Portraying Woman in the Labor Force and in the Family: A Content Analysis of Japanese Textbooks

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Portraying Women in the Labor Force and in the Family:
A Content Analysis of Japanese Textbooks

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This paper employs content analysis to examine the coverage and treatment of gender representations shown in Japanese civics textbooks used in junior high schools between 1981 and 2005. The main question that this paper seeks to examine is whether there are gender discrepancies between those found in Japanese textbooks and those found in society. Content analysis provides (1) significance of gender representations in the labor force and in the family, (2) significance of gender representations by occupational classifications, and (3) significant changes in gender representations over the years. The results of this study demonstrate insignificant representation of women except for the household setting, a preference for socio-economically higher occupational groups, and the status quo ante of gender representations since the 1980s as compared to women in actual society. The findings are discussed in terms of the curricular perspectives, and implications for the realities of gender in the labor force and family are explored.

Introduction

Over the last three decades, a growing awareness of gender and gender dynamics in Japanese society has led to greater interest in examining gender discrepancies in every discipline. To be sure, “gender” is more than a biological characteristic. It is a culturally and socially shaped set of attitudes that lead to expected patterns of behavior as females or males. Influenced by international recognition of women’s rights during the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholarship in Japan has introduced new perspectives on research, theory, and curriculum development. One issue in which both feminists and non-feminists have been actively involved is that of how educational policy affects women.

Japanese educational policies concerning women have never been free of traditional gender role stereotypes. At the beginning of the 1960s, for instance, based on recommendations from the business sector, the Japanese government supported the enforcement

キーワード：ジェンダー、女性、教科書、労働、家族、職業
Key words: gender, women, textbooks, labor, family, occupations
of home economics instruction on the secondary level to women only. Policy makers in both business and education have shared the assumption that the ultimate role of women is giving birth to children and raising them, handling all domestic responsibilities, and providing care for elderly family members. Feminist scholarship has challenged this assumption. Through the introduction of gender analysis, feminist scholars in the field of education have begun to question gendered pedagogy as well as gender discrepancies in the educational materials in which cultural and social biases are embedded: textbooks.

Textbooks have much ideological and political significance in every culture, and Japan is no exception. Education laws in Japan require that the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) approve all textbooks for use in both public and private schools (1-12 grades). Therefore, policy makers are granted complete administrative privilege and discretion over what content is and is not included in the textbooks by manipulating laws and regulations. Because of their policy-influenced content and privileged state in the classroom, textbooks often serve as a tool to reflect and to impose social, economic, and political gender dynamics of existing society on children.

A number of articles examining Japanese school textbooks have identified the predominantly negative nature of gender stereotyping and gender roles of women and men. These works show almost uniformly consistent findings that females are significantly underrepresented. This trend can particularly be seen in work settings, despite the increased range of careers and lifestyles available to both sexes today. For instance, the percentage of women in the labor force portrayed in textbooks was only 25 percent in the 1989 editions of Japanese language textbooks. In addition, the portrayal of women’s occupations has also been historically limited in variety as compared to their male counterparts. Itō found that the top two women’s occupations accounted for 68.4 percent of total pictorial material in moral education textbooks in 1990. Such occupational categories for women included teaching (57 percent) and nursing (11.4 percent). Portrayals of women in occupational categories tend to be as auxiliary personnel. In short, women shown in textbooks have rarely been portrayed as central figures or decision-makers in the economic sector.

In contrast to the significant underrepresentation of women at work, the content of household activities seems predominantly biased against women. For instance, in Japanese language textbooks at the elementary level, 86.5 percent of female adults are portrayed in household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and washing. Itō also points out that Japanese textbooks suggest that men perform household tasks only when women are not available or when rare situations exist. As a result, women are depicted as passive experts in household and childcare duties while men are portrayed as active agents in the labor force and community.
Portraying Women in the Labor Force and in the Family

Despite the negative findings of past research, there are indications that the contents of recent textbooks are moving toward more gender-balanced representations than found in previous editions. Textbook producers have made a greater effort to include the portrayals of women at work as well as women’s perspectives on the topics covered. In addition, the current textbooks depict more equal treatment and less stereotyped gender roles. Responding to these signs of change, Sakai states that recent home economic textbooks, which are based on the new Course of Study by the MEXT, seem to have departed from past gender biased practices, although she states this claim with a call for further analyses in this area.

