Achievement of Work-Life Balance: Japanese and Foreign Mothers in Japan

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Abstract

This research looked at the impact the PTA in Japan has on women's careers from a multicultural perspective. Mixed methodology was employed to analyze data that was collected from Japanese and foreign parents in Japan. The central research questions were: 1. How do Japanese and foreign women's attitudes differ regarding the priority placed on work and the PTA? 2. What changes need to occur in Japan to allow mothers to pursue a career? The central phenomenon emerged as a need for better work-life balance for both the Japanese and the foreign mothers. In order for work- life balance to be achieved, change is needed in government policies, the employment system, gender roles, and the PTA system. Descriptions of cultural traits are woven in to provide a more insightful view into the societal pressures placed on women and the role of motherhood in Japan.

Keywords: PTA, Japan, societal pressures, Japanese mothers, foreign mothers, work-life balance

1. Introduction

At the conclusion of WWII, the Japanese constitution guaranteed gender equality for its citizens, yet in 2014, Japan was ranked 104 out of 142 countries on the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2014). How do Japanese women feel about the gender stratification that exists in Japan? Prime Minister Abe is pushing for a social movement in Japan and is calling for women to return to work with the hopes of boosting Japan's economy and filling the gap that the ageing society is creating. Through attending Parent Teacher Association meetings and arranging for their children to attend afterschool lessons, mothers in Japan have always taken the lead in aiding their children through the vigorous education system. How do women living in Japan balance the traditional role of care giver with the untraditional role of career woman? Do Japanese mothers and foreign mothers feel the same pressures? How do their cultural backgrounds impact their feelings and actions?

1.1 The Parent Teacher Association in Japan

The Parent Teacher Association began in Japan after the end of World War II. It was modeled after the American PTA. The objective was for the mothers to support the school with the aim of enriching the lives of their children. It began at a time when most women were full time housewives allowing them to attend meetings during the week while their children were in school(Kittaka, 2013; Mera, 2014).How do modern working mothers balance their careers with PTA responsibilities?

PTA begins when a child enters kindergarten and continues throughout high school. The busiest time commitment occurs in kindergarten and elementary school. It is quite normal for an elementary school to require every mother to hold a leadership position at least once for each child while they are in grades 1 to 6. It is not uncommon to create positions to ensure that everyone serves a rotation.

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Leadership positions range from overseeing parents cleaning the school grounds and bathrooms to classroom leaders, all the way up to the head of the PTA of the entire school. Time commitments vary but some meetings do take up the entire school day. The intenseness of the PTA in Japan can be quite shocking to foreign parents that did not grow up with the system (Kittaka, 2013).

1.2 Literature Review

In many countries like America, the PTA is considered to be a volunteer position. Participating in the PTA in Japan is an obligation that usually falls on the mother rather than the father. As we see from Nakano's (2004) research, "In Japan, women in the PTA are generally not considered to be volunteers, but are thought to be fulfilling their duties as mothers" (p. 105). Nakano also discovered, "Women chose different degrees of involvement, but many women sacrificed paid work and full-time jobs to work for the PTA" (p.105).

Culture impacts the roles parents play in their child's education. These roles are shaped by relevant social contexts such as the family, school, and society (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, and, Sandler, 2005). Ideas that parents hold with regards to child-rearing and their understanding of child development shapes the way in which they involve themselves in their child's school (Stevenson, Chen, and, Uttal, 1990). According to Hoover-Dempsey, et al. (2005) parent's role construction for involvement is formed by their thoughts on appropriate and desired outcomes, their understanding about who is responsible for said outcomes, how their role as parents is perceived by society, and their own beliefs as to how they should become involved. Scribner, Young, &Pedroza, (1999) found positive links between the importance schools place on collaborative relationships with parents and parents' construction of fulfilling an active role in their child's education.

Yamaguchi's (2000) research into married women's gender-role attitudes and social stratification reveals that women who have less than 4 years of higher education, work part-time or those that have no opportunities for promotion are less in favor of women working. Women with more time spent on higher education or are employed in higher income jobs are more in favor of women working. Yamaguchi concludes that "higher individual income for married women greatly increases the proportion of those women who have nontraditional gender-egalitarian attitudes in Japan" (2000, p.88).

According to Yu (2009), Japanese companies created a labor surplus with the lifetime employment system aimed at employing male employees for their entire careers. The labor surplus was balanced out with the expectation that women would not keep their jobs beyond marriage and childbirth. Those that did wish to continue working faced hostile work environments and challenging working conditions thus pressuring women out of the labor market. (Yu, 2009, pp. 178-179) Yu (2009) states, in Japan, 70% of women leave the labor force due to marriage or childbirth (p. 25).

