

**Empowering Women in Management  
of Japanese Higher Education Institutions:  
Analyzing Challenges and Possibilities**

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**Abstract**

**Women's empowerment is a globally and continually discussed phenomenon. Indeed, women's participations and achievements can be**

seen in various fields of social life. Women can be seeing holding senior level positions in areas such as politics and business. However, the area of higher education is still overwhelmingly a male preserved spot. Women are still considered a minority at professorial and dean level. The purpose of this paper was to explore the Japanese experience in terms of women's empowerment in higher education management by clarifying the historical background and current situation, as well as the obstacles and policies that affect Japanese women's empowerment. In depth interviews were conducted with ten women occupying various senior positions in universities in Japan. A snowball sampling method was used to choose the women. Interview findings can be viewed within four themes including: (a) current situation, (b) supporting factors, (c) challenges, and (d) strategies. Based on the findings, recommendations and implications were provided.

**Keywords:** women in higher education management, women in leadership, Japan.

### ملخص البحث

هدفت الباحثة التعرف على تقييم الوضع الراهن لتعيين المرأة اليابانية في مناصب إدارية بمؤسسات التعليم العالي وحاولت الباحثة الإجابة عن تساؤلات الدراسة التي تمثلت في الوضع الراهن لعمالة المرأة بالإدارة بجامعة اليابان ، ماهي التحديات والمعوقات التي تصادف عمل المرأة بالمناصب القيادية بجامعة اليابان ، وما هي الاستراتيجيات المقترحة نحو توظيف هؤلاء السيدات اليابانيات بالوظائف القيادية بالجامعة .واعتمدت الباحثة على أسلوب المقابلة الشخصية لعينة من 10 شخصيات قيادية من العاملين بالوظائف الإدارية بالمعاهد التعليمية العليا باليابان .وقد اشتملت أسئلة المقابلة الشخصية معهم التعرف على وجهات النظر بخصوص عمل المرأة بالمناصب القيادية ، التعرف على العوامل المدعمة لعمل المرأة بهذه المناصب وما هي التحديات التي تواجه عملها ، التعرف على جوانب التوازن بين العمل ومتطلبات حياتها كأمراة .التعرف على العوامل الثقافية المرتبطة بعمل المرأة باليابان ، والتعرف على الاقتراحات والتوصيات من وجهة نظرهم . وقامت الباحثة بتحليل نتائج المقابلات الشخصية موضوعيا للتعرف على الجوانب المشتركة بين المستجيبات للتوصل الى عوامل يمكنها ان تكون وراء عمل المرأة بالوظائف القيادية بمؤسسات التعليم العالي باليابان.

وتوصلت الباحثة إلى أن هنالك فجوة ما بين السياسات الحكومية الداعمة والتطبيق على أرض الواقع في الجامعات .كما تواجه النساء اليابانيات مشكلة في الموازنة ما بين متطلبات الأسرة

والعمل بسبب أنظمة العمل التي تتطلب البقاء لساعات طويلة في المكاتب مما يضطر الكثير من النساء العاملات إلى الاستقالة بعد الزواج .  
واقترحت الدراسة دعم النساء اليابانيات عبر إقامة الدورات وورش العمل التدريبية في المهارات القيادية ورفع مستوى الوعي بأهمية تمكين المرأة في اليابان وإعادة النظر في معايير التقييم بحيث تركز على الإنتاجية (المخرجات ) وليس ساعات العمل فقط ( المدخلات ) وتبسيط الضوء على النماذج الناجحة من النساء في المناصب الإدارية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي اليابانية.

### Introduction

While women have achieved significant developments in areas such as education, health and employment, they still significantly lag behind their male counterparts in holding leadership managerial positions. There are several causes for this situation. However, many studies have proved that countries with large numbers of women in leadership managerial positions in various sectors of their societies tend to perform better than those countries with less women in such high positions.

Women's participation and achievements can be seen in various fields of social life. Women can be seeing holding high senior level positions in areas such as politics and business. However, the area of higher education management is still overwhelmingly a male preserved spot (OECD, 2010; UNESCO, 2011). Blackmore (2002) indicates that women represent less than 50% of academic and administrative positions. Furthermore, according to Ekirikubinza (2007), the worldwide depiction in higher education signifies the rate of men to that of women at middle management level at about five to one, and at senior management level at about twenty to one. As for the progress of women in holding such positions, a study done by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) indicates that women are still far too slow in reaching top senior level positions (Holt, 2013). According to this study, women engage an average of 30.9% of the majority of senior positions from a set of 11 key sectors examined by the BBC, including business, politics and policing. Furthermore, women are most powerfully represented in secondary education, about 36.7% of head teachers are women, and in public appointments, where they account for 36.4%.

According to Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman's study (2001), which examined 7,280 female and male leaders in 2011, women are better leaders than men, and companies that hold a higher representation of women in management positions seem to be more profitable and have advanced employee productivity (Andersen, 2012). Thus, there must have been factors behind this underrepresentation of women in senior level positions. According to several studies in the field of women's management in sections other than higher education, there are various reasons for the underrepresentation of women in such positions (Bando, 2007; Dines, 1993; UNESCO, 1993). One reason can be the cultural values and the attitudes of a country, which play a role in demonstrating that the role of women and men is framed by society; this is mainly because men have the major significant role and women have the secondary or supportive role for men. As a result, men are the ones whom receive the entire efforts of society rather than women (UGC, 2012). Other reasons include early marriage, child birth, religious beliefs, the dominance of a husband's career, policies that do not meet with human resources' needs, sexual harassment, discrimination against women, and the dominancy of women in specific fields of study such as social sciences and humanities (Ramsay, 2000). These studies are good references demonstrating the situation of women taking leading managerial positions in sections other than higher education. They also show that women can lead, possibly even better than men.

In the area of higher education management, several researchers have that women in general consider that they are vastly underrepresented in higher education managerial positions (Jagero, Beinomugisha, Rwasheema & Bin Said, 2012; Ramsay, 2000; UNESCO, 1993). Furthermore, the term 'management' has been clearly identified as "an occupational area where women are severely underrepresented" (Blackmore, 2002). In fact, although women are achieving successful remarks in various areas of social life, they are still lagging behind men in the field of higher education management (UNESCO, 2002). Women are a minority with regard to the positions of professors and deans.

Moreover, seeing women as presidents or vice chancellors has been regarded as rare. Thus, there is an essential need to address this issue and the obstacles that might be causing the lack of women's presence in senior level positions in different parts of the world.

A similar trend has also been seen in Japan. The Japanese Government is trying to assist women by declaring several policies that would support women's involvement in the employment system (Soble, 2013; Takamura, 2012). Moreover, the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has recognized the term "*Abenomics*" as the policies and plans that will improve the gross domestic product growth of the country. In *Abenomics* arrows, women play a major role in reforming economic productivity and growth. However, there are some factors and challenges causing the under-utilization of women in higher education managerial fields.

In this context, it is highly significant to study, as well as understand, the current situation of women in higher education management in Japan through women's own perspective by interviewing female leaders in various institutions using a purposive and snowball sampling method. Therefore, this paper aims to clarify the current situation of women in Japanese higher education management, the supporting factors that could empower them, and the obstacles that might affect women's presence in high senior management positions in Japanese universities.

### **Literature Review**

This part of the study presents a literature review of previous studies. The focus will be on three main concerns regarding women in higher education management in Japan. The first issue will be related to the idea of women's empowerment in general. The second issue views women's empowerment in Japan. The third issue regards women's higher education management in Japan. The fourth issue is related to the way women manage their work-life balance while occupying leadership and management positions. Finally, it focuses on issues related to the culture and traditions of Japanese society in terms of viewing and stereotyping gender roles. Thus, the literature review will

spotlight a number of issues including: women empowerment, women in higher education management in Japan, work-life balance, and cultural perception.

### **Women Empowerment**

Empowering women in various sectors of society, including higher educating, might result in several advantages (Creighton, 2011; King & Hill, 1993; Jamal Al-Lail, 2010; Purcell, Helms, Rumbley & Altbach, 2005; UN, 2011). It might improve the rate of gender equality in society and thus help sustain growth by including the larger participation of women in the labor force. Significantly, improving women's equality in society will lead to improving the economic and social situation of the whole community. At the International Women Leaders' Global Security Summit held in New York City in 2007, the United Nations Deputy Secretary, Asha Rose Migiro, stated, "study after study has shown that when women are fully empowered and engaged, all of the society benefits" (The World Bank, 2011). Thus, those benefits do not only advantage women, but rather society as a whole in relation to economic prosperity, civic health, or even an engaged community. However, women have been considered for a long period of time as "the world's greatest underutilized natural recourses" (Creighton, 2011).

The term 'empowerment' might include several implications, and it is of growing significance and interest to researchers, politicians, practitioners, and citizens at the same time. According to Edelman (1977), looking at the language and the politics of human services, one can assume that sometimes there is the appearance of new language describing the same existing old practices. Some people believe that the language of the term empowerment might in fact increase the sense of awareness (Rappaport, 1986). Indeed, a growing number of people are searching and studying the true meaning behind the term empowerment, and discovering ways it can be applied in order to bring about changes for individuals or societies as a whole.

