Principal Earner and Accommodator in Household

—An illustration of gender stratification process in contemporary Japan[*]—

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

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

Keywords: moderate work/family balance, family-friendly work system, gender-equal policy

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1. Introduction

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

In the late 1990s, the Government of Japan established a gender-equal policy. In a report submitted in 1996, it was first declared that men and women should enjoy economic earnings equally (Council for Gender Equality 1996). Following the line of the report, the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (1999 Law No. 78) required the Government to develop a gender-equal policy against gender biased institutions and practices.

How is the gender inequality caused? How does the current gender-equal policy try to remove it? This paper tackles these issues with the aid of the stratification theory in sociology.

2. General Stratification Theory

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 1. The general model of stratification

The model illustrates a general form of stratification with abstract concepts. You can substitute each of the concepts by any substantial ascription, status, or reward so that it is applicable in any kind of inequality.

For applied social scientific studies, the model is helpful to codify various political measures, because it is capable to make distinct articulation in complex processes of stratification. In particular, Figure 1 suggests the plurality of equal societies since the stratification process contains plural steps. Suppose you are aiming at the equality for a certain kind of ascription. You can accomplish your aim with only stopping one of the steps. Inequality will disappear either if status attainment becomes independent of ascription, or if rewards become independent of status. Accordingly the equal policies can take various measures. The image of the equal society can be different according to the condition the society faces with.

3. A Process of Gender Stratification

We focus on a particular process of stratification—stratification between men and women due to the sexual division of labor and resulting in the gap in earnings[1]. Throughout this paper we refer to this kind of stratification as simply "gender stratification". In contemporary Japan we can observe a great gap in the earnings that men and women earn throughout their life as an individual. The process creating this gap can be conceptualized as a variant of stratification process we formalized in the last section: It begins with sex—one of the ascriptions attributed by nature—, effects the process of her/his status attainment, and results in the distribution of earnings—one of the rewards of the greatest importance for people in modern societies. We postulate men and women are differentiated through two steps of status attainment process: sex-typed determination of the worker type and differentiation in the working style between the worker types. Then the earnings gap eventually emerges between men and women.

3.1. Sex-typed determination of the worker type

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

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

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

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

We call the two types of workers in Obi and Higuchi's model as "principal earner" and "accommodator"[2]. *Principal earners* take the charge of earning income to support the household, with no responsibility for housework. They therefore have no choice left but to be full-time workers. They are not responsible in housework, although they can participate in housework for their remaining time after the working hours[3]. On the other hand, *accommodators* take double roles of earner and housekeeper. They decide whether to work or not; and how long the working time should be, if they work. The decision depends on the family needs, the wage rate and working hours offered by their prospective employer, and the income that the principal earner of the household earns.

The notions of principal earner and accommodator are sex-neutral in their definitions. In reality, however, their distribution is extremely sex-typed. Table 1 shows changes in time-use by women and men among their

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[1] In this paper we will consider only an aspect of gender stratification, despite the wider coverage of the concept "gender stratification". Note that any kind of inequality between women and men could be a subject of the gender stratification study. In particular, inequality in status attainment in workplaces, not in households, has attracted much attention of social scientists (Kimoto and Hukasawa 2000). You can also focus on such rewards as power, security, and health (Council for Gender Equality 1996), as well as economic rewards.

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

[3] However, as we will find in Section 4.2, in reality there is only a minimal effect of the remaining time after the working hours on principal earners' housework participation.

life stages. Women adjust the allocation of their time according to the marital status and children's age. When unmarried or having no child, women spend long time on paid work. When they have a little child, they spend long time on housework. As their children grow up to reduce the needs for childcare, they spend shorter time on housework and longer time on paid work. In contrast, men's time spent on paid work is constant at 8–9 hours per day, regardless of their life stage (with the exception of the shorter working time in their later life). The figures reveal that most men are the principal earner in their household (at least in their mid-life), while most women are the accommodator.