2. Research Questions

There are two research questions.

1. How do Japanese and foreign women's attitudes differ regarding the priority placed on work and the PTA?
2. What changes need to occur in Japan to allow mothers to pursue a career?

3. Methods

A mixed method, quantitative and qualitative approach was employed. I used a survey to collect data to test my hypothesis that Japanese women were more likely than foreign women to place priority on their PTA duties than on their career. The inclusion of an open-ended question allowed for a story to emerge from the data which made up the qualitative portion of the research. The open-ended question was, "What changes need to occur in Japan to allow mothers to pursue a career?"

3.1. Participants

One hundred fifty-eight participants filled out an online survey. One hundred fifty-two (96.2%) were mothers and six (3.8%) were fathers. Ninety (57%) were Japanese and 58 (37%) were foreigners living in Japan. Ten participants did not indicate their nationality. The foreign respondents represented 14 different countries or regions:

United States (n=24), United Kingdom (n=10), Australia (n=6), Canada (n=5), Philippines (n=3), Germany (n=2), Israel (n=1), Malaysia (n=1), Mexico (n=1), Moldova/Romania (n=1), New Zealand (n=1), Rwanda (n=1), Estonia (n=1), and Switzerland (n=1). The majority of respondents (n=96; 60.8%) had children between the ages of 6 and 11. Smaller numbers had children between the ages of three and five (n=38; 24.1%), 12 and 14 (n=35; 22.2%), 18 and over (n=28; 17.7%), and 15 and 17 (n=17; 10.8%). Only a few (n=9; 5.7%) had infants between the ages of zero and two. Ninety-eight (92%) had one child, 55 (34.8%) had two children, and five (3.2%) had three children.

3.2. Instrument

A ten-item questionnaire was employed (See Appendix A). The first three items were demographic variables while the remaining asked respondents' opinions regarding the PTA. The final question was an open-ended item asking what changes needed to occur in Japan to allow mothers to work.

3.3. Procedure

Between November 2014 and January 2015 I collected survey responses. The majority of the surveys were collected online through the program, Survey Monkey and 10 were collected on paper and later manually entered into the online database. The foreign respondents were members of two English speaking online communities for foreign women married to Japanese men. One community, "Married in Japan" has members living throughout Japan and the other was "Kashiwa Foreign Wives Club" whose members live in Chiba and Ibaraki prefectures in Japan. The Japanese respondents were friends and friends' of friends who dispersed the online survey link through email and Facebook. All survey results were anonymous and the respondents could respond in English or Japanese. Japanese responses were later translated into English prior to analysis. Participant observation allowed me an insider's view into PTA duty in Japan. I actively participated in the PTA at my child's kindergarten in Ibaraki Prefecture from 2012-2015. Also, I observed my husband take on one of the leadership roles in my daughter's first grade class for the school year beginning in April 2015.

3.4. Quantitative Analyses

3.4.1. Preliminary analyses. From question five, which asked respondents to respond to several statements regarding their participation in PTA, I created dichotomous variables and then summed similar responses to create a scale(i.e., I arrange my work around PTA duties + I quit my job to be able to fulfill my PTA duties + I delayed reentering the workforce until after I fulfilled my PTA duties + My work takes priority over PTA duty= PTA Priority; I often feel pressured by other parents to participate in PTA + I have been bullied by other parents when I did not fulfill my PTA duties= External Pressures). From question 8, which asked respondents to check reasons they thought were valid for a mother or father not to be a class leader (*yakuin)*, I again created dichotomous variables and then summed the scores to create a scale. Zero indicated that a participant felt that there was no excuse not to be a class leader while a high score indicated a more flexible attitude.

The dimensionality of the seven items was then examined using Principal Components analysis with Varimax rotation. Two criteria were used to determine the number of factors: eigenvalues >1 and the scree plot. Three factors emerged, cumulatively explaining 61% of the variance. I named the three factors: Factor 1 - Keen attitude towards PTA/Vital to the school; Factor 2 - Participation in PTA by both parents/PTA has minimal impact; Factor 3- Balancing work and PTA (See Table 1). These three factor scores were used as the dependent variables.

