

Creating an Analytical Framework for Women's Career Development: Towards an International Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study introduces an analytical framework, Structural Model of Career Development (SMCD), for future international comparative studies on women's career development in the corporate world. There are various studies on women and work in Japan; however, few studies have as yet analysed women's lives from wide and comprehensive perspectives. Hence, the author has designed the SMCD which has proved to be useful. The four factors: Opportunities/Constraints; Values/Norms; Motivations/Personality; and Affective attachment were used for the analysis on cases of eight women in three companies in the previous study. They are interrelated with each other, and were found to be especially important to analysing women's careers in organisations. The research aims to further develop and apply the framework to analyses in international comparative studies to enable identification of crucial gender issues throughout the management world regardless of the country. As the first attempt at such a comparative study, the paper proposes to turn our eyes on an example of France where surprisingly the percentage of women among managers is lower than in Japan which has historically been notorious for its gendered society, politics and economy.

Introduction

This study introduces an analytical framework, the Structural Model of Career Development (SMCD), for future international comparative studies on women's career development. The framework was first designed and used for the analysis of Japanese women's career development based on in-depth interviews with female managers in big Japanese corporations through applying a life-history approach (Ishiguro, 2008)¹. The research aimed to find out factors which promote and inhibit women's career development in Japanese corporations where advancement of women remained underdeveloped. As is the case with men, a woman's career development is

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a dynamic, continual and reflexive process, and no two women are identical in this world. For the analysis of those intricate career development processes of women, the framework sets four factors: opportunities/constraints; values/norms; motivations/personality; and affective attachment. The study found that the framework is useful to understanding women's career development in a conceptual way. As will be explained, the framework employs a multi-disciplinary approach, and it aims to add new perspectives to the current study of women and work in this global economy.

First, the paper briefly reviews main arguments on Japanese women's career development and gender relations in the Japanese workplace. It will then introduce the developmental process and concepts of framework of the Structural Model of Career Development. The third section will summarise its application to the study on Japanese women's cases. Finally, the concluding section will discuss the future possibility of a comparative study on Japanese women and French women, as the first attempt at international comparative studies on this subject.

1. Studies on Japanese women's career development and gender relations in the Japanese workplace.

There are various studies which analyse women and work in Japanese society. In this section, I will summarise arguments from different disciplines so that we can comprehend the complexity of a Japanese woman's career development. I also seek to explore existing empirical research into female managers in Japanese companies with associated qualitative data.

The literature referred to in this study focuses mainly on four issues: theories which explain women's underdeveloped status in organisations from the areas of economics, management and Japanese labour research; motivation and career development in order to shed light on the individual person within the organisation; literature which analyses people's interactions with and inside the company in Japan; and women and work, and female managers in contemporary Japanese companies.

Through examination of each area, I found a number of influential factors which may affect women's career development processes in Japanese companies. They are:

- (1) institutionalised gender discriminative employment practices (for example, the dual career-track employment system (Koike, 1988));
- (2) employment practices which are sustained by men's longer years of service (Osawa, 1998);

- (3) stereotypical assumptions of gendered characteristics (Schein, Virginia E. (1973; 1975; 1994; 1996);
- (4) structured differences of opportunity, power, work allocation, opportunities for promotion and training (Kanter, 1977; Rengō Sōgō Seikatsu Kaihatsu Kenkyūjo, 1996; JIWE, 2002);;
- (5) lack of supportive measures by the government and companies;
- (6) gender discriminatory perceptions and behaviours by people in organisations;
- (7) women's personal work motivations (Baba, 1996);
- (8) women's personal circumstances;
- (9) norms and assumptions of expected behaviours of employees in companies;
- (10) emotional ties between individuals and other members of the company (Blatt, 1975; Dore, 1973; Nakane, 1967 ; Mathews, 1996);
- (11) difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities (JIWE, 2002; 2005);
- (12) perpetuating gender norms which put marriage at the centre of women's lives

In addition to the accumulation of rich studies, there are several case studies on women and work, especially in the retail industry, including Lam (1992) on Seibu department store, Kimoto (2003) on a department store and a supermarket, and Broadbent (2003) on part-time workers in a supermarket. These studies identified gendered management practices in each organisation, as well as gendered social and political systems in general in Japan (Ishiguro, 2011).