Educational material, such as textbooks, can be defined both as potential agents of changing society and as devices for perpetuating existing values in society. This leads to contradictions and the dilemma in gender representation as to whether textbooks should present gender-biased reality or the ideal society. Extensive literature has supported the idea that textbooks should provide the same visibility and treatment of both genders by treating women and men primarily as human beings rather than as members of opposite sexes. The underlying assumption of this position is based on the argument that the under-representation of women and gender stereotypes in textbooks might foster negative self-concept for members of that group, potentially causing the social and psychological problems that can be ensued from lowered self-image and a lack of perceived control. Based on the standpoint – the view that textbooks should portray both women and men equally, a vast number of literature reveals consistent findings that the portrayal of women in Japanese textbooks have been underrepresented in society and in the labor force, while they have somewhat been overrepresented in the family.

While the findings related to gender dynamics in Japanese textbooks are fairly reliable, there has been little information to assess the degree to which the actual realities of gender relations in the labor force and in the family have been incorporated into Japanese textbooks. In addition, extensive research has reported the apparent consensus on more “balanced” gender representations in recent textbooks than found in previous editions of textbooks. Nonetheless, little empirical study has been done specifically to determine to what extent and in what manner the portrayals of women and men in the labor force and in the family shown in textbooks have been transformed as compared to the gender representation in the actual society. There are a large number of unanswered questions concerning gender representation in the textbooks. This study attempts to answer some of these unexplored questions.

To address these gaps in the literature, this study employs content analysis to examine the portrayals of both women and men in the labor force and in the family shown in the textbooks. By using demographic features as a baseline, this study makes a clear-cut com-
parison between gender representation in the labor force and in the family shown in the textbooks, and their proportion in the population (based on census figures), to determine if there is any difference between two gender representations. Simultaneously this study aims to investigate any transformation in gender representation shown in the textbooks over the years by comparing the proportion of gender representation shown in the textbooks with their proportion in the population.

To do so, manifest content analysis was utilized to test the following two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** In civics textbooks used in Japanese junior high schools between 1981 and 2005, the portrayals of women are underrepresented in work setting, whereas the portrayals of women in the family setting are overrepresented as compared to their actual presence in the population.

**Hypothesis 2:** In the newer textbook editions, a more balanced number of both women and men in pictorial materials are presented in both work and household settings.

In addition, to provide a clear-cut picture of gender representation in occupational classifications shown in the textbooks, this study proposed the following research question:

**Research Question:** What is the nature of character portrayals of gender representation shown in Japanese textbooks? To what extent do the gender representations in occupational classifications shown in the textbooks differ from their actual proportion in occupational classifications?

**Methods**

Recognizing that gender dynamics in Japanese society can be transmitted through textbooks, this study employs content analysis to examine the coverage and treatment of gender in Japanese civics textbooks used in junior high schools between 1981 and 2005. Content analysis is a systematic research technique used frequently in the area of mass communication studies. The characteristics of content analysis involve a set of procedures to obtain the replicable and valid references from data to their context in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner. Content analysis also examines the meanings of the content that are embedded in a medium.

**Sample**

The sample consists of twenty civics textbooks used in junior high schools in Japan between 1981 and 2005 that have been authorized by the MEXT. Civics textbooks were chosen because they play a paramount role in affecting the role of women in the labor force and in the family. The textbooks sampled in this study are widely used: they all together have been adopted in more than 90 percent of junior high schools since 1981.