Table 1: *Summary of Items and Factor Loading for Varimax Orthogonal Three-Factor Solution for Attitudes Toward PTA*

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

Item	Factor Loading		
	1	2	3
Both Parents Should Participate in PTA	.046	**.775**	.108
PTA Should be a Priority (Sum of 4)	.044	**-.733**	.011
Try Hard To Balance Work and PTA	-005	.123	**.922**
External Pressure to Participate in PTA	**-787**	-.037	.180
PTA Experience Has Been Satisfying	**.740**	.225	.221
Number of Reasons *Not* to be a *Yakuin*	**-552**	.135	-036
PTA Impacts a Child's Education	**.523**	**-.383**	**.426**

Note: Boldface indicates highest factor loadings.

3.5. Qualitative Analyses

To better understand the nuanced differences between the foreigners and the Japanese with regards to how societal obligations like the PTA impact their career, a content analysis of an open-ended item was conducted. ATLAS.ti, qualitative analysis software, was used to do the coding collaboratively among the researcher and four assistants. Three coders were Japanese and two were foreign. Three were parents of school age children in Japan and two were not parents. These varied aspects of the coders' identities allowed for a more accurate interpretation of the raw text. In order to understand the subjective experiences of parents in Japan, I chose to use Strauss's *grounded theory*, allowing for the theories to emerge from the data through *open coding* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Frequency and extensiveness were used to determine the *core codes* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Next, *axial coding* was used to discover the relationships between each "category and other categories and subcategories" (Strauss, 1987, p. 32). Finally, three diagrams were created. One for Japanese responses, one for foreign responses, and a combined diagram of both Japanese and foreign responses. These diagrams visually reveal "the density and complexity of the theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 238). From here a theoretical model was made. "Member checks" were carried out to ensure the accuracy of the theoretical model which was created based on the story that emerged from the data (Creswell, 1994, p. 158).

4. Results

4.1. Results of Research Question 1

Research question 1: How do Japanese and foreign women's attitudes differ regarding the priority placed on work and the PTA?

To understand which of the independent variables regarding children's ages and geographic origin (i.e., has a child between the ages of zero and two; has a child between the ages of three and five; has a child between the ages of six and eleven; has a child between the ages of twelve and fourteen; has a child between the ages of fifteen and seventeen; has a child over the age of eighteen; number of kids; is a foreigner) best explained the three dependent variables, I conducted three backward multiple regression analyses.

The results suggested that being foreign explained two of the three factors over and above the other independent variables. Being foreign explained not having a keen attitude towards the PTA and not thinking that the PTA is vital to the child's education (Factor 1). At the same time, being foreign explained wanting to balance work and the PTA (Factor 3) (See Table 2). In other words, the foreign parents were less likely to place priority on PTA duties compared to the Japanese parents. Rather the foreign parents tried to strike a balance in their commitment to PTA and their commitment to their career.

Table 2: *Results of Multiple Regression Analyses*

Factor	Predictor Variable	Standardized Bet	SEB	t	Significance
1- Keen attitude towards PTA/Vital to the school R=.261; Adjusted R^2=.062; F(1,157)=11.44, p=.001	Foreign	-.261	.163	-3.383	.001
2- Participation in PTA by both parents/ has minimal impact R=.527; Adjusted R^2=.273; F(1,157)=59.99; p=.000	Foreign	.527	.143	7.746	.000
3 - Balancing work and PTA					N.S.

4.2 Results of Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What changes need to occur in Japan to allow mothers to pursue a career?

While the results of the quantitative data indicated a clear cut difference between the foreign and Japanese respondents, the qualitative data painted a more unified picture. The main categories that emerged are listed from most to least frequent in Table 3.

Table 3: Categories that emerged from the qualitative data

Foreigners	Japanese
Employment system and environment (32)	Gender roles (40)
Childcare (27)	Government Policies (27)
Changes are needed in PTA (21)	Childcare (21)
Government Policies (13)	Changes are needed in PTA (19)
Gender roles (18)	Employment system and environment (17)

Note- Numbers in brackets indicate the frequency

Though the same categories emerged for foreigners and Japanese, the frequency in which they appeared differed. The diagramming process revealed work-life balance was the overarching theme that emerged from the data. Both Japanese and foreign mothers strive to create a balance between working and their home life which includes child rearing. The Japanese and foreigners clearly believe changes need to occur in society. These changes relate to government policies, the employment system, the demanding and inflexible work environment, distinct gender roles that keep women at home and men in the office, husbands that are unable and or simply unwilling to assist in child rearing and housework, and the PTA system.

