort geared toward the smooth running of the home and by implication, the society (Iwao 1995).

Through the sole effort of the woman, the home becomes the “place for the reproduction of energy” (Ohinata, 1988:203). The hard work of Japanese women at home, according to Nancy Rosenberger, enabled men to give 100 percent to their companies and allowed children to study hard so they could pass the difficult exams to get into good high schools.

Increasingly, mothers worked to get sons into the best universities and daughters into the best junior colleges for their respective futures in corporations and households (Rosenberger: 2001). Sumiko Iwao also endorses this position when she asserts, “the management of the family has always been considered central to stability and prosperity in Japanese society” (1995: 4).

Women’s domestic tasks at home are seen as her duty and Japanese society sees their roles as important and deserving of applause. Jane Condon affirms, “all the caretaking may be onerous, but in Japan it is a woman’s duty. If she works in a factory or

office, then the menial, repetitive tasks that are part of her job are her duty as well” (1985: 2).

Historically, this arrangement has worked well for Japanese society, and the strict adherence to gender roles and gendered spaces have helped to create social equilibrium, which allowed Japan to , catapulte into the position of the second largest economy in the world(Rosenberger 2001).

Japanese women, as earlier stated, have the noble fortune of having their position recognized in society as a nurturer and caregiver, and even rewarded as evidenced by her control of the family purse string

Scholars, particularly Japanese scholars, have argued quite convincingly that Japanese women (to the astonishment of their western counterparts) are unperturbed by their positions as housewives. Iwao argues that the issue of inequality has never been contested in Japanese society because it has been thought that “as long as the changing weather from year to year produces good harvests and bad, people are all basically equal” (Iwao 1995:4). In this sense, equality consists of a “balance of advantage, opportunity, and responsibility achieved over time. It should, therefore, be deduced that equality in this sense is not measured in terms of an individual’s status or role but as humans” (ibid: 4). With such mindset in place, women gleefully relish the status of housewives. Arguing further, Iwao states:

...in Japan, equality is not sought on principle and part-time working women and full-time housewives, in particular, consider themselves equal to their professionally or vocationally employed husbands, at least as far as their status in the household is concerned. Not only do women see themselves as equal to

their husbands but their husbands willingly admit their dependence on women (in a sense, their inferiority).... Rather surprisingly, in fact, surveys show that 40 percent of full-time housewives think of themselves as economically independent.... This demonstrates clearly how these women, who may have no income themselves but who control the household purse strings, see themselves in relation to men. The role of the woman in the home is valued, and her self-esteem is high (Iwao: 1995:3-4).

Hence, the widespread argument that the Japanese woman is oppressed, confined to her “gendered niche,” and mainly spends her days picking up after children and possessing a worldview that does not extend beyond the parameters of her house is debunked by Iwao and other like-thinking scholars. Most Japanese housewives, in addition to being financially independent (even though they earn nothing of their own), possess a kind of freedom that the Japanese man can only aspire to. More so, the ubiquity of household electrical gadgets leads to an ease of performing domestic chores, and thus less time-consuming.

The popularity and general acceptability of the status of sit-at-home wives can be measured by the large number of professional housewives, a number that peaked in 1975 at 55 percent (Bando 1992). This is because, seen from a particular perspective, the life of an average Japanese woman appears smooth and hassle free.

However, the celebrated autonomy possessed by these women is also entrenched in patriarchy. It has its roots in the attempt to tie women to “gendered niches” and limit the scope of their involvement in society (Condon 1985; Hendry 1981, 2003; Muriel 2001). A brief look at how marriage and the family system relate to most of Japan’s

asymmetrical gender relations will provide a deeper understanding of this claim.

Marriage in Japan

Japan is usually considered a *kekkon shakai*, translated literally as a society that adores marriage and takes marriage very seriously. In fact, Condon believes that the “Japanese are the most marrying people in the world” (1985:23) while Bacon concludes that “marriage is as much a matter, of course, in a woman’s life as death, and is no more to be avoided” (1891:57).

Until the Second World War, Japanese marriages were mostly via *omiai* (arranged marriage). The importance of *omiai* in Japanese society is captured in the disdain with which marriages made for love, or *rennai*, was regarded. In this era, some couples reported meeting each other for the first time only on their wedding day. Others never knew their husbands, but their husbands knew them and had seen them a couple of times. The ladies were only encouraged by their parents to go and be a good wife. In those days, marriages were only conducted on the basis of agreements between both parents. (Hendry, 1981; 1985; 1996; Condon 1985; Sugimoto 2003).

In later days, a go-between, or adult familiar with both parties, became involved, and it was typical for the go-between to arrange an occasion for the parties to meet and interact with one another. The meeting did not guarantee the eventual marriage of the parties, though, as strong objections could be respected, and the process halted.

However, reasons such as personal professions of love were not appreciated as a “person [could] get a reputation for being too picky or aiming too high if he or she rejects all candidates. And there is some slight reluctance to put the uncle, aunt, or boss who introduced you in a bad position by saying no” (Hendry, 1981:19). Thus the demands of

the family were considered as paramount most of the time. In addition, “the social standing of the household was one of the factors at stake, in order to secure a suitable alliance upper-class families would sometimes betroth children at quite an early age” (ibid:18).

During this time, falling in love and getting married was highly frowned upon, as love and affection were considered effeminate and detrimental to the success of a marriage. Citing Futake, Hendry asserts that love “was considered to be on the same level as the casual mating of animals, and marriages based on it were generally considered to lead to unhappiness” (ibid; 19). The disaster such a union planted can be seen in the axiomatic adage, “those who come together in passion stay together in tears” (ibid;19).

For the Japanese, 40-50 years ago, falling in love was considered entirely different from marriage, as marriage was something more serious and almost permanent. Iwao (1995) posits, “To the practical-minded Japanese, romance is a fleeting thing and is not expected to last throughout the many years of marriage. The Japanese consider themselves quite lucky if love and marriage turn out to coincide.” She continues, “Japanese of the middle and older generations tend to see the relationship between husband, like so many other things, in a long-term perspective, extending into old age and to anticipate it as a developmental process throughout life”(ibid, 64).

Once married, man and wife usually assume their respective gender roles to ensure that they fulfill their part of the bargain (Condon, 1985; Iwao 1995). This situation, and indeed the choicelessness of women in marriage, held sway until 1946 was made possible by the feudal and patriarchal family system or the *ie seido*.

The Japanese family system or *ie seido* was grounded on a prototype envisioned by the samurai families in the 19th century (Nakane 1970; Hendrey 1981, 1987; Iwao

1995; Henshall 1999). This system was fundamentally Japanese in origin but borrowed partly from the revised Confucian ideology. The word *ie*, according to Fukutake, (1989) “stood for a concept which transcended the idea of “family” as a group of presently living individuals” (28). He added that the *ie* was conceived:

As including the house and property, the resources for carrying on the family occupation, and the graves in which the ancestors were buried, as well as a unity stretching from the distant past to the present and occupying a certain position in the status system of the village or town. The *ie* in that sense was far more important than the individuals who were at any one time living members of it, and it was seen as natural that the individual personalities of the family members should be ignored and sacrificed if necessary for the good of the whole (ibid. 28).

The core of the family system, or *ie*, is a unit that “does not happily translate as ‘family’ at all,” (Hendry, 1987:24) even more so for the female gender. This is because the *ie* system “prevented human equality and created sexual discrimination within the families in which Japanese were born and brought up” (Fukutake ibid: 31). Founded on the philosophy of Confucianism, the *ie* has placed Japanese women in an underprivileged position from its inception.

A classic Confucianism-inspired treatise written by the neo-Confucianist scholar, Kaibara Ekiken, stipulates that a woman amongst other things must:

...look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence, not despising or thinking lightly of him. The great lifelong duty of a

woman is obedience... the five worse infirmities that afflict the woman are indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy and silliness. Without any doubt, these five infirmities are found in seven or eight out of every ten women and it is from these that arises the inferiority of women to men.... The worst of them all and the parent of the other four is silliness... such is the stupidity of her character that it is incumbent on her, in every particular, to distrust herself and to obey her husband (In Henshall 1999:14).

The Meiji era (1868-1912) and Taisho era (1912-1926) epitomized the profligacy and blatant dehumanization of the female gender by the *ie* system, and by implication, patriarchy itself (Dales2009:15). Japanese women of the prewar era unobtrusively bore their fate and withstood the inequitable handling of their lot. They were “strictly bound by the rule of labor, confined to domestic drudgery, and pitiably deprived in status, power, and opportunities (Lebra 1984: ix). Lebra expounds that Japanese women were “demurely submissive, coquettishly feminine and hopelessly removed from the attainment of self-fulfillment,” (Lebra 1984 ix) but as Japanese society had (and still has) no provision for confrontation or non-conformity, the women silently bore their fate¹⁶.

However, all that changed after the Second World War. Immediately after the Second World War, the *ie seido* was perceived as a major obstacle to any meaningful development and calls were made for its abolishment. In the words of Nakane, “immediately after the Second World War, the idea had gained ground that the family system (*ie*) was an evil, feudalistic growth obstructing modernization” (Nakane 1973:28).

¹⁶ See Iwao (1995), Hendry 1981; 1987 for more on the non-confrontational culture of Japan.

This growing awareness eventually led to the promulgation of new laws in 1946.

Apart from the fact that the revised 1947 Japanese Constitution bestowed on women, the power to choose their spouse and divorce their husbands in the case of marriage failures were received with jubilation. Today's women have been increasingly gaining exposure, education, and the ability to earn their own living. This ability has far-reaching consequences on the entire marriage compact.

Consequently, marriage is increasingly becoming a less appealing option for an average, educated Japanese young woman. Some of the alternatives to marriage and other tentacles of male hegemony form the crux of this study.

Back to Gary Becker's principle of marriage economics, there is in a literal sense little incentive to such an arrangement for the contemporary Japanese working class woman. This is because "married women...work much less than single women and married men work more than single men, an increase in the wage rate of women relative to men would decrease the incentive to marry." In other words, "if married women were not in the labor force, a compensated increase in their wage rate would decrease the incentive to marry since an increase in their wage rate would decrease output" (308).

In other words, an amalgam of a stable financial source and a heightened consciousness, prompted by the quest for a new way of living (*ikikata*), retains the cumulative implication of a variety of alternatives, which has made marriage less economical and attractive as an institution. The search for oneself goes beyond "just earning money" as Yamamoto Michiko retorts. It embraces leading a life that is "alive." Thus, the goal today is to "find ourselves," she concludes (1993:170).

The waning popularity of marriage and the quest for, as well construction of, alternatives aimed at circumventing established societal aspects of the culture that smacks

of patriarchal hegemony have changed the focus of Japanese women studies. There is a change in focus from the ubiquitous, miserable Japanese woman to the pragmatic, thoughtful woman who is engaged in a “quiet revolution” (Iwao 1995:8).

Attention has shifted from the marginalization of women to women’s attitude and response to marginalization, their ways of dealing with it, and even how women have turned the situation around to their advantage. Iwao thinks that, “today it is, in a sense, the husbands what are being controlled and the ones to be pitied” (ibid: 5).

This histrionic change in the realities of Japanese women is captured succinctly by Ortner, who writes, “whatever the hegemonic gender beliefs which mold men and women relations...There are always sites, of alternative practices and perspectives available, and [these sites] may become the basis of resistance and transformation” (Ortner 1996:18). This is because they are capable “actors [who] play with skill, intention, wit, intelligence” (ibid, 1996:12) who are capable of shaping their own destinies. The various “sites” of alternative practices that are being gainfully employed as the basis of such transformations provide the crux of this research

Review of Literature

In Japan, the study of gender, the asymmetrical relations between the sexes and their implications, the dynamics of culture, and the various methods women deployed to defy cultural definitions and configure their own spaces in the of prevailing gender formulations have been substantially debated and documented by scholars from all climates.

Past studies on Japanese gender relations come in a variety of forms and shapes. Sometimes, they take the form of comparison between Japanese women and their western counterparts. At other times, they document the painfully slow pace at which the status of the Japanese women seems to be changing, often to the chagrin of some researchers. At still others, there are rebuttals from Japanese scholars who lay emphasis on the centrality of their culture that, like all cultures, cannot be brusquely upturned.

This research seeks to investigate not just trends of gender dynamics in Japan over the years, but how women have worked to overcome some of the challenges and limitations the culture poses in relation to self-emancipation. To achieve this, I will review past studies on Japanese women covering a whole a whole range of issues, particularly delayed marriage, cohabitation, singleness, and international marriage. The present research will also pay attention to the use of various theories of gender or feminist anthropology in the said works.

In her work, *Half a Step Behind Japanese Women Today*, Condon analyzed data from three of the five main islands of Japan to illuminate the changing status of Japanese women. (Condon 1991) ,Condon concludes that Japanese women today are only half a step behind their men counterparts as opposed to 30 years prior when they were three

steps behind. She thinks that “even though the Japanese are the most marrying people in the world,” Japanese women are beginning to question the meaning of their lives and view life as something larger than marriage and motherhood.

In her book, Condon researched a broad range of issues ranging from arranged marriage, Japanese female status, adopted husbands, and fertility and childbirth to women in politics. In her attempt to cover a wide range of diverse topics within the space of a single book, Condon highlighted peripheral research on otherwise weighty topics, which are capable of being independent books in themselves.

Alluding to her journalistic training, *Half a Step Behind* reads more like a piece of investigative journalism than academic research. In all its shortcomings, however, the book serves as a useful material for research, as it provides useful information on Japanese women of the late 70s and 80s. Such information, though considered outdated today, serves as useful background knowledge. The present research seeks to update some of the research carried out by Condon in the 80s.

Employing relevant ethnographic information, Sumiko Iwao’s (1993) *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality*, however, argues that Japanese women are unperturbed with issues of status and dominance. Being conscious of the deeply engrained value of group consciousness and the need to ensure harmony, the women abhor the confrontational and sometimes radical approach to gender parity favored by their western counterpart, and instead opt for a more pragmatic and long-term approach devoid of rancor.

This approach affords a woman autonomy both in terms of how she spends her time and her husband’s earnings. Iwao posits, “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” (Iwao: 1993:7). This in a way makes for a balance of power and indulges the women folk, as they do not need to undergo any stress or pressure associated with the public domain.

This rationale, however, appears to be too mundane for an issue as serious as advancing the status of a subjugated group within the society. More so, most women would like to participate actively in the running of their society rather than been forced to become housewives and depend solely on their spouse for their financial upkeep.

Further research on the changing status of women suggest the opposite of what Iwao advocates as scholars argue that as rewarding as being a housewife in Japan is, it is limiting in the sense that such women’s entire being consists of basking in the shadow of their husbands’ achievements. This tendency denies women the prospect of stepping out and constructing an identity for themselves, makes them less goal oriented and virtually cutting them off from society and any form of independence (Iwao, 1993, Lebra 1997, Hendry 2001).

In “Marriage and Family; Past and Present,” Kyoko Yoshizumi claims that “in the past, women’s happiness was thought to lie in marriage,” adding that “in recent years, marriage for women has become one of many variants lifestyles ... many women no longer seem to feel that they want to or have to marry at any cost; on the other hand, women’s ideas and expectations regarding marriage have become higher” (2005:184).

This article spells out many of the constructs observable in contemporary Japanese society. As the title implies, it surveys the life of a Japanese woman from the time of the family system to the Meiji period until now. Apart from condensing such a long history into a short article, the paper fails to use any particular ethnographic data while citing a pocket of government statistics from time to time. The results is that the

paper reads more like a newspaper commentary than an academic piece. It is hoped that this research will serve to bridge similar botches.

Nancy Rosenberger's 2001 book entitled *Gambling with Virtue: Japanese Women and the Search for Self in a Changing Nation* uses an ethnographic approach to chronicle the changes that have trailed the life of the Japanese woman from the 70s when women were basically "Virtuous Housewives" through the 80s in which they saw "marks of a rising individuality and diversity from the norm to the 90s that are characterized by independent and multiple selves". The book brought a novel approach to the typically ubiquitous narratives on trends in the lives of Japanese women in that it apportioned substantial space to the gradual growth of individualism that characterized some of the periods targeted. Rosenberger's study ended in the 90s, a situation that makes it outdated in today's highly dynamic world.

Joy Hendry's (1981) *Marriage in Changing Japan: Community and Society* is a sine qua non for the study of marriage and women in Japan. The importance of the book is derived from the fact that it is all encompassing. It portrays Japanese society as a whole, from living in a community to the notion of kinship to finding a bride through matchmaking (Omiai) and love. Hendry depicts the realities of the life of a typical Japanese woman from the era when "the only qualities that befits [her] are gentle obedience, chastity, mercy and quietness" to the era where marriage is no longer "as much a matter of course in a woman's life as death" (Hendry 1981:18). The book is a useful tool for this research, but it fails in terms of contemporaneity, a void the present study seeks to complete.

Analyzing the constraints and likely fulfillment on the path of an average Japanese woman, Takie Sugiyama Lebra's (1984) *Japanese Women: Constraints and*

Fulfillment chronicles the much written about (at that time) below average life of the Japanese woman. Making use of ethnographic data, she compares Japanese women with their American counterparts in the United States, claiming that they are a decade behind. Lebra opines:

They appear strictly bound by the rule of segregation and division of labor, confined to domestic drudgery, and pitifully deprived in status, power, and opportunities. Actually or expectedly, they are demurely submissive, coquettishly feminine, and hopelessly removed from the attainment of self-fulfillment when compared with their American sisters. (1984: ix)

Lebra describes the perceived backwardness of Japanese women as inflicted by their numerous cultural constraints in various facets of life ranging from their premarital days to occupational careers. The book is simply a product of its time. It is also very useful resource material for the present study. It is, however, dated as it was published over three decades ago.

“Japanese Women – Old Images and New Realities” (Berger, 1998) “Company Man Makes Family Happy: Gender Analyses of the Japanese Family” (Kimoto, 1998), “Home Truths: Women and Social Change in Japan”; “The Virtue of Japanese mothers: Cultural Definitions of Women’s Lives” (White, 1998) “Descent Housewives and Sensual White women- Representations of Women in Postwar Japanese Magazines” (Ochai 1998); “The Death of “Good Wife, Wise Mother”?” and “Professional Housewife: The Career of Urban Middle Class Japanese Women” (Vogel, 1998) all represent works that document the trends, movements, and changes registered in the lives of Japanese women

from various points of views.

However, they primarily arrive at a similar conclusion: the Japanese woman is no longer comfortable with being a housewife whose identity and life is defined by her husband and his income. This research seeks to take the argument beyond the level of their comfortability or lack thereof to their deeds, what constitute actions.

The decision to choose a career and an identity instead of getting married and vacating the public domain as is culturally stipulated creates a site of social friction as it distorts social order. Pioneers of this gender ideology bore the consequence of sexual harassment, discrimination, and ridicule from male colleagues (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995; Ogasawara 1998).

Until lately, most books about Japanese women chiefly authored by non-Japanese scholars hinge their arguments mostly on the dated, subjugated, and inhibited lives of Japanese women. Consequently, a stereotype arose which saw the birth of many books and movies like *Madame Butterfly* and *Sayonara*. In her work, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*, Dorrine K. Kondo decides to set the records straight. Using family businesses in Japan, Kondo looked at how the self is created.

She does a decent job of exploring the way gender, class, and generation are part of this on-going process of the crafting identity while injecting a measure that counters existing stereotypes. She asserts:

Any supposedly feminist account of gender and women's status in Japan of necessity negotiates an insuperable paradox between, on the one hand, the dangers of Orientalism-reinforcing stereotypes of western women as the most liberated, while our "poor Asian sisters" languish in submission, subjugated by

their men – and on the other, the imperative to carry out a culturally specific feminist critique.

With this ethnographic work of the multi-tensioned ideas of self and identity among females, Kondo, just like Iwao before her, debunks the myth of female subjugation by claiming that the relationship between Japanese men and women is more complicated and composite than what is discernible from the outside.

Crafting Selves is a useful text for a broader understanding of the complex relationship that exists between Japanese society/culture on the one hand and career women on the other. It, however, does not fulfill the specific need for a gender dichotomy, nor does it delve into idiosyncratic ideologies. The present effort intends to fill this void.

Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender and Work in Japanese Companies, by Yuko Ogasawara, also espouses the intricacies of the lives of Japanese career women, especially those who work in large Japanese corporations. These women are assigned mostly clerical tasks that are unchallenging. Simply known as "office ladies" (OLs) or "flowers of the workplace", OLs serve tea to the men and type and file their reports.

In this engaging ethnographic work, Ogasawara reveals the ways that these women resist male control and why men, despite their exclusive command of authority, often subject themselves to female control. She details the frustration they faced as highly qualified professionals who are trapped in disparaging, dead-end jobs.

Her work is similar to Kondo's *Crafting Selves*, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender and Work in Japanese Companies* in relation to its analysis of Japanese gender discourse from the perspective of work environment.

Susan J. Pharr (1998), Jean R. Renshaw (1999), Vera Mackie (1997), Friedman

(1992), Ueda (2007), and Nemoto (2013), among a host of other scholars, carried out research that depicts the gradual advancement of Japanese women in the office with roles extend beyond tea pouring and office ornamentation. Renshaw's *Kimono in the Boardroom: The Invisible Evolution of Japanese women Managers* provides copious examples of women who broke the glass ceiling.

Younger women, in a bid to break out of the familiar, are resolute on creating a niche for themselves. However, in a society like Japan's where until lately, the corporate structure is skillfully entwined with the hegemonic order obtained in a traditional society, it was natural for young women to quit their jobs soon after marriage. Finding no grounds for negotiation, modern Japanese ladies often take the path of least resistance by postponing marriage and childbearing. In *Marriage in Contemporary Japan*, Tokuhiro Yoko argues that "By delaying marriage and childrearing, young women can be seen as 'rebels' challenging Japanese patriarchal society" (Tokuhiro 2011:3). The author further opines:

A large number of people wish to secure control over marriage practices, by ideological, economic, legal or even forcible means, because they are so crucial not only to individuals, but also to the social order (or at least to the understandings of the social order), in all sorts of forms- for example, gender and sexual order, socialization and child-rearing, and demographics and economics.

In her work, Tokuhiro advances reasons for the alarmingly mounting number of women who are electing to delay marriage for as long as possible in favor of chasing their ambitions. *Marriage in Contemporary Japan* is a superbly -researched book which reveals much about marriage practices in contemporary Japan.

However, the book can be faulted in the manner and scope of its data collection. Primary data for this piece was collected from students of Hanamuko Gakko or Bridegroom School (a co-educational school with more women than men, even though it was meant to cater for mostly men), a decision that widely limits the diversity of the participants, since they largely hold similar opinions on marriage.

Iwao (1996); Retherford, Ogawa and Matsukura (2001); Sasai, Kamano, Iwasawa, Mita and Moriizumi (2008); Ota; (2002); Yamada (1999); and Ogawa and Clark (2005) have all written extensively on delayed marriage in Japan. Mostly, these authors analyzed the issue of delayed marriage from the perspective of its negative impact on the fertility rate, and by implication, the future population of Japan.

As noted earlier, the decision of career women to postpone marriage in a bid to transgress status and power yields a number of ripple effects that bear both practical and political implications on the generality of the Japanese society. One such obvious consequence is the alarming drop in birthrate and equally alarming number of single ladies well past their prime. This has had the consequence of discursively dislocating the institution of marriage and holds serious risks for the future of Japanese society.

This potential risk has forced the government to rethink the significance of creating favorable laws that encourage a woman to be both a mother and career woman. Unfortunately, the solutions proffered by government taste of insincerity, as laws promulgated to cater to professionally ambitious women are never enforced. (Muriel 1997; Sugiyama 1984; Hunter 1993)

Further research has revealed that one approach deployed by contemporary (a little fraction) Japanese women is to circumvent the dominant cultural order, escape the Japanese environment altogether, and seek love and a career outside of Japan, particularly

in the West. To the internationalists or escapees, life outside of Japan represents all that Japan is not: emancipation, unlimited mental and physical space, career, love, and equality. This new-found freedom is implicated in amorous adventures in their newfound Nirvana that culminates in a loving interracial marriage. (Dearborn 1986; Lye 1995; Kelsky 2008).

Karen Kelsky (2008) employing an eclectic approach carried out a fine research on internationalist Japanese women and similar narratives. However, her study approached interracial or international marriage from the point of view of Japanese women in the diaspora or those who have had experience living abroad particularly in the West. The relative absence of studies focusing on Japanese women who have never been abroad and are married to non-Japanese men, especially men with seemingly low social status within the Japanese society, makes the present study quite new and contributory.

Karen Ma (1999) re-evaluates of the stereotype of the mythical, submissive, and deeply respectful image of the Japanese woman in her book, *The Modern Madame Butterfly*. Here she argues that the westerners are allured by the stereotype of the Japanese woman as the ideal woman compared to women from the West and other parts of the world. She also argues that Japanese women are captivated by the sense that Westerners (especially Americans) are perceptibly superior to Asians and are thus proud to flaunt their Western boyfriends.

Unknown to most Westerners, however, Ma posits that Japanese women have evolved in several ways, particularly in regard to her their expectations in marriage and the discovery that married life is both disillusioning and disappointing. She presented several cases of failed international marriages. She also presented cases of successful ones highlighting their recipes for success.

Karen Ma's study is insightful and full of depth. She also took out time to note

the changes in various aspects of the life of the Japanese woman. Yet the study, though insightful, reads more like an editorial piece and lacks detailed academic analysis. Also, the research is limited in scope by dealing strictly with Japanese and Westerners, especially Westerners of American descent.

Itamoto (1992), Suzuki (2000), _____ (2001), Piper (2003), _____ (2010), Nakamatsu, (2005) and other notable scholars have researched international marriages involving one Japanese spouse. These studies, however, fail to analyze international marriage from a practical point of view, thereby essentializing the present study.

Scholars like Yamada (1994), Atoh (2001), Tsuya (2005), Iwasawa, Raymo and Bumpass (2005), and Iwasawa, Raymo and Bumpass (2009) have all researched cohabitation, marriage, and fertility in contemporary Japan using mostly official quantitative data to show trends in cohabitation and alternative lifestyles in Japan. The research conducted by these scholars relied heavily upon quantitative data, making its approach different from the present study's.

While a number of recent studies have sought to identify some of the issues that form the core of the current study, such as delayed marriage, international marriage, and cohabitation, (Kondo 1990; Iwao 1993; Tanaka 1995 Muriel 1997; Rosenberger 2001; Hendry 2003, 2011; Kelsky 2008, Kelsky 2001) they are mainly practice-based and rare. The paucity of research that focuses on post-emancipation Japanese women as well as their influence on younger Japanese women and men alike is a significant oversight. The purpose of the current investigation is to engage the theory of practice and seek deeper answers to strategies employed by Japanese women to circumvent male hegemony and establish precisely how well they have fared in this proposition.

CHAPTER THREE– DELAYED MARRIAGE

Delayed Marriage (*Bankonka*) & the Struggles of Women in Modern Japan

About a decade and a half ago, Masahiro Yamada published an instructive book on contemporary women in Japan. In this book, Masahiro blames young people for Japan's economic hardship, the declining birthrate, as well as other major woes upsetting the country in modern times.

Yamada titled his work, *The Age of Parasite Singles*. His hypothesis, popularized by the Japanese media, has since become a common theory on gender or gender related themes in contemporary Japan. This is due mainly to the beguiling phrase employed in the title, a phrase that is now stereotypically linked to young working class unmarried men and women from approximately 28 years of age through their 30s (Tokuhiro 2011; Retherford, Ogawa and Matsukura 2001).

Precisely speaking, parasite singles refer to those who live rent-free with their parents and enjoy services like free food and laundry provided by their mothers. The savings they accrue from not paying rent affords them extra income to spend on lavish lifestyles and designer shoes and bags. The book details the lives of such women and explains the conditions that make it necessary for women like them to emerge in contemporary Japan.

Using figures from the 1995 national census, Yamada estimates an approximate 10 million parasite singles in Japan. He further predicts that given the steady rise in the

opposition to marriage, parasite singles will probably account for 10% of the Japanese population in 2000 and will thus have “a significant impact on Japanese society and the economy and also cast a shadow on the health of society in the future.” Yamada’s book on parasite singles, and by implication, delayed marriage (*bankonka*), identifies a contemporary concern in Japanese society. However, instead of looking inwards to examine and possibly uncover the tie between Japan’s long histories of patriarchy, a byproduct of which is *bankonka* and by implication parasite singles, Yamada resorts to blaming the victims.

The following chapter shall interpret the views of Yamada’s book in another lens by arguing that *bankonka* is a choice women in contemporary Japan are forced to make in the face of the prevailing male hegemony. It also seeks to debunk conventional beliefs and stereotypes attached to delayed marriage by arguing that delayed marriage is one of the practices present day Japanese women are deploying to circumvent patriarchal norms and sexism in Japan. The chapter shall deploy evidence and data from the field to show the prevalence of the phenomenon of delayed marriage among young women. Engaging qualitative data, it shall advance reasons why *bankonka* has become a “necessary evil” in present-day Japan.

The phenomenon of *bankonka* has been well written about by various scholars of Japanese gender and culture. Consequently, there is no paucity of information in regard to delayed marriage in Japan. Rutherford, Naohiro, Ogawa and Matsukura (2011); Tokuhiko (2011, 2004); Kanai (1991) Atoh (1994; 2000; 2001); and Atoh and Akachi (2003) have all carried out extensive research on delayed marriage in Japan. Most of the existing works on *bankonka*, however, either employed data that is dated, are comparative studies with other second demographic nations cum South East Asian countries, or are

focused more on the relationship between *bankonka* and the dwindling fertility rate in Japan rather than the politics of it.

What this research attempts to do is reiterate some of the arguments on *bankonka*. It also seeks to take the debate on delayed marriage a little further by using an amalgam of both qualitative data and quantitative data to elaborate on and show the extent of *bankonka* in Japan while arguing that *bankonka* is one of the ways in which the practicalities of patriarchy is being undermined in Japan. Lastly, it argues that the phenomenon of *bankonka* represents a phase in the evolution of the female gender in Japan. This evolution is seeing to be the blurring of gender roles and specialization, which have traditionally defined the sexes in Japan. For as Lebra (1984) argues, “the structural embeddedness of sex roles stabilizes and rigidifies the sex-based hierarchy” (301) in Japan.

The data for the following section was sourced primarily from the field. I carried out wide-ranging interviews spanning a period of about 18 months across various parts of Yokohama. Additionally, data from the 14th Japanese National Fertility Survey conducted in 2010 by the National Institute of Population and Social Security (NIPSS) is invaluable to this research.

The importance of the NIPSS data stems from the fact that apart from being broad in terms of the variety of related topics it targeted, the numerical strength of the survey is much greater than the interview I conducted. The result of the interview, however, even though limited, took into account the details of individual lives that the survey lacks. This makes a combination of the two data seamless.

