Marxist and Socialist Feminism, and Women in Technology Sector: A Comparative Study of Japan and USA Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Through Marxist and Socialist feminism frameworks, this paper seek to evaluate the conditions of women in Japan and especially in technology sector. The Marxist and Socialist argue that the economic dependence on a husband and the patriarchy in the government is oppressing women. Whether women are workers and also mothers, or just mothers depend on the state's needs. In Japan, while Education and Employment rates in women increase drastically in the past two decades, many women chose low-pay or part-time jobs, gender wage gap still remain large up until today, and mothers still face numerous hardships. Employed women around the world encounter many challenges, such as work-family conflict, hostile workplace environment, harassment, lack of mentorship. The situation in technology sector is expected to be worse than that. By comparing the United States with Japan about women in tech, we can see and understand the difficulties of women in technology sector in not just Japan but also United States.

Introduction

Japanese culture has historically emphasized gender roles. Women dominated the household but outside of the home, their families dictated their behavior. New ideologies were introduced during several changes and helped shape Japanese culture. Women were taught to prioritize modesty, virginity, etiquette, respect, restraint, and organization. Women had little freedom under samurai feudalism, and many were forced into prostitution. Others, like aristocratic ladies, were kept as pawns for family investments and utilized in political ties (Khopkar). Japanese women's lives were altered by World War II as a result of their employment in weaving, textile, and silk factories while men were at war. Working fields that were once exclusively the domain of men, women realized their potential and refused to revert to their former limitations. However, during the war ,the government recruited poor Japanese women to be comfort women for military men and their duties may only involved providing sexual services. They were given more freedom to make lives outside of the home, but were still limited by men's expectations and perceptions (Khopkar). Through organizations like the Nurse Corps, women expanded their influence during Japan's most difficult periods. In the absence of men, Japanese women reinterpreted their social status, and society realized how crucial they were to the country's identity. Women in Japan persisted after the war that they wouldn't go back to the old practices of discrimination against women and that they wanted to be pioneers for future females in Japan. Modern day women show the drive to continue working beyond the expected retirement age to make a difference in society. The most dramatic change in modern Japan is the role of women and how they are defining themselves both internationally and nationally. Sadly, many gender stereotypes still remain up until now in the consciousness of many people (Khopkar).

By using Marxist and socialist feminism framework, I want to discuss the state of women in workplace in Japan and also in male-dominated occupations like technology sector. Past Marxist and socialist feminists

had always debated about the matter of patriarchy. Many countries have patriarchal societies but Japan is often cited as a primary example. Japan's conservative patriarchal culture is highly influenced by the Buddhist and Confucian values on which the country was built (Villa, 2019). During Japan's rapid modernization the mindset of seeing women as housewives and men as breadwinners became especially prominent (Villa, 2019). Hence, it resulted in numerous difficulties for women in Japan nowadays.

In this paper, firstly, I will cover Marxist and Socialist feminism framework. Secondly, the paper will briefly discuss about the state of women in Japan. Thirdly, I will give an overview of the challenges that women in the general workplace usually face. After that, I will talk about women specifically in technology sectors in two of the most influential economies in the world: the United States of America and Japan. This paper finds that women in the workplace experience gender biases, sexual harassments, lack of mentorships and models; this experience is particularly heightened in STEM fields because the occupations related to STEM are male-dominated. In the two major economies of Japan and the United States, this experiences are similar.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism framework: An Overview

First of all, it is crucial to understand the following: *Gender* is now understood to be a social status, a personal identity, and a set of relationships between women and men, and among women and men. *Sex* is no longer seen as a one-way input or basic material for social arrangements, but a complex interplay of genes, hormones, physiology, environment, and behavior, with loop-back effects (Lober, 1997). *Sexuality* is understood to be socially constructed as well as physiologically based and emotionally expressed (Lober, 1997). Reproductive labour is the work associated with houseworks and caregivings. It is believed that although reproductive workers, which mainly are women, sell their labour power to capitalism, they receive nothing in return (Armstrong, 2020).