Empowerment can be referred and connected to the action of giving a person or an organization the power to do something. Thus, it can be

understood by investigating the concept of power. The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) defined this concept of empowerment as the “capacity of some persons and organizations to produce intended foreseen and unforeseen effects on others” (Lord & Hutchison, 1993). According to The Oxford American Dictionary, empowerment can be defined as “to make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights”. The term might also refer to allowing more women to take on leadership positions in society. Applying the term empowerment to women might hold the meaning of reducing the disparity between men and women, either by building action plans that include targets, or by ensuring equal opportunities for both genders. Another implication the term empowerment might hold is the ability to making women stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their lives and calling for their rights.

One of the ways to develop and release women’s potential, and thus empowerment, is through education. The UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund) believes that “education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process”(UNFPA, 2014). Particularly, the higher education sector plays a major role in supporting women’s position in society. There are several reasons for focusing light on higher education levels rather than other levels of education. First, the higher education system plays a significant role in offering sustainable growth, as well as developing society through producing and spreading knowledge, and that “with the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, higher education is facing unprecedented challenges consisting in the increasing importance of knowledge as a crucial motor for development as well as challenges from information technology and communication” (The World Bank, 2010). Second, the importance of higher education is shown in the way it can be directly linked to the labor market (Fasih, 2008).

## **Women’s Empowerment in Japan**

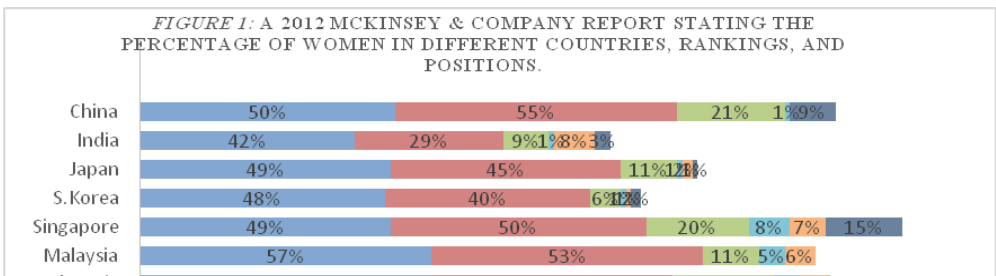
In the case of Japan, the country is still facing the challenge of refreshing its stagnant economy in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami; since this time, the country has been struggling to fulfill the cost of rebuilding the affected areas by the devastating phenomena. Unlike before, it has become necessary for Japan to make best use of its under-utilized resources, i.e., women. Indeed, according to a report published in 2013 by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), there are clear advantages to involving women in the workforce; if Japan raises the number of women in the labor market to a level similar to that established in G7 countries, this could increase the gross domestic product (GDP) of Japan by up to 5%.

There are several reasons behind utilizing women, which can be listed as follows. First, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) all agree that educating woman can bring about a lot of advantages for the country as a whole and its economy (Matsui, 2013). As the Japanese counselor for gender equality analysis, Shizuka Takamura, states “women will be in the front line as the greatest potential to move Japan forward” (Takamura, 2012). Second, in Japan, 70% of working women quit working after the birth of their first child. If the country’s female employment rate matched that of males (80%), the workforce would gain 8.2 million employees and Japan’s GDP could be boosted by up to 15% (Cooper & Hagiwara, 2012). According to Kathy Matsui, the chief strategist at Goldman Sachs Tokyo, who has looked at the role women can play in Japan’s economy ever since 1999, “Japan is lagging in growth because it is running a marathon with one leg” (Rousseau, 2013). Japan must start tapping its most underutilized resources, which is women. Third, as Japan is facing the issue of low birth rates and an aging population, Fuster’s (2005) study has proved that there is a positive association between working women and high birth rates. In fact, the working age population of Japan is predicted to shrink by about 40% by 2050, affecting the economy of Japan. Fourth, gender diversity is a significant way of improving performance and reflecting the needs of the market (Curtis, Schmid & Struber, 2012).



With regards to the gender gap, Japan is marked as having the second largest gender gap among the OCED countries. According to the 2013 World Economic Forum’s gender report, Japan ranked 105<sup>th</sup> out of 136 countries. Indeed, Japan’s gender gap is increasing year after year. It ranked for 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 at 94, 98, 101 and 105, respectively. For this reason, the government of Japan is identifying the significance of closing the gender gap by involving many women in the workforce. The Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, has recognized that women are indeed the greatest aspect of growth, labeling his idea as *Abenomics*. Many other experts stated the term *Womenomics* along with Minster Abe’s term. Kathy Matsui created the term *Womenomics* in 1999 and it mainly refers to the idea of attracting more women into the workforce for growth purposes.

Japanese women are considered as being highly educated, however they are more likely to quit their jobs after having children. According to a 2012 World Bank report, almost half of Japan’s population, about 51%, is women; 60% of them worked before getting married, and 62% of them stop working after having their first child. Japan’s female worker participation rate is considered as being the lowest among other OECD countries, compared to 64% in Germany, 68% in America, and 75% in Norway (Bystricky, 2013). Furthermore, Figure 1 shows a 2012 McKinsey & Company report stating the percentage of women in different countries, rankings, and positions. As can be seen from the figure, in the case of Japan, women form 49% of university graduates, while representing 45% of entry-level positions: as for mid to senior management positions, women account for only 11%. The percentage gets even worse in terms of women occupying chief executive officer and board-level positions. It varies from 1% to 2%, which is considered as being the lowest percentage of in the whole of Asia.

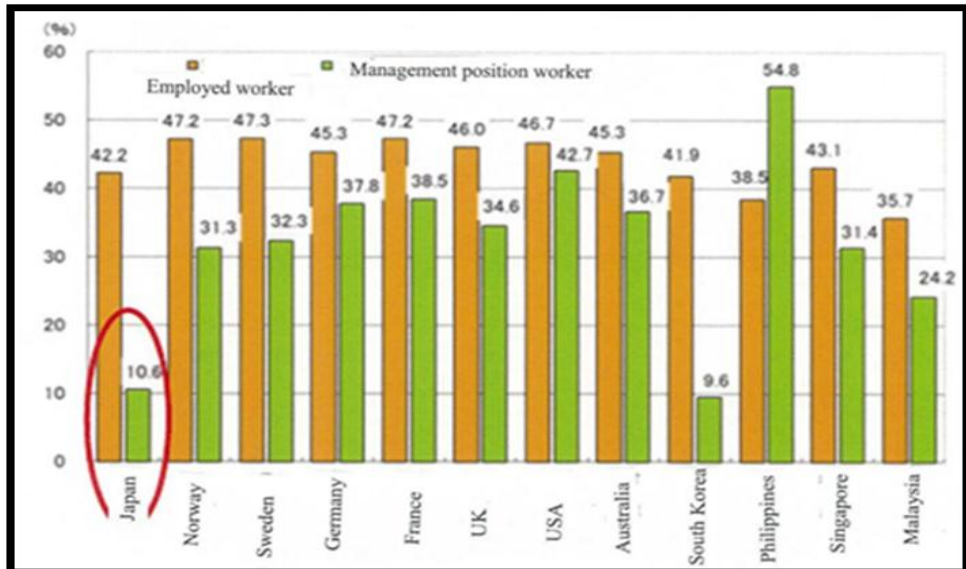


Source: McKinsey & Company, 2012.

### **Women's Higher Education Management in Japan**

Looking at the situation of women in management positions in Japan, one can identify that women still represent lower rates compared to men. According to several research findings, it will take about a further 75 years for women and men to reach equal rates at top senior positions (Cosgrave, 2104). The study reached this finding while looking at Fortune 500 companies. It found that only 60% of the companies include 2-3 or more women in their top-level positions. This situation is hardly improving, and the change is taking about 0.5% a year. In order to further understand the position of women in management level, Figure 2 demonstrates the ratio of women in management positions in an international comparison. Overall, according to the figure, the ratio of women as management position workers compared to the ratio of women as employed workers is low, with the exception of the Philippines. Indeed, the Philippines lead Asia with its high rate of women in management positions. Women account for 47.6% of management positions, ranking the country the 4<sup>th</sup> in the world (Kikuchi, 2015). As for the case of Japan, Figure 2 shows that women workers in management positions account for only 10.6%, placing the

country, along with South Korea in the lower ranks of the other countries included in the figure.

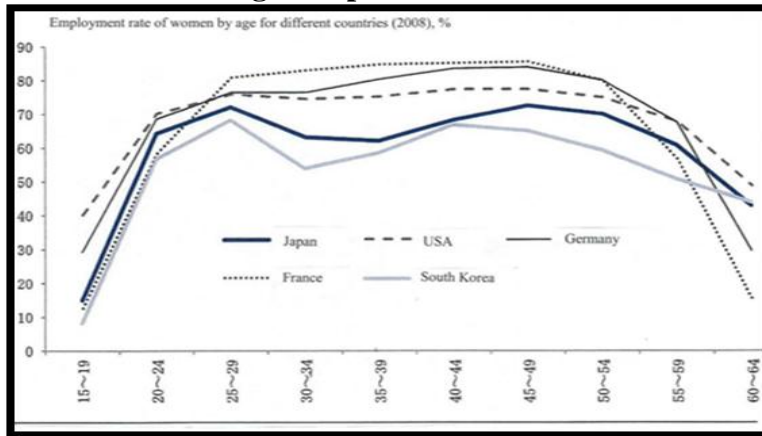


**Figure 2:** Percentage of women in management positions (international level).

Source: Japan Institute of Women's Empowerment & Diversity Management, 2014.