**Manifest Content Analysis Coding Units**

This study developed two sets of coding units. The first coding unit was based on the
setting (labor and household) in which the pictorial materials (photographs and illustrations) are shown by genders. Pictorial materials in the labor settings covered any human figure who works for pay in an economic or political environment.\textsuperscript{23} Pictorial materials in household settings covered a variety of household activities shared with family members inside or outside a household. The second coding unit included a set of occupational classifications by gender. The occupational classifications were based on \textit{The Occupational Classification} used in the 2000 Population Census of Japan, published by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Sōmushō).\textsuperscript{24} Only pictorial materials that were coded in the labor settings were considered for further analyses of occupational classification.

\textbf{Reliability}

Reliability checks of the manifest analyses were addressed through the use of intercoder reliability checks. This is a procedure for obtaining a consensus achieved among other coders on the targeted sample textbooks. The intercoder reliability checks were conducted after the author of this study had coded a subsample of four textbooks, selected on the basis of one textbook for every year in the target range, from each publisher in alphabetical order. All eleven coders were native speakers of Japanese, six males and five females. Each coder was assigned to code (1) the frequency of pictorial materials by genders and two settings, and (2) the frequency of pictorial materials by genders and occupational classifications independently. Examined textbooks were approximately 20 percent of the entire sample. Intercoder reliability was obtained by Scott's \textit{\pi} index.\textsuperscript{25} The overall intercoder reliability was as follows: (1) frequency of pictorial materials by two settings, 0.89, and by genders, 0.92; (2) frequency of pictorial materials by occupational classification, 0.82, and by genders, 0.89. These results were within an acceptable range; most content analyses typically report a minimum reliability above .75.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{Expected Values}

This study employed chi-square tests for examining two hypotheses, and for answering the research question. In the labor setting, this study adopted somewhat conservative way to determine the expected values. This study compared the proportion of gender representations shown in the textbooks with their actual proportion in the population, based on census figures. In the family setting and total, this study employed a fifty-fifty percent measurement. Considering the dynamic changes in Japanese society between the 1980s and 2005, the 1990 data of the Population Census (the middle of the target years) were used as a standard for the comparison between gender representations shown in textbooks to their actual presence in the Japanese population.

\textbf{Results}

In the twenty textbooks, there were a total of 1,154 portrayals of women or men. Over-
all, this study found a total of 298 women and 856 men across the pictorial materials (see Table 1). Of the labor force setting, a total of 1089 identifiable occupations were found: a total of 249 depicting women and of 840 depicting men. In the household setting, there were a total of 59 pictorial materials: 43 depicting women and 16 depicting men. In the next section, two hypotheses are tested.

Demographic Analyses

Table one shows the number and percentages of women and men shown in textbooks by two settings. In the twenty textbooks, women constituted only 26 percent of the portrayals in Japanese textbooks (298 portrayals of women out of a total of 1154 pictorial materials), whereas approximately 51 percent of the Japanese population were women between 1980 and 2000.\(^2\) Treating 50% as the expected value in this study reveals the underrepresentation of women in the textbooks clearly: \(\chi^2 (1, N = 1154) = 84.16, p < .001\). In labor settings also, results were similar to the previous one. Considering a figure of 39.62 percent (1990) as the expected value of women in the labor force, portrayals of women (n = 249) appeared significantly fewer than those of their male counterparts (\(n=840\)): \(\chi^2 (1, N = 1089) = 127.85, p < .001\). These results support for the first hypothesis, which predicted that the portrayals of females would be underrepresented, compared to their presence in the population.

Concerning the household setting, this study finds women in the pictorial materials appear more frequently than those of males: 49 females and 16 males. In other words, this analysis reveals a significant underrepresentation of men in the household setting: \(\chi^2 (1, N = 65) = 16.74, p < .01\). This also provides the support for the first hypothesis.

As shown in Table 2, the number of women depicted in textbooks in two settings is generally increasing year by year; however, male domination of pictorial materials in the textbooks does not change at all because the numbers of male portrayals have also increased. Pictorial materials in the household setting, on the contrary, show somewhat of an over-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER, PERCENTAGE, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PICTORIAL MATERIALS SHOWN IN TEXTBOOKS BY SETTINGS AND GENDER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a **p < .001.  
b Expected value in the Labor Setting is 39% for female and 61% for male (Rödösh , 1990).
representation of women. Nonetheless it calls for further investigation since sample size of pictorial materials in the household setting is very small --- most cell values of both women and men are less than 10. Thus, it is safe to conclude that this study rejects the Hypothesis 2, which predicted that in the newer textbook editions there would be more gender-balanced pictorial materials at least in the labor force setting.