Karl Marx, a German Philosopher, analyzed the social structure of capitalism and it was supposed to apply to people of any social characteristics. If you owned the means of production, you were a member of the capitalist class; if you sold your labor for a wage, you were a member of the proletariat (Lober, 1997). However, housewives had no place in Marx's analysis of capitalism.

Yet, housewives are vital for capitalism because they work unpaid in homes to maintain bosses and workers and also reproduce the next generation of bosses and workers and their wives. If the husbands fall into hard times, the housewives can do work at home or a temporary job to earn extra money. If the husbands' wages fall lower than the minimum requirements to feed his families, the housewives can work in factories or shops, or maybe open small factories and put everyone, including workers, to work.

Marxist and socialist feminisms believe that women are being oppressed, exploited by family and economically dependent on the husband. As Lober (1997) put it, a woman who works at home for her family must be financially supported, making her economically dependent on the "man of the house" much like her children. She works twice as hard as a male, typically for much less money, because even if she works outside the home, she is still expected to do her domestic tasks.

When talking about communist and socialist countries, women there have what women in capitalist countries do not have: full-time jobs with state-supported maternity leave, paternity leave, and child-care services. However, Marxist and Socialist feminists argue that male-dominated states prioritize its interests rather than women. The states will pay child-care leave if they need workers; The states will reduce the benefits during the economy recession; The states will decrease abortions if they need more children. Hence, women are seen as a reserve army of labor and as a child producer is no different under socialism (Lober, 1997).

In the early 20th century, socialist feminists argued for the social wages to bridge the divide between paid productive work and unpaid reproductive labour. As Armstrong (2020) put, the social wage sought to give material value to reproductive labour. For example, provide greater support spread from the USSR to Europe,

Iran, and other socialist governments; paid childcare, maternity leave or financially support pregnant women (Ghodes, 2015).

Another approach related to the value of reproduction labour: In the late 1930s, Mary Inman argued that reproductive labour should be recognized as productive work (Inman, 1940). Not just Mary Inman, Socialist feminists from the Caribbean, Italy, Germany, France, and the UK believed in Inman's recognition of reproductive labor as productive work (Armstrong, 2020).

Women and Work: Some General Reflections

The increase of women's labour force worldwide have expanded their access to occupations historically held by men. However, women still face various and numerous challenges. Women earn less money, power and status than men for the same work and male-dominated occupations offer higher wages and better working conditions than their counterparts (Stier & Yaish, 2014). Many efforts to improve women's job quality and empowerment have been given by accessing legal and institutional influence. However, work-family conflict and many other barriers restrict women's participation in unions (Eby et al., 2005). Many social movements, frameworks highlight the limitations that women have and also improve their working conditions (Flores et al., 2021).

Psychological climate is a subjective, individual-level construct that includes perceptions of the organization's practices, policies, and rewards (Ostroff et al., 2012). In male-dominated fields, women's psychological climate is less positive, less fair, less friendly, less collegial than men. Sexist climates reflect individuals' perceptions that organizational policies, practices, and rewards favor men over women (Gunter & Stambach, 2005; Hoonakker et al., 2004; Major et al., 2007; Makarem & Wang, 2020). Sexist climates reflect individuals' perceptions that organiazations' policies, practices, and rewards favor men over women (Flores et al., 2021). When women view their workplaces as having more sexist climate, it is reported that women have less job satisfaction, more job stress and turnover intentions, and being less accepted and valued (King et al., 2010; Settles et al., 2006; Settles et al., 2007; Wessel & Ryan, 2012). Diverse climates show individuals' perceptions that their organizations are valuing diversity (Flores et al., 2021). In short, a diverse climate is tied with positive outcomes. Many studies have found that diversity climate perceptions are linked to lower turnover intentions (Flores et al.,2021). However, many organizations see less value in diversity (Mor Barak et al., 1998).