I found, however, that there was still a considerable lack of qualitative data concerning the group of women who have successfully advanced their careers in the company. From this review, the need became apparent to me for analysis women's career development in an integrated way so that we could gain in-depth understanding on women's lives and careers. One possible way to understand women's career development may be to design an analytical framework by putting women at the centre of the analysis, and by reorganising the factors presented above. It is also important to see career development as a dynamic process. Reciprocity, or reflexivity, is important in order to understand people and their organisations.

In analysing organisational culture, Schein points out that organisational structures and the realities of people working within them are not static, and people themselves reproduce, reinforce or change their realities through their own behaviours and actions, and by interaction with other people (Schein, Edgar H. 1985). Giddens also expanded the traditional view of social structure as a constraint on interaction with the recognition that interaction creates the structure of constraint

to which it is subjected (Giddens, 1984; Hatch, 1997, 180-181). The structuration view focuses on the duality of structure where social structure constrains the choices humans make about their activities, but at the same time social structure is created by the activities that they constrain. It also argues that structures not only constrain, but they enable interaction. Thus, structuration theory emphasises the ever-changing dynamics that occur within social structures. In the structuration view, a social structure is not a fixed and immovable object, but is a delicate cooperative moment of tentative and ever-changing interactivity, sustained by the complicity of the individual involved at particular places and specific moments in time. In sum, the system that we took for granted as inflexible is a dynamic condition whose seeming stability is the result of the unexamined assumption that it is stable.

I maintain the same view as Schein and Giddens in examining organisations and individuals working there. Organisations and people are not static – rather they are continuously changing, with multiple and interwoven influences. By paying attention to this point, we will be able to understand and uncover relationships between people and organisations, which are flexible, interactive and dynamic processes in the creation of organisations and individuals' organisational lives.

Based on these findings and discussions, I have set up the analytical frameworks which integrate diverse features which influence women's career development. The following two sections will present the concept of SMCD and its application to the cases of female managers in Japanese companies.

2. The Structural Model of Career Development (SMCD)

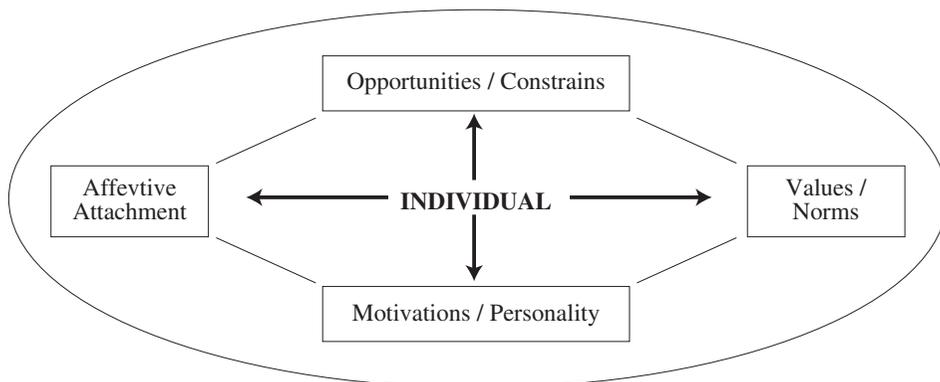
We have reviewed many different factors which influence women's career development processes. Surrounded by these different elements, women choose and decide their career paths. Also, sometimes women may be forced to make particular choices. The SMCD was designed so that it can express the situation where a woman is pulled by different forces. It also aims to represent the reciprocity and dynamic state of these factors surrounding women.