Marriage is increasingly becoming an option in the life of an average educated Japanese woman. (Kanai 1996; Nakano 2003, Tokuhiko 2004). The case of marriage

being an option has been a source of concern for Japanese society, and thus features prominently in the national fertility survey that is conducted every four years.

Precursors and Data from the National Fertility Survey

Changes in women's attitude towards marriage have been constantly altering since the 1980s and 1990s, as these were the years in which a majority of Japanese women began to realize that marriage and happiness are not synonymous (Kooseishoo, 1996). Japanese women at this juncture, both literally and figuratively, can be said to have heeded to the advice of the editors of *Mores* (a Japanese women's magazine popular in the 90s) to demand for more. As the name of the magazine implies, the writers challenged women to question their marginal positions in society and demand more for themselves:

Why is it always women who are forced to lead a life within the 'framework'?
Increasing numbers of women have started to break this framework and are leading lives fulfilled by their careers; they are actively participating in society... [are] able to see the new future through this way of life...If you are craving to become a career-oriented woman, please break the framework of being a [conventional] woman and change your consciousness. We firmly believe this is the first step... (Quoted in Sakamoto 1999:185)

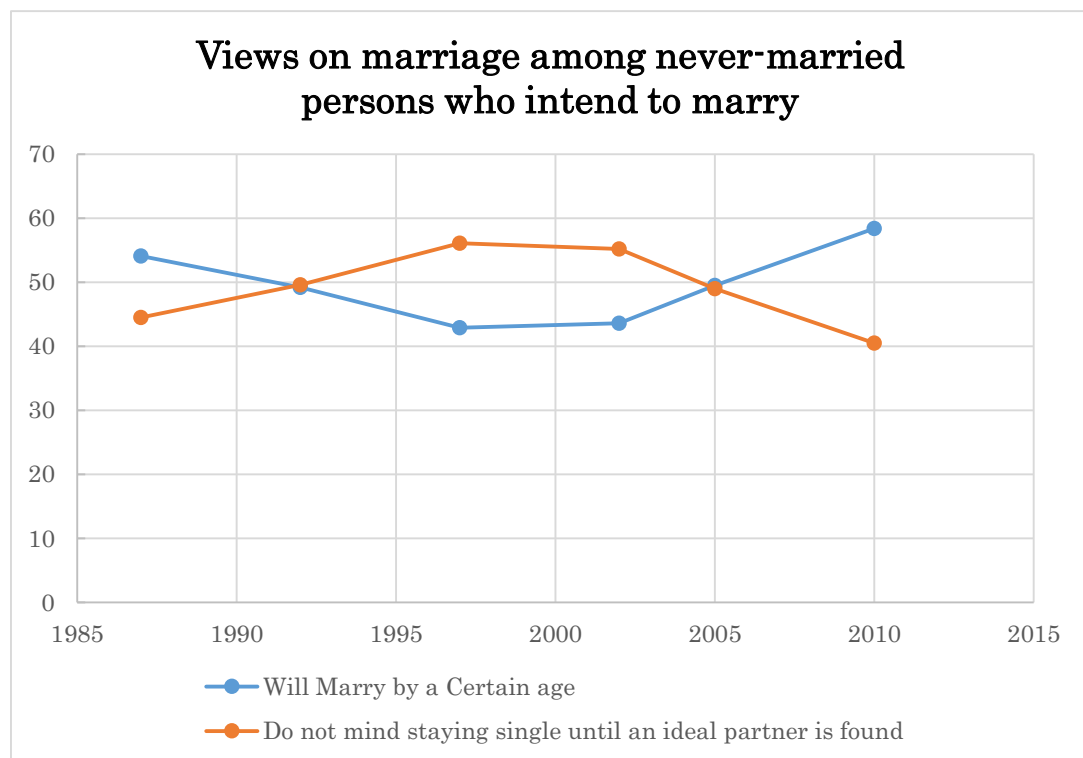
Needless to say, Japanese women took this advice slowly but surely. One result of the influence of women's magazine and other media on the lives of women is an increase in the level of awareness of what should constitute a good or fulfilling life. For some women, fulfillment does not lie in marriage, but as Japan is still a marriage-based

society (*kekkon shakai*), they do desire to get married someday.

In the latest survey, some questions focused on Japanese singles' attitudes toward marriage and relationships. The findings revealed that the attitude of young people (aged 18-34) towards delaying marriage, which had consistently been increasing in the past decade, is beginning to stagnate. According to the survey, this is because the proportion of singles who are consciously trying to delay marriage is waning. Also, the study concluded that the proportion of never-married persons who answered "Do not intend to marry yet" also decreased slightly compared to the previous survey.

See fig. 1.

Data obtained from NIPSS survey, 2011



A critical look at the above data reveals that the trend has not changed much since the 13th survey conducted in 2005. For instance, in reply to the question “what do you think about getting married within a year from now? 84.4% of the respondents who expressed desire to get married are aged between 30-34 years. This is an indication that women are getting married much later than they used to.

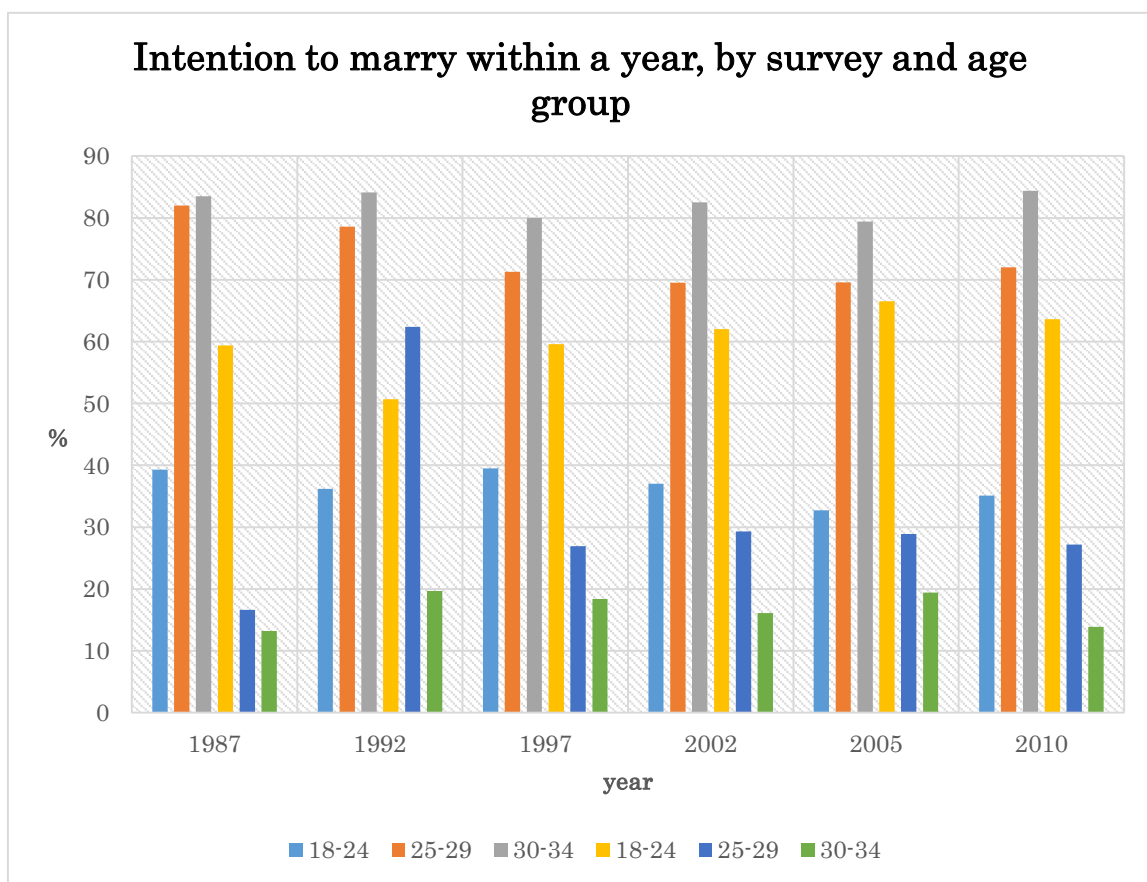
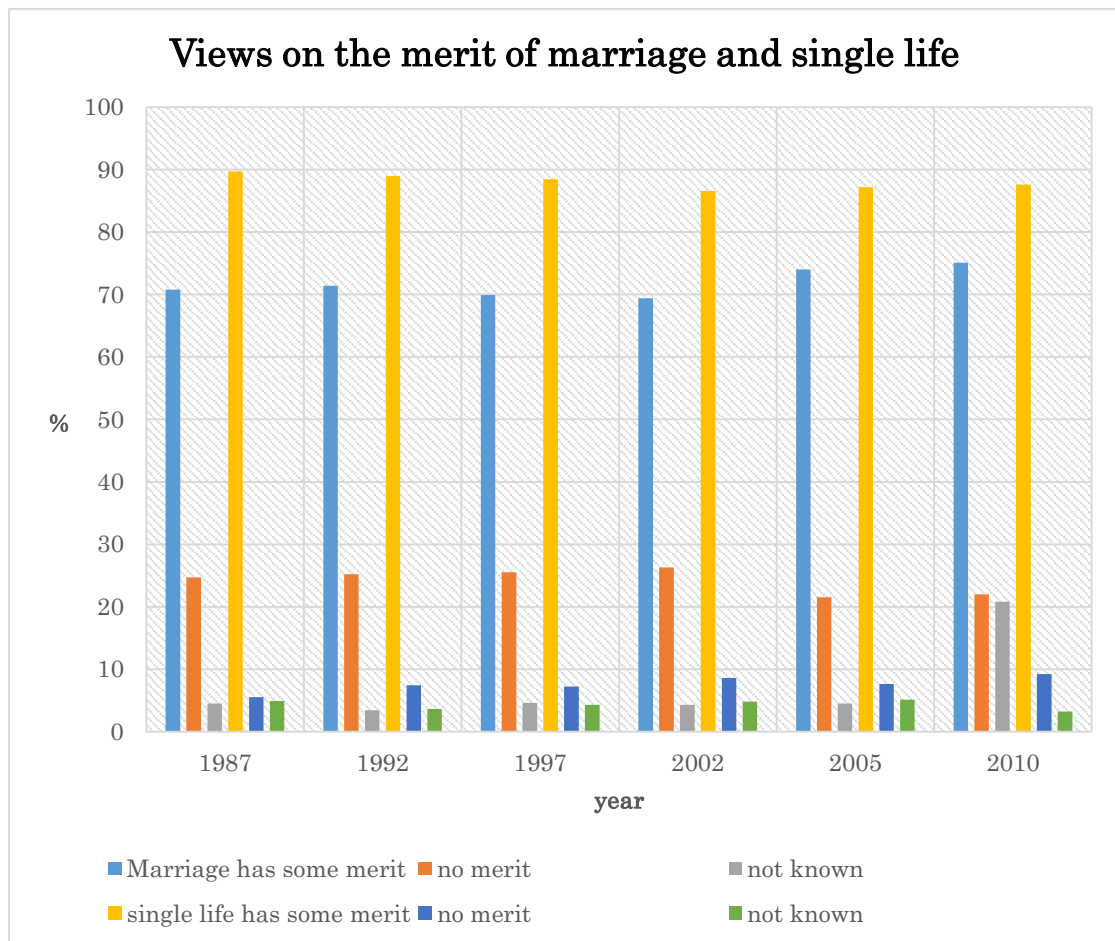


Fig. 2 (Women between the ages of 30-34 is represented by the green bar)

Both men and women’s desire to marry varies depending on their educational/employment status. Less career ambitious women who hold less secure jobs are more likely to jump on an offer of marriage than more goal-oriented women with

well-paying jobs. Similarly, men with part time and less secure jobs are far less likely to get married than those with job security and a good salary. This follows Gary Becker's economics of marriage analogy. Marriage holds no advantage for people in this category and consequently, women would rather sit back and enjoy their time and freedom for as long as their biological clock¹⁷ permits before signing up for the lifelong commitment of marriage and family.



¹⁷ Also known as the DNA clock, the biological clock is an internal mechanism in most organism that controls the timing of bodily functions including reproductive capability. In Japan, it is generally believed that the biological clock starts ticking to the negative once a woman is over the age of 35. (Muriel 2001)

Figure 3, is based on the result of the 14th survey, which reveals that for married women, the merits of marriage have been on the increase in the last ten years. Equally, the demerits of marriage have been on the increase, rising from 21.5% to 22.0. The percentage of single women who believe that single life has some merit increased slightly from 87.2% to 87.6%.

These results demonstrate the consciousness of contemporary Japanese women towards marriage. They also divulge the struggles and dilemmas of women as they experiment with different lifestyles to find a most appropriate solution to the challenges posed by present gender formulations. It is an indication that more and more women do not believe that marriage holds the key to a woman's happiness but becomes a "necessary evil" as they grow older to find a secure life in old age.

Bankonka: The Struggles, Challenges, and Advancements of Women in Modern Japan

The following data from the field reveals detailed contemporary trends and patterns of *bankonka*. Between November 2013 and November 2014, I interviewed about 28 unmarried women between the ages of 28-50, some of whom I conducted subsequent interviews with. It is imperative to distinguish between women who did not make a deliberate attempt to become *bankon* but have been forced into such a category due to an inability to find a suitable spouse from those who made a deliberate choice to delay marriage. Such women (even though their situations form part of the larger concern of the contemporary reality of sexism in Japan) have been excluded from this detailed study.

Among the ladies whose life stories I shall be analyzing are a group of women

who have made a conscious decision to postpone marriage to pursue their goals or ambitions. The women, Megumi Iwamoto, Masami Kato, Junko Ishihara, Momoka Nakayama, and Midori Sato (all pseudonyms) have uniquely different experiences as unmarried women. The nuance or strength of their decisions to postpone marriage as well as their motives differ. The women, however, all possess a common feature: their resolve to not abhor marriage entirely but delay it both as a way of getting the most out of a patriarchal society and fulfill personal ambitions.

What follows would be better understood as illustrating how individual women sustained and transformed their feminine identities through their lifestyles and actions in the 21st century. In other words, they are “experimenting and exploring their sexuality and their changing behavior is indeed affecting their identity”. (Tokuhiko 2004:132)

Megumi Iwamoto, (Getting Married in My 20s would have been *Mottainai*- a Waste)

Megumi, now 42, was born in Tokyo and grew up in both Tokyo and Yokohama. She attended both elementary and high school in Yokohama. Megumi’s mother passed on when she was still in high school. Her father worked very hard and drank a lot too. Her mother had a difficult time dealing with him. He came back late and extremely drunk most nights, singing and disturbing other neighbors.

Megumi remembers that back then, her mother always had to apologize to neighbors in the morning for the nuisance her father created the night before. Her mother was stressed and sick most of the time. Eventually, she died of ill health. In retrospect, Megumi believes that if her mother had not died, she probably would have divorced her father when the children were grown.

Women sometimes make the decision to delay marriage as long as it takes to accomplish their personal dreams or secure finances because of the lived experiences of their mothers or other women close to them.

As a child, Megumi wanted to study mass communication because she loves the fact that reporters traveled a lot and could experience the lives and cultures of other countries around the world. However, she did not think she was smart enough to earn the entrance exam scores to qualify her. Instead, she decided to try out fine art only to learn she had no innate talent. She opted for photography because it did not require an entrance examination. Megumi's father was furious at her decision to study photography. He also refused to pay for her school fees at first, but eventually did so.

Megumi, it appears, has always been a decisive woman who is aware of the workings of her society and able to fashion out ways to evade any bottleneck on the path to living the life she desires. For instance, she realized her academic deficiencies early on and decided she was not smart enough to study mass communications. She knew she was not talented enough to study fine art, so she opted for the next barrier-free option - photography - and stuck with it. Her father's threat to not pay her school fees for a degree in photography was not enough deterrence to make her budge.

On graduation from the University, Megumi worked as a rugby photographer (sports photographer) and had opportunities to travel to several countries covering rugby events, and later worked as a photographer for an advertising company for 10 years.

Being a rugby photographer gave her a chance to fulfill her travel dreams also, it served to convince her to delay marriage for as long as necessary. Sadly, she had to quit in her early 30s because, according to her, "Many colleagues were beginning to make indirect allusions to my status as a single woman. I was not ready to be married yet, and

my life was too exciting to be dulled by company gossip, so I moved on". She then started up a personal business with a friend.

It is worth noting that even though the culture of "shoulder nodding" (indirectly telling or urging a working woman who is over 30 to quit) is fast dying in Japan, it was experienced by Megumi as early as 10 years ago. For Megumi, marriage was something reserved for the far future, as marriage meant the termination of her freedom. In her words:

Getting married at 25 is a timeworn idea. It is completely a waste (*mottatianai*) for people to become mothers in their 20s. What do you do with your life when the children are all grown, and you are in your 40s or 50s? If you have a skill and you waste your skill by just being a mother and nobody knows what you are good at, and then that is not enough. Nobody should do that. However, then, picks are different so if being only a mother and wife, makes a woman happy then she should do it. Even in the past people wished for freedom but they could not have it but now they can have it. It is not selfish in my opinion to be what you want to be. In the past, Japan had lots of pressure placed on women but now the pressure is less and women have choices.

Megumi, it can be gathered, has carefully planned a timeline for her life. At a certain age, she wanted to achieve certain goals and then consider marriage and childbirth later. She did not shut out the option of getting married like the women who opt for the life of Singleness.

At the age of 35, Megumi felt she was ready to marry. Her boyfriend at the time was however not yet ready for marriage, so they broke up. She eventually got married at

37 to her now ex-husband whom she claimed to have accidentally met and dated for only three months. They were married for two years and lived mostly apart coming together only on weekends and national holidays. (She jokingly referred to her marriage as 週末婚/weekend marriage). The marriage continued in that manner until they both eventually went their separate ways when the two could not agree on having kids.

Megumi said some of her friends are still single, but they want to get married. However, they are not desperate to find a partner. Marriage is still an option for her and her friends because at old age, “we might need someone to rely on”. In her characteristicly practical approach to life, she opines that there is a possibility that she might remain single for life and has prepared for that possibility by saving the money she would need to pay for her retirement care.

The story of Megumi Iwamoto reveals that the modern woman is very alert to the workings of Japanese society and its attitude toward career-driven women and thus has her life mapped out in such a way as to circumvent all or most of the barriers society places in the way to personal fulfillment and freedom. Megumi and her contemporaries represent the crop of women who desire to impact the social society in more ways than one.

Megumi epitomize the group of women who believe that their impact can be made in more ways than solely guarding the home front. This is due to their understanding that the “traditional married lifestyle which demanded much sacrifice from women was no longer attractive” (Sakamoto1999:186). She has not all together jettisoned the idea of marriage. She still wants to get married and raise a family, but at a later age, after she has worked, travelled, and advanced the career ladder (for those who are career ambitious), She could consider marriage and raising children.

By taking her destiny into her own hands and upping the gender game, Megumi confirms Tokuhiro's (2004) assertion about Japanese women that by "delaying marriage and childbearing... their behavior as a whole could even shake the foundations of the existing system and structure". She adds:

Young, highly educated single women, in particular, are indeed in the process of redefining the meaning of womanhood in a rapidly changing society and asking a fundamental question- what does it mean to be a woman? This involves questioning and redefining gender identity, as well as the understanding of what is acceptable behavior for women (ibid: 125).

Even though there has been a constant rise in the number of women employed in the Japanese workforce and various areas of government are initiating plans to employ more women in the workforce to quell the shortage of manpower, the work pattern in Japan still makes it difficult to combine reproductive activities with a career. Women like Megumi are not afraid to look Japan's patriarchal society in the face and boldly assert their opinion and act on their decisions.

Masami Kato (I will wait until I find a man willing to fit into my Lifestyle)

Masami, unlike Megumi, has a less dramatic life. Born in the late 1970s, Masami grew up and lived all her life in Yokohama. She admitted the fact that her mother, who is a chief medical officer and has always had a flourishing career, was the most influential person in their house. It was her mother who made all the decisions concerning others, including what temperature to fix the air conditioner.

Masami studied IT engineering at the University and although she neither wants to work as hard as her mother nor be as powerful both in the office and at home, Masami is afraid that she is becoming more like her mother each day.

At 37, Masami lives in a rented house away from her parents and pays all her bills from her earnings. She also has a cocktail of unusual hobbies ranging from learning to play the shamisen (a three-stringed, Japanese musical instrument) and traditional Japanese dancing to learning to play the violin and guitar. Because of her dedication to those carefully selected hobbies, she hardly has time for other activities outside of work.

Asked if Masami is dating anyone and plans to marry soon, she replied in the negative. She reports that she broke up with her last boyfriend exactly a year ago because he was becoming too much of a hassle. In her words:

He complains about virtually everything about me. He complains about my energy, the amount of time I put into work, my hobbies (he wants me to cut down on them), and my lack of personal attention. When I felt I had had enough, I told him since this is whom I want to be, it will be better for us to part ways. All he said was okay, and that was the end of it.

Masami still wants to get married, but she is yet to find the kind of man she wants. In her view, her problem is that young men these days hesitate a lot. “They hesitate to assume a leadership role or do what men should ordinarily do in a relationship.” She hopes to find a man who will fit into her lifestyle, but is not in a hurry to go searching for men and does not join dating parties or activities that bring singles together. Moreover, she recently got a new job with JICA (Japan International Corporation Agency) and has

been deployed to a foreign post. Masami expects to live outside Japan for the next two years, but she is unperturbed about her relationship status.

Masami, like Megumi, is influenced by her upbringing. Her mother may represent the generation of women that sprung up after the Second World War and was exposed to gender equality and women's rights. Ironically, although Masami professes her unwillingness to work as hard as her mother, she is turning out to be a harder worker herself. Also, it is obvious from her actions that even though she professes a desire to be married and raise kids, she is not exactly ready to make the move yet. For instance, Masami chose her hobbies over her relationship, she has no social life no makes effort to build one, and to cap it all, she recently took a foreign job.

Masami's indifference to gender roles and expectations as well as the mythical "biological clock" is a way of resisting and confronting systemic gender discrimination in Japan. Her decision to break up with a boyfriend for being unable to accommodate her lifestyle is a strong statement on the ongoing negotiation of her feminine self. The actions of women like Masami bear far-reaching implications on and undermine sexist gendered assumptions.

As indicated from the 14th National Fertility Survey, a whopping 40.5% of women are willing to wait until they stumble across the ideal partner. As the perfect or ideal partner is only a non-existent myth, it can be argued that these women who are already experiencing the "frustration, struggle, confusion, anger and stress of being a woman in patriarchal Japanese society" (Tokuhiro 2004:125) are buying time for themselves. They are positively deploying the excuse of "waiting for the ideal partner" while exploring their options and mapping out an individualized path in the gender cartography.

Junko Ishihara (It makes no sense to get married just for the sake of it)

Junko, an only child, was born in the early 1980s in Yokohama. She grew up mostly in Japan and studied Electrical Engineering at Tokyo University. She then proceeded to Australia for a Master degree and returned to Japan on graduation. Junko currently works as a patent engineer and lives at home with her parents. Unlike the typical stereotyped “parasite single”, Junko desires to get married and makes an effort to find her match by attending *konkatsu* (singles club) and other dating clubs.

Nevertheless, Junko has a list of conditions, too. For one, she does not want to be a housewife like her mother. In her words: “I cannot be a housewife at all. It does not suit my personality. Also, I want to have a life outside of my husband”. Junko laments the poor social and emotional skills of present-day men and their unwillingness to assume responsibility. She thinks contemporary Japanese men have a fixed idea of girls in their mind and desire only romanticized, “perfect” girls. She believes that even though she wants to get married, she does not want to get married for the sake of it. She wants a partner who fits well into her lifestyle.

Apart from being book smart and competing for excellence in a man’s world, Junko is conscious of her needs and desires in the 21st century. Unlike some foreign educated woman, she refuses to “construct the West as a site of emancipation” (Kelsky 2008). Even though she was presented with a chance to seek a lasting relationship in Australia and avoid Japanese sexism altogether, she came back to Japan. She opted to come back to Japan to marry a Japanese man who would fit into her lifestyle.

During a follow-up interview with Junko, she revealed that she recently had an *omia*i (arranged meeting) with a young Japanese man in his mid-30s. Everything went well until the man declared that he wants her to quit drinking alcohol (since he does not

drink alcohol) and quit her job since he makes enough money (an annual salary of over ¥ 10,000 000) for them both. Even though they were introduced by a third party and traditionally it was normal for her to convey her disapproval through a third party, Junko dispensed with customary edicts and turned down his request on the spot. She finds it amazing that a man that young was still strongly tied to old, unpopular cultural practices and gender norms.

Since gender is a cultural concept, unlike biology, it is very malleable. However, the degree of its malleability and the success of the struggle for a cultural re-orientation in a society that has hitherto sanctioned and still sanctions the treatment of the female gender as “the second sex” (Beauvior, 1947) is determined by how often young women permit males to wield sexual power over them.

The action of Junko and women like her challenges the generally accepted myth of the three highs (high salary, height, and handsome looks) (Iwao, 1995; Kendall, 2001). It contests the notion that most women would be relieved to find a young man with a high salary and good looks since it is assumed that women are simply interested in rich men with enough money for them to squander, what one commenter at the Japan times referred to as “parasite housewife”.

This socially accepted belief about women has also enabled men to feel a sense of ownership (in the sense of property) over women’s lives. For instance, Junko and the would be partner had only met a couple of times but he was already setting a grand rule for Junko about her lifestyle and future. By refusing, Junko sought to enunciate codify, and legitimize a new meaning of gender relations and sexual expectations in Japan. Her actions also debunked popular myths at least two levels.

Junko and those like her typify a class of women who, by prioritizing their

preferred lifestyles as practices, are staying within the boundaries of Japan to create whatever impact they can. Yorburg (1974) points out that the “almost total exclusion of women from the highest positions of power and privilege in the non-family sphere in modern societies rests partly on the continued existence of sex typing...(192). If all resilient and smart women like Junko flee Japan for the supposed ease of the foreign, Yorburg’s account of Japanese society in 1974 will unquestionably remain unchanged.

Momoka Nakayama (Waiting is not always Bad)

Momoka was born in the early 1980s in Tokyo and spent her childhood in both the U.S and Japan. She attended international schools for both her elementary and high school studies and studied Art and Design at a university in the United States. She then returned to Japan where she is currently working as a research assistant for a government institution.

Momoka’s parents who (are now divorced) had a very turbulent marriage. She confessed that her mother was mostly sick and had a psychological imbalance while she was married but got well soon after she divorced her husband. Her mother had to endure a bad marriage for as long as Momoka was in school since her school fee was highly expensive and her mother, as a housewife, could not raise the money.

Currently in her 30s, Momoka is taking her time to get married because in her words:

My mother has a master degree, and she has never worked, not even for one day. I am not saying I must keep working if I don’t have to but, I want to be sure I have developed a sound financial base and skills such that I don’t have to stay married to someone I would rather not be with because of financial problem.

Even though Momoka is already 34, a year away from the supposed expiration date of her “biological clock”, she is still single and is careful not to rush into a poor relationship. She also does not feel any pressure from her family and keeps herself busy with her job and other activities.

Women like Momoka, Megumi, and Masami, have made choices that were influenced by their mothers lived experiences. Megumi and Junko, for instance, believe that their mothers made sacrifices for them to have better lives and that it would be foolhardy for them to make the same mistake since they have options that were not available to their mothers. In her *Marriage in Contemporary Japan*, Tokuhiro (2011) opines, “By delaying marriage and childrearing, young women can be seen as ‘rebels’ challenging Japanese patriarchal society” (11). This statement appears to be most true in the case of Junko and others like her who feel the need to be prepared and take as much time as necessary before venturing into marriage.

Discussion

Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1984) analyzed the constraints and fulfillments of the the Japanese woman from the point of view of three models: “the principle of role specialization”; “the principle of assymetry in the distribution of social valuables such as status,” and “the principle of segregation of sex” (2). She suggests that the Japanese woman is more likely to find herself at the a continuum beginning with polarization at one extreme and neutralization at the other end.

The women we have encountered here on the other hand are neither unperturbed about the existence of a continuum nor are they ruffled by societal dictates or expectations. They have instead elected to subvert motherhood and female sexuality and dispense with

all allusions to the sexist phenomenon of “good mother and wise wife” that has been used for many decades to cower women into staying within their “gendered niches” and observe their assigned gender role. This is because “a woman, Japanese or non- Japanese, is an individual person with inner feelings and thoughts, aspirations and frustrations”, (Lebra, *ibid*:3) who embodies an identity of her own. The myth of being a “good wife and wise mother” cornered women into feelings of guilt that thwarted their desire to exceed their ascribed status in the society (Muriel 2001).

Women like Megumi and Junko are not seeking to jump from one end of a polarized continuum to the other. They are instead seeking to create a Japan that bears no mark of gender based polarizations of any sort. They do not seek to outdo or outshine their male counterparts struggle for a reversal of roles. These women desire an erasure, a blurring of the lines that polarize and assign people to various classes and roles.

To achieve these aims, they have decided to take their destinies away from the society into their own hands. Junko, for instance, rejects any form of condition to what most women in her mother’s generation (40-50 years ago) would consider to be the peak of success. By rejecting anything that holds the prospect of diminishing her as an individual with a unique personality, Junko’s actions might be called “the politics of agency, the cultural work involved in constructing and distributing agency as part of the process of creating appropriately gendered, and thus among other things differentially empowered persons” (Ortner 2006:139).

By their actions, these women are questioning the conventions of their times and attempting to redress male hegemony. Their actions can be interpreted as an act, a way of blurring, an obliteration of the things that once defined them, and subsequently, a construction of new identities for themselves.

It is worth noting that since Japanese society is a male-centered society, the lives and lived experiences of these women are not altogether rosy, neither should it be implied that the women's daily lives are easy as a result of their choices, as "agency is not free". For instance, single women have to work twice as hard to be able to live above the poverty line in Japan. This is because poverty among single women is said to be higher than other among categories of people within the Japanese society. They have, however, made a choice to use their lives as statements capable of inspiring change within the entirety of Japanese society.¹⁸

Also, it is safe to conclude that the trend of *Bankonka* is not likely to wane as there are equally corresponding high numbers of male *Bankon*. There is also a surge in the number of non-parasite singles (see the cases of Megumi and Masami) who are both financially and emotionally ready to live independent of their parents and be responsible for their own welfare. Lastly, a significant number of ladies are psychologically preparing themselves for lifetimes of singleness.

¹⁸ See Chapter Five for more on female poverty.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cohabitation as an Agency of Change

Nowadays the question ‘Do you intend to marry’? Can be almost interchangeable with the question ‘Do you desire to form an intimate relationship with someone’? ...We can say that intimate relationships still continue to be of primary interest to the younger generation. However, the establishment of legal ties ... is viewed as unnecessary.

