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YOUNG JAPANESE WOMEN’S ATTITUDE TOWARD MARRIAGE AND CAREER

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ABSTRACT

This study examines young Japanese women’s attitude toward marriage and career. Emphases are placed on both the past and present roles of women as they evolve in Japanese culture. A survey-type questionnaire was conducted to 16 young women in Tokyo, university students and office ladies, aged from 20-35. Three in-depth interviews were also included.

The results of the study indicated that today’s Japanese women prefer career to marriage. Implications of these findings were discussed with particular literature references and survey.

*Key words:* Japanese women, housewives, office ladies, marriage, singleton, and career.
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1. INTRODUCTION
The role of Japanese women attracts a great deal of attention. Traditionally they were viewed in relation to the family, their husband and children, but changes have come to them, though in a slow pace. The role of women in most agricultural and industrial societies throughout the world has been a supportive one. In some countries women have been directly involved in changing their status, while others accept the role that are impose upon them by their society. This thesis is written with the intention of examining Japanese women’s roles, lifestyle preference, and opportunities in relation to marriage and work, both in the past and present.

1.1 Statement of Problem
Traditionally, Japanese women have been tied to a set of cultural and economic circumstances. Japanese society cherished group conformity and harmony, and the past has dictated what the role of women should be.

Women in Japan have a reputation for being devoted, self-sacrificing, demure, and thoughtful (Condon, 1985). Images of beautiful and serene women, elegantly clothed in kimonos, serving tea or arranging flowers, may come to mind when one thinks of Japanese women. Many people envision Japanese women as submissive, soft and serving family. The most important job for women is securing the best education for their children and taking care of their husbands.

Since World War II, Japan’s GDP has increased dramatically. In 1982, Japan was one of the economic giants, ranking third in the world, behind the United States and the former Soviet Union (Reischauer, 1982). Employment opportunities develop with the changing economy. Women now have opportunities to work in foreign companies in Japan. These companies will hire women in positions that normally are not open to them in Japanese firms. Also with the implementation of the Japan’s Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL), more Japanese companies, under social pressure combined with their realization of the importance of female labor, came to provide women with more opportunities both on employment and promotion than they did before (Imamura, 1996, p190). Circumstantial changes have a great impact
on women’s lives. Young women today enjoy more opportunities and a degree of financial independence unknown to women of earlier generation (Tanaka, 1995, p79). Although changes affect all women, it is the primary purpose of this thesis to focus on those who have received the higher education to determine how these changes have affected their lifestyle choices and preferences. Increasing educational and employment opportunities, as well as marriage and child rearing, are important considerations of women. The desired lifestyle that Japanese young women envision for themselves was examined.

1.2 Research Question

This thesis surveys marriage preferences of 16 young Japanese women aging from 20 to 35. The research questions to be answered are as follows:
To what degree are young women interested in marriage?
To what degree are they interested in pursuing a career and equal opportunity in the workplace?
To what degree do they want to be housewives?
To what degree would they consider remaining childfree?
To what degree are other variables important in their lives?

1.3 Format

This thesis consists of five parts. The first part (Introduction) contains the introductory materials and questions.
The second part (Methodology) provides an explanation of the design of the study and the methodology used. The survey items will also be discussed in this part.
The third part (Review of the Literature) reflects the historical process Japanese women have trudged.
The fourth part (Results) discusses the results of the survey of the samples of young Japanese women.
The fifth part (Conclusions) contains the conclusions and recommendations of the study.
2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design of Study

The format of this study employs both historical research and social investigative methodology. Therefore, a literature search was undertaken and a survey was conducted.

Historical research, to a certain extent, can predict future trends (Borg, 1989). This thesis examines the current preference of young Japanese women toward marriage. Therefore, a historical review of the roles of Japanese women is necessary to facilitate a better understanding of the cultural heritage of these women.

Surveys are concerned with the demographic characteristics, social environment, activities, or opinions and attitudes of a group of people (Moser, 1972). Information such as “sociological data is indispensable since it is used to study the relationships among groups (Kerlinger, 1975, p86).” Surveys have a clear descriptive purpose. The desired intent of this research is to assess the preference of young Japanese women toward marriage.

To initiate a search for historical sources, Brooks suggests the following approach: “Resourcefulness and imagination are essential in the preliminary exploration as well as in the later actual study. One can suppose that certain kinds of sources would exist if he thinks carefully about his subject, the persons involved, the government or institutions concerned, and the kinds of records that would naturally grow out of the events that he will be studying. He should ask himself who would have produced the useful documents in the transaction he is concerned with. What would be the expected flow of events? What would be the life history of the documents, from their creation to current use, filing, temporary storage, and eventual retention in a repository where he can consult them? What kinds of materials would one expect to be kept rather than discarded?”(Brooks, 1969, p19-20)

It was necessary to pay a visit to Japan to collect materials and become acquainted with the people and customs of the country.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis
While in Japan I visited Tokyo, had specially course in Waseda University, where I collected references from its library. Other resources for this thesis were found in National Library China and ELIN@Lund. Approximately 10 articles relevant to the thesis were available from the Internet. Prof. Stephen Nussbaum and Prof. Glenda S. Roberts helped me sort out some useful data for this thesis.

The survey was conducted with the help of Roberts, who received his Master’s degree in Asian Studies in 2003. Currently he lives in Tokyo, where he started his own business. I designed the questionnaire, and Robert distributed it to his Japanese acquaintances to fill it in. The survey consists of 19 items. A scale is used ranging from 1 (agree very much) to 7 (disagree greatly). The survey respondents comprised 16 young Japanese women aged from 20 to 35; 6 university students, 7 office ladies, 2 shop assistants and 1 stay at home. Percentage was calculated and reported for each item. Three in-depth interviews with office ladies were conducted.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is an important source of data for understanding the history of women in Japan. Without some knowledge of the past, contemporary Japanese cannot really be understood. In order to understand Japanese women it is important to look at their past, the Japanese society as a whole, and how Japanese women interact within the context of that society. This part is divided into five sections and reviews the literature as it relates to the historical background of Japanese women.

