

GAEF 2017 Fieldwork Report
“Gender Equality and Women’s Participation in
the Labor Market in Japan”

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1. Introduction

A YNU cohort visited Stockholm in Sweden for nine days from 13 to 21 Nov 2017 on the Department of Economics GAEF (Global Applied Economics Forum) program. Our purpose was to investigate “gender equality and women’s participation in labor market in Japan.” In Japan, we have a lot of problems related to this topic such as maternity harassment, women’s limited career, and lack of nursery schools. These problems are caused by several factors such as government, economy and companies. Sweden is famous as a country of gender equality. The proportion of women in managerial positions is three times higher than Japan. Before we left Japan for Sweden, we studied the present situation of “gender equality and women’s participation in labor market in Japan.” Then we made a presentation about the topic at SSE (Stockholm School of Economics) and discussed it with SSE students. To consider this topic from wider viewpoints, we visited some companies and educational institutions in Stockholm. In order to learn how women work in Japan and Sweden, we interviewed Ms. Keiko Sampei who works as a JETRO Stockholm correspondent and Ms. Masami Omae working as a doctor at the Karolinska University Hospital. In terms of how Japanese companies deal with Swedish people, we learned that from visits to Mitsubishi Corporation and Mitsubishi Electric Scandinavia. Also we considered education in Sweden through visiting an adult education institution called “Hermods” and a nursery school “Förskolan Pärlan”. We found that Swedish people have very different values about gender equality from Japanese people and re-considered this problem from more various angles. We propose what Japan can learn from Sweden on the issue of gender equality.

2. Discussion with SSE students

We made a presentation and discussed about it with four undergraduate SSE students and four members from the European Institute of Japanese Studies; the director Professor Marie Söderberg, two PhD students and one administrator.

Let me begin with a brief introduction of Stockholm School of Economics (SSE). It is an international business school located in Stockholm, offering a first-class, competitive education in business administration and economics on the bachelor and master level and also provides highly regarded MBA, PhD and executive education programs.

The topic of our presentation was “Gender equality and women’s participation in labor market in Japan”. In our presentation, we suggested that the factors preventing women’s participation are difficulty to keep work-life balance and limited career plan. Furthermore, we divided the problems of work-life balance into three problems; shortage of childcare service, parental leave system, and environment of work place. We also divided the problems of limited career plan into two problems; over-time working and seniority-based promotion system.

After the presentation, we discussed mainly about childcare and women’s right. In Sweden, men are as likely to take parental leave as women. They can acquire 480 day parental leave in total and the system guarantees that both husband and wife must take 120 days parental leave of these. Also, after childbirth parents work short-time commonly, 75 percent of time or 50 percent, for example. In general families, in the morning mothers go to office late and take children to nursery, and in the evening fathers leave office early and pick up children. There is also the reverse. And companies hire temporary staff for empty posts during parental leave of their employees. Furthermore, the fee of nursery school is cheaper than Japan, which corresponds to 10,000 ~ 20,000 yen per month. About women’s right, the Swedes value women’s participation in labor market from not only economic viewpoint but also the idea of respecting women’s right. This is a summary of the discussion.

The challenges for the Japanese team were that we could not discuss the solution to the problem, which was the original goal. However, we could analyze the problems of gender equality in Japan and the factors preventing women's participation. It was also difficult to answer conceptual and psychological questions such as women's human rights, because we usually had considered women’s participation in Japan only from economic viewpoints. But we were able to deepen our knowledge by company visits and

Ms. Omae's lecture and interviews at educational institutions.

3. How women work in Japan and Sweden

3.1 Interview with Ms. Sampei (JETRO Stockholm correspondent)

We visited the World Trade Center in Stockholm to interview Ms. Keiko Sampei, who is a JETRO Stockholm correspondent. She has written some books about gender equality in Sweden, for example “Sweden; a country where women and men are live comfortably.”

She explained the history of gender equality in Sweden. Actually, Sweden had gender discrimination for a long time but they changed their thinking because of economic and political reasons. Sweden had the thought that men should work hard and women should be devoted to housework. For example, Uppsala University, which is the oldest university in northern Europe, was a university for men. So, if women wanted to study, they were taught by private teachers. However, national schools for boys and girls were established in 1870, and women could also enter universities because education for women was needed to secure the shortage of working population. From the side of labor, it was difficult for women to find a job until 1840, but due to the need of labor force and the effort of women’s labor union, today women can be what they want to be including the work for defense. With regard to rights, until 1845 women didn’t have the right of inheritance. However, thanks to the effort of women’s suffrage union, women got suffrage in 1921. From the 1970s, the evolution for gender equality started. For example, the government introduced the parental leave system for both women and men. So nowadays, gender equality is natural for young people. From the history of gender equality in Sweden, it can be said that Swedish gender equal society was achieved by the economic reasons such as the shortage of working population and the political reasons that women made an effort to improve the status of women.