Iwasawa, Miho (2004:90)

Marriage in the past was the sole means of fiscal sustenance for women as few occupations were opened to them. Moreover, due to the wage disparity in Japan, which was the norm until 1986, few women were earning high enough salaries to live comfortably as singles. Women’s marginality in the social system enabled the development of a critical discourse of gendered distrust. This distrust in turn has occasioned the interrogation of many aspects of the gendered life of the Japanese woman.

In pursuit of answers, aspects of the society that were considered sacrosanct like marriage and family were not exempt. The questionings, in fact, reckoned marriage as an agent of the gendered assumptions of Japanese patriarchy. With more women working hard and earning a good living for themselves, marriage is fast becoming an option and no longer the only means to financial security. Similarly, living alone and the practice of cohabitation no longer carry the negative stigmas that accompanied them in the past.

This chapter argues that cohabitation is a common practice in modern Japan. It is arguably one of the performances deployed by today's women to subvert patriarchal hegemony and the institutionalized exclusion of women from the corporate world. The segment begins by analyzing official statistical data while reviewing existing research on the topic and concludes by doing an analysis of case studies from the field.

Cohabitation involves the act of an unmarried man and woman living together in a relationship that does not exclude sexual intimacy. Cohabitation relationships involve minimal ties with little commitment.

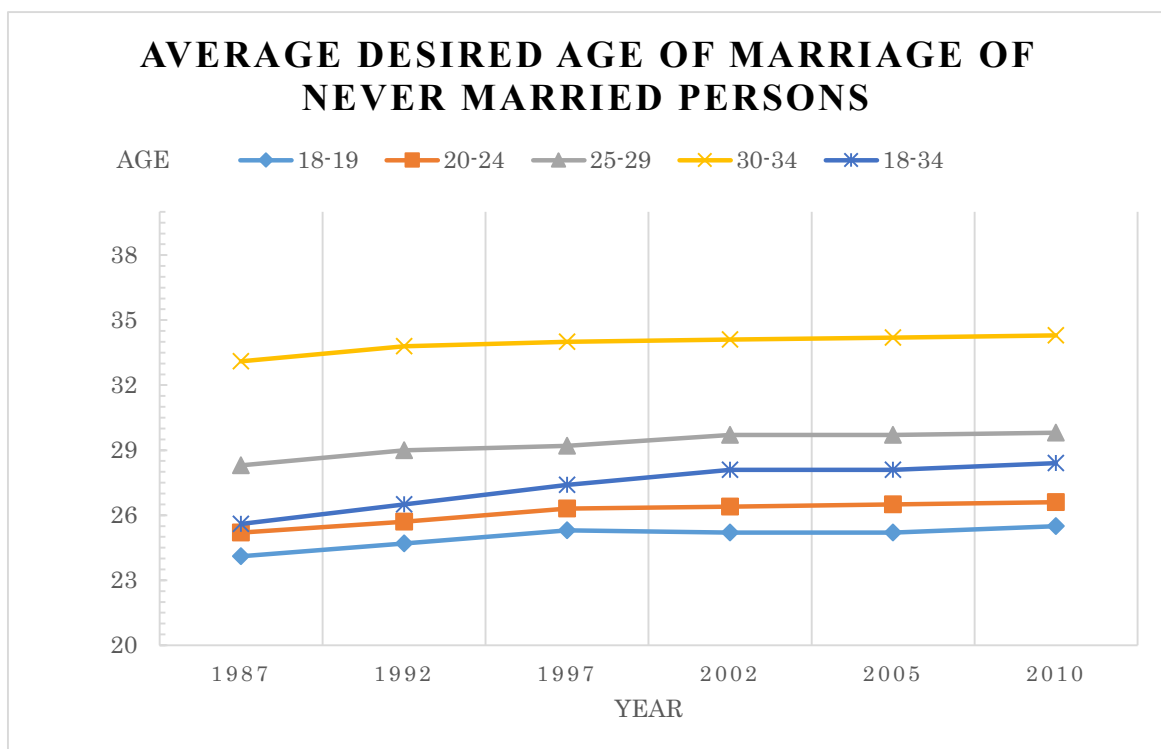
Existing research on cohabitation indicates that cohabitants saw fewer barriers to ending their relationships, more closely resemble never married people, and see it in no way as an alternative to marriage. Others argue that cohabitation and cohabiters choose the kind of people who are more prone to breakups. (Newcomb, 1981; Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel, 1990; Axinn and Thornton Lewis 2001).

In comparison with most developed nations, cohabitation in Japan is relatively small. Nevertheless, it is actively present. In the U.S., for instance, recent studies on cohabitation conclude that cohabitation has increased by 1,500 percent in the past half century. Additionally, in 1960, about 450,000 unmarried couples lived together. Now the number is more than 7.5 million¹⁹, with more than half of all marriages being preceded by cohabitation. In France about 80% of the population has some cohabitation experience while Italy has just 10%, with countries like Sweden and Finland viewing it as an ordinary aspect of life (Iwasawa et. al. 2005).

In Japan, however, the number of people in cohabiting relationships, according

19 Ray Meg, The New York Times. Sunday Review, The Opinion pages: April 14, 2012.

to a survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, has been increasing steadily until the last survey was carried out in 2010. Responding to the question: “Have you ever cohabited (lived with a partner without legally registering for marriage)?” The proportions of respondents with such experience in their early 30s was 8.9% for men and 9.3% for women respectively. See figure 4.20



Iwasawa, Raymo and Bumpass (2005) argued that the data from the Japanese National Fertility Survey is incomplete as the collected data on cohabitation and responses provided was limited to unmarried respondents. Also, they argued that the JNFS survey indicates an enormously low cross-sectional incidence of cohabitation ranging from less than 1% in 1987 to about 2% in 2002. Thus, the few works on cohabitation in Japan which

relied solely on this data (Iwasawa 1999, Atoh 2001) can be safely considered incomplete.

The study conducted by Iwasawa et. al (2005) further stressed that data only from unmarried people “will understate both the prevalence and experience of cohabitation to the extent that cohabiting unions are short-lived and often transition to marriage” (Iwasawa et.al 2005: 23). However, Tsuya, (2005) using data from the first round of the “Japanese Gender and Generations Study”, shows that the number of cohabiting couples born in the 1970s is about 20%, which indicates a marked increase from a similar previous studies.

There is still a paucity of data as well as research on cohabitation in Japan compared to the number of works on other factors affecting marriage, fertility, and related trends. The cause of this paucity is not entirely clear, but many scholars may be tempted to ignore this trend since Japanese society does not exactly condone premarital births, a major risk with cohabitation.

Atoh (2001) argues that because traditional roles are strictly adhered to even in cohabiting relationships, Japanese women today are reluctant to take up such roles too quickly. Adding that “secularism and individualism have progressed very gradually in the Postwar Japan, but individuation seems to have not so much evolved as to break down traditional familism in which linear relationships are regarded as more important than husband-wife relationships, having its roots in the stem family system in the pre-modern Japan” (Atoh 2001:11). This is because the Japanese family life course is relatively homogenous (Brinton 1992).

However, this may not precisely be the case, as recent studies point to the relationship between increasing bridal pregnancies (shotgun marriages) and cohabitation (Raymo and Iwasawa 2004, 2009). Other scholars argue that the high cost of setting up

temporary apartments and the comfortability of living rent-free with parents is one reason cohabitation is unattractive (Yamada 1997, Atoh 2001). Lewis argues that periods of cohabitation may precede marriage and follow divorce (Lewis 2001:41). It is thus safe to argue that periods of cohabitation in Japan mostly precede marriage for those interested in a legal union or mark the evolution of a Japanese lifestyle that is set to circumvent the traditional norms and steps culturally outlined for Japanese women.

Recent changes affecting the Japanese family (i.e. decline in marriages, late marriages, below replacement fertility, individuation, and the emergence of alternative carnal lifestyles like premarital cohabitation) provide evidence that Japan, like most industrialized nations in the West, is experiencing a second demographic transition.

This chapter does not seek to investigate cohabitation, not from the angle of its effect on marriage and fertility, thus overlooking its link with the second demographic transition. It seeks however to point out the extent to which the practice can be engaged as a contrivance for constructing ideal power relations in a relationship before making a more permanent commitment.

Most of the present works on cohabitation in Japan consider cohabitation strictly from the standpoint of its impact on the Japanese family and fertility. They relied chiefly on data from the Japanese National Fertility Survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research and the Survey on Population, Family, and Generations conducted by the Populations Problems Research Council of the Mainichi Shimbun. The present study shall go beyond solely analyzing data.

Data and Methods

As the study strives to be as topical as possible, it shall use the latest data from the Japanese Government's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare as well as information from the 14th Japanese National Fertility Survey conducted in 2010. Additionally, I used data from a series of in-depth interviews I conducted within Yokohama and part of Tokyo area.

Between June 2013 and January 2015, a total of 20 women, most of whom have experienced cohabitation at one point in their lives, are currently experiencing cohabitation, or have progressed from cohabitation into marriage with the person with whom they cohabited, where interviewed.

The interviews focused on their opinions on cohabitation, their motives for cohabiting, and the level of success or failure achieved within their intents. They also address those who have broken cohabitation experiences and whether they would go through the process all over again, as well as the values and drawbacks of cohabitation.

Basic Descriptive Characteristics

In arguing that cohabitation is one way in which contemporary Japanese women register their anger against a system that demeans the average woman, certain salient factors that may impact the present study are the age of cohabiters, level of educational, and the duration of cohabitation.

Birth group- because non-marital cohabitation is a relatively nascent and non-widespread development in Japan, (Atoh 2001, Tsuya 2005) it is important to control for the birth cohort.

Didactic Accomplishment: educational accomplishment is essential to show the correlation between cohabitation and level of study.

Age of cohabitants: the age of those in a cohabiting union or with prior experience cohabiting is useful to ascertain the topicality of the union against the times they experienced such unions.

The percentages used here refer to both those who are cohabiting presently or have cohabited in the past. We carefully note the duration of the union as well as the age of the cohabiting partners. All these essential information extends our empirical understanding of cohabitation in Japan.

Hanako Ono – cohabitation gives you the chance to establish the rules of your relationship

Hanako, 28, was born and brought up in Nagoya. She completed high school and had to move to Tokyo for college. She attended Soka University where she studied Engineering. Midway, Hanako went to Australia for a one year English studies program. Upon graduation from University, Hanako got a job as a systems programming engineer. After working for 2.5 years, she concluded that the task was very difficult and stressful, so she quit and joined a dispatch company.

While working for the dispatch company, Hanako suffered a major bout of depression and took an extended medical leave to recover. She said the depression stemmed partly from pressures both from the job and her family, who wanted her to get married, and also from her inability to maintain a healthy relationship with the opposite sex. In Hanako's words:

I love meeting new people but once they start getting too close to me or fall in love with me, I find it really stressful. Do not get me wrong, I want to be loved, and I want to be loved on my own terms. I think I am a *carnivore* (*nikushokukei*) so I do not want a man coming on me like that. I want everything to go at my pace. I will probably function best with an *herbivorous*²¹ man (*soushoku kei danshi*).

As Hanako's physical appearance represents the paragon of Japanese beauty, it was easy to see why she is popular among men. It also explains her stress and attitude towards the opposite sex.

Six months after taking an extended medical leave away from her job to recover from depression, Hanako took a part time job to prepare her mentally towards rejoining the corporate world. While at the part-time job, she met a nice man who offered to get her employed in his company. She has since returned to the corporate world with a good salary.

Hanako has also found a stable relationship and cohabits with her now boyfriend without the usual stress she feels. Hanako, who shared a house with a friend, suddenly found herself looking for a roommate when her friend relocated abroad to study English. She eventually found a tenant, Taro, a man two years younger than her. At first they were just housemates, who became friends, then lovers and roommates. Hanako claimed that

21 Herbivore males or *soshoku-danshi* is a term coined by pop culture columnist Maki Fukusawa to refer to the generation of Japanese men who are uninterested in the ways of the flesh. See "Young Japanese 'decline to fall in love'". *BBC News*. 2012-01-11, "[Herbivorous men, where's the beef?](#)" *The Japan Times*. Retrieved 2012-01-15.

the transition for her was natural as she controlled the pace of their relationship.

Now that they cohabit as a couple, Hanako claims that cleaning the house, washing, and performing other wifely duties were a source of worry to her, so she called Taro and they both had a discussion about it. Now the housework is shared and sometimes Taro cooks and shops for groceries. According to Hanako, she:

Does not really care about being a career woman. I think I am not cut out for that as I am easily stressed. Neither am I cut out for being a housewife. I just can't survive as one. Am sure I will indeed wind back being depressed again. I want to be an average woman who is neither tied down to housework nor restrained by outdated norms. I see myself owning my own business in the future and becoming my own boss. I want to do that with a man who is willing to accept me and my way of life. I see this time with Taro as a "trial". We have been living together for eight months but have been in love for six months now. If we make it past one year. I can start thinking of marriage. There is no need to hurry or be anxious. I believe the foundation we lay now will be the bedrock of our marriage, so it is best to patiently lay a foundation that makes the two of us happy. It is easy to cohabit and break up than to get married and have a divorce.

When asked if she does not fear the possibility of remaining single all her life if she carries on with this attitude, Hanako replied by saying "that is a possibility and I don't believe that being single is the worst thing that can happen to a woman in this age. There are ample hobbies that will keep you occupied. If you plan well and maximize your freedom now, you have no need to fear for the future".

For Hanako, cohabitation is more than just a step towards marriage. Starting a relationship with Taro was not a first step into marriage even though she was already ripe for marriage. Hanako's motive for cohabiting moved from practical economic reasons to love. She is, however, unblinded by love as she realistically maps out the nature of the power relationship she would rather have in a society that stipulates otherwise.

It is worth noting that the survival and progression of her cohabitation with Taro depends on her level of satisfaction with the power relations in their union. This is evidenced by her willingness to break up should the partnership fail and her non-anxious disposition towards a future of singlehood.

Hanako, whose position towards marriage borders on indifference, 'drifted' (Lewis 2001) into cohabitation, and even though she did not explicitly reject marriage, she appears to possess no sense of urgency regarding the decision to marry, her age notwithstanding.

Hanako demonstrates the belief that self-actualization and empowerment for Japanese women does not necessarily include the pursuit of Marriage. This goes to show that contemporary young women are becoming oblivious to the relative homogeneity that is expected of the Japanese family life course (Brinton 1992) and are taking their time to judiciously craft an atmosphere of their choice in a "trial union" before taking the leap into marriage.

Midori Okada – Cohabitation is Another Lifestyle Choice

Midori Okada, 47, was born in Chiba but due to the extremely mobile nature of her father's job she lived in various parts of Japan and attended various schools. Eventually settling again in Chiba, she completed high school and attended a Junior

College in Tokyo where she studied English Literature.

Upon graduation from University, Midori got a job with a car parts exporting company and has worked there for the past 20 years. She claims her colleagues are good and understanding and has never felt sidelined as a result of her age, as was the practice in some other companies in the past.

When Midori was in her early 20s, she dated a colleague for three years and hoped they would later get married, but they broke up. He wanted to get married very quickly (he was already over 30) but Midori felt both unprepared for and undecided about marriage. That eventually led to their parting ways. In her words:

I felt it was too early then. I was only 23; I wanted to be single for a longer while before taking up the lifelong encumbrance of marriage and childbearing. As at that time, getting married almost certainly meant quitting your job and becoming a housewife. What defines a person's happiness differ from person to person but certainly marriage was not it for me. For me, being a housewife will rob me of what I consider as happiness so I wanted to delay it for as much as I could.

After the relationship came to an end, Midori claimed that she decided to stop dating until she was ready to marry to prevent a repeat of her previous experience. When she turned 33 and was still single, Midori decided she was not going to get married. She spent her time after work enjoying hobbies and attending English conversation classes. At 41, Midori fell in love with another man from her company and after dating for a while, moved in with him. She declares:

I cohabited with him for one year. We had much fun living together and traveled during our vacations. Before moving in, we did not talk about marriage. We did not want to become anxious by the thought of marriage at first. After about six months, I decided that if our lives are compatible and he proposed I would say yes. Unfortunately, it turned out that we were not compatible. After one year, I moved out. Cohabitation is no longer rare in Japan neither is it considered taboo anymore. Some people live their entire lives in a cohabitation relationship. It depends on what they want out of life.

Midori goes on to assert that because the scope of a woman's life has expanded so much, some women are no longer willing to be limited by housewife status. She, however, adds that as of late, she sometimes feels lonely and would like to have a child of her own, but as Japanese society does not condone single motherhood, she remains childless.

Cohabitation afforded Midori the opportunity to decide if a relationship was strong enough to withstand the vicissitudes of marital life. She was also able to assess the compatibility of her would-be life partner. As they proved to be incompatible, she moved out. She believes that cohabitation is another lifestyle choice, and people can maximize their gains from it.

In other words, it is a relationship entered into by two grown adults who do not expect much from each other by way of commitment. It shows that women in Japan are increasingly becoming more individualistic and, in their quest for more satisfying gender relations, do not fear the risk of remaining single.

Chiyoko Mieda – Cohabitation is the bedrock of a good marriage

Chiyoko, 32, who was born and brought up in Yokohama is the first of two daughters. Upon graduation from high school, Chiyoko went on to study Arts at a junior college for two years. As a high school student, Chiyoko got a job as a part-time staff member at Tokyo Disneyland, a job she kept even after graduation from the junior college. It was at Disneyland that Chiyoko first met her partner and now husband, Shota. At that time, he was cohabiting with another woman but they soon broke up due to his unwillingness to marry her.

He came back to Disneyland purposely to find Chiyoko. When they first met, Chiyoko was 19 and Shota was in his late 30s, but she felt so much love for him that she was unperturbed by the age gap. Soon they were cohabiting. Chiyoko's parents were unhappy with the relationship as they found it difficult to comprehend why a man who is expected to know better would not just marry their daughter over cohabitating.

Chiyoko, on her part, claims she entered into the relationship as a matter of choice, not because she was desperate to get married or felt coerced. She declares:

I wanted a relationship and was into one for the sake of it. Everything does not have to be knotted around marriage. We had a nice time cohabiting for 1.5 years in Tokyo. One day, Shota came back with the news of his transfer from Tokyo to Nagano. He said, as he would like to take me along with him, he wanted to do the right thing by getting married to me. I still loved him like before so; I said yes.

She quit her job at Disneyland and moved to Nagano shortly after her wedding. One year

later, she bore a child. Chiyoko claimed that the years spent cohabiting were very formative years for their marriage as she was able to establish the course of their relationship. For instance, she claims that since both partners worked at the time, they had to share the housework. She claims that the same pattern has since been sustained in their house even when she was a housewife for the two years spent at Nagano.

Her husband was transferred back to the Kanto area in Yokohama and she started work with a new company. Commenting on the power relations in their home, Chiyoko proclaims:

I am more powerful in the house than my husband, the huge age difference notwithstanding. I made up my mind that I was going to be a strong wife, not his daughter or mother so I did not let him depend on me so much. I think the fact that he had had a couple of cohabitation experience before tired him out, and he was more submissive and probably tired. You know cohabitation is a good thing, it helps you feel the bridge before crossing it.

Chiyoko believes that a woman has nothing to lose should cohabitation not result in marriage. “Life is a two-way thing, and so is a relationship. Both partners benefit in various ways. It is best to go into a cohabitation relationship first, without the pressure of marriage”.

It can be argued that Chiyoko was only engaging in youthful fantasy and had no clear cut motives for her actions. The Chiyoko I interviewed 12 years after her cohabitation experience, however, appears to be as determined and satisfied with the result of cohabiting as she probably was 12 years ago. It is obvious that in retrospect, she

relished the fun and early affection that she experienced as a cohabiter. She also appreciated the fact that she was able to lay a foundation for household work ethics and power relations that continues to be observed in her home.

Mami Ueada – for me, Cohabitation was a lot more than Trial Marriage.

When I first met Mami, she was single, new to Yokohama, and lived alone at the company quarters. That was two years ago. Mami now 33, was born and raised in Kobe. She attended the prestigious Kyoto University where she studied Biochemical Engineering. Upon graduation, Mami secured a job in Yokohama, which necessitated her moving from Kobe to Yokohama. At Yokohama, Mami joined a number of sports clubs, dance clubs, and English conversation classes. It was at one of these sports clubs that she met her boyfriend, Shinji (now husband). Mami and Shinji dated for a year and soon made a decision to get married. When Shinji suggested they move in together, Mami agreed because according to her:

It was an economically sound idea; it was going to help me save money but most importantly, I wanted to try out marital life first. You know, I have zero cooking skills. I am such a bad cook that I feel I cannot make any nice meals so I agreed to cohabitation to see how we can both cope as man and wife without eating at home. My boyfriend who, fortunately, is a good cook opted to be the cook of the house when eating out was becoming too expensive for us. Now the rule in our house is, he does all the cooking from Monday to Friday while I cook whatever food I can put together during the weekend. We do the dish washing in the reverse order.

Mami went on to assert that if they did not cohabit, they would not have come up with this wonderful formula. Stressing that there are things that need to be settled or straightened out before marriage, she mused, “Imagine he found out that I hated cooking and were such a bad cook after we got married. What would have happened?”

For Mami, cohabitation served as an avenue for putting into place what appears to be a functioning condition for her new home. They were married six months after cohabitation and, even though her culinary skills are yet to improve, that is no source of friction between the two.

Kanae Matsuda

When I first met Kanae, 32, she was married for only one month and had just returned from her honeymoon. Kanae was born and brought up in Kamakura, Kanagawa. She studied Systems Engineering at the Tokyo Institute of Technology and went on to study for her Master degree at the same institute. Kanae, whose father is an engineer, said she wanted so much to be like her father that even though her mother (who quit her job as a teacher to become a homemaker) encouraged her to pursue a more feminine course, she would not.

After her graduate studies at 26, she got a job as an engineer at a data processing company. Two years later she moved out of her family house to live alone away from her protective mother. At that point, she sought to get married, but her then boyfriend (who still lived with his parents) was hesitant because his mother insisted it was too early for him to get married. “I think he is a classic case of mother complex,” declared Kanae. They broke up when she turned 30.

Six months later she met a friend from the same social circle as her at University. Before long, they were dating and later moved in with each other once he asked her to

marry him. They cohabited for a year. Kanae claims that her cohabitation experience was much fun as they traveled together a lot. She believes that cohabitation is an important step towards marriage as it helps you understand each other and helps you decide if you want to go ahead and submit your official marriage registration document. She also believes you disagree early and fix everything that is likely to bring disagreement in your marriage.

Kanae, however, concedes that there is a negative side to cohabitation. The downside of cohabitation, in her view, is the fact that living with a man gives him all the satisfaction that he would have had only from marriage minus the commitment of marriage. It takes away the urgency or desire to get married. That is why you see some people cohabiting for several years; they become tied to a man who is reluctant to get married. Also, in Japan, it is socially unacceptable to have a child as an unmarried woman, and cohabiting increases the risk of pregnancy while the woman has the sole responsibility to prevent such a situation.

Kanae believes that cohabitation is an exciting experience, but decries the young generation of Japanese men who are reluctant to get married for fear of being saddled with a woman who will completely depend on him. Women these days have more opportunities to pursue their life goals.

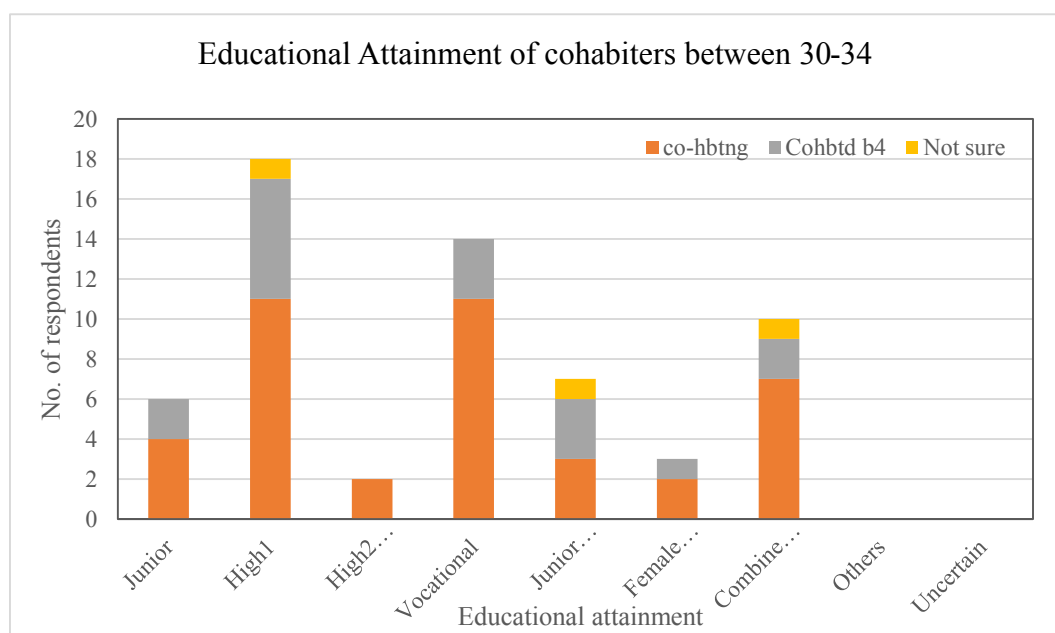
To properly analyze the phenomenon of cohabitation within Japanese society, statistics on factors like age and education are made available for further consultation.

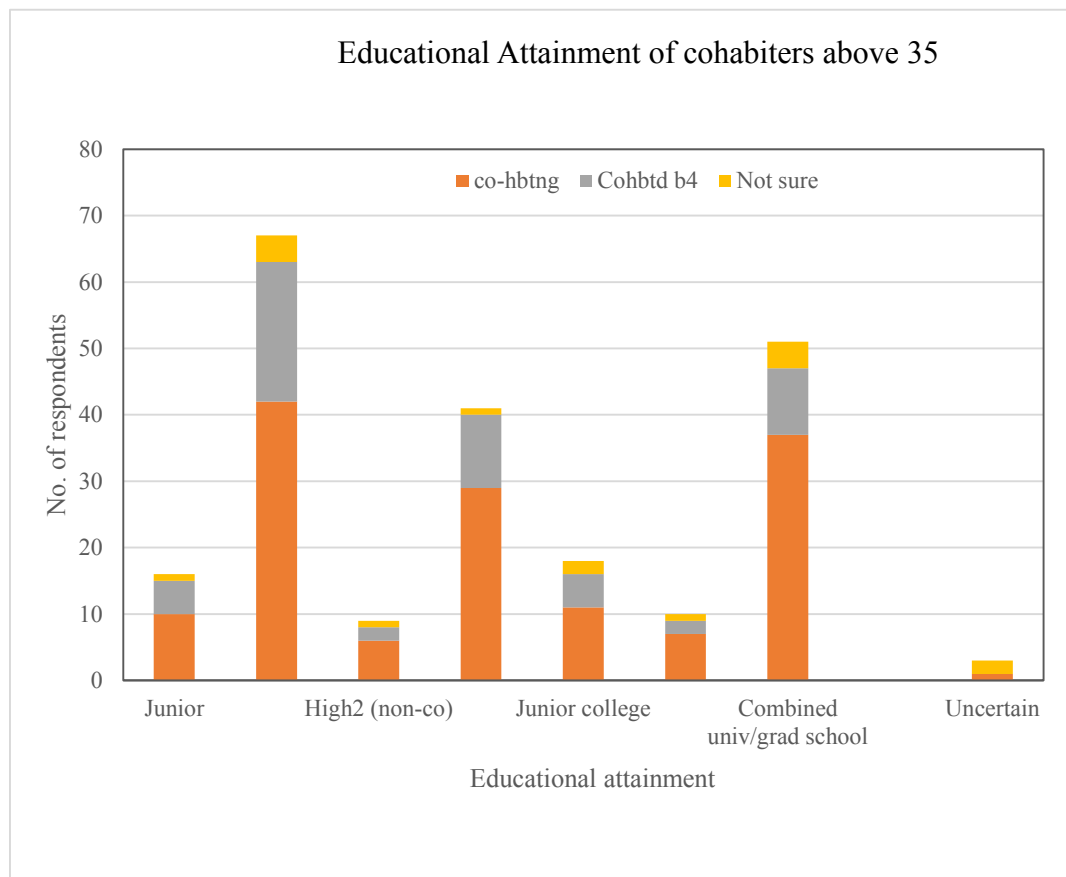
Age Groups and Educational Accomplishments

Statistical evidence from data obtained from official portals reveals that on average, more women than men cohabitate. The majority of women with cohabitation experience are born in the 1970s and afterward with a few born earlier in the late 60s. A huge majority of women enter into a cohabitation relationship as early as 18-19 years and peak between the ages of 20-24. These relationships are carried on well above the age of 35. The data, however, did not state whether the relationship entered into at the ages of 18-19 is the same relationship carried through the age of 35 and above.

The findings of previous research on the educational attainment of cohabiters holds true to a relatively large extent in this study. Most cohabiters, according to past studies, have lower levels of educational attainment (Iwasawa 2005, Tsuya 2005, Iwasawa et.al 2009). However, the data also suggest that a significant number of women with junior college or university degree qualification also cohabitate.

See Figures 6 and 5

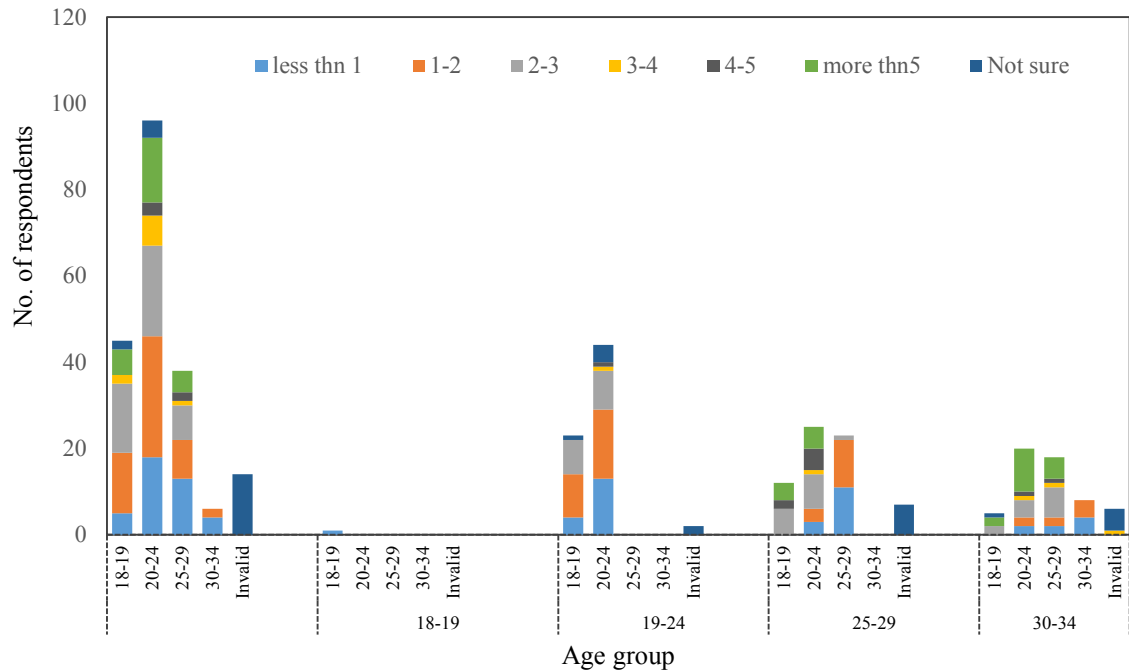




All figures from Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan in figures 2010 <http://www.estat.go.jp/SG1/estat/eStatTopPortalE.do>

The duration of cohabitation differs from one age cohort to the next. Responses from women in the age cohort of 35 and above show that women often cohabit for two years. However, a significant number of women also cohabit for 5 years or more. See figure 7.