Table 1. Time use of women and men by household type (hours per day; weekly average)

Household type / Age of the respondent or the youngest child*	Housework[a]	Work[b]	Tertiary activities[c]	Primary activities[d]	Total
Men					
One person (25–49)	0.54	7.53	6.00	9.92	24.00
One couple only (25–49)	0.41	7.89	5.66	10.04	24.00
Couple with child [0–2]**	0.95	8.48	4.53	10.07	24.00
Couple with child [3–5]**	0.59	8.60	4.77	9.98	24.00
Couple with child [6–9]**	0.43	8.48	5.17	9.93	24.00
Couple with child [10–14]**	0.33	8.25	5.43	9.97	24.00
Couple with child [15+]**	0.48	6.38	6.67	10.47	24.00
One couple only (50+)	0.76	3.92	8.13	11.19	24.00
One person (50+)	1.31	4.24	7.43	11.02	24.00
Women					
One person (25–49)	1.51	6.30	5.80	10.41	24.00
One couple only (25–49)	3.58	4.03	6.06	10.32	24.00
Couple with child [0–2]**	8.42	1.00	4.35	10.20	24.00
Couple with child [3–5]**	6.39	2.13	5.16	10.32	24.00
Couple with child [6–9]**	5.60	2.93	5.50	9.98	24.00
Couple with child [10–14]**	5.30	3.67	5.45	9.58	24.00
Couple with child [15+]**	4.83	3.20	5.90	10.08	24.00
One couple only (50+)	4.39	2.07	6.62	10.91	24.00
One person (50+)	3.01	1.83	7.62	11.55	24.00

Data: 2001 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities (Statistics Bureau 2003: Tables 10, 14, 19).
*: Age of the respondent is in ( ), age of the youngest child is in [ ].
**: Household of a couple with their child(ren) or household of a couple with their child(ren) and parent(s).
a: Housework, caring or nursing, childcare, and shopping.
b: Work and commuting.
c: Leisure, sports, social activities, medical examination, rest, watching TV, schoolwork, and so on.
d: Sleep, meals, and personal care.

3.2. Differentiation in workforce participation

Since principal earner and accommodator behave following different rules, they have different working styles. By definition, principal earners always meet the normal full-time working hours requested by a prospective employer. They consequently make participation in workforce as full-time workers. In contrast, accommodators' workforce participation is dependent on their family needs and economic conditions. While some of them participate in workforce as full-time workers, others become part-time workers or do not work at all.

As well as working time, accommodators' occupational career is dependent on life stages. Table 2 shows the continuity rate of full-time employment (CRFE), which is defined as the proportion of people continuing regular full-time employment, until their childrearing stage, among those who were regular full-time employees before marriage[4] (Tanaka 1999). As summarized in Table 2, women's CRFE has been steady at about 20%. Among women who were regular full-time employees before marriage, about 80% have discontinued their

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

career. Most of them experience career interruption during the period with the great family needs; they give up a continuous career as full-time workers and become part-time workers or full-time housekeepers.

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

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

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

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

3.3. Differentiation in earnings

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

$$\text{Earnings} = Q \times W + A \qquad (1)$$

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

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

Furthermore, the wage rate W is dependent on Q, in reality. Full-time workers are always offered a higher wage rate than part-time workers. This kind of wage differentials makes part-time workers more disadvantageous against full-time workers.

Discontinuous career, which means a temporary fall in Q, can also entail a disadvantage in the long run. If the work performance depends on the human capital accumulated through job experiences, workers quitting job and being absent from job experiences will be less competitive with the competitors who have a continuous career and have fully developed their work performance. In addition, if the wage system places importance on seniority, a discontinuous career itself lowers the wage rate, even after the worker comes back working.

The last factor determining earnings is allowance A, which is paid for the support for one's livelihood, regardless of her/his service to production. Some kinds of allowance, for example, sick leave allowance or parental leave allowance, are designed to compensate workers for the earning loss because of the decline in labor supply Q due to a certain reason. Suppose such kinds of allowance fully compensate the lost earnings, workers will be able to opt out of work without potential loss of income when they themselves consider it necessary—that is, "de-commodifying" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 23) in the work-system will be completely achieved. However, all societies are far from the complete de-commodification for present (Esping-Andersen 1990: 50). People in any society must prepare for some loss of earnings if they withdraw from full participation in workforce, though the extent of loss varies with societies (Iguchi and Nishimura 2002; Nishimura 2003).