*Portrayals of Occupational Classifications*

Table 3 reports the comparison of the distribution of both women and men by occupational classifications found in textbooks to that of the actual distribution of both genders in the labor force. Concerning each occupational classification, three out of nine occupational classifications (professional & technical; sales; and agricultural, forestry and fisheries) show male overrepresentation. For instance, women as professional and technical workers constitute more than forty percent between 1980 and 2005, but Japanese textbooks depict only one third of women. Regarding the sales occupational categories, women have seldom been portrayed as sales workers of commodities (e.g. retail or wholesale dealers, commodity brokers) or sales related workers such as real estate and bill brokers. Women shown in the textbooks have appeared only as cashiers or sales clerks.

Interestingly, in the occupational classifications of protective workers and transportation and communication workers, women shown in the textbooks are significantly overrepresented as compared to the actual distribution of women in the labor force. Despite the fact that both occupational classifications are substantially male-dominated in the actual distributions (more than 95 percent of workers in those occupational classifications are men), for instance, women as transportation and communication workers shown in textbooks have constituted more than one third of portrayals. In Japanese textbooks, particularly in newly published ones, the number of women as engine drivers, public transportation drivers, airline pilots, police, rescue workers, or even fire fighters has been por-

### TABLE 2

**NUMBER OF PICTORIAL MATERIALS IN TEXTBOOKS AND SIGNIFICANCE BY SETTINGS, GENDER, AND YEARS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting/Gender And Year</th>
<th>Labor Force</th>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2(1)^*$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $**p < .01.

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trayed more frequently than those of women found in actual labor force.

The ratio of the portrayals of women and men as the managers and officials, clerical workers, service workers, and production process workers has been the same over the year. What has to be noticed is that a percent-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN OBSERVED FREQUENCY IN TEXTBOOKS AND REALITY BY OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Classificationsa and Sex</th>
<th>Textbooks</th>
<th>Reality</th>
<th>X(1) *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Technical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers and Officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural, Forestry, &amp; Fisheries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a For the definition of occupational classifications, see The Occupational Classification, published by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2000).
b Expected value in each occupational classification was obtained by the 1990 national census as a standard.
c **P < .01. ***No significance found.
d Significance of these occupational classifications means numbers of female workers shown in textbooks are overrep-

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cials shown in the textbooks are less than 10 percent. This disproportionate underrepresenta-
tion of women as managers and officials shown in the textbooks reflects exactly an ab-

sence of women as decision-making positions in the labor force.

This study also finds that some occupations shown in the textbooks are assigned specifi-
cally to the female or male gender, depending on the embedded assumptions of their gen-
dered characteristics (see Table 4). The study of occupational classification identifies a total
of forty-three occupational groups, which are subdivided into nine subgroups with more ho-

mogeneous interests, aptitudes, and adaptability requirements. Japanese textbooks have
portrayed female-dominated occupations such as nursing (91%), cashiers (95%), and caring
(80%) in similar proportion to the actual prac-
tice in the labor force. Reflecting the harsh
reality of women in the labor force, the re-

sults of this study find evidence that female
workers shown in textbooks have a narrower
range of occupations than their male counter-
parts. Among the professional occupations,
for instance, women were allowed to choose
only two types of jobs, teaching or caring
(e.g. nursing, childcare). In fact, 72 percent
of female professional and technical workers
shown in the textbooks are assigned either
teaching or caring-related jobs.

Further analysis of occupational classifica-
tions demonstrates that the portrayals of
both genders shown in textbooks are in favor
of socio-economically higher occupational
classifications as compared to the actual dis-
tribution of each occupational classification.