Designing the Model

The Structural Model of Career Development is a framework which puts the individual at the centre of a circle with four surrounding factors. The four factors are: opportunities/constraints; values/norms; motivations/personality; and affective attachment (Figure1). I have designed the

framework in order to understand interwoven and interrelated factors which affect people's career development processes in a structured way. From my own working experience in companies and from the interviews with women, I also found that we made our career decisions by considering various issues in our working and private lives. Therefore, I assumed it would be useful to design a framework by placing a woman in a wider context, with special emphasis on the four factors. For an individual, her work in an organisation involves a considerable part of her life, and choices regarding work may decide the rest of her choices in life, while for an organisation, an employee's choices regarding her work may affect only a tiny part of the organisation's activities. Therefore, examining careers from an individual's point of view is essential if one seeks to study individuals and their relationships with the organisation as a whole, as well as with other members of the organisation.

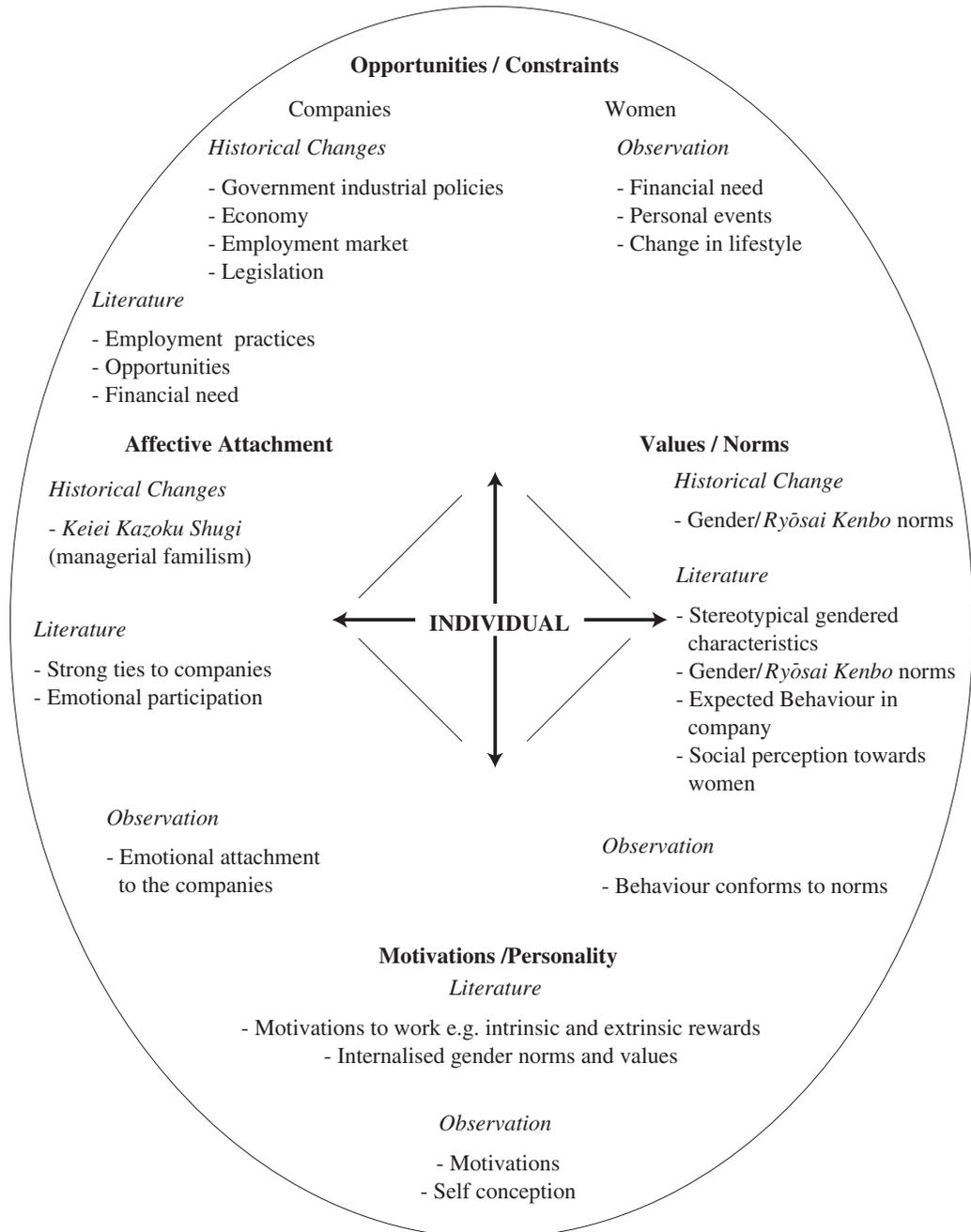
Figure 1 Structural Model of Career Development