3.4. A summary of the gender stratification process

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Gender-Equal Policy against Each Step of Stratification

4.1. Current sub-goals

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

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

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

workforce can earn as much as those fully participating—i.e., although their work-styles are different, their earnings are equal.

In the following, we will examine the feasibility and limitation of the measures.

4.2. The moderate work/family balance

Work/family balance policy

The sharp contrast in work styles between principal earner and accommodator is rooted in the difference in responsibilities they hold. Since principal earners hold no responsibility in housework, there may be no problem if they continuously commit themselves to full-time paid work. In contrast, since accommodators hold family responsibilities, it is often difficult for them to make continuous commitment to full-time work; they should accommodate their working time to the family needs. As a natural consequence, accommodators' work/family balance is inclined to the family side, relative to principal earners'.

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

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

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

Criticisms against the effectiveness of the work/family balance policy

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

Cabinet Office (2002) reported the small effect of the husbands' working hours and the capacity of daycare centers on full-time employment of women with infants. This report provides results from a multivariate nested logit model using data from a national representative sample of married women with children aged 3–5. The dependent variable was whether they are employed full-time or not. Among numerous independent variables, this report focused on husband's working hours and the capacity of daycare centers within the municipality they lived. An extrapolation on the basis of the result (Cabinet Office 2002: 74) showed that when we assume the husband's working time to be 8 hours per day and the daycare center to be capable of a half of the number of children, full-time workers would constitute only 26.2% of the sample. That is, even if the political measures work as scheduled in the current policy, accommodators can hardly make full participation in paid work.

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

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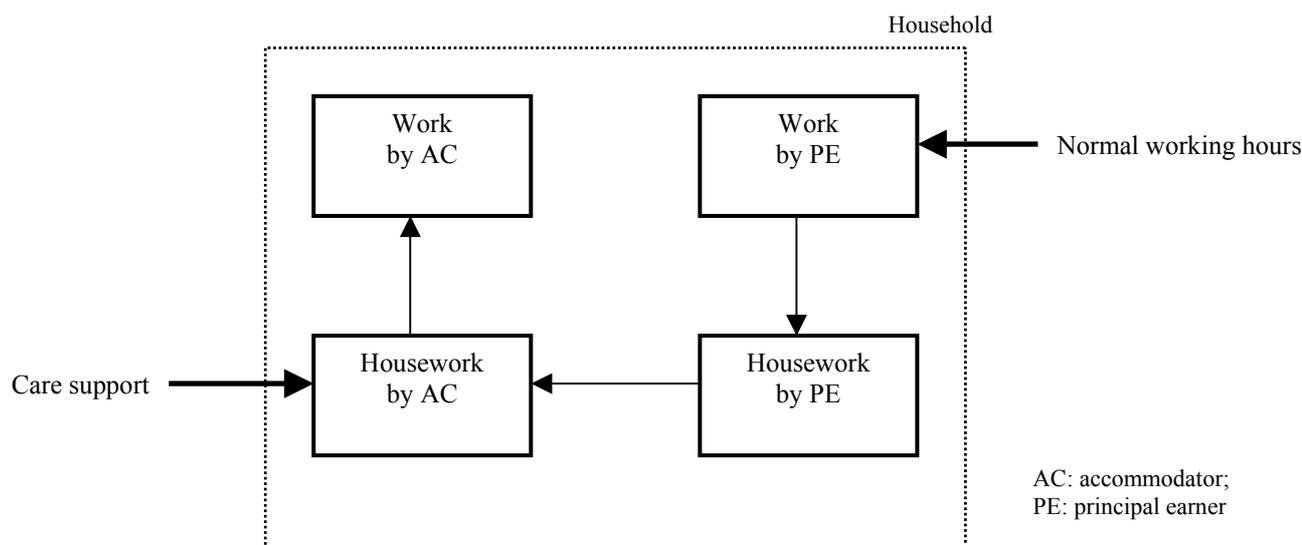
Figure 3. Exchange system of members' time in the household expected in the policy

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

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

Suppose the smooth working of the time-exchange system is completely achieved, will the moderate work/family balance be realized under the current policy? Unfortunately, the answer will be "no". Tanaka (2003) reported the result from a simple simulation of time-use of men and women aged 30–39. For the simulation, Tanaka assumed that any change in work (or housework) time is completely substituted with the change in housework (or work), with no change in leisure time. The expected time-use of men and women was simulated under the condition that working hours are reduced to 1,800 hours per year and childcare time was reduced to zero. The result showed even under the completely smooth working of the time-exchange system, the measures of the current policy could not realize the moderate work/family balance.

