

**GENDER BELIEFS IN JAPAN:  
PROCESSES OF CHANGE AMONG WOMEN AND MEN**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research investigates the mechanisms of change in gender beliefs in Japan from 1994 to 2002. Cohorts of Japanese women born early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were more likely than later-born cohorts to have worked full-time when their children were young. At the same time, these earlier-born cohorts express, overall, more conservative beliefs about a gendered division of labor. We ask how gender beliefs change in the population as these older cohorts of Japanese are replaced by younger cohorts. Using repeated cross-sectional data from the ISSP, we examine how processes of cohort replacement and of intra-cohort change contributed to the changes (from 1994 to 2002) in beliefs about the gendered division of labor and women's obligation to contribute financially to the family. We find that while changes in gender beliefs occurred through both cohort replacement and within-cohort change, the mechanisms of change were different for men and women.

**GENDER AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY JAPAN**

The roles occupied by men and women in Japanese society have undergone dramatic changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to World War II, the *Ie* family system organized daily life. This patriarchal family structure was characterized by Confucian filial obligation, primogeniture, and the exit of adult daughters from the family of origin upon marriage. During this time, many Japanese women were actively engaged in agriculture and family businesses. The wife of the

household head managed the family budget and directed the other women of the household. Although women maintained some power in their households under this system, they were officially subservient to their husbands with no property rights.

Following World War II, the *Ie* family system was abolished. Although women had worked outside the home in the war industries and the new constitution guaranteed gender equality, the postwar Japanese government chose to promote women's role as mothers. Reproductive labor became more important than productive labor for Japanese women. Women returned to the home as housewives in the postwar period when Japan was experiencing rapid economic growth. According to Ochiai (1997, 35), "in the postwar period, the state of being a housewife became so strongly normative that it was practically synonymous with womanhood." Overall, the labor force participation rate for women declined from 1955 until the late 1970s and then began to increase again. At this time, women's movement out of agriculture was faster than their movement into the secondary and tertiary sectors (Brinton 1993). Women's labor force participation rate in Japan dropped from a high of 53 percent in 1920 to 41 percent in 1947. From 1950 on, women's labor force participation rate has fluctuated between 46 and 50 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Women socialized in different periods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are likely to have developed different concepts of femininity and work. Although many associate Japanese femininity with the role of "good wife, wise mother," Ueno (2001, 215) cautions that "'Japanese femininity' is a modern construct, and not at all traditional." Although research in the West suggests that individuals born early in the 20th century are more likely to express beliefs that women should specialize in the domestic sphere while men provide financially for their families, this is not necessarily accurate in the case of Japan. Many women who grew up in prewar Japan have

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistical Survey Department, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan.

perhaps a better understanding of the economic motives for women's employment than their later-born counterparts reared during Japan's "economic miracle." At the same time, these women born in prewar Japan came of age under a family system in which women clearly played a subservient role to men. These competing historical forces create an interesting question of how gender beliefs have changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Japan. Are the cohorts of Japanese born before the war open to changing their gender beliefs in later-life or is social change in beliefs accomplished primarily through the succession of cohorts? How will beliefs change as the cohorts of women who were reared in prewar Japan under the *Ie* family system are replaced in the population by cohorts of women who were reared in a postwar Japan characterized by both greater gender equality and lower rates of full-time employment for women?

### **DATA AND METHODS**

We analyze data from the Japanese version of the International Social Survey Programme's "Family and Changing Gender Roles" module, which included measures of gender beliefs in surveys administered in 1994 and 2002. In all our analyses, we scale responses to these questions so that a high score reflects a liberal (as opposed to conservative) gender belief. Table 1 includes descriptions of the variables used in the analyses.

Modern theories of social change rest on the idea that culture, social norms, and social behavior change through two main mechanisms: (1) through changes undergone by individuals (due to aging or period effects), and (2) through the succession of cohorts or generations (Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965). Underlying the cohort succession mechanism of social change is the assumption that beliefs are formed in youth and remain relatively stable thereafter (Alwin and McCammon, 2003). Methods of decomposing social change into intra-cohort change and

cohort succession, linking processes of individual and social change, have been used in previous research to examine changes in attitudes and beliefs toward women's work and family roles in the U.S. and internationally (Mason and Lu, 1988; Firebaugh, 1992; Neve, 1995; Alwin and Scott, 1996). It is through a combination of both mechanisms that dramatic changes in gender beliefs have occurred in most Western countries over the last half-century. In this paper, we endeavor to decompose the change in gender beliefs observed between 1994 and 2002 in Japan into change resulting from individuals changing their beliefs and change resulting from the succession of cohorts.