4.2.1. Government policies-taxes. First, I will discuss government policies that currently hinder married working women in Japan. Based on the data that was coded and categorized, 13 of 59 foreigners and 27 of 89 Japanese referred to the need to change government policies in the form of taxes, government funding programs, or by offering more supportive government policies. Four foreign mothers made specific reference to the tax system in Japan. This comment by one American mother is reflective of their feelings, "Change the tax law! It penalizes women who make over 1.3 million yen." There is a social security program that provides a tax break and other benefits for families with spouses in traditional gender roles, meaning the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker. If the wife's annual income stays below two thresholds: 1.03 million yen and 1.3 million yen then her husband will receive 17,000 yen ($163) as a monthly spouse allowance from his employer. The husband will qualify for the full earned-income tax credit. "In fact, 76.5 percent of all married women working part time in 2010 made less than 1.3 million yen a year, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and other data" ("Working moms caught in web of tax breaks, benefits and potential poverty", 2014).

According to analysts, a wife looking to earn more than 1.3 million yen a year would have to earn more than 2 million yen to make it worth her while financially ("Working moms caught in web of tax breaks, benefits and potential poverty", 2014). Only 5.8 percent of married women working part-time in Japan earn 2 million yen or more annually ("Working moms caught in web of tax breaks, benefits and potential poverty", 2014). It seems that this government program pushes down the price of women's labor and allows business to capitalize on the weak position married women wishing to work find themselves in.

It creates an unequal distribution of power making the woman financially dependent on the man. Women whose marriages have ended in divorce have come to realize what a desperate situation this creates. Many have spent much of their adult life performing unskilled labor for minimum wage to ensure their husbands qualify for these benefits only to find themselves in a situation where they must support themselves and their children.

4.2.2. Government policies-childcare. Another concern that falls under government policies is that of childcare. Childcare concerns were cited frequently by foreigners (27 out of 59) and by the Japanese (21 out of 89). Large cities in Japan have a shortage of childcare facilities especially for preschoolers. There is also a shortage of preschool teachers. Some fault the overly involved process required to become a preschool teacher coupled with the relatively low salaries. There is also a need for reliable childcare during school closures and vacations. There are many days on the school calendar in Japan that have irregular schedules and this creates a real challenge for working mothers.

4.2.3. Employment system. Next, I will discuss the employment system and inflexible work environment. Under this category, 32 out of 59 foreigners and 17 out of 89 Japanese made reference to the employment system and inflexible work environment. An American mother indicated the need for "more flexible work attitudes, hours. Women need to feel free to have children without having to sacrifice their work/careers." The tradition of lifelong employment, an employee working for the same company for their entire career is changing but the mentality is still very much the same. Traditionally, large Japanese companies guarantee lifelong employment to their employees with the understanding that the employees would dedicate themselves to the company. This system was clearly designed for male workers. In order to accommodate females, companies created a two track system. Women choose whether to enter the career track or the clerical track in the hiring process in their senior year of college. If the woman chooses the clerical track then it is expected and accepted that she will eventually quit after getting married or giving birth. The clerical track offers little room for advancement. Women that choose the career track are expected to work long hours for the good of their employer for their entire life. The employment system in Japan has traditionally made young women choose between getting married and having children or having a career. Those that choose the career are often harassed into quitting their jobs if they become pregnant because of the presumption that one could not possibly balance motherhood and one's job. This harassment is known as *mata-hara* in Japan meaning maternity harassment. According to an article written in 2015, "70 percent of women quit their jobs after having their first child" (Ryan, 2015). It is believed that many of these women were harassed into quitting their jobs. In an effort to reduce discriminatory practices in the workplace, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law went into effect in 1986. However, until the mentality of the general population changes, women will continue to face discriminatory practices and attitudes.

The employment system is very strenuous on families in Japan. If a woman is employed full time with the hopes of someday becoming a manager then she often has to be willing to be transferred to other branches. If she refuses, then her career aspirations will be limited severely. The transfer system in Japan sometimes leads to family members living in different cities for extended periods of time. This results if both spouses are working and one does not wish to quit their job to accommodate the other's transfer or if the children are at an important stage in their education and changing schools would put them at a disadvantage. Three of the foreign respondents specifically mentioned the transfer system in Japan.