The framework evolved gradually with the progress of my research to form a type of grounded theory. Firstly, from the review of the literature, I found that features such as institutionalised gender discriminating employment practices, and structured differences in opportunities by gender have constrained women's career development processes. Issues such as stereotypical assumptions of gendered characteristics, gender norms represented by *ryōsai kenbo*, good wife and wise mother, and expected gendered behaviour may determine or regulate women's behaviour. Women's motivations for working and career aspirations also seemed very important. There was also the aspect of strong ties to the company seen in *keiei kazoku shugi*. Secondly, I regarded historical changes in economics, the employment market, legal frameworks, and social perceptions of women as important in defining women's career choices, directly or indirectly. The shift in industrial policies and structure has dictated the specific types of labour force and working patterns that companies have required. Consequent changes in the employment market have directly caused

companies to re-design their employment policies and practices. The provisions of legislation have also regulated companies' personnel management policies. The cooperation of government and employers, and the failure of unions to fight for policies for women seem to have been the main sources of these institutionalised gendered personnel management practices. Historically deep-rooted gender norms, as mentioned above, again regulated women's behaviour and these could be internalised and could then reconstruct women's identities. Thirdly, from the testimonies of the female managers and by reflecting on their testimonies with my own experience, several points became highlighted. Most of them had a financial need to work. For some, this financial need continues. Personal events such as marriage and childbearing/rearing have inevitably brought about changes in their life/working styles. On the other hand, the conditions which companies have created, such as work allocations, job assignments and responsibilities and promotions, provided or limited their work opportunities in the company. The ways in which these women behaved in the companies showed some differences. Many of the women carefully chose their behaviour so that they would not upset people or to protect their positions in their companies. They often followed unspoken but strong regulatory criteria, such as 'this is the way we treat women, and you should expect it'. The women themselves have had changing motivations, career aspirations, and self-conceptions throughout their long years of working. A remarkable characteristic, which I found among some women, was their emotional attachment to people in their companies, and to the company itself (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Sources of Each Concept



In this way, the framework started as a working concept at the early stage of the research, and gradually took on a clear form with the four main factors. I found diverse forms of opportunities/constraints from all three research companies. Motivations and perceptions of the women's work were also often described to me in a revealing manner. Gender norms and values which affected women's behaviour were rather more subtle compared to the two factors above; nevertheless, their importance was found behind their words. In a similar way, affective attachment was often found indirectly while discussing other topics such as organisational restructuring of the company.

I understand that at each moment an individual's current circumstance is chosen and decided by balancing several different forces. Sometimes there is some freedom to choose a certain path, however at other times an individual may feel that she is forced to make a particular choice. Thus, the SMCD can be understood by imagining a woman placed inside a circle, where many different forces try to pull her in opposing directions. As long as she can maintain her balance within that circle, she will be able to remain in a stable situation and environment. However, once disruption of the balance occurs, she will either try to regain her balance, or give up her position within the circle. In addition, the pulling forces of each factor are not static but are in fact continuously moving, and sometimes they spin out of control. This image describes the situation of a Japanese woman in an organisation.