In Japan, other facts related to the process of empowering women, and which play a tremendous role in it, are the issues of childbirth, child raising and childcare. The reality is that in Japan there are few universities or organizations that provide childcare facilities, extended school care services, or even flexible and negotiable working hours. Many women face lots of challenges when it comes to the decision of whether or not to go back to work after the birth of their first child. Figure 3 displays women's employment rate by age in Japan, South Korea, USA, France, and Germany. Unlike the USA, France and Germany, Japan and South Korea represent a strange curve shaped similar to the letter 'M'. The ages of 20 to 24 and 45 to 49 represent the two-drop periods of the figure. Japan's unusual M curve shape explains

that a majority of women might be leaving their jobs right after getting married or having their first child, and they might be coming back to work after their children grow up.

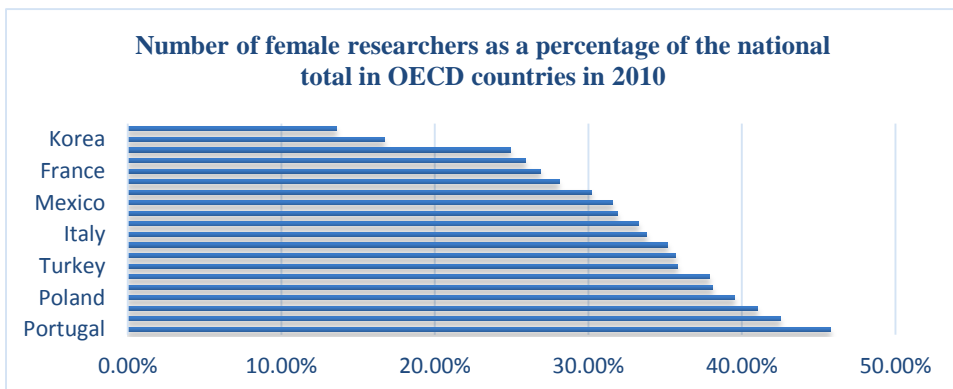


*Figure 3.* Employment rates of women by age (international comparison).

Source: OECD database “LFX by sex and age”, 2008.

Looking at statistics that demonstrates the positioning of women in the Japanese higher education sector proves that women still need to work harder to achieve gender equality. Indeed, among 746 higher education universities in Japan, women leaders account for only 8.7%; the majority of these women leaders are functioning in either vocational institutions or female colleges. Furthermore, in the latest 2014 Gender Gap Report, specifically where it spotlights the percentage of senior executive and deans and the gender distribution of professors and administrative management, one might see that Japanese universities are at the bottom of the ranking. In fact, of the G20 countries, about a quarter, contain fewer than 10% women leaders. Among the G20, Canada is considered as having the most women public leaders at 45%. Until recently, no country in the world has entirely tackled the issue of women’s shortage in leadership positions by utilizing 50% or even more women leaders (Crane, 2013).

In terms of the proportion of Japanese women in university teaching faculty members, Japan is facing a chronological change. Indeed, Japanese women faculty members teaching in universities account for 21.8%, and the percentage has been increasing in recent years. According to Kawai (2010), “Various efforts have been made, such as setting up a childcare center on campus, encouraging female faculty members to take maternity leave or child-raising leave, and promoting the introduction of the female faculty members’ tenured track system to be financed by the Special Coordination Funds for Promoting Science and Technology. Supported by these measures, the environment has been improving. Nevertheless, when compared to other countries, the percentage of female researchers does not seem to have improved as much as expected”. However, from an international view, when we address the position of Japanese women as faculty members and researchers, Japan’s performance is surprisingly low (see Figure 4). In Japan, female university researchers account for 13.6%, which is considered to be a low percentage if one compares it to the proportion of Europe 27 women researchers at 33%.



*Figure 4.* Number of female researchers in OECD countries.

Source: Statista 2016.

### Work-Life Balance

In every aspect of life, be it family, house chores, hobbies and other interests, work-life balance is becoming an essential issue. The

phrase “work-life balance” began to be used in 1986 and it was mainly related to the fact that many Americans preferred to focus more on their work place while deciding to neglect their family, friends and free time life (Yadav & Rani, 2015). Lately, the meaning of the phrase has changed (Hudson Highland Group, 2005). This shift occurred because taking care of children was in fact not the only non-work burden on the shoulder of workers, but rather the phrase can be related to any other activities or obligations that do not require payment, and it can refer to different types of workers ranging from female and male, singles, couples and married people, parents and non-parents. Moreover, study, travel, leisure, charitable work, or sports are all life style behaviors that cannot be detached from one’s employment.

According to Hudson (2005), work-life balance “does not necessarily [mean] to dedicate an equal [amount] of time to rewarded work and non-paid roles. The word in its broadest intelligence is defined as a suitable level of attachment or ‘fit’ between the numerous roles in a person’s life. However, women’s work commitments may be negatively affected by the possibility of having conflicts between the several tasks in one’s life (Carlsen & Derr, 2003; Fiksenbaum, 2014).

Work-life balance is regarded as being a considerable matter in every kind of employment. It is also considered as a challenging issue facing women as employees. Glenda (2005) referred to the concept of balancing between work and life as “precarious at best, and often elusive”. Typically, women with qualified professions and high ambitious careers have a tendency to struggle balancing between their professional demands and family needs (Cho et al., 2014). Delina and Raya (2013) studied the many factors and challenges that women may encounter in balancing their professional and career life. The study showed that in all areas including women’s career sectors, age, the number of children and spousal career type, achieving a work-life balance is extremely hard for a working married woman. In general, the study pointed out the significance of attaining a work-life balance and its necessity in achieving life enjoyment, fulfillment and happiness.

As for the case of Japan, the phrase work-life balance was introduced in 1989 when Japan's fertility rate attained a postwar low level of 1.57. At that time in developed countries, the population fertility rate level was roughly around 2.08. Since the mid 1970s, Japan started to experience a lower fertility rate below 2.0, and this was at a time when the birthrate was declining (Ikezoe, 2012). According to the 2012 National Institute of Population and Social Security Research Report, in 2005 Japan's postwar fertility rate was recorded as 1.26, and continued recording a low rate of 1.39 in 2011. As a way to deal with the low birthrate issue, in 1994 the Japanese Government, represented by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Construction, collectively published the "Angel Plan" report. The plan stated the main reasons behind low birthrates, which are couples' tendency towards late marriages and declining fertility. Furthermore, the main factors behind the occurrence of these reasons are females' desire to pursue higher education, their desire to work in a way of achieving self-realization, and the idea of the difficulty of achieving a balance between work, households and child rearing. Furthermore, regarding the significance of balance and child rearing, the plan stated, "Considering the importance of child rearing as a function of the family, child rearing support measures in family life will be strengthened to ensure that this function is not lost. This will include creating an environment for creating a gender-equal society in which men and women will share housework and childcare" (Ikezoe, 2012).

Following the publication of the 1994 plan, in 1997 the then Ministry of Health and Welfare published a report under the title "Basic Ideas on a Decrease in the Number of Children: The Society of Decreasing Population, Responsibility and choices for the Future" (OECD, 2011). The report stated various ideas that might tackle low birthrates in the future. Among the ideas was the correction of the awareness of gender-based roles within society, and adjusting one's practice on placing work as the top priority in one's life. Furthermore, in 2002, the Ministry published a plan based on these ideas labeled "Plus One Measures to Halt the Declining Birthrate". This plan took a huge step by announcing an amendment to working styles, especially to

those of men. Following the publication of these policies and plans, a formulation of a work-life balance charter including action plans, was announced in 2007.

Regarding the conceptualization of the phrase work-life balance, the term balance might be recognized either objectively or subjectively (Guest, 2002). In terms of subjectively identifying balance, gender plays a big role in this way. According to Cho et al. (2014), “There may be a socio-cultural assumption that balance is good while imbalance is bad, and this assumption would affect women’s perception of being balanced in some way”. Thus, it is highly recommended that the phrase work-life balance should be looked at from the social limitations of a particular framework.

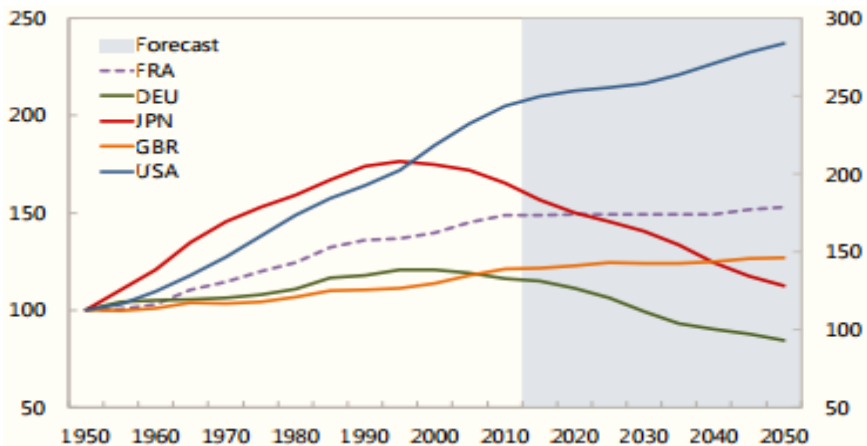
### **The Cultural Perspective**

The idea of culture has various meanings. One way to describe the culture of a specific country is by referring to its knowledge and innovative criteria such as music, drama, customs, art and many others. Culture can also be referred to as the beliefs and traditions of a society, whether it’s related to religion or the way of life (Schalkwyk, 2000). The 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico City presented an ongoing definition of the term culture as “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 1982). In many ways, culture has a great impact in forming the notions, ideas, styles and concepts of management and leadership in different organizations in a particular society (House, Wright & Aditya, 1997; House et al., 1999; Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneider, 2010).