An American mom wrote,

> Let fathers come home earlier. The way it is now with fathers often working very late, working on weekends, working/living in another town, moms are often single parents in most ways accept financial. Until fathers are allowed/expected to come home early enough to contribute to child care, little will change, unless moms are willing to put their children into the care of others for a substantial part of their infanthood/childhood. It's very hard to be a single parent and work. The way it is now isn't fair to fathers, mothers, or children.

In addition, it is very difficult to take time off in Japan. Very few Japanese use all of their allocated vacation time. Most companies do not understand when a parent needs to take time off to care for a sick child. Four foreign mothers and four Japanese mothers mentioned the need for family-sick leave.

As a Japanese mother stated, "The Company has to improve their policy when needing to take time off for taking care of kids or attending school events." Another Japanese mother shared her situation as follows, "I quit my part-time job because my child got sick and was hospitalized. I wanted to continue working but it was impossible. I wish there was some office that had a flexible schedule that allowed for time off when kids are sick."

4.2.4. Gender roles. Now I will address the issue of distinct gender roles and husbands limited participation in child rearing and housework. There were 18 foreigners and 40 Japanese that commented about the distinct gender roles found in Japan. It is common in Japan to place the needs of your company over the needs of your family. This custom is followed to such an extent that fathers often do not take time off from work to be present in the hospital for the birth of their child. This sends a message as to the involvement of the father in the child's early years. One Japanese mother commented, "We need to change our notion/idea that raising the kids is only a woman's job. Not only the husband but everybody must change their way of thinking, including coworkers and bosses, and women." Japan is rooted in Confucianism which stresses the importance of strong families for a stable society. Gender role attitudes stem from the traditional *ie* or house system (Kamo and Warner, 1997). An Israeli mom wrote, "Men have to be taught how to look after themselves. They are totally useless." The ineptness of some Japanese men to perform housework stems from the concept that the home is the woman's domain and the company is the man's. A Japanese mom commented, "We have to stop thinking stereotypes that men work outside and women do the housework." But unfortunately for many families in Japan this is the reality. Women are so busy cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children that they have little opportunities to earn a salary making them dependent on their husbands. In return, many men in Japan are first cared for by their mothers and then their wives leaving them virtually useless at performing basic chores. This interdependency is known as *amae* (Doi, 1981). "Japanese show a strong commitment to a given role." (Lebra, 1976, p.82) Japanese get their sense of identity from the role they play in society. "Another source of role commitment is the sense of belongingness, including strong identification with a collective goal. To the extent that they identify with the group goal, its attainment gives gratification to the individual members." (Lebra, 1976, p. 83) By seeing to every aspect of the household, a Japanese woman shows her commitment to her role as a wife and she obtains satisfaction from the success of her husband and children as they are her group. She sees herself as playing a strong role in their achievements. A Scottish mom commented, "The PTA does lovely things, but they are not necessary. I think PTA exists in Japan as it does, to give SAH (stay at home) mothers 'proper' work to do. I hated the PTA for what it did to other, mainly Japanese, women; made them financially dependent on men . . . the whole work culture and attitude to women needs to change." In a sense, the Scottish woman is correct. PTA is one of the many roles that a mother must fulfill. Although some mothers are reluctant at first, once they have been assigned a role in the PTA they give their full commitment. The Scottish mother also sees PTA as a means of creating a dependency on men. From a Japanese cultural standpoint, *amae* or mutual dependency is deep rooted in Japanese society and is revered not feared. The dependent nature of each person's role keeps their group functioning as one collective unit. This can be seen in the family, in the company, and even in the PTA.

4.2.5. Parent teacher association. Now I will present the qualitative findings specifically related to PTA in Japan. Table 4 lists the sub-categories linked to the PTA.

Table 4: *Subcategory List: PTA Involvement Showing the Frequency of Occurrence*

PTA	Foreigners	Japanese	Total
Foreigners should join	4	0	4
No Changes are needed	0	4	4
PTA is not needed	1	2	3
Needs to be flexible	6	6	12
Less time commitment	4	9	13
Should be voluntary	10	2	12
Serves as purpose in life for mothers	2	2	4

As was revealed in the quantitative analysis, foreign mothers do not think that the PTA is vital to the child's education. As is shown in Table 4, mothers want the PTA to be more flexible, less of a time commitment, and voluntary. There were 10 comments from foreigners and two comments from Japanese stating that parent participation in the PTA should be voluntary.

An Australian mom commented,

> I think they should get rid of obligatory PTA. And if they had less school activities during the school year they wouldn't need so much support from the PTA. Do we really need all these endless school activities? I don't think so. I would rather my children had more free time, more time relaxing with the family.