I also had an interest in Ms. Sampei’s opinion about the view of marriage in Sweden. Swedish couples typically live together for 2~3 years,

have children and get married. If they don't get along with their partner, it's not rare that they get a divorce. And if they find new partner, they get married again. Also, many couples choose common-law marriage. Compared to Japan, they may be not constrained by marriage and they can live as they want. I think there are many reasons behind it, for example a traditional reason, but the main reason is that they are financially and mentally independent and the Swedish society has created an environment where people can require quality of life. Instead, they have strong self-responsibility. For example, they can't ask for consolation money from partner when they get a divorce.

Through this interview, we learned that the economic reasons are emphasized in Japan to promote women's participation in labor market, but the political reasons are not seriously considered compared to Sweden. It may be difficult for Japan to use the gender equal system of Sweden, but I think Japan also needs to create the society in which people insist their opinions for gender equality.

3.2 Interview with Ms. Omae (Karolinska University Hospital)

We interviewed Ms. Omae, who is a Japanese doctor of Karolinska University Hospital in Sweden. While she belongs to a Japanese hospital, she has studied esophageal cancer at the Swedish hospital and lived with her family in Sweden for two years.

Through the seminar with the Swedish students on 15th November, we got more interested in how women work in Sweden, and the differences between working in Sweden and Japan. In this interview, Ms. Omae talked not only how women work in Sweden but also the different views of life and death between Sweden and Japan from the viewpoint of a doctor. In this section, we summarize her lecture with three main points and describe our opinions.

The current situation of Japanese medical care: She told us the current situation of Japanese medical care before talking about Sweden. Actually in Japan, the labor shortages of pediatrics and ob-gyn (obstetrics and gynecology) occur especially in isolated areas. Recently, news told us two problems in hospitals. Some doctors worked overtime for average 95 hours

per month and didn't get salary of overtime work. Hospitals reduced the number of clinical departments to pay the unpaid salaries, but those actions led to reducing chances for patients to receive medical care and running in the red. Therefore, in Japan the demand of medical care is unlimited, but the supply is limited.

We found differences of environments and ideas of Swedish and Japanese medical care. In Sweden, patients will decide their end of life by themselves. Actually, death with dignity of elder people is admitted in Sweden. When they can't eat by themselves, they receive death. They don't try to prolong their lives by taking a nutrition from tubes. As a result, there are not any bed-ridden elderly people in Sweden. In Japan, in that case they try to prolong their lives based on the intension of relatives. In this way, we can know that there are big differences of views of life and death between Sweden and Japan. Also there are differences of medical care systems. In Sweden, there is no system of medical examination and people sometimes wait for a couple of months to receive medical care. Swedish hospitals don't receive patients like in Japan. But strangely for the Japanese, Swedish don't complain about it. There are even patients who want to receive medical care after their vacations.

Differences of how to work as a doctor between Sweden and Japan: At first in Japan, male doctors don't take leaves for the reasons of sickness of their families, but female doctors have no other choice but to take parental and maternity leaves. Male doctors are busy working late, but also female doctors are busy picking up their children, doing housework, working in hospitals and so on. On the contrary, there are almost no differences of how to work between male and female doctors in Sweden. Employees can take leave for the reason of not only sickness of their families but also their pets.

Personally, I was really surprised at the differences of medical cares between Sweden and Japan. And I thought it was difficult to solve the problems of Japanese medical care by introducing the Swedish systems because the view of life and death and the social background are very different. It is very rational to reduce the demand of patients, but I think the Japanese won't take up this solution because there are many people

regardless of age who can't have ideas of death like the Swedish do. In the case of my relatives, women who had a sick husband decided to stop to prolong his life before he died. But I heard she sometimes regrets that. And I think the Japanese government should change the systems of parental and maternity leave. But if we try to extend the term of paid vacation, the financial resources and the environment in workplaces may become obstacles. We should change not only Japanese companies' culture in which maternity harassment happens but also the system in workplace to go well even if some workers take a leave. Through this interview, we had a chance to think about how we work and live. I really appreciate Ms. Omae's kindness for offering us a lecture.