3.1 Ancient Japan

According to the Shinto, the native religion of Japan, the nation of Japan was created by, Izanami, a strong and free-spirited goddess. The heavenly pair, Izanami and her brother, Izanagi, was commanded by all the heavenly spirits to give birth to Japan. On the first meeting between the sister and the brother, Izanami spoke first. She was then disciplined and told by her brother that as a woman she should not speak first. When they came to give birth to their offspring, they failed. After consulting the heavenly spirits, they were told because the woman spoke first they could not bear adequate offspring. They were ordered to go back and amend their ways. The second time they met, it was Izanagi whom opened his mouth first. They then bore the islands of Japan (Campbell, 1985, p584-92). Japanese sun goddess, Amaterasu, was born as Izanagi washed his left eyes. She was the founder of the Japanese Imperial Family. Amaterasu dispatched her grandson to descend from the heavens to the Japanese Islands to govern the nation. The Japanese Imperial Line, according to this saga, was inherited from the Devine (Campbell, 1977)

In the third century, a women ruler, Pimiko, dominated Japan. She was an old and unmarried woman who was skilled in magic and gained favor with the people who made her queen. But it also said that it was the support of her brother helping her seizing the throne. After her demise, a young girl of thirteen, Iyo, Pimiko’s relative, was made queen. Following the two queens, there was another legendary woman, Empress Jingo (200-269 A.D.), the wife of the head of the warriors. After the death of her husband, she disguised herself as a man and led the Japanese forces against Korea
By the fourth or early fifth century, Confucianism arrived in Japan from China, and so did Buddhism. They played an important role in affecting women’s status within the society (Campbell, 1962). Buddhism became a competitor to Shinto, and its teachings were a negative influence on the status of women in negative way. Confucianism paved the way for the Japanese way of thinking and for a rigid code of life. For Japanese women the new philosophies brought them less equality, more restrictive family relationships, and the loss of political power (Robins, 1983).

During Heian Era (794-1185 A.D.), lots of limitations were placed on women. They were not to be seen by men who were not her family members. Their education was limited to penmanship, poetry, and music. Nevertheless, women produced great literary works during this period. Sei Shonagone’ Pillow Book, Lady Izumi’s diary, Lady Murasaki’s diary, and the Sarashina diary were all written in this period. The world’s first novel, The Tale of the Genji, was written by Lady Murasaki (Robins Mowry, 1983). Until the end of the Heian period, women were defined in terms of what they should not do. The growth of feudalism and the Samurai ethic that began in the Kamakura era developed and refined expectations of what women should do (Palson, 1976, p1-24).

Japan was at war by 1500 (Ashikaga Era). Women often became hostages when hostilities erupted. During this time women, including wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers, were married, divorced, or given as hostages for political reasons. Brute force was highly valued, and women slowly came to accept themselves as less valuable than men.

During the Tokugawa period of the Edo Era (1600-1868), the status of women was defined. Women and children were in a low place in society. A social practice was largely done at that time. That the midwife would kill the child if it was a baby girl. When the mother came to give the birth, the midwife would prepare a wet paper in advance. If a girl was born, the wet paper was used to suffocate the baby (Cressy, 1955). From the age of seven, boys and girls were not allowed to dine together (Lu, 1974). Girls were taught and told to be obedient, chaste, merciful, and quiet.
marriage the wife had to do all house chores. They had to learn how to please their husbands and parents-in-laws. Education for girls was limited. Only 10% of the girls received the education outside their home, one-quarter of that of boys. Most girls studied at homes for practical things on pregnancy, etiquette, and dressing. Women literally had no rights. Before she got married, she depended on her father, after the marriage, she became the dependant of her husband, then her son. A woman could not devoice her husband, but could be devoiced by her husband easily. If divorced, she was cast away by both her husband and her parents. There was no way for a woman to become the head of the family; or the guardian of her own children, to own property in her name, or to make contracts in her name (Palson, 1976, p209-32).

In the period of Meiji Restoration (1868-1911), Meiji civil law endowed women the right to divorce on the grounds of cruelty, desertion, or misconduct. But divorce women were not accepted by society. As a result, the right was like the ears for a deaf. Women also gained the right to become the head of a family, to inherit and own property, and to act as guardians to children, but the precondition was she had the prior consent from her husband (Palson, 1976, p209-32). Even if a woman had some property before her marriage, her husband had the right to deal with her property according to his own will, such as he could sell his wife’s property and keep the money. Ostensibly women had gained some rights, but without the permission from her husband and parent-in-laws, the rights were nothing. The family registration and resident card system created gender division in the family, which could be noticed through some of the practices. The system required that each household selecting one as its head, and 98 percent of the head were male. Even if the husband deceased he still remained as the head on his family register as long as other household member still listed in it. The system also required that wife and husband took the same surname after their marriage, either the husband’s or the wife’s. Actually in almost all cases it’s the woman who abandoned her surname to adapt that of the husband (Sugimoto, 2003, p146-51). To remarry, a widow had to ask permission from the parent-in-laws first, which was mostly turned down by them. Men could easily go away from adultery, but for women, it was quite another story, she would be punished
severely as being divorced or imprisoned.