Four foreign parents recognize the importance of becoming a member of their community. In order to integrate, foreigners must participate in local activities including the PTA.

A Canadian mother wrote,

> My opinion is that PTA duty is essential for non-Japanese parents. Why? Because being seen as performing such duties, becoming known in their communities, and communicating with other parents can greatly affect how the non-Japanese parent is perceived in the community. In turn, I strongly believe that this has an impact on reducing the possibilities of bullying and other negative experiences that our cross-cultural children may experience. I could be wrong, of course, but I think that the PTA is one means of establishing relationships in the community that could have a positive impact on our children's school life (/lives).

One foreign mother recognized the benefits of pitching in and helping out but resented being assigned roles that did not match her skill set.

An Israeli mother commented,

> Personally I have lots of critical (opinions) about the PTA system and wish it would be thought over and be changed. Now it is basically just at the school's service and each year just follows the manual. I wish each parent would be able to contribute, help, organize on a more volunteer base and at what the parents are good at. Just for an example I could be so much more useful if I could do art workshops for the kids more than the current PTA where I'm in the school newspaper without being able to read and write Japanese! I feel so not useful and (it is a) waste of time! If every year each parent will volunteer for one thing at their own will . . . it will be much more heartfelt and enriching for the kids.

Although foreigners do not think the PTA is vital for their child's education, some recognize it as playing a key role in the community. In order to be a good member of that community then one must take part and fulfill their role. The collective nature of Japanese society places the need of the group over one's individualist needs. At the heart of the education system in Japan is that everyone must be treated the same regardless of ability or special circumstances. This carries over to the PTA. The emphasis on sameness makes foreign parents feel uncomfortable. Many feel it would be more beneficial to acknowledge the differences and utilize each member's skills in a productive manner.

4.2.6. Change in Japan. Change occurs slowly in Japan. Here is an insightful comment made by a Japanese dad that responded to the survey,

> Japanese culture trains females to believe that they are bad mothers if they work. This needs to change. The mentality needs to change, especially among women. Once they want to work and do not feel guilty other things will start to change. Like making PTA a volunteer activity not a required activity. Women must want the system to change but many seem content staying home and caring for kids. Also husbands must be able to support their family more by being home more often and working shorter days.

Do women want to see societal changes occur to allow for less distinct gender roles? According to the World Values Survey of 2010-2014, 66% of Japanese women surveyed responded that being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay (World Values Survey, 2010-2014). This indicates that many Japanese appear happy with their role of housewife.

In this section I presented the findings of the qualitative analysis. Japanese and foreign moms want to see a change in societal attitudes especially relating to the employment system and rigid work environment, traditional gender roles, and lack of support by their husband. In addition, the foreign respondents commented about the role PTA plays within the community and revealed some frustrations with the system. Next I will present the model that was created after the data analyses were completed.

5. Model
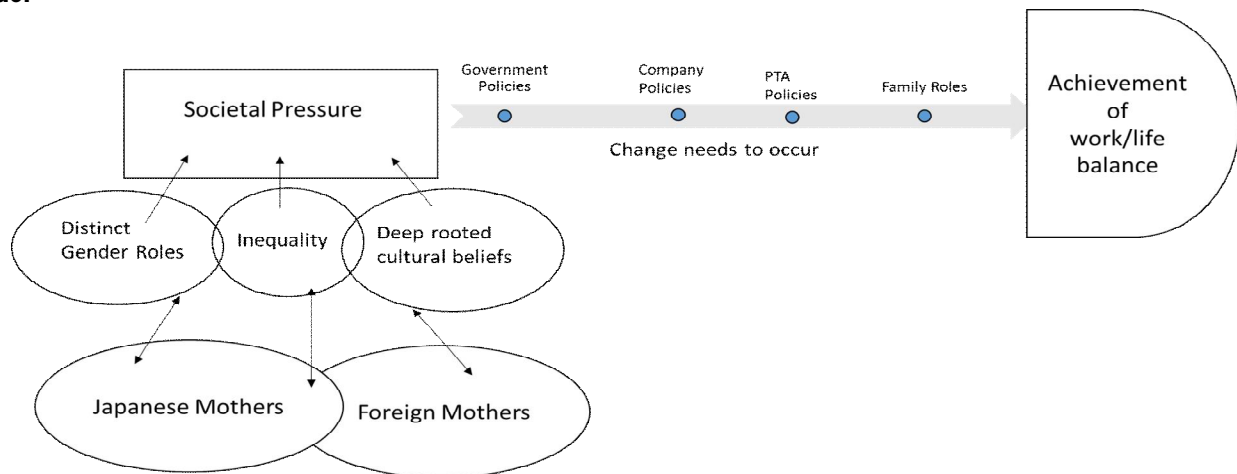
This model shows that both Japanese and foreign mothers feel the inequality in Japan which is rooted in cultural beliefs and manifests itself in distinct gender roles. If change can occur in the form of government policies, company policies, PTA policies, and family roles then mothers could achieve their goal of work-life balance. I named the theory that emerged, "Societal change will lead to work-life balance for mothers in Japan." The key difference between the foreign mothers and Japanese mothers lies in how they handle the societal pressures. The Japanese mothers are heavily influenced by societal pressures found in Japan. The foreign mothers feel similar pressures, yet their birth countries' culture seems to have a stronger influence on them.