### **TRENDS IN LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND GENDER BELIEFS**

Looking across historical time, in the pooled 1994 and 2002 ISSP data, female respondents born from 1904-1930 had higher full-time labor force participation rates and lower rates of being stay-at-home mothers when their children were under school age than women born later in the century. (TABLE 2) In fact, as the availability of part-time employment opportunities increased mid-century, rates of full-time employment among women with pre-school age children decreased while rates of part-time employment increased. Cohorts of Japanese women born in the 1960s and 1970s have considerably lower rates of full-time employment while their children are small than did the generations before them.

Earlier-born cohorts of respondents in these data also report stronger beliefs that women should contribute financially to the household. (TABLE 3) Again looking at the pooled 1994 and 2002 data, men and women born 1904-1930 report the strongest level of agreement with the belief that both husband and wife should contribute to the family budget (BOTHEARN and WMNSPRT). Later-born cohorts show lower levels of agreement with these beliefs, with a

slight upturn in agreement in the youngest birth cohort, born 1979-1986. At the same time, respondents born 1904-1930 also show the greatest level of agreement with a gendered division of labor (SEXROLE and WANTHOME). The youngest cohort, born 1979-1986, shows the lowest level of support for a gendered division of labor. This seeming contradiction in beliefs will be further explored in the decomposition of change in gender beliefs between the two waves of the survey.

### **DECOMPOSITION OF SECULAR CHANGE**

Between 1994 and 2002, respondents indicated decreasing approval of a gendered division of labor and of the belief that women should contribute financially to their families. In our decomposition of change in gender beliefs between the 1994 and 2002 waves of the ISSP, we found that most of the change in gender beliefs between survey waves occurred in the older age groups. (TABLES 4-7) The older respondents (ages 56+ in 1994) reported the most conservative beliefs about a gendered division of labor and much of the change between survey years appears to have occurred through cohort replacement as more recently-born cohorts replaced the oldest cohorts. There is also evidence of intra-cohort change in these older age groups but the bulk of the change is occurring through cohort replacement. As an example of this intra-cohort change, among men, those ages 48-63 in 1994 (born 1931-1946) experienced the greatest social change in beliefs about a gendered division of labor between survey waves. Based on the decomposition, it seems that changes in beliefs in these age categories of men occurred through *both* cohort replacement and intra-cohort change.

We found that processes of change differ for men and women. While change in beliefs about a gendered division of labor occurred primarily through intra-cohort change for men,

changes for women occurred largely through the slower process of cohort replacement in which older cohorts are replaced by younger cohorts in the population. Overall, it seems that while men are open to changing their beliefs about a gendered division of labor, women's beliefs are formed in youth and are more resistant to change. Interestingly, women in the oldest age groups did not adopt more liberal beliefs between survey years. The intra-cohort change occurring among these women who were reared in the *Ie* family system is toward *stronger* support for a gendered division of labor. The net social change in beliefs about a gendered division of labor for women age 56 and up is entirely due to cohort replacement, as younger women reared in postwar Japan move into these age categories.

For both men and women, however, beliefs about a woman's responsibility to help support her family (WMNSPRT) changed primarily through intra-cohort change between 1994 and 2002, with respondents expressing lower levels of agreement with the belief in 2002. This may reflect period effects on beliefs regarding a woman's financial obligation to her family. Increased optimism about the Japanese economy or appreciation of the role of full-time mother may have contributed to such changes in beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

In this analysis of changing gender beliefs between 1994 and 2002 in Japan, we found that birth cohorts of women born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century report the highest levels of full-time employment (when their children were preschool age), the strongest agreement that women should contribute financially to their families, and also the strongest agreement with a gendered division of labor. In our decomposition of the change in beliefs observed between 1994 and 2002, we found that changes in beliefs about a gendered division of labor occurred through both intra-cohort change

and cohort replacement while changes in beliefs about a woman's need to help support her family occurred primarily through intra-cohort change. Change occurred differently for men and women with men actually changing their beliefs between the two surveys and with changes in women's beliefs occurring largely through processes of cohort replacement. Cohorts of women born in prewar Japan appear hesitant to adopt more liberal beliefs about a gendered division of labor and therefore most of the change in beliefs within these age groups is occurring through the succession of cohorts.