For instance, the results reveal that the por-

| TABLE 4 |
| --- | --- |
| TOP 10 OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS SHOWN IN TEXTBOOKS BY GENDER | | |
| | Female | male |
| 1 Teachers | 34 | 2 Administrative Officials | 242 |
| 1 Nurses | 32 | 6 Safety & Law |
| 3 Cashier | 20 | Enforcement Workers | 49 |
| 2 Administrative Officials | 19 | 1 Law-related Workers | 47 |
| 3 General Clerks | 17 | 4 General Sales Workers | 45 |
| 8 Electrical & Vehicle Assembly Workers | 14 | 1 Engineers | 45 |
| 1 Pre-school Teachers | 12 | Assembly Workers | 43 |
| 6 Safety & Law Enforcement Workers | 11 | 1 Teachers | 38 |
| 8 Spinning & Silk Production 6 Foreign & UN Militaries | 3 | 3 General Clerks | 30 |
| 5 Service-Related Workers 1 Artist/Musicians | 7 | | 24 |
| Sub-Total | 174 (70%) | 595 (71%) |

a Each occupational group is shown in the following parentheses: 1 Professional and Technical; 2 Managerial; 3 Cleri-
cal Work; 4 Sales; 5 Service; 6 Protective; 7 Agriculture/ Forestry/Fishery; 8 Transportation and Communication; 9 Production process and laborers. (See The Occupational Classification, 2000).
portrayals of workers as administrative officials, teachers, law-related workers, engineers, are substantially overrepresented as compared to the actual distribution of workers in the labor force as a whole. In general, occupational classifications as the professional and technical (e.g. teachers, lawyers, engineers) as well as the manager and administrative officials rate relatively high in social prestige because these occupational classifications require more advanced level of education and training. More than half of both women and men shown in the textbooks are engaged in these two occupational categories while the actual distribution of these two occupational categories was approximately 13 percent for women and 17 percent for men. This information suggests that textbooks tend to portray both men and women in favor of the socio-economically prestigious occupational classifications while women’s occupational categories are frequently limited to teaching and caring.

Previous result of this study reveals that the portrayals of women as protective service workers are significantly overrepresented; however, no female portrayals are found in such occupational groups as self-defense and foreign military in this analysis. Rather, Japanese textbooks have typically assigned the portrayals of women such protective service jobs including fire fighters, watchpersons, and rescue workers. Again, such a trend towards the increasing number of women as protective service workers is only observed in recent editions of textbooks.

Concerning male portrayals of occupations, one single occupation, national and local administrative officials, has constituted approximately thirty percent of entire portrayals of men in this study. Other than this, men are portrayed as judicial workers, protective service workers including in self-defense and foreign military, engineers, teachers, for instance (see Table 4). Among top ten male occupations, no female portrayals as judicial workers, foreign military workers, and business managers are found in Japanese civics textbooks. This result suggests that textbooks have a tendency to assign gender specific occupations depending on women and men (e.g. teaching and caring related jobs for women, and security and managerial jobs for men). At the same time, recent textbooks tend to portray women with very untraditional occupations, although this trend can be seen only in newer textbooks.

Discussion

Based on this research, several generalizations can be asserted. First, women remain significantly underrepresented in Japanese textbooks. Only 26 percent of women are portrayed in the textbooks, whereas over 50 percent of Japanese population is women. In the work setting, this study also found the results similar to the previous one. In general, the conditions and treatment of women in the actual labor force are inferior to those of men. Hence, the support for a significant underrepresentation of women in textbooks implies that Japanese textbooks portray more male-dominated outlooks than reality.
Furthermore, the results of this study disclose that the portrayal of women in general, and those of women in the labor force in particular shown in the textbooks, have been significantly underrepresented over the year, despite earlier findings of a gradual transformation in Japanese textbooks towards a more gender-balanced representation. Although on the surface the number of the portrayals of women has increased over the years, the number of portrayals of men has also increased. As a result, textbooks have routinely marginalized women over time. It is important to reiterate that this study constituted a somewhat conservative assessment of underrepresentation. This study compares the proportion of gender representation found in the textbooks with the actual gender distribution in the labor force. Therefore, the expected value of women is approximately 40 percent rather than a fifty-fifty percent measurement that a majority of previous research has adapted. Considering national and international trends toward a more gender-balanced representation of educational material, the results of this study, which reject the claim that newer textbook editions include more gender-balanced pictorial materials, show somewhat retrogressive trends.