Many women view their workplace as negative and hostile. They experience incivility, exclusion or ostracism, and harassment (which is more types of interpersonal mistreatment than men (Cortina & Magley, 2003). Early conceptualizations of mistreaments tend to locate the cause in qualities of the victim or perpetrator. Sex-based mistreatments were viewed as resulting from something about the victim (dress, behaviour, personality) or the desire of the perpetrator (Flores et al., 2021). More recent theorizations show interpersonal mistreatment is because of a function of power. Ones with more formal or social power direct interpersonal mistreatment towards ones who have less (Flores et al., 2021). Male-dominated fields like STEM and medicine also have interpersonal mistreatment because many men in that field believe that men are more suitable for those occupations (Flores et al., 2021). Current discrimination laws do not address multiple forms of harassment. Hence, it gives little legal resources for such matters.

For women, the increase in work responsibilities outside the family does not result in the decline in responsibilities at home (Horne et al., 2018). However, women in leadership roles or in male-dominated occupations may encounter stiffer challenges in work responsibilities management, such as demanding work hours (Makarem & Wang, 2020). Hence, it is another important factor to leave the field. Lack of family-friendly policies at national level cause many, especially women in low-wage employment, disadvantages (Flores et al., 2021).

Mentorship is formal or informal relationships between senior and junior colleagues that focus on professional and personal growth of the mentee (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Hence, it is associated with positive

outcomes (more promotions, reduced turnover intentions, more positive workplace climate) (Flores et al., 2021). However, women faced challenges in accessing mentorship, especially in male-dominated occupations like STEM and in informal mentorship (Flores et al., 2021; Makarem & Wang, 2020). The barriers that women face in accessing mentorship are potential male mentors less willing to invest due to gender bias; lack of gender diversity in positions of powers within the organizations (Flores et al., 2021). Studies have shown that women receive different mentorship than men (Leck & Orser, 2013; Dickson et al., 2014). Usually, mentors provide instrumental support (e.g, access to material resources) and/or psychological support (e.g, counsel). However, women tend to receive psychological support because of the belief that women need more "emotional" support (Flores et al., 2021). Therefore, it negatively affects women since instrumental support is better in career development. Incidents in mentorship or mentor characteristics ruin the quality of mentorship and women's workplace experiences (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2000).

Women and the Technology Sector

Women are rare in most technology companies around the world. In 2022, women held only about 26% of tech-related jobs (Howarth, 2022). Women in the Technology sector face worse problems than many other fields. In a male-dominated occupation, they encounter many gender biases and many reported that they felt a lack of role models and opportunity for promotion.

Japan

Education is important for job employment since the function of education is to prepare students for upcoming word tasks. Compared to 59% of men, 64 percent of women between the ages of 25 and 34 hold degrees from a tertiary institution (OECD, 2020). The percentage of Japanese women who transferred from secondary schools to universities increased from 15.2% in 1990 to over 50% in 2019 (50.7%) (Ministry of Education, 2019). The employment rate of highly educated women has increased in the past decade, reaching 82% in 2019 (OECD, 2020).

Women are increasingly making up the workforce in Japan as a whole. From 52% in 1990, in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 65% of women aged 15 to 64 were employed across the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Japan had a greater ratio than the US and other nations, at 73%. A labor force survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications found that 78% of women in the 30 to 34 age range were employed or actively seeking employment in 2020. From a Marxist and Socialist feminism framework standpoint, more and more women in Japan face "second shift," a term coined by Arlie Hochschild, to imply the workload of people who work to earn money but also responsible for unpaid houseworks.

On the other hand, women in Japan are more concentrated in part-time, low-paying jobs. 44.2% of employed women in 2019 worked part-time or on a temporary basis, while only 11.7% of working men (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic caused economic losses equivalent to 9.8% of women's earnings in jobs that were unpredictable, face-to-face, and rigorously scheduled, compared to 5.2% of men's earnings in similar jobs (Feng, 2020). When compared to full-time employees, part-time workers are employed under contracts with little to no job security (let alone until retirement), earn less money with fewer career options, receive fewer or no benefits like annual payments or social welfare benefits, and are not eligible for union membership. Enterprise unions are founded on the idea that most women are married and hence unable to support themselves. Employers view women as marginal or secondary workers who don't need training because they'll get married and leave, or because if they do get married, they won't be the primary breadwinner (Broadbent, 2002).