3.2 Pre-War Japan

This section was about the changes that affected women after feudal times, from the time of the Meiji Restoration to the end of World War II. State attention to women was a product of the sweeping political and social reforms of the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (Berstein, 1991, p151). Changes took place in the areas of education, employment and social freedoms. The Meiji Civil Code of 1898 gave women some rights, on paper mostly. Whatever, it did perpetuate the evolvement of feminine ideal. To impress the Western powers, a small number of high-ranking women were set into a more public role (Berstein, 1991, p154). Education was given a high priority by Meiji leaders. The Education Ordinance of 1872 defined the aim of increased education for all segments of society (Paulson, 1976, p209-32). By the end of the Meiji Era (1912) the rate of school attendance at the elementary level was 98% for girls and 99% for boys. The literacy rate was 100%, which is still in effect today (Robins Mowry, 1983). However the equality in elementary schools could not be seen in the middle school and university. Only 13 public middle schools open for girls, and the total number of students was around 2000 (Robins Mowry, 1983). In schools, girls were taught how to prepare for their marriage. If girls wanted to continue their education, there was only one woman’s normal school for training teachers was open to them. Women were excluded from the university (Paulson, 1976, p209). The government sponsored higher education schools for women in Tokyo and Nara, and in addition to teacher training also included technical training in pharmacology, dentistry, and domestic sciences (Robins Mowry, 1983). After much opposition, Dr. Yayoi Yoshioka established the first medical school for women in Tokyo in 1900, and the following year Jinzo Naruse founded Japan Women’s University. In 1938 there were 48 institutions for higher learning for women, of which only 6 were sponsored by government (Robins Mowry, 1983). All these institute and college taught women to develop their individual personalities and to become financially independent working women.

3.2.1 Industrialization
Industrialization was one of the avenues undertaken by Meiji reformers in order to make Japan more modern. Business groups known as zaibatsu began to form. The great financial and industrial empires expanded from these groups. Industrial progress gained momentum from the cotton and silk spinning factory. The labor force was primarily female. The first spinning factory was built in 1872 in Tomioka. This factory employed approximately 400 women. At first women workers came from the samurai class but later women from the rural areas took their place. Female workers outnumbered males in light industry, especially in textiles. 60 to 90 percent female produced 40 percent of the gross national product and 60 percent of the foreign exchange during the late nineteenth century. By sharp contrast, long working hours, bad sanitary conditions, and low salaries were featured the women’s working life, a gloomy picture (Gail Lee Bernstein 1991, p153). What’s more, teenage workers were widely used and constituted a basic element in Japan’s economy.

Eventually in 1911 and 1923 factory laws provided some protections for working hours, child labor, and maternity leave. But these laws were not applied everywhere, it didn’t work with those small firms.

3.2.2 Social Issues
There are many social issues that affect women in Japan, such as birth control, marriage, and divorce. Industrialization had brought changes to the economy of Japan, it also had an impact on society and people as well, especially on women. “Winds of social change, once freed, may veer at unforeseen strengths in directions hardly anticipated. Even the carefully controlled Meiji revolutionizing ran this risk, and the enlightened women who sought emancipation provided some of the surprises. Many of the social, economic, and political struggles proceeded in concert from the late Meiji period to World War II” (Robins Mowry 1983).

3.2.2.1 Marriage
In the early Meiji period the average age for marriage for girls was 15 or 16 years. Those who were unmarried at twenty were regarded as left over, and those at 25 but still unmarried were considered a disgrace to their families. By the 1920s, as a result
of both industrialization and education, the age range for marriage for women was between 20 and 25, and for men it remained between 25 and 30. Many women who completed higher education often delayed marriage, and many of those who went to the foreign universities never married at all (Robins Mowry 1983).

3.2.2.2 Divorce
Marriage rated increased while divorce rates declined. From 1879 to 1897 when a man or his family could dispose a wife, one marriage in three ended in divorce. The rate dropped to one in ten by 1926. The phenomenon of taking concubine also decreased. (Robins Mowry 1983).

3.2.3 Social Freedoms
Before and during the initiative state of Meiji period, women were explicitly excluded from political activity and participation in public discourse; their role was only confined within their family. They were one of their husbands’ assets, and their ascribed role was good wives and wise mothers reproducing and socializing children (Mackie , 2003, p3). Kishida, a feminist during that time, described the upbringing of young women was like the cultivation of bonsai trees, whose shape is created by the trimming of roots and leaves (Mackie , 2003, p20). With very little proper education and too much Confucian feminism ideology infused in mind, women were not aware that they should be granted the equal right as men had. With the development of modernity, feminism consciousness in Japan was forged as part of it, and women began to be interested in exploring the meanings of individualism for themselves. Although women were still politically confined to the domestic sphere by Meiji Law, which prevented them from attending or holding political meetings of joining political parties, the movements argued for a view that women could become citizens with rights which matched their obligations had never been ceased (Mackie , 2003, p32). In 1911, a women’s literary journal, Seito (Bluestocking), was established by Hiratsuka Raichō, the daughter of a bureaucrat of samurai origin, a new woman. The journal functioned as forum to defend woman’s right and attack all the unfair and discriminated treatment to woman. It devoted to discussions and debates relating family system, chastity, abortion, and etc (Mackie , 2003, p45). Compared with the
journal established by Kishida Toshiko in 1884, in which issues as woman’s education, the relationships between husbands and wives, and woman’s aspirations to political and freedom were concerned, the posture of Seito was even bolder. In the wake of such debates, an organized group, the New Women’s Association, was formed in 1920, which aimed to argue for the rights of women, mothers and children and to institute a movement for the achievement of women’s higher education, women’s suffrage, the abolition of laws which disadvantaged women, and the protection of motherhood (Mackie, 2003, p15-8). All the voices from feminist laid the foundation for women obtaining more civil rights later.

3.3 Post-War Japan
The end of the war brought many changes to Japan. The United States occupation of Japan opened up many opportunities for women. This section examines the areas of educational, constitutional, and civil equality for women.

3.3.1 Political Rights and Equality
After the World War II, many of the institutional changes women had claimed for in the first half of the twentieth century was finally being put into place, and women could be seen on the stage of politics. New Constitution guaranteed freedom from sexual discrimination, and a revised Civil Code conducted reform of family law and the creation of legislation specifically directed at the conditions of working women. With feminists’ unremitting struggle and petition, women were bestowed the right to vote as elections were held, and female candidates to the Diet for the very first time appeared on 10 April 1946 (Mackie, 2003, p120-38). The election results were very enlightening. Thirty-nine of 79 women running for the House of Representatives were elected (Robins Mowry 1983). Women continue to have a strong influence in politics. In 1972 women voters outnumbered the men voter. In an election of that year 72.46% of the women voted as compared to 71.01% of the men (Jones, 1975, p708-23).