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**Table 1 ISSP Measures of Gender Beliefs**

<b>Variable label</b>	<b>Question wording</b>
<i>Gendered Division of Labor</i>	
SEXROLE	A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family. (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)
WANTHOME	A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children. (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)
<i>Women's Obligation to Help Support the Family</i>	
BOTHEARN	Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income. (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)
WMNSPRT	Most women have to work these days to support their families. (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

**Table 2 Percent Female Respondents who Worked Outside the Home when a Child was Pre-school Age: 1994 and 2002 ISSP Japan<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Birth Year</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>	<b>Full-time mother</b>
<b>1904-1930</b>	38.8	8.4	52.8
<b>1931-1938</b>	33.1	10.6	56.3
<b>1939-1946</b>	25.6	14.0	60.4
<b>1947-1954</b>	22.3	24.3	53.3
<b>1955-1962</b>	23.8	18.5	57.6
<b>1963-1970</b>	16.7	29.2	54.2
<b>1971-1978</b>	26.7	13.3	60.0
<b>Base N's</b>			
<b>1904-1930</b>	69	15	94
<b>1931-1938</b>	50	16	85
<b>1939-1946</b>	42	23	99
<b>1947-1954</b>	44	48	105
<b>1955-1962</b>	36	28	87
<b>1963-1970</b>	12	21	39
<b>1971-1978</b>	4	2	9

<sup>1</sup>None of the female respondents born 1979-1986 answered this question.

**Table 3 Mean Gender Beliefs by Gender and Birth Year: 1994 and 2002 ISSP Japan**

<b>Birth Year</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>				<b>MEN</b>			
	<b>SEX ROLE</b>	<b>WANT HOME</b>	<b>BOTH CONTR</b>	<b>WMN SPRT</b>	<b>SEX ROLE</b>	<b>WANT HOME</b>	<b>BOTH CONTR</b>	<b>WMN SPRT</b>
<b>1904-30</b>	2.22	1.90	4.21	4.16	2.35	2.08	3.61	3.74
<b>1931-38</b>	2.68	2.24	3.95	3.96	2.48	2.13	3.57	3.89
<b>1939-46</b>	3.37	2.59	3.33	3.56	3.10	2.36	3.30	3.60
<b>1947-54</b>	3.73	2.88	3.35	3.61	3.28	2.76	3.26	3.37
<b>1955-62</b>	3.69	3.03	3.17	3.41	3.26	2.82	3.16	3.44
<b>1963-70</b>	3.72	3.05	3.23	3.41	3.48	3.26	3.19	3.43
<b>1971-78</b>	3.72	3.19	3.28	3.31	3.48	3.18	3.30	3.36
<b>1979-86</b>	4.33	3.35	3.61	3.61	3.71	3.05	3.24	3.24
<b>BASE N's</b>								
<b>1904-30</b>	192	185	188	186	153	147	150	149
<b>1931-38</b>	167	160	168	166	147	142	145	142
<b>1939-46</b>	180	177	178	177	145	137	145	145
<b>1947-54</b>	215	210	215	213	185	168	186	183
<b>1955-62</b>	189	186	189	188	152	141	150	149
<b>1963-70</b>	158	151	159	156	126	116	129	128
<b>1971-78</b>	148	144	148	148	140	116	141	132
<b>1979-86</b>	54	49	54	54	51	40	49	49

Table 4 SEXROLE Means by Gender, Year, and Age: ISSP Japan

Age Group	Women				Men			
	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$
16 - 23	3.67	4.33	0.66		3.32	3.71	0.38	
24 - 31	3.58	3.78	0.21	0.11	3.25	3.71	0.46	0.39
32 - 39	3.50	3.86	0.37	0.29	3.20	3.68	0.48	0.43
40 - 47	3.64	3.95	0.31	0.46	3.11	3.33	0.23	0.13
48 - 55	3.47	3.85	0.38	0.21	2.96	3.46	0.50	0.35
56 - 63	2.66	3.26	0.59	-0.21	2.51	3.25	0.74	0.29
64 +	2.04	2.60	0.56	-0.06	2.25	2.49	0.24	-0.02
Mean			0.44	0.13			0.43	0.26

## Base N's

16 - 23	88	54			84	51
24 - 31	78	60			60	56
32 - 39	107	80			80	66
40 - 47	128	82			93	72
48 - 55	98	87			77	92
56 - 63	92	82			84	68
64 +	116	151			100	116

$\Delta_1^1$  Intercohort Change / SC (Net Social Change)

$\Delta_2^2$  Intracohort Change / ICC

SEXROLE: A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family  
(1=strongly agree ... 5=strongly disagree)

