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Serial ***Home Economics Education in Japan 5***

This serial focuses on the characteristics and current issues surrounding home economics education in Japan, while also providing a historical perspective.

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The Driving Force of a Gender-Equal Society

Nao TAKAGI

Professor Emeritus at Yamagata University

Keywords

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1 Changing the Consciousness of the People

Since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1975, every possible effort to promote this objective has been made in various areas of the society both in the UN and the member countries. In Japan, The Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society (hereinafter as Basic Act) was enacted in 1999 and the preamble to the Act gives the most important task of the 21st century of our society to promote a gender-equal society in which the basic principle was decided that men and women shall perform the respective role of both social work and home life as equal members of society.

Such tendency also reflects upon national education policies, and after the Course of Study was revised in 1989, Home Economics has become a completely common subject that men and women should study all through elementary, junior high, and senior high school. A new generation who studied home economics as a common subject (for both sexes) has already reached their mid-30s and the way of thinking of the younger generation as to housework and childcare seems to be changing. For example, a survey for working adults carried out by the Japan Home Economics Association in 2007 shows that the consciousness of men and women concerning their roles with housework differs before and after Home Economics became a compulsory subject in senior high school (Japan Association of Home Economics Education 2007).

A recent survey was given to senior high school students concerning their thinking on ordinary housework. The response, “men and women live better in cooperation” rose to as high as 63.6% among students who studied Home Economics as a compulsory subject. Those who studied the subject as an elective amounted to only 30.7%.

2 The Problems to be Solved for the Gender-Equal Society

(1) The Ratio of Females in the Decision-Making Process

Although in the consciousness of the people some changes have come to be seen after the laws and the systems to formulate the gender-equal society were provided, we can see through actual conditions that the opinions of females are not sufficiently accepted and reflected on in various social fields of activity. For example, the ratio of females in congress was only 7.9% at the time of the general election in December 2011, placing Japan 163rd in the world. Furthermore, the ratio of women among administrative and managerial posts (principal and vice-principal) is so low that only the male teachers are promoted to the administrative and managerial posts notwithstanding the existence of a large number of female teachers. Just a quick look at these examples shows how the opinions of females are neglected and not reflected on in important areas of society.

Although the 2nd Basic Plan for the Gender-Equal Society provided in 2005 set up a numerical target to achieve “30% of administrative and managerial positions come to be occupied by female workers by 2020”, the actual situation is just as aforementioned. Japan is economically placed in the top level in the world, but with respect to whether or not women’s abilities are being sufficiently utilized, the level is unfortunately said to be as low as that of backward countries.

(2) Target of Overcoming the Fixed Idea of Sexual Division of Work

As for reasons why we don’t have the reality of more active roles for women and difficulties with women’s opinions being accepted and reflected on in society, we may say that it is because of a traditional thinking about the sexual division of work. The concept, “Men for Jobs, Women for the Home” has extended to every corner of our entire society for a long period of time. In Japan, more than 50% of married women are working, but 70% of them are non-regular employees such as part-time workers. In other words, a large number of female workers usually choose a lifestyle in which they temporarily retire from their company when they marry, and after they finish raising their children, they again go back to work but usually in the type of short time work such as part-time workers.

It might be thought that even though they wish to continue to work after marriage or childbirth, there are a variety of obstacles that prevent them from remaining on the job, such as the job-site systems or environments, and the shortage of day nurseries as well. Moreover, it is because of a social consciousness that values family life, and the idea that the couple shall cooperate to take care of their children is not so strong throughout our entire society.

In order to live like a decent human being, the work-life balance will be the most important factor to consider. However, because of the lack of strong social welfare policies that would create a suitable environment to help dual-income families go into work easily, it can be observed that a variety of warped perspectives have come to bear in many areas of society. The concept of fixed sexual division

of work is thought to narrow our alternatives to life- styles both for men and women and to accelerate the difficulties to live a happy life.

3 The Importance of Home Economics to Study the True Meaning of a Gender-Equal Society

With respect to the contents of both Home Economics and Skills / Home Economics in the elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, the Report of the Council for the Curriculum in 1998 states that “in consideration to coping with extending a gender-equal society and the advanced aging of a society with a declining birthrate, the new curriculum policy will hereinafter emphasize more the importance of human relations in the family and the understanding of the family function, learning of the knowledge and skills necessary for our everyday life, desires to improve one’s life and practical attitudes and moreover will plan to enrich the contents of things such as the way of family existence and human relations in the family, and also the meaning of child care, interrelations between life and technology, and the use of information tools”.

Furthermore, every Basic Plan of the 1st to 3rd Gender-Equality Society adopts the “enrichment of home economics” in definite measures among the items “upgrading of education and learning which make it possible to promote gender-equality and one’s diversified selections” and hold high expectations especially to the important role of home economics as the driving force to promote a gender-equal society (Table 1).

In the actual class of home economics at elementary school, boys and girls learn to increase the work they can do by themselves by taking a close look at the various chores around them. In junior high and senior high schools they learn both various relevant laws and systems and through comparison to those of foreign countries they not only find out both the characteristics and problems of our country, but also become able to think about the adequate measures to be taken by themselves.

Learning Home Economics is a prerequisite to set up the foundations of livelihood where men and women can spend their everyday lives in peace under equal human relations and also give necessary power to both sexes to live in the modern global society. We can say that Home Economics would be exactly the only subject which could lead boys and girls to learn “the most important problem to be solved in our country in the 21st century” clearly stated in the Basic Act, in accordance with their respective growing stages and give sufficient abilities to step forward in their practical livelihoods.

Reference

Japan Association of Home Economics Education (2007). The Product and Problem of Implementation of Home Economics at Senior High School into Obligatory Course System among Male and Female Students -The Survey to Students, Teachers, and Working Adults

Table 1 The Importance of Home Economics Education Indicated in the Basic Plan for Gender-Equality

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| <p>The 1st Basic Plan for Gender-Equality in 2000</p> <p>Section 2 10 Upgrading of the Education and Learning which Promote Gender Equality and Enable One to Make Diversified Selections</p> <p>(1) Education and Learning Advancing Sexual Equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Upgrading Elementary and Secondary Educationb) Upgrading Home Economics Education <p>With regards to Home Economics education, the new Course of Study (revised in December, 1998 and March, 1999) seeks to upgrade the teaching concerned with the state of the family and human relations among households in relation to the advancement of a Gender-Equal Society. Especially in Home Economics of senior high school, it emphasize the importance of education which inspires the students to cooperate with each other across genders, to be responsible for taking a role of a family member as well as establishing a loving home. Proper efforts shall be made for disseminating the idea and policies.</p> |
| <p>The 2nd Basic Plan for Gender-Equality in 2005</p> <p>Section 2 10 Upgrading of the Education and Learning which Promote Gender Equality and Enable One to Make Diversified Selections</p> <p>(1) Education and Learning Advancing Sexual Equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Upgrading Home Economics Education <p>→ See the 1st Basic Plan (texts of this part almost unchanged)</p> |
| <p>The 3rd Basic Plan for Gender-Equality (2010)</p> <p>Section 2</p> <p>Area 11 Upgrading of Education and Learning which Promotes Gender Equality and Enables One to Make Diversified Selections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">11 Education and Learning Advancing Sexual Equality<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Upgrading Elementary and Secondary Education <p>In Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with their respective growth stages, based on the Course of Study, through the overall education systems in schools including Social Studies, Home Economics, Morality, and Special Activities, it shall seek to upgrade the teaching as to the importance of respecting human rights, the equality of both sexes, taking proper roles as family members and establishing a nice family.</p> |