There are two characteristics of the model. Firstly, the SMCD attempts to express the dynamic and interconnected status of the model. In Figure 1 the factors are arranged evenly, linked by arrows and lines, and presented on a two-dimensional figure for the sake of simplicity. However, each of these four factors is closely linked with the other three factors, and the proportions and gravity of each factor could be better expressed on a three dimensional figure rather than a planar circle. One factor may be changed by another factor, and a small change in one factor will change the whole structure of the balance. For example, one woman's way of thinking may have been greatly influenced by social norms which she has absorbed and internalised throughout her life. On the other hand, those social norms may influence companies' decisions on personnel management practices, or decision makers' perspectives in deciding the practices. A woman's motivation might be increased by promotion or decreased by not being promoted. All the factors are interrelated, and affect the others' characteristics. Moreover, the life-world of an individual is always moving, travelling and changing its form.

The four factors also change their meanings and messages to women over time. For example, when a constraint such as discriminating employment practice is abolished, new opportunities

may arise for women. Changes in people's perceptions toward gender norms may lead to changes in women's behaviours as well. Women's motivation and career aspirations are not static – rather changing with and against the times.

Secondly, the model is well-suited for analysis of data derived from a life-history method, which I have been employing for the collection of qualitative data on people's work and lives. By means of interviews related to women's life histories, I expect to see how the factors changed and how women decided their behaviour in response to the changes. In addition, the ways in which the factors were interconnected, and the ways in which women made their choices and behaviour would also be seen through their narratives. Features of norms and values, and affective attachment are sometimes interpreted from women's words, rather than directly spoken. These women's nuanced and unnoticed emotions and perceptions would become two of the main points of the analyses, and a life-history approach could extract these women's words.

By applying this framework, I expected to create a new approach to examining and analysing women's career development processes in Japanese companies. The following description summarises the contents of the four factors.

The Four Factors

Opportunities / Constraints

There are some seemingly uncontrollable factors for a woman, both in an organisation and in her private life. For example, personnel management systems in an organisation have definite power to decide and limit her activities within it. Employment practices seen in the past, such as earlier retirement ages for women compared to their male counterparts and limited job opportunities, are other examples. Apart from these relatively explicit examples, there are many other examples at a day-to-day level, such as supervisors' capacities to assign jobs and provide training opportunities.

On the other hand, she has her own concerns and problems which she has to follow and overcome. She may need to work for financial reasons. She may have family and her family circumstances may force her to devote her available time and energy to them. Those issues become constraints on her. At the same time, if those given situations work positively for her – for example, managers give her a challenging but interesting new job, promoting her to a higher position; if she has free time and choices due to being single; strong support from her family; high skills, abilities and educational background - they become opportunities for her.

Values / Norms

Being a member of a society means having to follow implicit and explicit values and behavioural norms, which often turn out to be tacit rules in societies and communities. In Japan conforming is expressed as *shakaika* (socialisation), or becoming *shakaijin* (to become a mature and responsible adult member of society). In the past, values and norms have been sources of great power to define people's behaviour in an organisation. In particular, gender norms are often applied in Japanese society: which to a great extent explains the under-developed status of Japanese women in formal economic and political arenas.

Motivations / Personality

Not only do gender norms and values regulate and decide women's behaviour in an organisation, they are also internalised in women's own values. Consequently norms and values in society or in the organisation at the same time form women's personalities and identities, in that they may be metamorphosed into another facet of the individual's personality. In addition, there are several other aspects which can impact on a woman's identity. An individual woman has her own wishes, hopes, intentions, ways of thinking, aesthetics and preferences as well as her talents, skills and abilities. She may want to do a certain job if other factors allow her. She may have a strong desire to marry and raise children. Some women may want to become housewives while some may want to continue working after marriage and childbirth. Her own personal traits will also lead her to take certain actions. Those issues which are inherent to her create her personality and change her motivation to work. Issues such as consciousness as a professional and of femininity – whether a woman is conscious of having femininity or not, whether a woman wants to be feminine or not, though the definitions of femininity and feminine may vary according to the individual – may be also categorised here.