3.3.2 Social Equality
The family system after the war, under the revision of Civil Code, was based on egalitarian principles; marriage, divorce and inheritance being based on equality between husband and wife. The conjugal family replaced the traditional
multigeneation “ie”. The situation held by old laws that only a wife responsible for “illicit intercourse” had been changed. “Adultery was no longer considered a criminal act, but could constitute legal grounds for divorce by either party”. Since then women have been able to divorce (Mackie, 2003, p120-38).

3.3.3 Labor Standard for women.
Equal pay for equal work regardless of sex was provided for by new labor standards. Licensed prostitution was abolished. Overtime and night work was limited, and underground, dangerous, and harmful work was prohibited for women. A twelve-week maternity leave was required of employers if it was requested by women. In 1948 a Women’s and Minors’ Bureau was established in the Labor Ministry to protect children and working women and to improve the conditions for working women. Advisory service on marriage, birth-control information, and the availability of physician assisted abortion was guaranteed by the Eugenics Protection Law (Robins Mowry 1983).

3.3.4 Education
The United States Education Commission arrived in Japan in 1946. They believed that a complete reform in Japanese education was necessary to democratize Japan, the changes included the introduction of a six-year elementary, three year lower secondary school, and three year upper secondary grade school structure, support for equality in education, and equal access to higher education (U.S.D.E 1987).
Women were taking advantage of the educational opportunity afforded them. The percentage of women going to higher education in 1974 was roughly equal to that of men (Paulson 1976, p229). Different educational tracks were followed, though. Approximately 90% of the junior college enrollment consisted of women, and half of those women were enrolled in home economics courses. Less than 20% of women were enrolled in four-year universities.
Besides junior colleges and universities, there is the existence of women’s universities. The aim of women’s university was to educate women for the role as mothers. Some subjects such as the sciences and economics were considered unsuitable for women. Many women major in the humanities, even at the four-year universities (Paulson
1976, p332).

3.4 Women’ occupation

In this part the occupations that women have traditionally held in Japan is examined, mainly on the post-war period until the early 1980s.

3.4.1 Farmers

More than 60% of the farmers in 1980 in Japan were women (Condon, 1985). Although the average farm contains only three acres, the farmers have the scarcest and dearest resource in Japan-land. With the cost of inflation and the demand for a better lifestyle, only about 15% of the nation’s farm households can live by farming alone (Bernstein 1976). Women and men are both working to earn extra income as the supplement.

The once called “family farming” is literally “female farming”. Women become the main labor of the farm since their husbands and sons work on other jobs, sometimes far away from their home, to earn an income to the household. Actually farm wives have three jobs: homemaker, farmer and partly breadwinner. All household chores are their responsibility. Besides they have to do much of the farm labor. Most females also find some part-time job to earn some extra income to subsidize the family (Bernstein 1976). Their salaries are generally lower than that of men’s for the same work.

3.4.2 Factory Workers

In the mid seventies over five million, of the fourteen million factory workers (approximately 33%), were women (Matsumoto, 1976). More than half of them were married and had children, and many of them were in part-time jobs. In the 1970s women working in factories usually had completed only nine years of education, though the factory wanted to recruit among high school graduates. For girls graduated from high school they could easily find jobs in offices. Factories many times had to hire older women with less education.

The new trend of using part-time employees appeared during the same time. Part-time employees worked less than eight hours per day, and they usually did not have the benefits or salary that the full-time employees had. This kind of part-time jobs
supplemented the family income of women while they could also take their responsibilities as wives and mothers. The average part-time employee was 39 years old, worked seven hours per day, and worked 22 days per month (Matsumoto 1976). Even though the Labor Standards Law of 1947 prohibited wage discrimination by gender, the salary differential still existed (Matsumoto, 1976). The salaries for men, of the same work, were 50% higher than that of women’s. Japanese male industrial workers felt that they are superior to their counterparts; they looked down on their women co-workers (Matsumoto, 1976).

3.4.3 Office Ladies

Most of those office ladies have attended a junior college and majored in the humanities. They generally plan on terminating their employment upon entering marriage. These office ladies share some commonalities. First, they receive extremely low pay in comparison to their male co-workers. Second, as part of their office duties they are expected to serve tea and make working conditions pleasant for their male co-workers. Third, they are told that their most important role in life is to be wife and mother (Carter & Dailatush 1976).

Women are usually hired to do some low-ranking routine work, and they are known as “office flower” (Imamura, 1996, p194). Although the EEOL (Japan’s Equal Employment Opportunity Law) ostensibly prevents the practice of differentiating between a male work track and a female work track, the law does allow companies to set a line between a career track and a noncareer track, and overwhelming majority of women are in the noncareer track, with little hope to be promoted (Imamura, 1996, p195). When they get married, they are supposed to quit their job to manage the household and raise children, and hardly can they live as their own person since then.

Women also have a poor concept on themselves with the feeling that they are inferior to men, and men were better than women and more important to the society. They think the most important contribution that a woman can make to society is to be a good wife and mother. Women from urban areas have a desire to continue working after marriage, while those from rural areas only want to be a wife and mother (Carter & Dailatush 1976).
3.4.4 Service Industries

In the 1970s 14% of the women who worked were employed in the service industries. Within the service industry 50% of the workers were women (Lebra, 1976). While many of the women in service work were in their early 20s, others were in their 40s or older. As women working in offices and factories, women in this group were also discriminated and treated unequally. Many of the service required the skilled technicians; some special training schools provided the corresponding course. The number of female students attended vocational courses in 1982 outnumbered men: 299,130 women to 179,840 men (Nier, 1983).

