

Preface

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journal or publication title	Technology Change and Female Labour in Japan
page range	xi-xiii
year	1994
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2344/00051055

Preface

Female labour has become an indispensable element of today's industrial society. During the 1960s, as Japan's rapid economic growth rose to its peak, the entry of women into the workforce in large numbers brought about major changes in the country's employment structure. The high tempo of innovation in science and technology, needless to say, formed the backdrop for this trend; the spread of office automation and use of electronic equipment expanded employment opportunities for women and accelerated changes in the woman's life cycle. Technological development transformed the production process in factories and labour–employer relations; it led even to transformations in human relations in society and in the household environment. The Japanese have never before experienced a technological and social revolution of this degree, occurring this rapidly. In this context, it was only natural that “Technology Change and Female Labour in Japan” should be added to the list of topics to be studied in the United Nations University Project on Technology Transfer, Transformation, and Development: The Japanese Experience” in cooperation with the Institute for Developing Economies.

IDE's project coordinator, Professor Takeshi Hayashi, approached me in the spring of 1981 to request me to undertake a collaborative study on technological change and female labour. I was finally convinced to undertake the project because of the topicality as well as the great importance of the subject, and work began in March that year. I and the members of our group (the other scholars collaborating on the study) held regular seminars every two or three months to exchange ideas. It seemed to us that studies showing how technology had changed in each period and in specific industries, and how those changes had affected the nature of female labour in Japan, would offer a useful guide to those considering the problems of female labour in developing countries currently in the throes of rapid technological change. We discussed this challenge many times in the room set aside for our meetings at the Institute. About one year after these meetings

began, we decided on our respective topics for writing. The draft manuscripts were prepared by the end of 1983 and, after being read by the editors, were returned to the authors for checking and revision.

The study had to proceed in accordance with four important considerations: (1) our small study group had to cover the period from the beginning of Japan's modernization (Meiji, 1868–1912) to the rapid economic growth period (1955–1973); (2) there was surprisingly little previous research on the topic; (3) reliable documents and statistics that could be used in the study were quite limited; and (4) the resulting research should be presented in such a way as to be useful to developing countries. With these concerns in mind, we determined to define the focus of the study very specifically; for the pre-war period, we selected the three topics of silk-reeling labour, women workers in the coal industry, and female workers of the urban lower class. For the post-war period, we decided to deal with women working in family-based industries, as exemplified by agriculture and fisheries, and with female employed labour during the rapid economic growth period. This book is made up of five chapters, each covering one of these topics, along with an introductory chapter providing an overview of female labour in the pre-second World War period, and a concluding chapter. The following is a brief outline of the book's content.

The introductory chapter deals with female labour in the industrial revolution period from the two perspectives of production type and source of labour supply, divided into six categories, and the changes for each during the First World War period, the inter-war period, and the wartime (China War and Pacific War) period. Chapter 1 focuses on the conditions of workers in the silk-reeling industry, reflecting developments in production technology from the end of the transition period to the modern Meiji period government in around 1900, mainly as observed in the Suwa region of Nagano Prefecture. Chapter 2 describes female workers in the coal-mining industry, explaining how technological innovation prescribed labour management in the coal-mining industry from 1900 to the 1930s and analysing the impact of those changes on female labour. Chapter 3 looks at female labour among the lower classes in the large cities from the 1870s to the 1920s, examining how industrialization and the progress of urbanization altered the framework of daily life and the structure of employment for these women. The next two chapters cover the post-war period. Chapter 4 deals with family-based enterprises in agriculture and fisheries, portraying the impact of technological innovation during the rapid economic growth period on employment patterns among women of agricultural, and especially fisheries, households. Chapter 5 discusses the sharp rise in female employment during the rapid economic growth period and the changes in Japanese lifestyles and living patterns brought about by the automation of labour processes and technological innovation.

The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of each of the studies and places them in the context of historical research, and examines their

significance and usefulness from the point of view of the problems of female labour in other Asian countries.

As reflected in the above remarks, female labour encompasses both employed and family-based workers, but, with the exception of chapter 4, which examines women working in agriculture and fisheries in the post-war period, the main thrust of analysis is on employed workers. This book was originally compiled for an overseas readership, mainly for the reference of third-world countries, and plans did not include the publication of Japanese or English editions. As a result, the authors were required to include references and information which are often common knowledge to Japanese specialists. They therefore made full use of existing studies, including quotations and citations from these works.

The fact that the study of how technology transfer, transformation, and development changed the nature of female labour was a completely new field left us relatively unconstrained by previous research and gave us a free hand in our endeavours. We will be satisfied if this work provides a useful landmark in further efforts to open up this field of research.

Masanori Nakamura