4. Views from Japanese companies in Sweden

On 16th November, we visited two Japanese companies that have branches in Stockholm; Mitsubishi Corporation Stockholm Liaison and Mitsubishi Electric Scandinavia, to deepen our understanding about the Swedish society and how it differs from Japan. The contents of the interviews are as follows.

4.1 Interview at Mitsubishi Corporation

Mitsubishi Corporation Stockholm Liaison is the Stockholm branch of a Japanese general trading company, providing service to Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We interviewed Mr. Outeki (Chief resident officer of Mitsubishi Corporation Stockholm Liaison, President of Japanese Businessmen's club in Stockholm). In the interview, we talked about the welfare system of Sweden and some features of Swedish companies.

While Sweden is well known for its high welfare and heavy burden rate, there are two reasons that make it possible. The first reason is that the public confidence in the government is very high. The Swedish are eager to participate in politics and are willing to pay high taxes for the benefits the government provides. We can see how much the Swedish are interested in politics by the voting rate in Sweden, which is over 80% while Japan is around

50%. This is because the Swedish have the culture to discuss and think about their country's politics and have been taught that they can make changes by speaking up, ever since they are young. The other reason making high welfare and heavy burden rate possible is that the income gap is narrow in Sweden. Because of this, there are not so many people who have to pay extremely high taxes, and everyone bears about the same amount.

Also, Mr. Outeki told us that Swedish companies have two distinctive features. The first one is that they put great emphasis on the foreign market. This is because Sweden's population is less than 10 million and the domestic demands for products and services are limited. Because of this feature, many global companies were produced from Sweden, such as H&M, ABB, SCA. The other feature is that Swedish companies care about achieving both social contribution and making profits rather than only pursuing profits. This is because the Swedish have the idea that the activity you have done for the society will soon return to you.

Listening to the interview, I thought Japan could learn two things from Sweden. One, how the government can make people more interested in politics and two, the importance of companies contributing to the society. To make people more interested in politics, the Japanese government should try to increase the opportunities with which people can realize politics and show respect to various kinds of opinions. Also, since the idea of CSV (Creating Social Values) is being spread in Japan, the efforts of social contribution conducted by Swedish companies would be helpful to understand how to achieve both social contribution and making profits.

4.2 Interview at Mitsubishi Electric

Mitsubishi Electric Scandinavia is the Stockholm branch of a Japanese multinational electronics and electrical equipment manufacturing company, providing their products (such as air conditioners and heaters) to Sweden, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We interviewed Mr. Morisaki (Branch president), Mr. Ishii (Vice president), and Ms. Liljefors (Executive assistant). In the interview, we talked about two topics; efforts to create a workplace environment that is easier for employees to take maternity

leave, and how they work with the national staff in their office.

For making it easy to take maternity leave, it is important to lighten the burden imposed on other colleagues as much as possible. This is since being sorry about having your work done by other colleagues, increasing their workload is generally one of the biggest reasons that makes employees hesitate to take maternity leave. Mitsubishi Electric Scandinavia is making various efforts to lighten the burden imposed on other colleagues. The first effort is to hire temporary staff to cover the position of maternity leave staff. Since the temporary staff will handle the work that was formerly done by maternity leaving employees, the workload of other colleagues should not be influenced. Another effort is to have manuals created by employees, before they take maternity leave. Because of these efforts, employees are being able to take maternity leave without being worried about their work and colleagues.

The next topic was about how they work with the national staff. They told us that when working in foreign countries, it is important to slightly change the way you work with your staff in accordance to the culture of that country. As in Sweden, since the independence of individuals is highly respected, building a consensus is essential when working with national staff. Also, Mitsubishi Electric is trying to create a workplace environment that everyone can speak up by communicating with staff members through annual meetings and conducting leaving interviews to staff that chose to change their occupation.

Through the interview, I thought that Mitsubishi Electric's efforts of creating a workplace that everyone can speak up and making it easy to take maternity leave, can be applied to other Japanese companies as well, since they usually still have a strong top-down culture and working while raising a child is not easy. Employees of global companies, such as Mitsubishi Electric, often have chances to experience the culture and working styles of foreign countries that differ from Japan, so I believe that hearing from them and having them bring back the features that Japan should adapt, would be helpful improving the workplace environment of Japan.