As this research spotlights Japan, the issue of empowering women in leadership and management is considered to be unique in many ways. As a developed country from the East, Japan is in fact the only non-Western country in the G7 group, which might make its experience unique in this field (Horioka, 2012). Furthermore, acknowledging the



cultural context of Japan is unique in the way that the majority of studies concerning women's management and leadership has been conducted in Western countries (Cho et al., 2014). Moreover, Japan is considered to be an aging society that is "aging in fast forward" (Anderson, Botman and Hunt, 2014). According to World Health Statistics (2014), Japan is recognized as having among the top 10 highest life expectancies, with Japanese women having the longest life expectancy in the whole world at 87 years and 80 years for Japanese men. Around the early 1990s, the Japanese working-age population started to decrease, and the generation of 1947 to 1949 started to retire in 2007 (Figure 5). For that, Japan might be a model to cope by other Asian countries including Korea and Taiwan, which might be not far behind Japan in terms of the economic and social cost of a rapid grow as well as later decline in the population (Steinberg & Nakane, 2012).



*Figure 5. Working-age population (1950-2050) (index 1950=100). Source: IMF, 2014.*

Japanese society and culture has been largely shaped by various influences, including Confucianism, Feudalism (Samurai's morals), and Buddhism. The combination of these three systems of teaching pretty much formed women's position in society. Thus, "The place of women in Japanese society provides an interesting blend of illusion and myth" (Friedman, 1992). As Confucians have a tendency to refer to the past as

a “golden age” to look for morals and ethics from Confucianism teachings, they often search for solutions that might enhance a specific issue in the present (John, 2013). The fact is that Confucianism left a great impact on modern Japan; at least part of Japan’s modern success can be referred to this traditional system of teaching (Hendry, 2003). Thus, “Contemporary Japanese [...] are still permeated with Confucian ethical values. Confucianism probably has more influence on them than does any other of the traditional religion or philosophies [...] almost no one considers himself a Confucianist today, but in a sense almost all Japanese are” (Reischauer, 1977, p. 214). One can witness the great impact Confucianism left on Japanese society by the following features including group value, be it family, friends, or society as a whole, over individual value, males’ superior position over that of females, and a strong form of hierarchy within society (優子, 2008; Sugano, 2005). This culture and tradition of Japanese society is believed to be rapidly changing nowadays. Indeed, Japan is becoming more modernized in conjunction with swift economic growth, which has increased the percentage of women holding higher education backgrounds, advanced their standard of living in society, as well as increased government attention on women’s abilities and made use of them in the labor market. In Japan, women’s empowerment became the central concern to the success of Minister Abe’s 2013 economic growth strategy of *Abenomics*, which is the idea of allowing women to “shine”. More women have entered the workforce in 2015 under the government’s pro-women policies. There has been a huge awareness and change towards the attitude of including more women in the workforce. However, Japanese culture and tradition still strongly takes place in terms of family structures and duties. In November 2011, the Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training (JILPT) conducted a survey exploring the situation of Japanese households with children under the name the “National Survey of Households with Children”. The survey found out that 22% of Japanese women quit their career right after getting married just because they think that this is what they generally should do; it is a

kind of Japanese custom. Moreover, in the childrearing period, more than 60% of women had temporarily left their career and returned, or at least had the desire to go back to work. 56% of those women are from highly educated backgrounds. Culture can play a big role in producing such results. In 2013, the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research conducted the “National Survey on Family”; 45% of women strongly believed that after getting married husbands should work outside of the home, while wives should stay home and take care of the house. Furthermore, in the same survey, 77% of married women believed that “Mothers should not work but should concentrate on childcare until their child is about three years old”. According to a 2014 survey conducted by the Meiji Yasuda Institute of Life and Wellness, about 40% of respondents still believe that husbands should work full time while wives should stay at home (JIJI, 2014). The respondents who favored the idea were 39.3% male and 43.0% female. Changes are happening gradually. As Kathy Matsui the Japan strategist at Goldman Sachs said, “Things don’t change overnight. At the minimum, we first need to get more women into the workforce [...] Where progress is most needed is boosting female representation within managerial/leadership ranks” (Lewis, 2015). The above studies and surveys linked to Japanese women’s conditions might provide a helpful view to further study the situation of women in Japanese higher education management and leadership in a society where cultural obstacles, gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, community demands and burdens still play big role.

### Study Methodology

The main focus of the study was to examine the empowerment of women in higher education management in Japan. The central research questions that directed the study included the following: what is the current situation of women’s empowerment in Japanese higher education management? What are the supporting factors and challenges in the process of empowering women in Japanese higher education management? And what are the strategies for empowering those women in such high leadership and management positions? The findings of the research questions were collected through conducting

semi-structured interviews with women leaders and managers from different higher educational institutions in Japan.

Thus, this qualitative tool is considered as being significant in gathering deep as well as factual data. Interviewees shared their views regarding women's empowerment in Japan, supporting factors and challenges of women's empowerment, the concept of balancing between work and life, cultural perspectives on the issue of women's empowerment, and strategies and recommendations. Using a thematic analysis approach across all participants, in order to reach common themes in their insights regarding women's higher education management in Japan, represented the data analysis of the research.

As for the method of performing the interviews, the researcher kindly asked each participant via email if they would attend the interview. The respondents were asked to provide interviews on some pre-selected topics/issues and they were also asked to give free comments, as well as any general information that they thought was significant with regard to the research topic. Interviews were semi-structured and took place at reasonably formal and informal settings, which was believed to generate more genuine feedback to the questions.

In order to understand the situation of women in higher education management in Japan, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with ten Japanese women leaders and managers who were selected purposefully. Some of the characteristics of those women include the following: (1) occupying high senior positions in Japanese higher education institutions, (2) facing obstacles and challenges balancing work and family, (3) sharing long time experience and knowledge, (4) married, and (5) raising children. The women were interviewed and selected from different positions in higher education institutions. Table 2 shows details of the names, positions, and institutions of the interviews. Among the interviewees were three university presidents, four university department directors, two deans, and one university vice president. Semi-structured interviews were conducted following the purposive and snowball method (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were mostly conducted face to face in the

interviewees' offices in their universities. Interviews mostly took around 1 hour and were recorded.

**Table 2. Percentage of Female Faculty Members to University Teaching Staff**

Name	Position Rank	Institution
Dr. Mariko Bando	President	Showa Women's University
Dr. Emiko Mizunuma	Director, Graduate TESOL Program English Academic Program	Temple University
Ms. Chie Kato	Associate Dean, Enrollment Management	Temple University
Dr. Etsuko Katsu	Vice-President International/ Professor at the School of Political Science and Economy	Meji University
Dr. Yasuhiro Ishizawa	President	Gakushuin Women's College
Ms. Sachiko Yamano	President	JICE
Ms. Hideko Sumita	Administrative Director	Keio University
Ms. Kimiyo Watanabe	Director of Public Relations	Kanda Gaigo
Dr. Keiko Sakurai	the Dean of School of International Liberal Studies	Waseda University
Dr. Kazuko Shiojiri	The Director of Institute of International Exchange and former vice rector of Tsukuba University	Tokyo International University

## Findings

This part of the study describes and examines the research findings. The researcher provides a description of the findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with ten participants following the thematic analysis approach. Findings will be viewed within four themes including: (a) current situation, (b) supporting factors, (c) challenges (work-life balance), and (d) strategies. The entire analysis themes are related to Japanese women's management in higher education.

### **Finding 1: The current situation of women empowerment in Japanese higher education management**

Studying the current situation of women's empowerment in Japanese higher education management throughout interviews with specialists has contributed several results, which can be summarized as follows.

The current situation of women's empowerment in Japanese higher education management is certainly enhancing and changing day by day. Japanese society has begun to have awareness and understanding of the abilities and skills of women. During the Olympic Games, more female Japanese athletes won gold medals than male athletes. Nevertheless, women are still handicapped and continue to face challenges to attain management positions in different sectors of Japanese society. The total number of managers in management positions in Japanese corporations or educational institutions is in fact highly limited. Indeed, the government is supporting and making lots of efforts as a way to increase the number of women in management and leadership positions. However, Japanese society is still considered to be a male related world, and the involvement of women in this world is considered to be not easy, but at the same time possible.

