NON-MARRIAGE AND THE MEANING OF EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN:
AN EXAMINATION OF COHORT EFFECTS ON MARITAL BEHAVIOR
(extended abstract)

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Marriage rates declined significantly in Japan since the mid-1980s, and today

unprecedented numbers of Japanese women are unmarried in all age groups (Japan Ministry of

Internal Affairs & Communications 2008). Unlike many other industrial societies, most of these

women are not cohabiters or unwed mothers (Raymo 2003a; Rindfuss et al. 2004). Based on

observations from Western societies, it has been theorized that the retreat from marriage occurs

when women gain economic independence (e.g., Becker 1993), young males face low economic

prospects (e.g., Easterlin 1978), or culture shifts to individualism (e.g., Lesthaeghe & Neidert

2006). However, empirical findings from Japan do not support these theories (e.g., Raymo 1998,

2003b; Shirahase 2005; Tsuya & Mason 1995).

The most significant decline of marriage rates was first observed between the mid-1980s

and early 1990s when Japan's economy boomed and expanded employment opportunities for

women. Prior to the boom, young women were hired into replaceable positions and expected to

marry and leave the labor force in their early 20s. The typical pattern was that married women

return to the labor force as children grow in order to earn supplementary income as part-time

workers (Brinton 1993, 2007).

Applying the life course perspective and William Ogburn's theory of *cultural lag*, I

expect that the sudden increase in employment opportunities for Japanese women might have

caused young women to view employment differently than their previous cohort and men. These

women may have enjoyed a sense of fulfillment and autonomy derived from better jobs and

incomes, and wished to continue working regardless of their marital status or financial needs during marriage. This may have caused a discrepancy in role expectations between men and women, and hence the increase of singlehood among this cohort. On the other hand, for the subsequent cohort, both men and women may be more accepting of married women's employment as women's labor force participation becomes normalized and job prospects for young adults deteriorate due to economic recession.

This study hypothesizes that the gender discrepancy in views toward married women's employment differs by cohort. I expect a larger gap among the cohort that experienced the economic boom as young adults, compared to the cohorts that spent their youth before and after the boom.

The data used in this study are a sub-sample dataset (1,167 men and women) from the Japanese General Social Survey 2005 (JGSS 2005). The economic boom period is operationalized as the years between 1985 and 1992, and cohort membership is determined by whether individuals spent their young adulthood (ages between 18 and 25) before, during, or after the boom. Cohorts are labeled as *pre-boom cohort*, *boom cohort*, and *recession cohort*. The pre-boom cohort includes those born between 1947 and 1959, the boom cohort those born between 1960 and 1972, and the recession cohort those born between 1973 and 1985.

The dependent variable is the view toward married women's employment. This variable is constructed from three items in the JGSS 2005 that ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with statements regarding married women's employment. These statements are (1) If a husband has sufficient income, it is better for his wife not to have a job, (2) A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family, and (3) It is more important for a

wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself. Individuals' scores on these three items are added, averaged, and collapsed into a dichotomous variable.

The focal independent variables are *gender* and gender-cohort interaction terms (*gender*boom cohort* and *gender*recession cohort*). Control variables are father's and mother's occupation, rural upbringing, years of education, occupation, marital status, number of children respondent ever had, and presence of preschool children. Bivariate and multivariate logistic regressions are used to analyze the log odds of holding a non-traditional view toward married women's employment.

The table below shows the odds ratios of having a non-traditional view toward married women's employment. In Model 1, the odds ratio for female is 1.397 and statistically significant at $p < .01$ level, meaning that the odds for women to hold a non-traditional view are 39.7% higher than for men. This association and statistical significance holds after controlling for relevant variables as shown in Model 2 (with the odds ratio of 1.469). However, in Model 3, which includes the interaction terms, the odds ratio of gender loses statistical significance. Instead, the larger odds ratio (1.712) is observed for the interaction of gender and the boom cohort, which is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. The interaction term of gender and the recession cohort has no statistical significance. This means that the gender discrepancy in views toward married women's employment is significantly larger for the boom cohort (relative to the pre-boom cohort) whereas that is not the case for the younger cohort (i.e., the recession cohort).

In conclusion, the regression analysis supports the hypothesis that the boom cohort has a larger gender gap in views toward married women's employment than older and younger cohorts. Because the boom cohort of women experienced better job opportunities and income, jobs may

be a more meaningful aspect of life for this group, and thus these women may wish to remain employed after marriage even if their families don't need supplementary income. Such a wish is likely to clash with those of the same cohort of men, who have internalized traditional gender roles.

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Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Nontraditional View toward Wives' Employment (*n* = 1,167)

Predictor	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	Eᵉ	B	SE B	eᵉ	B	SE B	eᵉ
Gender									
Female	0.334 **	0.120	1.397	0.384 **	0.144	1.469	0.175	0.189	1.191
Years of education				0.161 ***	0.033	1.174	0.160 ***	0.033	1.173
Occupation									
Managerial/professional				0.271	0.260	1.312	0.263	0.262	1.301
Non-managerial				0.391 *	0.182	1.478	0.394 *	0.184	1.482
Self-employed				0.006	0.240	1.006	0.016	0.241	1.016
Part-time/temporary				0.459 *	0.201	1.582	0.451 *	0.202	1.570
Marital status									
Never-married				-0.389 +	0.214	0.678	-0.394 +	0.222	0.674
Presence of preschoolers				-0.338 +	0.176	0.713	-0.429 *	0.191	0.651
Interaction term									
Gender x Boom							0.537 **	0.210	1.712
Gender X Recession							0.163	0.246	1.177
Constant	0.231						-1.957		
df	1			18			20		
-2 log likelihood	1560.818			1514.625			1507.561		

Note: Control variables (father's and mother's occupation, rural upbringing, number of children) are omitted from the table.

eB = exponent B (odds ratio)

Gender (female), Occupation (managerial/professional, non-managerial, self-employed, part-time/temporary), Marital status (never-married),

Presence of preschoolers coded as 1 for *yes* and 0 for *no*.

Males, unemployed, ever-married, having no preschoolers, and interaction of gender and preboom cohort are reference categories.

†$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.