3.4.5 Professional Housewives

Professional housewives look upon marriage as a lifetime career that requires special training, special skills, and endless devotion. Mothering provides a purpose for these housewives. They are responsible for the well being of their family members, and their self-concept and self-definition depend on this total devotion to family. Women are responsible for almost all matters that relate to the household. Husbands expect their wives to look after their comfort in the home. The wife usually greets her husband in the evening with his slippers, a cup of tea, and his meal. Women are expected to be at home when their husbands and children are at home. As long as a woman has a husband, even if her children leave the home, she is still responsible for her family. Many women complain they never get retire. Some women are even envious of widows who are able to spend their time as they wish. Many women said they would not remarry if widowed during middle or old age. They said marriage was an endless job (Vogel 1978). Traditionally Japanese women ranked the role of “mother” as the most important role in their life, and they also thought the most important characteristic of wife is showing her husband affection. To keep husbands, elders, children, corporations, schools, and the nation satisfied, housewives have to pen their individualism inside their heart. Home, “simultaneously attracting and repelling”, was the center of professional housewives. They both “rebelled against it and valued it” (Rosenberger, 2001, p158).

3.5 Recent Trends in Women’s Lives
The life cycle of Japanese family is changing. Women are postponing marriage into late 20s or 30s; some independent women have no intention to get married at all. Premarital sex and abortion carry no stigma now. The enactment of the Men and Women Equal Employment Opportunity law of April 1986 urges employers to give men and women equal chances in the work place (Inoue, 1988, p1).

3.5.1 Education
The Japanese labor force is one of the best educated in the world. The National Institute of Educational Research in Japan states that equal opportunity in education is shared by all since the establishment of the nine year compulsory education period. Since 1990 an examination has been carried out by all national, local, and private institutions to improve selection and reduce intense competition at selected schools (Ministry of Education). With the implementation of this new national exam, women almost have the same opportunity to enter the university as men do. In 1955 the number of women enrolled in Junior college was 42,061, in 2003 the number rose to 220,090. In 1955 women only made up 25.6% of the enrollment at universities, but in 2004 the number of female students in university was 1,882,305, almost as the same as that of male students, which was, 1,927,522. (Ministry of Education, Japan). Some Japanese men say that women graduates from university are not desirable marriage prospects because they are:” Too smart” (Morley, 2001, p66-7).

3.5.2 Marriage and Family Mode
In historic idea marriage exists as an economic, political, social, and reproductive bond that was stronger than romantic passion (Rosenberger, 2001, p146). The role of wife and mother used to be important to Japanese women because it is socially and highly valued (White, 1987). The role of mother is held in the highest regard by the Japanese, and mothers have a powerful influence over their children and their husbands. Also, Japanese women used to feel that their lives are fulfilled by raising children in the possible environment (White, 1987). Traditionally the ideal marriage age for women is 25 years, and unmarried women after the age of 25 are called “Christmas Cakes”. This name comes from the buying and eating Christmas cake on or before the 25th of December, after that time it is no longer considered edible. Also,
if a woman over 30 still remains single, she would not be considered a proper adult since adult life is defined with obligation to marriage. Today, women across Japan, from school leavers to members of royal family, are grappling with a choice between traditional roles and modern freedoms. The average age at first marriage is on the rise across the globe. Over the past decade, Japanese government figures say, the portion of Japanese women aged 25-29 who never married has surged from 40 percent to 54 percent (Japan’s women defy pressure to wed, 2004, p32). In 2000, more than one in four Japanese women aged 30-34 still unmarried, the percentage increasing from 14 percent to 27 percent (Japan’s women defy pressure to wed, 2004, p24). And the number of women believing singleton can bring contentment has risen by 10% since 2003; the survey also found that 73% of single female respondents agreed that women could be completely happy living on their own.

“Once they’re married, they have to do all the housework. Japanese husbands may help some, but they won’t share the burden. Also, if women work as hard as men today they can be promoted—not always, but it’s possible—but if they have children and stop working, it’s virtually impossible to re-enter the work force. Many well-educated women quit and become housewives whether they want to or not. So instead, women are postponing or shunning marriage and childbirth” (Mariko Bando, director general of the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office) (Fox, Colleen).

Instead of getting married and living with husbands and children, these single women choose to live with Mom and Dad. Among unmarried women aged 20-34, only 20% lived alone. The parents of this generation worked during Japan’s rapid-growth era and are relatively well off, many of them own their own houses. They can afford to take care of their daughters and see no need to drive them from the nest. Because of conveniences providing from their parents, single women pay no rent, do no housework and come and go freely, just enjoy a high level standard of living (“Parasite singles” multiply,2000).

Among young Japanese women, the practices of deferring or shunning marriage lower fertility rates, and shrink the family size (Takahashi, 2000). The birthrate has sunk to 1.29 in 2004 (Japan Brief, 2005) per woman, below replacement levels. In 2000, the
average household had shrunk to 2.67 members. Private households consisting of one or two persons accounted for 52.7 percent of the total households in 2000. By current projections, this average is expected to keep declining in the years ahead, reaching 2.37 in 2025 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan). As the family size is getting smaller and Japanese government is facing bigger challenge. Japan’s population is aging more rapidly than any other countries; by 2015, one in four Japanese will be elderly.

3.5.3. Employment Opportunities

Japanese society is a male dominant society, and a sharp distinction of sexual division has always been there. Women do seek out careers and find their niche in the world of work.