There are many female workers in Japan, but not in management and leadership positions. In some jobs such as nurses and child carers the majority of the workers are women, who are appointed in leading positions. However, 66% of primary school teachers are women: about two third of the teachers. They all have the same higher education background, but still only 70% of the heads of primary schools are women. Many of the women who choose teaching jobs are smart and capable. There is still a glass ceiling, which is not written about, and at the same time there are several obstacles ahead of women preventing them from being promoted to top positions. In the last ten years, Japan is changing the system to encourage more women to be heads of schools and different institutions. Furthermore, there are significant differences among different prefectures within Japan. Each prefecture has its own educational system. For instance, Tokyo and Toyama prefectures

**consider having more women as heads of primarily schools than any other prefectures in Japan. Some prefectures have less than 10% of women occupying top management and leadership positions. As such, one issue considered significant in enhancing the situation of women is financial aid.**

**The situation of female workers has improved especially with the implementation of the law that gives all female workers equal opportunities. In the case of business corporations, women have been progressing quite well. But, in higher education institutions the process is rather slow. Unfortunately, in some universities such as Waseda and many others, statistics prove that they still have more male managers than female ones. Indeed, universities have different governance systems. Generally, professors and faculty members in universities are equal and they have their own duties and research. There is less competition and this also depends on the field. For example, in Keio University there is a large body of humanity and science studies where each professor writes their own research and usually interacts less with outside business. In fact, it is not important in universities whether men or women lead the institution. The most important factor is to provide excellent and good quality knowledge to students. Furthermore, women's universities are considered more peaceful and more focused when it comes to university management and leadership.**

**In the case of promotion, the type of thinking varies between private and academic sectors in Japanese society. The academic sector does not necessarily circle around promotion, but rather mainly encourages its members to produce more research and excellent work. In fact, faculty members of both genders working in the academic sector do not desire to occupy managerial and leadership positions. Furthermore, it has been illegal to discriminate against others, especially with the implementation of the promotion law. Yet, in universities many regulations are considered extremely vague and unclear. In a way, universities still prefer having more male professors than female professors. On the other hand, promotions in the private sector are considered tremendously important and essential for both genders. In general, in different sectors men are being promoted more easily than**

women. However, nowadays even the promotion of men is becoming difficult because recently in Japan the number of non-regular workers accounts for 38% of the whole workforce. Thus, it is even harder for men to compete with others, and in that case men will find themselves struggling to join prestigious higher education institutions. However, it is still challenging for them to follow the job-hunting process in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of their graduate studies.

Along with studying the current situation of the empowerment of women, it is essential to acknowledge Japanese women's desire to be promoted to leadership and management positions. Recently, with Minister Abe's support, many opportunities have been given to women in Japan. Acknowledging the desire of women to be appointed in management positions in the academic sector is rather difficult. This subject depends on several factors including each woman's responsibilities and her way of thinking. Women with children might reject the idea of holding such high positions, as it would increase the amount of responsibilities on their shoulders. In this case, it is important to have family or institutional support. Women who still hold onto the traditional way of thinking that women should stay at home and men should go to work might as well reject the idea of occupying high positions in universities. However, normally Japanese women working at universities tend to avoid such high positions for two reasons. First, in universities every faculty member would like to be an expert or specialist in her/his own field. Thus, faculty members tend to avoid being in management positions. Second, faculty members might believe that they do not have enough experience to be in such a high position. In general, for many academics being in a management position is good, but it should not be an objective in itself.



**Finding 2: The supporting factors in the process of empowering women in Japanese higher education management**

This part of the analysis studies the supporting factors for women's empowerment in Japanese higher education management. Several results were shown through the interviews, which can be reviewed as follows.

Universities consider playing a big role in supporting the empowerment of women in Japanese higher education management. They are considered as being good places for women to work in Japan. In universities, being active and getting promoted is somehow becoming much easier than it used to be. Recently, and particularly in the last five and six years, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) is continuing to push universities to implement the process of internationalization. Thus, it is a good time and chance for women to be in management positions in international programs within the university.

Every university is seeking reforms and quality assurance. There are three important areas for university reforms: education, research and social responsibility. As part of university reforms in all three areas, diversity is considered to be extremely significant. Indeed, increasing the number of female workers in management positions represents a way of supporting diversity. As a result, universities are changing the number of women workers and the number of female vice presidents is increasing.

Another supporting factor for empowering women in Japanese higher education management is the sense of awareness towards women in Japanese society. It became known and understood that women are looked at as more active and stronger than men in many different areas of society. Furthermore, the flexibility of working hours is realized as a huge supporting factor for the process of empowering women in higher education management. In fact, the flexibility might depend on the person. Usually, university professors have to teach at least five times a

week, other than that they get to spend their time on accomplishing their research.

### **Finding 3: The challenges to the process of empowering women in Japanese higher education management**

This part of the study has attempted to represent the challenges and obstacles that might occur when empowering women in Japanese higher education management. The results obtained by the researcher through the analysis of the interviews, are represented as follows. The majority of the interview participants agreed that the major challenges facing Japanese women in the process of empowering them in higher education management are: the lack of day care, childcare centers and other services, the long and inflexible working hours, far working places, male-female income differences (gender earning gap)[1], and many others.

Another challenge facing the empowerment of women is Japan's elderly society and the decreasing number of children. Thus, it is considered extremely challenging, especially for private sectors, to survive in these circumstances. Furthermore, leaving a marriage is seen as a big challenge facing the empowerment of women in Japanese management of higher education. The number of unmarried men and women is in fact increasing day by day. The idea is that, if a woman is working, getting promoted, receiving a good salary, and eventually building self-confidence in her abilities and skills, she will possibly reject her marriage. Indeed, in Japanese society some women positively avoid marriage for the sake of their work. Japan is facing a decrease in the marriage rate as a result of the decline in men's wages. Thus, both women's desire to get married and the non-married male ratio is also declining. As a result, a decrease in the child birth rate has occurred in Japan.

Balancing work and private life is a big challenge that faces working women all over the world. Japanese women need to work both outside in the workforce and in the home as well; this is considered to be a big obstacle for them. Women occupying management positions in different

sectors of society will need to attend various social events at different times and days of the week. Although in recent years the level of Japanese husbands and fathers' involvement in house workloads and childcare has changed considerably, it is still low and limited in comparison to other countries. Furthermore, the fact is that leadership and management positions are believed to be very demanding and difficult jobs, especially when it comes to the challenge of achieving a balance between private life and management positions. Thus, this has created negative campaigns against those high positions and made them less desirable to Japanese women.

Another challenge is that Japanese society still holds on to the belief that women need to work in the house and men have to work outside. Thus, Japanese women feel pressure to take care of their house, children, and husband at the same time. They feel that they should stay at home, even though they hold a high educational level or high degree, or any professional certificate. This concept is spread even among women themselves. In fact, the key factor behind solving the problem of women's participation in the workforce is behind changing the male oriented mind-set [2].

The lack of role models is a further challenge facing women's empowerment in higher education management. In universities in general, the number of full time male professors is more than the number of female professors. There are some improvements in terms of women's representation in humanities and social studies departments. However, women's representation in other departments such as law, medicine, science, technology, economics, and mathematics (STEM) fields, is far lower than men's representation. These departments are considered to be highly significant to every society. Thus, generally women in Japanese universities lack the presence of good, positive, attractive, or visible role models. Japanese women need to have such role models occupying higher management and leadership position to inspire their future career plans.

There is a gap between the ideas or women's empowerment plans and the implementation of them in the behavior of educational institutions. The Japanese Government has started to introduce some kinds of

actions to reduce burdens and provide support for Japanese women, however the implementation of these actions is limited. Moreover, the lack of financial aid can be considered as a big obstacle in terms of implementing the action and maintaining it. Furthermore, some policies can be implemented and used against women. For example, for a long time Keio University has implemented a positive and good childcare system. Legally, the minimum maternity leave is six weeks before bringing the child and eight weeks after the delivery of the child. However, according to Keio's system childcare leave can be extended up to three weeks. Although the length of the leave's period is considered generous, if this happened and a women delivered her next child she would be away from her work for up to six years, which is considered a long period of time to be away from her work. As a result, some women consider the possibility of quitting their work. In the case of promotion, if the woman happened to be away from her work for 6 years, it would be like starting from the beginning. Thus, women will be far behind men in the case of promotion.

#### **Finding 4: The strategies for empowering women in Japanese higher management**

This part of the study attempts to represent the strategies for empowering women in Japanese higher education management. The results obtained by the researcher through the analysis of the interviews are represented as follows.

One of the strategies for supporting and empowering women is the Japanese Government's projects and policies. Since 2012, the Japanese Government, headed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, has been supporting the involvement of women in the workforce. In recent years, Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet are seeking methods to improve the situation of the economy by empowering women and allowing them to shine in different sectors of the society, including universities and private cooperation. The government considers women as an engine towards improving the Japanese economy. Prime Minister Abe has

called for an *Abenomics* or *Womenomics* plan and included it as a significant pillar policy among his economic growth approaches.

As a strategy to promote work-life balance and working hours' flexibility, in early July 2015, government employees started the early-working system announced by Prime Minister Abe. Workers can start their work between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. and continue working until 5:00 p.m., in order to take care of their households and spend time with their families. In other ways, universities recognize family and children issues as private affairs, which they should not interfere with. Those issues are considered as the faculty members' full responsibility.