Duration of cohabitation



Discussion

Cohabitation has a far reaching implication on marriage and fertility in Japan. This explains why most researchers view cohabitation solely from the perspective of family and population. More than that, cohabitation is shown to bear a great implication on the nature of the power relationship between the man and woman in a cohabiting relationship.

Cohabitation is also likely to be more common among less educated women compared to highly educated women. What differentiates one group from the other is the motive for cohabiting. While a vast majority of women enter into cohabitation as a

prelude to marriage or see cohabitation as “Trial Marriage” (Davies 1985; Atoh 2001, Iwasawa et al. 2009), cohabitation can be used to achieve implications beyond marriage, as some women enter into a cohabitation union without first having a long-term goal of marriage or otherwise. Cohabitation periods in Japan varies and are as likely to end as they are likely to result in marriage or long-term cohabitation.

Findings suggest that cohabitation also affects the pace of marriage. Women who are disposable to marrying and bearing children at an early age practice cohabitation as much as educated women who are likely to postpone marriage or who are concerned with the nature of power relations and gender role assignments within the Japanese society.

Women like Hanako and Mami used cohabitation to reconstruct power relations and gender roles in their relationships. Their act of gender role negotiation calls to mind Catherine MacKinnon’s (1987) position on cultural role assignment: “Subordination is a matter founded on men’s dominance of institutionalized heterosexuality. (1987:32)”. By refusing to take on the victim identity, these women took steps to not abhor marriage altogether, but customize their relationships in ways that they deem ideal.

Chiyoko, though young at the time, was able to establish a decree in her home, thus demonstrating how the “game of gender” can be played to upturn patriarchy in a society steeped in patriarchy.

Cohabitation is neither an alternative to marriage in Japan nor is it legally recognized in any respect. This is because Japanese society frowns on premarital births. Also, the cost of raising a child in Japan is high even for married couples and would be predictably harder on a single mother. Cohabitation is also not an alternative to singlehood.

Data from the 14th JNFS (see figure 1) indicates that the number of people in a cohabitation relationship has fallen from 9.9% to 8.9% for men and from 10.6% to 9.3% for women. However, judging from ethnographic data from the field, it is safe to argue that the stagnation or fall in the number of cohabiters can be explained by the rise of more alternative lifestyles among women. This is because more and more women are rejecting anything that might constitute an inconvenience to their lives. The growing number of “*Ohitorisama*,” or women bound to singlehood, especially among contemporary women, is one case in point.

This information nevertheless, does not negate the positive popularity of cohabitation among young Japanese women as a majority of the women (aged 20-30) this researcher interviewed have a positive disposition towards cohabitation.

As much as it can be used for positive ends, cohabitation also bears some negative implications on the cohabiters. Cohabitation can be alleged to be a relationship between two self-centered individuals who are likely to end the union if it fails to deliver the level of gratification they desire. This attitude may be carried on into marriage. Cherlin (1992) affirms:

Cohabitation comes with the ethic that a relationship should be ended if either partner is dissatisfied, this after all is part of the reason people live together rather than marrying. Consequently, the spread of cohabitation involves the spread of an individualistic outlook on intimate relations. (Lewis 38)

The attitude of most cohabiters is to avoid the legality of marriage that will pave the way for an easier exit if their expectations are not met. Others make a principled decision about cohabitation preceding the actual practice. All such calculated tactics around relationships

have the ability to asphyxiate the aura of love that most likely exists in an apolitical union.

Similarly, there are high chances that people change in relationships, especially when the initial wave of affection starts waning. A man may agree to cook or do the dishes during the time of cohabitation, but may decline to do such chores when the union is legalized. This is because anticipations change and intuitively, gender roles, cultural norms, and expectations play a psychosomatic role in gender relations. In other words, there are no guarantees that a “gentleman” in a cohabitation relationship will remain that way after legalizing the union.

Finally, there’s the ever-looming danger of unwanted pregnancy. This for some may result in short gun marriages. However, in cases where none of the partners is ready for the commitment of marriage, the woman will bear the brunt of raising her child alone. By implication, she will endure both financial hardship and the challenges of raising a child alone.

All the negatives notwithstanding, the study concludes that cohabitation, also a form of “trial marriage,” is a good source of female agency when the advantages are maximized. The dearth of data and useful materials on cohabitation in Japan reflects the fact that the Japanese government is oblivious to this silent change in the lifestyle of young singles. A change which is likely to affect Japanese society in more ways than marriage and fertility.

Chapter Five – *Ohitorisasama* & Gender Negotiation in Japan

When Being Single is not Synonymous with Loneliness

I do not want to change my lifestyle at all, neither do I think married life suits me. There is, therefore, no need to get married. If I continue to work like this, I can live on my own, and I have just realized that there are many other women like me.

Shiho Tanimura (1991) 結婚しないかもしれない症候群 (1991:9-10)

According to the 2013 U.S Census Bureau data, 96 million people have no spouse. In other words, 50.2% of all Americans over the age of 16 are single. "Single" as used here can be defined as adults who have never been married, are divorced, or are widowed. Of the singletons, 61% of them have never been married, 24% are divorced, and 15% are widowed. An increasing number of these single Americans - more than 31 million -- are living alone and make up 27% of all households. About 46% of all households nationwide are maintained by a single person. That adds up to 52 million singles²².

While we are yet to obtain such detailed statistics and figures about singles in

22 The US Is Becoming More European: Half of Adult Americans Are Now single
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2014/09/11/the-us-is-becoming-more-european-half-of-adult-americans-are-now-single/>

Japan, there is substantial evidence to demonstrate that single households and single lifestyles are on the rise among both males and females. The question is why is there a rising trend that is antithetical to the very core of the Japanese belief in harmonious living and obligations to family and society? More precisely, why is singleness on the rise among Japanese women? This section shall appraise singleness in light of the present gender discourse, drawing empirical evidence from available official data and data from the field.

In her work, *The Hidden Sun: Women of Modern Japan*, Robins-Mowry (1983) declares: “The Japanese are the most marrying people in the world: only 4 percent are still single in their late forties” (12). Alice M. Bacon made this assertion more specific by narrowing it down to the most affected gender: females. Bacon opines: “Marriage is as much a matter of course in a woman’s life as death and is no more to be avoided.”(1978:18). These assertions are just a few of the indicators of the centrality of marriage in the life of an average Japanese woman.

However, these observations held true several years ago when marriage was as important to the life of a woman as the very air she breathes. This was at a time when a woman was considered deformed or imperfect if she was still unmarried well after her *tekiraiki* or marriageable age. This was an age when women were as analogized with Christmas cakes that ought to be consumed by 25th December as they start to go stale from the 26th and even staller as the number increases. A time described by Emiko Ochai as “a nightmarish era which imposed a uniform life course on every man and every woman” (1966:55).

Times have changed, and women’s lifestyles have evolved in many ways. Nemoto et.al (2012), however, warns that the “weakening of the social pressure to marry

does not relate to changes in employed men's gendered views of marriage, which remain traditional" (1).

In Japan, much like elsewhere, marriage and childbirth have both been venerated as an all-important step or landmark in life, a landmark that (almost) every woman aspires to. Marriage brings validation and security and women who decide to abhor marriage are mostly considered immature, selfish, (*Wagamama*) and threats to humanity. (Hendry 1981:1985). Since the mid-1990s, however, Japanese society has moved into a major period of change and restructuring, especially with the spread of globalization and neoliberal policies. (Suzuki et.al 2010).

One of the fallouts of these major changes is the spread of individualization. This is because "the Japanese have a tendency to seek realization; at the same time, they also want secure employment" Suzuki et. al. (2010:1). The search for self-realization and a stable employment is not unerringly restricted to men, as Japanese women have also embarked on their own journeys of self-discovery.

***Ohitorisama* against the Background of Gender in the Japanese Society**

Japanese society essentially operates on an almost neatly delineated gender framework (Lebra1984; Fukutake 1989; Iwao 1995). This framework have been subjected to serious debate and various public discourse in many forums. Some scholars, like Kyoko Inoue and Rosenberger, have vehemently excused the practice while others, like Sumiko Iwao, have tried to interpret the practice of gender role delineation from a consoling point of view. Inoue, for instance, maintains that:

Men and women are equal and have equal rights, but I believe that they have different responsibilities as a housewife within her home, and the man has responsibilities as a man... if we compare marriage with a tree, the wife is the roots that hold the tree below the ground, and the husband is the branches above ground. (1991:15).

Arguments like these, even from female scholars, have helped to justify and even sustain hegemonic gender division in Japan for decades. Such arguments are also implicated in the slow changing attitudes of the male sex toward gender relations in Japan.

As women are the “roots that hold the tree below the ground,” they are expected to work and function from behind the scene as roots are in actuality buried under soil. Career-minded women have had to withstand the troubles and frustrations of having their careers thwarted midway and forfeit their ambitions to comply with societal expectations.

Modern Japanese women who are questioning the correctness of the society’s resolve to place a glass ceiling on the path of their growth are probing alternative possibilities. These women are seeking ways of challenging hegemonic laws and have come to identify the option of remaining single as a practical solution.

With the advancement of individualism, this option is progressively becoming a viable one. For as Lewis (2001) remarks, individualism is “believed to have undermined the commitment to intimate relationships” (2001:8). It also retains the potential to inflict havoc on the institution of marriage as an individualist is usually torn between the pursuit of personal pleasure and the decision to marry (Tokuhiro, 2004).

As the concept of individualism is antithetical to the very soul of Japan, *Ohitorisama* as word has come to take on negative connotations. This negative meaning is popularized by the popular (read sexist) press that portrays such lifestyles as self-centered and indulgent. Women in urban areas who remain single and spend money on themselves are known as *Hanakozoku*, a pejorative term derived from the name of the most popular women's magazine in Tokyo, Hanako, which contains detailed articles about shopping centers, restaurants, and foreign destinations.

Back in 1991, Shiho Tanimura wrote her 結婚しないかもしれない症候群 (The I May not Marry Syndrome). The book comprises a collection of anonymously written letters from single Japanese women expressing the dilemma faced by contemporary women who are both frustrated and hopeful. In their chronicles, they tell of their experiences as young unmarried women in society.

They are frustrated by the patriarchal system and lack of options available to them, but remain hopeful at the prospect of finding a way around their predicaments. Due to the seeming unpopularity of the lifestyle of *Ohitorisama* and some of its attendant challenges, they are thrown into a dilemma, torn between the decision to maintain the status quo or seek alternative routes.

Consequently, we see these young women preparing themselves for a future of uncertainty by signing up for singles retirement pension plans, buying apartments, and getting psychologically prepared for an uncertain future. At the end of the book, the editor writes:

...now that I have written this book, I have begun to see the vague position of “maybe not getting [married]” in a positive way. I believe that this change in my outlook is due to the interviews with each of the people I met. All these women realized that they might not get married; all had anxieties about such future, all of them were alone, and yet all of them had the spunk to keep going. (1991:89)

Since her options were untested and quite novel at the time, the tone of her book sounded uncertain, as the title suggests. Japanese women have now become more audacious, more daring, and have shed some of the cloaks of uncertainty. The age of “maybe not” has not been entirely supplanted by the dawn of an era of absolute certainty, however, the growing number of people opting for a life of singleness is a demonstration of a new confidence, a new poise, a quality that was absent among single women in the past.

Evidence of the Mounting Popularity of *Ohitorisama* in Contemporary Japan

Japanese women, like their American counterparts, are beginning to shun romantic relationships and all their attendant paraphernalia in droves. For instance, results of data from the 14th National Fertility Survey conducted by National Institute for Population and Social Security Research on the “Attitudes toward Marriage and Family among Japanese Singles” reveal that in 1990, only 4% of women in Japan were lifetime singles. By 2010, the percentage was 22.61% and by 2030, demographers project that it will be as high as 46%².

This trend was first observed in 1997 when the number of women that see any merit in marriage dropped from 71.4% to 69.9% according to the same survey. The study

further revealed that “the proportion of never-married women who stated that they are ‘not in a relationship with the opposite sex’ amounted to 49.5%” (44.7% in the previous survey); the proportion of such women therefore increased a little. Moreover, singles who are not involved in any romantic relationship and do not want to date anyone accounted for 22.6% of women. Meanwhile, the proportion of never-married persons who have a potential marriage partner accounts for only 27.0% (27.3%) of all women.

This data is a broad indicator of the general attitude of women towards marriage and committed relationships as a whole. As this is a survey, it lacks depths and detailed explanation for the mounting number of *Ohitorisama* among present day women. The following section seeks to fill in such gaps.

Being single is not Synonymous with Loneliness: Case Studies

In this section, I will employ case studies of young single women who have grown past the traditionally appropriate marriage age of 25 and are yet to make a decision concerning marriage or do not see marriage as a priority, but instead elevate their present careers and life goals.

The data for this section was collected from the last quarters of 2013 to the last half of 2014. A total of 26 young single women were interviewed around the Yokohama area and its environs. Their interviews were sorted out and cases of women who desire to marry but have yet to find a partner were separated from women whose present single status are a lifestyle choice or a politically motivated choice. Some of such cases have been selected for analysis. The stories that follow are the product the selection.

Expectedly, all 14 of the individualistic women are financially independent. All but 3 of them have a bachelor's degree and are highly motivated about their jobs and hobbies. Most importantly, they have concrete plans and closely knit networks of friends. It is important to note that the decision to remain single is not always motivated by good careers or education.

Rather, it is the product of an individual's understanding of their environment, contacts, and life experiences. It is also a product of how the above factors are shaped by the prevailing gender norm in Japanese society. The common denominator amongst all the women opting for a lifestyle of singleness is their belief that such a lifestyle serves as a vehicle for evading all forms gender roles or what sociologist Inamatsu (2009) termed, "role harassment," in modern Japan.

Ayumi Yoshida "Being single for me, brings more than just freedom."

Ayumi was born in 1974 to the Yoshidas, a salaried worker, and his wife, a housewife. Ayumi's mother, an extremely strong and assertive woman, ruled the house. Her father, on the other hand, a quiet gentleman who was largely obedient to her mother's rules. Ayumi has a turbulent relationship with her mother but is cordial with her father.

Ayumi hates studying with a passion, so after graduating from high school, she made no effort to proceed any further. She joined a small company and worked as an accountant for over ten years. She then switched jobs and worked as a local reporter for some time before joining the local ward office as a staff.

Ayumi also took to making stuffed animals, sewing, and other handicrafts. She is passionate about her stuffed animals business, which grosses in a reasonable amount

of income every month. Most importantly, she claims that the act of making and being surrounded by stuffed animals is a world of its own. “It is a world devoid of loneliness as you lose touch with the passage of time.”

As a young lady, Ayumi dated quite an impressive number of men, but the thought of marriage never crossed her mind.

I never liked the idea of getting married. I got marriage proposals from at least two of the men I dated, but I turned them both down. I think marriage is too much of a hassle (*mendokusai*). As a married woman, you have people who depend on you to help plan run their lives. You handle taking domestic decisions and your life essentially revolves around domestic issues. You bend your desires to fit that of your husband. At other times, you abandon such desires or plans altogether to do what is most suitable for your marriage. I just want to be me. I want to do exactly what I want at any point in time. Marriage takes away your freedom and sometimes marriage takes you and turns you into someone you are unable to recognize. I want to remain me so I said to marriage “No Thank you.”

In the 14th survey conducted by the National Institute for Population and Social Security Research cited earlier, the study found that “The most attractive part of single life is ‘freedom.’” It expounds how, “‘Freedom in actions or lifestyles’ was by far the most chosen merit of single life by both men and women.” The researchers further deduced that the response “indicates that the never-married respondents consistently feel that marriage would restrict their actions, lives, financial situations, and friendships”.

Ayumi obviously fears the loss of her freedom. However, more than losing her freedom, she sees the whole marriage structure or mode of operation as too much of a hassle. For instance, she worries about losing her world to a limited space - that of her house. She wants her life to revolve around more things than just domestic affairs. More importantly, Ayumi fears the loss of herself as a human being. This is because of the tenacity of structural forces that operate to exclude women from full participation in the corporate world. The presence of these forces makes it difficult for people like Ayumi, who operate their own small business.

When asked what Ayumi thinks of kids, she responded in the negative:

I have always hated children (*kodomo wa diakirai desu*). To me they are noisy and impossible just like men. They require so much attention and are unable to do anything on their own for at least the first few years of their lives. That is too bothersome, and I am unable to deal with it. I love my elder sister's kids. They are cute. However, you should understand that I only visit them once in a long while.

An insufficient knowledge of the detailed lifestyle of *ohitorisama* would lead an observer to conclude hastily that Ayumi is suffering from some psychosomatic problem or has an undiagnosed case of depression. However, opting for a life of singleness involves a distancing of oneself from all the potential markers that are used in the enunciation, the categorization, and the legitimization of a good wife and mother on the one hand and patriarchal hegemony on the other.

Men control the mechanisms of valuations, and a woman is valued on a higher scale when she fits properly into Japan's chauvinist society. This includes getting married and bearing children to reverse the declining population and save Japan from becoming "a Childless Society" (Jolivet Muriel 2003). Her decision to abhor marriage and childbirth undermines sexist gendered assumptions and possesses far-reaching implications on the existing skewed gender formulations.

Ayumi reveals that she has also stopped dating all together as she is busy all week and would rather invest her time off on more profitable ventures than going on dates. She also takes a particular exception to the fact that before going on dates, ladies are expected to make an effort to look their best.

They dress beautifully with a well-made up face and have their hair made just to look good for the man. She wonders if men make such efforts before going to meet women, as they sometimes show up in jeans and T shirt. Ayumi believes that dating in itself is still a way of validating societal expectations of what the life of a "normal" woman should be.

She contends that she has dated and traveled so much in the past and believes that sort of life appears particularly boring to her now. She lives alone and enjoys her private world of stuffed animal making. She also has other pastimes like playing Tennis and learning English. She goes on annual vacations within and outside of Japan. Ayumi hopes to live such a simple and non-contoured lifestyle until she grows old, upon which she will move into a nursing home. For now, she claims to enjoy her life, especially because she is not "answerable to anyone and owes no one".

Ayumi's lifestyle choice shatters preconceived images of gender in her society. Ayumi does not belong to the elite class of highly educated career women whose exposure to the world via education and study abroad opportunities afford them the opportunity to see and compare the world from another point of view. Notwithstanding, her personal journey of self-exploration created a different being whose iconoclastic audaciousness reveals a resentment at a social system that debases the average woman.

This is evidenced by her obvious abhorrence of everything that is considered "normal" or "acceptable" in her society. She abhors dating, even for the sake of it. She denigrates the effort women put into making themselves look presentable to men and most of all, she hates what is considered the ultimate symbol of womanhood: motherhood. Ayumi, while not privileging career, is emphasizing the possibility of self-growth and self-fulfillment on her terms.

Mika Yoshino "Being alone opens the Door to Self-Discovery."

Mika was born in 1973 but looks at least 15 years younger than her age. The first of two girls, her father had high hopes that she would marry a responsible young man into the Yoshino family as a *mukoyoshi* to take on the family's name.

She grew up in Yokohama and attended an average private university in Tokyo. At the time, she was in a relationship with a young shy man who was two years her senior in the University. She joined a big company in the non-career track, or general line of workers, where women are considered brides in waiting and are expected to quit school for marriage after about three years.

She quit after three years, but not to get married. According to Mika:

I knew marriage was what I was supposed to do. I mean, that was the next stage in the outline of the life of a woman in Japan. My boyfriend was also ready for it, and my parents were waiting for an announcement from us. However, I did not feel that I was ready for that life yet. I felt like I wanted more, more of knowledge, more worldly experience. I want to see the world from another direction, from a non-Japanese perspective. I just felt I would be frustrated and bored if I married at the time so instead of a wedding announcement, I announced to my parents that I wanted to go to Australia to study English.

Her parents were quite disappointed and her boyfriend refused to give his blessing. He forbade her “inordinate ambition” while Mika insisted she would go whether he liked it or not. In the end, he said he was fine and that she could go. Mika claimed that her one year in Australia was the most interesting experience she had ever had, partly because it was an audacious and a non-conformist move and also because she could learn English and worked as a volunteer to people who truly valued her talent and let her do things beyond serving tea.

Mika returned to many surprises in Japan after her one-year stint in Australia. Her longtime boyfriend, as if to punish her for her actions, had not only met a new girl but had married her in the space of one year. She was totally heartbroken, but more devastating is the fact that her parents blamed her for her boyfriend’s actions and made it a point to frequently remind her of her missed chance to become the wife of “a responsible and agreeable” man.

Upon deeper reflections on the entire “tragedy”, Mika concluded that her parents’ anger was not borne out of genuine concern for her future, but out of the fact that her ex-boyfriend had agreed to her parents’ proposition of taking the family name and moving in with the Yoshino. She also felt that her ex-boyfriend did what he did not to punish her as she thought. He instead felt threatened by her desire to be more than an ordinary Japanese woman. He feared that more knowledge and exposure would make her an “abnormal” wife, a wife who “knows more than her husband”.

This realization for Mika was a perplexing eye opener. Mika recognized that her parents actions were borne out of a desire to have their daughter conform to a culture that continues to sanction and perpetuate status inequalities. Her ex-boyfriend on his part was afraid of change and unwilling to be saddled with a woman whose actions interrogate the conventions of their time.

To redress this societal anomaly, Mika decided to engage cultural valuation by discounting and challenging all that the society essentializes as the ideal for womanhood. She began by taking up a job in a bank in a rigorous career track. She worked very hard to prove that she could be as good as men, but once again realized that her actions were neither re-inventing herself as a person nor were they geared toward creating an identity that fit her personality. She was rather replicating societal expectations from the reverse. Doing what the society expected men to do and so once more, she quit the bank job. Mika’s decision to quit her job is a reflection of Nancy R. Rosenberger’s (1996) opinion on individualist women and work:

The search for freedom and individual choice for many young women involves leisure and consumption rather than jobs that require long hours

of devotion within a hierarchy; women recognize that the full-time career role carries as much stress and curtailment of “freedom” as does the full-time housewife role”. (1996:30).

This assertion does not hold true in all cases as many single ladies and professionally ambitious women opt for this lifestyle, considering it removes the fundamental obstacle (marriage) that stands in their way of progress. In the case of Mika, however, Rosenberger’s submission holds true. She decided that she did not need to prove a point to anyone. She resolved that her journey to self-rediscovery and fulfillment must be taken at her own pace. A pace antithetical to societal expectations that involves Mika redefining her career path and life goals.

Mika found a more flexible job that paid much less but enough to take care of her bills. She signed up for yoga as well as a dance club. She honed her skiing skills and acquired the license to become a skill instructor and volunteers at other places as well. This she claims gives her psychological peace and happiness, keeps her busy at her own pace, and leaves her out of the rat race of Japanese society.

Azusa Tsukuda “There are more attractive things in life than Marriage.”

Azusa, 33, was born and bred in Yokohama and studied law at Kyori University in Tokyo. Upon graduation, she worked as an editor and producer at Fuji television for years. She then quit her job and went to Australia to study English for one year. Upon her return from Australia, she got a new job as a lifestyle magazine editor. When asked why at 33 she is still single, Azusa replied by saying she lacks the opportunity to meet men.

She states that for now, though, she is not bothered about her status. In the words of Azusa,

I know in Japan, people think that marriage is equal to happiness, and it is not good to be unmarried, but I think happiness depends on individuals. People define what constitute happiness in their lives. I want to get married someday too, but I am yet to find the kind of man I want and instead of marrying for the sake of it, I would rather stay single. In life, there are more attractive things than marriage. Most men these days are childish so for now, I am living alone with my cat.

Azusa claims that some people her age still live with their parents, and that is okay because the salary of women in Japan can be quite low, so it is often easier to live with parents financially. However, she believes that moving out of her parents' house will give her the independence she craves and reduce the pressure to get married, and thus foster a better relationship between them. "I want my independence, and I want us to have a good relationship, so I moved out," she said.

Finally, Azusa admits, "Even though I do not think about it a lot for now, one day I want to get married. I do not know if that is going to happen because I have a strong woman personality, and strong women are not in demand. Men are afraid of strong women".

Sachiko Tsuge "In this age, Being Unmarried is no Longer Shameful."

Sachiko, 31, was born and bred in Yokohama is the first of two girls. She didn't quite like school, but was encouraged by her mother to at least have a skill that can make her financially independent, since in Japan, a woman with no husband and no skill is doomed. She decided on nursing and went to study nursing at the Red Cross nursing

school. On graduation at the age of 20, she got a job at the Red Cross hospital. She worked for 5 years and at the age of 25, quit her job and went to Australia for 1.5 years to study English and aromatherapy.

She then returned to Japan and got reemployed at the same hospital. She worked hard throughout her 20s and never thought about marriage (although her younger sister is 29, married, and has two kids). Even though Sachiko sometimes feels pressured by her parents to find a spouse, she feels no urgency about getting married. She proclaims:

Today, I am not married, I earn big and I am happy, but many people do not think so. In this age (時代) even if you are not married you do not feel any shame (恥ずかしくない) anymore. I may wake up one day, say 10 years from now and realize I am going to be alone forever which sometimes bother me but, I have friends, good reliable friends who are also single so I may be fine.

Sachiko lives alone because she believes that her parents are too much of a hassle. “Since I can pay my rent, and my company pays housing allowance, I do not need to live with my parents,” she purports. Sachiko ruminates about the difficulties faced by single Japanese women by observing:

The Japanese economy is getting bad and life for the average single woman is pretty hard so either way, it is not easy for women, however, it all boils down to choice. Some men think that Japanese women are lazy and do not want to work, only looking for someone to parasite on, but not all women want to live like that. Men in Japan have to change their opinion about the nature of male/female relationship so we can both make progress.

Sachiko believes that the alternative to a change of opinion/thinking concerning gender relations is a situation where more people (both men and women) will continue to remain single.

She wishes there was a less binding form of relationship that will be generally accepted by the public. Sometimes, I think instead of marriage “limited cohabitation” (limited 同姓) people can just have a stable boyfriend. Meet over the weekend and go back to their lives on week days. I cannot imagine living with someone forever, I need my own space. I know *Ohitorisama* is a little bit negative (バかにしているでしょう). To be sincere, sometimes, just sometimes, I worry about my future she said.

Michiko Kato “Sometimes, living alone is the Best.”

At 29, Michiko was still single. At the time, she had a good but very busy job in downtown Tokyo and lived a life that was and still is the opposite of society’s expectation for her. Born in the mid-1960s, Michiko had her early education in a public school, but from middle school up to university, Michiko attended a private school. Out of sheer curiosity about how the human mind works, Michiko decided to study psychology at university.

Upon graduation, Michiko joined a chain store as a retail staff member. She said the job was busy and highly demanding but very enjoyable, too. When two years after her *tekiraiki*²³ she was unmarried, her mother, a very traditional woman, was worried. Two

23 A metaphor for the appropriate age of marriage in Japan which climaxes at the age of 25. Christmas cakes are best consumed on Christmas day as it grows stale afterwards and considered bad afterwards.

years later, at 29, her mother was so worried that Michiko decided to get married just for her mother's sake, saying, "I married for my mother."

Through *omiai* (arranged marriage), she married a young researcher and quit her job to be at home. Michiko lived with her husband for only two months as he secured a grant to study abroad soon after the marriage and had to leave the country. He and his family asked Michiko to go join him at his new base, but Michiko, who got pregnant immediately and was experiencing near miscarriage, was advised by her doctor against the trip.

To save her pregnancy, Michiko did not travel. Unfortunately, the decision to save her baby instead of travel to be with her husband did not go over well with her husband and his family. During this time, Michiko claims she was psychologically abused by her husband and his family.

Upon his return to Japan one year later, her husband wanted a divorce for her purported non-submissive attitude. The controversy surrounding the divorce consumed an entire year. Since she had an infant baby, her husband was ordered to pay alimony. Yet he refused to pay, and he and Michiko were back in court for three whole years. She eventually won the alimony case at the upper court.

In all, Michiko suffered extensively from ordeal with her former husband, in-laws, and her own family, which never supported her decision to stay back in Japan and save her baby. She had to fight for herself and her son all alone. She discovered to her total amazement that her family did not support her. They blamed her for the divorce and blamed her for the messy nature of the divorce.

Recall that Michiko had quit her job after marriage and lawyer fees cost a fortune, too. These were trying times for Michiko all because she decided to get married.

Ironically, the only reason she decided to get married was because she wanted to please her mother, who was not pleased with the idea of having an adult single woman at home.

In retrospect, Michiko says, single women with careers and no husbands were few, so it was difficult to withstand the pressure from family. In present times, however, women are lucky to have to be able to make a choice without being pressured or judged. Michiko said goodbye to men after her two-month stint in marriage and subsequent divorce. She raised her child as a single mother, and even though she was a young woman in her early 30s at the time, she has abhorred by men ever since.

Unlike the other women described above, Michiko tried to conform to societal norms and expectations by getting married. Her marriage can be described as a selfless service to her highly customary mother. She sacrificed her self-desire at the altar of societal expectations, a sacrifice which is necessitated by a culture that privileges marriage as the ultimate sign of a woman's success.

Michiko's unfortunate situation exemplifies the dysfunctional gender system where logic can be stood on its head when a male ego is wounded to the point of risking the life of a mother and her unborn child.

She believes that women marry because they believe the myth that women can only be happy when they are married: very shallow and simplistic reason for anyone to embark on the journey into a marriage she claims. Even though Michiko lived as a married woman for two months, she is convinced that sometimes it is best to live alone. Living alone and being by yourself "saves you a whole lot of trouble and psychological trauma," she concludes.