4.3. Family-friendly work system

Policies aiming at established partial participation

As we saw in Section 3.3, a difference in workforce participation causes a difference in earnings with three factors. (a) Workers are usually paid according to how long they work: the shorter the working time, the lower the earnings, even at a constant wage rate. (b) The wage rate is not constant in reality: part-time workers are always offered a lower wage rate than full-time workers. (c) Even though the fall in working time is temporary, it entails a loss in earnings to the worker in the long run, because of the disadvantage in seniority and in human capital accumulation. These factors have a great effect under Japanese work system, which grants a great favor of workers with continuous full participation in workforce. Under this system, partial participation or no participation in workforce, either temporary or permanent, results in a disadvantage.

Suppose it is inevitable that accommodators are disadvantageous against principal earners in workforce participation, as we saw in Section 4.2. To achieve the equality between them, the work system should develop to overcome the effects of the factors above. Such a developed system can be called as the "family-friendly" work system (Ministry of Labour 1999: 7), under which partial participation in workforce owing to family responsibilities is no disadvantage.

To institute the family-friendly work system, the current policy mainly aims to establish the parental and family care leave. Since 1991, the Child Care Leave Law (1991 Law No. 76), the National Public Service Law (1991 Law No. 109), and the Local Public Service Law (1991 Law No. 110) have described workers' right to take parental leave. After several amendments, today they guarantee parental leave and family care leave to most workers[5]. For the duration of the leave, employment insurance or fraternity insurance covers the 40% of the cash earnings the leave-taker received just before taking the leave.

The leave system offers workers an institutionally established form of partial participation in workforce. It guarantees leave-takers to return to the company at which they worked before the leave. Using our formulation in Equation (1), we can interpret the effects of the leave system as follows. The leave system never stops the fall in the labor supply Q brought by family responsibilities. But it can keep the fall of Q as a temporary one, stop the decline in the wage rate W in the long run, and insure the short-term loss in earnings with allowance A during the leave. It thus permits the leave-takers to reconcile continuous career development with temporary no-participation in workforce.

Insufficient compensation and problems in the wage system

The leave system is designed to outweigh the disadvantage of holding family responsibilities. However, the parental or family care leave does not completely outweigh the disadvantage of those who takes the leave. While the 40% of their earnings is guaranteed during the leave, the 60% will be lost. Moreover, it has been reported that parental leave entails a disadvantage to the leave-taker in the long run. Senda and Higuchi (2000: 30–32) estimated the earning loss owing to taking parental leave using data from a national-representative survey of married women. They reported that except for professionals and managers, parental leave entailed 30% or more loss of earnings to leave-takers after they come back to their jobs. It is debatable what causes such enormous loss in their earnings. The cause may be the disadvantage in the turn-taking for promotion: During the leave they may have lost their place in the queue for promotion, and they may consequently go back of the queue[6]. However, the cause may be the decline in work performance because of obsolescence or depletion of their skill during the leave (Senda and Higuchi 2000: 34–35). These problems will be serious in the jobs with bitter competition or with frequent innovations.

Furthermore, the leave system is not necessarily guaranteeing a continuous career in reality. Numerous workers quit their job to fulfill family responsibilities. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2003a: 28) surveyed a sample of the babies born in 2001 and found that 73.7% of their mothers were not work at the baby's age of six months. The data also show that parental leave was taken by only 12.4% of the mothers and 0.6% of the fathers (NLI Research Institute 2003: 19). Most parents were not supported by the leave system. Even among workers taking the leaves, quitting job after the leave amounts to a considerable number. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2003b: 42, 63) reports that about 10% of leave-takers did not returned to their job after the leave. Thus many workers follow discontinuous career due to family responsibilities, in spite of the leave system.