Affective Attachment

People's emotions sometimes go beyond or conflict with logical factors. The issue concerning employees' attachment to companies, such as the emotional participation of employees (Nakane, 1967, 43-44), *ittaikan* (sense of oneness or commitment to group and role) in Mathews's study (1996) and people's subtle emotions in moving between being critical, and liking or 'even loving' (Graham, 2005), may explain nuanced feelings people have towards their companies in Japan. Examining and considering people's emotions is crucial in analysing their working lives and the career development process in Japan.

Through application of the SMCD, the study on women's career development in Japanese

companies was able to present several remarkable findings

3. Summary on the application of the SMCD to the cases of female managers in Japan

The study on female managers' career development used cases of three big Japanese companies (a bank, an electronic company and a company in a service industry) and eight women working in those companies.²⁾

Table1 Profiles of female managers

Company	Name	Starting year	Service Years	Age	Title (Japanese Equivalent Title)	Education	Marital Status
An electronic company	Manager 1	1986	22	44	Manager	Private University	Single with one daughter
	Manager 2	1984	24	44	HR Manager	Private Junior College	Single (Living on her own)
A bank	Manager 3	1985	23	43	Group Leader	Private Junior College	Single (Living with parents and brothers)
	Manager 4	1986	22	44	Manager	National University	Single (Living with a sister)
	Manager 5	1978	29	48	Operation Officer	High School	Married with one son
Service company	Manager 6	1982	26	49	Manager	Private University	Married
	Manager 7	1985	23	49	Deputy GM	National University	Single (Living on her own)
	Manager 8	1982	26	52	Director	Private University	Married with one daughter (Living away from home)

It was proved that the three factors, opportunities/constraints; values/norms; and motivations/personality, have greatly influenced women's career development in Japanese organisations. This finding corresponds to the knowledge derived from the review of the literature as well as from my own observations, as I have explained. In addition to the three factors, the women's strong ties with the companies and people working there, namely, affective attachment, have been found to be indispensable in many cases. This section will present analysis using the Structural Model of Career Development and discuss characteristics of each factor which became apparent in the case studies.

Opportunities / Constraints

With regard to opportunities and constraints, for women in the electronic company and the bank, there were times, especially during the 1980s to the '90s, when they were not provided with equal opportunities for career development to their male counterparts. However, the women I studied have been provided with opportunities to expand their job responsibilities as well as to experience a variety of new tasks, in many cases with elevation of their positions. These changes also greatly influenced their motivation and supported the women in establishing identities as professional business people. It was not only opportunities offered by the management systems but also those given at individual levels through supervisors and people in personnel management, that opened up women's potential and career development processes. The women's own personal circumstances also influenced their career choices. For most of the female managers, financial security is essential. This constraint has kept them from resigning from the organisations.

Values / Norms

Behavioural norms and values in the company as well as in society also greatly influence women's behaviour, actions and subsequent career development process. If we analyse findings at different levels through female managers' viewpoints and through examination of each company, several points come up. Women and personnel managers share common perceptions of the cultural norms and gender situations in Japan. Although it may have gradually become acceptable for women to take on greater roles in politics and the formal economy, it seems that traditional expectations of women as *ryōsai kenbo* have not vanished completely yet. These norms at both company and individual levels regulate women's behaviour and actions.

Motivations / Personality

The study identified changes in women's motivation, especially with regard to the changes in institutional constraints and opportunities given to them. In terms of gender relations in the companies, the cases of the electronic company and the bank are obvious. Five of the women experienced occasional ups and downs in their motivation. However, they experienced realisation of enjoyment of work at an early period of their careers despite the fact that they had not possessed any special desire or plan to work longer than three to five years. Their motivation did touch rock-bottom when they became aware that they would not be given opportunities equal to their male counterparts. However, once they were promoted to the higher and managerial positions, even

though their promotions took longer than those of their male peers, their satisfaction dramatically increased and they have maintained their high motivation. In addition, changes in social climate do not seem to be unconnected with their motivation. Since the late 1980s, media reports have conveyed strong images of career women, and they have gradually become one of the most influential groups in Japanese society.