Discussion

The life stories of these women represent a microcosm of the packets of the not too “silent revolutions” and resistances that are springing up among women in present day Japan to challenge the gender formulation dominant in the society. Due to this asymmetric gender formulation, women like Ayumi, for instance, are beginning to see the male-female relationship and all its attendants trappings with the eye of a hassle (面倒).

She sees marriage as a hassle, she sees the act of caring for someone else (husband or baby) as a hassle, she views domestic work as a hassle, and even the act of looking good for the sake of a man as a hassle. Ayumi’s anger, coupled with her position on marriage, can be compared to that of Tanimura’s (1991) when she blurts out in her 結婚しないかもしれない症候群:

I do not want to stand in the kitchen so many times in one day, and I do not want the smell of oil on me nor my hands getting caroused by dish soap. I don’t want any kids, and if I make the mistake of getting one, I will die if I have to sit at home to take care of the kid so if I can’t hire a babysitter, then I’d rather not have one or I’d work outside then use my earnings to hire one. I cannot just be a traditional housewife, which is the most boring life imaginable. I do not want any husband or children to be the hero of my life; I want to be my own hero. (1991:9)

The position taken by Ayumi and other like-minded women forms part of the gender roles blurring that is increasingly coming to replace gender roles and specialization in Japan. Ortner terms such agency the agency of “projects”. It is the agency of “intentions, purposes and desires formulated in terms of culturally established

“projects”. These projects, or “serious games,” may be unpopular, yet not uncommon, in the spate of the ongoing self-realization going on in modern Japan. This position affords them the opportunity to challenge hierarchies of male over female, of corporate over domestic, constructing an alternative reality under which they see themselves as the center of their lives.

Mika, Azusa, and Sachiko represent the new crop of women who are in search of a new self, or what Kelsky (2008:87) terms “*atarashii jibun*”. The women have embarked on a self-transformative journey. A journey that is based on individual desires, self-development, and the quest for fairness.

These women understand the gender dogma and seek a reformation, the alternative of which is a life of perpetual singleness. In the course of the self-transformative quest, their consciousness of what constitutes a happy life became broadened, resulting in a consciousness gap between their expectations on the one hand and the expectations of their counterparts on the other. Writer Takeshi commented on this gap when she wrote:

I often overhear women complaining about their husbands... The word human being crops up frequently in the speech of these unhappy wives Underlying its use is the married woman’s fervent pleas that she be treated not simply as a wife, not as a live-in prostitute, not as a maid, not as a mother, not even as a woman, but as an independent human being. It reflects that a relationship between a married couples is first and foremost a relationship between two human beings (quoted in Kelsky 2008:88).

These ladies, just like the author, are aware of the need to find themselves, and have indeed found themselves. They thus possess an expectation and an outlook to life and marriage that goes beyond marriage for the sake of procreation or financial security. Like Sachiko said, men have to change their thinking. The society has to change its opinion regarding the role and status of women in the society.

Women like Azusa see more attractive things in life than marriage and having achieved substantial financial independence and freedom, including the chance to live alone. Moreover, “they are questioning the wisdom of exchanging their jobs for marriage” (Awaya and Philips, 1996:245). This is especially so in contemporary times where, as Sachiko observes, it is no longer shameful to be single.

The individualization that is arguably associated with the increasing consciousness gap possessed by contemporary women is also responsible for the rising trend of divorce. (Suzuki et.al 2010). Institutionalized sexism makes it difficult for the privileged gender to keep track of the lives of partners, thus overlooking the fact that they are humans after all. Michiko’s life story is a case in point. Even though her and her baby’s lives were at risk, she was “fired” from her matrimonial home for being insubmissive. Michiko, who on her part is aware of her rights, contested her divorce case up to the Supreme Court alone without family support and has made the decision to avoid men ever since.

It is, however, worth noting that life for the single woman can be harsh and unpleasant in Japan. This is because single women are at the bottom rung of the economy and are most likely to be employed as contract staff or in part-time positions. (Kuchikomi 2011). See figures 8-10

Percentage of women in regular employment
(2014)

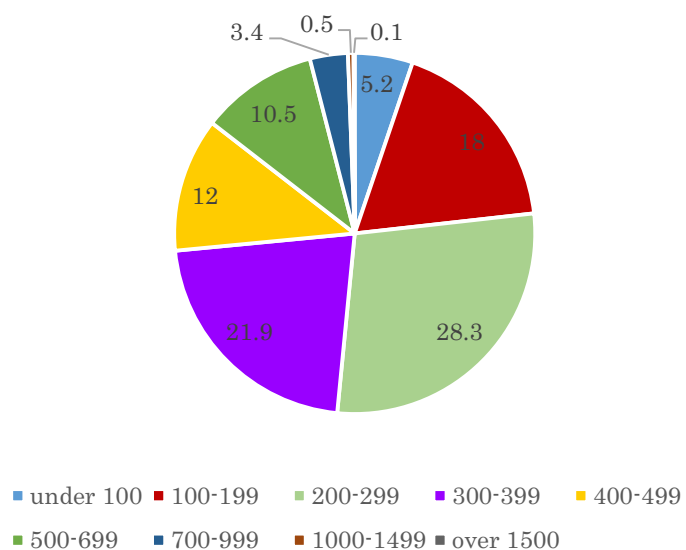


Figure 8

Percentage of women in non-regular employment

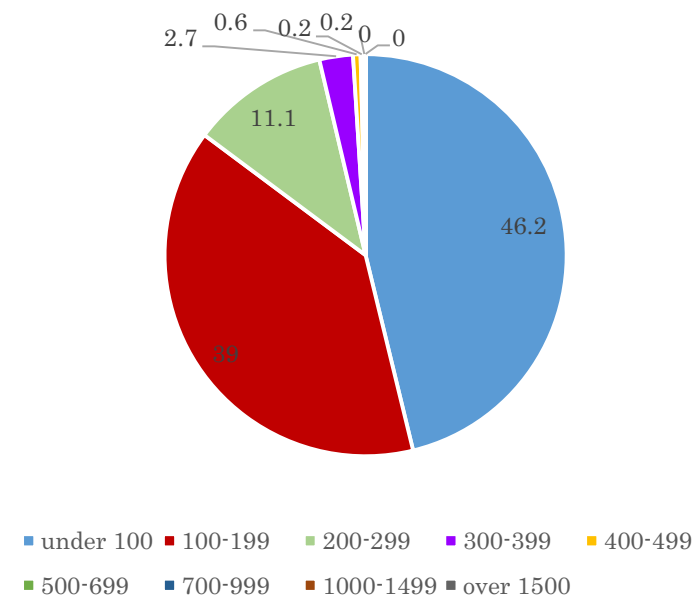


Figure 9

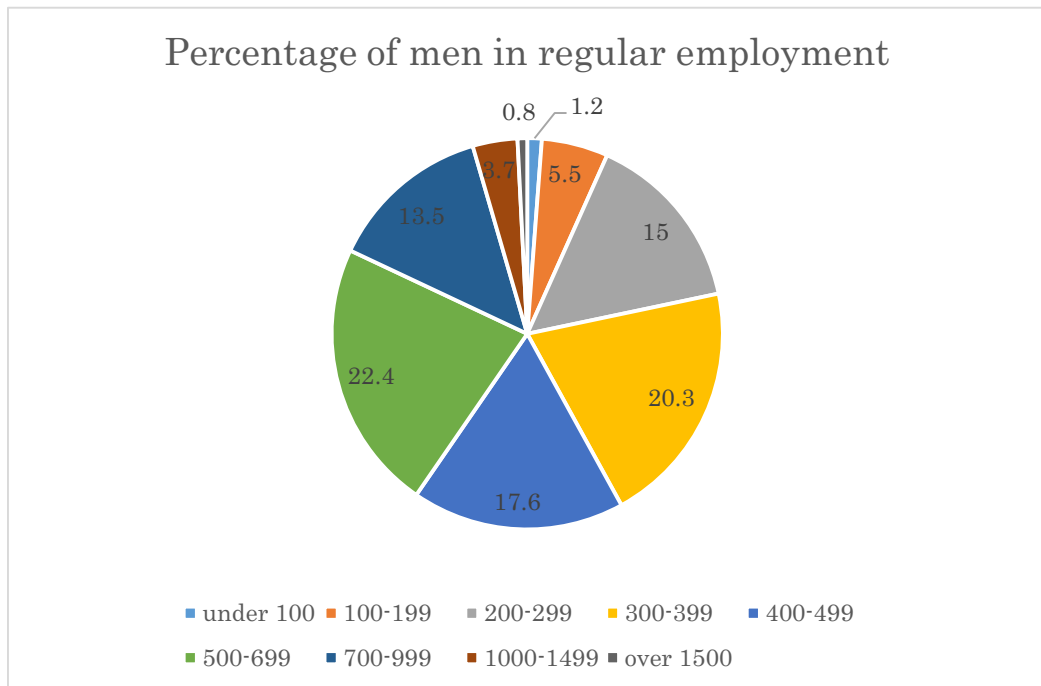


Figure 10

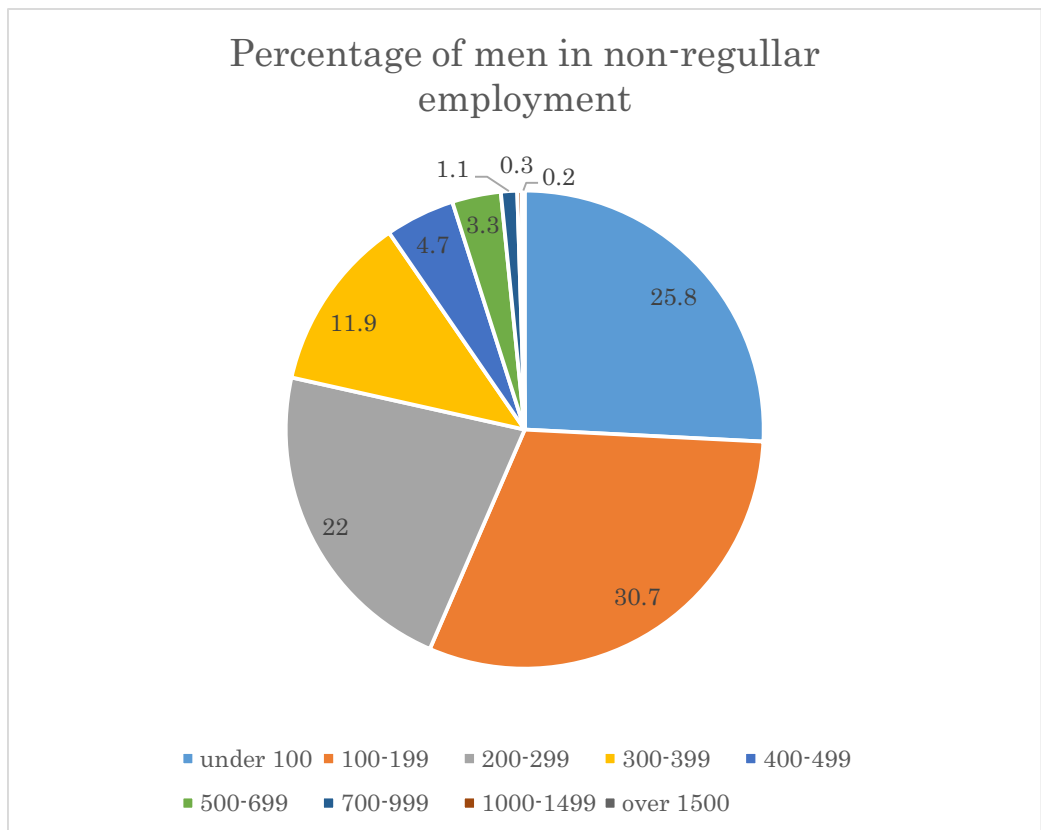


Figure 11. Data from the ministry of Health Labor and Welfare of Japan

Writing in a national dailies *Japan Today*, Aya Abe notes that “In working demographic (age 20 to 50), one single female out of three in Japan is poor,” and “57% of the nation’s poor are women, and that statistical data show the gap between males and females has been widening since 1995.” The key factor for this skewed poverty rates points to the fact that about half of Japanese women are not employed as full-time staff with bonus and insurance, but are rather mostly part-time. Consequently, the author concludes that “as the ratio of single people to the overall population continues to increase, the number of impoverished females is bound to keep climbing.”

This reality of the Japanese woman’s financial status can be said to be responsible for the dichotomous “contradiction,” as seen in the ambivalence felt by Azusa, Sachiko, and Mika toward shutting their minds completely to the idea of marriage. Azusa and Sachiko both confessed their worries for the future. They worry about life in 10 or 20 years when they are not as strong and able to work as well. This is in line with the worries expressed by some of the contributing authors to Tanimura’s 結婚しないかもしれない症候群.

Despite the editors optimistic tone, a few of her contributors still express their uncertainties about a future of being perpetual single: “I decided to be on my own, but I am also worried about my future. Can I buy a house? Can I continue to work? Who would take care of me after retirement? How do I live in old age? I bought the Toshiba stock to save up for the future, but the value of the stock is falling so how do I go on with such a negative life? (1991:17). As “projects” of this nature forms a fundamental dimension of the idea of agency. They are thus “disrupted in and disallowed to subordinates”

This is the uncertainty faced by many *Ohitorisama* women who are seen from an economic standpoint as “losers”. In her 2003 book, *The Distant Cry of Loser Dogs* (*Makeinu no tobe*), Junko Sakai sees single women over 30 as “losers”. She contends that they are “losers” not because of a character flaw, but as brave women who are adventurous and more honest than women who have chosen the safer path of marriage. Sakai claims that these single women in Japan are losers only because of the “prevailing social and economic conditions that privileges married women and create disadvantages for those without a family” (Sakai 2003:7 Nakano 2011:133).

Conclusively, these women are change agencies; they are actors who are actively shaping the course of their lives by their individual practices. Although their individual acts of resistance through non-marriage have yet to translate into widespread societal change, they are beginning to be noticed.

Furthermore, contrary to Rosenberger’s assertion that “their resistance is fragile and momentarily intended to increase options rather than change the status quo decisively” (18:2003), these women’s resistance are being sustained and more young women are opting for or considering the option of single life as demonstrated by National Fertility Survey statistics. The mounting figures of practitioners of *Ohitorisama* in contemporary times are evidence of the changes sweeping through the lives of women in Japan.

Chapter Six- International Marriage

Gender Politics: International Marriage and the Gender Game

Women Have No Need of Borders”²⁴

Women have no need of borders

We need only bear the child of the man we love

Race nationality, religion- none matter

Men war to make boundaries; they make nations

However, women have no need of borders

We need only love.

Nakagaki Sachiko

The Game of Gender

Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* perceives human practices from a political standpoint, describing the relationship between institutions/structures and individuals as that of a game between “strategy and tactics.” Arguing that individuals operate in environments defined by strategies by using “tactics,” various “acts of doing” that culminates in creative resistance to perceived asymmetrical structures.

²⁴ Nakagaki Sachiko’s women have no need for Border was published in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, cited by Kelsky, 2008:117

Sherry Ortner (1996, 2008), like de Certeau, perceives societal gender relations from a performative point of view. She describes her perspective as a game that involves skills, techniques, and intelligence with an approach that tends to highlight social asymmetry as the core of both action and structure. States or societies have in recent times generated two new games that have relevance for the questions of gender and gender equality.

One of these games is the game of power and authority, otherwise called patriarchy, in “which the role of the father as an essentially political role emerges. Fathers are constructed as disciplined and well positioned within a hierarchy, made responsible to the state as “heads of household” (Ortner 1996:14). The fathers are afforded remarkable power and authority over their subordinates in the realm of his household and this includes the female and all others and finally “fathers are highly fetishized within the symbolic order, as ancestors, gods, or God” (15).

The other game, according to Ortner’s thesis, pertains to social mobility, the newly invented desire to move up. This game, she says, “intersects with gender in an almost endless variety of ways” (15).

Ortner’s concept of social mobility, as conjured in the following proposition, is not limited to mobility in the direct sense of a movement from down to up. It is not to be construed strictly in the sense of the practice of hypergamy that she engaged as a seminal case. Rather, as previously underscored, it is a game that intersects with gender in infinite ways.

In this assessment, the present study calls attention particularly to a not so new but promising counter-hegemonic move to the perceived disadvantageous circumstances surrounding gender relations in Japan – international marriage. This phenomenon can be argued to be consistent with the politics of feminine identity and women’s struggle and is considered relevant in the changing status of women in contemporary Japan.

An important point in this game is the centrality of the doer, the agent, actor, or individual whose activities are the locus for understanding the processes involved in the reproduction of or change in some set of structural features.

Previous studies on international marriage in Japan mostly focused on rural dwellers who have married Asian women from neighboring Korea, China, or the Philippines (the so called *hanayome*) to curb the shortage of brides (Matsuoka, 1989; Shukuya, 1988; Iida 1991; Bauzon) or marriage as a means for migration (Kojima 1996) through selectnations with a huge number of brides for Japan (e.g. brides from the Philippines) (Yamazaki 1988; Suzuki 1998 2000) or couples (mostly middle class) where the foreign spouse is usually a Westerner (Imamura, 1988; Ma, 1996; Refsing, 1998; Kelsky 2001).

Most of these studies, according to Nicola Piper, are “grounded in economic theory.” Consequently, “these non-Japanese wives from other Asian countries are often depicted as poor, ‘using’ Japanese men as a remedy to alleviate their economic problems.” Piper added that the “multiple dialectics involved, the possibility of Japanese men ‘using’ Asian women, as well as the active decision making on the part of the women, are usually ignored” (Piper 2003:459).

This chapter explores such “multiple dialectics” and “active decision makings” while arguing that besides love, other motives abound for international marriage that are

neither non-political nor non-individualistic. By looking at international marriage from the perspective of a Japanese woman, this chapter argues that gender is a game and irrespective of who gets 'used' by whom, the game of gender, if dexterously played, can bring advantageous results for women in Japan's patriarchal society.

This approach is enthused by modern studies of gender as performative and negotiated practice, which is most powerful at the margins of cultures and nationalities (Butler, 1990; Ortner 1996).

It is worth noting that the Japanese women highlighted in this research represent a tiny fraction of all Japanese women. Although the drift this study investigates is evident as of late, it does not in any way generalize its result as representative of the entire female Japanese population or international marriages.

Also worth mentioning is the way "foreign husbands" or "foreigners" have been used in this study. The research collapses all foreigners into a single basket and does not draw conclusions based on clear-cut geographic boundaries. The Japanese word for "foreigner" is 外国人, or its contraption 外人, which literally translates as "outside country person" or "outside person" and is used to refer to a "foreigner," "non-Japanese", "outsider" or "different".

It makes no initial distinction, however, between race color and nationality. Also, the general belief or attitude of some Japanese women is the expectation that a 外人 is definitely *yasashii* (kind) and different from Japanese men. Japanese women's belief in *gaijin yasashisa* is sometimes applied arbitrarily to every 外人 man they meet. Thus the decision to lump foreigners from all nationalities and races into the same pool of 外人.

About International Marriage in Japan

Marriage between a Japanese national and non-Japanese person dates back to the Meiji period with the first officially permitted marriage by an act of law held on March 14, 1871. It entered into law before the old Meiji Constitution (1889) and the former Nationality Law (1899). At this time, intermarriages were frowned upon and bore social consequences.²⁵

International marriages have since taken significant strides. According to 2001 demographic data issued by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, out of a total of 800,000 registered marriages, an estimated 40,000 were international marriage, hence representing a ratio of 1:20 of all marriages. It further reports that there has been a 9.6 fold increase in the number of international marriages over the past 30 years, with a particularly dramatic rise in the early 1990s. In the 1970s, there were only 5,546 international marriages. In 2000, there were 36,263. (See table 1 and figures four & 5 below).

Japanese husband-foreign wife marriage account for a sizable 80% of all international marriages in Japan. The majority of marriages are among Japanese men and non-Japanese women are between Japanese men and Koreans and Japanese and Filipinas, as well as other Asian countries²⁶.

25 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_marriage_\(Japan\)#cite_note-ACT-GRAL-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_marriage_(Japan)#cite_note-ACT-GRAL-1)

26 Yearly Trend of Marriage according to Nationality Statistics. Ministry of Health, Labor & Welfare. Retrieved 2014/09/29 <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/suii07/mar2.html>

According to the Labor Ministry, the proportion of Japanese men and women getting married to foreigners is expected to increase further in the future.

Annual changes in the number of International Marriages

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total	1 029 405	941 628	774 702	735 850	722 138	791 888	762 028	798 138	799 999	757 331	740 191
Both Japanese	1 023 859	935 583	767 441	723 669	696 512	764 161	730 128	761 875	760 272	721 452	704 152
One Japanese Spouse	5 546	6 045	7 261	12 181	25 626	27 727	31 900	36 263	39 727	35 879	36 039
Jap. Husband/ Foreign Wife	2 108	3 222	4 386	7 738	20 026	20 787	24 272	28 326	31 972	27 957	27 881
Jap. Wife/Foreign Husband	3 438	2 823	2 875	4 443	5 600	6 940	7 628	7 937	7 755	7 922	8 158

Data from Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/suii03/marr2.html>

accessed on 6/22/2015

Figure 12

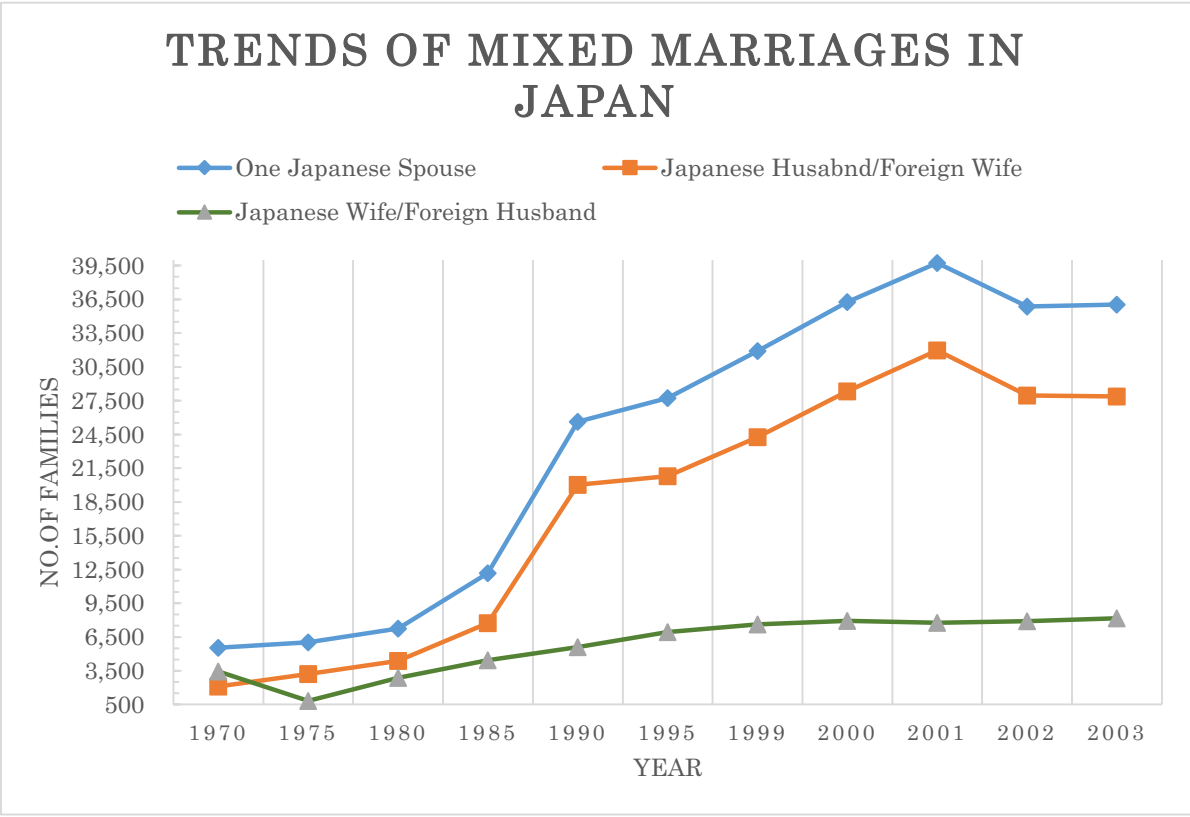
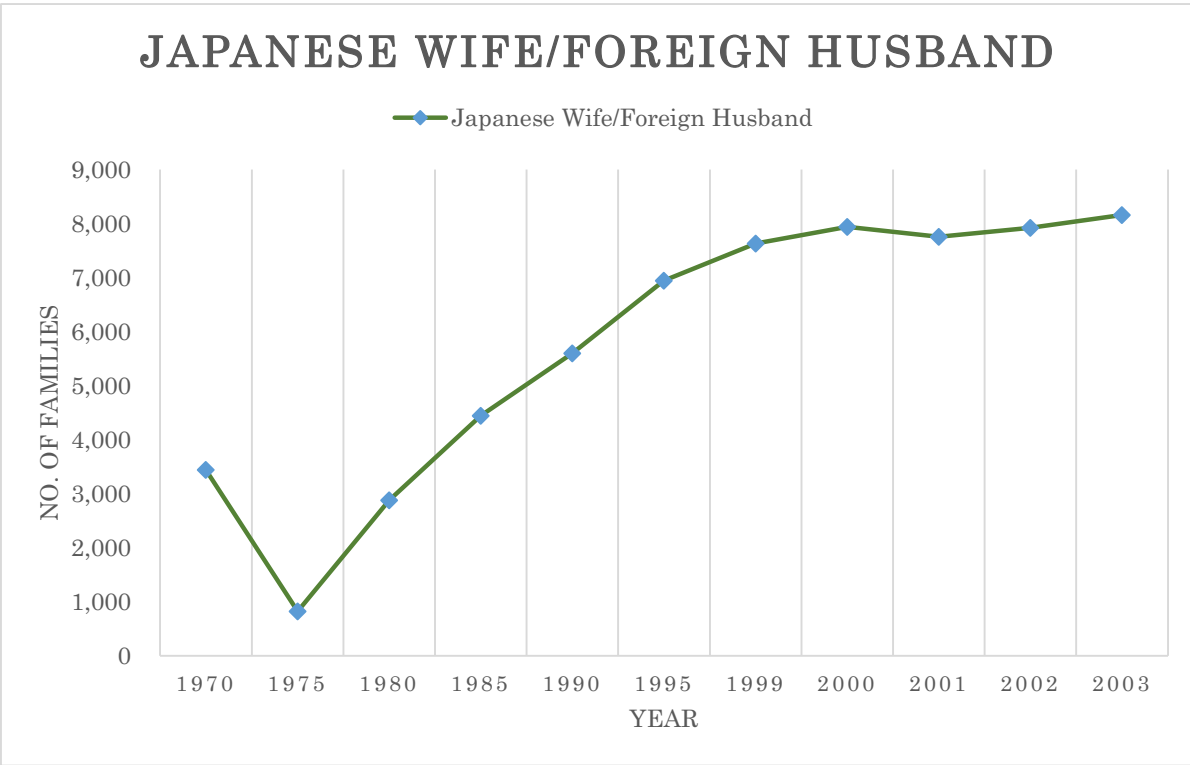


Figure 13



International marriage, however, has been perceived differently in various facets of society. Some Japanese see it as nothing short of love, and depending on nationality and level of affluence, the ultimate success. Others view international marriage as a bag of complications they would rather not have while some women see it as no different from any other marriages (*betsuni*). They argue that the person and not his nationality should be the priority. In other quarters, international marriage is ridiculed as a pool of the weak.

According to Yoshimura Fumiharu, President of the International Dating Service in Tokyo:

My opinion is that international marriage is a “circle of the weak” [jakusha no wa]. The weak of the world always look for women outside their country- weaker women. So weak white men marry Japanese women, who have lower status. Then weak Japanese men marry Thais or Filipinas. Chinese women try to marry Japanese men. Middle-aged, divorced Japanese women pick up Middle Eastern men in Japan. The Middle Eastern guys want young, sexy Japanese women but can’t have them. The middle-aged Japanese women want Japanese men but can’t have them. (In Kelsky *ibid.* 133)

International marriage goes beyond being a “circle of the weak” and rejects. It is a pool of all circles: weak and strong.

Why the Gradual Surge of International Marriages?

Karen Kelsky, in her seminal book, *Women on the Verge, Japanese Women, Western Dreams*, avers that “more and more women are exploiting their position on the margins of corporate and family systems to engage in a form of ‘defection’ from expected life courses”. She adds that defection, among other things, involves young women’s “personal and professional investment in what I call the realm of the foreign” (Kelsky 2002:2). They invest in foreign language study, study abroad, work in a foreign company, and even become romantically involved with foreigners. She argues that the “turn to the foreign has become perhaps the most important means currently at women’s disposal to resist gendered expectations of the female life course in Japan” (Kelsky *ibid.* 2).

The subject of Kelsky’s *Women on the Verge* is the narrative of internationalism that depicts Japanese women’s justification of their “shift of loyalty from what they call a backward and ‘oppressive’ Japan to what they see as an exhilarating and ‘liberating’ foreign realm”. Kelsky places a lot of emphasis on the geographical “foreign” and even quotes from Ariyoshi Sawako’s book, *Nobody ni tsuite*, when she says, “When life in Japan becomes too constricting, I simply flee abroad, like a goldfish coming to the surface for air” on the very first page of her book for emphasis. She also specifically collapses her foreign with only the West.

The focus here is entirely on Japan and the women who, instead of fleeing “oppressive” patriarchy to a foreign land “for air,” have decided to sit back and play the game of gender, to circumvent and cut corners to change the game in their favor. Modern Japanese women have been able to construct for themselves what Arjun Appadurai terms “imagined worlds”. Adding that: “an important fact of the world we live in today is that

many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds (and not just imagined communities) and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them” (Appadurai, 1996:33).

Contemporary Japanese women live in worlds they have dreamed for themselves even in the midst of institutional sexism and are able to do so because they have found an avenue of the official mind and mentality surrounding them in international marriage.

Hierarchy in International Marriages

Recently, “transnationalism,” “globalization,” and “diaspora” have become popular words in anthropological studies. There is a growing movement or flow of people, capital, information, and goods across national borders, resulting in “flexible citizenship” (Aihwa Ong 1996:6). Ong’s flexible situation involves “the cultural logistics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions”. (ibid: 12). This movements has resulted in a “time-space compression,” (David Harvey 1989:12) or simply put, globalization.

The tolerability of the trending force is seen in the globalization of hitherto closed societies like Japan’s through global media. The massive social transformations that have been occurring in the last few decades popularized by the ubiquity of the internet and social media has blurred the line demarcating boundaries and national identities (Giddens 1990, Robertson 1992; Al-Rodhan et. Al, 2006 Takeda and Matthews 2014). This concept has “created a hybrid and creolized cultural routes in global space interstice” (Robertson and Suzuki 2003).