Along with the leave system, reformation of the wage system should be made to eliminate the disadvantage of discontinuous careers. The Japanese wage system has placed great importance on seniority, which is often called the *nenkou* (年功) system (Tuda 1968: 51–61). Under such a system, a discontinuous career entails an enormous loss in earnings in the long run, even after the worker comes back to workforce (Economic Planning Agency 1997: 51–52; Maruyama 2001: 13). Suppose the wage system is restructured into a seniority-insensitive one. A discontinuous career will be no disadvantage for itself. The gap between continuous full participators and discontinuous ones will consequently be narrower.

However, even under the seniority-insensitive system, some disadvantage will be remained for a discontinuous career. If the work performance depends on the human capital accumulated through job

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[5] Temporary or day workers are the exception provided by the Article 2 of Child Care and Family Care Leave Law (2003 Law 82). Some exceptions can be added by a labor-management agreement (Articles 6 and 12).
[6] According to NLI Research Institute's (2003: 30–31) survey of personnel managers of 563 companies (not a national-representative sample), more than a half of them answered that the leave-taker will be disadvantaged in promotion if the duration of the leave exceeds six months.

experiences, workers quitting job to be absent from job experiences will be inevitably disadvantageous. Under the seniority-insensitive wage system, the work performance itself, not the seniority, become a key issue of equality between discontinuous and continuous careers.

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

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

5. Practicable Gender-Equal Society

5.1. Limited effects of the current policy

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

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

However, it is also probable that the sub-goals of the policy themselves will face essential difficulties, even with the tougher machinery.

First, there is a dilemma between leisure and the work/family balance. As we saw in Section 4.2, when the working hours are reduced, the reduced hours will be mainly spent on leisure, not on housework. This situation is unfavorable for gender-equality, but is favorable from another viewpoint. Here notice the fact that the claim for reduction of working hours has been made on the ground that people are overworking and need more leisure time (Economic Planning Agency 1989). As far as the Government accepts such a claim, measures can hardly be taken against the increase of leisure time. So it is difficult to expect that the moderate work/family balance will be realized.

Second, to eliminate the gap between full participators and partial participators in workforce, the family-friendly work system must give a full compensation for any loss due to partial participation, including possible opportunity costs that may appear in future. It may be too costly and infeasible.

5.2. Another possibility

It is unpredictable whether the current policy can solve these difficulties. In decades to come we will witness the result of the social experiment on the effect of the work/family balance policy and the family-friendly policy. In case the result confirms the ineffectiveness of the current policy, what measure will remain? We will conclude this paper by introducing the last measure, which has not been considered in the gender-equal policy.

We formalized in Figure 2 the gender stratification process as going through three steps X, Y, and Z. Among these three steps, the current policy has focused on the last two steps Y and Z. However, it is difficult to stop the differentiation process through these two steps, as our examination disclosed. Once men and women are assigned to the different worker types, the gap between them can hardly be closed afterwards. Hence equalization on the first step is of great importance. The focus should shift to the first step X: the sex-typed determination of the worker types.

If the equalization in the first step is achieved, men and women will become principal earners or accommodators with the same probability. Table 3 describes such an equalized society, where p denotes the probability of a person becoming a principal earner, while $1-p$ denotes the probability of becoming an accommodator. Probability p varies from 0 to 1 theoretically, but in reality it must be small, because an accommodator is necessary for any household to achieve an efficient allocation of the human resources. In

particular, *p* must be 0.5 or smaller for those who marry and form a nuclear family household, which needs at least one accommodator between the two adult workers available.

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

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

In such a gender-equal society, many men will become an accommodator. They must decide their work style according to the family needs. Some of them may become a part-time worker, become a full-time housekeeper, or return to work after a temporary break. Thus there will be a considerable number of men without continuous full-time participation in workforce. To put it in the statistical term, whether gender equality can come into reality depends on whether men's continuity rate of full-time employment (CRFE) can be reduced. We saw in Table 2 men's CRFE has been almost 100%. How to reduce this high rate will be the key to gender equality.

Unfortunately, we know little about what determines men's CRFE. Workforce participation of men has been rarely argued, whereas that of women has been long argued in stratification studies. There has been no research about how the number of male housekeepers has been changed, what social groups they belong to, how they are stigmatized, and how gender-free curriculums in education effect.

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

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