In comparison to 6 other nations in Group of Seven, Japan has the biggest gender pay gap at 22.5%, which is around 5% higher than the United States and much higher than 5% compared to the other 5 countries, namely: Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, France, and Italy. Japanese women earn 77.5% of what Japanese men do, which is much less than the 88.4% OECD average. As a Marxist and Socialist feminist, women in Japan are being exploited by the government more than other countries which have large economies. Moreover, we can clearly see the impact of patriarchy in Japan government.

Working mothers also face many challenges. Compared to men, Japanese women put in an average of three hours and forty-four minutes more each day doing unpaid work, such as childcare and housework (OECD, 2020). Although the number of working mothers rises, childcare options are not keeping up. 12,439 kids were on waiting lists for daycare facilities nationwide as of April 1, 2020 (The Japan Times, 2020). High degrees of pressure are placed on women to perform in caregiving responsibilities due to cultural stereotypes and expectations of women as ideal moms (Kyodo News). Compared to males, women, particularly mothers, report feeling more guilty about skipping home chores (such as attending school events or taking care of parents) because of work (Aoyagi & Munro, 2019). "Second shift" is now more problematic as time passes and mothers can't reduce the burden they have when there is less support from the government in childcare.

Japan is ranked 167th out of 192 countries in terms of the percentage of women in politics. In Japan's national parliament, women only make up 9.9% of the lower house and 22.9% of the upper house (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020).
Only 11.2% of directors and 18.3% of section chiefs in private firms were women in 2018. Only 5.2% of board members in Japanese corporations in 2019 were female (Gender Equality Bureau, 2020). Only two women are cabinet ministers in the Japanese government as of September 2020 (Rich, 2020). Factors preventing the Japanese women from advancing are long work hours, gender-specific professional paths, gender norms, lack of childcare options, maternity harassment (matahara), and a tax structure that favors single-earner families over dual-income households.

However, official statistics indicate that businesses are already boosting their benefits and assistance. According to a 2019 survey by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, childcare leave is provided by 99 percent of businesses with 500 or more employees. In addition, the percentage of businesses employing remote work has increased in recent years, reaching 23% for businesses with 500 or more employees and 47% for those with 1,000 or more. These figures have most likely increased considerably more as a result of the pandemic (Samuel, 2021).

Technology is directly related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). The Japanese gender gap in those fields remains large. Japan ranks 120th out of 153 countries (Global Gender Gap Index, 2021).10.2% of engineers are women, 14.2% in science (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2017), and 15.3% of Japanese researchers are women – half the average proportion among OECD countries (Osumi, 2018). The Japanese government failed to reach the targets set in 2006 to increase the number of female researchers to 20% by 2016. This may be due to a lack of female role models, challenges juggling work and childcare, or the view that science is a "masculine" field.

Just like United States or maybe many other countries, there is a gender stereotypes about women in tech fields. Many people believe that women who pursue the career of science, or dubbed "Rikejo" will have less opportunities in life. The word itself, although it just means women in STEM, is quite discriminated. For example, someone says, "You are so amazing in mathematics even though you are a girl" or he can say "You are so amazing in mathematics". The latter looks more like a compliment but the first one is more like sexism.

On international standardized tests, Japanese boys and girls perform equally well in math and science by the age of 15. Haruka Fujiwara, who is a teacher in programming classes in Tsukuba, Japan said that she had seen no difference in enthusiasm or ability between girls and boys. However, surveys and data demonstrate that when high school students must pick between the science and humanities programs, girls' enthusiasm and confidence in math and science abruptly decline at this crucial stage (Malcolm, 2021).

Many male research leaders worry that hiring females will give them more disadvantages. However, an Elsevier report in 2017 identified Japan as the only country where the score of scholarly output per researcher was higher for women than for men during 2011-2015 (Osumi, 2018). Still, the number of women researchers is low. It is because the senior positions are mainly male. With the unconscious bias of women not fitting in STEM and R&D, not having many women who are into researching is not a surprise. Marxist and Socialist feminists can argue this scenario as an effect of patriarchy in labour control in STEM and R&D fields.