Consequently, the global flow of individual migrants or “flexible citizenships” from across the globe to contemporary Japan escalates the prospects of transnationalization for her citizens: a recognition of the obtainability of a rather uncultivated pool of foreigners outside the familiar pool as well as the feasibility of a liaison with these pool of foreigners. However, the politics of race, class, and colonialism persist and are played out in such unions.

Caucasian-Japanese marriages “have often been viewed with admiration, envy and spite” (Suzuki 2003:91). A Caucasian husband is something to aspire to, a trophy to possess (Ma1996). Karen Kelsky terms this phenomenon *akogare* (translated as fantasy, yearning, longing, adoration). The concept of *akogare* viewed from the perspective of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* depicts the West as being several light years above the East and in possession of all that the East lacks (i.e. liberal, superior, egalitarian as against a feudal and conservative East.) This power relation, according to John Lie, “is best represented by the complementary yet conflicting relationship between patriarchy and paternalism”. He further emphasizes that patriarchy and paternalism are “two sides of the same coin: a currency that works in the complex milieu of international power relation” (Lie 2003:233).

Akogare prompts many Japanese women to seek romantic relationships and transnational marriage with Western men. Sometimes, *akogare* can be carried on to ridiculous levels and draws social backlash and criticism from other women and Japanese men, as seen in the yellow cab saga (Kelsky 2001, Suzuki 2000).

On the other hand concerning international marriage, the scale is the less weighty marriage to non-Caucasians, mostly Asians, and others. It comes with less glee, less shine, and of course, less spectacle, and forms the majority of international marriages in Japan.

There are Japanese-foreigner couples from other parts of the world as well, including South America and the Arabic states.

A subset of these international marriages is marriage between Japanese women and African men.

Note that the adjective “African” rather than “Black” has been used deliberately to differentiate the status difference in marriages between African men and African-Americans. Marriages between Japanese women and African American men, while not as condoned as marriages between Caucasian Americans and Europeans, are valuable for reasons ranging from solid passion to obtaining green cards. The latter is in a unique class of its own while the former appears to (until recently) be the least unpopular with the groups.

International marriages in Japan in early times (as evidenced by available research works) represent a liaison between other Asians and Japanese or Caucasian and Japanese men and women. Due to the presence of an American military base in Japan, such liaisons with African-American men is also a throw in.

In recent times, however, the scope of international marriages has expanded to accommodate people from all over the world, including a handful of couples from the Middle East and Africa. This can be explained as an import of the growing influence of globalization and the influence of the global media or what Arjun Appadurai termed “work of imagination”.

The choice of one’s spouse, Suzuki opines, mirrors one’s “taste” and accordingly, “the spouse’s class, race, and nationality become important markers of difference in one’s social position (Bourdieu 1984; Suzuki 2003:91). However, more than just taste, it mirrors the active decision of the new woman and the achievability of her motives.

Since the basis of this study is not to explore the race and social acceptability of international or racial marriages, I will not give much attention to it. It is, however, noteworthy to observe that regardless of race or nationality, individual women's choices, motivations, sentiments, and lifestyles become the prime nucleus in international marriage. While it would be ludicrous to suggest that all inducements for international marriages are the same, this study shall look at cross-cutting patterns observable in these marriages.

The appropriation of marriage as a gender game is neither a man's nor a woman's game. However, there are forces that direct Japanese women in dissimilar paths from men, especially in regard to their relationships to the society and the world, arcs of gender privilege etc. That makes women's and men's relations with the foreign (in a broad sense) distinct. It is therefore safe to conclude that women tend to apposite international marriage more and maximize its benefit to redress sexual subversions in a culture steeped in gender inequality.

Among other things, this section seeks to survey narratives of the illustrations of such liaisons. The personal accounts of select women (who are both professionally and unprofessionally ambitious) demonstrate how these women have transformed their feminine identity and are finding or have found outlets out of Japan's highly gender-stratified institutional and domestic structures in contemporary times.

Foreign Husbands: Of Romance and Female Ascendancy

Starting in November 2013 and continuing through 2014 to March 2015, I met over two dozen Japanese women married to men from different parts of the globe. There are no fixed groupings or stereotyped pictures of the category of women who have a

special preference for foreign husbands. Of the 29 women I interviewed, 9 are highly successful career women (including 3 heads of organizations), 9 are university graduates who have jobs, 5 are high school graduates and jointly runs their husband's businesses (bar, club, art and craft shop, restaurants etc.) 8 are housewives some of who works on a part-time basis (including some wives of American G.Is).

About 60% of the people I interviewed met their husbands at social centers (bars, clubs, and parties). A few others met on the street, at English conversation class, or 英会話 and official functions or dating sites.

Among the Japanese women under pseudonyms who spoke to me are Mariko Yamazaki (American husband, divorced), Noriko Kobayashi (British husband); Naoko Nishihara (Nigerian husband), Yuka Moriyama (Indonesian husband) and Yumi Yamada (Ghanaian husband). At the time of the interview, these women had been married for 10, 20, 3, and 4 years respectively, while Mariko had been married for 1.5 years.

Mariko Yamazaki – I Thought I could have it My Way

Mariko was born in the early 1980s to the Yamasakis in Southern Japan. Her father had a job that moved him around the country a lot and her mother, a housewife, found it easy to move with her husband and children from post to post. Mariko, the first of five children, grew up loving English language and investing much time into teaching herself perfect pronunciations and English grammar. In her late teens, she was sent to college in Tokyo.

Mariko was studious but had friends who loved to party. It was at one of these BBQ parties at the U.S. base that she met her now ex-husband, Rob. Theirs was love at

first sight. Says she of him, “Rob expressed his feelings and appeared sweet.” The speed of their relationship was propelled by the fact that her close female friend at the University who took her to the party was also dating another American G.I. Things moved quickly between them and before long, she had moved in with him. Not long after, her parents found out that she was cohabiting with a boyfriend and were furious, threatening to ensure that she would not graduate if she did not stop seeing him.

Mariko got pregnant and was eventually allowed to marry her heartthrob. The wedding was held in the states. A small ceremony was held at Rob’s countryside home with no representation from Mariko’s family.

In retrospect, Mariko said she was overconfident at the time. Her explanation:

I guess I felt like a god then. I knew his weak points, I knew that he was a reckless spender, drank too much and suffers so much from mother complex. However, I loved his strong points of being so romantic, and handsome and tall so I expected that I would be able to change him, remodel him into what I wanted. At the time, he was like my poppy, always quick to please me, very apologetic. I pushed him to change, to study, to get a degree and try to be ambitious. He didn’t like it, he didn’t ask me to help or mother him and here I was pushing him so hard wanting him to see life in my own way, from my own point of view.

Mariko soon began to realize that her fairy tale dream of living with her American husband was a mirage. The idealized image of an American couple, a romantic prince charming and an equally gorgeous lady in his arm who is madly in love with him, as seen in movies can sometimes be misleading. Mariko, who lived with Rob for 1.5 years

and was completely aware of all his flaws, saw the arrangement not as an obstacle but as a self-assigned task to remake him into the kind of man she did want to live with.

Not unexpectedly, the union did not go well, as remodeling an adult into another being that suits and satisfies you can indeed prove daunting. She narrates:

We argued most of the time. He is very nice and will do as a boyfriend, but he definitely wasn't a good husband. He was shallow and too immature. When we argue, he does not really argue with substance or make a constructive case. We really had no conversation like two adults. All he did was curse using dirty, swearing words.

Mariko's case is that of an educated, individualistic, and practical young lady. She knows exactly what she wanted and went all the way out to get it. Unfortunately, she wanted what he already had, his charm and sweetness, in addition to what he did not have, a sense of responsibility and critical thinking. While trying to "fix" him and make him an ideal partner, Mariko inadvertently pushed him to his elastic limit. She said of him:

Before we got married, he was my German Shepherd poppy. When I snap at him, my poppy listens to me but after we had got married, my poppy became an adult German shepherd dog, bigger than me and out of control. I kept the purse in the house, just like I saw my mother do, but it never worked. He wanted to use his money in his own way, so I keep getting a debit alert from the bank all the time. I was stronger in the house, I gave orders in the house but he does not listen to me or he stopped listening.

Mariko was married for only one and a half years and lived with Rob for a total of 3 years as they had earlier spent time cohabiting. She asked for a divorce from Rob, who flatly declined. However, she kept pressing, and Rob decided she could get a divorce on the condition that she left their baby behind, a condition she said was impossible. She said, “One day, I waited for him to leave for the office and I packed my things, took my baby and my dog and left.”

Mariko obviously has a short-sighted idea of how marriage works even though she knew exactly what she wanted in a marriage. She admitted to being attracted mostly to his good looks and how sweetly he treated her, “just like in the movies”. In her discussion of the “yellow cab” subculture, Kelsky argues that for Japanese women, “the west offers opportunities for sexual experimentation and flamboyant defiance of sexual norms”. Adding that “western men are idealized for their exemplification of the modern, romanticized for their sensitivity (*yasashisa*), and fetishized as signifiers of success and gatekeepers of social upward mobility in the world” (2008:8).

While entirely disagreeing with the “yellow cab” argument in Mariko’s case, it can be contended that Mariko sought the love and uninhibited affection that appeared to be absent in traditional Japanese marriage in addition to keeping the purse string and the power present in most Japanese homes.

It is noteworthy that Mariko did not set out to make a poppy out of a grown man. Her actions were most likely borne out of cultural dissimilarities, fault lines, and the tension that arises from liaisons that cut across cultures and race. Mariko grew up watching her mother encouraging or cheering her father as the head of the household to

work hard and secure a solid future for the entire family. She also grew up being pushed to aspire to greatness and saw learning as the only way to greatness. She no doubt did what she deemed best.

Mariko, now a career single mother with a secure job, works hard to raise her “cute” daughter and hopes to remarry someday. She is open to marrying anyone, either foreigner or Japanese, as long as the person loves her passionately, is ambitious, and is ready to support her career.

Mariko’s initial notion of marriage seems to have been one of eternal bliss, a highly romanticized union devoid of the vicissitudes of marriage. At the same time, she wants to be able to control “her German poppy”. Her desires and expectations from the relationship border on idealistic perfections. While seeking the type of profound, wild, and a ceaseless romance. She also desired the power and financial control, responsibility, and security enjoyed by women in Japan. Mariko carefully sorted out the merits of the two cultures and amassed them to herself.

Noriko Kobayashi

While Mariko’s narrative reflects that of an educated young girl who naively aspires to use her marriage to a foreigner as an avenue to live a life that is more tenable in romantic movies and books than in reality, Kobayashi’s story is that of a woman who tried to live quietly as a traditional Japanese wife who does not aspire for much but assiduously runs the household and looks forward to the daily return of her husband.

Noriko was born in the mid-1960s in Tokyo. The younger of two girls, Noriko was considered more of a tomboy growing up. Some neighbors even thought she was a boy. Her father used to be a stage designer and her mother was a housewife, but she liked

flower arrangement and is a professional with many students.

Her mother wanted her to study and teach music. She was sent to a music affiliated school, but it was quite difficult for her. She was not good at the subject, so it was almost torture for her. She then asked her mother to let her take the examination for another junior high school. Noriko changed to a regular girl's high school and after that attended an average high school, then went on to study art at college.

At the University, Noriko met her now ex-Japanese husband and they dated for a while and got married. The marriage lasted for 13 years; however, for Noriko, it was 13 years of unhappiness, worry, and endurance. Noriko met Jerry and that transformed her life. She asked for a divorce from her then-husband. According to her:

My former marriage was a major source of stress for me. My ex-husband is a typical Japanese man; he did not do any household chores and made no attempt to do things himself. I was working full time at the time, and everyone knew that I was not happy at home. However, my ex-husband spent much money, not on himself but just as a show off by always treating his friends. He was always treating his colleagues and subordinates. Meanwhile, financially, we were struggling. At that time in my marriage, we did not think about children because I was more worried about money problems.

Noriko met Jerry at an English conversation school and “liked him the moment I met him”. He made me very happy and for once I experienced what love meant. I am still very much in love with him after these years”. When asked what it was about him that made her give up her former marriage, Noriko said:

Jerry is very laid-back and a very relaxed person. He accepts so many things, and he is not stubborn and does not argue. Before meeting him, I thought that international marriages are difficult due to the differences in culture and lifestyle but instead, I found grimmer difficulties with the man with whom I shared the same culture.

Even though Noriko insisted that her decision to marry a non-Japanese man had nothing to do with his nationality, but rather his personality and attitude, she seems to enjoy the part of international marriage that de-emphasizes the culture of gendered roles and division of labor in the household. She is happy that Jerry cooks, cleans, draws his own bath, and does not wait around for her. More so, she works now because she enjoys working, not because of financial pressure.

Noriko, who was brought up by a woman who believed in traditional values, initially sought to follow in her mother's footsteps. This accounted for her decision to at first, quit her job, become a housewife, and look forward to the arrival of a child. But in hindsight, it never worked that way.

Noriko claims she has never been happier. Nonetheless, she claims that international marriage is not all rosy, as Japanese society has not fully accepted the concept of mixed marriages. She cited a case where, in trying to rent an apartment, the landlord would not rent one out to them because they were a mixed couple.

She also talked about the difficulty they are still having with getting Jerry's name fully registered in the family register as practiced in Japan, but concludes that these are minor setbacks compared to the happiness in her soul and the freedom she feels. Noriko

articulated her gender identity by taking her destiny into her own hands when she found what she recognized as love. She reconfigured a space for herself in “the interstices of the hegemonic gender cartography” (Ortner, 1996:26).

Naoko Nishihara

Naoko was born in the late 1960s to a well-travelled father who works in an international company and a stay-at-home mother. She attended a public elementary school and then proceeded to a private high school. Upon graduation from the private high school, she continued on to a private university to study at a time when it was still uncommon for women to study four years courses. She credits her decision to her father’s exposure as an international worker.

At the private girls’ high school she attended, the emphasis was laid on gender and gender roles in Japan. The common idea in Japan that women were to grow up, get married, and become good housewives who must be obedient and submissive to their husbands was old and outdated. She recounts:

This girl’s school was molding us to think differently. We were told repeatedly that women could also have dreams and aspirations. That women should also have their own opinions and ideas and be able to live life on their own. They trained us to think independently and not to believe that we are handicapped or have limitations because of our gender. We learned wood works and other masculine activities, not just sewing or flower arrangement.

Upon graduation from the University as an economist, Naoko got a job as a career staff

in the bank. She worked in the bank for roughly nine years before changing her job.

Naoko met her Nigerian husband on the road one evening. He stopped to ask her for directions and the two soon became friends and began meeting regularly. Her parents completely opposed their relationship at first. It was so bad that her father and husband had a sour relationship for many years. Her mother, however, said that even though he is a foreigner, he was good looking so she was more approving. For Naoko, it was a very difficult controversy between her and her family. As to why her father opposed so strongly, she says:

I think he would have being fine with an American. I think he is most uncomfortable with places he does not know. More so, at that time, the only image Japanese people have of Africans is that of abject poverty. He did not have information on Africa only an American would have been better. My father is a typical Japanese, but my mother was a bit more open and was ready to support me. To my father, even though he was a black man, a black man from America would have been preferable. In the past, the word international in Japan has a very narrow meaning. It included only America, France and maybe Germany. Even on the television, these are the only countries that are featured. Image wise, Japanese people treat these countries with a sense of respect. Japanese did not even consider other Asian countries as good and confident grooms. Worst still is Africa.

Naoko decided to not give in to family pressure and break up her relationship with her African boyfriend. This is because Naoko claims she already had a mind-set that was not

typically Japanese and getting involved with a Japanese man would breed conflicts of interests and roles. Due to this fear, Naoko had decided that she would rather not get married than give up her career and now here was a man who was willing not just to accept her as she was, but also ready to encourage her to become who she wanted to be.

While her father seriously opposed the relationship, she moved in with her boyfriend, and they both cohabited for three years. Naoko's father finally budged, and they were able to get married. Yet Naoko did not commit to marriage without first stating her conditions:

Before we got married, I told my husband that it would kill me to become a housewife, and he said he understood. The implication is that he got to do most of the housework like cleaning, laundry and was almost solely responsible for raising our son. In the house, we are equal. In fact, I think I am stronger in the house. Sometimes, I think he wished he married a woman from his country.

When asked if Naoko derives any joy or happiness from being in the business world competing with her male counterparts as opposed to having someone work on her behalf, she affirms:

I think it would have been a bit too easy. I see my friends who are housewives, all they need to do is to keep urging their husbands to do their best (頑張つて), and he keeps working hard for everybody. Then the women meet up for lunch with their friends and discuss domestic matters while eating expensive lunch (¥5000-7000), and their husbands who are working so hard eats just a ¥300-500

box lunch. That is an easy life style, and I think that can mean happiness too. However, for me, that would have been a narrow life, too narrow for me to fit in. I feel lucky and happy with my lifestyle and career choice. I think happiness depends on who is defining it. I think people's life purpose and the lifestyle they deliberately chose to follow can define their happiness.

When asked if she would marry a non-Japanese again if given the opportunity, she replied:

Definitely yes. Wherever he may come from I do not know but definitely, he will be a foreigner. Even if I were given an opportunity to correct all the mistakes that I have made in life, I would still marry a foreigner. It is more exciting. Maybe my husband will say no, this woman is too strong. However, for me definitely yes. It is more interesting and every day I get more shocks, which forms part of the fun.

Like Noriko, Naoko also cites challenges mixed couples face in Japanese society but also provided the following advantages:

I think international marriage has a lot of difficult points too. Getting married to a Japanese man as a Japanese woman is easier legally, language wise and even job wise but, international marriage is very good in that, domestically the man is very helpful and I was also able to learn a new, different culture that expanded my view of life, it also helped my child and we have a more global world view. Also in Japan, it is obvious that the woman is below the man and the woman

does nothing. Now that the economy is not so good, should the man run into financial trouble and cannot fall back on the woman, and then there will be trouble as they will all go hungry. However, looking at the fact that I can do just what I have always wanted without any opposition from him, I think it is better.

Here is a woman who understands the details of the mode of operation of her society with regard to gender formulations. She vehemently rejected the prevailing hegemonic gender structures epitomized by marrying not just a non-Japanese but a non-Japanese from an unrecognized and “accepted” pool. The strength of her determination and will was tested by the three years in which she battled with her father.

However, her desire, her “deliberate choice” (a word she emphasized a lot) to engage with structural limitations and phallocentric authorities, her ambitions, and her quest for gender parity led her on. Her marriage to a foreigner offered her a chance at a truly emancipated subjectivity. She could be all she wanted to be: a career woman, a wife, a mother, and a voice.

Yuka Moriyama

Born in the early 80s, Yuka was educated in Japan, the U.S., and Canada. Yuka has two Bachelor’s degrees. She first studied Economics, worked for some years, and went back to University to study Education when she realized she would rather be a teacher. She joined an NGO that sent her to Indonesia where she spent a year in Bali as a volunteer to young orphaned children. Yuka claims that she immediately fell in love with the uncomplicated nature and lifestyle of the Indonesians.

As a young lady schooled in the West, Yuka does not fit into the class of women

described by Kelsky as “constructing the West as a site of emancipation for Japanese women whose ambitions and abilities are thwarted in Japan” (Kelsky 2001:20). She savored the air of emancipation in the West, but perceives Japan as a place where her ambitions and hopes can be realized.

Nonetheless, she retains thought-provoking beliefs about marriage and relationship in Japan. In her view, “When it comes to marriage, the Japanese society seems to have their minds made up for the women. Yuka believes that “no matter where you have been to or how well read you are, you don’t have a space in the corporate world as a woman in Japan, and your place is always in the kitchen.”

This attitude is gradually changing, but the change is slow. She notes that the ubiquity of the perception is so pervasive that some women have come to believe that marriage is the ultimate or the peak of one’s success and that without marriage, you are lonely and sad:

All the girls or at least my friends believe that marriage equals happiness. Sometimes it does not matter to whom, their dream is to just get married. My friends for instance always say to my hearing, I want to get married, I want to get married and then I ask them, to who? Moreover, then they say, I do not know, I just want a happy life. Oh if I find a rich man, then I can be happy for sure. Once the person is rich, there is safety.

Yuka opines that such attitudes toward marriage and wealth leading to happiness are so pervasive that sometimes they are carried to extreme levels. Yuka believes that

these ladies have postponed marriage in their prime to pursue a career or other ambition and now, probably due to pressure from family or the sudden realization that they may grow old alone, are reluctantly searching for a partner. However, their status makes them picky and, in general, they are still uncertain of the need for marriage.

She looks at marriage in present day Japan as nothing short of “business”: like two business partners who both have something to offer coming together to strike a deal. “One needs a house keeper, a status maker, and a baby maker while the other needs financial security with slight attention paid to the little details that make for a happy home.” Yuka, who dated a couple of Japanese men in the past, concludes:

Japanese guys still believe that women should do all the house work, clean after everyone in the house and just be a house person. Even my brother; he does not know how to cook, do the laundry or anything. I think that is not fair. I think such mind-sets are too old fashioned. Of course not every man thinks the same way but majority do so. Also, Japanese guys like to keep their women or girlfriends in their cage. They require the woman to email him at work at least five times a day. Alternatively, you call once or do whatever to keep in touch, I do not want to do anything like that. Japanese men do not really believe in long distance relationship because for them, the only way to feel safe is to put the other partner in their territory. That is the only way the feel safe and can trust their partners.

Yuka believes that a woman should retain her life and individuality within a healthy relationship or marriage. She believes that everyone deserves to have his or her space, a

space to themselves. That is why her current relationship with her Indonesian husband is ideal. He lives in Indonesia, she lives in Japan, and they visit each other in the space of every 3-4 months. She believes that having a man around her all year round is too much trouble and having a Japanese man is even more trouble.

When asked what particularly attracted her to her Indonesian spouse as someone who was born and raised in Japan and who has lived and studied in the West, she replied:

Everything. He is completely different from Japanese men but, of course, different societies. He enjoys his life; he knows what is important to him and for me that seems beautiful. When I think back, I think Japanese men do not know what is important to them. For instance someone might say, I want a girlfriend, not because he loves her, or I want a wife not because he loves her, or I want to work in a big company, it doesn't matter what kind of job it is, just the status or name (not everybody though). However, my husband, money or status or all such things are not important to him at all. For him, what is important is happiness and what makes the society better. I thought that is beautiful, and that is how I wanted to live forever, so I got married to him.

She says life should not be a rat race; people can live their dreams and be happy, but Japanese society is yet to realize that life can be that simple. If my husband were a “normal Japanese” or “normal salary man,” she says, “I believe the situation would have been different. Different”. She expounds on her claim by saying:

I just opened a small language school; there isn't enough profit. It is more like

volunteering, but I think this is what I want to do. When I tell my Japanese male friends about my non-profit school, 90% of my friends say, “Wow Yuka that is great but I am glad you are not my wife.” So you see, for them as a friend its okay but as a wife it is not okay to do a job that exposes their young wife to meeting new people including men and to cap it all, it doesn’t contribute anything tangible to the family purse, so they are not happy with that since they want to put their wives in a cage. However, my husband is supportive, and he always says do whatever you want and do and he says if you even want to work hard in the future, I can even be a house husband while you work, and I don’t mind if he works outside or at home.

Yuka makes a point of emphasizing that not every single Japanese man is not the same as the Japanese boyfriends she has had in the past. She also emphasized the fact that her husband is different because of his unique personality and not because every Indonesian is like him to avoid generalizations. She makes her point, however, by drawing out contrasts in the attitudes she has observed among Japanese men and those of her non-Japanese spouse.

Yuka claims she has always had an independent spirit since she was a child, but her sojourn to the West and their free attitude towards life made that spirit blossom. She also said she is thankful to her parents for supporting her every move. For instance, after graduating as an economist and working for four years, she woke up one day and decided that being a teacher was where her heart lies, and thus returned to university.

In her quest for independence, self-discovery, and fulfilment she recognized all the issues that might constitute an obstacle on her path and astutely avoided them. Yuka

wants to be a mother one day. She aspires to have a stable partner, but recognizes that being with a Japanese man or in a hen-pecked relationship will not work for her. She predicted years ago that being in a relationship which denies her the power to make her own decisions and do as she pleases would amount to a disaster, so she avoided one altogether.

As mentioned earlier, marrying a foreigner has mixed reception in Japan. However, marrying a foreigner from another Asian country that is classed as “developing” may not exactly come as a good bargain. When asked how Yuka’s family reacted to the news of her engagement, she said her parents were worried about her fiancée’s financial standing and ability to cater for their daughter. However, the more interesting reaction came from her friends, who mostly questioned the logic of her choice:

They tell me you are so strong. How could you choose such a man? Even if you love him why choose a man from a developing country? Moreover, they said things like only love will not make you happy, money is the most important thing. They say he is not rich, not especially tall plus he does not have blond hair, blue eyes or anything cool (かっこいい) he is Asian, just like us. I find it amazing that people will think of marriage only in terms of money and looks. I want more, and I went seeking for and I found more, it makes me happy. That for me is the most important thing.

Yuka’s relationship demonstrates the extent to which young women are ready to go in pursuit of a relationship which they consider ideal and compatible to their transformed feminine identities and renewed lifestyles. Her case illustrates the “new woman’s”

determination to outdo men in the game of gender. With a husband who declares his willingness to be a “house-husband” while she goes about her business in the corporate, Yuka is unhindered by house chores or gender.

Yumi Yamada

Yumi was born in Hiroshima in the late 70s. As an only child, her parents spared nothing to give her the best education by sending her to private schools all throughout her schooling days. Yumi’s parents own a prosperous family business that they hope to pass on to her. Consequently, she joined the company as soon as she was out of college.

As an only child and a female, her parents were also in the market for an eligible son-in-law that will be married into the family, take up the family name, and raise future Yamada offspring for them.

Unfortunately, at the time Yumi was for ripe for marriage, she was already tired of a pampered and protected life. She wanted a life that allowed her more freedom and space and so turned down all the eligible bachelors her parents found for her. She insisted on meeting and falling in love with her own partner by herself. In Yumi’s own words:

It felt like I was not me or that I did not own myself. I felt like I was living for my parents and that everything about me is geared towards their ambition and happiness and that there was no room for what I wanted for myself. So I rebelled, I said I wanted my life. I went out of my immediate vicinity; I went to Tokyo to try and live a different life.

In Tokyo, Yumi met an African man from Ghana named Kofi. . Kofi struck her as a nice,

gentle, and malleable man. He was also good looking. The man was at Yumi's beck and call and was more than eager to please her, oblivious to Yumi's fortune. On her part, Yumi is not just pleased by such subservient love, but she genuinely loved the fact that he has no idea of her parent's wealth.

Back in Hiroshima, the news of Yumi's love interest was perceived as a disaster. The man was portrayed as nothing but an opportunist who had bewitched their girl with his sorry love story. Worst still, the family wanted a son-in-law that could be adopted into the Yamada family: a son-in-law that is Japanese, not Ghanaian.

What ensued was a long drawn out family battle that would last for a year with Yumi's family threatening to out her boyfriend to immigration patrol (his status was yet to be regularized). With tensions running high, Yumi's parents were forced to compromise. They supported her marriage to Kofi with a bucket list of conditions, which included Yumi taking over the family business and ensuring that her offspring take the family name of Yamada, but not necessarily obliging her husband to do the same and a host of other conditions.

Soon after their wedding, Yumi was allowed to stay back in Tokyo to head the branch of her family business while living with her husband, who now has a legal status and a job. It sounds like a win-win situation for Yumi and her parents, but unfortunately, not for her non-Japanese husband. For one, as a busy woman, Yumi has no time for housework, cooking, or even her own laundry. Moreover, she declared that she was too busy to get pregnant or have babies, causing her husband's pleas for children to fall on deaf ears.

When I called to check in on Yumi recently, she replied from Hiroshima where she currently lives with her parents and heads the family business. Her husband lives in

Tokyo to keep his job and maintain his financial independence and a measure of respect before his inlaws. He tries to visit Yumi once every other month.

International Marriage and the Feminine Politics

The imports of these five women's feminine experiences are multifariously inflected within the various aspects of Japanese cultural and institutional disciplines. These have implications on societal equilibriums and on Japanese men themselves, who have "no concrete ideas about marriage beyond just getting a wife" (Itamoto 1992). In the following section, I aim to juxtapose these women's narratives to show how they are imbricated within broader contexts.

The women in this study are wholly conscious of the existence of literature and narratives depicting images of the West as an opening, or "much-needed and effective space for oppositional female praxis" (Kelsky, 2003:87). However, the success rate of the totality of such narratives has never been gauged by scholars or even the narrators themselves. Most often, the images in circulation appear to be self-congratulatory on the amazing success of fleeing patriarchy almost to the point of make-believe. These images, much like Hollywood images, are burned into the individual consciousness, and the temptation to replicate them in reality can sometimes be derived from romanticized ideas of what ideal relationships look like.

Mariko's experience exemplifies a generation of women who are increasingly growing aware of their environment, its limitations, and the options available to them. These women are able to customize the arcs of their lives and find the option that suits them best. Even though Mariko's marriage to her foreign husband ended in divorce, it is noteworthy to observe that she sought and got the divorce on her terms.

Noriko Kobayashi, on the other hand, tried living her life according to the norms of Japanese society. She was willing to provide her husband with all the privileges afforded to men in marriage (Wakui 1990). The traditional path did not work out well for her, though, and she soon became engrossed in financial, emotional, and psychological burdens. This burden led Noriko to question her identity, her life as a Japanese woman, and the essence of her entire marriage. Her chance meeting with Jerry at the English school and the way she felt afterward led her to the realization that enduring a life of unhappiness to be culturally valued by society is not the place of women anymore.

Noriko embodied the act of self-reinvention by falling in love and letting herself be happy while she was still married, and then taking the bold step of divorcing her Japanese spouse and marrying her British boyfriend. By marrying Jerry, Noriko affectively unleashed herself from the yoke of Japan's asphyxiating gender roles. After all, as Nakagaki Sachiko pontificates in her non-emblematic poem, "Women Have No Need of Borders," Noriko showed that women are completely capable of transcending societal borders to find the love that suits them best.

The stories of Yuka, Naoko, and Yumi demonstrates how Japanese women have ominously confronted the Japanese gender configurations of cathexis and practice. They also adhered to Nakagaki's admonition of jettisoning race, nationality, and religion to bear only the children of the men they love. We see these women technically and metaphorically "marrying down" the social ladder just to get to the top of the gender game.

Yuka and Yumi had a long and bitter battle with their respective families, who felt betrayed and ashamed by their daughter's choice of marriage partner. The feuds did not break the young women; they strengthened their resolve to end up unconditionally with the subjects of their love. They also decimated the possible penalty for their actions

or any form of stigma.

Interestingly, however, these women got married to their respective non-Japanese husbands because for them, doing so was a good deal. The nature of their relationship and the power structure within the house, as well as the ratio to which domestic chores are shared and carried out, are mapped out to favour the women. These women, who are all professionally ambitious and to some degree individualistic, have gone out to seek for and tailor the bow of their lives within the relationship map.