Tremendous change is taking place in women's employment in Japan. The paid employment rate for women in general has risen from 29.5% in 1980 to 38.4% in 2002 (Machiko, 2005). Career opportunities have improved greatly for many Japanese women in recent years due to the improvement of educational levels of women and the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986. Although female still encounter discrimination during the job hunt, they have actually outperformed men in recent job searches. A survey of the top 74 universities confirms the trend, showing that women had higher job placement rates this spring in most of the 395 departments covered. More large companies are willing to hire them as career-track employees, considering hiring women on a permanent full-time base, and elite civil servant positions provided to women has been growing. “It appears that some businesses are taking more seriously the mantra that ability trumps gender in today's more globalized, market-oriented economy” (Machiko, 2005). Until recently, for Japanese women who desired serious jobs, one of the best opportunities were to learn English and work for foreign-owned companies (they also aim at the management level in government work; the stiff competition was open to women as well). Foreign companies offered good salaries. Following the example of these foreign companies, some major Japanese firms, especially department stores, airlines, and fashion and cosmetic companies, under the circumstance as the service-oriented economy, have
also become eager to recruit women worker (Machiko, 2005).

Along with an increase in the number of professional women, fields such as engineering, physicians, public relations, securities, and marketing that had formerly been totally open to women. Some Japanese career women even seem to have become afflicted with the malady of the nation’s businessmen: the workaholic syndrome (Liddle, 2000, p311).

3.5.4 Summary

Throughout history in the lives of Japanese women, an ebb and flow is evident from the historical survey. They took the position of power until the Heian Era. After that era, women gradually began to lose their power and their rights. During the Ashikaga Era the status of women began eroding and eventually sank to the level of birth tool, and could be killed or sold by their husbands for being lazy or bad. This situation did not change until the 19th century, the Meiji Era. From then on women’s rights were gradually regained.

During the years preceding World War II some feminist groups formed to claim right for woman, but they were opposed by government. Many of these groups disbanded because of the great pressure from government.

After the war women were bestowed the right to vote and gained the access to higher education, which were exclusive parts only for men before. Employment opportunities also became available, but mostly in farms, service industries and part-time categories.

Since the 1980s and the enactment of the Equal Opportunity Employment Law women are experiencing more chances in many new areas in the realm of work. The number of working women in Japan has doubled to over 22 million since the early 1960s, but women account for only 5% of managerial positions in 80s, compared to 25% in the US, and few of them could get into the career track. Those who reach company president in Japan have usually built the business themselves, or inherited it from their father or husband.

Since 1990s, higher education background and proficiency in the English language help Japanese women break through the traditional employment barriers. There is an
increasing tendency for college-educated Japanese women to join foreign firms; in there they are not automatically relegated to performing menial tasks. And more Japanese companies follow the suit, providing more opportunity or assigne more responsible task to women. To be a wife and mother, or a career woman getting well into the job, female Japanese have more choices today.
4 THE SURVEY

4.1. Result

All the 16 respondents aged from 20 to 35 who answered the survey are never married. Six university students, Seven office ladies, two shop assistants and one stay at home 90% of them have received or are receiving the higher education.

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4.2 Discussion of the result

Each research question is discussed individually.

Research Question One

To what degree are young Japanese women interested in marriage?

Item 1. Only 12.5% gave the positive answer that they planned to get married in future, half of them were not sure, and 37.5% gave negative answers (25% disagreed, and 12.5% disagreed greatly). Half of the respondents stayed neutral.

Item 2. Most respondents were in agreement that they could have a full and satisfying life without getting married (18.75% agreed very much, 31.25% agreed, and 6.25% slightly agreed). 31.25% were in disagreement, and 25% of the respondents were neutral.
Item 3. Women preferred to live on their own if not married. Most women (75%) responded to the statement regarding self-sufficiency with agreement (18.75% agreed very much, 50% agreed, and 6.25% slightly agreed). Women who were in disagreement totaled 12.5% (slightly disagree), and 12.5% were neutral.

Item 4. When asked if life would be meaningless if not married, women in agreement with this item totaled only 6.25%, those were disagreed accounted 75% (43.75% disagree, and 31.25% disagree greatly). Those who responded with neutrality totaled 18.75%.

Research Question Two

To what degree are they interested in pursuing a career and equal opportunity in workplace?

Item 5. Women who were in agreement with the view that a career was more important than marriage totaled 50% (12.5% agreed very much, 18.75% agreed and agreed slightly respectively). 31.25% did not agree (12.5% disagreed slightly, and 18.75% disagreed). Those remain in neutrality accounted for 18.75%.

Item 6. Most women (68.75%) were in agreement with expecting promotion in the workplace (12.5% agreed very much, 50 % agreed, and 6.25% agreed slightly). Only 12.5% responded to this statement with disagreement. Women in neutrality totaled 18.75%.

Item 7. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they would not quit their work after their marriage (43.75% agreed very much, 31.25% agreed, and 6.25% agreed slightly). None disagreed, and the rest 18.75 were neutral.

Item 8. 75% respondents expected to have equal working conditions with men (37.5% agreed very much and agreed respectively, and 18.75% agreed slightly). Those disagreed slightly accounted 6.25%.

Research Question Three

To what degree do they want to be housewives?

Item 9. 81.25% agreed that it would become boring staying at home (25% agreed very much, 31.25% agreed, and 25% agreed slightly). Only 6.25% disagreed slightly. Those were in neutrality totaled 12.5%.
Item 10. The statement that a woman’s place is in the home evoked a strongly
disagreement among respondents. All of them disagreed (43.75% disagreed greatly,
50% disagreed and 6.25% slightly disagreed).

Item 12. Almost all respondents (93.75%) agreed that after marriage they would not
only be house -wives (50% agreed very much, and 43.75% agreed). 6.25% remained
natural.

Research Question Four

To what degree would they consider remaining childfree?

Item 17. 31.25% agreed that they didn’t consider having any children in future (12.5%
agreed very much and agreed respectively, and 6.25% agreed slightly). 37.5% didn’t
agree the statement (12.5% disagreed, and 25% disagreed greatly). Women
responding with neutrality totaled 31.25%.

Item 18. Most of them agreed that they would miss an important part of their life if
they did not have children (18.75% agreed very much, 31.25% agreed, and 12.5%
agreed slightly). 18.75% were in neutrality and 18.75 were in disagreement (6.25%
disagreed slightly, and 12.5% disagreed).

