Chapter 90
The Empowerment of Japanese Women:
What Will the Social Impact Be?

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ABSTRACT

Power is defined as relational, authoritative, motivational, and as knowledge. Empowerment is the act of facilitating individuals to achieve their wishes, desires, and objectives by making them aware of their power, potential, and knowledge. Empowerment in an organization or society entails granting participatory rights to the members of the organization or society, enabling them to fulfill duties expected and benefits due. The household has historically been the basic unit of existence of individual Japanese. As influenced by Confucianism, Japanese people practiced a matrilocal system, one in which the husband goes to live with the wife's community, dating back to the Heian period (785-1184 A.D.). Disempowerment of women in the Japanese culture dates back to the Tokugawa Shogunate era of 1602-1868 (Seth, 1992). The Tale of Genji, a novel that was written in the 11th century by a woman, sheds light on one of the reasons that the Japanese people are apathetic to the empowerment of women. Nonetheless, to improve overall performance and increase per capital output of the country, Japan needs to address her gender inequality problems. This is explored in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Education is only a partial fulfillment of individual goals and those of society. Without the power to implement in society, that which is learned in the classroom, education becomes a trivial exercise, inconsequential, and a waste of time and resources. Without empowerment, individuals and society fall short of actualizing the purpose of education. An educated person has neither epistemic nor ontological justification for learning, if and when knowledge remain purely latent; devoid of any product or outcome to justify the time, energy, resources, and effort spent on absorbing information and/or acquiring experience. In fact, it is arguable as to whether, short of experience, information is synonymous to knowledge. Consequently, empowerment is an indispensable attribute of education, because it allows for experience and fulfillment through

opportunity. Empowerment allows individuals and society to transform knowledge or information from theory to practice. Society advances when individual constituents are empowered.

Empowerment is achievable through education, not indoctrination. Being able to critically examine what they see on television, read in newspapers, and hear in political speeches, adults are able to empower themselves. Participation in elections and voting that is based on informed decision is an attribute of empowerment. Research show that a vast majority of individuals in democratic societies may be disempowered by their inability to comprehend and discern information from the multitude of sources that present themselves in the current Information Age (Castells, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2011; Duflo & Saez, 2003) or the so-called Digital Revolution.

For example, Choi, David, and Brigitte (2005) found that media reporting of the Enron scandal "had a surprisingly modest impact on employer stock holdings in 401(k) plans." This implies that information, in and of itself, may not bestow power upon one who has no way of understanding what the information means. The ability to beneficially transform information from mere conception to practical application constitutes empowerment. The belief that current and future events are based on past events is what Popper (1944) referred to as historicism. Globalization, as facilitated by the Information Age (Castells, 2000a, 2000b; Duflo & Saez, 2003) and the Internet, is not an historicist trend; assumingly providing ample justification that change per se cannot have been relegated to the annals of history.

Empowerment does not necessarily mean replacement of the customary filial obligation by which the wife of the elder son assumes responsibilities for the parents-in-law (Ariga, 1954; Sodei, 1995, 1998; Spitze & Logan, 1990). All citizens, regardless of gender, should be expected to be given the right to participate in all aspects of social, political, economic and leisure in mush the same way as they uphold their individual responsibilities in society. Education can be empowering, however,

equal opportunity of employment can address the human capital issues that confront nations such as Japan. Although, according to Sasaki (2002), the predilection to follow tradition impels some women to refrain from joining the labor force and stay home as housewife instead, many women have decided to abstain from early marriage and to postpone having children. Empowered women can institute changes in modern society, including Japan (Friedman, 1992; Steinberg & Nakane, 2012).

Empowerment in the Japanese Context

Significant demographic changes in Japan demand changes to the status quo in the current globalized society. Women still face discrimination in the Japanese hiring practices in spite of a 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law that was enacted to ensure the eradication of such practices (Shire, 2000). This chapter reviews the literature on the disempowerment of women in Japan for the purpose of establishing the theoretical basis for answering the question: *What difference will the empowerment of women make in the Japanese society*?

The current review of literature on the empowerment of women in Japan comprises three segments: the first defines power and all its forms. This is followed by definitions and the historical context of empowerment and its ramifications in the Japanese society. Future trends or research directions will precede the conclusion.

Power Defined

Stephen Brookfield described power as "far more complex, capable of being experienced as repressive and liberatory in the same situation" (Brookfield, 2008, p. 121). In some situations power is exercised from the bottom up, or at grassroots level. Other situations adopt power in a top-down orientation. Michael Foucault defined power in terms of "how things work at the level of on-going

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