In an article in Metropolis Magazine 2018, a role model for rikejo is Dr. Yuko Makita. She completed her postdoctoral work at the Institut Pasteur in France after earning her PhD degree, and she is now a bioinformatics researcher at the Riken Research Institute. According to her, gender difficulties in Japan as a whole are symbolic of the challenges faced by women in science. "In this culture, women bear a larger responsibility in issues such as raising children or caring for the elderly." She does make the point that some researcher employment can be flexible, which can make the lab a more welcoming place for women than the office. "As it isn't a role which deals with customers, you can make up for lost time if, for example, your child gets ill. In this way there is a good work life balance."

Despite the fact that discrimination has not marred Dr. Makita's remarkable career, she raises issues with the industry as a whole. Younger scientists may not be sexists, but older scientists are more likely to make decisions and are less inclined to give women the credit they usually receive for career success. Her assessment is supported by the statistics, which show that the majority of female researchers in Japan who work as assistants rather than lecturers or professors. Regarding the term "rikejo," she is grateful that the word now has a positive connotation as this was not the case in the past. "Rikejo has a far more approachable feel to it, and although I don't describe myself as one, I wouldn't mind doing so." (Rikejo: What's in Store for Japan's Science Girls? | Metropolis Magazine, 2018).

Ms. Scarlett, a singer and data scientist, believes that the biggest thing she finds frustrating in Japan is the obvious routes people have chosen for themselves. Before people knew her, she was either called an office worker or a performer, depending on which topic of conversation came up first. She defies preconceptions. Her artist identity, Scarlett.ai, a blue-lipped vocalist who performs future songs with robotic dancing steps at music venues throughout Tokyo, draws on her work with artificial intelligence in her day job. Young and blonde, it is simple to think that someone with such a lovely appearance who participates in "frivolous" activities like performing battle stereotypes among the masses of grey-suited male programmers in Tokyo. "I feel that women in tech without the typical "tech look" are much more judged… I think the stereotype sometimes leads others to not take me seriously or undermine my ability – when I believe pursuing both creativity and science makes me well-rounded.", Ms. Scarlett said (Rikejo: What's in Store for Japan's Science Girls? | Metropolis Magazine, 2018).

The next thing I want to talk about is gender dícrimination in tech companies in Japan. There have been many cases that were reported about sexism in the tech workplaces. For example, Sony is one of the major technology companies in Japan or even in the world. However, Ms. Emma Majo, a former IT security analyst for PlayStation, sued Sony, alleging institutionalized gender discrimination on the part of the business. Majo claimed she was fired for speaking out against sexism at the studio and that she was let go soon after giving management a signed statement regarding the misogyny she had experienced there. Ms. Majo later submitted the necessary papers to convert her claim into a class-action lawsuit, and only last month Sony made an attempt to have the entire affair dismissed on the grounds that Ms. Majo's claims were too nebulous to withstand judicial examination. Additionally, no other women were coming forward with comparable claims, according to Sony's attorneys.

However, eight more women have now joined the Sony case. The new plaintiffs are current and former employees, and only one of them has chosen to remain anonymous. Ms. Marie Harrington, one of the plaintiffs, worked for Sony for 17 years before rising to the positions of senior director of program management and George Cacciopo's chief of staff. Ms. Harrington claimed that women were overlooked for promotions and

claimed that Sony Interactive Entertainment engineering directors hardly ever mentioned female employees as prospective "high performers" at annual assessment sessions. Only four of the 70 employees who were being reviewed in April 2019 were women, she claimed, compared to all of the men in this group, who were all designated as high performers. The remaining women gave similar accounts in their statements, with the lack of opportunities for female employees to progress and institutional favoring of male employees serving as a common theme. They claimed that male leaders at Sony made derogatory comments including, "you just need to marry rich," and, "I find that in general, women can't take criticism."

Another example is from Fujitsu Computer Products. Fujitsu is a Japanese multinational information and communications technology equipment and services corporation. A sexual harassment case was brought by a female employee of Fujitsu Computer Products against the business and two of her managers. According to the lawsuit, the woman's direct supervisor routinely made derogatory sexual remarks to her at the workplace and did unpleasant and offensive things to her, like giving her nude images of his wife. The victim alleges that her supervisor later discriminated against her when she confronted them on the subject, causing her humiliation, nightmares, loss of sleep, embarrassment and frustration. The suit asks for unspecified damages and relief from the discrimination.