Contemporary Japanese women find ways to redefine gender roles within the hybrid of boundaries and cultural provisions inherent in international marriages. This is because the norms and cultural yardstick employed for evaluating the needs and expectations of foreign spouses in such relationships are neither Japanese nor are they Indonesian or Ghanaian or any of the countries involved. They are mostly the original creation of the couples involved, and this is made possible because these women actively married their foreign spouses after judiciously contemplating the intrinsic worth and drawbacks of such relationships within Japanese society.

A critical look at the case of Yumi and Yuka reveal that international marriage can be a ground for Japanese women to wittingly or unwittingly reproduce gender inequality. In other words, because women can customize their relationship to their tastes, it becomes a ground for reverse hegemony.

Yuka, for instance, enumerated all of her conditions before getting married, including the fact that her husband was going to handle raising their child. Yumi, on the other hand, operates her family business both locally and internationally, paying no attention to her responsibilities as a wife. Naoko on her part is unable to stand a husband breathing down her neck every day so she would rather have him stay in Indonesia where

she can visit every once in a while.

These marriages are not without their failings or difficulties, as cultural dissimilarities abound on several grounds with difficulties and disagreements stemming from simple matters like food to issues of taboo and ethnicity. These can breed tensions and failed expectations that can consequently result in divorces (consider the case of Mariko).

Also, the social acceptability of such couples within society also poses some challenges, especially in regard to in-laws and extended family. These challenges can breed bitter disputes between the couple and the bride family, who may feel embarrassed or socially ostracized by their daughter's choice of spouse on the one hand, and the couple and the groom's family who may experience a sense of loss on the other hand.

In-law problems at other times can have disastrous effects on a couple's relationship depending on the "actors involved". Naoko, for instance, had a bitter quarrel with her father that lasted three long years over the choice of her partner. Her father eventually caved in with her mother's constant intervention. Yumi, on the other hand, is still strongly influenced by her parents in a way that is possible only because Yumi is married to a now-Japanese.

Other areas of challenge for the international couple include the renting or buying of properties and accessing bank loans. Some welfare packages and annuities available to a Japanese-Japanese couple are not available to mixed couples.

It is worth noting that the *yasashisa* of foreigners, or *gaijins*, widely assumed by young Japanese women is subject to debate. Due to differences in culture and the limited knowledge of the intricacies of the beliefs and practices of the foreign spouse, Japanese women sometimes inadvertently marry men whose cultural practices are highly

patriarchal and sometimes even permit polygamy, which I suppose is the height of patriarchy. The quality of their relationships becomes questionable when the women demonstrate so much power and autonomy that they jettison their husband's masculinity, thus reversing hegemony.

These women, and indeed many women like them, in contemporary Japan are devising ways of evading all the interconnectedness of patriarchal relations by negotiating the space between two cultures and nurturing personalized relationships that offer them almost all their desires. Their decisions may appear idiosyncratic and even egoistic; however, they only form part of the "gender game".

Some scholars in the past have proposed models for studying women and gender in Japan. Laura Dales (2009) proposed the "housewife-salaried worker" (*sengyo shufu – sarariman*) model and the family model for her study on feminist movements in contemporary Japan. Sugiyama Lebra (1984) proposed "the polarization-neutralization continuum" in her study on the constraints and fulfilment of Japanese women. From the arguments of this research, however, it is safe to conclude that gender relations in contemporary times define naming or tagging. What obtains now is a gradual but total eradication, an erasure of continuums and dichotomies of any sort. There are now few barriers concerning what women can do in modern Japan.

This erasure makes possible a negotiation, re-confirmation, and at other times, total rejection of the ideologies that institutionalized, maintained, and necessitated the erection of such continuums in the first place.

Chapter Seven - Summary and Conclusion

The Dialectics of Domination, Resistance, and Negotiation

Culture or structure and all it entails is dynamic. It is no longer an inert entity but something continuously under challenge and construction and reconstruction. The constant challenges to a culture that constantly re-evaluates, re-examines, and re-constructs itself are induced by certain factors inherent in that culture. This research started out by sorting out the claims and counter-claims about the position of women in contemporary Japanese society.

The study commenced by noting that Japan is a marriage society “*kekkon shakai*”. This implies that despite the rapid changes taking place across the globe in all facets of life, marriage remains central to Japanese society. The centrality of marriage serves to ensure that children in Japan are born within the precinct of marriage.

Since marriage still retains a principal place in Japanese society and both corporate and cultural sexism is perpetuated via the instrument of marriage (either by being required to resign and become a housekeeper or by having menial jobs thrust upon women by virtue of their gender), a fundamental question arises. The vital question is, do women maintain the status quo? And if not, how do women deal with institutionalized sexism in contemporary times?

I started out by problematizing standing presuppositions of male supremacy and the frontiers of gender dissimilarity in the face of a growing consciousness among modern day women. I laid out some applied but highly debatable and limited interpretations of the hitherto **gender plot** in Japan. This I did by pointing out arguments by foremost

scholars like Iwao (1995), who contends that the current structure is ideal in that women have autonomy and control and are thus able to live more freely and independently, only depending on their husbands' for income-related purposes. She argues that the issue of equality has never been contested in Japanese society because it has been thought that "as long as the changing weather from year to year produces good harvests and bad, people are all basically equal".

Other scholars have argued that the relationship between men and women in Japan is meant to be complimentary, a "balance of advantage" with each partner firmly acting within the precinct of their "gendered niches". The man is expected to work in the corporate world and earn income for the family while through the sole effort of the woman, the home becomes the "place for the reproduction of energy". (Rosenberger 2001).

This position, I argued, puts women in a state of perpetual subservience. New trends have arisen to militate against the appeal of such a lifestyle in contemporary times. Moreover, as the days are far gone when women were satisfied with being the wives of managers, today's women seek to cultivate their own personality and ambitions.

Contending that the desire to achieve personhood is aided by factors such as the growth of individualism among Japanese youth, particularly women. The current debate about the growth and implications of individualism in Japan reflects an evolving split between older generations and a new group of more self-oriented younger generations (Ronald & Hirayama 2009).

This younger generations of "individualized individuals... [are] centrifugal and associative. [They are] self-made and independent minded" (Maruyama 1967:527). The major feature of these individualists is their deep and sustained desire to be self-made. Their desire for being self-made transcends merely acquiring wealth. It also does not

involve working as hard as men to prove a point.

Male hegemony however, cannot be routed out “by simply rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, or even reordering the whole economic structure” (Rosaldo and Lamphere (eds) 1974:68). Modern Japanese women are increasingly seeking fulfillment in the form of a consciousness that goes beyond simply switching roles.

The result became a heightened awareness that viewed marriage as the foremost obstacle to the self-actualization they sought. They realized that the economics of marriage, namely financial security and a home in exchange for housekeeping, was no longer profitable; the opportunity cost of freedom is not worth the alternative forgone. They realized that a sense of independence is critical to reformulation as they seek cultural ideologies that borders on gender in Japan.

As “power itself is double-edged, operating from above as domination and from below as resistance” (Ortner 2006:139), the equation becomes even more complex. Contemporary Japanese women have an inherent capacity for agency, desire, and strivings for acting creatively. The “act” or “practice” of consciously constructing alternatives to the norm. Because agency has a strong element of intentionality, it involves highly conscious plots, schemes, and plans with a somewhat nebulous goal. Whether such goals are achieved or not is a topic that merits further discussion.

Using the model of practice and agency, particularly Ortner’s notion of the “gender game” as a scaffold, I identified four schemes deployed by contemporary Japanese women to confront institutionalized patriarchy: *Ohitorisama*, delayed marriage, cohabitation and international marriage.

Delayed marriage, cohabitation, and *Ohitorisama* provide a method to creatively construct ways of undermining the foundations of Japan's patriarchal society. The young women presented are clearly experimenting and re-examining their sexuality, and in turn their altered behavior affects their gender individuality.

Some other women on the second half of the divide have decided to explore the gray area as opportunities for self-expression, self-development, a degree of independence and discretionary power. These women whose "imagination" (Appadurai 1997:7) convinces them of the *yasashisa* of foreigners, use their marriage to non-Japanese men as a way of redefining gender roles within the hybrid of boundaries and of cultural provisions inherent in international marriages.

This is because the norms and cultural yardstick employed for evaluating the needs and expectations of the foreign spouses in such relationships are neither Japanese nor do they derive from the countries involved. Rather, they are mostly the original creation of the couples themselves. This is made possible because these women actively married their foreign spouses after judiciously contemplating the intrinsic worth and drawbacks of such relationships within Japanese society.

Although they employed pursue different tactics to subvert male hegemony in Japan and have different stories to tell, they share a common goal, and this goal can be seen running through each of their lives as a - desire for social mobility. These women all desire to move vertically up the gender scale. By delaying marriage, for instance, they seek to avoid any barrier on the path of this upward scale. Women in this category still recognize the significance of marriage but work actively to secure themselves on this scale before acquiescing to marriage. At this stage, marriage for them is no longer a means to an end, but rather is part of an end in itself.

Women in cohabiting relationships desire to live their lives to the utmost, both independently and pleurably. These women do not think that marriage is necessary to maintain an intimate relationship and view the establishment of legal ties as unnecessary. They desire partnership, but see such unions manifesting mostly as friends with benefits relationships. Because she and her partner are not a couple in the eyes of the law, the woman appreciates the fact that she is under no obligation to perform any wifely duties and can go and come as freely as she desires. She is by implication at liberty to pursue her desired goal, be it career, studies, etc.

Ohitorisama appears to be the end product of *bankonka*, or cohabitation. At this stage, women have typically given up on marriage because: they have not being able to convince themselves that there is any gain in marriage they see living with a man as too much of a hassle, or they are not able to find a partner they consider ideal.

Marrying a non-Japanese man is the quintessential example of the game of social mobility. For these women, the gray boundary area created by an amalgam of cultures, which is usually the creation of the couple, provide them the leeway necessary to live “normal” lives. Namely, they are married with a home, children, and most likely a career. This ground provides her an opportunity to advance the social scale unhindered by the chains of gender roles or be harassed or judged for her failings as a good wife and mother.

Some practitioners of international marriage are unperturbed by the status of their foreign husbands. These women are ready to sacrifice social acceptability for social mobility in this game of gender. Yumi Yamada is a case in reference. Being rich and the only daughter of a company owner, Yumi opts to marry down the social ladder to the chagrin of her parents. On the other hand, Yumi has a greater degree of liberty that allows her room to run her parents’ company as effectively as any man would. This affords her

the opportunity to decide exactly when she will be less busy and ready to bear children. Yumi possess agency, intentions and power and shields practically wielded all the tools in her possession to circumvent systemic and institutionalized sexism.

Contemporary Japanese women who have opted for lifestyles considered antithetical from societal expectations are considered poor role models and accredited as the main reason the Japanese population is decreasing, making them vulnerable to poverty, among a host of other vices. These women are focused, however, on their goals and have not been distracted by the sea of difficulties they perceive ahead of them. Some of them are seen taking steps to insure themselves against a future of hardship by taking life insurance or buying apartments and forming support groups.

Contemporary Japanese women consciously set out to change the structure of their habitus. A closer look at the life stories represented here show some taking active agency in the early parts of their stories. They are active in their quests (see the cases of Mariko and Yuki regarding international marriage and delayed marriage respectively). . However, (this is the crux of the gendered game) - they are customarily chastised for this and systematically forced to renounce their agency. This forces them to renounce the prospect of formulating and enacting new schemes.

This goes to show that agencies within the dialectics of domination and resistance are as complicated as power itself can be unstable. Thus, the game of gender is a game of resistance and counter-resistance at the various level within the polity. In other words:

The case that is playing the game [of gender] tends to reproduce both the public Structures of rules and assumptions, and the private subjectivity/consciousness/habitus of the players, and thus that playing the

game- as Bourdieu unhappily and critically insists – almost always results in social reproduction. Ultimately games do change, sometimes because of the entry of some externality that cannot be digested, but sometimes too because of the instability of the internal power relations on which successful play depends on. (Ortner 2006:149).

It is little wonder that even with the game in place, dexterous players would require foresight and new tricks and tactics to prevent reproducing sexism or falling prey to any backlash. In a cohabiting relationship, for instance, where there is no legal arrangement or commitment, a woman who becomes pregnant and a single mother winds up experiencing the most challenging life conceivable.

A careful observation of most Japanese women or gender related studies suggests dichotomized perceptions of an existing gendered division of labor, an assumption which has not witnessed significant change over time, even as Japanese women's reality has undergone tremendous changes. Even though scholars have tried to justify, explain, and even positively appropriate such a dichotomy, some negative, nay, simplistic, assumptions still persist.

This in itself can be limiting in a study that focuses on agency and change for, as Dorrine Kondo (1990) observes, “identity...is not a unified essence, but a set of contradictions and disunity, a node where various discourses temporarily interact in particular ways” (47). This researcher is also guilty of exploring the profundity, inimitability, and complexity inherent in such studies with such taxonomy and considers this a limitation of this research warranting further research in the future.

Closely related to the dearth of density that comes with groupings is the conceptualization of agency in terms of self-containment and individualism. Such conceptualizations, even though valid as argued in this thesis, overlook what Dales (2009) terms the “complexity and diversity of lived experiences” (3). Although this study attempts to scrutinize the diversity and uniqueness of individual lived experiences, it is not untainted by Dales’ observation due to the central premises of most of its arguments. This is another limitation that warrants a major consideration when carrying out studies on gender discourse and advancements in Japan.

The present dynamics and dialectics in the gender area bear grave implications for the Japanese population and by extension, the future of the country. This has forced the Japanese government to churn various programs and policies with strong notions of cultural hegemony targeted at women. These policies basically have a common goal of encouraging women to take on motherhood, regardless of whether they work or not.

Government policies also provide a tax break for a family with one stay at home spouse thus privileging marriage. A closer look at the policy reveals “the very presence of the patriarchal symbolic order that tries to fix all women as feminine and all men as masculine rendering them as the second sex” (Kristeva 1986:193).

The present government policy’s wemonomics is another program targeted at alleviating “role harassment” (*roru hara*) and “maternal harassment” (*mata hara*) that have hitherto been the lot of women. The current Prime Minister pledged, among other things, to ensure that all parents can access childcare (currently, more than 20,000 Japanese children are on waiting lists for a place in nursery school.) He also aims to boost women in management positions from 10% to 30% by 2020, is considering tax incentives that would encourage women to work full-time, and is planning to allow more foreign

employees into the country to work as housekeepers.

However, the problem is deeper than erecting a couple of nurseries and making other promises that appear nebulous, unrealistic and indeed diminishes in the face of the existing structure. The changes must begin with an alteration of the present mode of thinking, a consciousness transformation that involves looking at people first as individuals and not based on their status or sex. This consciousness should be all encompassing. Ida Hiroyuki, in his *Single-izing Japan* (2003), puts it more succinctly when he advocates for a Japan that will:

Stop considering whether one is legally married, or whether the man works outside and the wife takes care of children in a “standard family model,” and instead accept a system and policy that treats every individual equally regardless of whether or not that person is married, whether or not a family lives together, and whether or not one has children. (2003:129).

The composite portrait of contemporary Japanese women that emerged out of this study belies any lingering myth of the ubiquitous good wife-wise mother archetype that has been the bane of Japanese women studies for eons. These women are actively articulating, ordering, and legitimatizing a process of social engineering on the existing structure. It is an on-going, experimental process that has recorded success and failures.

This process should be viewed more like a negotiation, or arbitration between domination and resistance, which is likely to continue and even mutate as time goes by. This logic is captured by Ortner as she notes that “the anthropology of “agency” is not only about how social subjects, as empowered or disempowered actors, play the games

of their culture, but about laying bare what those cultural games are, their ideological underpinnings, and how playing the gender game reproduces or transforms those underpinnings (2006).

Appendices

Appendix 1 Profile of interviewees - *Bankonka*

Age	Academic Background	Occupation	Living Arrangement	Relationship Status
33	University(M.A)	IT Specialist	With parents	No B/F
42	University	Photographer	Alone	No B/F
34	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
37	University	Engineer	Alone	No B/F
40	Junior College	Teacher	With Parents	No B/F
34	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
37	University	Engineer	Alone	No B/F
34	university	OL	Alone	B/F
29	University	Consultant	Alone	No B/F
34	Nursing School	Nurse	Alone	No B/F
34	University	OL	With Parents	B/F
32	Vocational Sch.	Hair dresser	Alone	B/F
39	Junior College	OL	With Family	No B/F
43	University	OL	With Family	No B/F
34	Junior College	OL	Alone	B/F
34	University (M.Sc)	Researcher	Alone	No B/F
35	University	OL	With Parents	B/F
28	University	Student	With Family	No B/F
39	University	OL	Alone	B/F
43	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
50	Junior College	Editor	Alone	No B/F
38	Junior College	Freelancer	Alone	No B/F
26	University (M.A)	Researcher	Alone	No B/F
27	University (M.Sc)	Researcher	Alone	No B/F
40	University	Sales Consultant	Alone	No B/F
33	University	Consultant	With Family	No B/F
35	University	Teacher	With Family	No B/F
41	Junior College	OL	Alone	No B/F

(BF=Boyfriend)

Appendix 2 Profile of interviewees - *Cohabitation*

Age/ Duration of cohabitation	Academic Background	Occupation	Living Arrangement	Relationship Status
42/8 months	University	Post Office	Family	Now married
47/ one year	Junior College	OL	Alone	No B/F
28/8 months	University	OL	Cohabitation	B/F
40/ 9 Months	Junior College	OL	Family	Now married
32/ 1 Year	Junior College	OL	Family	Now Married
52/20 Years	Junior College	OL	Alone	No B/F
42/ 1 Year	University	OL	Family	No B/F
39/2 years	Junior College	OL	Family	Now Married
43/3 Years	Vocational School	Sales Officer	Alone	No B/F
42/7 Months	Nursing School	Nurse	Family	Now Married
34//6 Months	University	OL	cohabitation	B/F
32/8 Months	Vocational Sch.	Hairdresser	Family	Now Married
39/3 years	Junior College	OL	Alone	No B/F
23/9 Months	Junior College	Student	Cohabitation	B/F
29/4 Months	University	OL	Cohabitation	B/F
26/4 Months	University	Sales Staff	Cohabitation	B/F
25/ 1 Year	University	Sales Staff	Family	Now Married
35/2 years	University	Business Owner	Cohabitation	B/F
39/9 Months	Vocational School	OL	Alone	No B/F
43/7 years	University	OL	Alone	No B/F

Appendix 3 Profile of interviewees - *Ohitorisama*

Age	Academic Background	Occupation	Living Arrangement	Relationship Status
42	University	Private Business	Alone	No B/F
41	Junior College	OL	Alone	No B/F
33	University	Editor	Alone	No B/F
31	Nursing School	Nurse	Alone	No B/F
53	University	Sales Officer	Alone	No B/F
36	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
38	University	OL	Family	No B/F
30	University	Teacher	Family	No BF
40	Vocational School	Teacher	Family	No B/F
38	University	Consultant	Alone	No B/F
45	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
41	Junior College	OL	Alone	No BF
35	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
37	Junior College	OL	Alone	No B/F
35	University	OL	Alone	No B/F
42	University	Teacher	Alone	No B/F
29	University	Sales Staff	Family	No B/F
36	University	OL	Family	No B/F
39	University	Sales Representative	Alone	No B/F
42	University	OL	Alone	No B/F

Appendix 4 - Interview Matrix- International Marriage

#	Age	Husband's Nationality	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Length of Marriage
1	31	USA (Now D)	1 st Degree	O.L	1.5 years
2	50	British (2 nd M)	1 st Degree	O.L	10 years
3	51	Nigeria	1 st Degree	Banker	20 years
4	32	Indonesia	Master Degree	Business Owner	4 years
5	34	Ghana	1 st Degree	Family Business	4 years
6	63	USA	Master Degree	Teacher	28 years
7	59	USA	1 st Degree	Family Business	32 years
8	29	Australia	1 st Degree	O.L	1 year
9	41	Iran	Vocational Sch.	Family Business	6 years
10	42	Nigeria	Jr. College	O.L	12 years
13	49	Ghana	Jr. College	Teacher	12 years
13	52	Mali	Master Degree	Teacher	25 years
14	44	Italy	1 st Degree	O.L	12 years
15	41	USA	Jr. College	Salesperson	4 years
16	28	USA	Postgraduate	Consultant	5 years
17	57	Turkey	Jr. College	Restaurant	20 years
18	28	USA	Jr. College	Salesperson	3 years
19	32	Britain	1 st Degree	Consultant	1 year
20	43	Congo	1 st Degree	Teacher	17 years
21	52	Nigeria	Vocational Coll.	Personal Business	12 years
22	28	USA	University	O.L	2 years
23	26	Malawi	1 st Degree	Sales Staff	1 Year
24	45	China	Jr. College	Personal Business	20 years
25	45	Iran	Jr. College	Housewife	8 years
26	43	Iran	University	Personal Business	5 Years
27	43	Iran	Jr. College	Sales Staff	15 Years
28	49	Nigeria	High School	Housewife	21 years
29	53	Nigeria	1 st Degree	O.L	14 years

Appendix 5 - Interview Questions

Category A. Bi-racial/Mixed Marriages

1. Tell me all about yourself (profile, academic background, occupation, siblings and their marital status).
2. What was growing up like a girl in Japan like during your time?
3. What do you know about the status of women in Japan before World War II?
4. Were there obvious changes after the II World War?
5. How would you describe your mother's experience and how is it different from your experience?
6. What is your assessment of marriage in Japan today?
7. What in your opinion are the merits and demerits of the marriage system and laws governing marriage in Japan?
8. Where and how did you meet your spouse?
9. What prompted your decision to marry a non-Japanese?
10. Have you always wanted to marry a non-Japanese?
If yes
 - a. What are the factors that informed this decision?
 - b. By getting married to a non-Japanese, what were your expectations?
- C. So far, have those expectations being met?
11. What were your parent's initial reactions?
14. If given a chance to start all over, would you rather marry a Japanese man?
15. In Japanese homes, the woman keeps the family purse, is the same rule applicable in your home?

Category B. Delay of Marriage/ *Ohitorisama*

1. Tell me all about yourself (academic background, occupation, siblings, and their marital status).
2. What was growing up as a girl in Japan like during your time?
3. What is your view of marriage timing amongst young girls in recent times?
4. Why do you think people postpone or delay their first marriage?
5. What is your assessment of marriage?
6. What informed your decision to postpone your first marriage?
7. Do you wish to get married in the future?

If yes

- a. At what age in your life would you consider getting married?
- b. Are you currently in a serious relationship?
- c. Are there goals you would wish to accomplish before getting married?
- c. Tell me why you would want to get married eventually?
- d. Tell me the qualities you desire in a man?
- e. What are factors (socially, economically etc.) are responsible for your decision.

If no

- a. What would inform your decision to remain single?
- b. How would you like to spend the rest of your life when you grow old?
8. Do you wish to have children? Why/why not?
9. Are you experiencing pressures from family or relations urging you to get married?
10. Does your job give you time to socialize?
12. What is your assessment of full-time housewives in Japan?
13. Would you ever consider quitting your job to become one? Why?

Category C - Married Women

1. Tell me all about yourself (profile, academic background, occupation, siblings and their marital status).
2. What was growing up as a girl in Japan like during your time?
3. What do you know about the status of women in Japan before World War II?
4. What is your assessment of the status of women in Japan after the II World War?
5. How would you describe your mother's experience and how is it different from yours?
6. Tell me about your marriage e.g. how did you meet your spouse, was it an omiai (arranged marriage) or rennai
6. Before you got married, were you working?
7. Do you still work as a married woman?

If no

- a. What informed your decision to quit your job?
- b. Tell me about your normal day routine? Compared with other married women with jobs, would you say it is less/more stressful being a housewife?

If yes

Tell me about your average workday routine.

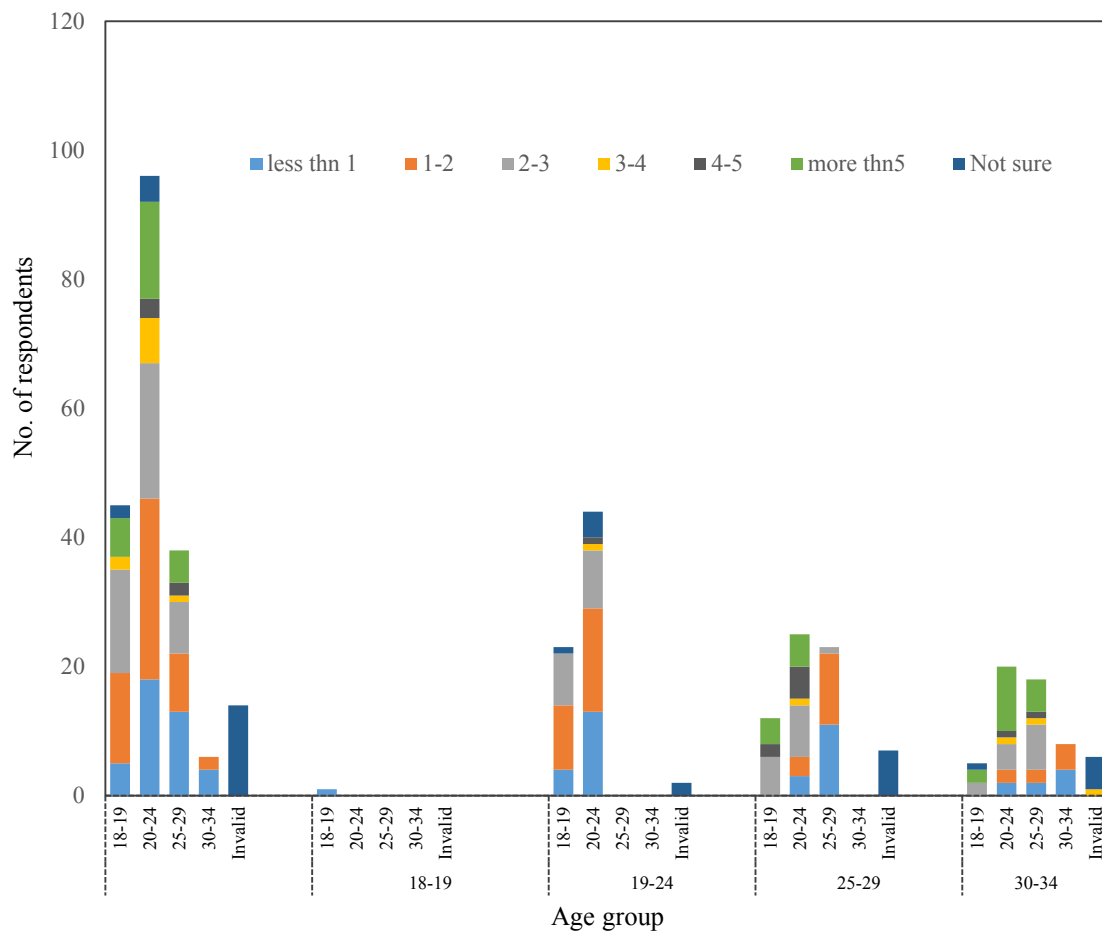
- b. What is your assessment of the life of a housewife in Japan?
8. What is view on the issue of delayed marriage?
9. What do you think about marriage in contemporary Japan?
10. What in your opinion is the future of marriage and the family in Japan?

Category D - Japanese men (Married and Single)

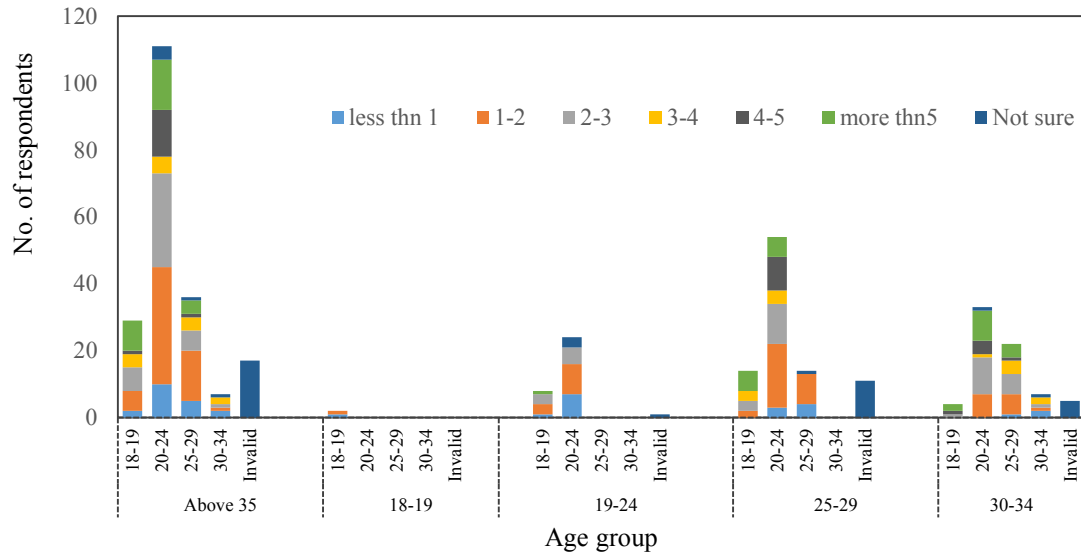
1. Tell me all about yourself (profile, academic background, occupation, siblings and their marital status).
2. What was growing up as a boy in Japan like during your time?
3. What do you know about the status of women in Japan before World War II?
4. What is your assessment of the status of women in Japan after the II World War?
5. How would you describe mother's experience as a Japanese woman?
6. What do you think of contemporary young Japanese women?
7. What is of view of marriage in present-day Japan?
8. What is your reaction to certain discriminatory practices against women in Japanese companies e.g. placing a limit on their job advancement, unequal salary for equal jobs, urging them to quit their jobs soon after marriage etc.?
9. What is your assessment of delayed marriage as practiced in Japan today?
10. What do you think of stay at home wives?
Would you encourage your wife to do so?
11. How does it feel to hand your pay cheque over to your spouse at the end of every month?
12. What in your opinion is the future of marriage and the family system in Japan?