On the other hand, Japanese civics textbooks show an overrepresentation of women in the household setting as compared to the actual presence in society. Although this result leaves room for further examination due to very small sample size of data, textbooks have subtly suggested that women’s place is in the house. It is also interesting to note that the number of portrayals of both genders in the household setting has not changed much, or even has decreased over the year, whereas the number of pictorial materials in the labor force setting has increased year by year. Thus, the amount of the space devoted to the family related portrayals, and to the labor force related portrayals, has shown an opposite direction in terms of quantitative visibility. One explanation for this trend may be that this is a compromise between political and economic demands of women’s productive labor and cultural demands of women’s reproductive labor.

Extensive literature has suggested that both female and male children show a preference for same-gender characters in textbooks. To this extent, it is argued that the underrepresentation of women and the gender stereotypes in textbooks may have a negative effect on female children. Female children may conceive of themselves in total isolation from society as well as the labor force, or as less important in the labor force. Though the results of content analysis do not provide evidence about the effect of the pictorial representations on the audience, namely children, the data obtained in this study support the claim that pictorial materials in textbooks concerning women are inaccurate. Underrepresentation of women in Japanese textbooks may send a message that women should be trained for submissive roles in the labor force or for passive expert at domestic task in the household.
Second, textbook portrayals of gender representations in the various occupational classifications are somewhat in favor of socio-economically higher occupational groups as compared to the actual presence in society. Concerning the number of portrayals of both women and men shown in the textbooks, for example, more than half of the portrayals are devoted to the occupational classification such as the professional and technical as well as the managerial and official workers, while the actual distribution of these two occupational categories were lower than 17 percent for both genders. As such, pictorial materials in the textbooks do not reflect actual gender distribution of each occupational group, nor does occupational distribution across the gender in the labor force. Rather, pictorial materials of occupational groups reflect more the social stereotype of stronger, more male portrayals than those of female or more socio-economically higher occupational groups than less in general. The low visibility of women and of wide variety of occupations other than the professional or managerial workers in the textbooks provides further evidence that societal sexism as well as the so-called “class-feeling” may be reproduced through educational materials.

Third, reflecting the reality in the labor force, the results of this study produce evidence that female workers shown in textbooks have a narrower range of occupations than their male counterparts. Among the professional and technical occupational categories, for instance, women can choose only two kinds of jobs, teaching or caring. Therefore, some types of occupations, which Japanese textbooks have assigned to women, are socially and culturally embedded, depending on the characteristics and requirements of the occupations by gender. In Japanese textbooks, some occupational groups as nurses, cashiers, kindergarteners, social welfare workers, or domestic service workers are considerably biased towards women. However in general, some of the female-dominated occupations lie at the low end of the pay scale, require less demanding skills, offer limited opportunity for promotion, and are subject to supervision. It is likely that curricular perspectives encourage female students to opt for care-oriented occupations rather than for a wide variety of occupational choices in the professional occupational classifications.

Finally, there is evidence of an increase of women depicted in occupational classifications that are traditionally male-dominated, although this finding can be applied only to the newer editions. For instance, in the 1980s editions of the textbooks the number of women as protective service, managers and officials, and transportation service workers reflected their presence in the labor force, where more than 90 percent of workers were males. However, female portrayals in the above occupational categories have significantly been seen since the 1990s editions, particularly in the 2003 editions. According to the Statistics Bureau in Japan, for instance, females constituted less than one (0.69) percent in both protective service and transportation & com-
munication related occupational categories in 2000, while 8 percent of women of these two occupational classifications are portrayed in textbooks. Other than the above occupational classifications, the recent textbooks make an effort to include female workers in a wide variety of occupational groups such as fire fighters, construction workers, rescuer, etc. Nevertheless, such trends are still the exception rather than the rule. Textbooks tend to dramatize or emphasize female gender when the target occupations are predominately male-oriented in a way that she is the first female astronaut or female pilot.