There is also a report in Nintendo, a famous Japanese video game company. Several female game testers told that they had faced multiple forms of harassment and discrimination at Nintendo. Senior-ranking testers allegedly made unwanted advances and comments. Anti-LGBT remarks, pay gaps and attempts to suppress criticism were also part of the workplace culture, according to the allegations. Female workers are believed to be underrepresented at Nintendo as a whole (37 percent), and particularly among contract-based game testers (10 percent).

The United States

As a global leader, the United States of America is used as a point of comparison. The United States has the world's largest GDP (United Nations, 2020) and is one of the largest producers of high-technology manufacturing (US News, 2021).

Silicon Valley is known for being the hub of big technology companies such as Apple, Meta, and Windows. Despite spending millions of dollars to improve the conditions of female workers, nothing changes much. In the tech sector, women are hired in lower numbers and also leave tech at more than twice the rate than men. They are less likely to get funded from venture capitalists, who find pitches delivered by men more persuasive. Ironically, women's contributions to open-source software are more accepted than men if their gender is left unknown (Mundy, 2017).

The Silicon Valley technologies companies had diversity conferences and training sessions. Many fixes have been applied. However, barely changes have occurred: Diversity numbers have slight movement; Many women say while sexism has become less overt, it still stays pernicious (Mundy, 2017).

There is also a belief that success in tech depends almost entirely on innate genius. A 2015 study published in Science confirmed that computer science and other fields including physics, math, and psychology cultivate the idea that potential is inborn. Therefore, these fields tend to be more problematic for women because of a stubborn assumption that genius is male trait.

Undoubtedly, tech companies are attractive to women since they offer flexible hours and family-friendly perks. Under the lens of Marxist and Socialist frameworks, those tech companies help their female employees to reduce the burden in "second shift". However, such offers are not the reasons for women to leave the firms. Workplace conditions, lack of access to key creative roles, a sense of feeling stalled in one's career, and undermining behaviors from managers is the major reason (Mundy, 2017).

At Google, about 17% of its technical employees were women. Moreover, the female technical force was 10% at Twitter, 15% at Facebook, 20% at Apple.

Conclusion

Although women have increased their status in the society through the time passed, many gender stereotypes still remain up until now. Such ideas include women for comfort or unsuitable for many occupations that are male-dominated. The Japanese government has given policies in order to solve the gender bias crisis in Japan. The most recent one is "Abenomics". Increased female employment and increased opportunity for women to advance to senior managerial positions are two key components of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" agenda, which is also known as "womenomics." Over the past five years, Abe's strategy has been successful in bringing 1.5 million more women into the labor field, but with the condition that the majority of the jobs are part-time (Larmer, 2018). Regarding their actual attitude on gender issues, Abe and his Liberal Democratic Party have also come under fire. Given his conservative views and turbulent past with women's problems, Abe's intentions have been questioned. Gender equality was declared as a danger to Japanese culture and family values by Abe during his first term (2006-7), and he fought official and unofficial campaigns for sex education and gender equality (Kano, 2018). Scholars have also been quick to point out that in his remarks, Abe avoids using words like "gender," "equality," or "feminist," instead adopting neutral terms like "utilization" or "lively contribution" (Kano, 2018). The LDP is charged with supporting gender policies only when they have favorable economic effects on growth and birthrates. According to a Goldman Sachs analysis from 2014 (Matsui et al., 2014), closing the gender employment gap may potentially increase Japan's GDP by roughly 13%. As a result, the government has intensified its promotion of relevant initiatives. For many Japanese feminist critics, this has been a particularly difficult issue. Women are vitally needed in the labor, as Ayako Kano (2018) says, but they are also needed to have more children in order to address the current demographic problem. As a result, "womenomics" appears to be a paradox in which women are expected to perform both roles. Associate professor at Hosei University, Kaori Katada, summarizes the criticism as follows: "Womenomics was never aimed at women's well-being, it targets economic growth only. For that purpose, it intends to fully 'utilize' women and consume them as human capital" (Larmer, 2018).

Acknowledgments

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