6. Conclusion

The collective nature of Japanese culture places the importance of the family over that of the individual. Historically, the role of the housekeeper has been that of the woman's and the role of the breadwinner has been that of the man's. Lebra (1984) indicates that economic development in Japan was not necessarily beneficial to women. "The anthropological literature suggest that women's status is higher or sex equality is greater where the society is lower on the evolutionary scale in terms of subsistence, technology, and social structure" (p.307). Less developed societies have more equality among the gender roles. As Japan developed into a modern, industrialized economy, women's roles became more glued to the home. Long working hours and draining commutes made men even less available to participate in the household. The clear separation of gender roles made for more pronounced gender stratification (Lebra, 1984). This notion is reflected in a comment by a Japanese mother,

> Women need to hold a higher position in society. Housewives are not rewarded for their efforts.
> There is an idea that people that get a high salary are in a high position, housewives get no salary and
> are looked down upon. This way of thinking is wrong and women should be respected more.

This quote indicates that some women feel the decrease in their status and find it to be unfair. Women should have the means to enter the workforce and not face so many obstacles that exist today. The opposite is also true. Women that want to make a career of being a full time mother and housewife also deserve equal respect from society at large. *Ikigai*, one's purpose in life or one's reason for living, is a focal point for many Japanese. According to a 1972 governmental survey, 70% of the 30-34 year old women found their *ikigai* in their children (Lebra, 1984, p. 162). Some women feel their purpose in life is being degraded with the push by some to contribute more to the economy by working outside of the home. Gender segregation occurs in social circles in Japan. Males and females operate and socialize in separate groups. Men and women pursue different hobbies and friendships are rarely formed across gender lines. Confucian ethics emphasize gender differentiation with a clear difference between "male" and "female" spheres in social relations (Kamo and Warner, 1997).

In the past, the genders had little need to cross these segregated lines but times have changed. If women wish to achieve greater equality the lines depicting gender interaction need to start to blur.

Culture impacts gender role attitudes. "The impact of multiple roles at work and in family may be bound to the culture in different countries" (Hanif, 2014, p. 103). In a culture that thrives on tradition and is slow to see change, gender roles are unlikely to alter. Japanese moms feel compelled to be a cooperative member of the PTA and fulfill their PTA duties as it is a way in Japanese society to support their children in their student days. There is little deviation from year to year because of the overall cultural aversion to change that falls under Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). More and more women are working either out of financial necessity or to pursue their career ambitions. These women are often forced to select jobs that are flexible and will allow them to fulfill PTA duties throughout their child's education. Japanese women are more willing to sacrifice their career for the perceived good of their family and their children which includes fulfilling their PTA obligations.

It seems the government is listening to the needs of women. The first female empowerment guidelines were released on June 26, 2015. The guidelines indicate the need for men to be more involved in child-rearing and housework. They also encourage companies to promote work-life balance. Companies that make efforts to support their employees in achieving work-life balance will be given preferential treatment when bidding for public contracts (Aoki, 2015). The economic reality in Japan is causing a situation where many can no longer afford to be full time housewives. It is unrealistic to think that women can work full time and run the house without some assistance. As women's roles in Japan begin to change men's roles will need to follow suit.

Values and traditions steeped in history take time to change and the government is trying to provide a catalyst for this change. Reading the comments from the Japanese and foreign parents, both indicate they want to have a life that is balanced and fulfilling while not neglecting the needs of their children. With the passing of time, and more government initiatives, we are likely to see more working parents achieve a healthier and balanced life. As more and more women spend time at work, the PTA is going to have to make some changes to their system. The PTA at Satsunae Elementary School in Sapporo, Hokkaido, changed a bylaw in February, 2013 making PTA membership optional. PTA executives moved the meetings from weekdays to weekends and did away with various committees run by parents, including the publishing of newsletters, which were a big time commitment. The reforms have paid off and the school has a 95% participation rate in the PTA (Mera, 2014).