5. Education in Sweden

5.1 Visit to nursery school

In Japan, nursery schools have some problems such as shortage of childcare workers, or large number of children on nursery waiting lists. So, we were interested in what problems nursery schools have and how to provide education for little kids in Sweden. That is why we visited a nursery school.

We visited “Förskolan Pärlan,” a preschool in Stockholm. We looked around there and had a short-interview with Ms. Jeanette Andersson who was the vice-principal of the school. According to Ms. Andersson, Sweden does not separate nursery school from kindergarten. Preschools play roles as childcare service and education before school age. There, we found that a preschool in Sweden has a different policy as compared to a nursery school in Japan. Their policy is developing the spirit of democracy and critical thinking in a child. To put it simply, teachers make each child express their own opinions without going along with the opinions of people around and also they respect individual opinions. This way leads to cultivate the sense of being a member of democratic society.

A good example is the way of teaching. Teachers in Förskolan Pärlan provide different education depending on interests of each child. They call this way of teaching “project.” In a “project”, teachers try to discover children’s own interests such as birds or vegetable by giving each child opportunities to say what they are interested in. After that, teachers teach each children based on their own interests without notebooks or pens. For example, in a project of vegetables, teachers take children to a supermarket and show various kinds of vegetables. Children can learn shape, color, size, texture of vegetables. In this way, children can understand the world more widely rather than just learning how to read and write “vegetable.”

Also, the way children spend their time in a preschool was different from Japan. When we entered the preschool, every child was doing what they want to do. One child was running around the room and another child was working with clay. When I was in a kindergarten, the timetable was prepared

by teachers such as time for painting, playing ground, a nap, singing and so on. Through this visit, we can understand the difference of child education between Sweden and Japan.

5.2 Visit to SFI (Swedish for Immigrants)

We also went to SFI to learn about adult education in Sweden. SFI offers free Swedish classes for immigrants. We observed a Swedish class for 90 minutes and had an interview with Mr. Roque Falcon who was one of the teachers at Hermods, a private adult education school. In the SFI, immigrants from a lot of countries like India, Pakistan and Russia, studied in a relaxed atmosphere. According to Mr. Falcon, SFI students have some courses of their own career after graduating from SFI. Students who graduated from universities before coming to Sweden will get jobs after SFI. Other immigrants without advanced education will enter high schools in Sweden. Immigrants who have specific qualifications such as a nurse can validate their qualifications after finishing SFI and can do the job. I think this adult education can make immigrants career more widely and realistic.

Through the preschool and SFI visits, I think Japan has to look at the Swedish style of education in order to make up a missing piece of Japanese education. It is respect for individuals. In Japanese schools, keeping order of the group is more important than individual opinion. I also went through that kind of education. However, I have more trouble when I am asked for my opinion because I do not have the habit of expressing my thinking up to now. So I think the Japanese education has to focus on discussion and exchanging opinions.

6. Summary

Through all interviews and discussion in Sweden, we found that the most important reason that Sweden has realized gender equality, in that it keeps the high proportion of women in managerial positions and low gender wage gap, is most people, regardless of gender and age, think of themselves as an independent individual psychologically and economically with a spirit

of social democracy. Social democracy means everyone is socially independent on condition that all of them are given the basic opportunity to live, such as education and medical care, equally from government with no relation to their salary. Of course people in Sweden have to pay comparatively expensive tax to their government to get the opportunity so we cannot see a lot of rich people in Sweden. Therefore most Swedish people have a mind to earn by themselves so that it is hard to find non-working mothers in Sweden. Individual rights in Sweden are freer but the responsibility is much heavier than Japan. Swedish people acquire the consciousness as an independent individual from nursery school. That means they get used to think critically and proactively and have their own opinions from a young age. It is the biggest difference from Japan and the most important factor to realize gender equality and women's participation in the labor market. Japanese people are not good at having their own opinions about issues surrounding them partly because the Japanese educational system is based on memorizing, not critical thinking. It has something to do with becoming "dependent individuals" economically and psychologically like people who make a living through the earnings of their spouse and people who forgot their aspiration because of pressure of work. Of course, we also have a problem in the aspect of the system like maternity leave, irregular workers and lack of nursery schools. However, it is the most important and the easiest to try for us to become "independent individual" so from now on we try to think about our surroundings critically and seek for answers. It could be the fundamental solution for gender equality in Japan in the long run.