One thing should be noted about the female managers in the service company. All three women's motivations are inherently different from those of the women in the other two companies. They each joined the company with a strong sense of career aspiration and professional identity as a working woman. The employment pool they came from, a group of female students from high-profile universities who had career aspirations, was also different from the women in the other two companies. They had all been involved in occupations in education or academia in some way since they were young. Their strong career aspirations and determination led them to find the place where their ambitions could be actualised.

Affective Attachment

Finally, it is important to observe the changes in women's emotions towards the company. This is strongest among the women in the bank. Long service of more than twenty years undoubtedly cultivated their emotional and affective attachment to the company. Although there are differences to some degree according to company, generally, the longer the service, the more people felt comfortable with working in the organisation. Even respondents in the other two companies replied that they have strong feelings of security and comfort in the company as they know the rules and people in the company, while they fear losing their competencies once they move to another company. A mixture of emotions - emotional attachment, feelings of security and comfort, and fears of leaving a very familiar environment - has developed within the women during many years of service and they indeed retain women in their organisations. These women's behaviour may prove that behavioural characteristics of Japanese male employees, such as emotional participation of employees in their company (as Nakane argues (1967)), *ittaikan* (sense of oneness or commitment to group and role) (as Mathews points out (1996)), and interdependency of selves in the society (as Matanle claims (2003)), also exist in female employees in some companies.

Interrelations of the four factors

As we have reviewed, the study found that sustained by these factors, the eight women

stayed in their jobs and they have furthered their careers within the organisations. The four factors, however, do not work independently. They are closely interrelated, forming and renewing women's identities and career directions every day. For example, changing gender norms and values change companies' management practices as well as women's motivation to work. How a company treats women strengthen or weaken a woman's sense of attachment to that company. Changes in management practices result in changes to wider social norms and values. In this wise, analysing women's career development using the SMCD at the same time illuminates the reflexivity of people's career development processes and the deep and wide implications to the wider society.

4. Conclusion: Towards comparative studies on women's career development in Japan and France

As discussed above, the previous study found four different factors which have affected women's career development in Japanese companies. Do these factors apply uniquely to Japan? Can the model identify idiosyncratic elements of Japanese society? Or are similar factors prevalent in other countries? As we have discussed in this paper, women's career developments interrelate with various factors, including society's culture, political and economic system, as well as companies' management systems. Hence, we need to broaden our perspectives in analysing women's career development by focusing on the types of politics and economy. In this regard, the variety of capitalism will offer a possible framework for the future development of the research into women and management in the contemporary society.

Keeping this line of inquiry in mind, I have planned international comparative studies. As the first case of this investigation, I have chosen to compare France with Japan. Japan is in one sense notorious for its lack of advancement of women in the economy and politics. However, as figure 3 shows, if we simply look at percentages of women among managerial-level workers, France scores even lower than Japan. Why is this so? Should not "Western" countries be much more developed than Japan in terms of gender relations in society and economy, as well as in politics?