Increasing the number of women in high leadership and management positions is considered a strategy towards empowering women. In some companies managers play a big role in supporting and encouraging the promotion of women into such high positions. Several studies have proven that institutions that promote as many women workers as possible help boost the profits and productivity of the institution. Other institutions might implement the Employment Quota System [3]. Furthermore, as a way to increase the number of women in management and leadership positions, women should have mentors and mentorships to help and encourage them, especially when they are coming back to work after childcare leave. Although women are considered capable of accomplishing work, they tend to quickly give up lots of opportunities. While on the other hand, men are considered far tougher in this case. Thus, talking and encouraging women is greatly needed in order to provide them with the power and support they need. In Japan, the government always respects the independence and autonomy of universities. Women must take the initiative of the change and the government must support this direction and effort. In terms of universities, they are considered independent in the sense of accomplishing their own plans and actions. Generally, universities might share similar goals for appointing women in leadership and management positions. However, at the same time, each university might follow its own plans. For example, Nagoya and Tohoku universities are recognized as being highly advanced in the sense of following their own plans and actions in promoting gender equality.

Many university executives should understand and be aware of the importance of having more women in leadership and management positions. However, universities, especially national ones, unfortunately do not have the tendency to adapt to the changes. Furthermore, Japanese universities are not considered as important as industrial institutions. Universities' recognition is second after business institutions.

Providing women with training programs while they are in their early education is an effective strategy towards empowering women into holding high management positions in Japanese higher education. At the same time, On the Job Training (OJT) is considered significant. This experience can be different for one person to another. It also not considered as a male/female issue, but rather it is an issue for both genders. Furthermore, Japanese women's universities are proven to be places providing complete training for only women. Universities with single educational systems are declining in Japan, as many students are transferring to co-educational systems. In fact, female universities can play a great role and strategy towards supporting women's intellectual and talent developments. Those children of universities should survive and encourage more women to be involved.

### **Discussion**

This section of the research presents a discussion of the findings that resulted from the interviews. The discussion focuses on the following areas: the efforts for empowering women in Japan, and the challenges for empowering women in Japan including government policies, work environment, cultural perception, maternity leave and childcare, the lack of role models and self-awareness. Furthermore, this part of the research will represent a set of recommendations as well as the study's limitations.

#### **Efforts to Empower Women in Japan.**

The Japanese Government has had several fundamental approaches in their efforts to empower women. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, specifically at the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly of the United

Nations, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe clearly touched upon his idea, which he referred to as “the power of women”. PM Abe stated that “the government of Japan will cultivate the power of women as the greatest potential for the growth of the Japanese economy, and further strengthen cooperation with the international community as well as assistance to developing countries with the belief that creating “a society in which women shine” will bring vigor to the world” (MOFA, 2013). Empowering women has been stated as a significant aspect of Japan’s “third arrow” Revitalization Strategy, or what it’s referred to as “*Abenomics*”. Another basic approach of the government occurred when Japan’s foreign ministry issued the first world assembly for women. The three-day assembly was intended to draw global attention to the efforts of Japan in empowering women. At the assembly, PM Abe stressed the importance of improving cooperation between Japan and the international community, with regard to building a better society that empowers women and achieves gender equality. He is willing and doing his best “to make Japan a country where the women are the brightest in the world” (Kakuchi, 2014).

Japan has achieved several initiatives in women’s empowerment and gender equality. PM Abe’s serious desire to establish an environment where women can shine and the belief that raising the participation rate of women in the labor market to equal that of men might play a great role in flourishing Japan’s economy. According to Kathy Matsui, the chief equity strategist at Tokyo Goldman Sachs Group, involving more women might expand the economy by up to 12.5%. Furthermore, in April 2013, the Japanese Government stated a goal of having at least 30% of women in different leadership positions covering the public and private sectors, including higher education and research areas by the year 2020. PM Abe has clearly made “*Womenomics*” the driver of Japan’s future growth strategy. Working women’s ratio has increased over the last two decades. According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Kaneko, 2014), the number of female workers has increased from 20 million in 1995 to 24 million in 2013. As for the percentage of women workers of total employees, women accounted for 39% in 1995 and 43% in 2013. In fact, non-regular

female workers represented more than 50% of the total percentage of working women in 2013, in comparison to 39% in 1995. However, currently in 2016, with five more years to reach the governmental goal, as yet only 11% of today's managers in Japan are women. When compared to working men's percentage, women's situation is severe. Male regular workers accounted for 80% in 2013.

The Japanese Government is supporting working women by issuing policies such as the following laws: The 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Law, which came into effect in April 1986. This law disallows any type of gender discrimination with regards to hiring, promotion, recruitment and job obligation. Another law is the 1991 Child Raise Leave (CRL) Law, which permits every working woman to enjoy up to 18 month's paid leave in order to take care of her child. Another significant law is the Basic Law for Gender-Equal Society of 1999. Within this law, Article 8 under the Responsibility of the State matter declared in the Gender equality report published by the Japanese Cabinet Office (2006) "the State is responsible for the comprehensive formation of a Gender-Equal Society (including positive action) pursuant to the basic principles of formation of a Gender-Equal Society prescribed in Article 3 to 7". Moreover, Article 10 under the Responsibility of Citizens, emphasized that "Citizens shall make efforts to contribute to the formation of a Gender-Equal Society in all areas of society, including workplaces, schools, the local community and the home, pursuant to the basic principles" (Inuuk, 2006).

In terms of Japan's efforts in empowering women in higher education universities, there are several initiatives. For example, in 2006 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in Japan (MEXT) launched a special program. The program was designed to finance unique projects for supporting female researchers in research institutions and universities. Moreover, the project tended to improve the situation of female researchers facing challenges including childcare, nursing and many others. Ten institutions were included in the project for the duration of three years. The project aimed to hire research assistants that could support researchers in childbirth or



childcare, support knowledge regarding career events and socializing, and many other actions. Another example of universities efforts in empowering women is the Hosei 2030 project. It is a long-term vision supporting diversity promotion committees for both genders, involving child rearing and caring for elderly people.

A further example of some of the significant initiatives advancing women's position and supporting women in Japanese universities is the Shinagawa Proposal issued in 2014 by the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU). The proposal consists of 45 significant research universities representing 16 countries. The aim of the proposal is to advance women's situation in Japanese universities. The proposal involves several suggestions listed as follows:

1. Increasing the number of women in high managerial positions including researchers and faculty members, in Japanese universities.
2. Supporting the plan of increasing the ratio of women in leadership positions up to 30% by the year 2020.
3. Issuing clear guiding principles for universities that might help in supporting the progress of women. For instance, a clear guideline that would support promoting women's issues at the university.
4. Annually screening, mentoring and tracking the progress of women's situation in the universities.
5. Offering several beneficial programs, which aim at supporting women's development.
6. Urging Japanese universities to spotlight more clearly on several issues affecting women in universities, such as all kinds of harassments, promotion, isolation and many others. Furthermore, universities should create strict policies with regard to dealing with such issues.

Although the Japanese Government is introducing many new policies and laws for supporting women's status in society, participants believe that "government support is not enough in every area, and is not sufficient as well". In fact, the efficiency of those new regulations

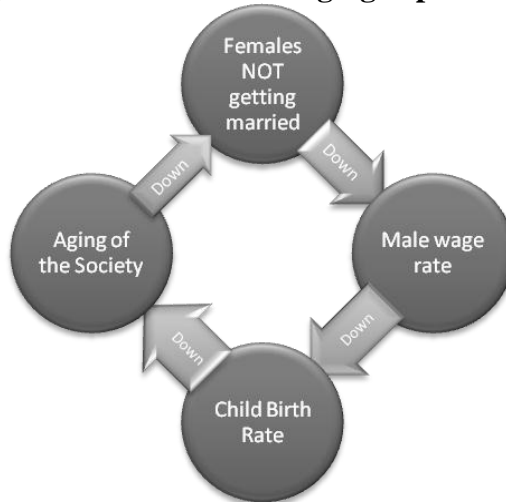
depends heavily on many factors. According to the participants of this study, one of the factors that can affect the implementation of the laws is financial aid from the government. One of the participants recalls one of the big projects announced by the government addressing women and gender equality schemes for enhancing women's capability in several university academic fields. However, three or four years later after announcing the scheme, the governmental project was halted, as there was not enough financial aid from MEXT. Another factor that can prove the efficiency of the new laws is the willpower, attitude and mindset of employers of both genders. According to PM Abe, "The idea that men are at the center has somehow become entrenched in our country [...]. We need to bring about a major change in society to break through that" (Reynolds, 2014).

There is a gap between "the announcement" and "the implementation" of the new laws, meaning that policies are available, but are not being applied by the universities. To some degree, sometimes the new policies that theoretically announce support for women will actually be in a way that can work against them. According to one participant in this study, "for a long time, the university has been implementing a positive and good childcare system. Legally the minimum is for six weeks before delivering the child and eight weeks after delivering the child. But in my university system, we can extend this time up to three years. In terms of caring of the child, this system is considered very generous, but if that happened and the women have their next child she will be away from work for six years, which is considered a long time to be away from work. As a result, some people might think of quitting work. Furthermore, in case of promotion, if you are away from work for six years, it will be like starting your work from the beginning. So, women will be way behind men in the case of promotion."

