

überreglementierten und überteuerten Land wie Japan gerade die politischen Schmierstoffe, die ihre Umsetzung und den dauerhaften Geschäftserfolg möglich machen.

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JANET HUNTER (ed.): *Japanese Women Working*. London/New York: Routledge, 1993. 245 pages, £ 37.50. ISBN 0-415-08873-9

The historical development and status of women's labour within Japanese society has so far been only minimally investigated, Anglo-Saxon research on Japan being no exception. *Japanese Women Working* is thus an important contribution to the understanding of modern Japan. The volume aims at spreading knowledge about the past and present of working women in Japan. The purpose of the different essays is to investigate what effects the traditional Japanese family and societal structures (*ie*) have on the role of women within society and working life. The intention of the authors is not to draw a complete picture of the past and present of women's labour in Japan, but, through their interdisciplinary approach, to promote understanding of some important facets of this complex topic.

As in all modern industrial societies the labour market in Japan is gender-segregated: women earn lower wages than men and work in less qualified jobs. A Japanese peculiarity is, as Janet Hunter argues in the introduction, the tension between a highly specialized economy and a very traditional structure of society. The gender-specific unequal distribution of gainful employment and participation in the reproductive process seems to be a constituent of all patriarchal societies and especially of Japanese society, which is so based on traditional role distribution.

The different studies all verify the close connection between a patriarchal family system (*ie*) and gender-segregated possibilities and prospects in the labour market. The common thesis of all the studies is that a change in the flexibility of this status can only be achieved through a fundamental change in the patriarchal family system. Therefore, as Janet Hunter says, the often heard allegation by academics that gender studies are peripheral has to be rejected.

The studies of the volume deal, in chronological order, with different areas of women's labour. Konosuke Odaka analyzes in her essay the second most important area of female gainful employment during Japanese industrialization: the work of female domestic servants. Especially for young women from rural areas, this occupation offered a possibility to escape the

unpaid work in the parental home as well as work in the industrial sector. Although wages for domestic servants were lower than in industry, the social status was higher. The explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the clear-cut distinction between production and reproduction. Female labour, in keeping with the social norm, should be restricted to typical female areas, and domestic labour is regarded as one of these. Odaka analyzes one central issue of female labour during the early phase of Japanese industrialization, but her essay mainly describes statistical findings and does not further interpret the results.

The studies of Kathleen Uno, Janet Hunter and Regine Mathias analyze more deeply the relationship of women to work in the coal-mining and textile industry as well as in the home. Uno examines the interaction between modern housework and the role of women in the reproductive process. In the beginning of Japanese industrialization the combination of low-paid home- and housework was necessary for the survival of families from the lower classes. Married women from this stratum were forced to earn money and homework made it possible for them to accomplish this as well as to fulfill their duties as mothers and wives. The necessity of this female labour resulted in a diversification in the role of women during industrialization. Uno proves that, during the 1890s, female labour was described by the propaganda of the Japanese Ministry of the Interior as an important part of the building up of the national economy. The traditional ideal "good wife, wise mother", as supported by the Ministry for Education, was forced into the background for economic reasons, but was able to recover its status as a predominant model in the 1920s. Paid labour by women was now described as a necessary evil, which the women from the lower classes were forced to comply with. However, the ideal of industrialized society remained the traditional view of women as housewives and mothers.

Regine Mathias' essay about working women in the coal-mining industry also shows how strongly economic and ideological motives are linked. Up to 1945 many women were working in the mines in Japan, a fact that tends to be forgotten today. Women were working under harder and more dangerous conditions than men and were paid a great deal less. Without this cheap female labour many pits would not have survived. For women this work possessed an ambivalent character: on the one hand they were exploited but on the other they established a stronger foothold for emancipation. Many women experienced themselves as independent wage-earners and so gained pride and self-confidence. But this cannot, according to Mathias, alter the fact that female labour in industry only gradually lost its character of a sideline job.

In her study of the textile industry and the spread of tuberculosis Janet Hunter shows how bad working conditions were for women working in in-

dustry. In this female-dominated industrial sector women worked under terrible conditions, which for many led to tuberculosis and death. Due to the rural origins of many women the spread of tuberculosis was rapid and difficult to contain. Hunter thus proves that female textile workers were the victims of rapid industrialization and were more affected by the development of the capitalist system than their male counterparts.

Eiko Shinotsuka's analysis of care assistants in hospitals and D.P. Martinez' study of the atypical female profession of diver (*ama*) also prove the thesis about the low status of female gainful employment. In traditional Japan the profession of diver had a high social status, but, as Martinez shows, industrialization resulted in a downgrading of this line of business. Presently only people of the lower classes follow this profession, and even here "it is mostly the work of those with the lowest status of all: the women".

The conclusion of the different essays in this volume is that the Japanese labour market, past and present, is strictly gender-segregated and that the discrimination of working women is the norm in Japanese society. Therefore it is not astonishing that many women, as Joy Hendry shows in her essay about "professional housewives", identify strongly with their role as housewives and perfect their housework. These women are proud of their position as "good wives and wise mothers" and devote all their energy to their part in the reproductive process. In Japan the M-curve is currently more pronounced than in Germany. With marriage and motherhood most women withdraw completely from the labour market or restrict themselves to an underpaid part-time job in the case of re-entry.

As a result of this more or less "voluntary" retreat of women from the labour market the present structures persist and no real parity of men and women can be attained. The laws about "Equal Opportunity Employment" have so far not been able to change the situation, as Alice Lam shows. Only a selected number of women already in high positions were able to gain something. In general, the situation is as described by Lam: "Women's career tracks are still entirely separated from those of men and they are still treated as a special category of the work-force."

All in all *Japanese Women Working* may be regarded as an interesting and important contribution to the historical analysis of female labour in Japan. The essays clearly show how important it is for the sake of emancipation to alter the existing structures of the labour market. But this can only be done, and this has been proven by the development in Western societies, with the active commitment of those concerned. Otherwise Japanese women will, at the beginning of the 21st century, still belong to the losers in the rapid process of modernisation.