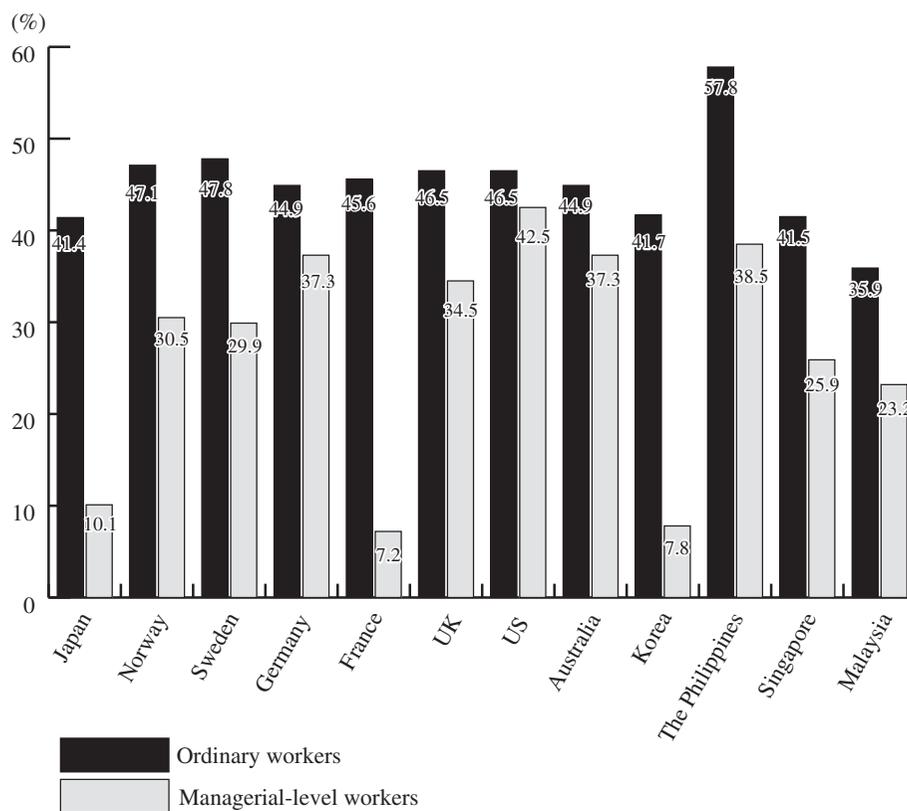
In pursuit of the answers to these questions, the data collection started in February 2012, using the same method as with the Japanese cases, namely, interviewing female managers on their career development. A total of seven French women, three women originally from different countries other than Japan but working in France, and three Japanese women working in France were interviewed during February and August 2012.

The analysis of detailed data is still at the preliminary stage, but their testimonies have already showed interesting findings. First, Hayama (2008) presents thorough examination and analyses on the elite system in French society to show that an individual's educational background and class or their family background, including status in the society, parents' occupations, place of birth and where s/he grew up, have excessive importance – it is as if family background decides everything. Second, there appears to be an acknowledgement throughout society that the business world is a very masculine society and women need to act wisely if they wish to pursue careers in an organisation. In relation to this point, the women's practical views would deserve special mention. The women I interviewed told me without exception that “independence has been most important” when they think about their lives and careers. In contrast to Japanese society, where people tend to value ambiguity or avoid direct confrontation and clarity in many cases, French women's approach seemed more direct and practical.

I intend to conduct in-depth analysis on the cases of French women using the framework of the Structural Model of Career Development. The research will then move on to comparisons with the Scandinavian countries, where gender equality is said to be more developed than anywhere else in the world, and finally I aim to expand the research to include comparison with Anglo-American societies, that is, the United States and the United Kingdom, where modern business and capitalist systems were developed.

The research on women's career development started with a very simple question: “why has the advancement of women in Japanese companies remained so difficult?” However, with the progress of the research, the interconnections of women and various factors have become more and more important, and I have become acutely aware of the necessity of investigating various models of social and capitalist systems. I hope we can find some answers for Japanese women and men through our future research.

Figure 3



Source: Cabinet Office (2007) White Paper on Gender Equality

Notes

- 1) This article is developed based on re-edited extracts from an unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the University of Sheffield, K. Ishiguro (2008) *Generating Equal Employment Opportunities: The Work and Life of Female Managers in Japanese Companies* (Chapter II).
- 2) Please refer to Ishiguro (2012) for the details of the cases of the eight women.

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