### **Challenges of Empowering Women in Japan**

Empowering women in various sectors of Japanese society, and more specifically the higher education sector, is one of the priorities of PM Abe's economic reform policy. The government is making several

efforts in support of the position of women in society; however, these efforts are not specifically issued for the purpose of empowering and supporting women themselves, but are more generally for the purpose of unleashing, as well as enhancing, the economic situation of the country. The fact that Japan's population is shrinking in size, there is a real need for women to enter the workforce now more than ever. However, along with the entire efforts that have been made by the government, there are still many challenges to overcome in order to utilize and empower women. Generally, Figure 6 demonstrates the situation of Japanese society in terms of the main challenges regarding women's empowerment agreed on by the participants of this study. In the figure, the percentage of females losing the desire to get married is actually decreasing, as a result of the desire to continue working and gain promotions. The male wage rate is also decreasing. Thus, as a result of the lower marriage rate, the child birth rate is also lessening in Japanese society, which will lead to an aging Japanese population.



*Figure 6.* The situation of Japanese society in terms of the main challenges

to women's empowerment.

Source: By the author based on the study participants interview.

Other challenges that might occurred when discussing women's empowerment in higher education management are listed as follows: realizing Japanese government policies and programs, work-life balance, work environment, culture and the concept of working women, childcare and parental leave, lack of role models, and women's self-esteem and individual obstacles.

### **The Realism of Government Plans and Policies**

In 2013, the Japanese Government established the goal of increasing the ratio of women in leadership positions by up to 30% in various sectors of society by 2020. Although the government, represented by PM Shinzo Abe, is supporting women through various and different strategies, there are, however, many concerns regarding to what extent these strategies and policies are realistic and achievable. In other words, it might be quite challenging for many organizations and institutions to follow up some of PM Abe's plans.

With regard to Japanese universities, the idea of appointing 30% of women in leadership positions by 2020 is considered to be a challenge. The implementation of this plan greatly differs between companies and higher education institutions. Compared to companies, the decision making process, and the employment and promotion system in universities are different in so many ways, specifically in the research area. Workers in each area require particular context, history, skills, knowledge and many other requirements. According to Ms. Maiko Bando, the President of Showa University, the goal of having 30% of women in leadership positions by 2020 faces lots of criticisms. Some looked at it as "not promising enough", and that the percentage of women should reach 50% before 2020. On the other hand, others considered it as "an unrealistic goal". Indeed, Japan suffers from the absence of women in the workforce. Nevertheless, Ms. Bando believed that the Japanese labor market might have many women workers once different Japanese organizations recruit new university graduates and offer support to them.

Other critics went further with their views with regards to the government's 2020 goal of appointing 30% of women in leadership positions. They went to the point of adjusting the goal and questioning the ability of setting a midterm target for having 30% of women in leadership positions. For instance, Japan might set a goal of having 20% of women by the year 2020 instead of having 30%. According to Dr. Naohiro Yashiro, the President of the Center of Economic Research in Japan, no one can label Japan as a direct (A) model. Moreover, presently in 2016, there are only five years left for Japan to fulfill this target. Currently, the ratio of women occupying senior positions is only just exceeding 10%. The question is, therefore, how can Japan further push and support this ratio in order to reach 30% in just five years. Like Ms. Bando, Dr. Yashiro expressed doubt about the achievability of this goal. However, he suggested several ways to achieve this goal by 2020. He believed that, although many Japanese leaders and managers do not look at this goal as reasonable, changing current employment practices might play a role in increasing the ratio of women in leadership positions and more importantly reaching the goal.

The Japanese Government's plan of appointing 30% of women in leadership positions by 2020 is questionable in regards to its do-ability among several companies' executives. To accomplish this goal, the Japanese Ministry of Labor and Welfare has been encouraging different companies to create their own future plans, targets, and visions in order to achieve women's empowerment in the economic sector. Many chief executives representing various well-known companies in Japan have heavily rejected this action. Companies and institutions' representatives showed their opinion by having a positive attitude towards empowering women in Japan. However, they refused to look at the government's plan as mandatory to their company or institution. They believed that those kinds of actions and efforts for empowering women cannot and should not be determined just by numbers. Certainly, the government has a great role in achieving goals, however, it is not enough for government to just take a decision and draw a plan with a goal without creating an initialization and an implementation plan (Kubota & Ando, 2014). For example, six years

ago, Saudi Arabia declared the goal of appointing Saudi women as members in the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia, also known as Majlis AL-Shura or the Shura Council. This action is considered revolutionary in Saudi history. Appointing these women was accomplished following an initialization process in the Saudi community as a whole and after that the decision has been made.

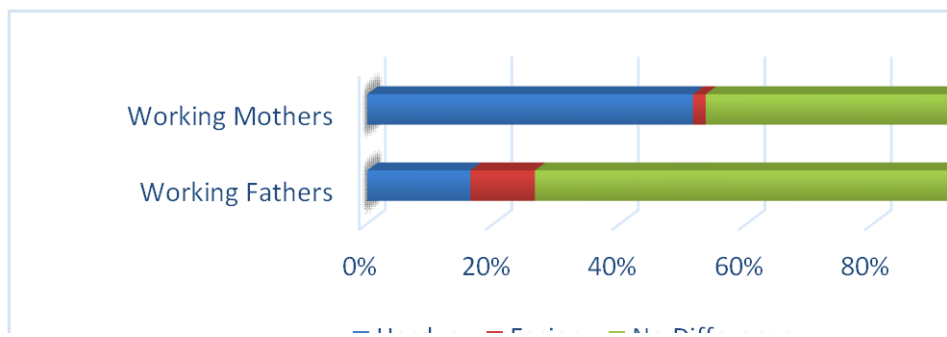
### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance is considered to be a challenging issue for the majority of women workers worldwide. Naturally, women with career ambitions have to struggle achieving a balance between their professional work demands and family needs. According to one of the participants, "It is very difficult to separate work and family life; women with both have to make a good scheme of their day and time." Besides, the possibility of having conflicts in making a balance between both sides of one's life might have a negative impact on one side. Groysberg and Abrahams' study (2014) identified that the most difficult aspect of managing work-life balance for women executives was related to the concept of meeting traditional and cultural anticipations for mothers. In the study, women executives considered the following work standards as the most valued ones, as compared to men: personal accomplishments, love for their career, earning the respect of others, and making a change. On the other hand, women executives placed less value on organizational development and achievement, and lifelong learning.

Achieving work-life balance is considered to be possible if women marry the right partner. Having a helpful and supportive partner is significant for every woman in the way of attaining work-life balance. According to Sherry Sandberg "the most important career decision you're going to make is whether or not you have a life partner and who that partner is" (Groth, 2011). Lisa Jackson, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, delivered a speech addressing Princeton students and alumni. In her speech she was asked about her career and family life management. She simply answered the question by pointing at her husband, who was sitting with the audience and referring to him as her work-life balance.

The concept of work-life balance has become popular in Japan. With the existence of the act of *Karoshi*, meaning death by overworking, Japanese people have begun to realize the importance of implementing some kind of work-life balance in their lives. According to Ms. Yoshie Komuro, the CEO of Work-life balance Co Ltd located in Tokyo, “The economic downturn is an ideal opportunity for Japanese companies to focus on work-life balance since it gives everyone a chance to reconsider their traditional working style. Men and women can no longer divide their working lives and private lives without creating some sort of balance” (Fujimoto, 2009). Ms. Komuro’s company specializes in offering consultation services to employees from different organizations on how to achieve work-life balance. Moreover, it also offers a commuter system called “*armo*” which provides support for returning employees after maternity, childcare and sick leave. She believes that work-life balance is significant for men and women alike.

Having a work-life balanced system in one’s life is harder to define for women than it is for men. Regardless of gender equality progress in recent years, women still continue to hold the heavier burden regarding balancing work and family. According to the Pew Research Center Survey published in 2013 (Figure 6), 51% of mothers with children aged 18 and under and 16% of fathers stated that working while taking care of a family made it tougher for them to progress in their work (Parker, 2015).



**Figure 6. Working Women and Work Progress:**  
Percentage of workers with children under the age of 18, who stated that being a working mother or father

makes it difficult for them to progress in their work

Source: Pew Research Center, 2015.

Furthermore, young working mothers between the ages of 18 to 32 are the ones experiencing greater challenges to their career. In the same survey, 58% of young working mothers stated that they are experiencing some kind of challenges to get ahead with their work. On the other hand, only 19% of working fathers stated that they are having challenges advancing their career.

The issues of valuing work over family or vice versa are considered arguable and vague as it depends on the person. Anne-Marie Slaughter's famous article under the title "Why Women Still Can't Have It All", published in 2012, stated that "Regardless, it is clear which set of choices society values more today. Workers who put their careers first are typically rewarded; workers who choose their families are overlooked, disbelieved, or accused of unprofessionalism" (Slaughter, 2012). Furthermore, women can have it all, basically by introducing some kind of changes to their work and family system. In other words, women can achieve a work-life balance by taking full control over their schedule. For example, Licia Ronzulli is an Italian member of the European Parliament who took her daughter to work with her from being 44 days old. By doing this, she proved that women can work and take care of her family at the same time. Moreover, what she represents is a symbolic sign for supporting women's right in terms of balancing work and family life.

