

Foreword

This book represents part of the results of research carried out by the Institute of Developing Economies at the request of the United Nations University for the Project on Technology Transfer, Transformation and Development: The Japanese Experience.

Anyone with an interest in development issues, and anyone who has ever been to a developing country, is aware of the importance of human resources, and development experts have been talking about the issue for many years. The aim of this project is to examine, from the general viewpoint of development, Japan's experience in undergoing an industrial revolution with the help of technology transferred from the advanced countries. It was natural that the focus should be on the labour force. However, we had a specific reason for addressing the subject of female labour rather than limiting the scope of our study to the general discussion of labour-force creation and skill development. In the words of Shōji Okumura, a historian of technology, it is historically undeniable that the dynamism of the present-day Japanese economy began with the energy of the nimble fingers of its young women in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

Further, although new technology did in some cases occasion loss of work opportunities for women, technological innovation and the female employment rate generally move along parallel lines. In fact, when advanced technology is adopted, women often become the core labour force. Re-entry into the labour force after taking time out for marriage and child-rearing has become an established social phenomenon over the past 30 years or so. It should be noted here that Japanese statistics treat the concept of "unemployment" differently from other countries: people seeking employment for the first time are not counted among the unemployed, and this shrinks the overall figures for the unemployed. The increase in the number of female job-seekers reflects changes in their life cycle and lifestyles. There are now (in 1990) more than 15 million working housewives, a number far exceeding

that of housewives occupied exclusively at home, and the unmarried female workforce is a minority in the labour market.

The culture of some countries rejects female employment, particularly as paid labour. This pattern was found in Japan as well before the Second World War, but the need to support a rapidly growing population made it imperative to adopt more advanced technology, and changes in technology promoted the employment of women. This inevitably produced shifts in the basic social structure of traditional culture, and such changes will undoubtedly continue. Japan was unable to maintain its indigenous culture untouched while pursuing industrial development and technological innovation. Other nations' cultures may be able to do so, but the prospect is not optimistic. The modernization of technology does not have to mean the complete reorganization of traditional culture. It can promote the partial advancement and more widespread transmission of culture in some respects, in some cases reinvigorating it in a more sophisticated form.

The Japanese did not cling to old ways. The national consensus welcoming the transfer of modern technology was in place more than a hundred years ago, although this was undoubtedly because people were already relatively poor and subject to population pressures, and because they recognized that this was the only alternative to ensure survival in the then international setting. Some scholars say that an "industrious revolution" took place prior to the industrial revolution, and that women, and even children, were the indispensable core of labour. This state of affairs continued in the course of the industrial revolution, as the earnings of the household head were not enough to support the family, and women and children also had to work. Some maintain that this "employment of entire families" was in complete opposition to the concept of full employment, but it was a common pattern before the war in small and medium-size factories, and in those smaller workplaces where Japan's industrial technology (and skills) developed.

The situation today has changed completely. Women are no longer engaged in hard labour, and office automation and micro-electronics are promoting a rapid influx of women into clerical or service sectors. But the foundations for these trends were laid by the increase in the nuclear family, rapid urbanization, and higher education, and further facilitated by the greatly reduced need for household labour as a result of the developments in the food and apparel industries. On the other hand, there is also a marked trend towards the part-time or indirect employment of women, and they are playing the role of buffer during economic fluctuations. This will surely necessitate a revision of non-Japanese ideas about "Japanese-style management," in particular, the system of lifetime employment. With the exception of professional and career workers, women are usually not employed for life.

The development of mechanization does not lead automatically to the lightening of the burden of female labour. In Japan, the mechanization of farming is encouraging men to take jobs outside agriculture and making it a

predominantly female occupation. In fishing villages, the motorization of fishing boats has led to wives taking their place as indispensable working partners of their husbands. Among the trade-offs are new health problems among women young and old in farming and fishing villages. In the past, young women endured long workdays (the 12-hour day was standard) in silk-reeling or textile plants, ruining their health for the sake of meagre earnings and poor nutrition which helped to secure the survival of their parents and siblings in poor fishing or farming villages. Today, although the nature and status of problems have changed, they remain in a sophisticated modern form at a higher level and are perpetuated.

Some of the young women who, by virtue of their robust health, survived the hardships of the silk-reeling industry around the turn of the century were still alive when our project was initiated. Among their recollections is *Aa, nomugi tōge* [Remember the Nomugi Pass] (1977) by Shigemi Yamamoto, considered the finest example of documentary literature. This record of the not-too-distant past moved many after it had been made into a film and shown in other countries.

This book also touches on the same period, and other groups in this research project are dealing with it. For example, Takeo Izumi's excellent work on (female) labour in the textile industry has been translated (*The Developing Economies*, IDE, Tokyo, 1979) and I recommend that it be read along with this book. This project series also includes a volume dealing with the issue of educational systems and human resources.

As Professor Masanori Nakamura, the editor of *Technology Change and Female Labour in Japan*, points out, this book's approach is unique for Japan, and few other books have covered the subject from the start of industrialization to the present day. I am grateful for the pioneering spirit of the editor and of the authors of each chapter. I also sincerely hope that research on the issues raised will be undertaken more extensively and in further depth and detail.

This book would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of my colleagues, in particular Akiko Akemine, who bore the brunt of the actual editing work. I would also like to thank Takeo Uchida and Shigeo Minowa of the United Nations University for their support and cooperation.

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