Although there are still some qualifications concerning the portrayals of women shown in the textbooks, an increasing number of women in variety of occupational groups are an encouraging sign. The importance of increasing the proportion of females in all settings as well as in various occupational categories cannot be overemphasized for a number of reasons. First and foremost, a more gender-balanced illustration in various settings and occupational categories creates a greater possibility for the full development of the individual, regardless of his or her gender, because readers may perceive pictures and illustrations similar to the way they view these things in the real world. Increasing the proportion of female portrayals in a variety of settings as well as in occupational classifications may have good effects on both girls and boys, in expanding the range of their choices in future careers, activities, and goals. Furthermore, Schau and Scott found that instructional materials, depicting main characters in more gender-balanced or equitable roles, are not (emphasized by the first authors) rejected by students. All children regardless of their genders should have the right to have the best possible bias-free education for well-rounded development of their personalities as well as for their future careers.

Second, all educators should note that textbooks which increase the proportion of women as compared to their actual presence could be considered as a possible tool for social transformation. Significant underrepresentations as well as stereotyping images of women in the labor force imply the idea that children should be cultivated to be well suited to the existing society and existing attitudes in the labor force that embed social and gender discrepancy. However, this curricular attitude may need more careful examination. If textbooks reflect only the existing gender realities in the labor force and in society, textbooks will perpetuate and reinforce the realities of gender discrepancy in the name of education. Female students may be less likely to pursue professional careers. Textbooks should not merely be concerned with existing practices in the labor force or in society that are culturally and historically embedded. Rather, textbooks should provide more balanced representation of the two genders than exists in the statistical realities. This approach is based on the concept of equal educational opportunity corresponding to each individual’s ability, not to gender. This is the basic educational policy prescribed in the
Constitution as well as the Education Law in Japan.

Finally, increasing the number of female illustrations in all areas of society will improve not only children’s full development as individuals, but also society as whole. According to the Keizai Kikakuchō, there is a positive correlation between the length of females’ service and the growth rate of companies. Faced with an aging society, an extremely high proportion of senior citizens and fewer children, Japanese policy makers have realized that joint participation of both genders in the labor force as well as in household management is indispensable for Japanese society. Therefore, positive action in increasing the proportion of females in textbooks in comparison to their actual presence in the labor force, as well as depicting a greater proportion of males in household settings is strongly recommended.

To summarize, the portrayal of women in untraditional occupations shown in textbooks have been seen in current editions. However, this study has found that significant underrepresentation and stereotyping of women are still prominent. This suggests that there is much room to move toward more equal representations of gender in all settings as well as occupational classifications in textbooks. It is recommended that educators and policy makers use the knowledge and information obtained by this study. Further development of policy analysis concerning females in the labor force must be ongoing, utilizing comparative studies to gain a more comprehensive view.

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1 See Linda Measor and Patricia Sikes, Gender and Schools (New York: Cassell, 1992), p.5.
2 The Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, or Monbukagakushō.
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7 Itō, Kokuyo, p. 25.
8 Itō, Dōtoku, p. 111.
9 Itō, Kokuyo, p.25; Itō, Dōtoku, pp. 110-111; Yoshioka, pp. 53-56.
10 Ibíd., p. 29.
11 Ibíd., p. 134.
12 Itō, Dōtoku, p. 205.
15 Ibíd.
16 Ibíd.
17 Sakai, pp. 150-162.
23 Examples include a member of the Diet or prefectoral assembly, an ambassador, a diplomat.
26 Ibíd.
27 Japan Statistics Bureau of the Census, 2001
28 See an overview in Schau and Scott, Impact of Gender Characteristics, p. 189 and Schau and Scott, Sex Equity and Sex Bias, pp. 222-223.
29 Tanabe and Ezaki, pp. 7-14.
31 p. 186-193.
32 Kokumin Seikatsu Hakusho, pp. 68-74