Research Question Five

To what degree are other variables important in their lives?

Item 11. Maintaining family harmony was a preference for the majority (93.75%) of
women (50% agreed very much and 43.75% agreed). Only 6.25 were in neutrality.
None disagreed.

Item 13. 31.25% would like to keep their present surname after marriage (18.75%
agreed very much, and 12.5% agreed). 37.5% disagreed and 31.25% were not sure.

Item 14. Over half of the respondents (56.25%) were in agreement with hoping that
their future husbands would be handsome, faithful and rich (25% agreed very much
and agreed respectively, and 6.25% agreed slightly). 12.5% disagreed and 31.25 were
in neutrality.

Item 15. The majority of women (56.25%) wanted to manage the money in their
households (12.5% agreed very much, 6.25% agreed and 37.5% agreed slightly).
Women responding with neutrality totaled 18.75% and 25% were in disagreement
(12.5% disagreed slightly and disagreed respectively).

Item 16. Although divorce rate is low in Japan, the majority of women (62.5%) responded in agreement with consideration of divorce if their marriage was unsatisfactory (18.75% agreed very much, 31.25% agreed and 12.5% agreed slightly). Respondents with neutrality totaled 18.75% and 18.75% was in disagreement (6.25% disagreed slightly and 12.5% disagreed).

Item 19. More than half (56.25%) agreed that they like to live with their parents (25% agreed very much, 25% agreed and 6.25% agreed slightly) while 31.25% didn’t agree (12.5% disagreed slightly and disagreed respectively, and 6.25% disagreed greatly). 12.5% stayed neutral.

Table 2


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<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Retirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Care of Pregnant workers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferential Treatment Of Female Workers</td>
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<td>Prohibited with some exceptions</td>
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</table>

Sources: Japan Institute of Labor

Japanese workplace experienced its first structure change in 1986 when the Equal
Opportunity became effective. The work environment changed further when the 1997 revised EEOL took effect. As the product of patriarchal values and the Japanese work environment, many obstacles hindering women’s pursuit of career before are now receding. Since 1997, in realm of workplace, women have a larger stage to perform, and many of their interests have been protected legally. If they are willing to, they could do well in their career.

Table-3

**Figure 2.7**
**Changes in Marriage Rate and Divorce Rate**

Table 3 indicated the descending and ascending trend for marriage and divorce respectively since 1970 to 2004. In 2004, the marriage rate hit the lowest point.

4.3 Interviews
I had a talk with one of my sister’s friend, Mika (her English name), 25, a secretary in a trade company. She is a very modern girl with elaborate makeup, hairstyle and dressing. Mika’s mother is a professional housewife, and her father, a typical salary man in a managerial position in a medium sized company. Mika explicitly told me that at least up to now she has no intention to get married. The idea of being a
professional housewife could not intrigue her because she doesn’t want to repeat her mother’s way of life. Her mother devotes the best time of her life for the family, which in Mika’s views, is unworthy. Her father, she said, is seldom at home. When she was only ten, her father was dispatched to Kagoshima for two years. “Sometimes I feel pity for my mother, she stays at home all day long, talks to her husband only several sentences every day and does all the house chores. I want to help her and talk to her but I have lots of things to do. But sometimes I accompany her to shopping centers at weekend.” Talking about her own life, she said, is so far so good. She lives with her parents, enjoying every convenient her parents providing to her without paying one single cent or doing housework. In her spare time, she attends English conversation school and accountant training schools that are full of young girls like her. She dines out with her friends in different restaurant, and travels in vacations. On special occasions, like birthday or New Year, she buys herself gifts. She said she is happy that she can afford this kind of living. “I work, travel and meet different people. It makes me more aware of my selves.” “Many of my female friends share the same idea as mine, we just want to enjoy our lives and do whatever we want to do.”

Also she talked something about uncertainty in her life. “I want to get some higher position some day in future, but now I am not competent enough, that’s why I go to night schools to learn new skills.” Her routine work and night class occupy most of her time. Although she is not interested in conjugal life, she wants to b a mother in future. “I like children very much, one of my cousins has a baby girl, and she is very cute. I want to have one like her…but this doesn’t mean I want a marriage; a baby is enough for me…. Sometimes I just wonder if I could find a man smart and handsome enough to be my baby’s father. ”

Another interviewee was a thirty something woman, who owns a mini shop selling artistically designed domestic ornaments near my dormitory in Waseda. I passed by her shop everyday to my class, and one day bought a small hand-made vase from her. After making acquaintance with the woman, I asked if she didn’t have to stay at home and took care of her husband. She told me she is still single. "I used to think I would
marry early, but somehow it just didn't happen, maybe it’s good for my business or I have to close the shop and stay at home." she spends half of her spare time with her mother, the rest with her girlfriends. The money she spends on going out with girlfriends is her biggest monthly expense. The second biggest is the payment on her automobile. "If I find a man who is well-off enough to provide a comfortable life to me, I would consider marrying him. Otherwise I would live on my own. She admitted that sometimes she felt a little bit depressed of being alone, but “it’s ok, at least I don’t have to cook the meal and wash clothes for somebody else.”

With their works and salaries, young Japanese women today ask more from marriage, and bear higher expectation to their future partner. The old saying “better than none” is not their philosophy.