In July of 2015, Toyota Motor Corp. announced a plan to stop issuing a spouse allowance for wives that earn less than the 1.03 million yen threshold per year and replace it with an increased childrearing benefit for its employees. This change is meant to encourage wives to reenter the workforce without having to worry about the earning threshold ("Toyota shifts allowances to get wives back to work", 2015). These changes are encouraging and hopefully societal attitudes will continue to shift to support working mothers in Japan.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

I am a part time university lecturer in the field of Intercultural Relations. I am researching how one's culture impacts their attitudes towards PTA duty. Your completion of this survey would assist me greatly with my research. Your participation would be appreciated. Thank you! 私は大学で異文化交流学を教える非常勤講師です。日本の **PTA** の業務がいかに日々の実生活に影響をもたらしているかを調査しております。この調査のためのアンケートにご協力をお願い致します。

1. Are you a Mom or a Dad? 母親ですかそれとも父親ですか？

☐ I am a Mom ☐ I am a Dad

2. How old are your children? (Check all that apply) お子様の年齢は？

☐ 0-2 years old

☐ 3- 5 years old

☐ 6-11 years old

☐ 12-14 years old

☐ 15-17 years old

☐ over 18 years old

3. What is your nationality? 出身（国）はどちらですか？

4. Whose responsibility is it to participate in the PTA? PTA への参加はどなたですか？

☐ Mom only

☐ Dad only

☐ Mom and Dad

☐ Mom or Dad

5. Check all the sentences that are true. 当てはまると思われる以下の項目にチェクを入れて下さい

☐ I arrange my work around PTA duties.　PTA の任務に合わせて、勤務先の仕事を調整する

☐ I quit my job to be able to fulfill my PTA duties.　PTA の任務のため、仕事を辞めた

☐ I delayed reentering the workforce until after I fulfilled my PTA duties.　PTA の任務全うのため、職場復帰が遅れた

☐ My work takes priority over PTA duty.　PTA の任務よりも自分の仕事を優先する

☐ I try very hard to balance my work and PTA duties　自分の仕事と PTA の任務のバランスを図るよう懸命になっている

☐ I often feel pressured by the other parents to participate in PTA.　PTA の活動参加への、他の親の圧力をしばしば感じる

☐ I have been bullied by other parents when I did not fulfill my PTA duties.　PTA の任務をこなせなかった (PTA に参加しなかった）ために他の親達からいやがらせを受けた

6. My experience as a member of the PTA has been . . . PTA の一員としての経験は以下のどれにあてはまりますか？

☐ Very positive　とても有意義

☐ Positive　有意義

☐ Somewhat positive　どちらかと言えば有意義

☐ Rather negative　やや否定的

☐ Negative　否定的

☐ Terrible　ひどい

7. Do you think all mothers must take the role of class leader "yakuin" at least once?　母親全員が一度はクラスの役員にならなければならないと思いますか？

☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Check all that you feel are valid reasons for a mother or father not to be a class leader "yakuin".　親が役員を回避できるとおもわれる最適な理由を以下該当するもの全てチェックして下さい

☐ Single parent　片親の家庭

☐ Foreign parent who does not read, write, or speak Japanese well　日本語の読み書きや会話が十分できない外国人の親

☐ Working mother　仕事を持つ母親

☐ Working father　仕事を持つ父親

☐ A mother whose family needs her income to pay basic living expenses　生活費を主に稼いでいる母親

☐ Busy caring for an infant　乳児の育児で忙しい母親

☐ Busy caring for an elderly family member　要介護の家族をもつ親

☐ Has three or more children　３人以上の子供のいる親

☐ Physically unwell　身体衰弱の親

9. How much impact does the PTA have on a child's education?　子供の教育に **PTA** はどのくらいの位置づけでしょうか？

☐ Vital to the school　学校にはかかせない存在

☐ Strong impact　大変大きな存在

☐ Medium impact　　普通の存在

☐ Small impact　あまり存在感はない

☐ No impact　全く存在感なし

10. What changes need to occur in Japan to allow mothers to work?　日本で母親が働けるようになるにはどういった改革が必要でしょうか？