**Table 5 WANTHOME Means by Gender, Year, and Age: ISSP Japan**

Age Group	Women				Men			
	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$
<b>16 - 23</b>	3.31	3.35	0.03		3.10	3.05	-0.05	
<b>24 - 31</b>	3.03	3.02	-0.01	-0.30	3.13	3.30	0.17	0.20
<b>32 - 39</b>	2.94	3.08	0.14	0.05	2.75	3.37	0.62	0.23
<b>40 - 47</b>	2.85	3.15	0.30	0.21	2.65	2.91	0.26	0.16
<b>48 - 55</b>	2.70	2.91	0.21	0.05	1.99	2.87	0.88	0.22
<b>56 - 63</b>	2.39	2.46	0.07	-0.24	2.13	2.82	0.69	0.83
<b>64 +</b>	1.82	2.05	0.23	-0.34	1.87	2.28	0.41	0.16
<b>Mean</b>			0.14	-0.09			0.43	0.30

**Base N's**

<b>16 - 23</b>	86	49		69	40
<b>24 - 31</b>	76	58		53	47
<b>32 - 39</b>	106	75		75	63
<b>40 - 47</b>	124	80		83	66
<b>48 - 55</b>	96	86		76	85
<b>56 - 63</b>	88	81		80	61
<b>64 +</b>	111	146		95	114

$\Delta_1^1$                     *Intercohort Change / SC (Net Social Change)*

$\Delta_2^2$                     *Intracohort Change / ICC*

*WANTHOME: A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children  
(1=strongly agree ... 5=strongly disagree)*

**Table 6 BOTHEARN Means by Gender, Year, and Age: ISSP Japan**

Age Group	Women				Men			
	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$
<b>16 - 23</b>	3.29	3.61	0.32		3.42	3.24	-0.17	
<b>24 - 31</b>	3.15	3.25	0.10	-0.04	3.24	3.11	-0.13	-0.31
<b>32 - 39</b>	3.19	3.30	0.11	0.14	3.11	3.13	0.02	-0.11
<b>40 - 47</b>	3.39	3.14	-0.25	-0.04	3.47	3.22	-0.26	0.11
<b>48 - 55</b>	3.42	3.29	-0.13	-0.10	3.29	3.04	-0.25	-0.43
<b>56 - 63</b>	3.98	3.21	-0.77	-0.21	3.58	3.31	-0.26	0.02
<b>64 +</b>	4.24	4.05	-0.19	0.07	3.71	3.50	-0.21	-0.08
<b>Mean</b>			-0.12	-0.03			-0.18	-0.13

**Base N's**

<b>16 - 23</b>	89	54		86	49
<b>24 - 31</b>	78	59		62	55
<b>32 - 39</b>	106	81		81	67
<b>40 - 47</b>	128	83		95	69
<b>48 - 55</b>	98	87		78	91
<b>56 - 63</b>	92	80		85	67
<b>64 +</b>	113	151		99	111

$\Delta_1^1$  *Intercohort Change / SC (Net Social Change)*

$\Delta_2^2$  *Intracohort Change / ICC*

*BOTHEARN: Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income (1=strongly disagree ... 5=strongly agree)*

Table 7 WMNSPRT Means by Gender, Year, and Age: ISSP Japan

Age Group	Women				Men			
	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$	1994	2002	$\Delta_1^1$	$\Delta_2^2$
16 - 23	3.35	3.61	0.26		3.53	3.24	-0.29	
24 - 31	3.53	3.25	-0.28	-0.09	3.75	3.11	-0.65	-0.42
32 - 39	3.62	3.30	-0.32	-0.24	3.64	3.13	-0.50	-0.62
40 - 47	3.83	3.14	-0.69	-0.47	3.70	3.22	-0.48	-0.42
48 - 55	3.86	3.29	-0.57	-0.55	3.85	3.04	-0.80	-0.65
56 - 63	3.99	3.21	-0.78	-0.64	4.15	3.31	-0.83	-0.53
64 +	4.15	4.05	-0.11	0.06	3.91	3.50	-0.41	-0.65
Mean			-0.35	-0.32			-0.57	-0.55

## Base N's

16 - 23	89	54			77	49		
24 - 31	75	59			61	55		
32 - 39	105	81			80	67		
40 - 47	126	83			92	69		
48 - 55	97	87			78	91		
56 - 63	90	80			82	67		
64 +	111	151			98	111		

$\Delta_1^1$  Intercohort Change / SC (Net Social Change)

$\Delta_2^2$  Intracohort Change / ICC

WOMNSPRT: Most women have to work these days to support their families. (1=strongly disagree ... 5=strongly agree)