Hayashi, Sekiguchi and Koyanagi are our three coordinators in Waseda. They are independent and fashionable young women in late twenties and early thirties, successful, single, and childless. They take their work seriously, attending all the lectures with us, making teaching notes, answering our questions, helping us with our study, and etc. I appreciate their work attitude very much. On one seminar, Professor Stephen Nusssbaum’s helped me put forward a very personal question to the three coordinators if they didn’t want to get married (since according to my study, quite a few young Japanese women don’t applaud the idea of getting married), quite opposite to my assumption, they said they are thirsting for a good marriage, but they just can’t find the right guy. “I’m not against marriage, it’s just not happening to me now” one said. The other told me that she had a boyfriend, but did not see him as marriage material because he is not reliable enough as a husband. All of them share the same idea that they can’t just marry somebody not so good and have a hard time. Are there no good men in Japan or Japanese women become too captious? I recalled what I had read in a Japanese article. A 37-year-old man makes about 7 million yen a year and owns an apartment in Tokyo but can’t find a woman who’s interested in him. He attends matchmaking parties but find that women of his age want to find someone with more money and higher position. Young Japanese women today earn a good salary, cast money lavishly on expensive cloth, cosmetics, jewelry and food. To
maintain such a high-standard living, they have to find a rich husband, or they have to say bye-bye to these good things they are addicted to, and practice a frugal living style because they are expected to quit work after marriage. Getting married means having less money and a lower standard of living, so what are the benefits of marriage? Japanese women become very practical and very pragmatic.

5 CONCLUSIONS
5.1 Summary of Results
Most respondents were not planning marriage, they preferred to live on their own if not married, and they agreed that they could also have a full and satisfying life without getting married. Half of the respondents thought that a career was more important than marriage and they wanted equal working conditions and expected advancement in the workplace.
The idea of being a full-time housewife bore those young females, claiming that woman’s place should not only be confined at home, and they would not quit their work after marriage. Divorce would be considered by many if the marriages were unsatisfactory. If they got married, most of them want to have some children.
Over half of them liked to live with their parents before they got married.

5.2. Say No to Marriages

5.2.1. For Career
Young educated women have been making progress in the workplace since the Equal Opportunity Law of 1986. They are taking advantage of this law and are entering the work force in greater numbers and in areas that had been previously dominated by men, surpassing their male counterpart in terms of new graduate employment rate in 1991 (Nakata, 2004), and doing well in their jobs. Both their higher education background and their work income back them up to live for their own.
For career women wanting to keep both career and marriage at hands, impediments are setting in front of them. Firstly, in Japanese workplace, employees are obliged to accept a transfer to a different branch in other cities or foreign countries. This practice makes it very difficult for both husband and wife to pursue careers (Fox, Colleen).
Secondly, it is not easy to make the work compatible with having children because of poor quality of social services for childcare and employment practices and working conditions not conducive to having a child (Fox, Colleen). Without a better day-care system and equal sharing of housework with husband, many workingwomen choose to stay single (Fox, Colleen).

5.2.2. Social Pressure Eased
Marriage used to be a must for both men and women if they wanted to get by in
society. In Meiji Era, marriage had been virtually codified; the roles for men and omen had been set as the breadwinner and the housekeeper. But people can afford to choose not to, the social pressure that prompted people to get married has receded, and premarital sex is not any more stamped with stigma (Brasor, 2005).

Single women could also get support from their parents. Today, parents become more tolerable to their daughters’ choice. If their daughter feels reluctant to get married, they accept it without dissatisfaction (“Parasite singles” Multiply, 2005). Nowadays single women feel increasingly free to choose, rather than simply cave in to social pressure.

5.2.3 Setting a too high expectation to their marriage

Young Japanese women today want to find men rich as well as handsome and loyalty as their husband, but men with all these features are the rarest creatures on earth, as well as consummate skills are required to capture such tidbits. The marriage rate descending while women’s expectation on men ascending.

5.3. Effects

These young women are happy and very satisfied with their single lives; nonetheless, the consequences of this social phenomenon may not be wholly positive. Japan’s baby boom after World War II reached the highest point in 1949 with the birth of 2.7 million babies. The birth rate fell rapidly afterward, but fluctuated back again in the 1970s with 2.1 million births in 1973. Since then, the number of births has been constantly declining. Japan's birth rate recorded another low in 2004 at 1.29. There seems to be no likelihood of a turnaround in future. The keep dropping birth rate and shrinking population definitely portends Japanese economic decline (Japan Brief, 2005). The smallest class in history just entered elementary school. It has been predicted that within two decades the shrinking labor force will make pension taxed and healthcare cost untenable (Orenstein, 2001).

5.4. Trends

Ten years ago, women would have had a wedding ring on her finger and children at her feet, but today the trend discerned is that quite a few young women in Japan choosing the live pattern of remaining single instead of getting married, contradicting with the “Japanese influence (Liddle, 2001, p291)” that traditionally women are
expected by their parents and the society to get married and stay home, where it is believed women’s happiness lies. The increasing female employment rates leads to the refusal or delay to marriage and childbirth, equipping young women with more options of their lifestyle. Young Japanese women are not going to emulate their mothers’ life pattern as housewives; instead, they’d like to be like their fathers in sense of their independent. Besides, they ask more from men and marriage.

5.5 Limitations
This study offers insights into life planning of young Japanese women. However the following limitations need to be considered:
The study relates mostly to office ladies and university students, other social groups are not covered.
The study conducted in Tokyo, and covers only one geographical area.

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Questionnaire
The opinions regarding life at work and marriage are listed below. I would like to have your opinions on these questions. For every question select the answer most closely expressing your thoughts from the selections listed below and list them in the space provided as 1-7

Choose One
Agree very much
Agree
Agree slightly
Not sure
Disagree slightly
Disagree
Disagree greatly

I plan to get married.
Women can have a full and satisfying life without getting married.
If I do not get married I would like to be self-supportive.
Life would be meaningless if I don't marry.
Career is more important to me than marriage.
I hope to be promoted if I do well at work.
I would not quit my work after my marriage.
When I start working I would like to have equal working conditions with men.
I will most likely become bored staying at home and doing housework.
I believe that a women’s place is at home.
When I get married I would like to value most the family harmony.
After marriage I will not only be a housewife.
I want to maintain my present surname after marriage.
I hope that my future husband would be handsome, faithful and rich.
I want to manage the money in my marriage.
I will probably consider divorcee if the marriage is unsatisfactory.
I may consider not having any children.
I feel that I would be losing the most important portion of my life if I did not bear any children.

I like to live with my parents.