Appendix 6 - Duration of Cohabitation for Men and Women

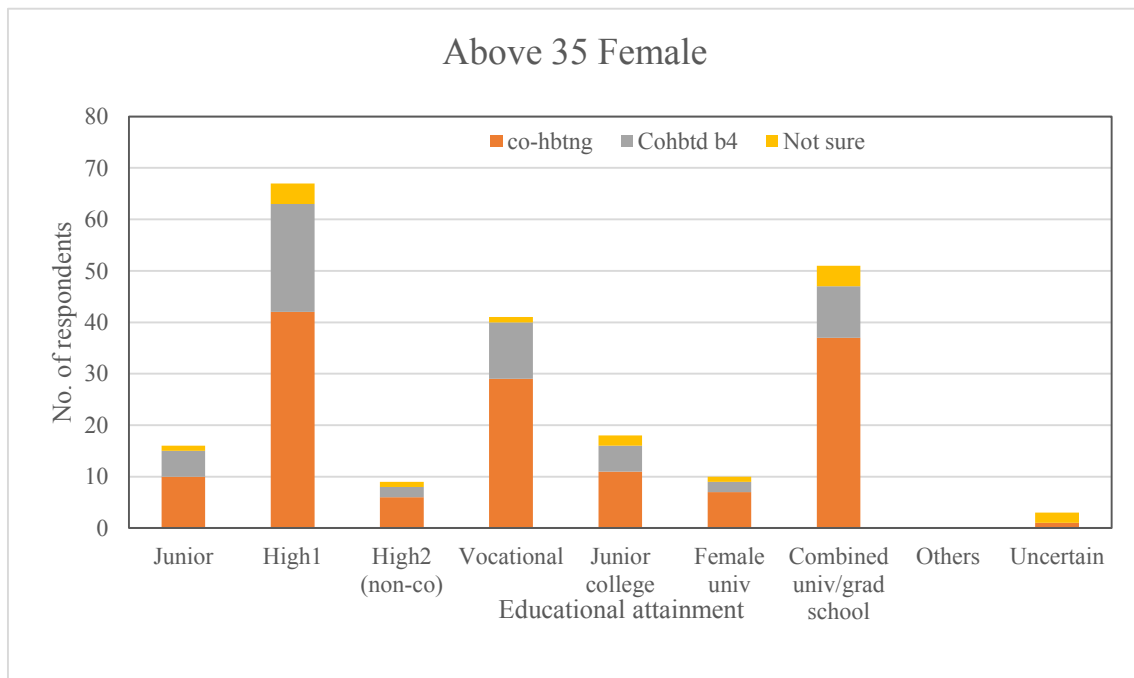
Female



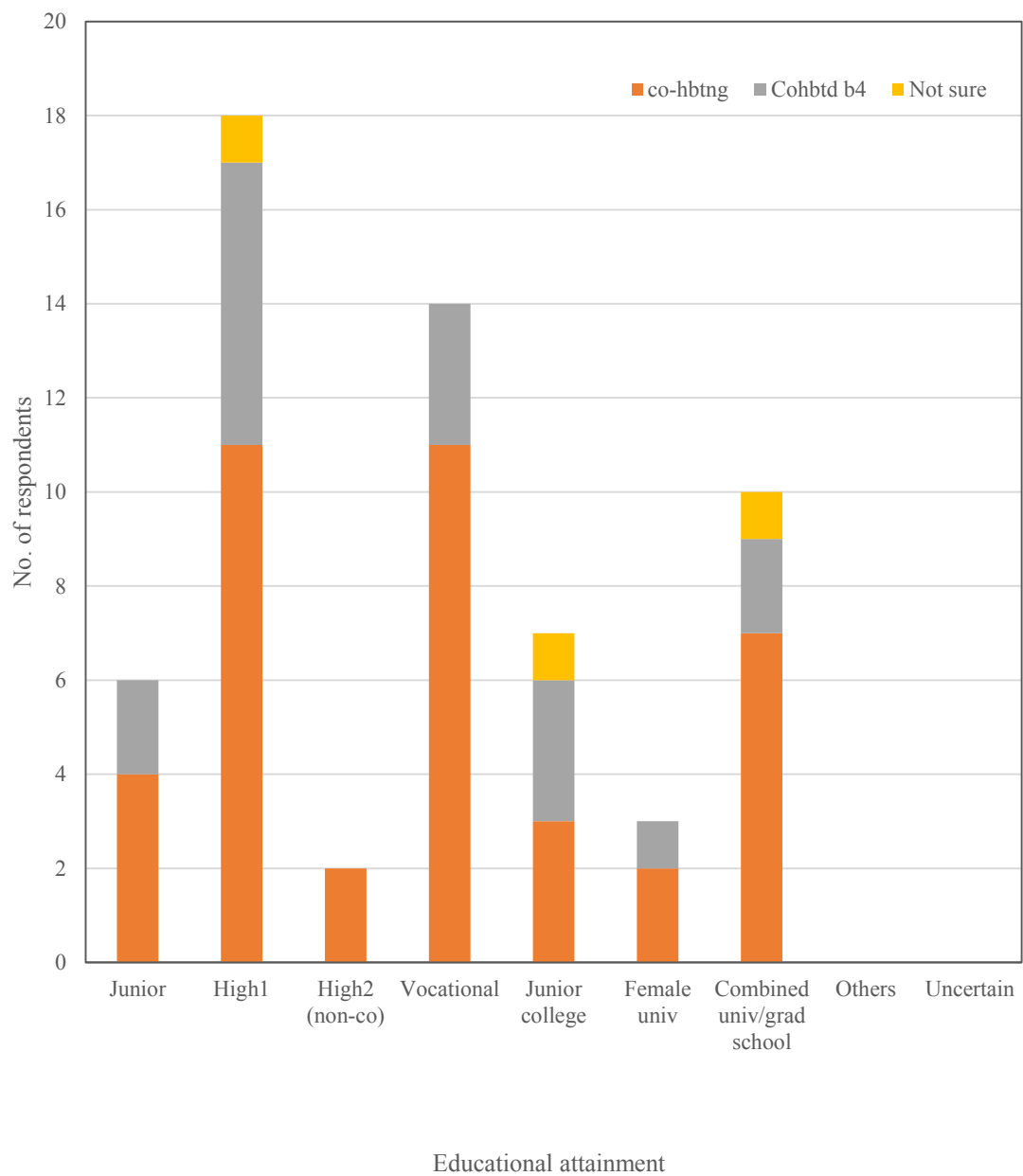
Male

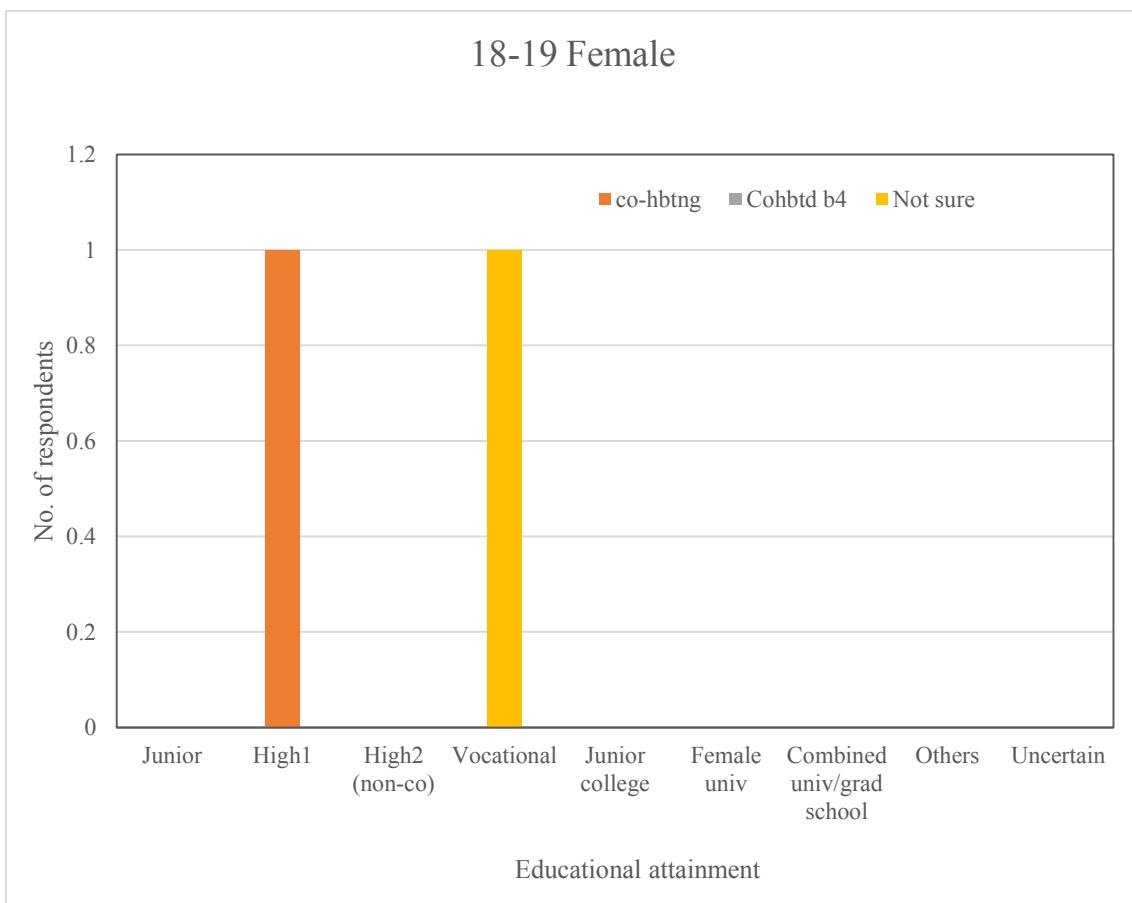
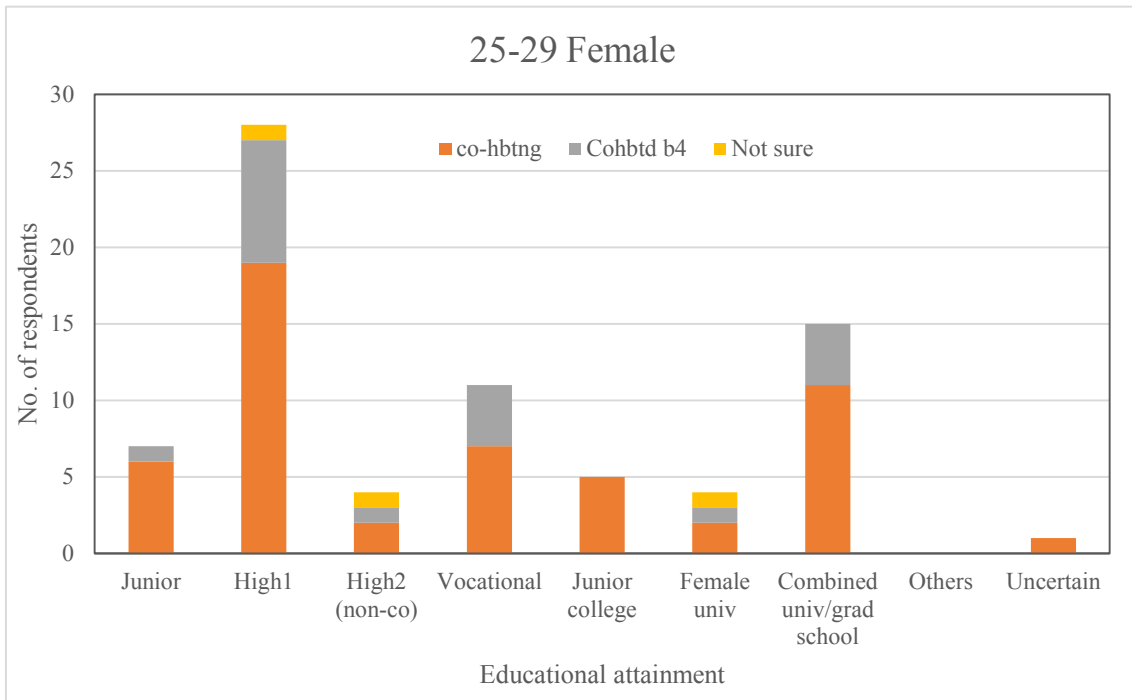


Literacy level of female cohabiters Amongst Various Age Cohorts



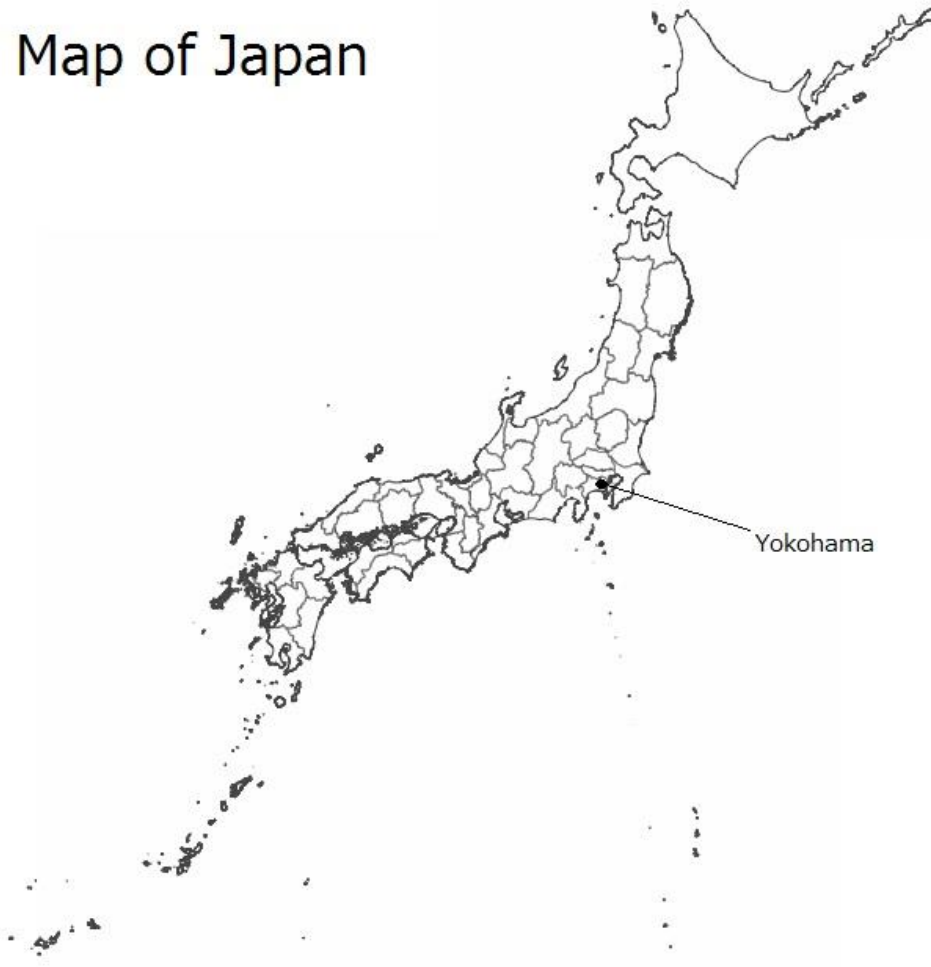
30-34 Female





Appendix 7 , Map of Japan showing Yokohama

Map of Japan



The Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

<UR > (2015/05/20Accessed)

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1 – Views on Marriage among never married persons who intend to marry.

Figure 2 – intention to marry within a year, by survey/year and age group.

Figure 3 - Views on the merit of marriage and single life.

Figure 4 - Average desired age of marriage of never married persons.

Figure 5 – Educational attainment of cohabiters between the ages of 30-34.

Figure 6 – Educational attainment of cohabiters above 35 years.

Figure 7 – Duration of cohabitation

Figure 8 - Percentage of women in regular employment

Figure 9 - Percentage of women in non-regular employment

Figure 10 - Percentage of men in regular employment

Figure 11 - Percentage of men in non- regular employment

Figure 12 – Trends of Mixed Marriages

Figure 13 – Japanese Women and foreign husbands

References

- Appadurai Ajun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*,
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Atoh, Makoto 2001. "Why are Cohabitations and Extra-marital Births so Few in Japan"?
Paper presented at Euresco conference on the 2nd demographic Transition held in
Germany, 2001.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in Lenin and
Philosophy and Other Essays. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 127- 188.
- Awaya, Nobuko and David P. Philips 1996. "Popular Reading: The Literary World of the
Japanese Working Woman" Imamura, Anne E ed. *Re-Imaging Japanese Women*.
California: University of California Press.
- Axinn, W.G. and Thornton, A. 1993. "Mothers, Children, and Cohabitation: the
Intergenerational Effects of Attitudes and Behavior." *American Sociological
Review* 58 (April): 233-46
- Bacon, Alice M. 1891. *Japanese Girls and Women*. London: Gay and Bird.
- Bando, Mariko. 1992. *A Data of Japanese Women*, Tokyo: Okurasho
- Barfield, Thomas (ed.) 2007. *The Dictionary of Anthropology*. Malden, Backwell
Publishing (181)
- Becker, G.1974. "A Theory of Marriage," in [T. W. Schultz](#), ed., *Economics of the family*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 293–344
- Berger, Michael (1998) "Japanese Women – Old Images and New Realities" *Dimensions
of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Edward R. Beauchamp. New
York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

- Bourdieu, Pierre 1977. *Outline of Practice*. Tr. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Tr. Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1962. "Society as Symbolic Interaction," in *Human Behavior and Social Processes*, A. M. Rose, ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brinton, M.C. 1992. "Christmas Cakes and Wedding Cakes: The Social Organization of Japanese Women's Course." Pp. 79-107 in *Japanese Social Organization*, ed T.S. Lebra. Honolulu HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Brodin, Karen. 2011. Morgen, Sandra; Hutchinson, Janis. "Anthropology as White Public Space". *American Anthropologist*.
- Burgess, E.W. and Locke, H.J 1945. *The Family: From Institution to Companionship*. New York: American Book Co.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender*. California: University of California Press.
- Clammer, John. 1997. *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Condon, Jane 1991. *A Half Step Behind Japanese Women Today*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company.
- Collier, Jane and Rosaldo, Michelle Z. 1981. "The Cultural Construction of Gender And Sexuality" in *Sexual Meanings*, S. Ortner, and H. Whitehead eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collier, Jane Fishburne & Sylvia Junko Yanagisako. 1987. *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- _____. 1989. "Theory in Anthropology since Feminist Practice". *Critique of Anthropology*, 9: 27-37.
- Dales, Laura. 2009. *Feminist Movements in Contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge.
- De Certeau, Michel 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dissanayake, Wimal. 1996. *Narratives of Agency: Self-Making in China, India, and Japan*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dominguez, Johnna et. al. *Anthropological Theories*.
<http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Feminist%20Anthropology>
- Dougherty, Elizabeth 2004. *The Balance of Practice* Left Brain: Right Brain. 25 Feb. 2010. <http://www.elizd.com/website-LeftBrain/essays/>
- Foster, Johanna. 1999. "An Invitation to Dialogue: Clarifying the Position of Feminist Gender Theory in Relation to Sexual Difference Theory," *Gender and Society* 13 no. 4: 431-456.
- Fukutake Tadashi. 1989. *The Japanese Social Structure: Its Evolution in the Modern Century*. 2nd.ed. Trans. Ronald P. Dore. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.
- Forestone, Shulamith. 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. NY: William Morrow Publishers
- Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.
- Gregor, Thomas. 1977. *Mehinaku: The Drama of Daily Life in a Brazilian Indian Village*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Harvey, David 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge, MA. Blackwell
- Henderson, Helen Kreider 1995. "The Gender Division of Labour" in Helen Kreider Henderson ed. *Gender and Agricultural Development: Surveying the Field*. Arizona: University of Arizona Press.
- Hendry, Joy 1981. *Marriage in Changing Japan: Community & Society*. London: Routledge.
- Hendry, Joy 1992 *Understanding Japanese Society*. London: Routledge.
- Henshall, Kenneth G. 1999. *Dimensions of Japanese Society: Gender, Margins, and Mainstream*. New York: Macmillan.
- Inamatsu, Tatsuo. 1993. "Shoshi Shakai no kiman toshite no dankai junior" (Baby Boomers Junior as the Key to Low Birthrate Society). Nikkei Image Climate Forecast, January 4-7.
- Inoue, kyoko. 1991. *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution: A Linguistic and Cultural Study of its Making*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Imamura, Anne E. 1991. "New Lifestyles for Housewives" in Finkelstein Barbara et.al (eds.) *Transcending Stereotypes*. Maine: Intercultural Press.
- Itamoto Y. 1992. "Why Men Cannot Marry", in K. Ichikawa (ed.) *Age of Crucified Men*, Tokyo: Shibundo.
- Iwao Sumiko, 1995. *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image & Changing Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Iwasawa M. Raymo J.M, Bumpass L. 2005. "Unmarried Cohabitation and Family in Japan." Tokyo: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.
- Iwasawa M. Raymo J.M, Bumpass L. 2009. "Cohabitation and Family Formation in Japan" *Demography*, Volume 46-Number 4, November 2009: 785-803

- J.E Robertson and N.Suzuki (eds.) 2002. *Men & Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salary man* Doxa, N.Y, Routledge.
- Jones, Elizabeth Bright. 2000. "Gender and Agricultural Change in Saxony, 1900-1930," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota.
- Kelsky Karen. 2001. *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams* Durham: Duke University Press.
- _____. 2008. "Gender, modernity, and eroticized internationalism in Japan" D. Blake & Wilis Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu (eds) *Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender and Identity*, New York: Routledge.
- Kimoto, Kimiko "Company Man, Makes Family Happy: Gender Analyzes of the Japanese Family" *Dimensions of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Edward R. Beauchamp. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Kingsley Davies. 1985. "The Meaning and Significance of Marriage in Contemporary Society" In Kingsley Davies ed. *Contemporary Marriage*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.
- Kondo Dorinne K. 1990. *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in A Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1997. *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*. New York: Routledge.
- Kovner, Sarah. 2012. *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan*. Stanford University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia 1986. *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Kuchikomi "Single Women at the Bottom Rung of the Economy". Japan Today. Dec. 28, 2001

Kumiko Nemoto, et. al. 2012. "Never-Married Employed Men's Gender Beliefs and Ambivalence toward Matrimony in Japan." *Journal of Family Issues* December 2013, 34 (12) 1673-1695

[Lamphere, Louise](#) and Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, editors. 1974. [Women, Culture, and Society](#). Stanford University Press. Stanford, California

Lebra, Takie Sugiyama. 1984. *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Lewis, Jane. 2001. *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Lie, John. 1996. 'Sociology of Contemporary Japan', *Current Sociology* 44, 1

Ma, Karen. 1996. *The Modern Madame Butterfly* Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle.

MacKinnon, Catherine 1987. *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Maruyama Masao 1965. "Patterns of Individuation & the Case of Japan: A Conceptual Scheme" *Changing Japanese Attitudes toward Modernization*. Ed. Marius B Jansen. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Mackie, Vera (1997) *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour, and Activism 1900-1937*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Millet, Kate. 1972. *Sexual Politics*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Monk, Janice and Janet Momsen, 1994. "Gender and Geography in a Changing World," *Bulletin of the International Geographical Union* 44: 12-19.

- Morgen, Sandra. 1989. Gender and Anthropology: Introductory Essay. In *Gender and Anthropology--Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching*, Sandra Morgen, ed., Washington D.C.: American Anthropological Association. Pp 1-20.
- Muriel, Jolivet 1997. *Japan: The Childless Society? The Crisis of Motherhood*. London: Routledge.
- Nakamatsu, Tomoko. 2005. "Faces of "Asian brides": Gender, race and class in the Representations of immigrant women in Japan". *Women's Studies International Forum* 28 (2005) 405-417.
- Nagase, Nobuko. 2006. "Japanese youth's attitudes towards marriage and child rearing" in Rebick, Marcus & Ayumi Takenaka ed. *The Changing Japanese Family*. London: Routledge.
- Nakane, Chie. 1973. *Japanese Society: A Practical Guide to Understanding the Japanese Mindset and Culture*. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing.
- Nemoto, Kumiko (2013) "When Culture Resists Progress: Masculine Organizational Culture and Its Impacts on the Vertical Segregation of Women in Japanese Companies" *Work Employment and Society*. 27 (1) 153-169.
- Nemoto, Kumiko 2008 "Postponed marriage: Exploring Women's Views of Matrimony and Work in Japan" *Gender and Society*. 22 (2) 219-237.
- Nakano, Lynne Y. 2001 "Working and Waiting for an "appropriate Person": how Single Women support and Resist family in Japan". *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation* Eds. Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy. London: Routledge.

- Ochai, Emiko 1996. *The Japanese Family system in Transition*. Tokyo: LTCB International Library Foundation.
- _____. 1998. "Descent Housewives and Sensual White women- Representations of Women in Postwar Japanese Magazines" *Dimensions Of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Edward R. Beauchamp. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Ogasawara, Yuko 1998. *Office Ladies and Salaried Men by Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender and Work in Japanese Companies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ogawa, Naohiro et. al. 2006. "Demographics of the Japanese Family: Entering Uncharted Territory" in Rebeck, Marcus & Ayumi Takenaka ed. *The Changing Japanese Family*. London: Routledge.
- Ogawa N. and Retherford, R. D. 1993. "The Resumption of Fertility Decline in Japan: 1973-92", *Population and Development Review*, 19: 703-741
- Ogawa, N. and R. L. Clark. 1995. "Earning patterns of Japanese Women: 1976-88." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 43: 293-314.
- Ohint Masami, 1995. "The Mystique of Motherhood: A Key to Understanding Social Change and Family Problems in Japan." *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future*. Ed. Kumiko Fujimura-Kanselow and Atsuko Kameda. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ortner Sherry 2006. *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. A55

- _____. 1996. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- _____. 1974. "Is female to male as nature is to culture"? In M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, culture, and society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- _____. 2001. "Specifying Agency: The Comaroffs and their Critics", *Interventions*, Vol. 3, no.1, 76-84
- _____. 1981. "Gender and Sexuality in Hierarchal Societies: The Case of Polynesian and some Comparative Implications," *Sexual Meanings*, S. Ortner and H. Whitehead eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1984. "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Society and History*. 26, No. 1 (Jan. 1984), 126-166
- Pharr, Susan J. (1998) "Status Conflict: The Rebellion of the Tea pourers" *Dimensions Of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Edward R. Beauchamp New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- _____. 1981 *Political Women in Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Piper, Nicola. 2003. "Wife or Worker? Worker or Wife? Marriage and Cross-Border Migration in Contemporary Japan". *International Journal of Population Geography* 9, 457-469.
- _____. 1997. "International Marriage in Japan: 'race' and 'gender' Perspectives." *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol 4, No. 3, pp. 321-338
- Rebick, Marcus & Ayumi Takenaka. 2006. "The Changing Japanese Family" in Rebick, Marcus & Ayumi Takenaka ed. *The Changing Japanese Family*. London: Routledge.

- Renshaw, Jean R. 1999. *Kimono in the Boardroom: The Invisible Evolution of Japanese Women Manager*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reskin Barbara F. and Irene Padadic. 1994. *Women and Men at Work* Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Retherford, Robert D. et.al 2001. "Late Marriage and Less Marriage in Japan" *Population and Development Review*. Vol. 27, No. 1 (Mar. 2001), pp 65-102
- Rindfuss, R.R. & Vanden Heuvel, A. "Cohabitation: a Precursor to Marriage or an Alternative to Being Single? *Population and Development Review* 16 (4): 703-26
- Roberson, James E. 2002. "Japanese working-class masculinities: marginalized complicity." James .E Robertson and Nobue Suzuki (eds.) *Men & Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salary man Doxa*, N.Y, Routledge.
- Robins-Mowry, Dorothy. 1983. *The Hidden Sun: Women of Modern Japan*. Westview Press
- Ronald Richard & Hirayama Yosuke 2009. "Home alone: the Individualization of Young, Urban Japanese Singles." *Environment and Planning A* Vol. 41, pages 2836- 2854
- Rosenberger, Nancy 2001. *Gambling with Virtue*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- _____ 1990 "Fragile Resistance, signs of status: Women between State and Media in Japan", in Imamura (ed.), *Re-imaging Japanese Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rouse, Joseph, 2007. "Practice Theory," in S. Turner and M. Risjord, ed., *Handbook of the Philosophy of Science. Vol. 15: Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*. Dordrecht: Elsevier, 630-681.

- Rubin, Gail. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex". In *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Rayna R. Reiter, ed. New York. Monthly Review Press, pp 157-210.
- Said, Edward. W. 1979. *Orientalism*: NY. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Sakai, Junko. 2003. *Make Inu no tobe (The Howl of the Loser Dog)*: Tokyo: Kondasha.
- Sugimoto, Yoshio 2003. *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Suzuki M. et.al. "Individualizing Japan: Searching for its Origin in first Modernity" *BrJ Social*. 2010 Sep; 61 (3): 513-38
- Suzuki, Nobue. 2003. "Of Love and the Marriage Market" in James E Robertson and Suzuki Nobue. (eds.) *Men & Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salary man Doxa*, N.Y, Routledge.
- Tanimura, Shiho 1991. *Kekkon Shinai Kamo Shirenai Shokogun Danseiban* (The I May not Marry Phenomenon Men's Edition) Tokyo: Shufu no Tomosha.
- Takano, Y. & Osaka E. 1999. "An unsupported Common View: Comparing Japan and The U.S. on Individualism/Collectivism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2, 311-342.
- Takano, Y. & Sogon, S. 2008. "Are Japanese more Collectivistic than Americans? Examining Conformity in in-groups and the Reference-group Effect". *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39, 237-250.
- Tanaka, Kazuko 1974. *A Short History of the Women's Movement in Modern Japan*. Tokyo: Femitem Press.
- Tanaka, Yukiko 1995. *Contemporary Portraits of Japanese Women*. USA: Praeger Publishers

- Tong, Rosemarie. 1998. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. 2nd ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).
- Tokuhiro Yoko, 2010. *Marriage in Contemporary Japan*. USA: Routledge
- _____ 2004. "Delayed Marriage in Contemporary Japan: A Qualitative Study." Ph.D. Thesis. The University of Hong Kong.
- Tsuya Noriko. 2005. "Changes in Partnership" manuscript
- Turner, Stephen 1994. *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge*
Moreover, Presuppositions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vogel, Suzanne H. 1998. "The Death of "Good Wife, Wise Mother"?"
Dimensions of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays. Ed.
Edward R. Beauchamp. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- _____ "Professional Housewife: The Career of Urban Middle-Class Japanese Women."
Dimensions of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays. Ed. Edward R.
Beauchamp. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Wakui Y.1990. "Troublesome Guys" in M. Fukushima (ed.) *Men's Miscalculations*,
Tokyo: Komichi Sombo.
- White, Merry. 1998. "The Virtue of Japanese mothers: Cultural Definitions of Women's
Lives." *Dimensions of Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Edward
R. Beauchamp. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- _____ "Home Truths: Women and Social Change in Japan"; *Dimensions of
Contemporary Japan: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Edward R. Beauchamp.
New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Whitehead Harriet and Sherry Ortner 1981. "Introduction: Accounting for Sexual Meanings" in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* Whitehead Harriet and Sherry Ortner (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Thomas

Wittgenstein L. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations* Tr. E. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell

Yamada Masahiro. 1994. "Sociological Explanation of Marriage Delay" The family and Social Security" Tokyo University