
Leaning Out for the Long Span: Married Japanese ‘Salarywomen’s’ strategies for maintaining careers and well-being in the 2000s

Glenda S. Roberts*¹

¹Faculty of Science and Engineering – Waseda University 3-4-1 Okubo, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-8555, Japan

Abstract (in French and English)

Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg’s 2013 book *Lean In* has attracted attention in Japan, where Sandberg’s advice for business women to ‘lean in’ and assert themselves in order to climb the ranks of power in the corporation caused some stir. Indeed, soon after the NHK special featuring Sandberg, I noticed the translated version of her book had appeared and was displayed prominently in a bookstore at Shinjuku station, easily in reach of the urban business commuter. But how do ‘salarywomen’ view Sandberg’s strategies? How do women in ordinary career positions maintain their well-being when their husbands are rarely able to substantially contribute to childrearing and domestic management? This paper concerns building a career over the long span of marriage and childrearing, and the choices ordinary salary women make not to lean in too far, while enlisting intergenerational support in order to manage their family lives. While such strategies may not propel married women into the Sandberg ranks of upper management, they are survival strategies while the children are growing up. How and whether these strategies will evolve as companies are pressured to increase the percentage of women in management under Prime Minister Abe’s policies is also a question. Data come from a longitudinal set of fifteen women in the same Tokyo corporation, whom I have been interviewing at 3-5 year intervals since 2003, most recently in 2013. I shall also utilize observations from my 2012 survey of 16 young adults in Tokyo, and background statistical and archival data from newspapers, surveys, and government documents.

Keywords: Japan salarywomen

*Speaker