Fathers have an important role in supporting working mothers to achieve work-life balance. There should be a true partnership between mothers and fathers in taking care of their children. In 2006, the Japanese Benesse Corporation conducted a study addressing working mothers and fathers and to what extent fathers are involved in taking care of their children. The study found out that only 18% of fathers in Tokyo said they played almost every day with their children, compared to 28% in Seoul, 40% in Beijing, and 40% in Shanghai. As for Japan, this low percentage of fathers' involvement might be related to the issue of long working hours of the Japanese work system. Although, the



**Japanese Government introduced many policies as to improve fathers' participation in housework and childcare, it is still limited. According to a government survey conducted in 2006, Japanese fathers with children under the age of six spent only an average of one hour a day on housework and childcare: 30 minutes on each. In comparison to Sweden, Germany and the United States, Japanese fathers spent about one third of the amount of time that fathers in these countries spent with their children. Furthermore, the Nippon Broadcasting Association conducted a study in 2005 to look at women and men's participation in housework and childcare. As demonstrated in Figure 7, women spend more time (an average of 4.26 hours a day) doing housework and taking care of children, compared to men (1.38 hours a day).**

### **Childcare and Parental Leave**

**By 2012, PM Abe declared new policies in order to support women and make them shine. According to Ms. Bando, PM Abe declared this step mainly to achieve good Japanese economy status, rather than achieving gender equality. The 2015 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index ranked Japan in terms of gender equality as 101<sup>th</sup> out of 145<sup>th</sup>, which dropped from 105<sup>th</sup> in 2013.**

**Even though the Japanese Government is trying to support working women by issuing several policies, women still suffer from holding different responsibilities ranging from work to home. Undoubtedly, policies play a role in changing as well as enhancing the situation and making it better for women to enter the labor market. Studies prove that countries with the most generous childcare policies have some of the highest rates of working women. For example, in Sweden they have a comprehensive parents' leave system, which sustains the childcare system and has a strict policy for shortening working hours for women. As a result, 90% of women return to work after giving birth to their child. As in Asia, specifically Japan and Korea, women say that challenges such as child rearing, households, and long working hours prevent them from entering the labor force.**

**Many working women might face issues concerning their return to work after maternity and childcare leave. One of these issues is the fact**

that these women are returning to work find someone else filling their place, which makes them think that they can be replaceable. Another issue that many women might face after returning to work is being pressured by questions regarding their commitment and enthusiasm to their work after coming back. Moreover, if women are transferred to different departments, they might eventually become depressed. Thus the university or institution has to offer different kinds of support to such women and to think of ways to help women who desire to go back to work. In fact, it is important to understand that for most women, going back to work after taking a leave is a difficult choice.

### **Lack of Role Models**

Although Japanese women are considered well educated, consisting of 43% of the total number of university students, they are still underrepresented in senior leadership positions in universities and other sectors. According to MEXT, 2012 statistics show that women occupied only 8.7% of management and leadership positions among 746 Japanese universities. Generally, those women are working at women's colleges and vocational schools. The fact is that universities in Japan are considered independent. In other words, universities share the same goal of appointing women in leadership positions, however each university has their own plans and actions. For example, Nagoya University is recognized as being highly advanced in empowering women by following their own action plans to promote gender equality. One respondent stated that in Japan, the government always respects the independence or autonomy of the university, and that women must take the initiative of driving change and that the government must support this action.

As for the research sectors of the universities, the situation is not yet promising. According to the 2014 MEXT statistics, Japanese women represent 14.5% of the total number of researchers in universities. Japan is considered to be far behind the percentage of women researchers in South Korea, which represents about 17%. Usually, female researchers would be working in universities, while male

researchers would be working in companies where the wages are much higher. Moreover, female researchers would mostly represent a higher percentage in humanities studies than in other fields, including science (13.2%) and engineering (9.7%).

Japanese women struggle with the lack of role models in different working sectors. In terms of universities, a participant stated that university executives should understand the importance of having more women in leadership positions. She explained that the Japanese system is more sensitive to the change of circumstances. Unfortunately, universities, especially national ones, are not so keen to adapt to the change. Moreover, Japanese women faculty members do not have enough good, positive, or attractive role models in universities. She stated that, “we have many negative role models instead, and we need to have positive role model.” The fact is that many women might have the ability to lead and manage; however, having negative information might hinder them. As there are few women in senior managerial positions, women generally do not have the ability to clearly evaluate themselves and to know whether they actually have what a job needs for them to become managers. Few women are ahead of them and so there is no opportunity to compare with anyone. Thus, women in this situation need to be forced to occupy such high positions, and then they can identify themselves and understand the situation. On the other hand, universities have to support those women with whatsoever they need to accomplish this work.

### **Women Self-Esteem and Individual Obstacles**

Women’s self-esteem and personal obstacles are considered as being important factors in every woman’s professional working life. The fact is that keeping careers and located in high leading positions are not only related to issuing policies, but at the same time it also related to individual barriers. Examples of such individual barriers that might affect the progress of Japanese women in their career life are as follows:

- Japanese women do not have enough self confidence in their abilities (Bando, 2014).

- The effect of traditional and cultural ideas: Japanese culture still holds on to the idea that a “successful mother is better than a successful career woman”. Indeed, Japanese women’s status in society might not be high enough; however, the status of mothers or housewives is much higher than the status of working women.
- Japanese women do not have enough experience of occupying senior leadership positions. At the same time, Japanese men do not have enough experience of working with women occupying senior positions.
- Japanese women are not given the opportunity to occupy high leadership positions in organizations, which might be related to the mindset of men.
- The Japanese evaluation system in organizations is mainly based on input, rather than output. In other words, the work system cares more for the duration of work duties performed by employees rather than the work itself. The idea is that the longer you stay and work in the organization the better. This is considered as being impossible for women with children and other outside work responsibilities. Thus, in general, Japanese men work far longer in organizations in order to demonstrate their work commitment.

#### **Recommendations for Empowering Women in Japan**

In light of the findings demonstrated in this study, the recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- Creating a long-term plan concerning Japan’s work-life balance policies as a way to support women of all ages and with all levels of skills.
- The need to provide a proper supportive workplace culture, procedures, and measures that encourage work-life balance.
- Encouraging networking opportunities and training programs that might help in keeping women motivated and honoring their skills.
- Forming a society that embraces diversity by welcoming more women at work as leaders. Spreading the awareness that Japan needs more women managers by providing opportunities for women, which will lead to business innovation and enhance competitiveness in

- global markets. Japanese society and individuals should be able to understand the need for involving more women in institutions as a way to enhance the productivity and the diversity of the institution.
- Setting up a list of participating institutions with specific objectives, then tracking and following up their progress. The Japanese Government should consider taking affirmative actions against institutions that fail to offer rational opportunities and salaries to both genders.
  - Reconsidering the traditional working idea in Japanese society, which favors long working hours and considers it as a desirable feature. The need to consider the productivity of a person more than the duration of their working hours.
  - Highlighting the achievements of women occupying leadership positions.
  - Spreading awareness of the need to be more confident about one's own abilities among Japanese women.
  - Allowing more foreign workers to access the country in order to operate child and elderly care facilities, as well as to support domestic duties. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's 2007 data, the percentage of foreign workers in Japan is less than 2.24%. Japan only allows foreigners with certain visas such as diplomats, investor or business managers to sponsor foreign domestic helpers, and not allowing Japanese or permanent citizens from employing foreign domestic assistance.
  - Considering the importance of imposing the quota system in Japanese institutions. The need to assure a firm number or ratio of positions to be occupied by women. Having a large number of women in quota to share views, ideas, experiences, and thoughts is considered as being essential.
  - Offering training and networking programs for women working in universities in order to encourage them to occupy senior management positions. Those programs can play a role in building up one's experiences and skills.
  - Creating a clear vision, timetable, and deadline for university projects targeting the empowerment of women.

- Developing social infrastructures in universities as a way of offering support for women workers such as areas concerning childcare and after school care facilities.
- Cooperating with the media in order to spread the awareness of women's empowerment among members of Japanese society. Particularly by focusing on the way empowerment can improve the role of women in society and the institution as well. It is important that different members of society, including the families of university students, understands and acknowledges this process.
- Establishing research centers of excellence dedicated to women's empowerment studies at Japanese universities.

Looking at these recommendations, it is highly significant to understand that none of these recommendations will change the situation by themselves. Furthermore, Reasons to avoid implementing them will hardly ever to be found. However, obstacles are controllable and fully depend on the manager and the leader of the workplace. In other words, whether the manager or the leader is exposed to shifting their norms and models regarding the workplace.

#### **Notes:**

[1] This is what Masako Mori the Upper House lawmaker and the state minister for measures for declining birthrate, gender equality and consumer affairs and food safety, agreed upon; the need to change men in the Japanese society in order to implement the empowerment of women.

[2] The Employment Quota System introduced to the Japanese society in 1960. Since it was founded, the system has significantly changed. This system is considered to be important in a way of supporting the promotion of disabled workers. Nowadays, this system is highly debatable and many Japanese institutions and organizations did not successfully implement this system.

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